

PUEBLO MISSION CHURCHES AS SYMBOLS OF PERMANENCE AND IDENTITY*

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ABSTRACT. The three Pueblo mission churches of San Esteban del Rey, Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, and San José de Laguna are the most visually striking structures in the western New Mexico pueblos of Acoma, Zuni, and Laguna. Prime examples of “structures of permanence” on the landscape, the churches define local cultural identity. Church permanence and Pueblo identity are expressed in a five-part typology of visible characteristics: natural materials and hand labor, massive exterior form, adjoining cemeteries, syncretism of interior decorations, and structural decay and rebirth. Permanence must, however, be understood as an evolving condition, undergoing new representations as multicultural relationships evolve.

Keywords: mission churches, New Mexico, permanence, place identity, Pueblo Indians.

In many cultures, people desire to create something that outlasts them, to leave a mark that says, “We were here.” The visually prominent and enduring cultural hallmarks are commonly forged through the built environment, as the New Mexico cultural geographer and landscape historian J. B. Jackson suggested: “All that we ask of our landscape . . . [is] a monument or two of stone, a series of landmarks to remind us of what we believe and of our origin and identity . . . that these landmarks have a permanent, visible character, that they be an integral part of the landscape, part of the cosmic order, and that they have the immediate emotional appeal of a widely recognized archetype” (1984, 107). A construct at once architectural, emotive, and social, the structure of permanence is a material expression grounded in local landscape and integral to cultural identity. Such structures shape place attachment because of what they represent, and they can serve as powerful sources of memory (Hayden 1997). Although permanence is measured relative to the human life span, it also is one element in an adaptive process over multiple generations.

With notable exceptions, much recent architecture has ceased to symbolize hierarchy, permanence, sacredness, and collective identity (Jackson 1994), yet these characteristics are embedded in New Mexico’s Pueblo mission churches (Figure 1). All architecture is contextual; it serves particular purposes, modifies environments, and communicates ideas about relative permanence, change, and time (Saile 1990). In this essay we interpret the development, maintenance, and revival of permanence as a hallmark of cultural identity at three western New Mexico Pueblo mission churches (Figure 2). We offer case studies in how a distinctive architectural landscape takes on specific meanings at the pueblos of Acoma, Zuni, and Laguna.¹ Although existing work has provided detailed interpretations of the architecture and ornamentation of Spanish-era mission churches in New Mexico (Kubler 1940;

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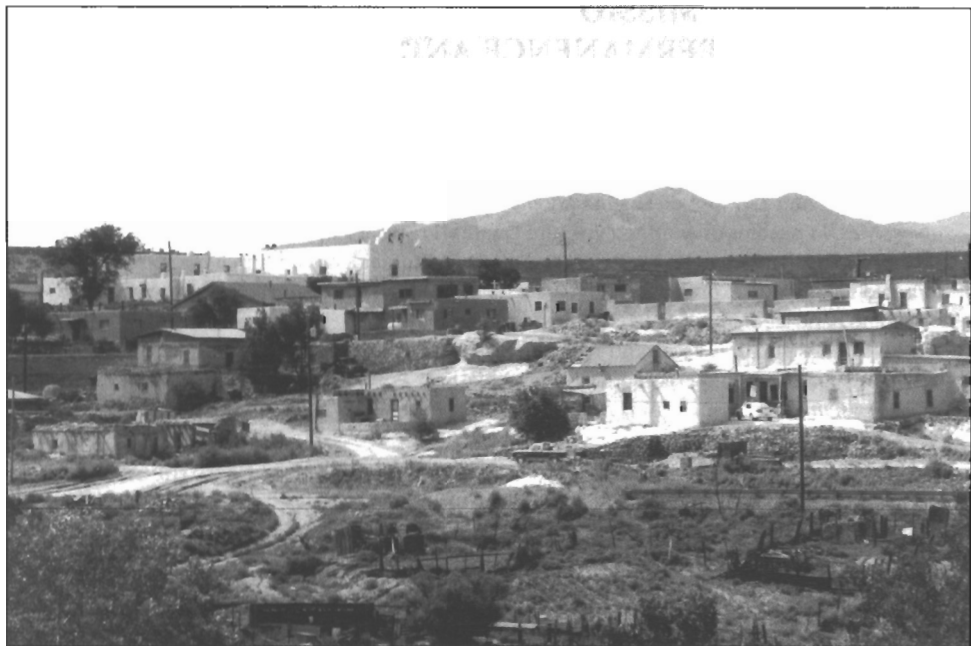


FIG. 1—Laguna Pueblo, San José Mission, and Mount Taylor, New Mexico. (Photograph by Kevin S. Blake, August 1997)

Domínguez 1956; Kessell 1980; Treib 1993; Wilson 1997), our intent is to explore how cultural identity is manifest through permanence.² We first explain our conceptual framework and methods, following that with a discussion of the culture–nature interplay on the Colorado Plateau and the historical context of the Spanish mission system in northern New Spain. Then short historical sketches for each church precede an examination of specific symbols of permanence. Multiculturalism, ties to the land, increasing local control, and adaptations to new values are each found to contribute to a bonding of place, permanence, and identity.

STRUCTURES OF PERMANENCE

Structures of permanence put down foundations in the psyche of place and become icons of local culture. Like time capsules, these structures reflect the values of a particular era, but interpretations of their form and content change over time (Pollan 1999). And unlike time capsules, structures of permanence are open to constant visitation, modifications, and redefinition. Structures of permanence may have a strong religious component, as do ancient pyramids, the Taj Mahal, and European cathedrals; others, including lighthouses, the Great Wall of China, and the Sydney Opera House, serve transportation, political, or entertainment functions. The loss of such structures may leave a void in a local culture's identity and attachment to place. Sufficient resources therefore tend to be devoted to their maintenance and, if necessary, reconstruction to ensure permanence.

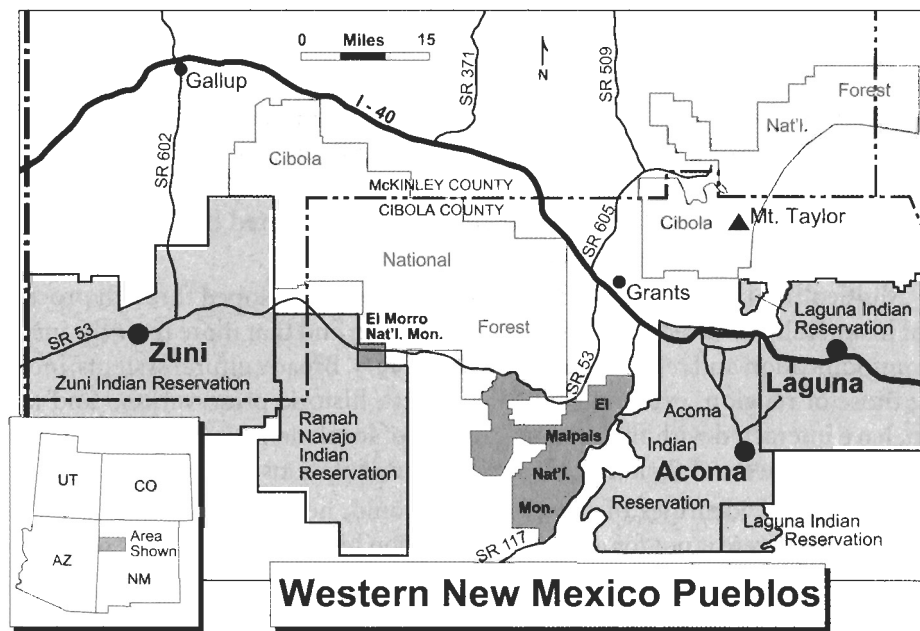


FIG. 2—Map of the western New Mexico pueblos of Zuni, Acoma, and Laguna. (Cartography by Jeffrey S. Smith)

In this study we examine permanence and identity in selected Pueblo mission church landscapes, employing intercultural qualitative methods and multiple overlapping classes of data (Turner 1967; Duncan and Ley 1993). Visual analysis of the churches and surrounding areas through frequent and extensive fieldwork was key to this kind of research. We then filtered our outsiders' view of the ideologies embedded in structures of permanence through Pueblo oral tradition, which helped us establish a connection with the distinctiveness of Pueblo belief systems and the multiple contexts that exist for these churches (Ortiz 1969; Clifford 1988; Basso 1996). In-depth interviews with Acoma, Zuni, and Laguna residents were central to the progression of our research from direct observations of structures to interpretations of belief systems. These discussions of church meaning, structural details, and Pueblo identity occurred over a span of six years and involved approximately a dozen Pueblo Indians of various ages, both genders, and several occupations. Ethnographic, geographical, and architectural literatures supplemented our perspective. By combining a reading of the landscape with archival literature and the study of religious and artistic expressions, we attempt to look "beyond the dominant culture" (Zelinsky 1997) into the fertile mixing ground of Pueblo landscapes.

A five-part typology of the expressions of permanence in Pueblo mission churches forms the conceptual framework of this article: natural materials and hand labor; massive and fortress-like exterior form; multilayered cemetery burials connecting earth and church; interior decoration; and structural decay and rebirth. Permanence is represented by more than the mere presence of these five criteria;

each of the traits embodies both form and process as “discourses materialized” to show how the landscape symbolizes permanence and Pueblo identity (Schein 1997). Three interrelated themes bearing on landscape meaning and cultural identity run through the typology. One is the multigenerational connection of people to local landscape. The second is the religious syncretism of Franciscan Catholic and Pueblo belief systems, evident in the distinctive assemblage of exterior and interior symbols. The third is the multicultural relationships engendered by church construction, maintenance, and restoration.

Multicultural identity in the American Southwest developed through processes that historically involved conquest and exploitation and that more recently include commodification and representation (Wilson 1997). Broad cultural systems, including those of religion, exploration and conquest, historic preservation,³ and tourism, have interacted with the changing nature of local identities to produce Pueblo mission churches and their accompanying representations of permanence.

The cultural identities of these pueblos would, however, lose much enduring distinctiveness were it not for a landscape tradition built upon the role of residents in the construction, revision, and representation of mission-church permanence. Hispanic and Indian northern New Mexico is one region in which past cultures have not been obliterated by outside forces (Spicer 1962). Pueblo Indians have been adept at surviving five centuries of geographical change without complete assimilation into an encompassing national society (Meinig 1971). The ethnographer Frank Hamilton Cushing likened the Zuni faith to a drop of oil in the water of Spanish influence—touched at every point but in no place penetrated or changed inwardly (1979). The Pueblo mission churches serve, then, to reflect the intriguing complexities of a diverse cultural milieu surrounding a persistent and distinctive local identity.

CULTURE AND NATURE ON THE COLORADO PLATEAU

Just as the most meaningful architecture often relates directly to natural surroundings (Day 1990), so the Pueblo mission churches in this study bond culture and nature on the Colorado Plateau. Extending over 330,000 square kilometers in western Colorado, northwestern New Mexico, northern Arizona, and eastern Utah, the Colorado Plateau is a diverse landscape noted for its deeply incised canyons, dramatic escarpments, towering volcanic mountains, and high, broad mesas and plateaus. The Colorado River and its tributaries—the origin of the plateau’s name—drain most of the region (Durrenberger 1972). The promotion of the region’s famous landforms in countless books, films, and advertising images makes the heart of the plateau the quintessential American West in popular imagination (Blake 1995).

In the United States it has been said that the impact of time is seen most clearly in New Mexico (Jackson 1994). Popular visions of the Colorado Plateau seem timeless—the buttes of Monument Valley appear identical across decades of visual media—yet the physical landscapes of the region define the passage of time through a naked exposure and an equally sharp and defined relief. It is in particular the distinctive blend of the natural landscape and the built environment on the plateau

that imparts an abiding sense of antiquity. The dry air that allows visibility in excess of 160 kilometers throughout the region also effectively preserves the millennium-old ruins of indigenous peoples. Through the use of natural materials and dramatic building sites, the structures of indigenous peoples seem almost to have risen straight from the earth.

SPANISH POWER AND PUEBLO SOULS

Beginning in the 1500s the Spanish Crown sent multiple forays onto the Colorado Plateau in search of instant wealth. Western New Mexico today is replete with indelible imprints of the early Spaniards. El Morro, for example, is a collection of signature carvings in soft sandstone cliffs, perhaps left to achieve a personal sense of permanence. After realizing that easy riches would not be achieved on the northern frontier of New Spain, the Spanish government established new goals to secure land for the Crown and to “civilize” the indigenous population, primarily through the Franciscan mission system (Radding 1997). The typical mission consisted of a church where daily Mass was offered, an attached convent where the religious personnel lived and worked, administrative offices, and a walled forecourt that often included the *campo santo* (holy ground/cemetery).

Civilizing the local population was most successfully achieved through a system known as *reducción* or *congregación* (Hornbeck 1994). By congregating the local Indians into mission settlements and “reducing” them from their heathen ways, a self-sufficient Christianized community was established. Agglomeration offered greater security for the previously scattered people and facilitated efforts to bring Indians into the Catholic fold. Furthermore, because Spanish clergy were in limited supply, a concentrated population reduced the number of missions needed. The missionaries supplied the Indians with seeds and tools, and expected them to plant the land grants. At harvest the Spaniards reaped the proceeds in lieu of the tithes and offerings typically collected in more secular churches. The mission system, then, forced the Pueblo communities to serve as religious, political, social, and economic units. Catholic Church directives called for a mission, at once stable and functioning, to establish two *visitas* (outlying communities served by a priest from the mission). A mission was deemed successful when all remnants of Indian religion had been removed from the community. In the 1600s the Catholic Church constructed nearly fifty mission complexes in the province of Nuevo México (Wilson 1997).⁴

Tragedy struck the missions with regularity, in the form of diseases, raids by nomadic Indians, severe droughts, and brutal and abusive acts by Spanish and Catholic officials. Enmity against Spanish power culminated in the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, during which 21 missionaries and 400 colonists were killed and as a result of which the remaining Europeans fled south, to the area of present-day El Paso, Texas. The Pueblo Indians retained their independence in the face of repeated punitive Spanish invasions in 1681, 1688, and 1689 but were reconquered in 1692 (Simmons 1979; Sando 1992). As more Indian raids and shifting political winds caused a decline in



FIG. 3—San Esteban del Rey, Acoma Pueblo. (Photograph by Jeffrey S. Smith, August 1997)



FIG. 4—In Zuni Pueblo, squat houses of red sandstone surround the east-northeast-facing Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe and the campo santo. (Photograph by Jeffrey S. Smith, August 1997)

missionary activity in the late 1700s and early 1800s, the mission churches entered a lengthy period of decay. Restoration efforts began in earnest in the early 1900s. The remnants of these early missions, in some cases several hundred years old, are among the most visible vestiges of the first two centuries of Spanish colonization in New Mexico and are evidence of continuity in the region's history (Jackson 1994).

PUEBLO MISSION CHURCHES IN WESTERN NEW MEXICO

The missions of San Esteban del Rey at Acoma Pueblo, Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe at Zuni Pueblo, and San José de Laguna at Laguna Pueblo are three of the enduring—for all intents, permanent—colonial structures on the Colorado Plateau. These churches warrant special examination for three main reasons. First, the location of these missions along the ancient route connecting the Hopi pueblos in present-day Arizona with the New Mexico Rio Grande settlements meant that church and government officials typically visited them on the same expeditions, thus establishing a spatial and administrative link among them. Second, the distance decay in Spanish influence westward from the Rio Grande resulted in fewer outside influences at these missions. Zuni, the westernmost New Mexico pueblo, was the least affected by Christianity, even though the Zuni accepted some of the missionary teachings (Forrest 1929; Crampton 1977). Third, the location of these pueblos on the periphery of today's Hispano Homeland (Nostrand 1992; Smith 1999) underscores the distinctive cultural mix of this study area relative to that of the other New Mexico Pueblo villages.

Perched atop a 112-meter-high sandstone mesa, Acoma Pueblo has recently become known as Sky City, but for more than a hundred years it has been recognized by American writers as a place where "antiquity and mystery haunt every nook of the stone acropolis" (Lummis 1952, 44). No pueblo setting conveys a stronger sense of permanence, solidity, and impregnability; until the mid-1900s no roads reached the top of the barren rock. In their Keresan language the Acoma call Sky City *Aacqui* and themselves *Aacqumeh hanoh*. The meaning of *Aacqui*, place of preparedness, relates to the journey of the Acoma to a place prepared for them (Ortiz 1992)—a place of self-sufficiency because of the capacious mesa-top cisterns (Nabokov and Easton 1989). Although the majority of today's population lives in Acomita and McCartys, two villages with better access to farms along the Rio San José, to community services, and to the interstate highway, the mesa has nonetheless been continuously occupied for nearly a millennium (Minge 1991).⁵

San Esteban del Rey towers above rows of cubelike private dwellings terraced two or three stories high (Figure 3).⁶ Constructed in 1629–1641 under the supervision of Fray Juan Ramírez, the incomparable cathedral is the largest of the early New Mexico churches. Ironically, it served the smallest congregation (Treib 1993). In every dimension the mission is a substantial monument to Catholicism, Acoma toil, and permanence. San Esteban was the only mission church to survive the Pueblo Revolt, a result of the Acoma belief that their labor in construction and decoration

made the church belong to them more than to the Spaniards. Today, the church is the highlight of the income-generating Sky City tour. Crowning the top of the rocky prominence literally and symbolically, San Esteban is paramount in Acoma identity. A sign in the museum at the base of the mesa states, "The mission as it stands today is the pride of the people."

Zuni Pueblo is situated nearly 240 kilometers west of Albuquerque on the north bank of the intermittent Zuni River. Originally called Halona, the contemporary Zuni Pueblo was first inhabited around A.D. 1100 and was one of six Zuni villages in the vicinity; the largest at the time of Spanish contact was Hawikuh. In 1629 three Spanish priests were assigned to serve the religious needs of the A:*shiwi*, as the Zuni call themselves. With Indian labor, the friars began building a mission at Hawikuh. After three years of increasing religious tension, the Zuni killed two priests and took refuge for a few years at Dowa Yalanne (Corn Mountain, a large mesa south-east of Halona) to escape retaliation by the Spanish (Woodbury 1979). In October 1666, construction of a church dedicated to Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria (Our Lady of Candelaria) began in Halona. In the early 1670s the Navajo and Apache raided Hawikuh, killed many of its residents, and burned the church. Hawikuh was abandoned, leaving the Halona mission the principal Catholic structure. During the Pueblo Revolt most of this second mission was also destroyed.

In 1699 the Halona mission was reconstructed on its original foundation and dedicated to Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe (Our Lady of Guadalupe).⁷ In the mid-1700s Indian raids, the great distance of Zuni from the core Spanish settlements, and conflicting religious interpretations on the part of the missionaries and their parishioners took their toll on the missionary efforts. A prolonged period of decay set in for Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, but today the church commands a prominent position in the central plaza (Figure 4). The church is known primarily for its dramatic interior murals of the Zuni spirits and landscape, a relict of as much significance to Zuni identity as are the Grand Canyon (the place of emergence), the ruins at Chaco Canyon, Bandelier, and Aztec (ancestral homes), and Corn Mountain (the sacred mountain of refuge). The murals add yet another layer of meaning onto a holy place (E. Seowtewa 1997).

Having celebrated its 300th anniversary in 1999, Laguna is the only Pueblo nation established after the sixteenth century. The community takes its name from an old pond along the Rio San José. The Laguna, who speak a Keresan dialect similar to that of the Acoma, call themselves *Kahwaikamen hanoh* and their village *Kahwaika* (Ortiz 1992).⁸ Refugees from a variety of other pueblos, primarily Acoma, originally settled Laguna during the tumultuous years after the Spanish reoccupation (Ellis 1979). Construction of the San José mission on the small hill above the river began on 4 July 1699, under the guidance of Fray Antonio de Miranda. Like the church at Acoma, the entrance faces due east onto a cemetery. During the 150 years that followed its completion the church achieved regional prominence, and by the beginning of the nineteenth century Acoma and Zuni were visitas of Laguna (Kessell 1980; Treib 1993).

In the three decades after 1850, however, Laguna fell into religious turmoil. A few Protestant missionaries supported by a progressive Laguna faction touched off a series of disputes that culminated in the departure of several conservative clans from the village. The church developed into a focal point in the struggles and became more a militant stronghold than a place of worship. In the 1870s two kivas (Pueblo ceremonial structures) were destroyed, and a pro-Protestant faction came close to razing San José (Ellis 1979). After religious tensions eased, the church achieved wide renown because of its proximity, in turn, to the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad, to Route 66, and to Interstate 40. Laguna identity is closely tied to San José, which "retains more of its original architecture and ornaments of fine quality than any other [Pueblo] church in New Mexico" (National Register 1973). Church brochures proclaim San José "the center of a proud tradition of Laguna people."

THE SYMBOLISM OF PERMANENCE

Five manifestations of cross-cultural permanence are present in each of the mission churches, but in varying strengths. Idiosyncrasies in the representation of permanence exist on the basis of occupation, clan, residence, gender, and age, but these are countered by the role of each church as an icon for the entire Pueblo nation. San Esteban del Rey symbolizes permanence primarily in its natural materials and hand labor, exterior form, and cemetery. Permanence emanates at Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe from the interior decoration in tandem with the spectacular renovation of the structure in the 1960s. San José de Laguna most clearly embodies permanence through interior decoration and natural materials and hand labor. Permanence was an original intent of the Catholic friars (Jackson 1993), but as political regimes changed and the earthen building materials began to melt away, permanence became central to Pueblo identity.

NATURAL MATERIALS AND HAND LABOR

Permanence resonates in these churches from the use of local natural construction materials bearing the marks of Pueblo hand labor. Pueblo people believe that their primary relationship is with the land, and they seek direct contact and interaction with it (Swentzell 1997). The churches facilitate this connection, appearing to be born of the earth, with natural building materials firmly rooted in place as the smooth adobe plaster melds into soil at the base of walls (Sturm 1990). Permanence is further symbolized by the multigenerational structural maintenance by the Pueblo people, even during periods of missionary inactivity.

Although adobe is a self-evidently impermanent building material, it symbolizes permanence through the tremendous quantities of soil and stone in the foundation, walls, roof, and floor of a church. These exude strength, solidity, and connection to the local landscape. Spaniards introduced the adobe brick to replace the Pueblo Indian construction method of puddling and to allow creation of permanent interior spaces (Jackson 1993). The uniform shape and binding ingredients of adobe brick were needed to prevent rapid settling and erosion of walls. Pueblo

hand labor built the bulk of the walls at San Esteban del Rey and Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe with adobe brick, whereas the San José walls were made of native stone. The undulating walls have stood for centuries, even through long lapses in maintenance, because of the careful placement of each stone and brick.

Soil is also an essential ingredient of church permanence through its use in maintenance and decoration. These structures of permanence are best maintained with frequent adobe replastering. Certain soil types are best for the roof, floor, and walls: Roof soil should shed water well, floor soil should be resistant to developing large cracks and raising dust, and wall plaster should breathe and accept paints or whitewashing. Interior decorative paints are made with soil of particular colors and textures mixed with water. The need to use the proper earth for each portion of the structure has resulted in churches becoming a medium of permanence in the cultural traditions of resource use. Without an intimate connection to the land that continues today through collecting and applying soil, Pueblo people would be further removed from the local environment (A. Ray 1999).

Permanence also is vested in these churches through the hand labor used to collect and carve wooden vigas (roof beams), altars, and other material.⁹ The massive vigas were gathered from the closest source of large timber, forests more than 25 kilometers from Acoma, Laguna, and Zuni. The great investment of labor in felling, carrying, and decoratively carving or painting the vigas imbued the churches with symbolic qualities of sacrifice, permanence, and pride (Figure 5). The San Esteban vigas became the most famous in the Southwest, for they were carried from Mount Taylor without ever touching the ground (National Survey 1970). Roof reconstruction resulted in replacement of the vigas, but the newer beams are still impressive in their size and appearance of permanence; those at San José date to 1818 (National Register 1973). Other wood in the churches, including railings, corbels, *latillas* (roof supports), pulpits, and altars, also bears visible ax marks, centuries-old symbols of the multigenerational creation of permanence.

EXTERIOR FORM

Exterior form contributes to permanence in the mission churches through massive size, fortress-like facades, and designs that echo the local landscape. An edifice symbolically representing the union of heaven and earth, the mission church was logically constructed as an architectural bulwark, with large enclosed spaces that exude power (Gutiérrez 1991). Immense walls were necessary to support a heavy earthen roof. Remarkably thick walls—measuring nearly 2 meters at San Esteban and 1 meter at Nuestra Señora and San José—convey an imposing sense of permanence. Vigas of considerable length determined the overall width of the churches and resulted in exterior dimensions dwarfing everything else in the pueblos. San Esteban is particularly impressive at 46 meters in length, 12 meters in width, and 18 meters in height (National Survey 1970).

According to Acoma tradition, San Esteban was used as a fort against invading Indians. The impression of the mission churches as fortresses, acknowledging their

ability to enclose and defend space and outlast contemporary lives, was imparted through several design features. For added stability the walls taper significantly as they rise; the result is a slanted exterior silhouette that looks all the more impreg-

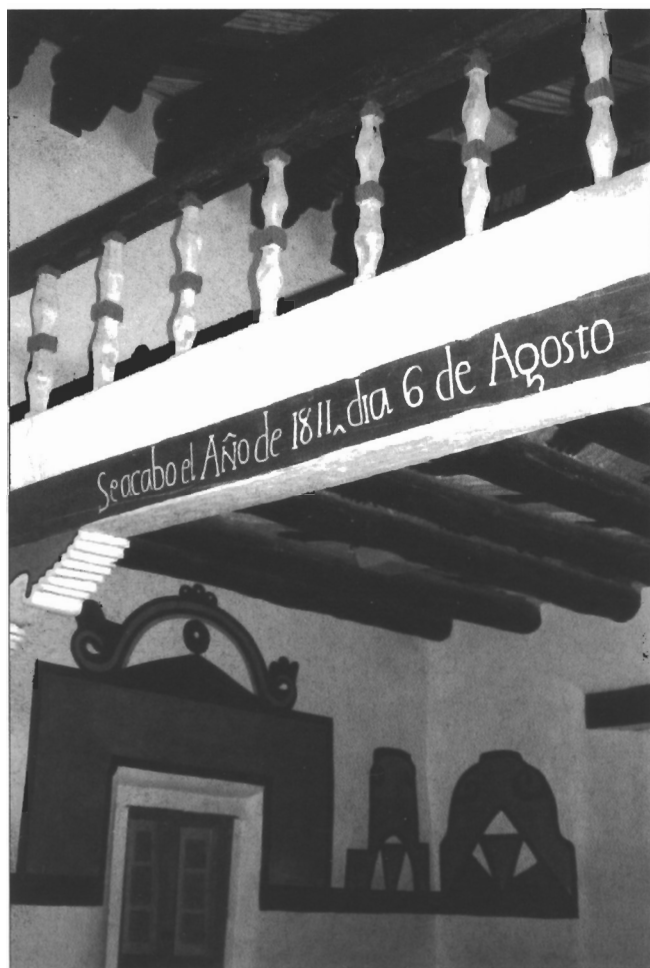


FIG. 5—The choir loft, vigas, corbels, latillas, and wall paintings in San José de Laguna. The inscription reads, "Completed 6 August 1811." (Photograph by Jeffrey S. Smith, August 1997)

nable. Roof parapets with projecting drainage spouts both exaggerate the height and fortress-like qualities of the churches and offer defenders cover from enemy fire. Protruding vigas just below the roofline and the presence of few windows accentuate the impression of a defensive structure meant to outlast any marauding force.

The blocky construction of the churches blends with the local mesa-and-plains landscape. Correspondingly, many eroded landforms on the Colorado Plateau evoke images of cathedrals and monuments.¹⁰ This echoing of the local terrain by struc-

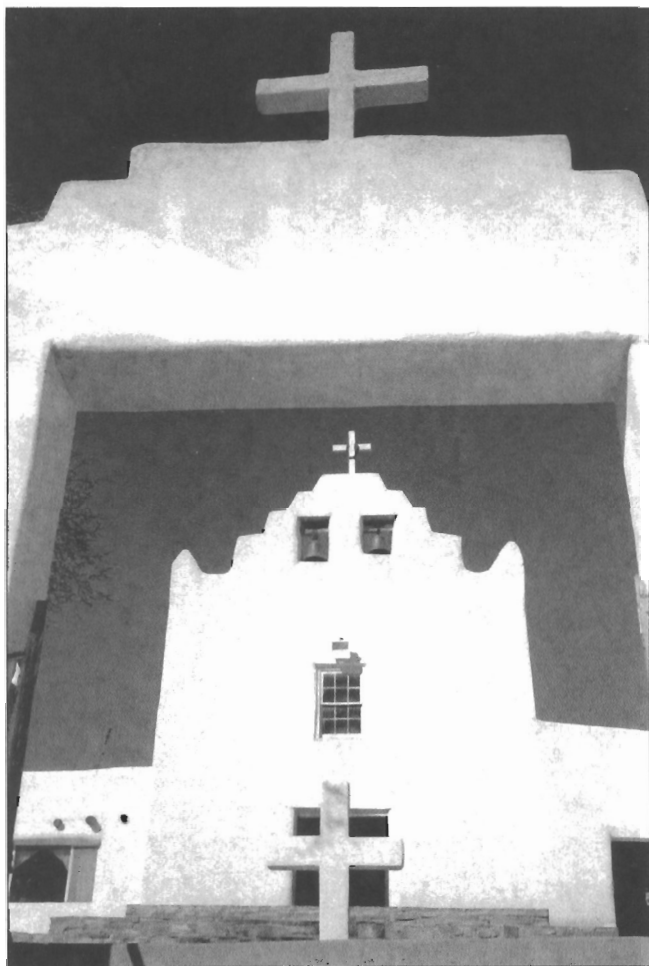


FIG. 6—A campo santo gateway at San José de Laguna, topped by a pediment in the form of a stepped sky altar with a cross. (Photograph by Kevin S. Blake, February 1999)

tural form enhances church permanence and strengthens Pueblo identity (Swentzell 1997). The bond between mission churches and nature resonated throughout New Mexico in the early twentieth century as an architectural identity was sought to represent landscape, Spanish colonialism, and Pueblo cultures. Mission exteriors, especially that of San Esteban, achieved greater permanence by inspiring the Pueblo Mission Revival and Santa Fe architectural styles (Sheppard 1988; Wilson 1997).

THE CAMPO SANTO

To a greater extent than with most cemeteries elsewhere, the campo santo adjacent to each church symbolizes permanence through its large size, multiple layers of countless burials, and the reverence Pueblo cultures retain for their ancestors. A simple cross at San José commemorates unmarked graves in a cemetery that is filled to capacity (Figure 6), whereas the active burial grounds at San Esteban and Nuestra Señora are scattered with individual monuments. To the Pueblo people no other place is more sacred: The Acoma disallow photographs of the church interior and the campo santo, and although the Zuni lease Nuestra Señora to the contemporary Catholic mission, they retain control of the cemetery (Ferguson 1996).

The protrusion of bones from the campo santo at San José after heavy rains may impart a sense of impermanence, but the Pueblo view is that the intermingling of bodies and mission earth creates a deeper connection between people and land. Furthermore, Pueblo people believe in an interrelationship between the future and the past, and ancestors play an important role in their interpretations of present-day life. To walk across a Pueblo campo santo is symbolically to walk with the ancestors and connect with the permanence of the place (German 1997).

Permanence in the Acoma campo santo emanates from its notable size and multiple burial layers. The absence of loose soil on the mesa made it necessary to import earth for the cemetery. Additionally, burials under the church floor, customary in other mission churches, were impossible here because only about one-half meter of soil was brought in for the church floor (Domínguez 1956). With the intent of creating a cemetery that would last for generations, the Acoma enclosed an area of approximately 33 square meters with a 14-meter-high stone wall. Centuries of Pueblo lives have been connected through the sacred earth, first in the forty years it took to fill the giant box with soil carried up the mesa and subsequently in the four layers of burials.

INTERIOR DECORATION

Interior decoration in the churches represents the religious syncretism of Catholicism and Pueblo cosmography. A shift from Spanish Catholic to Pueblo control of interior representations occurred slowly after the Pueblo Revolt. Combining Christian and Pueblo icons was encouraged by the Catholic hierarchy to graft Catholicism onto native beliefs. Syncretism results in an acceptance of church symbolism by more than one faith, giving more people an interest and a part in the permanence of the structure. Preservation efforts are then forced to consider interior decoration as a paramount concern because of its multicultural importance. Furthermore, as tourists experience the exquisite art, they are filled with an appreciation of the traditions of Pueblo cultures and a desire to perpetuate permanence through solicited donations.

The Acoma, Zuni, and Laguna churches are unique among New Mexico missions in having large wall paintings produced by intensive Pueblo participation

(Kubler 1940). The great expanses of interior walls offered ideal spaces for murals, but the advantage was countered by a need for frequent replastering. Permanence in the paintings is in the sheer antiquity of the painting tradition and the many painted symbols that are related to ancestors and to the land. This is permanence with a palimpsest quality: In the mid-1970s at least fifteen layers of adobe plaster and paintings were found on the San José walls (National Register 1973).

Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe is the best known of the three churches for interior decoration because of its murals of dramatic size and color that depict spiritual figures rarely seen by outsiders (Figure 7). The cultural traditions of the Zuni are rooted in their close ties to their landscape, and according to the Zuni those traditions are most clearly expressed through art (K. Seowtewa 1997). The Zuni have a long tradition of painting, first on caves and in kivas, then, in the 1700s, in life-sized murals in the church (National Register 1975; Sheridan 1978; Cushing 1979). During the 1800s decay wiped away all vestiges of these early murals, but a recent art project highlights the continuing importance of the church to Zuni identity.

Inspired by his maternal grandfather, father, tribal elders, and priest, Alex Seowtewa began a new set of Nuestra Señora murals in 1970. The multigenerational aspect of the latest Zuni murals further builds a symbolism of permanence. The project, grand in artistry and scale, is ongoing three decades later with the involvement of three of Seowtewa's sons (Seowtewa 1992). Murals are the prime significance of Nuestra Señora today; Mass services ceased because of paint fumes, ever-present scaffolding, and potential damage to the murals by auxiliary heat. The murals cover the top half of the walls down the entire length of the nave, seemingly floating above the wood carvings of the Stations of the Cross. In addition to the life-sized depictions of Zuni kachina spirits, the murals express details of the local landscape in the four seasons. Religious syncretism is inherent in how the kachinas are described as somewhat similar to Catholic saints (Gutiérrez 1991) and in a new altar painting that depicts Jesus descending into the pueblo on a Zuni rain cloud (Figure 8).

The murals have entered the discourse of permanence at Zuni as a focal point of debates over how cultural identity is best maintained. For some cultures, keeping religious practices a strictly guarded secret may instill pride, unity, and the spiritual power to resist domineering outside cultures. Some Zuni opposed the latest murals out of fear that sharing the details of Zuni religion could result in exploitation of their spirituality. Others believe that the creation of a permanent visual record emphasizing the importance of Zuni religious traditions outweighs these concerns (Seowtewa 1992). By adding something of lasting cultural value the murals contribute to the permanence of the structure and also exemplify the permanence of the Zuni faith.

Interior decorations at San José speak volumes about the Laguna desire to maintain their traditions in the face of Catholicism. Red, black, yellow, and green paintings of landscape, geometric, vegetal, and animistic design run the length of the nave in striking patterns (Figure 9). The paintings were probably first completed sometime between 1776 and 1846 and were redone every few years by Laguna reli-



FIG. 7—The mural of kachinas and Corn Mountain above the Catholic Stations of the Cross on the interior south wall in Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe. (Photograph by Jeffrey S. Smith, August 1997)



FIG. 8—Ken Seowtewa's altar mural sketch of Jesus on a Zuni cloud symbol above Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe. (Photograph by Jeffrey S. Smith, August 1997)

gious leaders when the walls were freshly whitewashed (Kubler 1940; A. Ray 1999). The rainbows may represent multicultural ties to the church, the terraced shapes signify tombs, and the doves embody the souls of those buried beneath the church floor (J. Ray 1999). Other shapes depict corn and sacred mountains. Alternative interpretations exist for the rainbows and terraced shapes. The stair-step symbols may refer to the distinctive spatial organization of Pueblo cosmology, which emphasizes motifs of ascent, descent, and the four cardinal directions in the migrations from underworlds up to the present fourth or fifth world (Nabokov and Easton 1989). Another view is that rainbows connect this world with the underworld and also are paths for supernatural travel (Swentzell 1990). Furthermore, *kachinas* may take the form of rainbows. The designs have been similar but not identical throughout their existence; parrots once represented the souls of the dead because they are revered in Pueblo cultures for their ability to commune with ancestral spirits (Figure 10). As a metaphoric return to prehistoric kiva paintings, the wall paintings at all three churches arguably transform the church naves into kivas (Wilson 1992).

Syncretism in the interior symbolism is evident in the juxtaposition of wall paintings, Stations of the Cross pictures, and other decorations. At San José and San Esteban the paintings wrap around wall niches with Catholic statues. Both churches also feature an ornate and colorful *reredo* (painted and carved wood altar screen) portraying Catholic icons that is attributed to the famous Laguna *santero* (Kornegay 1996). Projecting immediately above the altar screens at right angles are large paintings of celestial Pueblo religious images on animal hides (Figure 11). The preservation of these objects for centuries signifies a permanence that is deepened through the multicultural attachment to the churches.

DECAY AND REBIRTH

With declining missionary activity in the 1800s, the Pueblo people generally let the churches decay in favor of maintaining their outdoor ceremonial dance traditions (Jackson 1993). The easy Pueblo acceptance of structural decay and rebirth, as buildings come from and then return into the earth, metaphorically reflects Pueblo earthen burial practices (Swentzell 1997). The crumbling of the structures, however, masked their ties to Pueblo identity and gave greater significance to their rebirth. Restoration signifies permanence of the Pueblo spirit and the strengthening of multicultural bonds, and the act of restoration often has deeper meaning than the neglect of decay.

Of all the New Mexico Pueblo mission churches, Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe provides the most spectacular example of decay and rebirth. Having fallen into disrepair shortly after the visit of Domínguez in 1776, the church impressed nineteenth-century travelers with its sheer dilapidation. In 1849, Lt. James Harlan Simpson of the U.S. Army Topographic Engineers found the church almost bare of sacred furnishings, with only a "miserable painting of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe" (Crampton 1977, 99). In 1857, Lt. Edward F. Beale commented, "The interior is in a ruined state, great masses of earth have fallen from the north wall; the choir [loft] is



FIG. 9—The interior north wall of San José de Laguna displays religious syncretism. Pueblo symbols include paintings of a dove, corn, a tomb, a mountain, and a rainbow. Catholic symbols are Stations of the Cross, statues of Saint Joseph and Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, and a print of the Virgin of Guadalupe. At the foot of Tekakwitha are a flower basket, a Laguna pottery bowl containing corn pollen, and a framed prayer petition for her canonization. (Photograph by Kevin S. Blake, August 1997)

shaky and the fresco has long since dropped in great patches upon the floor” (National Register 1975). Cushing noted in the 1880s that the church “harbors only burros and shivering dogs of cold winter nights and is toppling to ruin” (1979, 176). In the first half of the twentieth century the downfall of the church was virtually complete, with observers merely noting a picturesque ruin (Forrest 1929).

Remarkably, even in ruins the church continued to symbolize permanence and Zuni identity. When Cushing’s friends plundered various objects, the Zuni demanded their return. Then, as the walls threatened to topple, Cushing urged that the ruins be razed, but the Zuni leaders refused, saying that the act would despoil the shrine of their fathers (Cushing 1979). Furthermore, long after missionary visits ceased at Zuni, the campo santo was the primary burial ground, and Zuni religious leaders regularly visited the church for ceremonial purposes (E. Seowtewa 1997).

Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe became the phoenix of the Pueblo mission churches in the late 1960s, with its dramatic return to former glory thanks to the labor and consent of the Zuni, the technical expertise of the National Park Service, and funding from the Catholic Church. To the involved parties the renewed church symbolized both a sacred place and a cultural icon, exhibiting the desire for permanence among diverse elements of society. Less dramatic cycles of decay and rebirth



FIG. 10—An earlier version of a wall painting with a parrot symbol, visible in a storage closet in San José de Laguna. (Photograph by Jeffrey S. Smith, August 1997)



FIG. 11—The animal-hide painting, with Pueblo symbols, on the ceiling above the altar in San José de Laguna, and the top of the *reredo*, with Catholic symbols. (Photograph by Jeffrey S. Smith, August 1997)

occurred at Acoma and Laguna; those churches also were restored to ensure permanence. San Esteban reached a critical level of deterioration before reconstruction and restoration efforts were launched in 1902 and 1924 (National Survey 1970; Kessell 1980). Although the nave of San José has undergone few major structural modifications, a massive stabilization wall built in 1996 by more than 150 Laguna residents and the communitywide fundraising efforts in 1999 to ameliorate decay in the walls and foundation have further imbued church permanence in Laguna identity.

PERMANENCE PERPETUATED

Any landscape is to some degree permanent, but the mission churches of Acoma, Zuni, and Laguna have enduring and deeply symbolic qualities born of an ongoing connection to the land, multiculturalism, and religious syncretism. Because mission-church permanence embodies both tradition and adaptation to the passage of time, it cannot simply be equated with antiquity. The fluidity and movement of culture makes it at once necessary and possible for permanence to change, embracing new representations that appeal to later generations. Structural changes, such as restoration or adding Pueblo symbols to interior decorations, actually ensure the survival of the structure and the multigenerational perpetuation of permanence.

Both culture and nature are embodied in the churches, and their joining is critical to the creation of permanence. Pueblo societies bridge the dichotomy of culture and nature and embed permanence in the churches with elements symbolic of their local landscape: soil for building maintenance and murals with landform designs. In Pueblo beliefs, the Creator is manifest in all things, not just a church building; Pueblo identity accompanies the symbolic and material imprint of sacred earth into the churches. Without the rootedness-in-place of Pueblo cultures, mission churches would merely have been an ephemeral relic of passing Spanish power.

Although efforts to maintain these structures of permanence involved multiple cultures, control over the production of permanence has evolved as local people have wrested power from distant authorities. After the departure of missionaries, the Acoma managed the use of San Esteban, and today a Laguna priest is invited to San Esteban only on rare occasions. At San José the Franciscans have maintained a stronger presence, but Laguna parishioners also perpetuate permanence in the church use and meaning. The 300th anniversary celebration efforts, for example, involved San José as the focal point for reinstilling community traditions when carved statues from the church were taken to the river for ceremonial blessing. Additionally, the church supports the efforts to maintain the traditional Laguna use of natural materials in building maintenance (A. Ray 1999). Although Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe is no longer used for Catholic Mass, it retains a highly symbolic role in Zuni feast days and dances. Today the sight of costumed Zuni dancers around the ancient church containing murals of their kachina representations reinforces the continuing permanence of the structure.

Cultural mixing has not eroded permanence; instead, multicultural respect for the structures, a respect that must be translated into ongoing community mainte-

nance, is necessary for these structures to weather time and cultural change. Church permanence represents the maintenance of cultural identity and ties to revered ancestors for the Pueblo people. To non-Pueblo Indians, church permanence is symbolic of the longevity of human presence in the region and syncretism with Native American values. Permanence has been shaped by imported religious values and architectural ideals, along with the centrality of the churches in Pueblo identity. For centuries the churches have been the primary destinations of pueblo visitors. juxtaposed with the Catholic and Pueblo senses of permanence are the values of explorers, tourists, and preservationists. The visible imprint of many an occupant, lifestyle, and set of values allows the churches to transcend individual lives—and achieve the symbolism of permanence—because they embody collective experience.

NOTES

1. Some spellings of *Zuni*, usually archaic, include a tilde, as in *Zuñi*, but we adopt the spelling used by the Zuni Tribe. Occasionally an accent is added to the spelling of *Acoma*, as in *Ácoma*, indicating the correct pronunciation and the Spanish spelling, but this convention is infrequent among scholars and has not been officially adopted by the Pueblo of Acoma.
2. Late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century missionary activity resulted in the establishment of additional missions in these pueblos. Our focus, however, is on the Franciscan churches constructed during Spanish rule and still standing. We contend that the symbolism of permanence is far more potent at these three churches than at recently constructed churches.
3. The three churches are on the National Register of Historic Places.
4. Today there are nineteen pueblos in New Mexico, most with at least partial remnants of mission churches from the Spanish era.
5. The Acoma share with the Hopi the distinction of the oldest continuously occupied communities in what is today the United States. The permanence of Acoma is openly touted in their tourist brochure: "You travel a thousand years in one day." Each year approximately ten to fifteen families maintain full-time residence on the mesa. The rest of the population uses the mesa for weekend and summer vacations and for feast-day celebrations.
6. The first patron saint of Acoma was probably Saint Stephen the Martyr, but his feast day is 26 December, too close to Christmas and at a cold time of year at this elevation of 2,133 meters. The patron saint eventually became Saint Stephen the King of Hungary, canonized by Pope Benedict IX for converting the Magyars (Domínguez 1956; Sedgwick 1963). An alternate spelling of the church name is *San Estevan del Rey*; we adopt the typical Acoma spelling of *Esteban*.
7. Some debate continues over the original date of a mission church in Halona. C. Gregory Crampton (1977) and Ken Seowtewa (1992) suggest that at least a portion of the current structure was built in 1629. What is widely agreed upon is that a church on the current site was substantially rebuilt from 1699 to 1705. The name of the church is in reference to the 1531 miraculous apparition in central Mexico of the brown-skinned Virgin Mary, La Virgen de Guadalupe.
8. *Kahwaika* refers to Laguna, the oldest Laguna village, the seat of government for Laguna Pueblo, and the site of San José Mission. Laguna Pueblo now comprises six villages: Laguna, Encinal, Mesita, Paguete, Paraje, and Seama.
9. At the top of a wall, heavy wood brackets, or corbels, are set into the adobe to support the transverse pine vigas spaced about a meter apart. Diagonally across them are laid smaller, dowel-shaped pieces of wood called *latillas*.
10. Whether to shield an anxiety over the starkness of the land, to promote the place to immigrants, to civilize a heathen land, or simply to implant familiar images in the minds of distant readers, writers have long compared the Colorado Plateau to monumental architecture in the built environment. At times this is done with literary aplomb, as in the reprinted work of Willa Cather (1990).

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