

Eden Itself?
Early Pueblo Occupation of the La Plata Valley

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East of Eden and North of Chaco:
Untangling Early Puebloan, Chacoan and Navajo Histories
in the Upper and Middle San Juan Drainage

Society for American Archaeology 74th Annual Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia
April, 2009
Revised November-December, 2009

“Eastern Mesa Verde,” as proposed by Wilshusen is east of The La Plata Valley. The valley is at the western edge of and outside the area that Rich and Ben have chosen to focus upon. This paper was invited to lend perspective from the La Plata valley. For a number of reasons, we have chosen to emphasize the early end of the temporal range of this topic

- 1) We associate Rich Wilshusen with Pueblo I (see, e.g., Wilshusen 1986, 1991; Wilshusen and Blinman 1992; Wilshusen and Van Dyke 2006).
- 2) Wilson has recently focused on early ceramics for his Early Ceramics Conference (2008).
- 3) Our work in the La Plata Valley has nothing to contribute to Navajo studies.
- 4) There are a number of Transitional Basketmaker III and Basketmaker III settlements in our project area, and assemblages from the La Plata may reflect among the most complete examples of the ceramic sequence from the earliest ceramics to the end of the Pueblo I period.
- 5) Clear trends of important factors in Pueblo I settlement location are present in the archaeology of the valley. Some of that evidence is purely negative in our data, but fortunately work in other

parts of the valley emphasizes those factors. Connection between the La Plata Valley and areas of interest to this symposium appear strongest during the early ceramic periods.

6) Eden implies beginnings, and we suggest Eden-like qualities for the valley.

THE TOTAH

We subscribe to the concept that the modern agricultural area surrounding the confluence of three of the largest, most permanent streams in the Colorado Plateau is a useful one in understanding prehistoric dynamics (Figure 1). The Navajo word for the coming together of the Animas and La Plata Rivers with the San Juan is Totah (McKenna and Toll 1992; Toll 2008). As is often the case, the Chaco and immediately post Chaco eras grab the most attention because of architectural scale and the impact that greater scale has on earlier sites. Thus, sites like Aztec, Salmon, the Holmes Group, and Morris Sites 39 and 41, all Totah greathouses, are established in the literature, though in many ways all of the last four are sadly under studied. They nonetheless clearly show the continuing importance of the river valleys to late and post Chaco Pueblo history.

CERAMIC STUDIES AND SETTLEMENT

It being the 100th anniversary of the Museum of New Mexico and given the importance of past work to present thought, we find ourselves in a history-of-archaeology mode, into which we will interleave current knowledge of the area.

In 1989, Wilson started analysis of ceramics recovered during excavations of the La Plata Highway Project in the La Plata River Valley conducted by Museum of New Mexico covering an area just to the northwest of Farmington New Mexico. The great majority of the pottery

recovered during this project was from sites associated with two large communities dating to the Pueblo II and Pueblo III periods. The collections also included much smaller amounts of pottery from components of these sites dating to the Basketmaker III and Pueblo I periods.

THE NUSBAUM SURVEY OF THE LA PLATA VALLEY

During this analysis, it became evident that in order to better interpret the trends at the communities investigated, it was necessary to gain a perspective on overall ceramic developments and settlement trends along the entire La Plata Valley. One important source of information on La Plata Valley prehistory and history is Dykeman and Langenfeld's (1987) overview of the valley. They included journal entries by Deric Nusbaum on file at the Laboratory of Anthropology from his largely unknown survey of the La Plata Valley. Deric O'Bryan Nusbaum became the stepson of Jesse Nusbaum when Eileen O'Bryan married him in 1920. Deric Nusbaum was barely in his 20s when he directed the survey of the La Plata Valley in 1935, but was already an established author, having written two adventure books as a teenager in the 1920s about his life, adventures, and excavations in isolated and pristine Mesa Verde National Park (Nusbaum 1926). Deric Nusbaum's survey of the La Plata Valley was conducted July to August 1935 for the Carnegie Institution.

This survey was intended to supplement Earl Morris's "La Plata District" study of 42 sites. Morris performed extensive excavations in 23 ruins from 1915 to 1930 for the Carnegie Institution in the Totah, Mancos, and Upper San Juan regions. He worked in La Plata Valley sites spanning the entire ceramic period, as well as extensive excavations at the Aztec Ruin, Basketmaker II sites in the Durango area, and Navajo sites in Gobernador region (Morris 1919, 1939; Morris and Burgh 1941; Carlson 1965) (Figures 1, 2).

Deric Nusbaum's survey of the La Plata Valley is still the most extensive archaeological survey of the La Plata Valley, though there have been multiple more spatially restricted, but better documented and reported surveys since. The area of the La Plata Valley surveyed extended from the confluence of the La Plata river with the San Juan 30 miles north to near Red Mesa, Colorado. The survey was mostly confined to the La Plata River valley, but occasionally extended into the upper stretches of tributary drainages including Barker Arroyo and tributaries of the Mancos River. Almost all of the sites recorded consisted of larger sites with distinct structures and features. Nusbaum lacked accurate maps, and it is not possible to determine the exact location of many of these sites. Our maps of his data place sites in one mile segments (Figure 2)..

A report of this survey was never written, but Nusbaum journal entries, the survey map, and 992 site forms with sketch maps are housed at the Archaeological Records Management Section in Santa Fe. In order to better interpret settlement data reflected by this survey, all these forms were copied and examined by Chuck Hannaford of the Office of Archaeological studies. In addition to imprecise locations, information from this survey lacked of dating assignments for the sites, other than sometimes referring to a site as Basketmaker or Pueblo. Associated ceramic types are also not mentioned on these site forms, although all forms note that ceramics were collected. To our surprise we were able to locate ceramic collections from this survey at three different institutions.

It is important to realize is that the late 1920s and 1930s represented a dynamic time in the Southwest, during which professional archaeology was transformed from a vocation where the primary goal of excavation of sites was to amass collections of whole pots and other nice artifacts for eastern museums to a more systematic, data-oriented discipline. By the late 1920s, a

number of institutions staffed by true scholars of Southwestern history and culture had established themselves in various areas of the Southwest. A new focus became understanding the nature of change in the Southwest, requiring, among other things, two important new tools. One was the areal or regional survey, in which involved the mapping and documentation of sites, whether they were excavated or not. The other tool was a system of regional classifications, which included the systematic description and taxonomy of pottery. One of the new goals of many of these investigations was to obtain samples of pottery representative of a wide range of temporal spans and geographic areas.

STUDIES OF NUSBAUM SURVEY POTTERY

Pottery collected by Deric Nusbaum made its way to various archeologists embracing these new approaches. Deric Nusbaum had connections to all three:

Mera The first set of collections we were able to locate from the 1935 La Plata survey consisted of sherds from a selected sample of sites from Nusbaum's survey is stored in the Mera Collections in drawers at the Laboratory of Anthropology in Santa Fe. These collections range from about 20 to 150 sherds, and are included with slips made by H.P. Mera with information concerning the ceramic types he identified. Mera's access to the collections Deric Nusbaum's La Plata survey stemmed from Deric Nusbaum's step father Jesse Nusbaum being director of the Laboratory of Anthropology during this time. As is the case for collections he made for other areas, Mera assigned Laboratory of Anthropology numbers to sites from the La Plata collections which he included with a slip describing the location of the site and ceramic types identified.

Gladwin The largest of the collections we located are those originally housed at Gila Pueblo Archaeological Foundation which and are now stored at Arizona State Museum in

Tucson. Gila Pueblo was established in 1928 by Harold and Winifred Gladwin inside a reconstructed ruin. This institute began the task of investigating archaeology across the Southwest recognizing and defining major culture areas such as the Hohokam and Mogollon. It was also deeply involved in examination and classification of Chaco and Mesa Verde region ceramics. As did Mera, archaeologists at the Gila Pueblo foundation placed considerable importance on site survey and ceramic classification. Pottery collected from sites in various survey areas were glued on boards. The Gila collections from almost all sites recorded during the 1935 La Plata survey consist of about 30 sherds per site. These sherds still have glue and labels indicating they were from sherd boards. During the 1940s one of the staff archaeologists for the Gila Pueblo institute was Deric O'Bryan (née Deric Nusbaum). Deric O'Bryan is best known for excavations he conducted for Gila Pueblo in Mesa Verde National Park for interpretive purposes during the late 1940s. Gila Pueblo center had conducted surveys in Mesa Verde National Park in the 1920s. O'Bryan published a report in 1950 in which the Mesa Verde phases were placed into the Gila classification system. The report includes questions and interpretations that remain relevant to Mesa Verde scholars.

Shepard Collections of sherds from a small number of Nusbaum survey sites are also stored in the Shepard collections at the University of Colorado Museum in Boulder. Having worked first with Wesley Bradfield in technological studies of pottery from the Mimbres region, Shepard began her work in Santa Fe through an unpaid research position at the Laboratory of Anthropology. Later, with support from Kidder through the Carnegie Foundation, she completed her ground-breaking study of pottery from Pecos Pueblo (Shepard 1936). Collaborating with Earl Morris and continuing to work for the Carnegie, she published another ceramic landmark work, "Technology of La Plata Pottery" (Shepard 1939). It is widely and naturally assumed that her

study was based on the examination of pottery from Morris's excavations, but most of the pottery from Morris's excavations was not available to her at the time of her studies. Her analysis was, in fact, based on the study of 3000 surface sherds from 95 sites collected during the 1935 La Plata Survey, probably available to her through the same channels through which Mera obtained the pottery for his studies. "Administrative" problems between Shepard and Jesse Nusbaum at the Laboratory of Anthropology resulted in her moving to Boulder Colorado in 1937, where her collections and archives remain. Shepard's 1939 report "Technology of La Plata Pottery" represents the only study ever published based on material from this survey. The only weakness the data in this report for examining basic settlement is that it is not possible to determine the types and characteristics of pottery from specific sites.

Despite the fact that a number of notable archaeologists obtained collections from the Nusbaum survey of the La Plata Valley, and that sherds from these collections served as the basis for Anna Shepard's important studies of Anasazi ceramic technological change over long time periods, no attempt has ever been made to assign specific dates to sites recorded during this survey. Examination of these collections provided an opportunity to assign specific dates to sites recorded during the La Plata survey, and to study trends for a large data set which includes sites that have since been impacted or destroyed.

The fortunate curation of these La Plata ceramic collections associated with almost all sites recorded during the 1935 survey meshed well with Wilson's refinements of methods of classification and dating of ceramic assemblages from various surrounding regions. This classification includes types and definitions for Mesa Verde pottery. It focused on pottery from the Northern San Juan or Mesa Verde region to the west based on material from Mesa Verde National Park, the Dolores River Valley, Montezuma Valley, Alkali Ridge, the La Plata Valley

and other areas in Southwest Colorado and Southeast Utah. A further synthesis resulted from a conference which produced insights into the identification and classification of pottery in the Gobernador or Upper San Juan region to the east. Alfred Dittert and other archaeologists who had long worked in this region using data from the Navajo Reservoir Project provided critical input to this effort (Wilson and Blinman 1993). Maps attempting to distinguish regions for this area of the Northern Anasazi place the La Plata Valley right between the Middle San and Upper San Juan regions (Allison and Hagopian 2008; see Figure 3). This ambiguity results from the history of projects and their use of taxonomies in the several river drainages, but it is also illustrative of how this significant place took part in cultural developments throughout the region. As we will discuss, this participation is visible in ceramic traditions. Terminological ambiguity is exacerbated by what might be called “the many San Juans.” All of the following exist in the literature:

--The Upper San Juan which is focal to the studies in this session (see for example Wilson and Blinman 1993), and includes the area sometimes described as the Gobernador region.

--The Middle San Juan which is essentially equivalent to the Totah (see for example Reed 2008). One of the advantages of the term Totah is that it does not include the words San Juan.

--The Northern San Juan which usually includes the Mesa Verde and Montezuma Valley area (see Lipe 2006).

--The San Juan Basin which includes the area south of the San Juan River and Chaco Canyon (see e.g., Judge 1989).

The early La Plata Valley ceramic sites contain pottery exhibiting characteristics of two distinctive traditions. This creates potential for strong dating resolution based on the large number of distinct ceramic types. There is further potential for study of regional interaction and

shifts.

Using types and dating spans associated with Upper San Juan and Mesa Verde traditions to assign dates to assemblages from these collections proved to be productive. Despite the small number of sherds from the collections from the 1935 survey, Wilson and Hannaford were able to assign specific ceramic dates to 752 cases.

BASKETMAKER CERAMICS

The earliest ceramic dating periods identified for these collections we refer to as Transitional Basketmaker (Toll and Wilson 2000) was only identified for assemblages from four sites in the Nusbaum survey, but pottery from this period is present in the collections from three sites excavated for the highway and is noted at the East Side Rincon. One of these sites, LA 37594, includes a fully excavated mid sixth century structure. This period is closely related to the Sambrito and Los Pinos phases defined for the Upper San Juan region and dates from about A.D. 200 to 550 (Reed, Wilson, and Hays-Gilpin 2000). Assemblages dating to this period are defined by the exclusive presence of Sambrito Utility, an early polished self-tempered brown ware. Though evidence is slim, it seems likely that during the 500s there were a number of fairly sparsely distributed small groups, which were nonetheless more numerous and widespread than we have appreciated until recently (e.g., Kearns et al. 2000), and which did not “fit” with classifications accepted for many years. This early “expedient” pottery varied across space according to locally available materials, and has been given a variety of names, including Sambrito, Woodruff, Obelisk, and Twin Trees, (see Reed, Wilson, and Hays-Gilpin 2000:206, 214; 218-219).

The next period recognized is the Basketmaker III spanning from about A.D. 575 to 700,

identified in assemblages from 97 Nusbaum sites. Ceramic assemblages assigned to this period are dominated by plain gray utility ware sherds assigned to Chapin Gray. This complex of building and ceramic styles fits most nearly the “classic” concept of Basketmaker.

While most of the ceramic assemblages from Basketmaker III sites exhibit a mixture of Sambrito Utility and Chapin Gray and Black-on-white, a few appear to contain only white and mostly gray ware sherds. The common occurrence of Sambrito Utility in many La Plata Basketmaker III assemblages distinguishes them from assemblages from most contemporary sites from areas in the Northern San Juan region to the west which contain only gray and white wares. Thus, ceramic assemblages from Basketmaker III sites in La Plata Valley appear to be more similar to Late Sambrito phase sites identified during the Navajo Reservoir Project than to sites in the Mesa Verde region to the west. (Eddy 1966; Wilson and Blinman 1992). This combination of pottery traditions may reflect the persistence of the earlier brown ware technology after the introduction of gray and white ware forms from the Northern San Juan region to the west. The presence of both Sambrito Brown and Chapin Gray and White wares in the same contexts in La Plata sites argues for *in situ* development of gray ware production. Gray ware clays and the firing and tempering they require have been shown to be form more reliable vessels under repeated and prolonged heating than available brown ware, self-tempered clays. This increased durability would have been necessary with increased reliance on agricultural products (Mills 1989; Reed et al. 2000:218-219). The loci of these innovations remains an intriguing unknown, but places where both technologies are present are candidates.

Most of the white ware sherds from these assemblages were assigned to Chapin Black-on-white. They exhibit decorations in mineral paint on an unpolished surface. Designs are mainly derived from basket-stitched elements and are very similar to those noted in Basketmaker

III sites in areas to the west.

PUEBLO I CERAMICS

Early Pueblo I period assemblages are thought to date between A.D. 700 and 800. They are represented in assemblages identified at 122 Nusbaum sites concentrated in the north, higher end of the valley (Figure 2). These assemblages are also dominated by plain gray ware sherds. Early neckbanded forms are occasionally present in extremely low frequencies. White ware sherds from these assemblages exhibit white polished surfaces and display bold decorations in organic and occasionally in glaze paint similar to styles noted for Rosa Black-on-white produced in the Upper San Juan region to the east. San Juan red ware types may be present, but are extremely rare. During the La Plata Highway Project the distinct characteristics of Early Pueblo I pottery were first noted for assemblages from LA 37605 below Morris Site 39. Other Pueblo I pottery was very rare in highway project site assemblages.

Late Pueblo I Period age was assigned to assemblages thought to date between A.D. 800 to 925. Forty such assemblages identified at Nusbaum sites. While plain gray ware sherds predominate in these collections, neckbanded and neckcoiled types are relatively common. White wares exhibit increasingly polished surfaces and decorations in mineral paint. Painted styles on the white wares resulted in their classification as Piedra Black-on-white which seem to reflect influence from areas to the west. San Juan Red wares such as Bluff Black-on-red are present in most assemblages.

Sites are characterized by room blocks, and are mainly concentrated in the northern part of the La Plata Valley (Figure 2). Collections from the Nusbaum survey for which 40 sites were identified probably indicate a drop in overall size from the previous period, although this may

simply reflect short distance movements of communities to nearby areas such as Mancos Canyon. The distribution of sites seems to indicate the continuation of the early Pueblo I pattern of concentration of villages in areas of higher elevation reflecting shifts resulting from climatic changes (Petersen 1988). A wave of influence from the Northern San Juan region is reflected in other areas of the Upper San Juan such as the Navajo Reservoir area, where replacement of Rosa Black-on-white by Piedra Black-on-white pottery took place (Eddy 1966). Settlements were concentrated in the upper La Plata Valley until the early Pueblo II period, when populations moved to the lower part of the La Plata Valley, and remained there until the abandonment of this region (Figure 2).

SITE DISTRIBUTION SEQUENCES

The long occupational sequence in the La Plata Valley spanning all Anasazi ceramic periods provided an opportunity to evaluate and modify interpretations from earlier studies. We can see shifting areas of influence and population through time (Figure 2).

The initial ceramic occupations of the La Plata are associated with the Sambrito phase as defined for the Upper San Juan region to the east. Figure 2 combines “transitional” and “classic” Basketmaker, which increases the site count, but it is still noteworthy that there are so many of these harder-to-see sites. Following the brown ware horizon, the presence of mineral-painted white wares with styles identical to those noted in pottery produced in areas from the Mesa Verde or Northern San Juan region at sites assigned to the Basketmaker III period may reflect influences or movements from areas west of the valley. The distribution of these sites differs from the other periods in that they are found across the full length of the survey area. Likely communities are visible as blips in the histogram (such as at Jackson Lake-East Side Rincon), but the overall

distribution is fairly even. This contrasts starkly with the concentration of Pueblo I sites in the upper valley, and Pueblo II and Pueblo III sites in the lower valley.

The unsettled and difficult Pueblo I period is in evidence in a complex and fluctuating series of ceramic occurrences. Another wave of influence from the east is suggested by white ware forms exhibiting designs identical to those noted for Rosa Black-on-white produced in the Upper San Juan region during the early Pueblo I Period. Sites displaying this pottery are concentrated in higher elevation areas of the La Plata Valley north of the Colorado boundary. Then, Late Pueblo I white wares decorated in mineral paint and assigned to Piedra Black-on-white appear to reflect another wave of influence and or populations from areas of the Northern San Juan region to the west.

The differences in the frequencies of mineral-painted white ware ceramics in the southern La Plata Valley and organic-painted ceramics in the northern valley were first noted by Shepard (1939) in her technological studies. She interpreted these distributions as reflecting contemporaneous but culturally distinct groups. Prior to these studies the documentation of change associated with the earliest occupations of the La Plata Valley was very poor. This stems from Morris's (1927; 1939) practice of placing sites in the La Plata Valley probably dating as early as A.D. 400 and as late as A.D. 800s, into a single Basketmaker III period.

For example, Site 23, north of the Colorado state line, was defined by Morris as a pure Basketmaker III horizon, but exhibits vents rather than antechambers, associated surface rooms, and tree ring dates in the 740s to 780s (Potter and Chuipka 2007). This site and other large sites in Colorado defined by Morris as dating to the Basketmaker III period, date to the Early Pueblo I period as defined here.

Refined dating and ceramic sourcing show that these differences actually reflect pan-

regional shifts and movements that influenced technology and style. Subdividing Morris's definition of the Basketmaker III and Pueblo I periods makes changes resulting from waves of influence and population from one direction and then the other clearer.

In contrast, ceramics from collections from later sites in the La Plata Valley indicate that the shift from Pueblo II mineral-painted pottery to organic-painted Pueblo III pottery types was more gradual. This interpretation contradicts characterizations in which ceramic change in La Plata Valley and elsewhere in the Totah region reflect control or even population movement into village communities, first from Chaco Canyon and then from the Mesa Verde region. Rather, data from the La Plata Valley reflect a gradual stylistic development in pottery and consistency in residency, indicating a stable and enduring occupation from the Early Pueblo II to the Late Pueblo III periods in the four large communities in the La Plata Valley.

INTRA VALLEY MOVEMENT

Data from ceramic assemblages collected by Nusbaum indicate population movements within the La Plata Valley that likely reflect responses to climatic episodes. The site distribution map (Figure 2) illustrates the number of Nusbaum sites for each mile segment along the La Plata Valley. These placements reflect shifts in settlement elevation through time. The southerly course of the La Plata Valley covers the range of elevation zones that were settled by Anasazi groups during various periods. The confluence of the La Plata and San Juan River is 5200 feet, Jackson Lake around 5400 feet, the Barker Arroyo locality 5500 to 5600 feet, with Morris 41 near 5900, the river at the border just 6000 feet, and the Pueblo I site of Morris 23 north of the Colorado line just over 6200 feet, to 6800-7000 feet at Sacred Ridge in Ridges Basin (Potter and Chuipka 2007). Basketmaker III populations were present in small pit-house villages along most of the La

Plata Valley, with greater concentrations in optimal locations such as the East Side Rincon (Dykeman and Langenfeld 1987). In contrast, during the early Pueblo I period, groups began to concentrate in larger communities in the northern part of the La Plata Valley in areas of higher elevation north of the Colorado border. This movement is reflected in other areas of the Four Corners Anasazi such as the Dolores and Chuska Valleys, probably as a result of changing moisture and temperature trends (Toll and Wilson 2000; Kearns et al. 2000). A southern movement of communities within the valley began during the early Pueblo II period, and populations continued to reside in the same four large communities until the abandonment of the La Plata Valley by Pueblo groups.

EARLY PUEBLOAN COMMUNITIES IN THE TOTAH

Clearly there were substantial communities with differentiated architecture in the upper La Plata and the Mancos by the 800s. This trend seems to be weaker in the bigger San Juan and Animas main drainages. From what we now know, antecedents to those settlements were more generally distributed along the valley. There are suggestions of communities with supra-household structures during Basketmaker times in the La Plata (Dykeman and Langenfeld 1987:47, 105). Including the known Basketmaker structures across the river from the East Side Rincon (LA 37595, 37594, and LA 60751), the Jackson Lake Basketmaker community is comparable to some of the large Arizona communities described by Gilpin and Benallie (2000).

So, how did these early communities use this especially favorable environment? We have little data as to Anasazi irrigation in the valley in any period, though we feel that the Rio La Plata was the most amenable to early irrigation of the three rivers of the Totah. As evidence for irrigation in other areas gets earlier and earlier, we can be certain that the concept was known by the 600s, and was certainly well developed in the region by the 1000s. Kearns (2000) notes that southern Chuska Valley Basketmaker III communities were using the arroyos as natural irrigation canals to channel seasonal runoff for flood water farming. It may be that some form of irrigation was part of the earliest communities in the valley, but, again, we have no concrete basis for it. The population of the valley clearly went through periods of increased density, sometimes to impressive levels.

As we have observed repeatedly once becoming aware of the phenomenon, there are numerous indications that tradition and long-term relationship to landscapes was an active endeavor for ancestral pueblo people. Nice examples of this effort are collections of projectile

points from antecedent eras in Basketmaker structures (La Plata site LA 60751; Tohatchi Flats pit structure Kearns et al. 2000:131), clearly intentional reoccupations of Basketmaker sites in Pueblo II, the frequent practice of placing later burials in partially filled earlier pit structures (Toll and Schlanger 1998; Toll and Wilson 2000), and Chacoan roads through time (Van Dyke 2007:234; Lekson 1999). This attention to the past gives weight to arguments for continuity and in-place ceramic development, and strongly signals land tenure.

TAXONOMICS

Archaeologists (ever a stylish bunch) make a habit of defining styles. The two relevant here are pottery styles and architectural styles. We have discussed pottery style at length, and the question of course arises whether pit structure styles vary coextensively with pottery styles. There have been several schemes of Basketmaker pit structure classification. Of note here are those by Vivian (1990), Shelley (1991) and Kearns et al. (2000) which elaborate and illustrate Shelley's scheme. These schema identify regional variants of pit structure architecture, such as La Plata, Sambrito, Lupton, and Sky Village (Vivian 1990:114), or Western, Northern, Mixed (Kearns et al. 2000:130), and Lukachukai, La Plata, Sambrito, Lupton, and Sky Village (Shelley 1991:11). We feel that, to a substantial degree, these are temporal variants (a likelihood also recognized by Kearns et al. 2000:132) that demonstrate the mobility and adaptability of these populations, and the high level of inter-areal communication that existed from early times. We do not doubt that there was also cultural variation within the area, but it is important not to conflate temporal variability with cultural variability and to guard against reifying typologies created by archaeologists rather than continually testing them.

As we look at the defined structure types (or cultural variants) we can see that there are

concentrations of types that allow for areas to be defined. A very good example is the “Sambrito Variant” (see Vivian 1990:114), defined as a Basketmaker variant of the upper San Juan region on the basis of Navajo Reservoir excavation of Sambrito Village (Eddy 1966). As we look at the layout of the structures we see that they occur with great similarity in other locations, examples being LA 37594 in the La Plata Valley, in Mancos Canyon (Breternitz 1966), and in the Tohatchi Flats. A clear example of this structure type is LA 2506 Pit structure 1 (see Kearns et al. 2000:130), which dates to AD 518. In their analysis this structure is classified as “Western.” These structures are also reminiscent of structures with early 600s dates from the Prayer Rock District (Morris 1980).

The occurrence of sites with early brownwares and similar shallow pit structures make more sense as a temporal marker than a cultural or areal one. That this combination of pottery and architecture occur in the La Plata Valley, Mancos Canyon and the Tohatchi Flats as well the Navajo Reservoir suggests that these structures are neither “western” nor confined to the Sambrito area. Site 29 SJ 423 in Chaco Canyon (Wills and Windes 1999; McKenna and Truell 1986:39-41) is likely to be an early example of a community from this time period. As indicated by Reed et al. (2000) and by Kearns et al.’s definition of the Muddy Wash Phase which includes round shallow pit structures and brownware pottery, this is a temporal phase that had a wider distribution than was previously recognized since they did not fit with ideas of Basketmaker II because of the presence of some pottery nor with Basketmaker III because of house form and pottery type. This phenomenon is well captured in Elizabeth Morris’ discussion of material from Obelisk Cave, the source of the type name Obelisk Gray, a polished utility ware which we believe fits into the early pottery tradition of Sambrito Brown:

“A problem arises concerning the tree-ring dates that range from A.D. 470 to 489.

If these are cutting dates and if the year designations can be applied to the houses and the plain gray pottery that was recovered, then this is the earliest Basketmaker III site that has been dug and dated” (Morris 1980:20).

The same can be said for what we call Classic Basketmaker III (Toll and Wilson 2000). Deeper, subrectangular pit structures with antechambers are found over a very large area including the Dolores Project (Chenault and Motsinger 2000), Tohatchi (Hammack 1964; Kearns et al. 2000), the La Plata Valley (Toll and Wilson 2000), Chaco Canyon (McKenna and Truell 1986) and on the Chuska Slope (Damp 1999; Hensler 1999). These structures generally date to the 600s and are associated with gray and white ware pottery.

Remarkable as the similarities in pottery and architectural style are across space there are, of course variations and lags. The patterns, however, are really quite clear. The more difficult and interesting questions are, of course, why there are these similarities and why the expressions change (see Kearns et al. 2000:132-133). These are deep questions, but, at their simplest, they demonstrate the mobility and broad knowledge of the populations. In further oversimplification, on the Colorado Plateau knowing a lot of people in a lot of places and being able to effectively interact with them, especially in times of stress, was clearly a recognized and sought-after benefit. Yet, we also know that we can also see multiple traditions and ideologies, the foundations of the ethnic diversity clear later.

The La Plata is an ideal location in several ways. It was and is clearly agriculturally and environmentally attractive, and, as such, was a persistent Pueblo place. Importantly, it crosscuts elevation zones, and demonstrates the critical impact elevation has had on the course of events. It is also well-placed in that it does rest between two areas that have been defined archaeologically, what Rich Wilshusen is now proposing to call Eastern Mesa VerdeBthe focus in this sessionBand

central/western Mesa Verde. These two areas have been studied in Pecos Conference systematics and in Navajo Reservoir systematics by astute archaeologists such as Alfred Dittert and Earl Morris. These taxonomies recognize real differences, particularly in ceramics, as well as in settlement and architecture. But has their use obscured the remarkable baseline similarities that existed through the pueblo history? It is an oft-repeated saw, but one that still seems warranted: once we have named styles and types we should remain vigilant that we are not allowing what we expect from our model influences what we see and attribute too much weight to the implication of a type name based on a place. We can, and should, continue to search for ethnic differences, but it should not be at the expense of seeing interaction and mobility among the groups.

The Totah is a place where these crossovers happened. Its similarities to Eden also include vipers: though they no doubt benefitted from advantages, its occupants were subject to environmental and social vicissitudes as well, and eventually moved to other climes.

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Figures with text version.

1. Region map showing Totah (from Toll 2008)

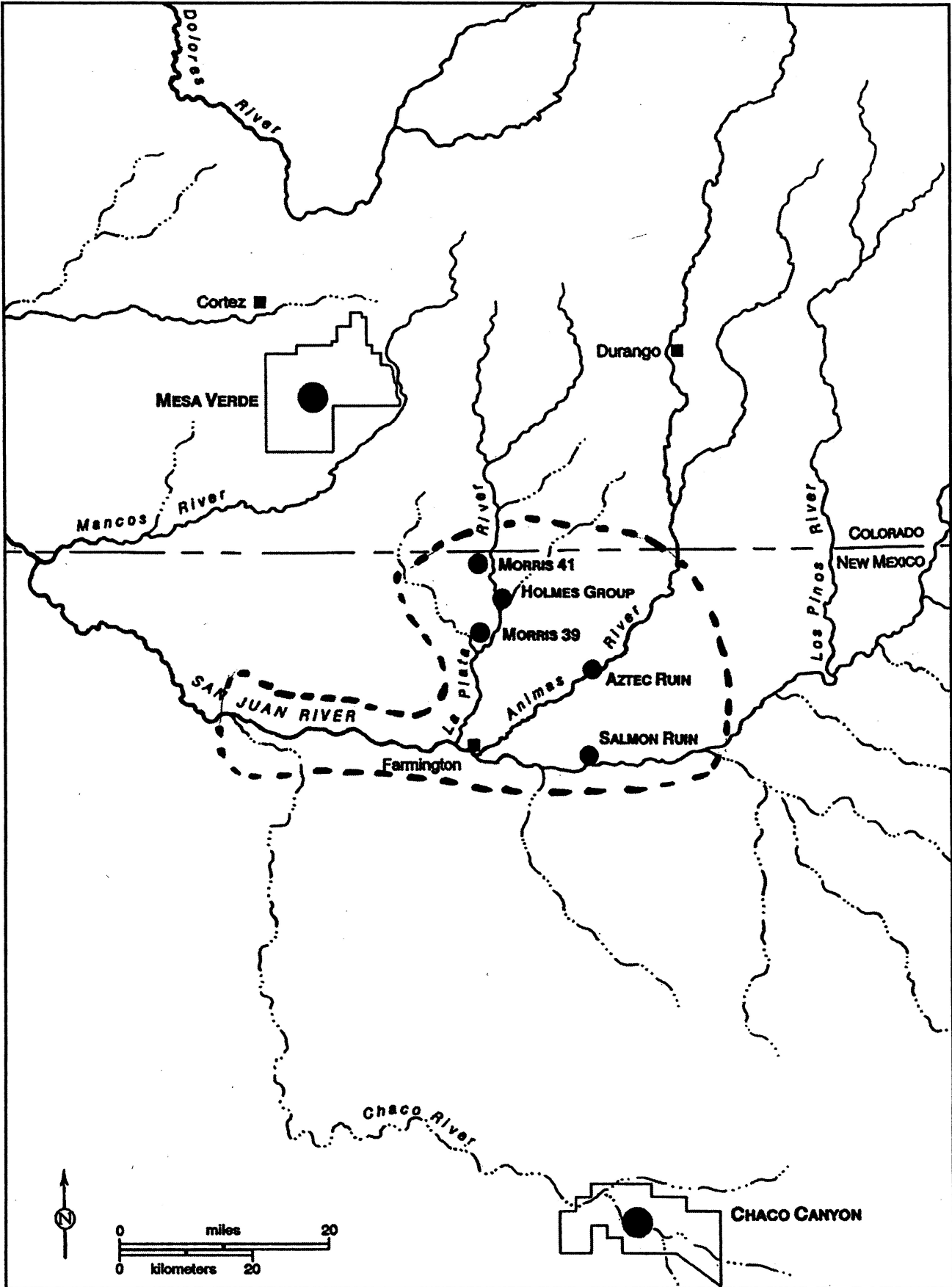
The area we define as the Totah, where the La Plata and the Animas Rivers join the San Juan River.

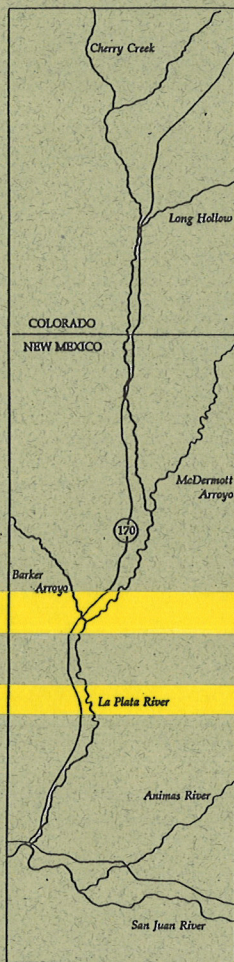
2. Nusbaum site distribution.

Site distribution based on analysis of sherds from Nusbaum's 1935 survey. Histogram bars show number of sites within one mile segments of the valley, broken down by major Pecos classification time groups.

3. Allison and Hagopian figure

Map from Allison and Hagopian 2008, showing how the La Plata Valley falls precisely between the areal variants they define.

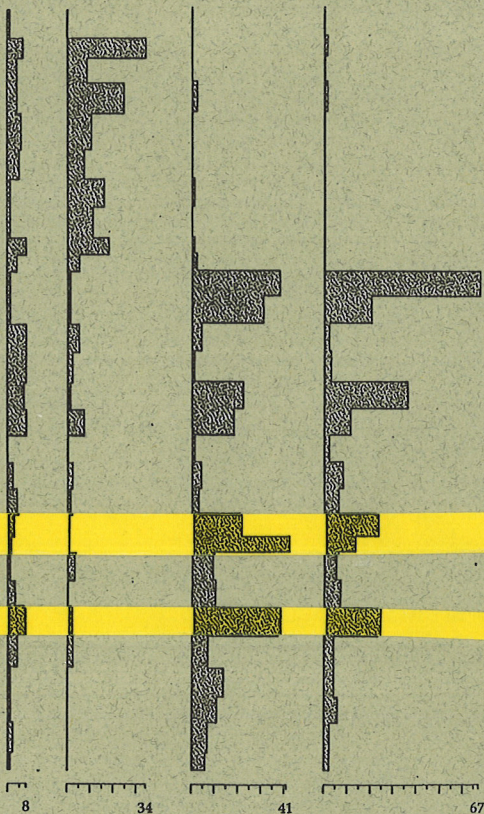




Basketmaker
Pueblo I

Pueblo II

Pueblo III



Number of Sites

