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The Emergence of Crenellated Ritual Pueblo Ceramics During the Late Prehistoric Period

This paper stems from an interest in studying not only the form, but the evolution of form, in late nineteenth and twentieth century ritual Pueblo ceramics. Although there is some latitude for variation, particularly in terms of commercialization, these vessels are basically stereotypical in shape as well as in motif and arrangement of motif. Immediately recognizable, for example, is the circular bowl with four crenellated projections or rim terraces from Zuni Pueblo; the squared bowl form from Hopi, with its four terraces and single loop handle; and the circular form with a single terrace from the Tewa Pueblos. The terraced rim is perhaps the most definite marker indicating a ritual function for a ceramic vessel, and is commonly found in association with design elements that are primarily water-oriented, including toads, tadpoles, and dragonflies, as well as the horned, plumed serpent. These elements are usually arranged in a formalized way, with four major motifs or motif groupings used on both exterior and interior walls; and often in combination with a more dominant central element in the bowl interior.

Although the majority of pieces appearing on the commercial market or in museum collections date after 1870, the formal origins of these vessels may be traced back much earlier in time, to the Anasazi Pueblo IV period, ca. AD 1300 to 1600. This paper will focus on the development of a single aspect of ritual form which first appears in this late prehistoric period — the crenellated terrace rim.

Perhaps, however, a few preliminary definitions or clarifications are in order. The term "ritual" is a non-connnotative category, to separate primarily by function certain ceramic types from those which are primarily employed in the secular or temporal sphere of life (although the division may often be rather ambiguous). Mortuary wares have also been eliminated from this discussion, which will focus solely on those ceramics which appear to have been created specifically for the performance of religious ceremony, and are distinguished visually by a highly patterned structure of form,

design, and composition. However, it is not necessary to the definition that these pieces be used in a strictly sacerdotal way, or within the context of highly formalized ritual performance, for a number of pieces have been recovered from habitation rooms rather than from *kiva* chambers. Some were likely used in everyday observance; others employed in more formalized ritual, were likely kept in private rooms for storage, and then brought into the *kiva* when needed. It appears that these vessels served primarily as receptacles used to contain materials of significance to the performance of ceremony, bearing designs that may have represented some of the more important religious themes.

These specialized ritual forms emerge in the late prehistoric period in the Southwest; certain of these vessels seem to observers more labor-intensive than functional in form, and consequently non-secular in function. Some of these ceramic forms appear earlier. The stirrup spout vessel and the annular vessel appear as early as the Basketmaker III period, ca. AD 500-700, are widely distributed geographically, and persist as late as the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries.¹ It should be noted parenthetically that these forms rather clearly derive from Mesoamerican sources, with similar examples found at sites in Northwest and Central Mexico; and that they occur in contemporaneous sites in the prehistoric Southeastern United States as well. However, as visually striking and as persistent as these forms may be, they appear as essentially sporadic and eccentric pieces, only rarely made or employed in a ritual context.

It is during the late prehistoric period, however, that a more regularized patterned type of ritual ceramic emerges, a development which may be viewed against the altering and unsettled social, economic, and environmental background of the period. This is a time marked by the general abandonment of the San Juan region and other areas traditionally occupied by the Anasazi; resettlement toward the south and the Rio Grande Valley; and the establishment of consolidated villages by larger, more heterogeneous populations. With the dearth of rainfall, more emphasis was placed on ditch irrigation, drawing water off the Rio Grande and its numerous tributaries. An intensification of religious activity occurs, perhaps as a means of dealing with new life-ways and uniting otherwise dissimilar groups of people in new economic endeavors. Also, it seems apparent that many of the religious concepts and motifs in operation are based upon Mesoamerican models, brought into the Pueblo Southwest first by visiting traders, and then later by population groups



Figure 1. Restored Tonque Glaze bowl. Height 5.2 cm., diam. 11.8 cm. The Albuquerque Museum of Art, History and Science, 74.33/21.



Figure 2. Restored Tonque Glaze bowl. Height 5.4 cm., diam. 13.8 cm. The Albuquerque Museum of Art History and Science, 74.33/16.

fleeing the political upheavals associated with the collapse of Post-classic period Mesoamerican centers and trading posts. Evidence for the increased ritual emphasis at this time may be noted in the greater production of ritually-associated materials and the depiction of non-secular themes, as seen in carved prayer sticks, painted alter tablets, *tablita* headdresses, and *kiva* murals.

It is against this background that the development of the terraced rim projection will be examined. While the terraced projection is almost always present on nineteenth and twentieth century ritual ceramics, it is virtually absent on prehistoric pieces. However, the *painted* terrace motif was well known on earlier secular ceramics, and during the period under discussion, is also found quite frequently on a variety of ritual objects. In probably the best discussion of crenellated bowls, Watson Smith notes the absence of the modeled rim prior to the Pueblo IV period; he implies uncertainty as to its possible appearance during the Pueblo IV period, and indicates that the only terraced sherds found in the Southwest, from the Pecos site, were dated by Kidder to the seventeenth century. Citing the failure of archaeologists to find evidence for the existence of the terraced rim prior to AD 1300. Smith observes that its probable origin and date of adoption by the Pueblos is unknown.²

Smith is correct in that the most predominant ritual forms during the late prehistoric period are the small circular bowls or rectangular dishes, unterraced, and which, through ethnographic analogy, are believed to have functioned as receptacles for prayer-meal, small amounts of liquid, or special plants. The small circular bowl, rarely over ten centimeters in diameter and four centimeters in height, occurs primarily in the Rio Grande Valley and on the Jemez Plateau, which includes sites in the Chama Valley, the Jemez Valley, and the Pajarito Plateau. Also, a few examples have been found in the Kayenta and Zuni areas. These dishes are primarily found at sites occupied during the middle to late fifteenth century. Examples from the Rio Grande Valley are executed in typical areal glazes, dating ca. 1350-1550, while those from the Jemez Plateau occur in both glazes and the biscuit wares, primarily Biscuit B. ca. 1400-1550.

Typical motifs used in the Rio Grande region include equal-armed crosses, X's, parallel dashes, dragonflies, and an occasional terrace, as illustrated by examples from Tonque Pueblo (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2). Design motifs from the Jemez Plateau are usually more zoomorphic in nature, as demonstrated in examples from the Pajarito Plateau (Fig. 3), and include horned snakes and frontal, spread-winged birds, tadpoles, and



Figure 3. Bandelier Black-on gray bowl. Pajarito Plateau. Laboratory of Antropology 435i8/11. Courtesy Museum of New Mexico.



Figure 4. Galesteo Glaze dish, San Marcos Ruin. Height 4.5 cm, length 12.0 cm. The Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, 46.15.1, University of New Mexico.

dragonflies, often in combination with crosses and stepped terraces.

Small rectangular dishes, usually under fourteen centimeters in length and five centimeters in height, also occur in the Rio Grande Valley, on the Pajarito Plateau, in the Galesteo Basin, at Pecos Pueblo, and in the Kayenta region (Fig. 4). Motifs again include terraces, dragonflies, and crosses. Obviously a small and symbolic vocabulary of design is being employed at this time.

However, of more particular interest to this discussion is the appearance of bowls and dishes which are topped by actually modeled terraces. A small, circular bowl with a terraced rim, from the Jemez region, has been published in both unreconstructed and reconstructed form.³ The piece was executed in Jemez black/white, which dates ca. AD 1300-1700. The bowl was found with one modeled terrace intact, of three levels; while the second terrace was added later by a conservator. The terrace is embellished by a second, painted terrace, divided medially into black and white halves, which may suggest of the pervading dualism found in the religious and economic structures of the historic Tanoan pueblos.

Terraced rectangular vessels are only rarely encountered. Most of the examples have been recovered from sites on the Pajarito Plateau, where they occur primarily in biscuit ware and in glazes that date to the fifteenth century. Terraces are occasionally placed on the short sides of the vessel while the general pattern seems to be for placement on the long sides. Again, the cross and the painted terrace motif are employed (Figure 5).

Regarding the paucity of examples, I would suggest that far more terraced pieces have been made than the literature or museum collections reflect. Due to their small size, these pieces may have been broken and overlooked, or may have been hidden away, or kept as prized heirlooms which may still be in use today. In fact, a piece identical in form to Fig. 5 appears in a late

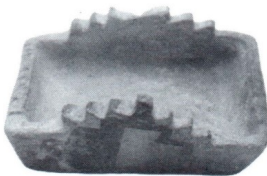


Figure 5. Biscuit ware dish. Height 3.7 cm, length 10.1 cm. Louie Museum of Anthropology, 2-36380, University of California, Berkeley.

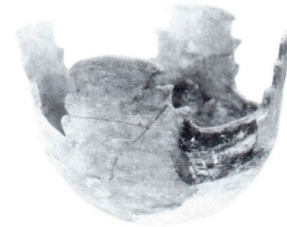


Figure 6. El Paso polychrome bowl, Twelve House Ruin. Height 16.8 cm, diam. 19.6 cm. University of Colorado Museum 26775.

nineteenth century illustration of an altar at the Hopi village of Oraibi.⁴

Various types of terraced vessels have been examined thus far, but no suggestion has been made as to the source of their incorporation as a formal element. Smith suggests quite reasonably that the origin of the modeled rim lies in the terraces that were painted on the sides of bowls designed for ritual use.⁵ However, terraced motifs tend to occur more frequently on the interiors, rather than the exteriors of painted bowls, and these motifs may often be widely separated into half terraces. However, another factor to be considered is the appearance of rim modification in Pueblo IV ceramics.

Rim edges of bowls and jars have often been utilized as a field for decoration in prehistoric Southwest pottery, from a band of continuous dots or ticks in the Basketmaker III period to groupings of three or four dots in four discrete units in Pueblo IV. Perhaps of more significance is the idea of rim notching, which occurs in the White Mountain area of eastern Arizona, particularly at the Point of Pines site. Here, four equally spaced notches have been found ground into the rims of funerary jars and their covering bowls. The practice of cremation and notching appear closely related, with notching possibly serving as a way of "killing" the vessel employed.⁶ Notching seems to have developed as a local phenomenon, ca. 1150-1400, although several notched bowls have been found in the Zuni area, dating after 1475, indicating a possible movement of people or ideas into the Zuni region after the abandonment of the Point of Pines site ca. 1450.⁷

Rim notching also occurs in ritual ceramics. It would appear that four indented notches were used first, as in examples from the Chama Valley (Jeancon 1923: p. 41), and then the clay itself was manipulated to form four pinched points, as in pieces from the Sapawe site, Chama Valley (Maxwell Museum of Anthropology 69.36.49). This quadripartite division of the vessel is often reinforced by the division of interior painted ele-



Figure 7. El Paso polychrome bowl, Twelve House Ruin. Height 15 cm, 10 cm., diam. 16.1 cm. University of Colorado Museum 26780.



Figure 8. El Paso brownware bowl, Twelve House Ruin. Height 9.9 cm, 5.5 cm., d. 12.1 cm. University of Colorado Museum, 26781.

ments into four units as well. The corresponding significance of the number four in Pueblo religion, the concept of world quartering, the fourfold repetition of ritual elements in ceremony, as well as their possible derivation from Mesoamerican sources can only be briefly mentioned.

Up to this point a variety and perhaps an evolution in ritual form in the late prehistoric Pueblo Southwest have been examined, from the small round or squared dishes with plain rims, to those with articulated rims, and finally to modeled terraces. But I would like to note three rather different, yet very important pieces which have not been critically discussed. These three vessels come from a site in the Hueco Bolson, known as Twelve House Pueblo, which was located approximately eight miles northeast of the present-day city of El Paso. They are of the type El Paso polychrome, a brownware, which dates ca. 1250-1350. These pieces are therefore quite likely older than any of the terraced vessels noted above. The pieces were excavated in the 1941-42 season, published on 1947 by Moore, who identifies them as ordinary storage bowls with "irregular scalloped rims"⁸ (Figs. 6, 7, 8).

The Hueco Bolson is geographically part of the territory once occupied by the Jornada Branch of the Mogollon. Sherds found in the region indicate close trade contacts with the Mimbres Branch to the east, as well as with Northern Chihuahua, and, to a lesser extent, the White Mountain/Little Colorado and Zuni regions.

In her study of Southwest rock art, Schaafsma finds that the Jornada pictorial style diffuses northward and is eventually borrowed by the Upper Rio Grande Anasazi peoples after 1300, when elements from the rock art are incorporated into Rio Grande pottery decoration and the painting of *kiva* walls. Among the motifs used in Jornada petroglyphs are snakes, tadpoles, spread-winged birds, and terraces. Schaafsma generally dates the Jornada style ca. 950-1200, but extends its influence to ca. 1350-1400 in the Hueco region. She also notes a clear impetus from Mexican sources in terms of subject matter.⁹ If, as she suggests, the Upper Rio Grande Pueblo people borrowed a new art style and an associated ceremonial complex, they may well have borrowed the idea of rim terraced ceremonial vessels. Thus, a probable source, time period, and mechanism for the introduction of the terraced vessel can be suggested.

It is likely that the terrace design derives originally from North Mexican or even Central Mexican sources, and terraced alter forms have been recovered from the

site of Casas Grandes in Chihuahua. It is generally assumed that the terrace design in the Southwest derives from the abstraction of piled rain clouds into a terrace form, as seen for example, in murals at the Pottery Mound site. This may be a local interpretation of the terrace form, one borrowed from Mesoamerica, or a secondary or projective explanation, used or incorporate a motif whose form may have been assumed, but whose original meaning might have lost its significance in transmission.

Associations between the terrace form and Tlaloc, the rain god of Central Mesoamerica, are rather clear, as is evidence for the adoption of the rain god cult in the prehistoric Southwest. Di Peso suggests that the cult of Tlaloc, who is usually represented in Mesoamerica with a terraced head and large circular eyes, entered the Southwest after 1340.¹⁰ But there is evidence for his presence prior to 1200, in representations from Mimbres pottery, where rather ambiguous figures with squared heads and circular eyes are shown with stepped terraced attached to or placed above their heads. Terraced ceramic or stone ornaments were used on roofs and altars at Central Mexican site of Teotihuacan, ca. 300 to 650, which mirrored the pyramidal form of the temple platforms, and these, Kubler suggests, may metaphorically represent a mountain topped by a cloud.¹¹ The Aztecs, ca. 1350 to 1550, also believed their pyramids to be man-made mountains filled with water, and represented their stepped pyramids in codices by the terraced form. The possibility that the ceramic rim terrace represented mountains as well as clouds to the prehistoric Pueblo people must also be considered.¹²

However, as an alternative interpretation, several tiered stone objects have been recovered from the site of Casas Grandes, Chihuahua, Mexico, the major frontier trade center between Central Mesoamerica and the Southwest. Here Di Peso identifies the terrace design as one associated with dead warriors and connected with the cult of Xiutecuhtli, the Mesoamerican Fire God.¹³ Xiutecuhtli has been identified by early Spanish chroniclers as a god highly revered by Mexican merchants, who celebrated his festival, significantly enough, by catching snakes, water creatures, and birds, and then eating them.¹⁴ Also, offerings to the Fire God were found in shrines below *kiva* fire boxes at a number of sites in the Chama Valley, as well as in West Mexico.¹⁵ Terraced stone objects, similar to those found at Casas Grandes, have also been recovered at sites in the Pecos and Tularosa Valleys and at Pecos Pueblo itself.¹⁶

The "dead warrior" motif, as found at Casas Grandes, is distinguished from the terraced design of the Upper Rio Grande by the acute angles of each terraced level, which is also quite evident in the El Paso polychrome vessels from the Jornada Mogollon site discussed earlier. Apparently, however, possible Warrior and Fire God associations may have eventually been lost, for at Hopi, for instance, the acute angled terrace is now known as the "cloud ladder."¹⁷ Thus it seems that the acute angled terrace form may have developed at Casas Grandes, moved northward to the Hueco region where it appeared on vessels, then to the Pecos Region, and the Upper Rio Grande.

Comparisons with terraced artifacts and motifs from the prehistoric Southeast are also noteworthy and suggestive of East-West diffusion. Examples include two vessels from the Middle Mississippian site of Moundville, Alabama (Museum of the American Indian 17/4404 & 18/419), which dates from 1200, and is roughly contemporaneous with the Pueblo IV. Note should also be made of the terraced motif found on an engraved shell cup from the Spiro site in Oklahoma (Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation 18,9121). The imagery of the so-called Southern Cult, predominant at this time, most probably also owes its inspiration to Mesoamerica. There is often a feeling among observers that there are greater similarities between prehistoric Southwest and prehistoric Southeast than between either and their presumed Mesoamerican sources.

Corresponding rim terraced ceramics do not seem to occur at Mexican sites. Puebloan trade pottery has been traced across Texas to at least the Louisiana border, and the possibility for a variety of contacts may be postulated, so there are certainly many streams of influence involved, many strands that remain tangled. To summarize, it seems that the acute angled terrace motif is employed at Casas Grandes, Chihuahua, in a ritual context, diffuses northward to the Hueco region where it appears on rim terraced vessels, then to the Pecos region, and finally to the Upper Rio Grande/Zuni areas, where it remains today the primary marker of ceramic ritual association.