Salado Archaeology and Social Change in the Late Pre-Contact Southwest

In the late 1200s, prolonged drought and social upheaval across the Four Corners region led many residents of this area to leave their homelands. Among these northern peoples were groups archaeologists call the Kayenta, who migrated to already populated valleys in the central and southern Southwest. In some places, they joined existing communities, in others, they created new settlements. Though relatively few in number, Kayenta immigrants were economically and socially influential.

In many places where the Kayenta resettled, their arrival coincided with a series of changes in how people lived and what they believed. At first, tensions ensued. As a generation or two passed, though, the descendants of immigrants and local groups found ways to live together, or at least coexist as neighbors. From these diverse communities emerged a new ideology—a new way of looking at things—that embraced aspects of local and immigrant traditions. We call this ideology, and the new traditions, practices, and objects associated with it, “Salado.”

Archaeology Southwest researchers have conducted a series of related projects since the 1990s focused on understanding the complex social, political, and demographic changes associated with Salado developments. Here we discuss how this program of research has been both informed by and has informed our recent work to preserve sites and landscapes across the Southwest.

What is priority area planning?

A dynamic process for using known information and expert opinion to identify spatially explicit cultural resource preservation priorities (sites and landscapes) within a region

One tool in the preservation toolbox intended to complement other preservation laws and management practices

The Salado Preservation Initiative

The Salado planning effort differs from previous projects in that the study area was defined thematically rather than geographically. We considered a restricted time period (A.D. 1250-1450) and defined the focal resources as those sites/areas with the potential to provide data important for studying the origins and spread of Salado. This allowed us to cover a larger geographic area and to tie this preservation work to our current research goals.

Why should we set priorities?

Resources (time and money) are scarce and we cannot protect it all

Our goals and objectives are best accomplished when actions are proactive rather than reactive

Preservation opportunities can be serendipitous and we need to be ready to act

Adverse effects are best avoided when considered early in planning processes, particularly when information can be organized at regional levels

The Priority Planning Process

The priority planning process can be broken down into five basic steps:

Organizing information

Spatially organizing those data to highlight focal resources

Soliciting expert knowledge/opinion

Providing spatial information and engaging experts one-on-one or in workshop settings to define/draw polygons in real-time (GIS) around important sites or areas based on their detailed knowledge of those areas

Site Survey and land status research

Refining priority area boundaries based on more detailed survey information when available

Removing private lands which do not support focal sites

Updating condition assessments

Where recent information are not available (and where possible) conducting new condition assessment/site visits

Finalizing recommendations/boundaries

Boundaries are finalized based on all the information above

Developing a publicly accessible platform for disseminating results

Regional distribution of Salado Polychrome (Roosevelt Red Ware) ceramics across Arizona and New Mexico

Focal sites were defined based on the presence and frequency of Salado ceramics or other related features/structures.

The Salado Preservation Initiative: Combining Research and Regional Preservation Planning

Credit:

Salado/Kayenta Migration maps by Catherine Gilman. Aerial photographs by Henry Wallace. Ceramic vessel photos by Mat Devitt.

Acknowledgements:

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