

TRANSNATIONAL AMERICAS: HOME(S), BORDERS AND TRANSGRESSIONS

Edited by

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HOME(S), BORDERS, AND TRANSGRESSIONS – THE STORY TOLD BY INSCRIPTION ROCK

ANDREA KÖKÉNY

El Morro National Monument is located on an ancient east-west trail in western New Mexico. The main feature of this National Monument is a great sandstone promontory with a pool of water at its base. As a shaded oasis in the western U.S. desert, it has been at the crossroads of different cultures, different peoples, and different periods in history, and has seen many explorers, home-seekers, and travelers who left signatures, names, dates, and stories of their treks on it. The Spanish explorers called it El Morro (*The Headland*). The Zuñi Indians call it "A'ts'ina" (*Place of writings on the rock*), and Americans call it Inscription Rock.

In my paper I propose to discuss what these inscriptions reveal about the history of the borderland region and the constant interaction of the people who migrated through it. Atop the promontory we can find the remains of an Ancestral Pueblo settlement from over seven hundred years ago. Between 1250 and 1350, about 1500 people lived here. They were most probably attracted by the permanent pool of water formed from rain and melted snow, which was the only water source for more than fifty miles. The location was also strategic because of the nearly impenetrable bluff.

The sacred Pueblo ruins at the site offer great insight into the culture of the Zuñis and their ancestors. The Puebloan culture developed about two thousand years ago. It consisted of skilled farmers and master builders, whose earliest structures were pit houses built mostly underground. Eventually, these pueblos evolved into above ground multi storied towns the people constructed. They used flat sedimentary rocks piled one on top of another and cemented with clay. The A'ts'ina ruins that archeologists unearthed in the 1950s demonstrate the advanced building skills of these ancestral Puebloans. Until its abandonment near 1400, this 200 by 300-foot pueblo above El Morro could house between one thousand to one thousand and five hundred Puebloans in the almost nine hundred interconnecting rooms that surrounded the open courtyard. We can still see today the square and circular underground kivas where the Zuñi ancestors performed religious ceremonies to bring rain and abundant crops, which traditionally consisted of corn, beans, and squash. As skilled farmers, they grew crops in fields the people irrigated with the rainwater collected in cisterns atop the mesa. They also irrigated their fields with the water from the pool located at the bottom

of the headland, which they reached by using still evident hand and toe steps etched into the face of the cliff.

A'ts'ina was the easternmost of six large towns into which the people of the El Morro Valley gathered for defense, but at the end of the 14th century they gradually abandoned it for lower altitudes and new centers in the Zuñi pueblos the Spanish encountered in the 16th century (Gutiérrez, 1991: xx–xxix; Weber–deBuys, 2017:101). Although the Ancestral Puebloans abandoned A'ts'ina long before the Spanish arrived, they left behind many petroglyphs that in 1605 inspired the Spanish conquistador, Don Juan de Oñate, to record his stay at *El Estanque de Peñol*, which is Spanish for „pool at the great rock.” His name was the first of hundreds of Spanish inscriptions carved at El Morro, most of which include the standard phrase *pasó por aquí* or *passed through here*, followed by the traveler's name and date of passage.

It was on September 21, 1595, that Oñate was awarded a contract by King Philip II of Spain to lead an expedition to and settle New Mexico. Spreading Catholicism was a primary objective, but many colonists enlisted in hopes of finding a new source of silver. After many delays they set out on their journey in early 1598. Oñate forded the Rio Grande at the famous crossing point of El Paso del Norte, which he discovered in May 1598, after making a formal declaration of possession of New Mexico on April 30 of that year. In July 1598, he established the headquarters of the New Mexico colony at San Juan pueblo, and thus extended the Camino Real by more than six hundred miles (Hammond, 1979:24-26; Simmons, 1991:58-61, 84-87, Gutiérrez, 1991:48-49; Weber, 1992:77-78). Oñate gradually explored the surrounding area and solidified his position. In 1601, he undertook a large expedition east to the Great Plains region of central North America. The expedition party included a hundred and thirty Spanish soldiers and twelve Franciscan priests, and a retinue of a hundred and thirty Indian soldiers and servants. They journeyed across the plains eastward as far as present-day Texas and Oklahoma (Bolton, 1916:250-267; Hammond, 1979:26-27; Gutiérrez, 1991:54). Oñate's next major expedition went to the west, from New Mexico to the lower valley of the Colorado River. The party of about three dozen men set out from the Rio Grande valley in October 1604. They traveled by way of Zuñi and Hopi pueblos to the Colorado River, and descended the river to its mouth in the Gulf of California in January 1605, before returning to New Mexico along the same route. The purpose of the expedition may have been to locate a port by which New Mexico could be supplied, as an alternative to the long and laborious overland route from New Spain (Bolton, 1916:268-280; Hammond, 1979:27-28; Weber, 1992:82). Oñate and his party probably passed by El Morro on their way to the west, but it was only in 1605, on their return trip from the Gulf of California – which he thought was the Pacific Ocean and which Spaniards of his time called the South Sea –, that Oñate carved the oldest European inscription that remains on El Morro: "Paso por

aq[u]i el adelantado don ju/an oñate del descubrimiento de la mar del sur a 16 de Abril del 1605." In English it means: "There passed this way the Adelantado Don Juan de Oñate, from the discovery of the South Sea, on the 16th of April, 1605." (Weber, 1992:82-83; Weber – deBuys, 2017:97).

Thereafter many Spaniards passed that way and inscribed their names on the walls of El Morro. It is important to explain the name and to point out that a *morro* is not merely a bluff. The term suggests a headland, especially a rock promontory that marks a coastline for sailors – a navigational aid, as El Morro aided navigation of the land. On November 8, 1692, when Diego de Vargas, the Spanish Governor of New Mexico passed by on an expedition to draw the Ácomas, Zuñis and Hopis back into the Spanish fold following the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, he noted in his journal that he had come to „this place of El Morro [...] a very large, extended *peñol* – i. e. a big rock –, at the foot of which is a hollow like an inverted cupola in which rainwater collects." (Gutiérrez, 1991:143-144; Weber – deBuys, 2017:97-98). Vargas stopped at the sight and decided to leave his own inscription on the rock: "Aqui estuvo de General Don Diego de Vargas, quien consuisto a nuestra Santa Fe y a la Real Corona todo el Nuevo Mexico a su costa Ano de 1692." In English: "Here was the General Don Diego de Vargas, who conquered for our Holy Faith, and for the Royal Crown, all the New Mexico, at his expense, Year of 1692." (Weber, 1992:137-138; Weber – deBuys, 2017:98).

The most important causes of the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 were rooted in the Spanish imperial policies that were to incorporate the Native American communities in the Spanish colonial system. Franciscan missions were established to convert the Native population to Catholicism and integrate them into the imperial economic and social system. The Pueblos were forced to provide tribute to the colonists in the form of labor and taxes. The *encomienda* system restricted the Natives' access to fertile farmlands and water supplies while the missions were an assault on their traditional religion. All this caused unrest among the Native communities and led to the outbreak of the Pueblo Revolt in 1680. They believed that once the Spanish were killed or expelled, the ancient Pueblo gods would reward them with health and prosperity. The Puebloans pillaged the Spanish settlements, killed more than four hundred people including twenty-one missionaries, and thus forced the Spanish to retreat – at least temporarily (Gutiérrez, 1991:130-140; Weber, 1992:134-136). The Spanish wanted to return to New Mexico in order to counterweight the French advances into the Mississippi valley that intensified in the mid-1680s, and to create a defensive frontier against the increasingly aggressive nomadic Indians on their northern borders (Meinig, 1986:194; Weber, 1992:148-152; Gutiérrez: 1991:146-148). However, it was only thirteen years after the Pueblo Revolt that Spaniards could gradually reestablish their control over the region with the leadership of Governor Diego de Vargas. The struggle for independence took a heavy toll on the

Pueblo communities. Many of them died or fled. The Zuñis, who occupied six villages in the middle of the 16th century when the Spanish first appeared in New Mexico, were reduced to a single village (Halona). Partly because of the revolt, partly because of the declining population, the Spaniards had to ease their control over the territory. The *encomienda* system was not reestablished, labor and tax demands were reduced, and the Franciscan missionaries did not try to oppress the Pueblo religious practices completely (Gutiérrez, 1991:156-160; Weber, 1992:139-141).

The area around El Morro was also abandoned, but Spaniards, missionaries as well as military officers and their families who passed by, continued to inscribe their names on the rock, the last dated 1774. Then, for the rest of the Spanish colonial era, nobody did. There are no traces of any new inscriptions during the period of Mexican control (1821–1846) either. Thus, when Anglo Americans arrived on the scene—their first inscription “O. R.” is dated March 19, 1836—, the Spanish inscriptions on El Morro appeared as vestiges of a bygone era (Simpson, 1852:106; Weber – deBuys, 2017:98). The year of 1836 marked the birth of the Texas Republic, and the Lone Star state was admitted to the Union in 1845. The Mexican government never acknowledged the independence of Texas or its annexation to the United States of America, which led to the U.S. – Mexican War of 1846–1848. In the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed on February 2, 1848, Mexico had to give up not only Texas, but also what is known today as the American Southwest, including New Mexico (Israel, 1967:733-751; Kókény, 2001). It was not much after the ratification of the Peace Treaty that New Mexico Territory was organized (in 1850) and thus integrated administratively and politically into the United States of America. It included most of the present-day states of Arizona and New Mexico, as well as part of Colorado. (Meinig, 1993: 456) In the second half of the 19th century the majority of European-descended residents in New Mexico were ethnic Mexicans, many of whom had deep roots in the area from early Spanish colonial times, and Anglo Americans were in minority, just like the different Native American tribes. The population was a little more than sixty thousand in 1850, and had reached only about two hundred thousand by 1900. The American Congress admitted New Mexico into the Union as the 47th state on January 6, 1912.

There were changes in government, but Inscription Rock was still at the crossroads of different cultures and different peoples. Although El Morro derives its fame from Spanish inscriptions, the first detailed account of the site came from an American army officer. After the United States acquired New Mexico at the end of the U.S. – Mexican War in 1848, the U.S. Army Corps of Topographical engineers began to explore the region. It was Lieutenant James H. Simpson, a topographical engineer for the US Army, who began surveying the Zuñi and Navajo territory (Goetzmann, 1991:239-244). He and his party visited El Morro on September 17 and 18, 1849, on

the home leg of their expedition into Navajo country. As Simpson explained in his journal, a Mr. Lewis – who traded with Navajos in the area and knew the territory – met him along the trail and “offered his services as guide to a rock upon the face of which were [...] half an acre of inscriptions, many of them very beautiful, and upon its summit some ruins of a very extraordinary character” (Simpson, 1852:98).

Lieutenant Simpson did not hear about El Morro before, but he accepted Lewis’ invitation to take a side trip to see it. Richard Kern, the expedition’s artist, and William Bird, Simpson’s personal assistant accompanied them. At the end of their first day, Simpson described El Morro in his journal: “We came to a quadrangular mass of sandstone rock, of a pearly whitish aspect, from two hundred to two hundred and fifty feet in height, and strikingly peculiar on account of its massive character and the Egyptian style of its natural buttresses and domes.” (Simpson, 1852:99). He also gave an account of how the small party explored the bluff as well as the ruins atop, and how they pictured the community that had lived there before.

These ruins present, in plan, a rectangle two hundred and six by three hundred and seven feet, the sides conforming to the four cardinal points. The apartments seem to have been chiefly upon the contour of the rectangle. [...] There appear to have been two ranges of rooms on the north side, and two on the west [...] (Simpson, 1852:101).

What could have possessed the occupants of these villages to perch themselves so high up, and in such inaccessible localities, I cannot conceive, unless it were, as it probably was, from motives of security and defence (Simpson, 1852:102).

The explorers marveled at the ruins and the rock as well. They spent hours taking notes and copying the symbols, signatures, and dates carved in the sandstone. “It will be noticed that the greater portion of these inscriptions are in Spanish, with some little sprinkling of what appeared to be and attempt at Latin, and the remainder in hieroglyphics, doubtless of Indian origin,” Simpson remarked. (Simpson: 1852: 99) When they were done with making facsimiles, Kern also inscribed their names in the rock: “Lt. J. H. Simpson, U.S.A., and R. H. Kern, artist, visited and copied these inscriptions, September 17th 18th, 1849” (Simpson, 1852:103). Kern’s most valuable images, however, were not on the rock but on his drawing pad. He drew the outline of the ruins atop the rock, recorded some forty inscriptions, and sketched views of El Morro from the north and south. And he did all that in two days. Working meticulously, his drawings of what he called “written rocks” remain irreplaceable. They provide information about many inscriptions that have since faded from the soft sandstone or have been destroyed (Weber – deBuys, 2017:103).

From El Morro, Simpson returned to Santa Fe and Fort Marcy to continue his duties as chief of Topographical Engineers of the Department of New Mexico. In the first months of 1850 he completed his journal of the Navajo expedition, and the American government published it later that year (Simpson, 1852). The publication brought El Morro to the attention of the American public, and many people thought that it was Simpson and his party who discovered the place. Simpson's Journal included the first visual representations of El Morro in print. Lithographs of Kern's drawings of the inscriptions, together with their English translations, appeared on ten plates in the document, which also reproduced Kern's views of El Morro and the ruins and potsherds atop it (Simpson, 1852: Plate 60-67, 73, 74). Subsequent government explorers who visited El Morro did not see any point in taking detailed notes of the place and duplicating the work of Simpson and Kern. Many of them, however, inscribed their own names. The former was the case with Amiel Weeks Whipple, who when exploring the 35th parallel route in 1854, made only a short reference to Inscription Rock in his journal. He marveled at the sandstone promontory, the noted that Simpson had described it "minutely", and that "little remains to be added" to his observations about the pueblo ruins atop the rock (Whipple, 1941:133-135; Goetzmann, 1991:287-289; Weber – deBuys, 2017:105).

Other visitors in the 1850s often took note of the emotional impact of El Morro and its inscriptions, and then carved their own names and stories in the rock. So did members of the Union Pacific railroad surveying teams in the 1860s, and many-many pioneers who passed by El Morro while heading west. They all added another layer of history to the site. In a way, Inscription Rock has become a history book. In the 1870s, the main east-west route through New Mexico shifted from Zuñi and El Morro to the north side of the Zuñi Mountains. In 1892, Charles Lummis, one of the great promoters of the Southwest, in his book, *Some Strange Corners of Our Country*, estimated that only a few hundred Anglo Americans had seen El Morro. He was impressed by the site and pronounced it "the most precious cliff, historically, possessed by any nation on earth." (Weber – deBuys, 2017:107). He urged the American government to take measures to protect Inscription Rock. Then, on June 8, 1906, Theodore Roosevelt, signed the Antiquities Act, which gave American Presidents the authority to create national monuments from federal lands to protect significant natural, cultural, or scientific features. El Morro National Monument was created as a 160-acre reservation on December 8, 1906 to preserve the history of the area. As the proclamation creating the monument stated: "The rocks known as El Morro and Inscription Rock . . . are of the greatest historical value and it appears that the public good would be promoted by setting aside said rocks as a national monument." (Lee, 1970:73, 88-89). The public good has definitely been

promoted by protecting the site and today El Morro still remains one of the iconic places of the American Southwest.

* * *

In the closing part of my paper I would like to pay tribute to two iconic figures of the history profession: David J. Weber and Ádám Anderle. The two professors never met, but they knew each other's works and shared the same vision and gave the same kind of inspiration to generations of students and scholars. I had the honor to be the student of both of them. David Weber was born in the east coast, in Buffalo, New York, in 1940. Ádám Anderle was born in the southwestern part of Hungary, in Kozármisleny, in 1943. David Weber studied social sciences, and was thinking about majoring in music, but a course in the History of Latin America led him in a different direction. His professor, Marvin D. Bernstein suggested that he should pursue a degree Latin American history. He chose the University of New Mexico, and earned a master's degree in 1964 and a doctorate in 1967, and started to specialize in the history of the Spanish borderlands. Ádám Anderle was also inspired by one of his professors, Tibor Wittman, who introduced him to the history of Spain and Spanish absolutism, and through them to Latin American history. He earned his master's degree in History and Literature in 1966, and his doctorate in 1967. In 1976 David Weber accepted a position at Southern Methodist University, in Dallas, Texas, where he became the founder of the Clements Center for Southwest Studies in 1997. Ádám Anderle directed the Department of Medieval and Early Modern History in Szeged for ten years, and then founded the Department of Hispanic Studies in 1993. Both of them were recognized for their merits by the Spanish government with the Order of Isabella the Catholic – David Weber in 2002, Ádám Anderle in 2008. Both of them were outstanding scholars, who published numerous books and articles, and who established a “school” at their respective universities which developed to be a thriving forum for research, dialogue and scholarship and where they taught students to think in comparative perspectives and broad contexts. David Weber had his summer home in Ramah, New Mexico, right by the Zuñi Mountains and Inscription Rock. Ádám Anderle never visited the place, but knew a lot about it. Neither of them inscribed their name in the rock or in stone, but their legacy will live on.

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