

Natural Setting as Cultural Landscapes: The Power of Place and Tradition

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Abstract—The natural environment of the Madrean Archipelago comprises a mosaic of cultural landscapes. Throughout human history, people have imbued the natural environment with meaning by layering cultural values and historic contexts onto the natural world, allowing them to situate themselves in time and space. Cultural landscapes contain special places that have power associated with important events, people, or critical resources. Effective conservation and management of the Madrean Archipelago require an understanding of the complexities and intricacies of the storied cultural landscapes layered upon the natural environment.

Natural Setting and Cultural Landscapes

The Madrean Archipelago is a natural wonder, encompassing a unique diversity of landforms and life. It is, quite understandably, a focus of much environmental research and management by a variety of government agencies and private sector organizations. Almost all this research and management is conducted within a scientific framework, bringing with it a set of prescribed constructs and values. In effect, the scientific framework provides the individual scientist viewing the natural setting with his or her cultural landscape, in which meaning is ascribed to the natural environment.

The Madrean Archipelago has been the home of many peoples over the past 13,000 years, all of whom have projected their own constructs and values onto the natural environment. While we cannot know what past peoples believed and what values they held, their descendants encapsulate fragments of this knowledge in present-day cultural and oral traditions. These descendant American Indians bring constructs and values to the Madrean Archipelago that imbue the natural setting with meanings different from those of us with scientific training.

It is our impression that few scientifically trained researchers and managers are cognizant of American Indian cultural landscapes within the Madrean Archipelago. We believe that an appreciation of these cultural landscapes will inform and enrich natural resources research and management, thus encouraging a more holistic approach to conserving this unique region.

For humans, as for other life forms, water is a critical resource. Not surprisingly, archaeologists find that most ancient habitation sites in the Madrean Archipelago are situated along

the rivers and at other hydrologically advantageous locations. The San Pedro Valley is no exception. Because so many archaeological sites are located along river courses, and because the conservation of biodiversity in the Madrean Archipelago includes the critical river corridors, there is substantial locational overlap in central components of the cultural landscapes of ecologists, environmentalists, archaeologists, and American Indians. This is not to say that river valleys are the only overlap in these varied cultural landscapes, as mountain ranges and other places have importance in all these perceptions of the Madrean Archipelago. It is fair to say, however, that rivers have a special place in these various cultural landscapes. It is also fair to say that any natural resources research or management along the river corridors is highly likely to impinge upon cultural resources and the cultural landscapes within which these resources play a pivotal role.

In this paper we present some theoretical, methodological, and practical results of a recent three-year long cultural landscapes project conducted in the San Pedro Valley in collaboration with the Tohono O'odham, Hopi, Zuni, and the San Carlos and White Mountain Apache Tribes (Ferguson et al. 2004a,b). This research was funded and facilitated by The National Endowment for the Humanities, the Salus Mundi Foundation, and the Center for Desert Archaeology.

The cultural landscapes of the Tohono O'odham, Hopi, Zuni, and Western Apache incorporate vast geographical areas and considerable time depths. While each group has its own unique cultural landscapes with varied geographical areas and temporal ranges, the San Pedro Valley is a common element linking them all. The natural setting of the San Pedro Valley, consisting of its terrain and biota, provides the canvas upon which mythical and historical events are perceived and situated. Some of these events are understood as creating elements of the

land itself, while other events produced the material culture of past people, what we today call the archaeological record. All of these events, whether natural or cultural, form palimpsests of history—the cultural landscapes that are layered throughout the San Pedro Valley. These landscapes consist of a rich tapestry or mosaic of space, time, and cultural traditions.

Conceptually, cultural landscapes encompass both the land itself and how individuals perceive the land given their particular values and beliefs. Cultural landscapes are fashioned by cultural groups from the natural environment. As Carl Sauer (1963: 343), a prominent geographer, has noted, “culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape is the result.” Cultural landscapes have complexity and power as a result of their creation by people through experience and encounters with the world. People understand cultural landscapes in relation to specific events and historical conditions, and these provide the context for their comprehension (Bender 1993: 2).

Cultural landscapes are created and maintained by cultures that instill values, beliefs, and historical memory in the people belonging to a community. Consequently, cultural landscapes can be sustained for long periods without physical use. Even after a long absence, the cultural processes of memory and history renew links with places that may have been forgotten, irregularly visited, or occupied by others (Morphy 1993: 239–240; 1995). This is not a reinterpretation of landscape but a process of discovery and revelation in which ancestral presence is palpable and immutable. We found this to be the case for each of the tribes conducting research in the San Pedro Valley.

Archaeologists divide the human occupation of the San Pedro Valley into a number of periods (Clark 2004). In the broadest terms, between about 11,000 and 2,500 B.C. people relied on hunting and gathering for subsistence. After about 2,500 B.C. domesticated crops were grown. Around A.D. 500 the Hohokam archaeological culture becomes defined and continues until about A.D. 1450 when it is no longer evident. While the Hohokam occupied the San Pedro Valley, there was a migration of Western Pueblo people from what is now northern Arizona between about A.D. 1200 and 1350. Sometime after A.D. 1450 the Sobaipuri, who were close relatives of the O’odham, inhabited the San Pedro as seen in the archaeological record and historical Spanish documents. In the 1760s, the Spaniards convinced the Sobaipuri to leave the San Pedro Valley in favor of living in places like the Santa Cruz River Valley. Thereafter, the Apache, who had been present in the area for some time previously, lived in the San Pedro Valley, where even today they own land in the valley. For most of these 12 or 13,000 years people derived sustenance from the natural environment of the Madrean Archipelago, supplemented with some trading. The intensity of human occupation along the San Pedro Valley is evident in more than 500 identified archaeological sites within a half-mile of the river between the modern towns of Benson and Winkelman.

Tohono O’odham Cultural Landscapes

The Tohono O’odham, who have a long and complex history in the Madrean Archipelago, retain oral traditions that explain their relationships to the Hohokam and Sobaipuri. One

portion of a traditional narrative recalls the story about *I’itoi*, the Elder Brother, who, following a period of discord with the ancient *Huhugkam*, led an army of people who emerged with him from underground in the east and swept across the region, killed the *Huhugkam*, and settled on the land. This narrative has different variations, with some O’odham believing their ancestors were the conquerors while others saying the O’odham ancestors were the conquered. Tohono O’odham advisors recalled this narrative while conducting research in the San Pedro Valley.

The complex social relations and interactions of the past, that are so eloquently elucidated in O’odham traditional narratives of the *Huhugkam* and *I’itoi*, do not reflect the rather homogeneous and uniform concept of an archaeological culture such as the Hohokam. However, recent historical linguistic research is beginning to illustrate that the Hohokam archaeological culture very likely constituted a “multiethnic community” (Shaul and Hill 1998). In this respect, archaeologists are starting to think of ancient archaeological cultures as being vibrant multifaceted societies that are somewhat reminiscent of the dynamics of ancient life portrayed in O’odham narratives.

Hohokam and Sobaipuri archaeological sites, features, and artifacts that the Tohono O’odham research team saw and studied on the San Pedro Valley project were to them tangible evidence of their history. They feel a strong affinity to the ancient people who lived in the San Pedro Valley. It is clear from our research that the Tohono O’odham people recognize salient features in the Hohokam and Sobaipuri archaeological cultures, just as many of them experience palpable connections to both the *Huhugkam* and those who emerged from the underground with *I’itoi*.

Hopi Cultural Landscapes

For the Hopi, their long journey to the Hopi Mesas was accomplished by a multiplicity of clan migrations, and this is monumentalized in the many thousands of ancestral homes that are found throughout the Madrean Archipelago and beyond. The ruins, potsherds, petroglyphs, and other remains that people now call archaeological sites are recognized by Hopis as the footprints of their migrating ancestors, the *Hisatsinom*. The concept of footprints constitutes the historical metaphor by which the Hopi people comprehend the past and give meaning to the archaeological record.

Clan histories are closely guarded at Hopi, intended primarily for the spiritual education of clan members. Consequently, only abstracts and fragments deemed relevant to our research in the San Pedro Valley were made available by the Hopi research team. Much of the clan migrations that relate to the San Pedro Valley involve more than 30 Hopi clans associated with *Palatkwapi*, a pivotal place and time within the Hopi migrations that began from a place of origin far to the south. In Hopi history, the Hohokam sites in the Madrean Archipelago are the footprints of Hopi clans and ancestors migrating toward the Hopi Mesas from *Palatkwapi*. Eventually, when they arrived at the Hopi Mesas, these clans brought with them ceremonies and knowledge gained along the way. For example, knowledge of canal irrigation from rivers, an aspect of Hohokam archaeology,

is still an important component of Hopi ceremonies involving the Water Serpent. Agave, which does not grow at the Hopi Mesas but is plentiful in the Madrean Archipelago, has ongoing important roles in Hopi ceremonialism.

Hopi clan migrations were neither directionally linear nor uniform. Clans sometimes journeyed together. At other times they split into smaller groups, then regrouped in different configurations. Some clans or individuals may have spiraled in directions visiting new places or revisiting ones different. These migration paths are symbolized by petals on a flower or the fourfold swastika designs painted on rattles used in Hopi ceremonies. For the Hopi advisors on the San Pedro project, the Western Pueblo intrusions into the San Pedro Valley, most clearly seen at the Davis and Reeve Ruins, are vivid evidence of the complex history of Hopi migrations. At the Davis site, archaeologists have excavated a kiva. Kivas are highly symbolic structures in Hopi culture, and are found throughout the Colorado Plateau yet are not present in Hohokam sites in the Sonoran Desert.

To some degree, Hopi history in the San Pedro Valley has become attenuated by time and distance. One indication of this is that the historically documented trade fairs between the Hopi and Sobaipuri in the early eighteenth century have faded from memory. Even so, the Hohokam and Western Pueblo archaeological sites are stark evidence that the *Hisatsinom*, Hopi ancestors, migrated through the Madrean Archipelago. These footprints bring the past into the present, and according to at least one Hopi advisor this cultural landscape recalls songs, and therefore history.

Zuni Cultural Landscapes

The Zuni origin talk has different versions, incorporating numerous levels of meaning, many of which are only entrusted to certain initiates of religious societies. All of these accounts tell of Zuni emergence onto the Earth's surface in a deep canyon along the Colorado River, from where the people began a long journey to the Middle Place, present-day Zuni Pueblo. Of significance to the San Pedro Project is the history of the "Lost Others." At a point on their migration in the Little Colorado River Valley, the people were given a choice of two eggs, one multicolored and one dull. The group that chose the dull egg, from which hatched a brightly colored parrot, were told to go south. They left and went southward, never to return, and are now referred to as the "Lost Others."

When the Zuni research team visited the San Pedro Valley, they were intrigued by the pueblos they saw. They knew the story of the "Lost Others," but had not seen these sites before. To the Zuni research team, the Puebloan sites in the San Pedro Valley constitute evidence that there is a historical relationship between the ancient people who lived in the Madrean Archipelago and the modern Zuni people.

Many other connections exist between the Zuni people and the ancient peoples of the Madrean Archipelago. When studying collections removed by archaeologists from archaeological sites in the San Pedro Valley, the Zuni advisors interpreted many ceramic design motifs based on their cultural knowledge, and, based on present-day Zuni cultural practices, explained

the functions of many artifacts, functions that had previously proved elusive to archaeologists.

While viewing the San Pedro Valley and contemplating the archaeological sites, the Zuni advisors correlated their traditional history of the "Lost Others" with the geographic setting of the Valley. They actively engaged the archaeological record in an interpretive and historical exposition that drew it into the Zuni cultural landscape. It is through the cognition and use of this landscape that the ancient past is projected into the contemporary world and kept alive.

Apache Cultural Landscapes

The San Pedro Valley sits between the four sacred peaks of the Western Apache. It is, therefore, an integral component of their traditional geography and their cultural landscapes. The Valley is the origin place of two Apache clans, and the home of others. During the historical period, the Dark Rocks People, or Aravaipa band, made the San Pedro their home. The Cottonwoods In Grey Wedge Shape People, or the Pinal band, also commonly used the Valley.

Apache history along the San Pedro is replete with conflict. By 1700, the Spanish Empire, which had formed an alliance of sorts with the Sobaipuri, was in conflict with the Apache. In the 1760s, when the Sobaipuri left the San Pedro Valley, Apache bands made it theirs. It was not until the United States military campaigns of the late 1800s that control of the Valley changed hands. On the morning of April 30, 1871, a mob of Anglo-Americans, Mexican-Americans, and Tohono O'odham massacred about 100 Apaches, mainly women and children who were living along Aravaipa Creek under the protection of the U.S. military in nearby Camp Grant. Some children were taken as slaves. The collective scars of this tragedy still permeate Apache memory.

Over 60 Apache place names are recorded for locations in the San Pedro Valley and Aravaipa Creek. Place names are particularly important in Apache culture and the construction of Apache cultural landscapes. As Keith Basso (1996) has noted, naming places is a way of doing history, and it provides a way of constructing social traditions as well as personal and social identities. For the Apache, names such as Big Sycamore Stands There, the place along Aravaipa Creek where the Camp Grant massacre occurred, evoke not only tragic memories, but also a salient character of the landscape at this location. Apache place names are more than simply labels: they are poetic expressions signifying the cultural and historical value of places. For example, Mescal Big Resting indicates an important source of food, Mesquite Circle In A Clump is a good place to live, and Water Blue Resting identifies a source of good water. Apache place names constitute one aspect of Apache cultural landscapes that are layered onto the San Pedro Valley and constitute part of a living history of this region.

A Mosaic of Land, History, and Culture

The natural setting of the San Pedro Valley and the remainder of the Madrean Archipelago comprises a mosaic of cultural landscapes. There is not one story or one collective value of place, but a mosaic of histories and meanings.

The lives of Tohono O'odham, Hopi, Zuni, and Apache ancestors are not forgotten by their descendants. The lives of these people are recalled in stories, songs, rituals, names, and the objects they left behind. The lesson here is that it is important to us all to value and protect the legacy of those who came before.

In this brief paper we have touched upon the palimpsest of the Tohono O'odham, Hopi, Zuni, and Apache cultural landscapes that are overlaid on the natural environment. Our purpose in presenting this paper is simple. We wish to draw American Indian cultural landscapes to the attention of people working with natural resources, environmental, and ecological organizations and agencies. It is important to be cognizant of different cultural values that are attached to the natural setting, and take these values into account when planning and implementing actions that affect the natural environment, because these actions may have a profound effect on a living culture (Ferguson and Anyon 2001). For example, a plant may be a Hopi totem, a source of Apache or Zuni medicine, or a basketry resource for the Tohono O'odham. An environmental restoration project that inadvertently disturbs a shrine could have a negative impact on a living culture. By illustrating different cultural values relating to both the natural and cultural resources that are a part of the environment we hope to widen and enrich the discourse concerning the conservation of the Madrean Archipelago.

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