

CONNECTIVITY AND ISOLATION IN EARLY SPANISH COLONIAL NEW MEXICO

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The New Mexican Spanish colony, established in 1598 under the leadership of Juan de Oñate y Salazar, existed at the extreme fringes of the colonial Spanish empire. The Camino Real (the main route connecting the New Mexican colony to Mexico City) was over 2,560 kilometers long. Travel between Mexico and New Mexico involved navigating both mountains and desert as well as passing through territory controlled by hostile indigenous populations. In addition, the initial Spanish colonists in New Mexico were few in number. Given this alongside the difficulties involved with travel along the Camino Real, trade caravans connecting New Mexico to the rest of New Spain arrived in Santa Fe and points north only irregularly: support wagon trains began around 1610, but were highly sporadic until 1631, and even then they arrived at best every three years. The 17th century New Mexican colonists were, in short, isolated from the rest of the Spanish world both physically and politically. In this remote location, how did the New Mexican Spanish colonists maintain (or fail to maintain) their connections to Spain? In this paper we use architectural, faunal, and ceramic evidence from early Spanish Colonial New Mexican sites as compared to the record from 17th century Mexico City to explore questions of Spanish identity on the edge of the 17th century Spanish world.

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