

# Tabira — Identification and Historical Sketch

By RICHARD M. HOWARD

*Archaeologist, National Park Service  
Gran Quivira National Monument*

In the October 1959 issue of *El Palacio*, Stanley Stubbs reported on the excavation of a mission church at Pueblo Blanco, a ruin about 15 miles northeast of Gran Quivira. In that article, he did not discuss the historical identification of the site, other than to say that "... Pueblo Blanco, with its ruined church, is probably the site noted in the archives as Tabira" (Stubbs 1959: 169). It is the purpose of this article to present historical evidence that Pueblo Blanco is the Spanish site of Tabira, together with a very brief historical outline.

For many years, the name Tabira had been associated with the ruins at Gran Quivira National Monument. This error apparently dates back to Bandelier, who first identified Gran Quivira as the Spanish site of Tabira (Bandelier 1890: 131-132). He did so on the basis of a Spanish map of the eighteenth century, in which the only mission site shown south of Abo and Quarai is Tabira (Bandelier 1892: 291). Since Bandelier knew of only one mission site south of Abo — and that being Gran Quivira — he assumed that Tabira and Gran Quivira were one and the same.

Some fifty years later, Kubler suggested that an error had been made, and proposed that Humanas was the true Spanish name for Gran Quivira, and that Tabira was a distinct (but unlocated) site (Kubler 1939). This thesis was soon accepted by scholars, and for 20 years since that time, Tabira had been known as a lost mission.

However, the discovery, in March 1959, of a church at Pueblo Blanco<sup>1</sup> appears to have removed Tabira from the designation, "lost mission," and brings to six the total number of known and located Saline missions.

Both Gran Quivira and Pueblo Blanco are situated southeast of Quarai and Abo (and of the modern day town of Mountainair). This fits, then, the documentary evidence that Tabira was located southeast of those two pueblos.

It has been known, of course, for some time that Tabira and Humanas were located in the same general area, since they were both of the same language group (Hackett 1937: 163), and Tabira was, for a few years, a *visita* of Humanas (*ibid*: 135).

A 1779 map, which Bandelier may have used, clearly shows Tabira (with a picture of a church) southeast of Abo (Thomas 1932: 87). In fact, Bandelier even mentioned (but didn't believe) a map of 1705, which correctly shows Humanas south of Quarai, and Tabira southeast of Quarai. (Bandelier 1892: 290-291).

A document of 1663 states that "... two [Apaches] from Los Siete Rios

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Mr. Mack Wells, Gran Quivira, who first guided me to Pueblo Blanco in 1958, although at that time both of us were unaware that a church existed there.

having arrived at nightfall at the pueblo of Cuarec [Quarai], the Indians of that pueblo, understanding that they were enemies, killed one of them. . . . Thereupon the Apaches of Los Siete Rios who had been friendly made demonstrations, desiring to come and attack the pueblo to avenge the killing. . . . But . . . a pact was made with [the Apaches] that they should not pass beyond the pueblos of Humanas and Tabira, where they come to barter. . . ." Hackett 1937:143). This statement indicates that Humanas and Tabira lay between Quarai to the northwest and Apache territory to the southeast. Or, in other words, both Humanas and Tabira must have been located southeast of Quarai.

If we accept the fact, then, that Tabira was located southeast of Abo and Quarai, there remains the task of showing why other sites in the Gran Quivira-Pueblo Blanco area cannot be Tabira. The only site near Pueblo Blanco large enough to consider is Pueblo Colorado. The site, is, in fact, somewhat larger than Pueblo Blanco. However, pottery surveys of the site have yielded Glazes I to V, but no Glaze VI. Mera places the terminal date of Glaze V at 1650 (Mera 1940:5). Although this date is late enough to allow for the original construction of the Tabira church (*circa*, 1630), as reported in the documents, it is not late enough to allow for the later renovation of the church, about 1660 (The construction dates for the Tabira church are discussed in more detail later). Of course, it can be said that the terminal pottery date is only approximate. Nonetheless, the extreme abundance of Glaze VI sherds at Gran Quivira cannot be reconciled with their total lack at Pueblo Colorado, should it be assumed that both pueblos were inhabited and abandoned at approximately the same time. And, although no excavations have ever been undertaken at Pueblo Colorado, surface survey indicates no apparent church structure.

The only other site in this area which extends into the historic period is Pueblo Pardo, a fairly large ruin located about two miles south of Gran Quivira. However, careful examination of the site has failed to yield any church structure. Furthermore, it is unlikely that a village so close to the big church at Gran Quivira would have had a separate mission.

There is, actually, another historic site which could be considered here. Known only as LA 572 (Mera 1940: 14), it is situated a number of miles north of Gran Quivira, and a few miles east of the town of Mountainair. After repeated inquiries, I have failed to locate anyone in the area who has heard of the site, and have been unable to find it. I have eliminated it, nonetheless, from this discussion because it does not jibe with the Abo-Humanas-Tabira distances recorded in the Spanish documents. According to a document of 1661, Humanas was six leagues from Abo, and Tabira was nine leagues from Abo (Scholes and Mera 1940:284). Since LA 572, according to Mera, is slightly closer to Abo than Humanas is, LA 572 could not be Tabira by the distances set in the 1661 document.

This leaves only that Pueblo Blanco be identified as Tabira.

Additional interesting information was learned while I was examining other early maps (and I am grateful to Mr. Robert H. Schroeder, National Park Service, who first put me on to them). The Coronelli map of 168? shows two sites southeast of Quarai: Humanas and another site about ten miles north of

it called "S. Diego" (*New Mexico Historical Review* 1927: 323). The "Penalosa" map (circa. 1675) shows a similar arrangement, except that "S. Diego" is shown northeast of Humanas, in the location of Pueblo Blanco (*ibid*: 1934: 113). Since we know of no other church in the Saline area named San Diego (in fact, the only other San Diego in New Mexico at that time was in the Jemez area), it can be deduced that the church at Pueblo Blanco was originally called San Diego de Tabira.

Concerning the dates of construction of the church, the original construction appears to have taken place about 1629 or 1630. If we accept Aguilar's 1663 statement (supported later by Vetancurt) that Father Acevedo built the church at Tabira (Scholes and Mera 1940: 281), then the date can be fixed fairly closely. We know that Acevedo arrived in New Mexico in April, 1629, with Perea (Bloom 1933: 226), and was soon assigned to Abo (from which he administered Tabira as a *visita*). We can also assume that the church at Tabira was at least well along in construction by 1630, because Benavides states in 1630 that among the Tompiros, from Chilili south (including, of course, the Manzano Tiwa), there were fourteen or fifteen pueblos, "with six monasteries and very good churches" (Ayer 1916: 20-21). Since five of the villages with churches can be identified,—Chilili, Tajique, Quarai, Abo, and Gran Quivira—the sixth church evidently was Tabira.

The second construction or rebuilding date is a bit more uncertain, but can be inferred within limits. We know that little, if any, construction activity was carried out in the 1640's and 1650's. However, in 1659 a revitalized program was started. Father Diego de Santander was assigned to Humanas and embarked on an ambitious rebuilding program (Hackett 1937: 161). At the same time, Tabira was made a *visita* of Humanas, and therefore also came under Santander's direction (*ibid*: 135). Since we know of no other construction activities in that area by other friars between 1650 and 1670, it seems likely that Santander accomplished the rebuilding at Tabira. And since Santander was assigned to San Marcos, near Santa Fe, in 1662 (Scholes and Bloom 1945: 65), we can assume that the construction of the church as it now exists at Pueblo Blanco occurred between 1659 and 1662. These two periods of construction agree with the archeological findings as previously reported by Stubbs.

The abandonment of Tabira probably occurred between 1666 and 1671. We have seen that missionary activity in this area was revived about 1660, and it is unlikely that Tabira would have been abandoned very soon without some reason. Good cause did occur in 1666: beginning in that year, a drought hit the area (Hackett 1937: 272), and lasted for five years (Smiley, Stubbs, and Bannister 1953: 55). Tabira very probably was abandoned at this time, since severe Apache raids added considerably to the hardship (Hackett 1937: 271-272).

Tabira must have been abandoned a year or two prior to 1672, for the abandonment of the last five pueblos east of the Manzanos—Chilili, Tajique, Abo, Quarai, and Humanas—took place between 1672 and 1677 (*ibid*: 297-298). Since Tabira is not mentioned, it must already have been abandoned. This probably did not occur much before 1672, since Escalante,

writing about 100 years later in 1778, indicated that Tabira and Humanas were abandoned at about the same time (in Bandelier 1890: 132). Possibly Tabira's inhabitants joined with those at Humanas, but this is merely a guess. However, it may be of some interest to note that there exist at Gran Quivira three large pueblo mounds (containing an estimated 150 rooms), which are located adjacent to the later church, and which were apparently built *after* construction of the church (not very many years before the final abandonment). But whether or not this relatively extensive construction represents a consolidation of forces, or increase in population from other pueblos, it is not possible to determine, at least not without further excavation.

One further note, although unrelated to the above discussion, might be of minor interest. During excavations at Abo, about 20 years ago, Joseph H. Toulouse noted the presence of three new and distinct pottery types which, because of their relative abundance at Gran Quivira, he named Tabira Plain, Tabira Polychrome, and Tabira Black-on-white (Toulouse 1949: 18-19). All three of these types have now been found at Pueblo Blanco. The geographic name applied by Toulouse, therefore, is still valid.

## REFERENCES

- Ayer, Mrs. Edward E. (Ed.)  
 1916 *The Memorial of Fray Alonso de Benavides: 1630.*
- Bandelier, Adolf F.  
 1890 *Final Report of Investigations among the Indians of the Southwestern United States.* Papers of the Archaeological Institute of America, Part I.  
 1892 *Final Report of Investigations among the Indians of the Southwestern United States.* Papers of the Archaeological Institute of America, Part II.
- Bloom, L. B.  
 1933 "Fray Estevan de Perea's Relacion." *New Mexico Historical Review*, Vol. 8, No. 3.
- Hackett, Charles Wilson (Ed.)  
 1937 *Historical Documents Relating to New Mexico, Nueva Vizcaya, and Approaches Thereto, to 1773.* Carnegie Institution of Washington, Pub. 330, Volume III.
- Kubler, George  
 1939 "Gran Quivira — Humanas." *New Mexico Historical Review*, Vol. 14, No. 4.
- Mera, H. P.  
 1940 *Population Changes in the Rio Grande Glaze-Paint Area.* Laboratory of Anthropology. Technical Series, Bulletin No. 9.
- Scholes, France V. and H. P. Mera  
 1940 "Some Aspects of the Jumano Problem." *Contributions to American Anthropology and History*, No. 34. Carnegie Institution of Washington Pub. 523.
- Scholes, France V. and L. B. Bloom  
 1945 "Friar Personnel and Mission Chronology." *New Mexico Historical Review*, Vol. 20, No. 1.
- Smiley, Terah L., Stanley A. Stubbs, and Bryant Bannister  
 1953 *A Foundation for the Dating of Some Late Archaeological Sites in the Rio Grande Area, New Mexico.* Laboratory of Tree-Ring Research. Bulletin No. 6, University of Arizona Bulletin.
- Stubbs, Stanley A.  
 1959 "'New' Old Churches Found at Quairai and Tabira (Pueblo Blanco)." *El Palacio*, Vol. 66, No. 5.
- Thomas, Alfred Barnaby  
 1932 *Forgotten Frontiers*, University of Oklahoma Press.
- Toulouse, Joseph H., Jr.  
 1949 *The Mission of San Gregorio de Abo.* Monographs of the School of American Research, No. 13, Santa Fe.