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THE MESA VERDE TYPES OF PUEBLOS

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The excavation of a mound in the Mesa Verde National Park, Colorado, by the Smithsonian Institution, at the request of the Interior Department, during the summer of 1916, uncovered a building called Far View House belonging to a type which is morphologically the same as that of adjacent cliff dwellings. In form Far View House differs from its nearest large neighbor, Spruce Tree House; its outline is rectangular while that of a cliff dwelling, like Spruce Tree House, follows the irregular walls of the cave in which it lies. So close is its likeness in other points that we may say that the main difference between the two is that one is constructed in a cave sheltered by an overhanging roof, while the other is built under the open sky, without this protection; both are pure examples of the same type.

The importance of site has been magnified by some archaeologists, and it must be confessed that the resemblance of the modern pueblo type to that of a cliff dwelling, is not very close. The accepted belief in an identity of cliff dweller and pueblo, largely determined by legendary and somatological evidences, is supported by architectural features of the Mesa Verde type, which is the purest form of pueblo construction. The former failure of house structure to adequately show this identity was due to the fact that modern pueblos belong to a mixed or highly modified type. Far View House is nearer in time as well as in form to the cliff dwelling, being unchanged by foreign influences. A comparison of it with typical cliff dwellings shows good evidences that community houses erected on sites so different are practically identical in details of construction and practically contemporaneous.

The type of pueblo illustrated by Far View House is now extinct and we have reason to believe that it antedated the beginning of the seventeenth century. It is therefore a true unmodified expression of the aboriginal mind, representing a stage in the development of southwestern architecture preceding the modern type.

The feature that distinguishes the community building of our southwest from other aboriginal dwellings north of Mexico is the arrangement of rooms in stories, one above the other. Of course in its simplest form it has but one story; the multistoried form is characteristic of the highest developed condition of the eastern or pueblo area. It is pronounced in the Mesa Verde type when there are two forms of rooms
structurally unlike and functionally different. Some of these rooms are circular, others rectangular; the former probably ceremonial, the latter secular, probably domiciles. Both kinds of rooms were closely crowded together in a compact mass, and were two or more stories high, the upper rooms having lateral entrances from the roofs of lower terraces; the ground floor chambers generally entered through the roofs. In its simplest form the Mesa Verde type has but one circular room, centrally placed, with rectangular chambers arranged about it. The inhabitants carried on most of their daily occupations on the terraces; the men used the circular rooms for assemblies and ceremonies.

In Far View House there are four of these circular rooms, one of which, the largest, is centrally placed; the rectangular rooms number about fifty. On the south side there is a rectangular court enclosed on three sides by a low wall. A few yards from the southeast angle there is a low mound, the site of the village burial place.

Geographically the Mesa Verde type is widely distributed; its center of distribution was the valley of the San Juan and its tributaries, canyons or mesas of Arizona, Colorado, Utah, and New Mexico. Examples of it are not only numerically most abundant in this region but also are the best constructed. The influence of the type extends far from its center of origin, becoming modified as the distance increases. It appears in the great communal houses of the Chaco Canyon in New Mexico and in the cliff dwellings of Canyon de Tsegi, or Chelly Canyon, in Arizona. The type occurs both isolated and in clustered forms, as at Mummy Lake on the Mesa Verde, and on the La Plata; or united in great consolidated communal buildings, as in the Chaco Canyon and elsewhere.

The position of the kiva in relation to other rooms is the most important feature that separates the Mesa Verde from the modern pueblo type. The main characteristic of the latter type is diffuseness in the arrangement of rooms as compared with the compactness of the northern or more ancient form. The rectangular rooms of the modern type are arranged in rows separated by passageways, concentrated into pyramids or more generally in rectangles enclosing courts. This relation of the circular room has sufficient importance to indicate distinct types; a difference which is still further emphasized if we compare the structure of the roofs and its supports, or the ventilation and other openings in the floors of the Mesa Verde and the modern types.

The modern pueblo type is marked by isolated circular kivas and house masses, as seen in modern pueblos still inhabited and in the historic ruins in that region. We find also, as at Sia and Jemez, and elsewhere, rectangular rooms united with others serving the same purpose.
Two explanations have been advanced to account for this condition: (1) The original external kivas were destroyed by the Spaniards, and secrecy sought by hiding the room used for rites among the rectangular rooms. (2) A habit of performing rites in rectangular chambers in the midst of other rooms has been introduced by foreign additions. The former explanation throws light on the absence of kivas in several Rio Grande pueblos.

From what is said above it appears that the chief structural feature used in separating the two types of pueblos, known as the Mesa Verde and the modern, is the relative position of the circular kiva. The construction of the walls and roofs of circular rooms of the two types is characteristic. To this last feature a few lines should be devoted. The two kinds of circular kivas are distinguished as follows: (1) Those with a vaulted roof indicated by the remains of pilasters on which roof beams were supported and still to be found, even if the roof itself is wanting; and (2) circular kivas the roofs of which were flat, the rafters extending across the top parallel with each other, resting not on pilasters, but on the edge of the wall.

The kivas of Far View House, as in the majority of the kivas of cliff houses in the Mesa Verde, had vaulted roofs; but a few kivas, like those of Cliff Palace, had flat roofs. Accompanying the vaulted roofed circular kivas of Far View House was an elaborate interior construction for supplying fresh air, called the ventilator and deflector. In the flat-roofed kiva these constructions take another form, a description of which would take me too far afield at this time.

Far View House is only one of several types of open-sky buildings on the plateau. There is another more distinctly related in form to cliff dwellings. I refer, of course, to the mysterious structure called Sun Temple, brought to light from a pile of stones by the Smithsonian Institution in the summer of 1915.

In Sun Temple there is a circular kiva surrounded by rooms in the annex, at the west end, but the rooms of the main building surround a central court in which are two isolated circular kivas; there is also a fourth kiva a few feet outside the wall near the southeast corner. In other words, this structure shows in one building a combination of the compact type and the type with separated kivas. In structural details the kivas of Sun Temple resemble the second or flat roofed circular rooms of cliff houses and towers, the distribution of which, in the San Juan culture area, is wider geographically than the vaulted roofed form of Far View House. Sun Temple is a type of its own and must be looked upon as a highly specialized building. The nearest approach to it,
in form, are the 'towers' widely scattered throughout the San Juan culture area, a type imperfectly investigated. Provisionally I will designate this type as the Sun Temple type. Should it, as suspected, turn out on renewed study to be morphologically identical with towers, the term 'tower type' would suffice for both. Awaiting this needed field work, we may summarize by pointing out provisionally that there are three types of prehistoric buildings that have been clearly recognized on the Mesa Verde: (1) The Mesa Verde type; (2) the Sun Temple type; and (3) the tower type. The cliff dwellings and Far View House belong to the first of these.

In order to bring out in clear relief the differences between these prehistoric types and the archaic historic, or modern type, the following statements may aid the student.

A few references may first be made to rectangular chambers commonly called kivas, used by some of the modern pueblos for ceremonial functions. These rooms are not morphologically the same as circular kivas, but rather secular rooms adapted for religious functions. Among the Hopi these rectangular rooms are free from the houses; among some other pueblos embedded in them. The theory that ceremonial rooms of rectangular form are derived from the circular forms is not accepted by the author, but it is recognized that certain clans who once used free circular kivas now use rectangular ones. Clans that used a rectangular kiva at one time were not always too conservative to adopt a circular one, as we see from the evidence given below.

The Hopi rectangular 'kivas' are isolated from house masses in the same way as the circular kivas of the modern type. One of the Hopi pueblos, called Hano, is inhabited by Tewa clans that came from the Rio Grande about 1770. The forms of the kivas of Tewan ruins in their old houses in the east are unknown, but, like Hano, had isolated kivas. Another foreign pueblo, on the Hopi East Mesa, called Sitcomovi, settled by clans from Zuñi, also has two rectangular kivas, situated in its court, separated from the rows of houses. There are no isolated kivas in modern Zuñi.

Unfortunately kivas have not been definitely identified in Hopi ruins, except at Kükütcumbo and in a ruin in the Oraibi 'Wash' which, unlike the modern, are circular. Some of the clans use secular square rooms surrounded by living rooms, others have rectangular kivas separated from these rooms; a choice of position ascribed to the configuration of their mesas. In a court of the Hopi ruin, called Payúpki, whose builders were Tanoans who fled from the Rio Grande region in the decade 1680–1690, Victor Mindeleff records two isolated kivas, the
ground plan of each of which was a rectangular form. The Payúpki people returned to the Rio Grande about 1750 and were settled in Sandia and Isleta, both of which now have circular kivas.

The settlements along the Little Colorado, abandoned about the middle of the eighteenth century, had no circular kivas, as far as known, and the same is true of the ancient Zuñi settlements. The present pueblo Zuñi is of comparatively modern construction and its buildings show a comparatively late modern type. The form of the ancient kivas of the Zuñi region and their situation relative to house masses has not been observed, or at least has not been recorded by archaeologists. The ceremonial chambers of modern Zuñi are rectangular, surrounded by rooms, a position that may have been chosen for secrecy or may be survivals of those in the Little Colorado settlements, to which some of the old Zuñi towns were related. When excavations are made in the round Zuñi ruins circular kivas may be brought to light, for Mota Padilla appears to refer to a kiva in the middle of the court of a circular ruin called Tzibola (Cibola).

Our knowledge of the forms of building on the Mesa Verde before the development of the pure types above mentioned is vague. It is possible that the earliest houses were not built of stone or other durable material but were subterranean and separated from each other. From these primitive buildings the more advanced types later developed, under the influence of 'cavern' life.

It is important to record that in the area in which the Mummy Lake mounds are now found there are depressions below the general surface suggesting subterranean pits, as if indicative of prepuebloan people whose homes were underground. Like pits have been described at the La Plata pueblo by Mr. Earl Morris, and similar structures near the mouth of the Gila were recorded by the early Spanish travelers as inhabited at the end of the sixteenth century. Evidences are not wanting to support the theory that early inhabitants of the pueblo region not only inhabited caves in the sides of canyons, but also used depressions in the earth, covered with roofs on a level with the surface of the ground. The call is urgent for renewed exploration on the Mesa Verde to enlighten us on the sites and form of prepuebloan huts.

1 Published by permission of the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution.
2 The name kiva is applied by the Hopi to these rectangular rooms. I find no record of similar rectangular isolated kivas among inhabited pueblos on the Rio Grande, although they are universal in Hopi.