

From *American Antiquity* 17(2):114-119

A BRAVO VALLEY ASPECT COMPONENT OF THE LOWER RIO CONCHOS VALLEY, CHIHUAHUA, MEXICO

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L OMA SECA (Chihuahua E7-5) was discovered July 23, 1949. It is an eroding village site located about one kilometer south of the Rio Conchos some eight kilometers southwest of Ojinaga, Chihuahua, Mexico. The site is located at the western edge of a large draw which intersects the valley of the Rio Conchos at this point. Physiographically the site occupies an eroding saddle at the foot of a high mesa which represents an outlier of the high gravel terraces of the Conchos valley. The mesa or butte lies just north of the site and separates it from the lowlands of the Conchos valley and at the same time provides protection from northerly winds. There is a thin scattering of hearthstones, flint chips, and artifacts over the eroding surface of the draw just west of the site. The alluvial floor of this draw is now cut by many small interbraiding arroyos. The lower end of the draw is the site of several *temporal* fields. It is a fair assumption that most of the alluvial flat of the draw over which the litter of camp debris occurs was at one time occupied by *temporal* farms which supplied much of the sustenance for

west, a large arroyo enters the Rio Conchos and must have provided a means of irrigation of the lowlands adjoining the site on that side.

The site is represented by scattered hearthstone charcoal, flint chips, animal bones, potsherds, and miscellaneous artifacts scattered over a roughly rectangular area which measures some 65 by 95 meters. At the eastern end of the site there is a midden of hearthstone and charcoal (Fig. 52, *a*, left center) some 3½ meters in height and about 4 by 7 meters in area. This pile of hearthstone and charcoal has several irregular shaped depressions in its surface. Judging by surface indications the height of the midden is produced in part by erosion of the former surface to the present point, perhaps from one to two meters below the former level. Such middens occur quite frequently in sites along the Rio Grande to the northwest but their nature and origin are unknown. In the summer of 1948 a similar midden (Site 45C2-1) was trenched by the author and Donald J. Lehmer without producing any conclusive evidence as to its origin. The trench, which cross-sectioned a room-like depression in the surface of the midden, dem-

onstrated the presence of a dug-pit into which hearthstone and charcoal had washed, but revealed no trace of a prepared or burned floor, walls, or superstructure.

In addition to the large midden mound at the east, there are low mounds of hearthstone at more or less irregular intervals forming two or more parallel rows running lengthwise of the site (Fig. 52, a). Potsherds and other artifacts, together with lumps of burned clay showing marks of posts or *jacal* walls, are very common in these low middens. Examination of several of these reveal that they mark the location of house pits. The apparent erosion of the site indicates that the present middens may represent fill in the house pits when the surface of the site was a meter or more higher than at present. A relatively open

area running down the center of the site along its long (northeast-southwest) axis perhaps represents a village plaza. Low eroded gravel hills delimit the site on the southeast and there is a scattered growth of mesquite and greasewood over the gravelly adobe soils on which the site lies. There are some traces of recent occupation, including several modern pits (Fig. 51, a) which may represent anything from treasure-hunter's pits to garbage pits and wells, although the latter guess is probably more nearly correct.

Pottery and artifacts of stone were fairly common among the surface debris of the site. The following artifact classes and types were identified from materials collected from the eroded surface:

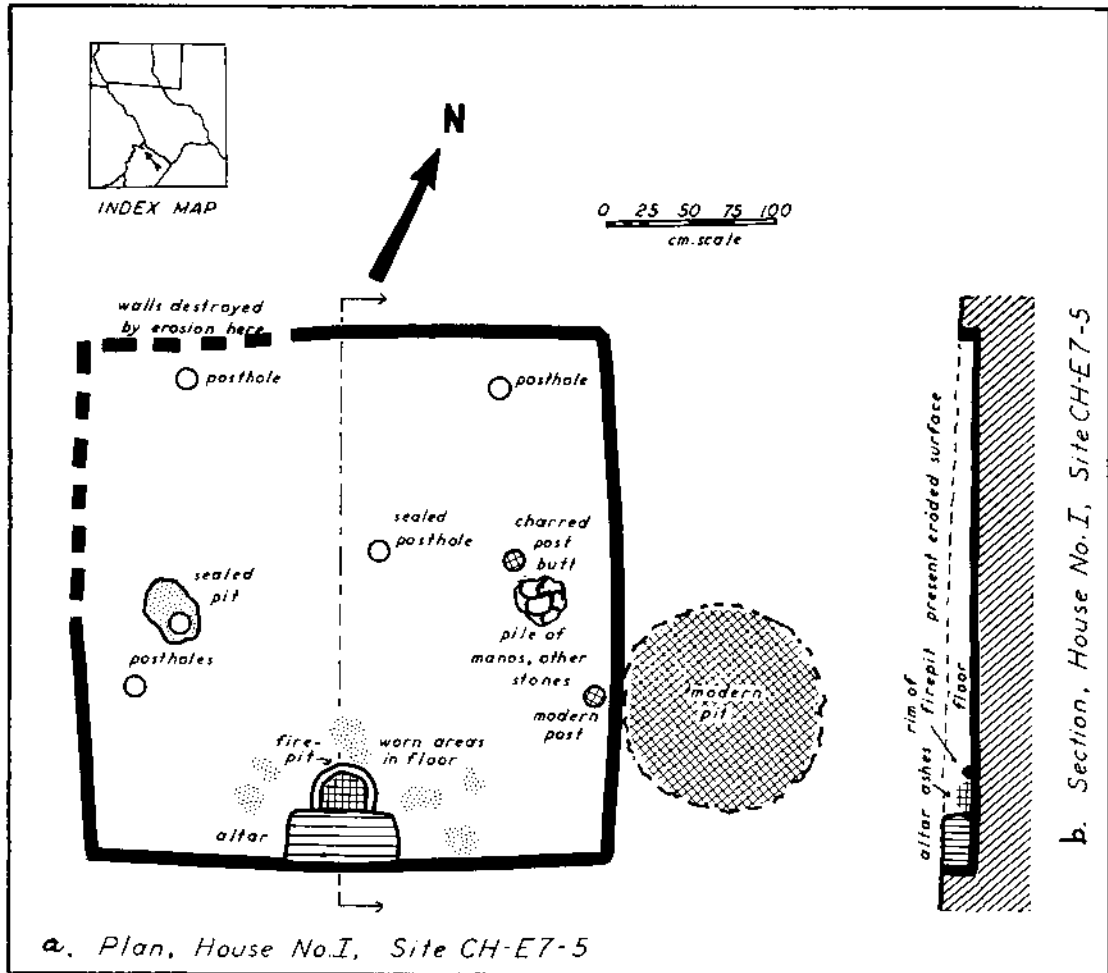


FIG. 51. Loma Seca. a, plan of house, excavated; b, southeast-northwest section through house I.

STONE ARTIFACTS

End-notched pebbles	8
Manos (one-hand, two-faced, ovate-quadrangular)	6
Ovate-rectangular stone shaped for mano usage, holes in each edge	1
Chopper (roughly chipped core, medium size)	1
Hammerstone (globular)	1
Flake side-scraper	1
Chipped spall (scraper?)	1
Perdiz Stemmed arrowpoint	1
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Total stone artifacts	20

POTTERY

(Type identifications made in field)

	Sherds
Babicora Polychrome	11
Villa Ahumada Polychrome	1
Ramos Polychrome	3
Playas Incised (?)	1
Playas Plain Corrugated (brown with red rim and red band below corrugations)	6
Plain red-brown ware (Chihuahuoid).....	8
Unidentified gray crackled ware	1
El Paso Polychrome (10 rim sherds, all painted; two direct, two thickened, two thickened- everted)	375
El Paso Ware undifferentiated, probably El Paso Polychrome (no rim sherds or painted pieces) ..	269
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Total potsherds	675
Total artifacts	695

FOOD REMAINS

Mussel shells, opened	6
Charred fragments animal legbones	3
Corn cob, twelve row, small cob, charred	1

10

HOUSE I

An unusually high concentration of potsherds and burned clay chunks with *jacal* wall imprints in the low midden adjacent to the large eastern midden and lying at the north-eastern edge of the "plaza," led to further investigations at that point. Troweling revealed the edge of a burned clay-lined house pit underlying the midden. The edge of the pit was exposed by troweling on all sides save the northwest corner, where erosion of the site had cut the present surface below the floor of the pit. Then the midden debris lying in the pit was cleared away, leaving only the burned roof debris and artifacts lying directly

on the floor. This debris was then carefully troweled and brushed away, exposing the floor, walls, and features of the pit.*

The house pit thus excavated was almost square, measuring approximately 3 by 3.2 m. on the longer sides (Figs. 51, a; 52, b). The walls were slightly convex outwardly. Erosion of the northwestern corner below floor level prevented determination of exact dimensions of northern and western sides. The maximum depth of the house pit when excavated was only 15 cm. but judging by the depth of other houses of this type previously excavated and by the evidences of extensive erosional denudation of the site the original depth may have been one meter or more.

The floor and walls of the pit had originally been lined with a thin (3 cm.) layer of adobe clay which had burned to a brick-like consistency in the fire which destroyed the house. In the northwest and northeast corners, set in slightly from the north wall, and some distance from the west and east walls, were conical shaped postholes, 25 and 30 cm. deep respectively, probably representing the site of major roof supports. These contained decayed wood and dirt at the bottom and charcoal near the top. The post in the northeast corner had slanted slightly inward. Two other posts set fairly close together, one in an irregular shaped sealed pit, were found just south of the center of the west wall. These may or may not have represented part of the roof and wall superstructure. Near the center of the room, slightly to the north of the east-west axis, was another hole in the floor that had

* The house was excavated by the author and Thomas E. James on July 23, 1949. The site itself was discovered during a reconnaissance of the greater La Junta area, particularly the Rio Conchos drainage, carried out in July and August 1949 by the author, under a grant from the Institute of Latin American Studies of the University of Texas and under a permit from the government of the Republic of Mexico. I wish to express my gratitude to all members and sponsors of the Institute, and in particular to the director, C. W. Hackert, and Donald D. Brand, whose interest and continued cooperation made the work possible. I also owe a deep debt of gratitude to Eduardo Noguera of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia for his courtesy and continued cooperation in the obtaining of the necessary permits and the completion of the work. I would also like to thank Thomas E. James for his valued assistance and pleasant company during the first two weeks of the reconnaissance.

been sealed with adobe clay. The position and general appearance of this sealed pit conforms fairly well with that of the sipapu, or ceremonial spirit entrance, of the southwestern kiva. Just north of the east-west axis of the house and some distance from the east wall was the charred butt of a post 12 cm. in diameter resting in a slight concavity in the floor. This may have been part of the roof superstructure, the butt of a pole ladder, or the remains of some floor feature. In a somewhat similar house associated with a related ceramic complex on the Rio Grande near Esperanza, Texas, the only indications of the presence of roof support timbers were two similar charred post butts set in concavities

on the floor in line along the eastern wall of the pit. These post butts had been held in place by plastering wet clay around them (Kelley, 1949). No such clay supports were found in the Rio Conchos structure. A single charred post butt was found on the floor, just northwest of the center of a pithouse at the Millington Site (Shafter, 7:1) on the Rio Grande just below the mouth of the Rio Conchos (Kelley, 1939). Not far from the southeast corner and directly against the eastern wall of the pit was a slightly decayed cottonwood post set in a hole in the floor. The lack of burning or significant decay of this post and its position relative to a modern pit (Fig.



a



b



c



d

FIG. 52. a, general view of site from high mesa to the northwest. Large burned rock midden at left center. Arrow marks location of excavated house. Jeep in right midground indicates scale. Eroded alluvial flat of draw in mid-background has litter of campsite debris and probably was site of *temporal* fields upon which village depended for sustenance; b, view of house I, excavated, from northwest; c, eastern portion of floor and wall of house I. Dark spot in mid-foreground is charred post butt on floor. Note pile of manos and other stones at right of post; d, worn floor, altar, and fire pit (outlined with dashed line) at south end of house I.

51, a) suggests that this is a recent feature not associated with the original structure.

On the floor of the house lay a mass of intersecting and interwoven charred saplings and reeds, and broken chunks of burned adobe showing marks of criss-crossed reeds and saplings. This undoubtedly represents the former *jacal* walls and roof. If a heavier adobe or post wall structure existed above the level of the pit walls no trace of it was found. A somewhat similar house excavated at Site 57D2-3 on the Rio Grande near Redford, Texas, in June and July 1949 by the Anthropological Field Session of the Department of Anthropology of the University of Texas was found to have had durable walls of adobe built up at least some distance above ground level. These walls were constructed of turtle-back shaped adobe bricks laid up longitudinally and plastered together. The inside of the house was plastered and at least in places painted with red, yellow, black, and perhaps white bands.

Midway of the south wall of the pit there was a plastered adobe block or "altar," measuring about 30 by 65 cm., set slightly into the wall (Figs. 51, a, b; 52, d). The surviving feature was only about 15 cm. high but similar "altars" found against the south wall of houses at Shafter 7:1, and Shafter 7:3 on the Rio Grande were two or three times as high. The top of the altar is unplastered and conforms to the slope of the present eroded surface; hence, it is merely the basal part of the original structure. Discovery of this feature against the south wall of the house provides at least a partial answer to a question developed in the excavation of related sites on the Texas side of the nearby Rio Grande. There likewise all altars were located on the southern side of the house, but since the southern side was also the side toward the river it was impossible to say whether southern orientation or the position of the river was the controlling feature. Since the altar of the present structure is on the south side but away from either the Rio Grande or the Rio Conchos it would seem fairly certain that directional orientation alone explains the position of the features.

Against the northern face of the altar there was an adobe lined semi-circular fire pit with a raised plastered adobe rim (Figs. 51, a, b; 52, d). A thick bed of ashes filled this pit. In front of the pit and on both sides of it and the altar were irregular worn areas in the plastered

floor. It should be noted that the sealed sipapu-like hole in the floor previously described was roughly in line with the altar and fire pit in a north-south axis across the main dimension of the house.

A few centimeters east of the burned post butt in the eastern side of the house there was a neat pile of seven stones on the floor (Fig. 52, c). These were fire cracked and discolored but still remained in place just as they had been stacked after their last usage. Included in the pile were three manos (one-hand, two-faced, shaped, ovate-rectanguloid), one peniform stone or light pestle, one unmodified moccasin-shaped nodule, one unshaped stone, and a fragmentary palette-like stone slab, which lay directly on the floor and supported the other stones.

The following artifacts were found on the floor of the house or in the fallen roof and wall debris immediately above it:

STONE ARTIFACTS

End-notched pebbles	1
Smoothed ovate pebble with concentric zigzag painted lines in black (atlatl weight or amulet?)	1
Manos (one-hand, two-faced, shaped, ovate-rectangular)	3
Peniform stone, or light pestle	1
Stone slab palette (?)	1
Moccasin-last (?)	1
Metallic rock, probably copper ore	1
Total stone artifacts	9

POTTERY

(Type identifications made in field)

	Sherds
El Paso Polychrome	7
El Paso Ware undifferentiated (no rim sherds or decorated sherds; probably El Paso Polychrome)	8
Total sherds	15

OTHER ARTIFACTS

Bison (?) bone hoes (?)	3
Charred checker-weave mat (individual leaf-elements about 0.8 centimeters wide).....fragments	2
Shaped mussel shell	1
Total miscellaneous artifacts	6
Total artifacts	30

FOOD REMAINS

Various fragments of large animal (bison?) bone and mussel shell.

CONCLUSIONS

The type of house with the associated altar and fire pit; the end-notched pebbles; one-hand, shaped, two-faced, ovate-rectangular manos; Perdiz Stemmed arrowpoints; together with village plan, maize, indications of *temporal* farming, and a high percentage of El Paso Polychrome pottery with associated lower percentages of Chihuahua Culture ceramic complexes indicate clearly that Loma Seca is a component of the Bravo Valley aspect and specifically of the La Junta focus of that aspect (Kelley, *et al*, 1940). There are no traces of the later Concepcion and Conchos foci of the aspect at this site and the component does not appear to have been occupied over a very long span of time.

The general trait assemblage, particularly the ceramic complex represented, suggests that the component was occupied between *circa* 1200 and 1400 A.D.

Excavation of house I at this site verifies previous generalizations regarding houses of the focus, and indicates that the location of the altar at the south end of the house is based on directional orientation rather than with reference to the location of the river. The appearance of a charred post butt on the floor renews speculation as to the existence of pole ladders in the houses of the focus. There is a suggestion of the presence of a sipapu, which is important and needs verification through further work. The heap of stones, including such household implements as

manos, a moccasin-last (?), a pestle (?), and a palette or cooking slab (?), suggests orderliness of housekeeping and provides some indication of the range and number of implements used in a house. The absence of a metate is interesting. The presence of charred checker matting verifies the presence of this trait in the culture. The location of the site suggests that its occupants depended largely upon *temporal* farming for sustenance. It is possible that the abandonment of the site at about 1400 A.D. resulted from climatic deterioration which made *temporal* farming temporarily undependable or impossible as the principle source of subsistence.

The extent of the erosion of the site makes location of house pits and their excavation simple and speedy. Burning of the houses was apparently universal and promises a rich return in artifacts together with excellent preservation of house features. A small crew of men with adequate technical supervision could completely excavate the site in a few weeks time. Such an excavation would not only provide us with excellent supplementary information regarding house structure and artifacts but would likewise provide for the first time a complete village plan with streets, plazas, religious structures if any, burials, community hearths, storage bins, etc. The stage of erosion of Chihuahua E7-5 is such, however, as to demand excavation within the next few years if the site is not to be lost completely.

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Carbondale, Illinois
March, 1951