

*Tex. Arch. Research Lab.
Library*

**PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
THIRD
JORNADA - MOGOLLON
CONFERENCE**



Edited by
Michael S. Foster and Thomas C. O'Laughlin

THE ARTIFACT
EL PASO ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY
Volume 23 Numbers 1 and 2

1985

A REVIEW OF THE ARCHITECTURAL SEQUENCE AT LA JUNTA DE LOS RIOS

J. Charles Kelley
Sul Ross State University

From October 1938 through July 1939 I planned and supervised excavations of sites of the Bravo Valley culture at La Junta de los Rios, in the vicinity of Presidio, Texas and Ojinaga, Chihuahua. My valued associate in this work was Donald J. Lehmer, who directed in the field most of the excavations until May 1939. I was personally in charge of the final field work at the Millington Site (Shafter 7:1) and the excavations at the Loma Alta Site (Shafter 7:3). These excavations were carried out under the auspices of the Sul Ross State Teacher's College (now University) at Alpine, Texas, with principle financing from the Work Progress Administration and supplementary funding from the School of American Research and the late E. B. Sayles of Gila Pueblo. In other years I also carried out minor excavations at the Polvo Site (Kelley 1949; Shackelford 1955), near Redford, Texas, at Shafter 6:1, the Shiner Site (Kelley et al. 1940:73-81) on Alamito Creek and at the Loma Seca Site in Chihuahua (Kelley 1951). The latter excavations have been published and a description of the excavations at Shafter 7:3 was included in my doctoral dissertation at Harvard University (Kelley 1947).

For a variety of reasons, largely unjustifiable, the actual site reports on the Millington (see Kelley 1939) and Loma Alta Sites have never been published, although summaries have appeared in several sources (Kelley et al. 1940:39-47, see also Kelley:1952,1952-53). Because, at least in part the La Junta occupation is attributable to the Jornada branch of the Mogollon as defined by Lehmer (1948), it appears especially important to bring the architectural data to the attention of present day Jornada branch researchers. Preparing such a report has proven unexpectedly difficult. Using the mass of 45 year old notes and illustrations has presented serious problems. Although most of the excavated house plans had been long ago drafted by Lehmer, they had deteriorated badly and some very significant errors, particularly in scale, were discovered. My co-worker/wife, Ellen, and I have attempted to produce a meaningful graphic presentation of the architectural data. But the resulting drawings included with this paper are greatly simplified; the detailed plates will have to be completely redrafted. Nevertheless they may prove helpful to students of the Jornada branch.

THE BRAVO VALLEY CULTURE

Originally we used the McKern system in our classifica-

tion, but bowing to current usage I will now discuss phases rather than foci. The Bravo Valley culture is generally restricted to the valley of La Junta itself, extending for twenty or so miles or more along the Rio Grande below and above its junction with the Rio Conchos, and up the latter river as well. Some sites are also known from tributaries of the Rio Grande in this region. During its earlier La Junta phase, the culture was part of a virtually contiguous series of Jornada Branch components extending along the Rio Grande upstream to the El Paso area. With the beginning of the Protohistoric Concepcion phase the distribution became restricted to the immediate La Junta area, as it also was in the following fully historic Conchos phase. We have a rich supply of ethnohistoric data for the culture beginning in 1581-83 (perhaps 1535) and continuing into the late 18th century. Today there are mestizo towns in Mexico that have the names given them in the early historic period and occupy their original locations. The ethnohistoric data are especially rich with data regarding subsistence, house types, population, etc. In many ways the La Junta situation resembles that of the upper Rio Grande - a group of sedentary towns differing in some degree in ethnic linguistic and archaeological backgrounds. The two towns where major excavations were carried out were the Millington Site (Shafter 7:1), a large midden mound located on the low terrace of the Rio Grande in the eastern edge of Presidio, Texas and the Loma Alta Site (Shafter 7:3) located on a high mesa near an old branch of the Rio Grande some five miles above Presidio. The Millington Site is identified with the historic site of San Cristobal of the Cholomes Indians and the Loma Alta Site with San Juan Evangelista of the Espejo entrada.

ARCHITECTURAL TRADITIONS OF THE LA JUNTA PHASE

At the Millington Site 22 house structures were excavated and nine others were located in trenches but not excavated. For the earliest La Junta phase three principal architectural traditions were identified. The El Paso tradition (Figure 1) was represented by one essentially surficial adobe-walled building (Structure 2) of five contiguous rooms built in an east-west line. "Altars" of adobe were found placed against the south wall of two rooms but no fire hearths were located. The structure is virtually identical with smaller Jornada branch pueblos of the El Paso area, and there seems to be no doubt as to its cultural affiliations. Although a later structure cut away its southeast corner and another later structure was built on its ruins, Structure 2 itself was not superimposed on any earlier structure. We suspected that it was the earliest structure at the site but could not prove it.

The second architectural tradition of the La Junta phase was that of the Rectangular Houses (Figure 1), houses built

in pits but not utilizing the walls of the pits as part of the construction. These were rectangular, sometimes almost square, houses built in relatively deep pits. They were as a rule somewhat smaller than individual rooms of the Structure 2 pueblo. These were isolated structures (with one exception), oriented north-south and characterized by constructed adobe floors. Some of them had low adobe curbs along their floor edges. Most of them had adobe altars placed midway of their south walls and there were occasional raised adobe fire hearths built in front of and against the "altars." The "altars" were rectangular adobe blocks placed against the wall. They were carefully plastered and showed little if any traces of wear. Molds in the exteriors of adobe curbs and adobe floor edges showed conclusively that these houses had walls of jacal construction, with little plastering of the wall structure. Similar small jacal houses still in local use in the 1930s had walls built of ocatillo stalks. Regardless of the fragile wall constructions these houses had substantial pole frames. Small poles were placed along the edge of the floor; corner posts were usually larger. In addition a pair of larger posts were placed east-west out from the walls near the center of the north-south axis, each one often accompanied by smaller posts. In some houses similar pairs of larger poles were, on occasion, placed near each end of the house, rather than in the center. No traces of side entrances were found; presumably the houses had roof entrances although we found no identifiable pole ladder butts or recognizable holes for the same. The matter remains uncertain.

Houses of this same type have been excavated also at Shafter 6:1 (the Shiner Site) on Alamito Creek, at Shafter 7:3 (San Juan Evangelista, the Loma Alta Site), at Loma Seca in Chihuahua, and at the Polvo Site at Redford. One such structure (House 3) at the Polvo Site varied sharply in construction technique (Shackelford 1955); walls were made of turtle-back adobe bricks placed longitudinally beginning at ground level. Its interior walls were plastered and there were traces of geometric decoration in yellow, red, black and white on these walls. In this house the altar was not in the center of the south wall but about a third of the distance from the east side; placed flush in its surface with a polished stone slab. The possibility that House 3 was a ceremonial structure deserved consideration. It should be noted that burials, usually flexed in simple shallow grave pits, occurred frequently beneath the floors of houses of this tradition.

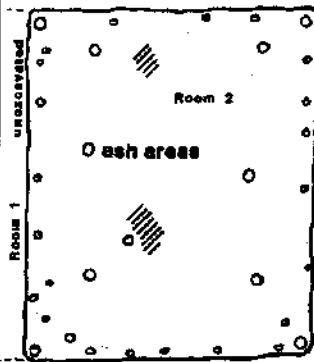
The third architectural tradition found in the La Junta phase was that of the Circular Houses (Figure 2), actually some of them oval-shaped. These were simple pits, a little less than 3 m in diameter cut into the terrace gravels, which also served as floors and, possibly, walls. Post holes were placed around the interior walls and in one case a pair

FIGURE 1

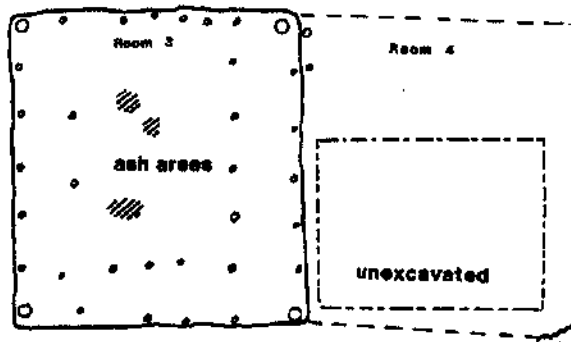
Floor plans of the Rectangular House and El Paso Traditions.

Millington Site

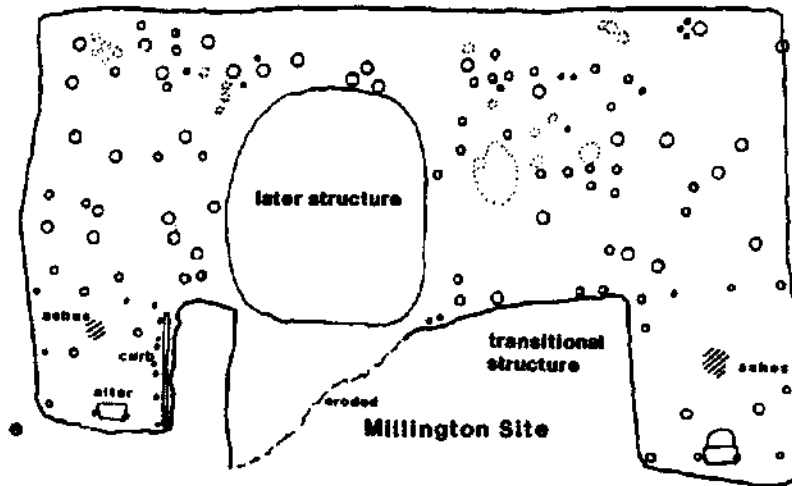
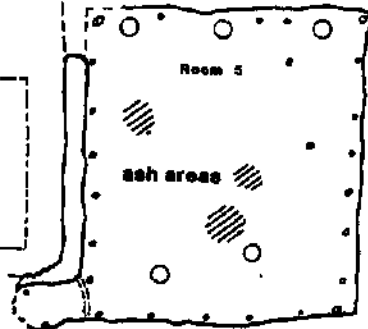
Loma Alta Site



f Isolated house



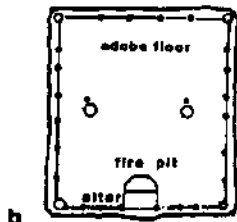
g house tier



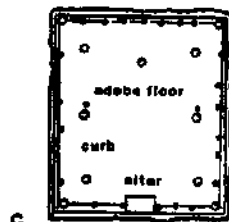
earth or refuse floors, all
 jacale walls and roofs, all
 flat roofs, roof entrances ? all

RECTANGULAR HOUSE TRADITION

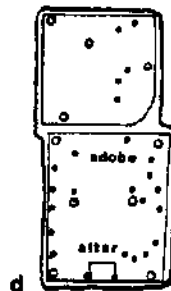
CONCEPCION and CONCHOS PHASES



b



c

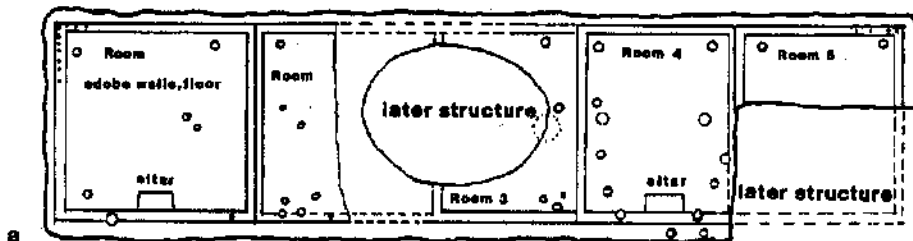


d

jacale walls, roofs all
 flat roofs, roof entrances, all ?

RECTANGULAR HOUSE TRADITION

LA JUNTA PHASE



a

Millington Site

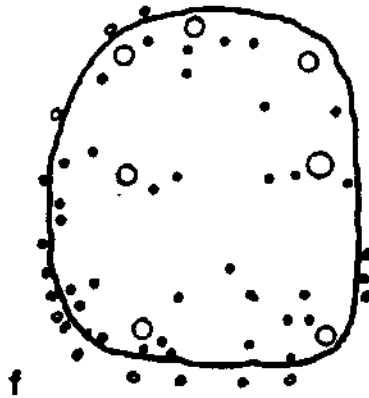
EL PASO TRADITION

LA JUNTA PHASE



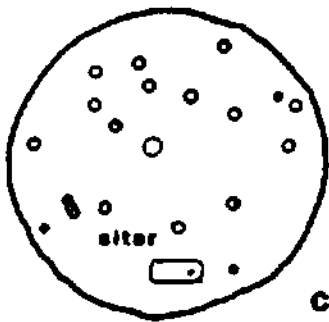
FIGURE 2
Floor plans of the Circular House Tradition.

CONCHOS PHASE

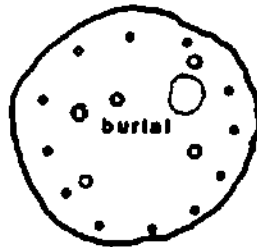


Millington Site

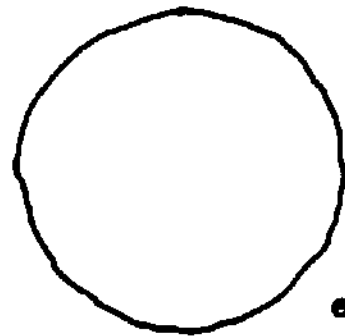
CONCEPCION PHASE



Millington Site

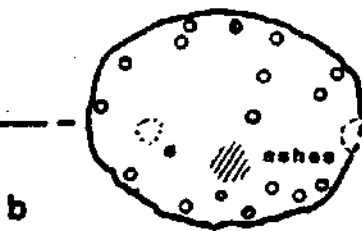


d



Loma Alta Site

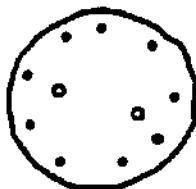
LA JUNTA PHASE



b

Millington Site

transitional ?



a

earth floors, jacale construction, all

CIRCULAR HOUSE TRADITION



of opposed larger holes was placed out from the walls. Jacal construction seems certain. No floor features and no traces of side entrances were found. It has been suggested that these may have been grainaries but no evidence to that effect was found.

LA JUNTA PHASE CERAMICS

El Paso Polychrome and a related plain ware (probably sherds from olla bottoms) represented by far the dominant ceramics of the La Junta phase although the actual amount recovered was not great. Two restorable ollas were found and most of the sherds appear to come from ollas. El Paso Polychrome sherds were found on the floors or in floor debris of houses representing all three La Junta phase architectural traditions.

Next most frequent were wares of the Chihuahua/Casas Grandes complex. Among such wares identified were Villa Ahumada Polychrome, Babicora Polychrome and, somewhat dubiously, Madera Black-on-red, in addition to Playas Red, Playas Red Incised, Ramos Black and others not specifically identified. Chupadero Black-on-white occurred but not in large numbers. Notably no decorated Mimbres sherds were found. Individual specimens of a number of other Southwestern wares were found at the Millington Site, but I cannot locate the list in the notes.

ARCHITECTURAL TRADITIONS OF THE CONCEPTION PHASE

Causes for the apparently sudden abandonment of the Jornada branch sites extending along the Rio Grande from the El Paso area to the La Junta area are still poorly understood. Minor climactic changes and nomadic incursions have been suggested, and one might add to this list of potential causes the break-up of the Casas Grandes interaction sphere, which, in turn, may be attributable to major political/economic changes in far-off West and Central Mexico. At the Millington Site there was actually some evidence for cultural continuity accompanied by marked changes in house types (and inferentially social/residential practices) and in ceramics. Our very poor evidence suggests that virtually the entire lithic complex continued unchanged through the La Junta and Concepcion phases. At the Millington Site itself there was some evidence for a transition in house types between those of the La Junta and Concepcion phases, but the architectural changes from the former to the latter phases were major ones.

Two major architectural traditions continued in use but with considerable change. The Rectangular House (Figure 1) tradition was the dominant one in the Concepcion phase as previously noted but houses were greatly changed. They were

still rectangular jacal structures built in pits, but floors were made of tramped refuse and adobe was not used at all. There were no altars, except in transitional structures, and instead of adobe fire pits there were two or three areas of white wood ashes at various locations on the floor of each house. In size, whereas the floor area of La Junta rectangular houses was on the order of 60-75 square m, single houses of the Concepcion phase had floor areas on the order of 265-300 square m. One may infer that the La Junta houses were used by simple families, those of the Concepcion phase by extended families.

There was also a tendency for such houses to be built side by side in east-west tiers, especially at the Loma Alta Site (Shafter 7:3). The individual houses were oriented north-south, the house tiers east-west. One such house (Structure 9) was excavated at the Millington Site; the pit measured approximately 7 x 20 m (140 square m) and represented at least three separate adjacent houses. This house cut through two (probably three) La Junta phase rectangular structures, and a later (probably Conchos phase) ovate structure was superimposed upon it. On the south side at both east and west ends there were small rectangular houses with adobe altars (and a fire pit in one) on the south side. These were in form and size La Junta phase houses, but their floors were gravel and continuous on the same level with that of Structure 9, as were their end walls. They appear to have been part of the Structure 9 complex and the entire structure may have been transitional between those phases, implying continuity in occupation.

The Circular House tradition (Figure 2) was also represented in the Concepcion phase by two major structures. These were not grainaries but actual houses. Structure 1, which I excavated in 1937 (Kelley 1939), was a roughly circular structure about 4 m in diameter cut into terrace gravels. Eleven to twelve post holes slanted inward around the periphery and four larger posts forming an irregular quadrilateral were set away from the walls. The house had burned and what appeared to be the butt end of a pole ladder was found between two of these larger posts, suggesting use of a roof entrance. A flexed burial of an adult individual was found in a shallow pit beneath the floor. Above this burial and extending well above floor level was a cairn of small stones. The house had apparently been burned after the burial since the burned roof lay on the cairn. On the house floor were animal bones, burned mesquite beans, corn cobs and shucks and in the roof debris a stalk of corn complete with cob (12 row). Items associated were Concepcion phase; the house lay on the periphery of the village. Another circular house (Structure 15) was some 15 feet in diameter and was cut through a rectangular La Junta phase house. The post hole distribution was somewhat erratic, with one very large post hole just off center, again possibly representing a pole

ladder and roof entrance. Surprisingly a La Junta type altar was found near the south wall.

The Spanish accounts of the 1581-83 expeditions describe Concepcion phase houses (Gallegos in Hammond and Rey 1966):

They live in houses made of palings plastered with mud . . . (pp.73); standing on the house tops, the natives showed great pleasure in seeing us. The houses resemble those of the Mexicans, except they are made of paling. The natives built them square. They put up forked posts and upon these they place rounded timbers the thickness of a man's thigh. Then they add stakes and plaster them with mud. Close to the houses they have grainaries built of willow, after the fashion of the Mexicans (pp.75).

One village, possibly the Millington Site, "had eight large square houses with . . . more than three hundred persons altogether." (pp. 75).

According to Luxan in 1582 (Luxan in Hammond and Rey 1966):

The rancheria resemble a pueblo, as it was composed of flat roofed houses, half under and half above the ground (pp. 162), (and speaking of San Juan Evangelista [Loma Alta]), The pueblo was on a high ridge and contained many flat roofed houses, below were many other houses forming a sort of suburb. . . . (pp. 163). (It had) a very neatly kept plaza (pp. 164).

At the Millington Site the large rectangular houses continued into the Conchos phase and indeed were still being made, but not in pits, in 1939; these contemporary houses had windows and doors, not roof entrances.

CONCEPCION PHASE CERAMICS

Very little pottery was associated with the early Concepcion phase. At San Juan Evangelista only 20 potsherds and two restorable pots were found. Two of these sherds were certainly identifiable as Patton Engraved, a protohistoric east Texas ware, and one was unexpectedly a sherd of Jeddito Corrugated from the Hopi country. The site was apparently abandoned between 1583 and 1683 and its probable nearby successor, Shafter 7:4, has produced a large collection of ceramic wares: Capote Red-on-brown, Paloma Red-on-gray, and the first of the fully historic pottery Conchos Red-on-brown, which was still being made in Ojinaga in the 1930s. Most important of all is the new ware Chinati Plain and its variants Chinati Neck-filletted and Chinati Scored. The only known restored vessel of this type was found at San Juan

Evangelista, the Loma Alta Site. This was essentially a cylindrical grey ware with slightly flaring rim, constricted neck, flaring lower section and conoidal bottom. A number of the conoidal bottoms of this ware was found at the Millington Site. As a type it is highly reminiscent of Apache and Navajo wares, suggesting that the Jumano, Plains buffalo hunters who spent the winters at La Junta (Kelley 1947, 1955), may well have been an early Apache group. Notably, before 1700 the Plains group wintering and trading at La Junta was named Jumano, after 1700 it was called Apache.

THE CONCHOS PHASE

At Shafter 7:4 the mass of ceramics recovered from eroding houses included Maiolica and one Aztec sherd from the Valley of Mexico (identification by George Vaillant). Also numerous sherds of Spanish "olive jars" were found. Capote Red-on-brown apparently evolved into the coarser Conchos Red-on-brown. Occasional sherds of this ware were wheel-made and an attempt was made to copy the green glaze of the "olive jars." The glaze produced was a bubbly green ranging into white; subsequently a dirty white slip cover Conchos plain ware vessels. Conchos wares were found in great abundance at the Millington Site.

Houses of the Conchos phase continued the Rectangular House tradition (Figure 1) of the Concepcion phase and apparently the builders gradually eliminated the pits in which these houses had previously been made. Two aberrant circular-ovate structures tentatively assigned to the Conchos phase may indicate survival of the Circular House tradition (Figure 2) into this phase. Tentatively the beginning of the Conchos phase is dated to ca. A.D. 1700, but 1680 or 1715 dates perhaps correspond more closely to the cultural changes involved.

COMPARATIVE HOUSE TYPES

Clearly, La Junta house traditions show relationship to Jornada branch structures but apparently there are local variations and relationships with other cultures as well. Limitations on the length of this paper, however, prevent considerations of such problems or of the ecological basis for the La Junta development, the lithic complexes represented, and other items of La Junta culture.