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

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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.

