THE NAVAJO ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE CHACRA MESA, NEW MEXICO

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A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirments for the Degree of

Master of Arts in Anthropology

The University of New Mexico

1960

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1700-1750

Historical evidence indicated an impending change in the Navajo political situation in the early eighteenth century. The almost complete cessation of Navajo conflict with the Spanish by 1717 was undoubtedly the result of an increase in Comanche and Ute raids in the Province of Navajo, and this pressure on the Navajo, who were enjoying a period of economic prosperity, forced them to turn their energies to self preservation.

Again Navajo disunity resulted in ruinous consequences. The Comanche and Ute took advantage of this disunity. The pillagers struck at separate Navajo rancherias with no fear of organized reprisals of any magnitude. The Navajo chose more isolated and easily defendable locations for their separate fortifications. The assaults of the Ute and Comanche were probably responsible in part for the migration of bands of Navajo to the west and south at this period.

Though Spanish military operations in the early 1700's might or might not have contributed to subduing the Navajo, as suggested by Reeve (1958:230), campaign records did provide an accumulation of informative reports on these people. On the basis of one collection of such reports (the Rabal manuscript) Dr. W. W. Hill pointed out some facts of Navajo culture in the early 1700's.

> Agricultural activity was mentioned ... and was the basic economic pursuit. ... Cultivation was by hand with the aid of wooden implements, undoubtedly the digging stick and the wooden hoe. Produce was stored in underground globular shaped pits.
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> The beginnings of the Navajo livestock industry were clearly discernible at this time. ...
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> By implication hunting was an important economic pursuit both on the basis of present-day accounts and because of the recurring references to buckskin as a trade article.

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> The virtual cessation of Navajo-Spanish warfare had an important effect upon intertribal relations. It stimulated trading between the Navajo and the "Christianized" Pueblos as well as the Spanish. ... The primary Navajo trade articles consisted of woven blankets, baskets and buckskins.
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> For purposes of defense the houses were located away from the fields on the tops of adjacent mesas. ...
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> Wearing apparel for women consisted of a black woolen dress of the type worn by the Pueblo women of that period. The men were described as dressed in buckskin; apparently a style derived from contacts with Plains tribes. ... (1940:397-398).

Historical documentation of the Navajo after the first two decades of the eighteenth century until almost mid-century was sparce and brief. Ecclesiastical interest in the tribe ripened, however, in the 1740's and several journeys were made by Franciscan friars into the Provinces of Navajo and Cebolleta. The habitants of the Province of Navajo were reported living in "Pueblos", which they occupied as a defense against the Ute. The fear of the Ute and a drought were apparently factors in the decision of a group of these Navajo to move to the southern Cebolleta province, under the direction of Franciscans in the late 1740's. Though no fortified pueblos were noted by the Spanish in the southern region, the local Cebolleta Navajo expressed a desire for protection from the Ute.

With the failure of the missions established at Encinal and Cebolleta in 1750, the Navajo again faded into historical oblivion.

These historical indications of changes in relationship between the Navajo, Spanish and other Indian groups confirmed archaeological and dendrochronological data, which also provided evidence of a subsequent and resultant change in Navajo culture.

Archaeological surveys showed that the Gobernador area was densely inhabited at this time and that areas to the south, the Chacra and Big Bead Mesa, were being settled by migrant groups from the north. Surveys

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and excavations (Keur, Kidder, etc.) in the Gobernador indicated that it was the center of an early eighteenth century development of masonry structures; towers, tower complexes, pueblitos and walled pueblos, which were Puebloan in character. The earliest dated remains were from a small pueblito in La Jara canyon from which five dates of 1714 were reported. Tree ring dates showed that a peak in tower development was reached in the late 1720's and 1730's.

This architectural development, often referred to as "Refugee" architecture, spread to the south at a slightly later date, where it was represented in a diluted form on the Chacra and at Big Bead. It did not extend any distance to the north, however. Dittert reported only forked stick hogans, ramadas and lean-tos for the Navajo Dam Project area (1958b:69). "Refugee" architectural characteristics - the use of masonry, flat roofs, windows, whitewashed walls, etc., common features in the Gobernador - were present in some sites on the Chacra, but collective units, i.e. walled pueblos, pueblitos, and tower complexes, were replaced by small multi-room structures and double oval units (CM's 18, 38, 39, 142, 143, and 149).

Emphasis on defense was still important and some structures were characterized by defensive locations, port holes and parapet walls. The few structures of the multi-room and double oval type, which were dated by dendrochronology on the Chacra, demonstrated occupation in the 1730's and the 1740's. Tree ring dates and ceramics from CM 139 and pottery from CM 17 and 98 indicated that fortified butte tops were also being used at approximately the same time.

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Structures, dated in the first half of the eighteenth century at Big Bead Mesa, included two masonry hogans, two forked stick hogans and the room at the fortification near complex D.

Evidence of Pueblo contact with the Navajo was also discerned in ceramics collected at sites in the Gobernador, the Chacra and Big Bead Mesa. Pottery types associated with "Refugee" structures in the Gobernador included Navajo Utility or Dinetah Scored, Gobernador Polychrome, Navajo Decorated and Pueblo trade pieces primarily from Jemez and the Upper Rio Grande Pueblos. Wares found in the Navajo Dam area included all of the above and, additionally, Gobernador Indented "... a local adaptation of Jemez Culinary." (Dittert 1958b:69)

On the Chacra, Navajo Culinary was the predominant type. Gobernador Polychrome was well represented and trade wares from the Pueblo area ranged from the Rio Grande to Hopi. Ashiwi Polychrome from the Acoma-Zuni area was by far the most abundant of the trade pieces. Navajo Decorated was rare in this period.

No sherds occurred in the room at the fortification on Big Bead Mesa. Puname Polychrome, Ashiwi Polychrome and Navajo Utility were found at the masonry hogans and the latter two types were also reported from the forked stick hogans.

Spanish trade items were rare in the Gobernador, and absent on the Chacra and at Big Bead Mesa.

The early and late years of the first half century (1700-1750) were well documented historically, and the entire period was represented by considerable archaeology and dendrochronology and a correlation of the data

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furnished an excellent archaeo-historical interpretation of Navajo culture in the process of change.

The development of a masonry architectural tradition with Puebloan and Spanish characteristics and the evolution of several ceramic types (Gobernador Polychrome, Gobernador Indented and Navajo Decorated) attested the presence of Pueblo captives and refugees and possibly Spanish captives in Navajo camps.

Although economic and subsequent related changes in Navajo culture were attributed to the introduction of Spanish livestock, this process probably proceeded more slowly than some have thought. Notwithstanding the fact that large numbers of livestock were stolen from the Spanish, very few sheep and horses were recovered on Spanish raids into the Navajo country, indicating that they were either hidden or had been eaten. Archaeological excavations in the Gobernador, the Chacra and Big Bead Mesa revealed bones of sheep, mules, and horses in refuse deposits implying a dependance on these animals for food. Horses were eaten, but were also kept for raiding and hunting and might have been prestige items.

There was little evidence that Navajo residence patterns changed as a result of a shift in economics from agricultural to sheep herding. Intensive herding would have necessitated the fragmentation of compact rancheria groups and the isolation of family or extended family units, a procedure militarily unwise for the time. As localized rancherias were reported in the late 1700's such a change had presumably not begun.

1750-1800

The Navajo referred to in post 1750 historical documents were those

living in the Province of Cebolleta; those in the Province of Navajo were unreported. For approximately twenty years after the Navajo abandoned the missions at Encinal and Cebolleta and returned to the mountains, peace endured, and during this time a large number of land tracts, principally on the eastern and southern flanks of the Cebolleta Mountain, were granted to Spanish settlers.

Gradual encroachment on Navajo lands continued until the 1770's when the normally peaceful Navajo, feeling the pressure, rose against the settlers and within a decade drove them from the Puerco Valley and surrounding area. Dr. Reeve (1959:39) suggested that the outbreak was in part a result of destruction of Navajo corn fields by Spanish livestock and in part of petty thefts of Spanish sheep and cattle by the Navajo. He added (1959:40): "... too close contact through territorial proximity provoked frictions that brought an end to the longest era of peace between the white people and these Indians (Navajo) until their military subjection in the 1860's".

Following this uprising, the Navajo drifted back into the mountains and canyons. From there they resumed their periodic raids on Spanish settlements and Indian Pueblos for the remainder of the eighteenth century.

Archaeological evidence, supported by dendrochronology, denoted that the Gobernador region was becoming depopulated after 1750 as historical references implied. Refugee architecture, though it persisted through the decade of the 50's in the Gobernador, was in another ten years almost completely replaced by the forked stick hogan in the few rancherias which remained in the northern province. Dittert (1958a:208) noted that during the Gobernador Phase (A.D. 1700 - A.D. 1800) "The occupation of this group

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(Navajo-Pueblo) appears to have been more in the form of continual movements rather than permanent settlements. Many Navajo were already living far to the south and west before the Upper San Juan drainage had been abandoned."

The only dendrochronological dates for the Chacra were 1773 and 1779. These were from a forked stick hogan - part of the complex at CM 4. Twelve other Chacra Mesa sites were believed to have been occupied in the latter part of the century. This judgement was based on a comparative analysis of the pottery and changes in architectural forms. These architectural changes were marked by the absence of multi-room structures, the addition of single oval units, and the use of crude masonry hogans as house types. Double oval units were continued in use and forked stick hogans persisted without any apparent changes.

The various structures described above occurred as a complex at some sites. In other instances double oval units were located in masonry hogan complexes (CM's 14, 15 and 23); single oval units were found in masonry hogan complexes at sites 13, 36 and 40, but also occurred as a separate unit at CM's 10 and 99. A complex of masonry and forked stick hogans marked CM 4, while only forked stick hogans were found at CM 7 and CM 8 and only masonry hogans were present at CM 22.

CM 2 was the only fortified butte used at this time, and all other sites were situated in less secluded and/or defensible locations than had been chosen previously.

The great majority of sites from Big Bead Mesa dated in this half century, (1750-1800). Structures included both masonry and forked stick

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