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THE IDEA OF THE KIVA IN ANASAZI ARCHAEOLOGY

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(Boring, annotated version available at some future date.)

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The earliest accounts of the ruins of the southwest were the most extravagant. In magazines and newspapers, writers that Lummis contemptuously referred to as Pullman-car ethnologists described Southwestern ruins as the handiwork of Aztecs, Toltecs or lost tribes. In part, this was just journalistic excess, but the attribution of the large ruins to exotic cultures served another, more malevolent purpose: denying the historic Pueblos a connection with the celebrated ruins of Mesa Verde and Chaco effectively supported our colonialist Indian policies. How should the government treat people who could build something like Pueblo Bonito? That ruin alone was thought to be the biggest building north of Mexico. No matter that Bonito would fit into the plaza at Taos; the ruins were seen as somehow more magnificent than, and alien to, the living Pueblos.

The earliest serious research in the Southwest was in adamant reaction to this view, and had as its goal the re-connection of modern Pueblos with ancient ruins. Bandelier was perhaps the first and Lummis perhaps the foremost, but, archaeologically, the most important champion of the Pueblo

patrimony was Edgar L. Hewett. His influence, from his positions in Sante Fe and at UNM, was enormous, and lingers to this day.

In the face of Aztec and Toltec claims, the method of argument that Hewett and his colleagues adopted was to trace continuities in the physical aspects of Pueblo life back into the archaeological past. And what better indicator of Puebloan ancestry than the peculiar Pueblo ceremonial structure, the kiva? In effect, the search was on for, the earliest kiva, the origins of the kiva. In that kind of teleological easter egg hunt, the odds are very good that you will find that which you seek. With the discovery of Basketmaker pithouses, the lineage of the Pueblo kiva had apparently been pushed back to the most remote stages of Anasazi development. That was one in the eye for the boys in the Pullman car.

I submit that our idea of the kiva is still essentially that of Edgar Hewett. His view, unfortunately, was warped by an excessive zeal for continuities in the Anasazi-Pueblo record, and -- as I'll explain in a minute -- it biases our view of the pithouse-pueblo transition. Since the shift from lowly pithouse to sacred kiva ended domestic use of these structures,

*Transition instead is from kivas (a kiva is also used at times in ceremony) to the "husan" of the Sed. H. T. H. Bldg. at NCC?*

the pithouse-kiva watershed simultaneously marks the pivotal pithouse-pueblo transition. Or so the story goes. Since that transition seems to fascinate southwestern archaeologists, we would do well to assess the received view.

How far back can we trace kivas? Since we no longer need to grind Hewett's particular ax, let us turn this question on its head and ask: how far forward can we trace pithouses?

For purposes of this paper, we will limit the field to the eastern Anasazi area. For the eastern Anasazi, the received view is that pithouses turned into kivas between 700 and 900. I will argue that pithouses continued as a primary (perhaps, the primary) element of Anasazi residence in various styles and developments until the late 1300s. This is four centuries after the scenarios presented in the numerous recent explanations of the pithouse-pueblo transtion.

Recently, there has been intriguing discussion of PIII pithouses in the highland areas of the eastern Anasazi. While I greet the discovery of "out-of-phase" pithouses with glee, these uplands PIII pithouses are not the basis of my argument. They

are too easily, but wrongly, dismissed as back-woods atavisms. Rather, I will argue that all those little PII and PIII kivas, from Prudden's unit houses to the clan kivas of Pueblo Bonito, are not really little kivas, but are, instead, pithouses.

First we must consider: what is a kiva? According to the first Pecos conference, a kiva was any "chamber specially constructed for ceremonial purposes". As the first Pecos Conferencees acknowledged, that was an unsatisfactory compromise of conflicting Eastern and Western Pueblo situations. Let us limit ourselves to the Eastern Pueblos: in the Eastern Pueblos, there is generally only one or two kivas per village, which house the activities of village-integrating societies. The kiva, then, is the architectural embodiment of a village-integrating institution.

This was clearly the idea of the kiva that informed Stewards' classic formulation of room-to-kiva ratios. You will recall that Steward had 100 rooms for each kiva in PV, 60 rooms for each kiva in PIV, 14 rooms for each kiva in PIII, and 6 rooms for each kiva in PII and PI. For Steward and many others, this was evidence for increasing integration within Anasazi and Pueblo villages. But in PI and PII, with only 6 rooms per kiva, it's

a little difficult to envisage what was being integrated. An extended family? I suspect that the phenomena that Steward was trying to observe simply slipped off the tray, and that in PI, PII, and -- as I will argue -- PIII the things he thought were kivas were, instead, pithouses.

What is a pithouse? Strictly speaking, a pithouse is a house built in a pit. But this definition is insufficient, lamed by our archaeological perceptions: what we see, when we excavate, is a pit, so we call the things pithouses. Some pits are up to 3m deep, but many many more are much shallower. Most are so shallow that the superstructure was clearly of more architectural consequence than the pit itself. We would do well to think of pithouses as they were built, rather than as they appear archeologically: it is amazing how any rectangular foundation, no matter how sketchy, conjures up Zuni Pueblo, while any pit, no matter how shallow, brings to mind nothing more than a low bump on the landscape, hardly distinguishable from a prairie dog hill. There was clearly more to a pithouse than that. A pit is just a pit -- a cheap way to insulate -- but the superstructure, with its heavy timber framework, leaning walls, and its small cribbed or flat roof: that was building.

Think for a moment what pithouses looked like from the inside: round, or rounded square in shape, with walls leaning up to a roof considerably smaller than the floor area: the effect is essentially a dark, warm dome, with a small but intense beam of light shining in through a smoke hole or side entrance. If you grew up in a BMIII or PI pithouse, that was your idea of a proper home.

If we learn anything from the enormous literature on vernacular building, it should be this: house forms change only under the most compelling necessity. The relative permanence of architecture makes house form peculiarly self-perpetuating. For the kinds of societies we are concerned with, a house might last over a decade: think how many pots and arrowheads a family could go through in that much time, how much more opportunity for experiment, invention and change in those technologies! In more substantial building traditions, like Chaco, several generations might pass within the same walls. Architecture is a language, a semiotic system, and its rules would be communicated all the more rigidly for being permanent and non-vocal. As Winston Churchill very aptly put it: first we shape our

buildings, then they shape us.

Accept, for a moment, that people did not cease to think of round, domed, dark rooms as home when the meter moved from BMIII to PI -- or even from PI to PII. House forms changed, of course, but in much less radical ways than we are lead to believe. People gave up on antechambers; the unlined pit was replaced with a masonry-lined pit; and finally, some folks quit digging pits at all, and took the round room form up out of the ground. But the form itself stayed pretty much the same; we are not talking about an enormous amount of change for 800 years. Think of ceramics; think of the number of types, and styles, and vessel forms that the Anasazi ran through in 8 centuries; yet we do not think that the basic function of ceramics, as containers, changed radically over that period. Yet that is the tack we take with pithouses and kivas. Change the surface finish, take away a few pits, make a few rather minor structural improvements, and we think a family living room has become the community church.

But what about all those above-ground rooms, the Taos-in-chrysalis, that supposedly materialize during the pithouse-kiva transition? Again, we have an oddly colored view: to make the

origin of kivas coincident with the earliest pueblos, we have not only to force kiva-hood on the pithouse, but we also to assume a grim, troglodyte existence on the poor Basketmakers. We know they had storage cysts and temporary camp sites, but what about their homes? They must have liked being underground, because everybody knows that Basketmakers lived in pithouses. This view is no more sensible than the antique notion that paleolithic man lived only in caves. I'm sure none of us really believe it, but it structures all the writing I've seen about the pithouse-pueblo transition in the Anasazi.

If we haven't got a really good idea about Basketmaker above-ground architecture, it may be because either (1) it is difficult to see archaeologically; or (2), we've been digging sites occupied during only one season of the year; or (3) -- and by far the most likely -- we have not been looking for it.

I will simply assert, without serious fear of contradiction from a Southwestern audience, that the pithouse was only one component of the Basketmaker house or house system. The rest of that system was above-ground facilities and structures. The first pueblos, into which the Anasazi supposedly retired when the old

home turned into a kiva, are almost certainly elaborations -- developments -- of earlier above-ground facilities.

The evolution of Anasazi above-ground building almost certainly parallels the elaboration and formal development of the pithouse. Pithouses are simply more durable in the archaeological record, so we have formed our questions in terms of sequent, rather than simultaneous, change. The question from Basketmaker to PIII should not be: why did they abandon pithouses for pueblos, but rather: why did both pithouses and pueblos become increasingly formalized and permanent in their construction? Why did the below-ground and more fragile above-ground house system of Basketmaker III become writ in stone?

Let's take this view to the data. From the computer files at the Laboratory of Anthropology and the National Park Service's San Juan Basin data base, we have compiled the total number of depressions, pithouses, proto-kivas, and kivas from the tens of thousands of sites on record in northern New Mexico and southwest Colorado, from earliest Basketmaker to proto-historic Pueblo.

What do we see in this data? Most significantly for this argument, the number of these features shows a steady not-quite-linear increase from BM II through late PIII. Now I am not going to say that survey data, with a Pecos System chronology, is a direct measure of population growth; but, I would not be surprised if the cumulative total of these features within the Pecos periods was a rough proportional reflection of population. The number of combined pithouses and kivas doubles with every Pecos Stage -- ideally that is about every two hundred years. If we ignore our qualms with the data base (and it has real problems) and the difficulties of the Pecos System, the increase in pithouses and kivas from BM II to PIII closely approximates a 0.25% annual growth, a rate entirely consistent with neolithic-level groups. Only after PIII, or after about 1300, does the number of kivas -- so-called -- take the enormous nose dive consistent with a radical change in function.

This does not tell us, directly, about Anasazi population in Northwest New Mexico, but I think it does tell us a very great deal about our frameworks for thinking about the pithouse-pueblo transition. One suggestion from this data is that room-to-kiva ratios, prior to 1300 or so, may be telling us more about site

function or seasonality than about "village integration". While  
the number of pithouses and kivas is regularly doubling every two  
hundred years, the number of rooms quintuples between PI and PII,  
and then levels off between PII and PIII. You tell me: which is  
the growth curve?

I feel that I have used a sledgehammer to swat a fly. Once  
you start wondering about PIII kivas, most of the arguments I  
have made seem almost painfully obvious. But it remains that all  
of the extensive literature on the pithouse-pueblo transition in  
the Anasazi is set in the BMIII-PI range, and is logically bound  
up with this business of pithouses turning into kivas. If you are  
interested in the loss of the pithouse form in Anasazi domestic  
building, you should look not to the 700s or 900s, but to the 12-  
and 1300s. If you continue to be interested in where modern  
Pueblo ceremonial structures come from, I suppose you could look  
at Great Kivas. But if you think you are going to examine the  
pithouse-pueblo transition, I suspect that you need to rethink  
the question, because the "transition" probably lasted 800 years.