

What of Chaco Canyon?

How many unanswered mysteries lie buried there? What people so loved beauty that they laboriously polished rude stones to form walls to their homes? Was love of beauty a sole compensation for their restricted material fortunes, or rather is it that we see only the remains of that which well might have been a rather luxuriant richness at the time when the master artist builders raised those historical piles? Aside from the architectural structure of the buildings themselves are several remarkable features which offer food for thought. Thus there are in the numerous kivas terraced seats, secret vaults or crypts wherein had been deposited a wealth of jewels. The position of these crypts as related to the sitting places may well furnish subject for much investigation. Did they mark the place where some hero or martyr was won't (sic) to sit in council or in ceremony? Were the terraced seats themselves arranged to increase capacity or do they symbolize degrees of social, ethical or religious growth?

The fire pits I think are more easily explained. Of these we may learn from the ancient pueblo of the Pecos, where for 2000 years the sacred flames had blazed without ceasing. To a people not possessing oil or other concentrated fire materials the holy alter would of necessity be large, thus explaining the size but not the structure of the fire pits. For this explanation we are referred back to the much earlier house forms found in the lost city of Nevada and by such reference one may readily understand that they reflect the cherished memories of an earlier home design.

In the Pueblo del Arroyo across the canyon is another mystery. In using the term mystery we mean that the form departs radically from the customary or ordinary form of kiva equipment. In this case there is in the center of the kiva a square foundation which probably carried the walls of an inner room. This square is oriented with the four directions. From its northernmost side there extends to the wall a ditch or passageway perhaps three feet in depth and quite wide enough to permit free movements of a person. At its northernmost end, under the wall at the foot of a stairway this open channel enters an unbroken passageway. Up this flight of stairs to a second and very similar structure on the bank above.

Was it covered? Was it a secret passageway? We do not know. Surely its existence was known to all people in a high condensed community in the very center of surrounding homes. A building project of this extent could not be hidden.

Some have said that the trickery of the ancient priests might well have been served by such a passageway, if secret. Are there reasons to suspect such trickery? When we come to realize, as we must, that in this society there dwelt a people of wholly communal consciousness wherein each individual served himself by serving others; where the priest and the medicine man was wont to till the soil and gather the harvest with his fellowmen. In such a society there could be no assessing of taxation or sacrificial gifts. Therefore, all trickery would be tabooed (sic).

My explanation is that it was the passageway (hidden but not secret), for the actors in some of their religious pageants and dramas. By means of this they could come from outside where they completed their make up and suddenly at the right time make their appearance on the step in the center without the anticlimax and embarrassment of a long visible march into the scene of action. Similarly the actor whose part was finished could disappear in a flash. No, it was no trickery but consummate art in harmony with the Aztec mind.

Similar passageways may be found among the Mayan cities of Guatemala and Yucatan, where the coming out of earth centers into new earth centers is commemorated by religious forms calling for just such architectural devices as the passageway and central chamber unearthed at Chaco.

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