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The Pajaritan Culture



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THE PAJARITAN CULTURE

IN proposing the name which is now generally accepted for the plateau lying between the Jemez Mountains and the Rio Grande and extending from the Chama valley to Canada de Cochiti, the writer chose the central geographical feature of the area, *i.e.* the Pajarito canyon (Spanish *pajarito*, a little bird, a sparrow). The Tewa name, Tchirege (the place of the Bird people), is applied to a "cliff city" on the northern rim of this canyon, more extensive even than Puye, in which, as well as in the neighboring villages, I have made considerable excavations. These investigations made known a new region and a culture for which a more definite term than "Pueblo" or "Ancient Pueblo" or "Ancient Tewa" seems necessary. It will suffice for the moment to state the three principal reasons for withholding assent to the long-accepted dictum that the Tewa and other Pueblos are merely the descendants of the ancient cliff dwellers, and this point will be discussed at greater length further on in this paper. 1. There is general non-conformity between Tewa symbolism and Pajaritan symbolism. 2. There is non-conformity of physical type, the Pajaritans having been a homogeneous people of dolicocephalic type, while the Tewa, and all other Pueblos, are non-homogeneous, and predominantly brachycephalic. 3. Tewa tradition, when thoroughly sifted, does not support the hypothesis of identity. These facts have seemed to me of sufficient importance to warrant, pending the acquisition of further information, the tentative establishment of a culture which, from the community on which the type is based, I have named the Pajaritan.

The archaeological remains of this culture are scattered over almost the whole of the Pajarito plateau. There were three principal foci of population, the Puye, the Pajarito, and the

Rito de los Frijoles. The degree of ethnic relationship between these groups remains to be established, but certain common characteristics that persist throughout indicate relationship as close perhaps as that now existing between the Tewa villages of San Juan, Santa Clara, and San Ildefonso, though it does not necessarily follow that the same language was spoken in the three groups of settlements. These groups afford exceptional facilities for the study of the development of culture through a long period of time. The geographical isolation was such as to induce definite, homogeneous development. That this isolation was well preserved is shown in the homogeneity of both the physical type and the cultural remains. In the art of the Pajaritans we may read several centuries of their history. It is entirely pre-Spanish, the excavations having never yet yielded a vestige of European influence, and so distinctly does it reflect the civilization in which it was produced that a specimen of pottery from this region is as unmistakable to the trained eye as is anything Greek, Etruscan, or Egyptian.

It would seem that some ancient culture wave, traversing the Rio Grande valley in very remote times, must have thrown off detachments which lodged upon this plateau. The cause of the unique localization of these bands is not at first thought clear. It is unlikely that motives of defence directed the choice, as would at first seem obvious, for much evidence tends to show that the modern predatory tribes, Navaho, Apache, and Ute, arrived in the Southwest in comparatively recent times. As I have shown in a previous paper,¹ the construction of the great defensive community houses of the Pajaritans belongs to the latest epoch of their history. For a long period they were dispersed over the plateau. This was the epoch of the "small houses," of which several thousand have been counted in this region. As I have shown in a previous paper,² there is both archaeological and physiographic evidence that the earliest inhabitants of this region arrived at a time when climatic conditions were radically different from those of the present. The proof of slow, progressive desiccation of the Southwest is

¹ Archaeology of Pajarito Plateau, New Mexico; *American Anthropologist*, October-December, 1904.

² *Les Communautés Anciennes dans le Desert Américain*, Chapter III.

abundant. The Pajarito plateau has lain uninhabited for ages because of the almost total absence of water. The great communities, representing the last stages of habitation, clustered about the gradually failing springs. The earlier "small house" communities were found everywhere, indicating a general climatic condition favorable to agriculture. It would thus appear that the reason for selection of this plateau as a place of residence by those early bands that first settled here was simply that in those times this now desiccated table-land afforded more favorable conditions for subsistence than did the adjacent valley of the Rio Grande; a condition now reversed. This diffusion of population would seem to imply a social organization different from that existing among the people of the great community houses where the system was the prototype of the modern Pueblo. Such, however, is not the case. In the dispersed "small house" communities there were fully developed the basic principles of tribal structure that govern in Pueblo organization to-day. There was lacking only the element of dual organization, a social phenomenon that attended the coming together of numerous clans into great communities. This fact of genetic aggregation persists among the Pueblos to-day. In the "small house" communities the groupal unit was the clan. The basic social fact was the matriarchal system, by virtue of which all domestic authority resided in the mother. The fundamental fact of the religious order in the modern Pueblos is the dual hierarchy, by virtue of which the sacerdotal authority is lodged in two priests, the *Summer cacique* and the *Winter cacique*, who have charge of the ceremonials of their respective seasons. This developed along with the movement toward close community aggregation. But that the basic elements of it existed in the "small house" communities is disclosed in the house remains. The structural germ of every community house was the *kiva*, the circular subterranean room that is found in conjunction with all the community houses, small and great, of the Rio Grande and the San Juan valleys. This was the clan sanctuary, the place set aside, before the first stone of the dwelling was laid, for prayer and religious ceremony.

No other single object in southwestern archaeology is of

greater interest than these subterranean sanctuaries. Everywhere we find the kiva as the nucleus of the settlement. In southeastern Utah, especially in the Montezuma canyon, the circular underground kiva is conspicuous in connection with every ruin group even though it may consist of only two or three rooms. The evidences that we have accumulated in Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico during the last two seasons point to the kiva as the germ of every pueblo community. It seems that the first act of the clan was to locate its sanctuary and around it extend its living rooms. In the small community houses scattered all over the Pajarito plateau we find, as in southern Utah, first of all the kiva. With the formation of the great communities it would seem that a new feature of tribal organization developed, namely, that of the dual hierarchy, and with this came the dual kiva system, the common sanctuary for each division of the tribe, the essential point around which the settlement could grow. In it was centred all that was vital to the life and happiness of the people. It was the place of silence, the sanctuary to which those charged with the sacerdotal functions of the clan retired for thought, for prayer, for offering, for sacrifice. It was the place for the performance of secret religious rites and preparation for public ceremonials. In gathering about the Sipapu, men again approached the Earth Mother, they sought the channels of ancient wisdom, they were at the portal whence life itself emerged. I quote here from the sayings of Pueblo priests of to-day, according to whom it is not quite correct to speak of the Sipapu as symbolizing the entrance to the underworld. In the kiva of the Rio Grande clans and the observances clustering about it, we have symbolized the Pueblo conception of human birth, the origin of life, and the ordering of human conduct.

In Pueblo organization to-day, the clan kiva has almost disappeared. It still remains at Taos, but at San Juan, Santa Clara, San Ildefonso, Nambe, and Cochiti only tribal kivas remain. There is the kiva of the *Summer people* and the kiva of the *Winter people*. In some cases one of these is subterranean or semi-subterranean, the other wholly above ground. The religious functions of the tribe are, as above stated, in the hands of two priests, the Summer cacique and the Winter

cacique. Each one has charge of the ceremonials pertaining to his season, and each one officiates in the sanctuary pertaining to that division. The history and meaning of this dual organization are not yet fully known.

In connection with the uses of the kiva among the Pueblos, it is interesting to note the following parallel in Pawnee ritual. I quote freely from Miss Alice C. Fletcher's study of the Hako.¹

"The first stanza of the second part calls the people to give heed to Ku-sha-ru, a place set apart for sacred purposes. Concerning Ku-sha-ru, the old priest said: 'The first act of man must be to set apart a place that can be made holy and be consecrated to Ti-ra-wa, a place where a man can be quiet and think about the mighty unseen power.'"

It will be remembered that the first stanza of the first part made mention of A-wa-hok-shu, the holy place, the abode of Ti-ra-wa, whence life was given to man through the intermediary powers. The first stanza of the second part directs that man should set apart a holy place, where his thoughts could ascend to the life-giving Ti-ra-wa.

The old priest further explained: "We are taught that before a man can build a dwelling, he must select a place and make it sacred, and then about that consecrated spot he can erect a dwelling where his family can live peacefully. Ku-sha-ru represents the place where a man can seek the powers and where the powers can come near to him."

There is to be noted here a most significant similarity between the Pueblo kiva as the essential nucleus of a settlement and the "sacred place" of the Pawnee.

The arts of the people of the plateau were those of practically all the ancient sedentary tribes of the Southwest. Their highest attainment was in pottery-making, and in this their only unusual achievement was in the use of glazing in ornamentation. That they had discovered the art of glazing and were using it with fine effect in decoration cannot be questioned. In the greater part of the beautiful red and brown ware found at Puye, Otowi, and Tyuonyi the black lines were covered with a vitreous coating which chemical analysis proves to be a true glaze.

¹ *Rep. Bur. Amer. Ethnol.* XXII, 2, p. 33, and pp. 284-285.

It has been used solely for decorative effects, and while usually applied over black lines, giving the peculiar under-glaze effect, the material has, doubtless intentionally, been caused to spread over large areas, producing striking effects, especially when by reason of iron in the clay, rich iridescent hues have occurred. But one specimen has been found, a small prayer meal bowl at Puye, in which an entire surface of the vessel is covered with the glaze.

The process of glazing as practised by the Pajaritans was very simple. After the vessel had been decorated and fired in the usual manner, a saturated solution of salt water was laid on over the ornament and the vessel again fired under as great a degree of heat as they were able to produce in their primitive kiln. The soda of the solution combining with the silica of the clay produced over the design, and over all surfaces on which the solution might have been spread, a true transparent glaze which could never scale or peel off without taking with it the clay of the vessel itself to the full depth to which the salt water had penetrated. As above noted, the spreading of the solution and the occurrence of oxides in the clay produced beautiful accidental effects, particularly the rich iridescent tints found on the pottery at Puye and Tyuonyi.

Glazing was practised to some extent in the valley of the Little Colorado, but the art was probably carried there in the course of migrations from the Rio Grande drainage. It is of quite an inferior order. In fact, nowhere else on the American continent was the art of glazing so well understood as in this region. It was long held, and may still be held by some American archaeologists, that the art of glazing was not indigenous to America and that wherever found it is an indication of European influence. In fact, by some it has been called the "Spanish glaze." We have shown the contrary to be true. It was practised on the plateau west of the Rio Grande for centuries prior to the advent of the Spaniards, and ceased to be practised during the upheaval that occurred with the coming of the conquerors. The art is unknown to the modern Pueblos, is never seen in the specimens of archaic pottery, sacred vessels, and heirlooms that have been handed down among them for many generations, and is not to be found in the refuse heap of

their villages which go back over almost the entire historical period. On the other hand, it occurs profusely in all the ruins on the western plateau, where no vestige of European influence has ever been found — sites which if occupied at the time of the conquest could not have escaped mention in the ecclesiastical records. It may then be safely affirmed that decorative glazing was an indigenous American art, and I should be inclined to consider the plateaus of the Rio Grande drainage as the place of its origin.

As stated at the beginning of this paper, it cannot be said that the ancient people of Pajarito plateau were the immediate ancestors of the tribes living now in the Rio Grande valley. That there was relationship is not questioned, but the degree of relationship is yet to be determined. It is the theory of absolute identity that is not entirely accepted. This general theory concerning the ancestry of the Pueblos was first announced by no less authority than Major Powell and for many years was accepted as conclusive. It was based upon facts of similarity in culture and upon the statements of the living Indians. My reasons for the rejection of this theory were stated briefly at the beginning of this paper and will here be touched upon again. First, the symbols with which the ancient people of Pajarito decorated their pottery were entirely different from those of the Pueblos of the present day. This fact was pointed out by me and supported by a large series of illustrations in a paper read before Section H of the American Association for the Advancement of Science at Washington in 1902. The system of symbolism of the Pajaritans is dominated by one definite idea. The prevailing motive throughout all their decoration was that of the Awanyu. It is the emblem of a mythic power. Awanyu was the preserver of water, the guardian of springs and streams, the preserver of life; for without water, crops, food, life, must fail. The history of the last epoch of the occupation of this plateau, and this is the epoch of highest development in art, social organization, and religious life, is a history of unceasing struggle against failing nature. Subsistence became constantly more and more uncertain, life more and more precarious. It was just the condition necessary to the development of ritual and the elaboration of symbolism.

So we find everywhere the one idea projected in symbolic ornamentation upon the food bowls and water-jars; Awanyu, emblem of mythic power, represented by the great prayer plumes, or the circuit in which the power habitually moved, or the great band across the concavity of the vessel—the Sky-Path of the mighty power. In Tewa tradition there is the belief that the disappearance of the Pajaritan people was due to their loss of favor with Awanyu, after which he “threw himself across the sky.” The origin of the Milky Way is thus accounted for.

The ancient cycle of Pajaritan mythology is entirely broken down, and the merest fragments can be recovered from a few of the old men of the different villages. It has been submerged by the more vital mythology of a more recent epoch. The dominant religious symbol of the Pueblos of the present day, seen on all their prayer meal bowls and etched upon the rocks, is the plumed serpent called by them Awanyu, but never confused with the Awanyu of the ancients. It is a representative figure in reptilian form, furnished with plumes upon head and body, pictured as moving through the air and often drawn with great vigor. It is a symbol that is widely distributed over the American continent, and the being which it represents was doubtless one of the principal deities of the ancient Mexicans. Nowhere else has it been used on so magnificent a scale and with such remarkable effect as a decorative motive as upon the Aztec temple of Xochicalco near Cuernavaca in Mexico. In this connection a myth of the Tlauicas, a branch of the Aztec stock inhabiting the Cuernavaca valley, with reference to a mythic power, represented by them in serpent form and now seen in the Milky Way, is significant.

The most convincing testimony on the subject of the non-identity of the Pajaritans with the modern Pueblos is that of their physical characters. The skeletal remains that have been collected, in one case as many as 125 subjects from a single burial place, have been examined by Doctor Hrdlicka, and in a preliminary statement he pronounces the ancient Pajaritan people to have been of rather inferior muscular development and of the dolicocephalic type; moreover, a homogeneous people, unmixed in physical characteristics. On the same

authority modern Pueblos are predominantly a brachycephalic people. This nonconformity of physical type seems to destroy the hypothesis of identity between the ancient cliff-dwelling people of this region, whom I have called the Pajaritans, and the modern Pueblos.

As before stated, the evidence on which the hypothesis of identity was mainly based was the testimony of the Pueblo Indians themselves. For example, the Keres of Cochiti have always claimed the Rito de los Frijoles as one of their ancestral homes, and the Tewa of Santa Clara have in like manner laid claim to the ruined towns of Puye. The claim of the latter village was taken up for thorough examination. For over a quarter of a century these Indians have consistently claimed the cliff dwellings and community homes of Puye as the homes of their ancestors. During this period the Pueblo of Santa Clara has had pending in the courts a claim against the government of the United States for a large tract of land, about 90,000 acres, lying west of their grant and extending to the top of the Jemez mountain range. The basis of the claim was an alleged Spanish grant, and in support of such documentary proof as could be adduced, their ancient homes scattered over the plateau, particularly the Puye villages, were pointed out.

This tradition certainly came to be believed in good faith by the majority of the tribe. It was a stock argument in pointing out the injustice of the court in granting them a strip of less than 500 acres along Santa Clara Creek in lieu of the large tract claimed by them. This case was recently settled by the setting aside of the original claim and granting in lieu thereof a new reservation embracing something near half of the tract originally claimed. Since the favorable issue of their suit, the old men of Santa Clara are losing their fear that the admission of their exact relationship with the people of Puye will prejudice their claim. In a council held with their head men in August, 1907, to consider their opposition to my making excavations at Puye, what I believe to be the exact truth of the matter came out. They do not contend that their people, in their present organization as a village group, were the original builders of the cliff dwellings and community houses of Puye.

They hold consistently to the tradition of a reoccupation of the cliff houses and of some rooms in the great community house by the Santa Clara people during the troubled times of the Spanish invasion. It is possible that after the Pueblo rebellion of 1680, some Santa Clara families lived for a while in the cliff houses. This could have been but a temporary and limited occupation. The acculturation resulting from contact with European civilization could hardly have failed to manifest itself by that time in their utensils and in decorative motives. The excavations at Puye have as yet yielded no vestige of such influence. It is possible that the irrigating ditch along the south side of Puye arroya may belong to this late period. It seems likely that searching investigation of the Pueblo claims with reference to ancient sites will usually result as this case does.

It is certainly true that some clans in almost every modern Pueblo village trace their origin to the people of the cliffs in a perfectly consistent line, and this would account for the dolicocephalic strain found among all the Pueblos of the Southwest. They are uniformly a composite stock, formed doubtless by the amalgamation of people from the cliffs with incoming bands from outlying regions.

It is not to be supposed that the disappearance of this plateau population was due to any event of catastrophic character. Certain evidences of seismic activity have been observed in this region, but there is nothing to indicate that the dispersion of the people was due to earthquake shocks; nothing to indicate any general, sudden exodus, but rather a gradual abandonment of the towns, as the springs and streams dried up and the sites became untenable and the farms untillable because of the failure of the water supply. We have as yet no means of knowing to what distance the detachments that migrated from time to time from this plateau may have wandered. We find remnants of them at Hopi and in the villages of the Rio Grande valley, but these small bands do not account for the large numbers that must have at one time occupied the Pajarito Plateau. Among the people nearest in physical type to those whom we have called the Pajaritans are the Tarahumaras, a forest people living along the crest of the Sierra Madre and in the barrancas of the Pacific slope in Southern Chihuahua and Sinaloa. Also

among the California tribes are found those who conform rather closely in physical type to the ancient cliff dwellers of the Pajarito. The Pawnees are of like type but a greater stature—a difference that might readily come about with a radical change of habitat and mode of life.

EDGAR L. HEWETT.

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