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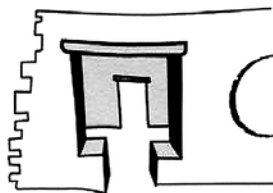
ERRATA:

COMMENTS:

Typed manuscript written by Barbara Palmer Clark for a class (Anthropology 175F). This manuscript focuses on the excavation of a pit house encountered during trenching of the Bc 50 trash mound. The structure lies in trenches 8 and 9, sections I, II, and III. This structure was excavated in 2 days by a crew supervised by Wesley Bliss. Manuscript includes a detailed plan view.

CITATION:

Clark, Barbara Palmer
1938 Report on Field Work, Chaco Canyon, August 1938. In Chaco Culture NHP Files,
Chaco Canyon, N. M.



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REPORT ON FIELD WORK
Chaco Canyon, August 1938

Barbara Palmer Clark
Anthropology 175F

THE PIT HOUSE PROBLEM

I Previous Work

The pit house in question (M or #3, 1938 classification) was partially uncovered during the season of 1936 in the strat trench through the refuse mound of Bc 50. In May, 1937, a week-end trip was made to the Chaco by a group of UNM's archaeologists at which time said pit house was as thoroughly excavated as was possible in two days. This work was done under the supervision of Wesley Bliss.

At the beginning of the 1938 field session in the Chaco, the Pit House Problem fell to this author. The greatest stumbling block of the problem was the fact that Bliss had neglected to leave any field notes on said pit house in the hands of Dr. Brand. The only available material consisted of a ground plan of the pit, some photographs of it in various stages of excavation, and several mentions of BM III material and of a possible pit house in the Tseh So report.

The last mentioned BM III material was found in the strat trench in Trenches 7 and 8, Section III. To quote from the report, "The small mound of this material suggests one or more pit houses in the near vicinity and perhaps covered by the later deposits . . . Beneath trenches 8 and 9 in Section I were found sandstone slabs so set into the ground that their identification as the outline of one or more pit houses was possible." ¹

The ground plan by Bliss showing the uncovered pit house identifies the latter material with that quoted above. According to the plan, the structure lies in Trenches 8 and 9, Sections I, II, and III.

¹ Tseh So, A Small House Ruin p. 166

The structure itself and the recorded stratigraphic material (1936) seem to point fairly definitely to a BM III occupation. Representative pottery types included Lino Gray and La Plata Black on White.

In the excavation of the pit house (May, 1937) features of the structure were outlined and are shown on the ground plan (Fig. 1). A burial was found on the south side of the structure at what has been defined as the entrance (see Fig. 1). There is no data available on this skeletal material.

About one foot east of the pit house is located a cist which was partially gone into at the time the former structure was uncovered. It was also indicated by Bliss's drawing that there had been two other cists superimposed over the pit house structure. It seemed probably that these cists belonged to a later period, and this was proved, as shown in this report.

II.

The first step in solving the problem of the pit house (M or #3) was to clear off the floor of the pit, clean out the loose debris, and redetermine the extent and features of the structure. Opinions on these seeming to agree with what Bliss had put down, the cist was the next object of consideration.

Following are the data and conclusions on this cist.

The width across the top of the cist -- measuring approximately North and South -- was 55". The greatest height from wall to floor of the cist was 21".

The floor in the middle of the cist was either washed out or had previously been dug through. For a space of 24" -- approximately in the center of the structure -- the usual hard packed adobe floor was out, only loose dirt and sandy fill remaining.

In taking out the dirt on the Southwest side of the cist and looking for the wall on that side, several hard packed adobe layers were encountered. It was at first thought that these were floors, but as three of them were superimposed within six inches of each other, it seems more reasonable to assume that they were the result of wind or water laid deposits which were subsequently hardened by weathering. About one inch below the third hard layer, a cracked, weathered dirt surface showed up, covered by a layer of coarse sand.

The west wall of the cist was not found, and had probably fallen in following the natural processes of time and erosion.

From the floor of the pit house to the floor of the cist measured 30". From the floor of the pit house to the top of the cist

measured c. 52".

Some Conclusions on the Cist:

Due to the position of the cist and the existence of three washes running through it (see Fig. 2), it is difficult to draw any definite conclusions concerning it from the pottery types taken out. Lino Gray seemed to be the predominant type, but there was not an abundance of shards and those that were found were scattered. It is probable that a good deal of the fill from this cist came from surface washing in. Also, because of the fact that the cist had been previously dug into (May, 1937), it is impossible to determine how much of the fill is recent and how much is of older deposits.

The fact that the floor did not exist in the center of the cist might indicate that there has been material placed under the floor, or it may be that the floor was simply washed out. This could be determined only by further excavation, which was not carried out during the 1938 season. A profile taken down the wash running from the cist into the pit house showed a loose sandy fill running into natural adobe, and a number of fallen slabs in unordered position. These slabs may have been part of the pit house below, but from their position it seems more logical to assume that they represent the fallen walls of the cist.

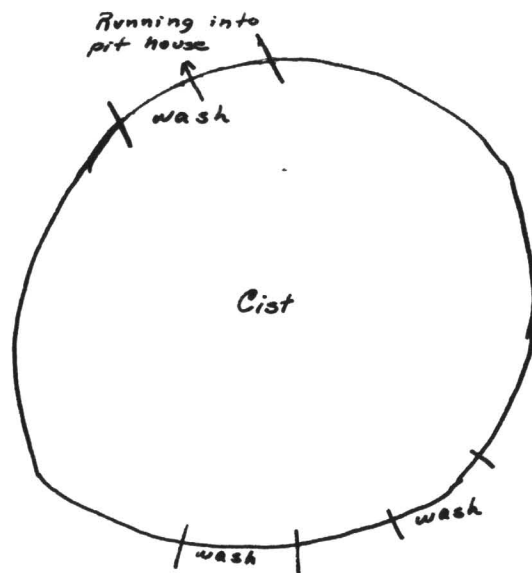


Diagram showing position of washes through cist.

Figure 2

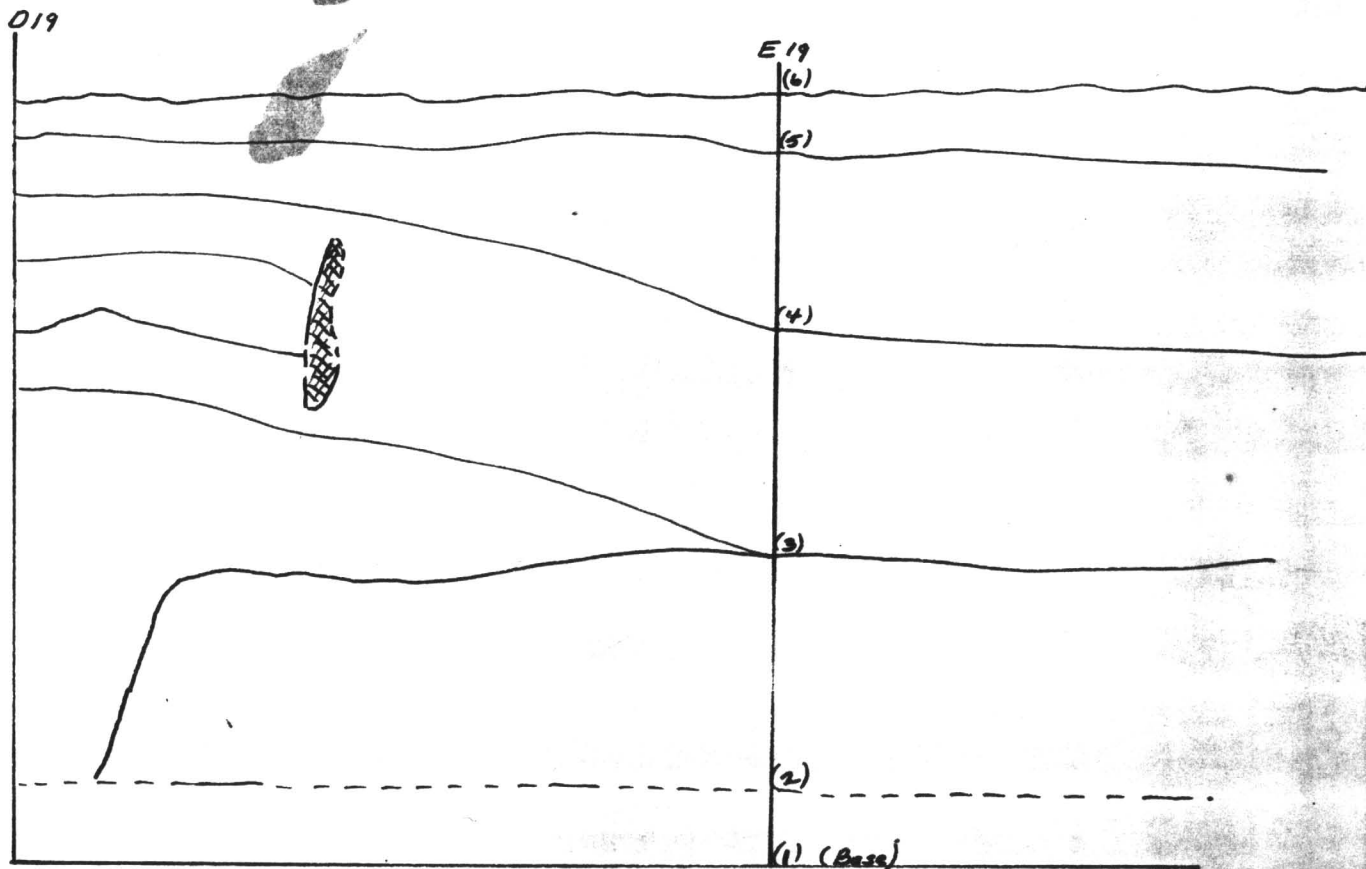
III.

When excavation of the cist showed nothing of importance in regard to the problem as a whole, a trench was cut through from the correlation trench -- running East and West between Bc 50 - Bc 51 -- into the pit and cist structures.

The purpose of the trench was to determine the possibilities of the so-called entrance of the pit house. The entrance was marked by a section covered with slabs, the whole standing about one foot above the level of the pit house floor. (See F, Fig. 1) It was in front of this section that the burial was uncovered during the excavation of the pit house. By trenching and profiling along the side of this whole section it was hoped that some clue might be obtained as to its possible significance.

The trench ran along the line of stations D 19 - E 19 plus 3' South to the correlation trench, and was three feet wide.

Following is a diagrammatic sketch of the profile, and the reading of same, as per Dr. A. R. Kelly.



Diagrammatic Sketch of Profile

Profile taken along line of stations E 19 - D 19
Base of cut in white adobe

Station E 19:

- (1) White adobe
- (2) Top of white adobe:
Natural adobe shows variation above white adobe in which there is less dendritic white precipitate, and soil profile shows definitely more silt.
- (3) Top of natural adobe:
Soil zone no. 2 begins in contact with natural adobe just described. No. 2 shows usual wind and water blown striations of laminations with several large spawls of sandstone and shale; also, some localized white dendritic adobe as lenses or lumps. The suggestion of water action is stronger in the North end of the profile pattern where dip or inclination downward over fill to BM pit, suggesting continuity of soil formation in panel under station E 19 with indicated gradual fill by natural forces.

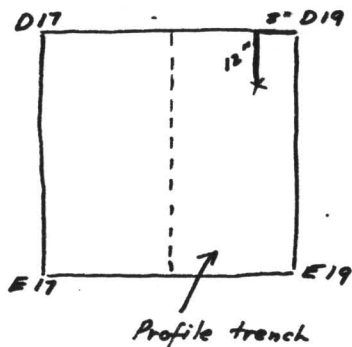
in the pit house. Continued dumping of ashes and charcoal in dump with soil creep might account for incidental filling of pre-existing excavations as the dump grew.

- (4) Top of No. 2 level
- (5) No. 1 Soil Zone -- top
- (6) Ground level:
Recent fill, perhaps accumulated incident to operation of dump car.

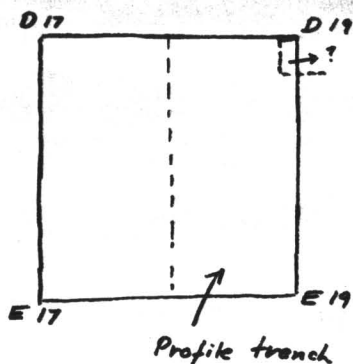
The following finds were made in the profile trench:

Shards of a lino gray pot with fugitive red wash.
Pot incomplete and non-restorable.

3' down; 12" south from D 19 - D 17; 8" west from D 19.



In profile trench -- 3' down and running approximately along line of stations D 17 - D 19, in a section 6" south: bones of a dog were uncovered. These bones were found in a good state of preservation -- orientated approximately East and West. They extended east into the profile cut along D 19 - E 19. Most of the bones were removed, but as entire removal of them would have necessitated too great undercutting of the profile, the remainder were left in situ. The bones were tentatively identified as those of dog by James Spuhler, in Chaco for the Conference.



IV. Conclusions:

In general, the pit house structures of mounds Bc50 and Bc51 and in the dump between the two show no masonry or slab stone construction. There are a number of cists or storage places showing slab lining but it is probable that these are of later date, perhaps falling into Pueblo I.

The profile trench which was cut into M or #3 proved conclusively that the cist was not a part of the pit house but was intrusive into the fill of that structure.

Probably the entrance to this pit house lay under the line of superimposed or intrusive cists. This may or may not mean that it would coincide with what Bliss has defined as the entrance. Only further excavation can solve that point.

If the pit house is to be considered BM III -- as it seems to be -- and if the cist falls into Pueblo I, then it seems reasonable to point out that, since the cist was intrusive into the fill of the pit structure, there must have been a considerable lapse of time between the two periods of occupation at this site.