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Burial Customs in Small House
Sites in Chaco Canyon

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175- Field Session

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September 14, 1941

19 documents in
Box 345

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Brand, Hawley, Hibben | <u>Tseh So. A Small House</u>
<u>Ruin</u> |
| Burial Sheets from Bc53 | |
| Morris | <u>Burials in the Aztec Ruin</u> |
| Pepper | <u>Pueblo Bonito</u> |

Burial Customs in Chaco Canyon
From mounds 50, 51, and 53

Burials in Chaco Canyon have always presented a puzzle to archeologists, for in spite of the fact that Chaco was once the home of thousands of people, very few burials have been found in the area. One explanation made for the scarcity of discovered burials is that the old river bed, since the time of occupation, has been filled in by deposition to the level of fourteen or more feet above the original ground level. Perhaps the old burial grounds were in this area. In that case it would require a tremendous amount of excavation to uncover the cemeteries of these ancient inhabitants.

The general belief is however that the peoples of Chaco buried their dead in cemeteries on the canyon floor. This belief is supported by the fact that most of the inhabitants of the northern Pueblo area used this method of disposing of their dead. This was undoubtedly the most usual type of burial but actual evidence of several other types of burials have been found in Bc 50, 51, and 53; and also from the large ruins of Pueblo Bonito and Chetro Ketl. Evidence up to the present time indicates that at least six types of burials prevailed in the Chaco Canyon Area:

1. Burials in the valley floor
2. Burials in mounds
3. Burials in Room fills (most of the burials in Bc 50, 51, and 53 fall into this group)
4. Burials in refuse heaps (Chetro-Ketl)
5. Burials beneath boulders of talus slopes (Chetro Ketl)

- 6; Child burials beneath the floors of rooms. (numerous examples of this type in Bc 50, 51, and 53)

Fepper also concluded that these people ate human flesh either for ceremonial purposes or because they were hungry; for he found worked human bones and cracked and calcined bones in one room in Pueblo Bonito. This is a further possibility; but there is no other evidence to support this idea. The working on these human bones may have been done later by grave robbers, or others who disturbed the old graves when new graves were dug.

Cremation is another possibility for the Chaco area. However no evidence that cremation was practiced has been uncovered.

Bc 50 and Bc 51

1. Sixteen burials were removed from these two mounds.
 - a. Six of them were oriented north- south.
 - b. Two of them were oriented East-west.
 - c. The rest were too disturbed of observations
2. There were five burials of the Pueblo 1. period. They were all infants- three of them were in room three, one in room seven, and one beneath the west wall of the same Pueblo. None of their body positions could be ascertained because they were too disturbed. These burials were accompanied by Red Mesa Black on white bowls.

3. Seven burials of the Pueblo 2. period were found in mound 50. Four of them were adults: two males, one female, and one so badly disturbed as to indistinguishable. Four of them were found in room twenty-two, two in room six, and one in room eleven. Two of the adults were wrapped in matting; and one of the infants was wrapped in a twilled mat.

All of these skeletons were accompanied with pottery offerings. These included: a crude undecorated jar, a Mc Elmo Black on white jar, and Escavada black on white bowl, a Gallup black on white bowl, some tusayan polychrome ware, and a wingate black on red ware. Other artifacts such as bone awls, bone beads, and shell ornaments also were included in the burials.

Four burials were removed from the one room excavated in mound 51. Three of them were adults and one an adolescent. One male and one female were identified- the other two were too disturbed to be identifiable. One of the adults had several vessels with him of Mc Elmo black on white ware, of Kana-a Gray and of Exuberant corrugated. The others were accompanied only by potsherds.

Bc 53

During the 1941 digging on Bc 53 twelve burials were uncovered. Of the twelve burials found seven were adults, one adolescent, three infants and one unidentifiable. Seven of them were females and one male. Four of them were found in room ten; three of room seven; one in room fifteen; two in room eight; and two in the dump heap- Ea 20.

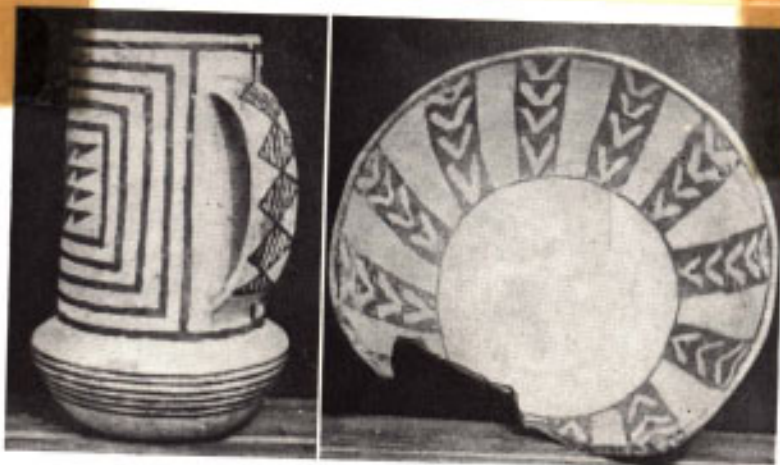
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Seven of the burials were oriented east-west (head toward the west) two were oriented North -south (one with head toward the north and one toward the south. Three of the Skeletons were scattered over the floor of the room and their positions could not be determined.

Six of the group were accompanied by pottery, and sometimes by other artifacts also. One other was accompanied only by a wooden bow laid obliquely across the burial; but this one had no pottery with him. The three burials scattered on the floor of room ten probably had been accompanied by pottery and perhaps other artifacts also - these things may have been removed by pre-historic grave robbers.

Three of the burials were in a right angle flexed position, three were extended burials, one was completely flexed and the remainder were too disturbed to be distinguished. All of this group were simple excavations- several of them were under the floor but the majority had been buried on the floor in room fill.

TYPICAL POTTERY TYPES IN BURIALS
IN MOUNDS 50, 51



a

b



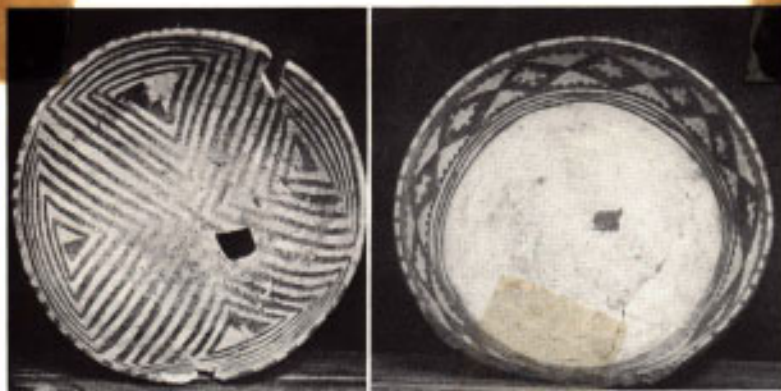
c

d

- a. Gallup Black on White Jug Which Accompanied Burial 5.
- b. McElmo Black on White Bowl with Burial 4.
- c. Large Corrugated Pot Embedded in the Floor of Room 29.
- d. Large Corrugated Vessel from Sub-floor Level of Room 3.

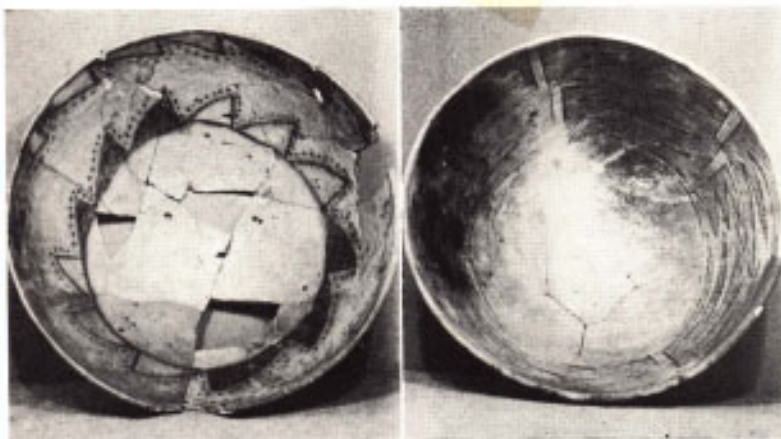
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Be 50, 51



a

b



c

d

- a. McElmo Black on White Bowl Which Accompanied Burial 10.
- b. McElmo Black on White Bowl Which Accompanied Burial 9.
- c. McElmo Black on White Bowl of Large Size Which Was Inverted Over the Head of Burial 4 of Be51.
- d. Gallup Black on White Bowl from a Cache in Level 4 in Room 5.

C102417

Representative Pattern Types in Be53



C102418

Serial Number	Age of individual	Position of Body	Orientation	Place of Burial	Wrappings	Accompanying objects	POTTERY	
	Adult	Adolescent	INFANT	Extended	Flexed			
				Room Fill	TRENCH	BONE	STONE	
						Basketry	ORNAMENTS	
Be50 1	Child	Disturbed	N-S		WEST PREL. TRENCH			1 Jug (Red MESA)
Be50 2	X	Disturbed		7				
Be50 3a	X	Disturbed		N.E. CORNER of Rm 22				1 Bowl (Wingate)
Be50 3B	X	Disturbed	E-W	N.E. Corner of Rm 22				1 Jug (Undecorated)
Be50 4	X	X	E-W	22	REED MAT		SHELL EAR PLUG	
Be50 5	X	X	N-S	22	Twilled MAT	1 AWL	2 Balls	4 BOWLS Wingate, Tusayan, Escavada, Gallup
Be50 6	X	X	N-S	11	Grass MAT	14 Bone Bands		1 Bowl Mc EIMO
Be50 7a	X	Mixed	E-W	3	Grass MAT			1 Bowl Red MESA
Be50 7B	X	Mixed	E-W	3	Twilled Grass MAT			1 Bowl Mc EIMO
Be50 8	X	Disturbed		3	Twilled MAT			
Be50 9	X	Right angle X	E-W	6				2 PIECES Mc EIMO Bowl Escavada Jug.
Be50 10	X	X	N-S	6				1 Bowl Gallup

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Conclusions

Using these three mounds as typical small house sites in Chaco Canyon, we can draw certain general conclusions about the burial customs of this type of site, particularly about the furniture found in such burials. As previously stated we have no definite information about regular burials in cemeteries. We can deduce however from the scarcity of discovered burials, and from the general practices among the northern Pueblos that cemetery burying was also practiced in Chaco Canyon. The burials in Bc50, 51, and 53 however give us a rather representative picture of room burials in small house sites and the furniture usually present in such burials.

Let us begin with the placement of the burial. Out of a total of twenty eight burials we find that ten of the skeletons were flexed (right angle and complete flexion are about equally represented) Only five were extended and three of these were infants, and the other was indistinguishable. One female adult was also found in a flexed position. Apparently the general custom was to place the burial in a flexed position. Whether this was part of a ceremonial practice or merely a labor-saving device is not known; but in as much as the infants were usually placed in an extended position it was probably as much to save space and energy as any other reason.

Eleven of them were oriented north-south, seven were oriented east-west, one was oriented south-east--north-west; and the others were so disturbed that their position could not be determined. From the evidence gathered it does not

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appear that there was any preferred direction of burial- for East-West and north -south burials are about equal in number.

Burial Furniture

Even from the limited number of burials in these sites we can readily see the general practices used in the matter of burial furniture. Pottery is the one essential accompaniment of a burial , and some pottery is found in almost every burial. The very few burials which do not have some pottery represented are either those of infants or burials which are so disturbed that it is impossible to determine whether or not there was some pottery present when the individual was buried. We may go further and state that the pottery specimens in burials were probably among the most valuable household goods. In nine cases out of ten the pottery is trade ware(which would naturally be of more value than home made wares) and the quality and beauty of the bowls and jars is above average wares found on the same sites outside of the burials.

The quantity of pottery in each burial varies considerably from a few potsherds(in a infant's grave usually) to as many as six beautiful bowls and jars (found in burial number ten in Bc 53)

No general conclusion can be drawn concerning other artifacts in the burials. They vary considerably in quantity, type of artifacts found, and quality of the article; and in many cases artifacts other than pottery are entirely absent: In a man's grave might be found articles which he used during his lifetime- a bow and arrow, or an ax , or bone implements. Ornaments such as turquoise pendants, earrings etc. were found in both male and female graves. Some examples of basketry

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and weaving were also found with several of the burials. Ten of the burials were found wrapped in some sort of mat- made of grass, reeds, or sometimes of feathers. Although the majority of burials had no evidence of wrapping many of them were so disturbed that any of the remaining material might have entirely disappeared. It would seem that wrapping the body before burying was a general custom in the Chaco area.

There are many aspects of the burial complex in Chaco Canyon about which we know nothing. Our examples are so few and so limited in scope that it is impossible for us to make general statements on such a basis. We do know that pottery was fundamental in the burial ritual. Were the pots filled with food to provide sustenance for the deceased on his journey to the lower world? We can't answer this with finality, but all the evidence points in that direction. In most instances any food material which might have been in the containers has long since ~~been~~ decayed; but in a few cases there were found actual remains of maize and other food stuffs in the bowls when they were uncovered. In several of the burials the bowls were placed so that one was inverted on top of another to provide a lid; this was probably done to protect the food contents in the underneath bowl.

These observations gathered from so few burials are interesting but very incomplete. We could learn a great deal about Chaco people if we had a better knowledge of their burial rites. These small beginnings should provide the spur which will lead others to find a more complete picture of burial customs in Chaco Canyon.