

Ritualized Structure Closings in the Ceremonial Square at Champagne Spring

Written and delivered by Dave Dove at the 2014 Pecos Conference Aug 13, 2014

INTRODUCTION

The Champagne Spring Ruins are located in southwestern Colorado around 5 miles east of the CO/UT line. The site covers two adjacent ridges and consists of at least 250 rooms, 50 pit structures/kivas, a great kiva and other public architecture. It was occupied between A.D. 900-1100.

In the summers of 2011-2013 investigations at the North Ridge Site were focused on the 8 structures that were built into the plaza that was formed by the construction of roomblocks on three sides of these structures. They date to approximately A.D. 910-1025.

I'll be talking about the functions these buildings apparently played and the method in which they were abandoned. The great kiva is not included in this discussion as it clearly was not used for the same purposes as the other 7 buildings in the plaza. That is not to say that most of these were not directly associated with the nearby great kiva. At least some do appear to be associated. Most of them were not standard household kivas and some may have functioned as corporate or perhaps clan buildings.

All of the structures in the Square (except the great kiva) appear to have been ceremonially closed. I'll start with the oldest and progress to the youngest structure in the Plaza and review the suggested structure function, noteworthy features, final use and destruction of these buildings.

Ritualized Structure Closing behaviors and methods may include:

1. STRUCTURE BURNING
2. ANIMAL SKULLS IN SOUTH END OF BUILDINGS
3. ANIMAL SACRIFICE AND MONUMENT OR CRYPT-TYPE BURIALS
4. MANY COMPLETE ARTIFACTS (arrows, awls, pendants, polishing stones & beads in fill)
5. STRUCTURE USE AS ROASTING PIT AFTER ABANDONMENT

All seven of these buildings were associated with at least 3 of the above phenomenon.

Str 46 – Small subrectangular pitstructure abandoned between A.D. 900-920. Unburned animal skulls in south end just above roof strata. This structure burned thoroughly at abandonment with pottery vessels, tools and multiple grinding stations on the floor. It was not a meal room. Several large bundles of human hair were hung from the ceiling and somehow managed to survive the conflagration. Floor features include a complex sipapu, tandem sand filled pits, and floor grooves. There were many complete and unusual artifacts in fill including jet, stone and bone gaming pieces.

Str 36 – Average size pitstructure that burned at least 3 and probably 4 times. Abandoned around A.D. 925. Unburned animal skulls in south end. Deer cranium and attached antlers on one of several floors (possible headdress). Final use was as a roasting pit for large group eating events involving the consumption of several very large deer and many other animals over approximately 25 use episodes. Redware pottery represented roughly 35% of the more than 1000 sherds that were in the roasting pit fill. More than 30 bone scrapers that were apparently used for deer hide processing, numerous complete projectile points, several awls and complete and unburned unusual artifacts that were buried within the burned layers. The unbroken artifacts were not burned and may have been deposited as offerings during times when fires were not burning in the roasting pit.

Str 38 - Average size proto-kiva. It burned at abandonment with a large artifact assemblage on the its floor. The roof was scavenged and then burned. Floor features include uncommon subfloor ventilation system. These features are rare in the Northern San Juan region and are ordinarily found in great house kivas from the mid 11th through early 12th century's. Not much is known about this structure yet. It was used as roasting pit after it was abandoned at around A.D. 950.

Str 34 – Average size late 10th century early kiva with central floor vault. Half of this structure was excavated. An unburned dog skull was found just above the roof strata in south end. Roof was disassembled and rebuilt over the sacrificed remains of 27 animals. Small crypt-like stone features were constructed around many of the buried animals. Animal Count: 7 adult and 14 juvenile turkeys, cottontail rabbit, 4 dogs and a beheaded rattlesnake. Many unbroken artifacts were in the mid and upper fill.

Str 35 – Elk horns and deer skull in south end just east of vent opening, Large structure with about 30 square meters of floor space, very unusual triple central floor vaults with deer cranium and attached antlers (possible headdress) overlying the sealed vaults. The floor was

replastered at least a dozen times. Roof was salvaged then burned. It may have been used as roasting pit after abandonment.

Str 37 – Average size early kiva abandoned around A.D. 975-1000. More than 40 animals sacrificed and buried inside and around a constructed 1+ meter tall and 2.5 meter diameter stone 'monument'. Burial compartments were built into this cone shaped feature. Within 10-20 years, the roof was salvaged then burned. Buried animals included turkeys, dogs, and an American Crow. The floor contained a very unusual above and below floor ventilation system. Only a small part of structure was excavated.

Kiva 2 – Average size kiva that burned at around A.D. 1030. There was no occupation in the area for 25050 years afterward. Only a small portion of this structure was excavated.

What do these subterranean buildings have in common ?

- 1) All structures were destroyed at abandonment
- 2) The two early kivas were abandoned with final act being ritualized animal sacrifice and roof salvage and/or reset. These appear to represent corporate buildings that may not have been tied to a specific family unit or surface roomblock.
- 3) All structure closings occurred over a roughly 100 year period.
- 4) Animal skulls were placed into the mid and upper fill of most of these structures.
- 5) An effort was apparently made to avoid earlier plaza structures during population resurgence between A.D. 1050-75.
- 6) Most structures appear to contain high volumes of complete artifacts in upper and mid fill.
- 7) Most structure fills contained strong evidence of a subsistence that was highly focused on hunting.
- 8) Roasting pits in 2 or 3 of these structures suggest they were used to host large group eating events that substantially contributed to the filling deposits inside the buildings.

9) All structure fills indicate frequent short periods of no occupation in the area after these plaza structures were abandoned. Several contain ritual features indicating they may have been relatively more important buildings in terms of ritual performances.

10. Redware pottery constitutes between 20-35% of the ceramics in structures fills and this percentage rises markedly inside roasting pit strata.

The level of importance these structures held in the Champagne community probably elevated the motivation for the village to pay a proper homage of sorts. Burning as an abandonment action is widespread through the American Southwest. I include burning in the criteria since it is often a deliberate act to respectfully return something to the earth. These abandonment modes were evidently intended to complete the life cycle of some of these structures and animals. The elaborated burial and dispatch of numerous valuable creatures would have been a sacrifice to the community and was therefore significant and meaningful. In most cases efforts were made to prolong the lives of these structures and when that became an act of diminishing returns due to prolonged age, the buildings were put to sleep.