

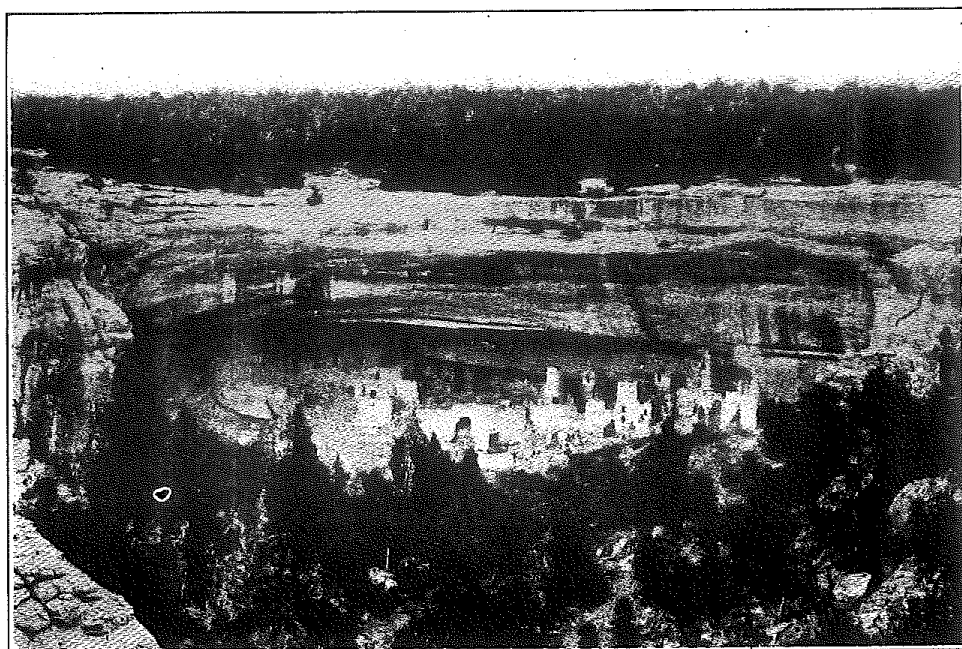
DENVER ART MUSEUM

DENVER, COLORADO

Department of Indian Art

FREDERIC H. DOUGLAS

Curator



CLIFF PALACE, MESA VERDE

Leaflet No. 14

1930

2nd Printing, March, 1945

THE PUEBLO GOLDEN AGE

DATES AND LOCATIONS. The prehistoric pueblo culture reached its height in a period running from about 1050 to 1250 A.D. This is often called the Golden or Classic Age. Amongst the best examples of the towns of this age are Cliff Palace, Spruce Tree House, Sun Temple and the Far View Group of Mesa Verde; Yucca House and the Montezuma Valley ruins in southwestern Colorado; the Aztec ruin in northern New Mexico; Betatakin and Keet Seel in northern Arizona; Pueblo Bonito and the other ruins in the Chaco Valley of New Mexico.

ARCHITECTURE. In the Golden Age the tendency of the southwestern sedentary peoples to gather together into large communal houses reached its height. In caves, on mesa tops and valley floors they erected large buildings rising several stories in height and containing great masses of cell-like rooms. The buildings were terraced, the lowest floor having the largest area. The buildings in the caves, being well protected by the cave walls, were more spread out and roomy than those in the open.

The walls were built of beautifully dressed stones set in adobe. The bottom story walls had no openings, but the upper stories, which were reached by ladders stretching from terrace to terrace, had very well squared openings. The doors were small and rectangular, though sometimes T-shaped. They were closed with a slab of stone or with hides or reed mats. The windows were not glazed, even with selenite. The lower story was for storage, the living rooms being on the upper floors. The rooms ranged in size from about 4x6 to 10x20 or larger. Their average height was about 7 feet. The walls were plastered with adobe, which was sometimes colored and rarely decorated with painted designs. Roofs and floors were constructed as described in Leaflet No. 9.

The kivas, or clan ceremonial and club rooms for men and boys, apparently reached their highest significance at this time. They were elaborately built circular underground rooms, with log roofs resting on supporting pillars, and ventilated with airshafts entering the room at the bottom of the wall, the inflowing air being kept from the fire by a deflector.

FOOD AND COOKING. Corn, beans, squash and wild seeds, nuts, roots and berries were the vegetable foods used. The flesh of birds, and animals procured by hunting and trapping provided meat. Probably these early peoples used native foods similar to those described in Leaflet No. 8.

Cooking was done over small stone or adobe fireplaces located in the plazas of the pueblos. Food was cooked either by boiling in baked clay pots or by barbecuing or roasting over the open fire.

CLOTHING. In the summer the men wore a gee-string and the women a short apron of grass or shredded bark. It is possible that they also wore body coverings of woven cotton similar in shape to a poncho. During periods of cold or rain they used robes woven from yucca cord and feathers, or made from the well tanned skins of animals. On the feet they wore sandals made of yucca cord.

POTTERY. The form, design and hardness of baked clay products reached their height at this period. The principal forms were mugs, pitchers, dippers, wide shallow bowls, globular small mouthed jars, and bird, animal and eccentric forms. These shapes were made in the

decorated ware and ranged in size from small miniatures to large vessels holding several gallons. For cooking and storage undecorated grey-black jars were made, some showing the coil and others smooth.

The decorated wares had black designs on grey-white or red backgrounds. The designs showed innumerable combinations of rightangled, curved and triangular elements. Conventionalized bird designs were also often used.

BASKETRY was little used. Such specimens as have been found are of two types, those having sewn coils of willow and those made of plaited yucca.

TEXTILES. Cloth was woven from wild cotton or shredded yucca fibre. Colors and designs were used. Fragments of cloth now remaining are too small to permit an accurate statement of their original form. Sheets of matting were woven from yucca. Other mats were made by tying together lengths of reeds of twigs.

STONE ARTICLES. Axes and hammers of different sizes were made from river boulders. They were fastened to wooden handles. From agate, petrified wood, chalcedony, obsidian and occasionally lime-sandstone and lignite were made chipped arrow and spear heads. Axes were sharpened by rubbing on sandstone boulders. The deep hollows thus made remain today. Hand mills for grinding corn were made from two pieces of stone. One, called a metate, a flat slab about 18 inches square on the average, was fastened in place on the ground or floor at about a 45 degree angle. The other, the mano, a flat rectangular piece with rounded edges, was held in the hands and rubbed up and down over the fixed stone. Often a mill had several such grinding units.

WOODEN ARTICLES. Long sticks used in planting, scoops and bowls, spear handles and arrow shafts, drills and spindles, bows, weaving battens, war clubs, window and door jams and lintels, house beams, and ladders were the principal articles made from wood. Pines, cedars and other conifers, and scrub oaks provided most of the raw material. Stone implements, perhaps aided by fire, were the means of working the timber into usable shapes.

BONE ARTICLES. The bones of all the birds and animals used for food were carefully cleaned and made into a number of articles. The larger bones were made into hide scrapers, flutes, daggers and dice, while the smaller sizes became eyeless needles, awls and bodkins, hair-pins and beads.

WEAPONS. In hunting and war the men depended on bows and arrows, stone-tipped spears, stone knives, wooden clubs and bone dirks.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION. It is presumed that the social organization of these pueblos was similar to that found by the Spanish on their arrival in the Southwest in 1539, since the Pueblo Indians of that time were undoubtedly descendants of those who lived in the towns of the Golden Age. In each village were a number of clans governed by a religious hierarchy. This group nominated the candidates for civil positions of authority before an election in which all the men of the village participated. Descent was through the female line. Hunting and fighting were done under the direction of an elected war chief. The clan was the unit

of the village group, there being no conception of the family similar to that of the white races of today.

RELIGION. Sun and moon worship and fertility rites probably formed the basis of the religious philosophy of these people. The forms of religion were carried on under the direction of a priestly caste composed of certain men chosen from the membership of the clans and fraternities. The ritualistic observances were probably very elaborate and consisted of dances, both public and private, offerings of meal and other objects, songs, incantations and prayers, held at appropriate seasons of the year both outdoors and in the kivas. The whole scheme of the worship was to control the elements necessary for the growth and maturing of crops.

CUSTOMS. Though there was no family life as we understand it, still each family had its own rooms and individual possessions. The people used the rooms only for storage, shelter and to some extent sleeping. Practically all the active life of the people took place in the community plazas. We have no knowledge of the birth and marriage practices of this age, but presumably they were not unlike those of the descendants.

The dead were buried with the knees bent up on the chest. Usually mortuary offerings of pottery, weapons and turquoise or shell jewelry were placed in the graves. These offerings were in all probability personal belongings. The bodies were wrapped in blankets of feather cloth. Cremation was practised to some extent.

The men's time was occupied with farming, irrigating, hunting, fighting and ceremonial duties. The women were busy with housework, care of children and the making of pottery and other articles.

Compiled from the following sources by Jean Allard Jeançon and F. H. Douglas.

BUREAU OF AMERICAN ETHNOLOGY

Bulletins 41 and 51. Mesa Verde Ruins—Fewkes
Bulletin 50. Betatakin and Nearby Ruins—Fewkes

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

Miscellaneous Collections, Vol. 72, No. 15; Vol. 74, No. 5; Vol. 76, No. 10; Vol. 77, No. 2; Vol. 78, Nos. 1, 7; Writings on Pueblo Bonito. Judd

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Journal. Vol. 16, No. 3; Vol. 18, No. 7. } Writings on the Aztec Ruin—Morris
Anthropological Papers. Vol. 26. }
Vol. 17. Pueblo Bonito—Pepper

UNITED STATES NATIONAL MUSEUM

Proceedings, Vol. 77, Article 5. Excavation and Repair of Betatakin—Judd