

RUINS AND PICTOGRAPHS IN NINE MILE CANYON, UTAH

BY

ALBERT B. REAGAN

Ouray, Utah

Nine Mile Canyon is a deep, east-west canyon, fifty miles east of Price, Utah. Ages ago it was inhabited successively by the Basket Makers, earth-lodge people, and a tower-fort building people. The last-named people built not only cliff-houses, with or without associated towers, but also squarish houses, forts, and towers in the open.

The forts were built on eminences that project from the mesa walls into the valley in such a manner as to give a commanding view of the canyon and surrounding heights. One of these forts which is on the north side of the canyon, about a quarter of a mile west of the Nutter ranch house has a wall forty-nine feet long, which extends from one side of the eminence on which it is situated to the other. Back of this wall are two houses, one of which is circular and was probably a kiva. Another fort across the valley to the southwestward is on a high and precipitous cliff about 200 feet above the valley and is built in the form of a quadrant of a circle, with its round side facing the canyon.

One of the several cliff-houses has a two-story, circular tower which is only seven feet in height and about four feet in diameter. The other towers (circular buildings) so far seen in the region are in clusters in the open and are not associated with other structures.

One group of these towers is on the top of a high mesa in an extremely dizzy situation. It is composed of three small stone circular structures, two of which are provided with roofs of heavy cedar logs and heavy flat stones. The logs and poles of these two structures would make about a cord of wood, and they possess distinct marks of the rude stone axes with which they were cut into suitable lengths. Another group is situated on almost inaccessible heights that command a magnificent view of many canyons. This group is composed of four circular stone buildings, one of which is somewhat larger than the others. These are so arranged upon the flat mesa top that the three smaller ones occupy the front and most exposed places on the very edge of the mesa, one of them being in advance of the other two. The larger stone structure is several yards behind the three smaller ones,

but from it a clear view of a wide and extended tract of country could be obtained. The only openings are at the tops, and their walls slope inward from the bottom, so that the opening in each of the small structures would allow the entrance of only one person.

Besides the different types of buildings in this valley, the ancients also left their rock writings on the canyon walls wherever there were suitable rock faces on which they could be pecked or painted, ranging from the valley floor to elevations of more than 500 feet. The drawings depict square-shouldered human beings, painted ceremonial scenes, animal scenes, hunting scenes, a fish trap (?), rain scenes, the playing of a game of shinney (?), scenes of turkeys being herded, turkeys in corrals, turkeys being fed corn, numerous snakes, and even horned (plumed or feathered) snakes. Most of them are much like and one exactly like the southwestern plumed snake drawings, snakes being prominent in more than half of the pictographs made by these people. Most of them are Pueblo scenes but one of the figures has his hair done up in the side-lock (or side-bob) fashion worn by the Basket Maker people. Whether the drawings of this type represent an invasion of a Basket Maker people into the Pueblo inhabited valley, or a people who were driven out by the Pueblo comers cannot be determined from the data at hand.

The forts, caches, cliff-houses, square-houses, and towers are, of course, Puebloan without question, although, on account of the scantiness of the pottery and its crudeness—usually a gray, plain ware, smoothed but not decorated, their horizon is hard to determine. However, the writer has no hesitation in considering them as falling in a late phase of Pueblo I or a very early phase of Pueblo II horizon of Pueblo culture.

The information contained in this paper was obtained while the writer was doing archaeological research work for the Laboratory of Anthropology at Santa Fe.