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THE RUINS OF ABO MISSION AND MONASTERY, RECENTLY REPAIRED

In This Issue

THE MISSION OF SAN GREGORIO DE ABO

By JOSEPH H. TOULOUSE, JR.

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SAN GREGORIO DE ABO MISSION

By JOSEPH H. TOULOUSE, JR.

THE FORMER MISSION of San Gregorio de Abó was founded in the year 1629 by Father Fray Francisco de Acevedo, a native of Seville, Spain, who had received the habit of his order in the Convento de México in 1625. He arrived in New Mexico with the caravan of brothers headed by the new custodian, Father Fray Estevan Perea, the previous fall, in the year 1628, and was assigned to the Piro.¹

Before this the first Spaniard to have visited the Piro villages was Don Juan de Oñate in October, 1598, and again, in 1601, Oñate sent a punitive expedition against the Pueblo of Abó in retaliation of an attack upon some Spanish deserters. This expedition was led by Zaldívar.²

[EDITOR'S NOTE: In 1937, the site of the Indian Pueblo of Abó and its accompanying mission was obtained for the University of New Mexico by friends of the institution, which subsequently transferred a half interest to the School of American Research and the Museum of New Mexico. In June, 1938, the work of clearing and preserving the mission and monastery was begun by the Museum, the School, and the University, in coöperation with the Soil Conservation Service. Later, in February, 1939, the work was continued with a Works Progress Administration Project. Necessary repairs in the religious establishment were completed in October, 1939. The entire project was supervised by the author of this paper. The land upon which the mission and pueblo stand was declared a State Monument in August, 1938.]

1. Ventacurt; *Menologia*, p. 260, 1871.

2. Hammond, George P.: *Don Juan de Oñate and the Founding of New Mexico*. Historical Society of New Mexico, Publications in History, vol. II, p. 108 and 155. Santa Fe, 1927.

The first missionary activities among the Piro were under the Oñate régime by Fray Francisco de San Miguel. The headquarters of the fray were at Pecos, but he also ministered to the Indians of Quaraí and to the people of the three Piro villages of Abó, Tenabó, and Tabirá.³

Father Fray Francisco de Acevedo served amongst the Piro until 1659 when he was transferred to Alamillo, just below Socorro.⁴ He was succeeded by Father Fray Antonio Aguado who was guardian until sometime in the late 1660's⁵ when he in turn was followed by Fray Nicolas de Villar who was there in 1669.⁶ The pueblo of Abó was depopulated, the convent burned, and the resident priest, Father Fray Pedro de Ayala, a native of Campeche, was slain by Apaches between 1672 and 1678. This pillaging of Abó and other pueblos of the region is described by Fray Francisco de Ayeta, *procurador general* and custodian of the provinces of New Mexico in a petition dated May 10, 1679:

‘ . . . It is public knowledge that from the year 1672 until your Excellency adopted measures for aiding that kingdom [1678], six pueblos were depopulated—namely, that of Cuarac, with more than two hundred families, that of Los Humanas with more than five hundred, that of Abó with more than three hundred (in this latter they burned the convent after having sacked it and murdered the missionary, who was Fray Father Pedro de Ayala, a native of Campeche, stripping him of his clothing, putting a

3. Ayer, Mrs. Edward E.: *The Memorial of Fray Alonso de Benavides: 1630*, p. 215. Chicago, 1916.

4. Hackett, Charles Wilson (Editor): *Historical Documents relating to New Mexico, Nueva Viscaya, and approaches thereto, to 1773*. Carnegie Institution of Washington, Publication No. 330, vol. III, p. 159. Washington, 1937.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 159-160; 220.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 272.

rope around his neck, flogging him most cruelly, and finally killing him with blows of the *macana*; after he was dead they surrounded the dead body with white lambs, and covered the privy parts, leaving him in this way, a thing that caused astonishment to the inhabitants of the said provinces when they went to see him, knowing as they did the ferocity of these Indian barbarians, who kill one another for a piece of meat; (His Divine Majesty knows the secret of this), that of Chililí with more than one hundred, Las Salinas, with more than three hundred—restored, as has been said—, and Senecú, both these last being frontiers and veritable keys to those provinces.”⁷ After the burning of the church and monastery the mission does not appear to have been rebuilt as there was evidence of the fire in the excavations, but none of reconstruction, other than as mentioned later.

No further mention of Abó is to be found after 1682 when reference is made again to its total abandonment. It was visited by an American Army officer, Lieutenant J. W. Abert, in November, 1846, and mentioned subsequently in his report.⁸ About ten years later Major James H. Carleton, soon after to become Military Governor of New Mexico, visited and described the mission church at Abó.⁹

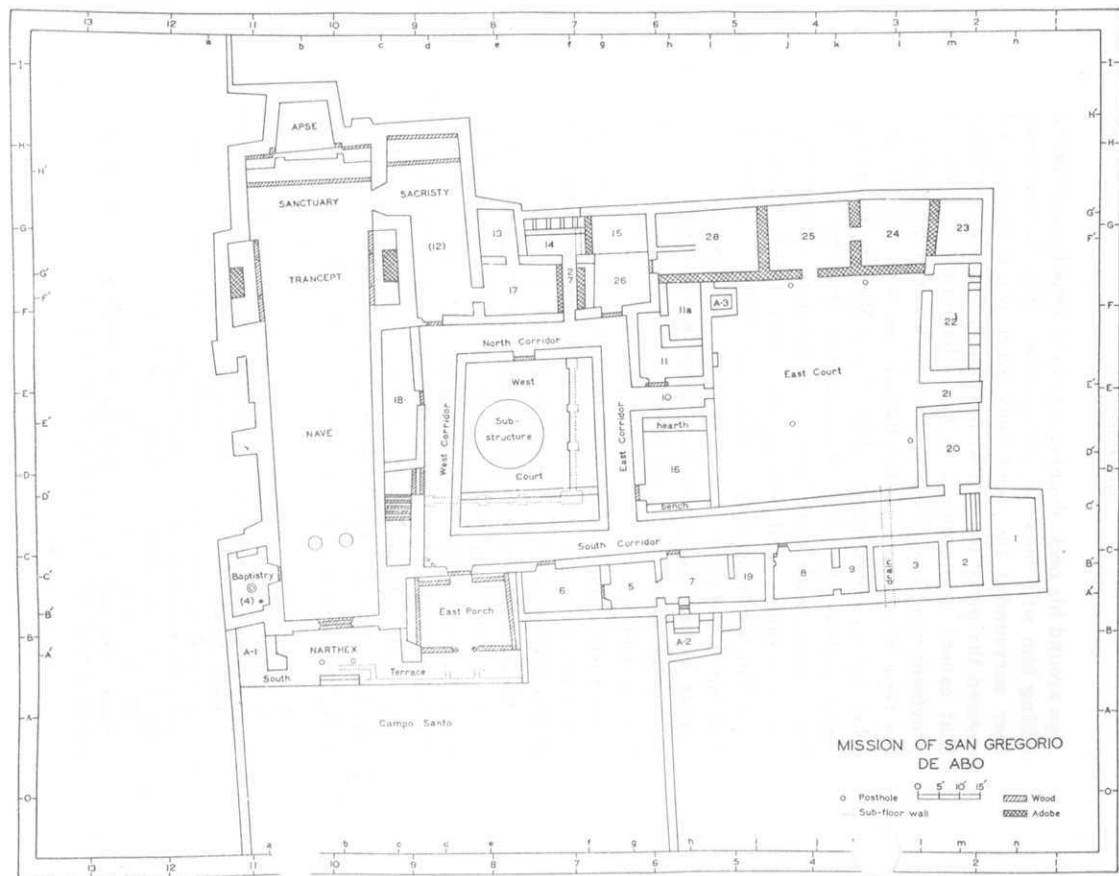
The first archaeological record was made by Adolf Bandelier in the years 1880-1885.¹⁰ Since that time the ruins have increased in popularity because of the writings of

7. *Ibid.*, p. 298.

8. Abert, Lieutenant J. W.: *Report of Lieutenant J. W. Abert of his Examination of New Mexico, in the Years 1846 and 1847*. Executive Document, Number 41, p. 488. Washington.

9. Carleton, James H.: “Diary for excursion to the ruins of Abó, Quarra, and Gran Quivira . . .” *Ninth Smithsonian Institution Annual Report, 1854*, pp. 296-316. Washington, 1855.

10. Bandelier, A. F.: *Final Report of Investigations among the Indians of the Southwestern United States*. Papers of the Archaeological Institute of America, American Series. Cambridge, 1892.



Charles F. Lummis,¹¹ Paul A. F. Walter,¹² and Edgar L. Hewett.¹³

The ruins lie on a split of land, at the junction of an unnamed arroyo, on the east, with Barranco Arroyo, on the west, in the center of a natural amphitheatre formed by low lying hills or knolls covered with shrub vegetation. A spring lies on the south side of the Indian village, and is the center of the small Spanish-American community of Abó Viejo. Seeps are to be found along the arroyo on the east. Cottonwood, locust, fruit, and poplar trees have been planted by the Spanish-Americans around the springs.

Abó lies in the edge of the Transitional Zone; with the Upper Sonoran surrounding the site to the east and west in the flat country. The Canadian is to be seen from the ruins in the upper reaches of the Manzano Mountains to the northwest.¹⁴

Architectural History.

The architecture of the mission has its beginnings in the early stages of the so-called "Early Christian Architecture." This form is the type called *basilica*, of which Saint Peter's in Rome is an excellent example. The basilica with its rather long and straight lines, roofs adaptable to the modifications which Indian architecture exerted, and its general adaptation to the environment of this region, made it the ideal form for construction by the Indian labor available.

Also the plan of the basilica, with its long lines centering attraction on the apsal end of the church, the altars, the

11. Lummis, Charles F.: *The Land of Poco Tiempo*. New York, 1902.

12. Walter, Paul A. F.: *The Cities that Died of Fear*. Reprinted by El Palacio Press, 1931.

13. Hewett, Edgar Lee: *Ancient Life in the American Southwest*. Indianapolis, 1930.

14. Bailey, Vernon: "Life Zones and Crop Zones of New Mexico." *North American Fauna*, Number 35. Washington, 1913.

pulpit would fix the attention of the Indian peoples. It would have been difficult or impossible to construct any of the several elaborate styles of churches found in the Old World of that time with the Indians upon whom fell the labor of the mission, because of their lack of knowledge of the arch, and the difficulties of speech between them and the Franciscans during the first few years of Spanish contact.

The typical features of the earlier basilica or Roman court of law, are as follows. The plan of the building was a rectangle, provided at one end with a semi-circular *apse*. Often a rudimentary *transept*, or *bema*, slightly salient at the sides, was introduced between the rectangular building and the apse, giving the plan a form approximating that of the Latin cross. In front of the building was a covered vestibule or *narthex*, and before that a peristylar atrium, open to the sky, a feature not found in the New Mexican missions. Most of the other typical traits are found as an integral part of the church at Abó. These are indicated upon the accompanying ground-plan of the mission and monastery, as are the narthex, nave, altars, the choir loft in the fore portion of the nave, the sanctuary, apse, baptistry, sacristy, and corridor-surrounded courts, this last being represented by the west court.¹⁵

Tree-Ring History.

The only actual dates that can be definitely assigned to the mission at Abó are those which have been secured through dendrochronology. The two dates available at present are 1646 and 1541 plus X. The latter date is of small significance because the symbol "plus X" indicates that an indefinite number of rings are missing from the

15. Kimbal, Fiske and George Harold Edgell: *A History of Architecture*, p. 163; 165-166. New York, 1918.

outer portion of the specimen, due to the squaring of the beam as a viga.¹⁶

Archaeology.

The mission is divided into two distinct and separate units: the church proper and the monastery. The entrance to the church lies up and across the terrace which faces the south. Entrance is made into the nave of the church, the section allowed the worshippers. Just to one side, on the left, is the entrance to the baptistry, in which all were inducted into their first preliminary Christian rites. As one approaches the rear, the transept with its altars are seen, and finally the sanctuary is reached, the holy of holies, with its altars, towering over which may have been seen the "high altar" in that section called the apse. The padre's entrance was made from the right onto the sanctuary, from the sacristy where he robed himself for his duties. In the sacristy, or in the rooms adjacent (Rooms 13 and 17), would also have been stored the various furniture used in the rites. The sockets for the *corbels* and roof *vigas* may be seen high in the west wall of the nave.

To enter the monastery one would go to the right after having ascended the south terrace into what has been termed, for convenience, the east porch. This was separated from the terrace by a low wooden balustrade across the front, leaving an entrance in the center flanked by upright roof supports. Benches of stone lipped with hewn beams lined the structure on three sides with the door into the monastery in the north wall. Through this doorway the south corridor is immediately available and runs the full length of the monastery from west to east. Just to the left upon entering this corridor was uncovered a fireplace, not unlike that found in the corners of the Spanish-American homes a decade or so ago.

16. Stallings, W. S., Jr.: "Southwest Dated Ruins: I," *Tree-Ring Bulletin*, vol. 4, no. 2, p. 5, October, 1937. Tucson, Arizona.

The monastery, for convenience, has been divided into two sections; that portion surrounding the west court and that which composes the east court. Around the west court and along the front of the monastery are what were presumably used as living quarters—given over to the mission life of teaching, sleeping, cooking, etc. To only a few rooms may we attribute any definite use, such as the kitchen (Room 16) in which was found along the north wall a slightly raised platform of an open hearth, upon which were laid a number of stone griddles; the turkey or bird pen below the floor of Room 14 in which quantities of bird dung material was recovered. In order to construct this turkey pit it was necessary to fill in a portion of Room 15, and to erect an adobe wall which separated the two rooms. The original west wall of Room 15 was encountered beneath the floor of Room 14 and may be seen in one end of the pen.

The west court is surrounded by corridors and entered from the north side. There are to be noted two such courtyards, an earlier one which had as its center the kiva, and the later one which defines that section. The wall of the former courtyard was narrow and buttressed at intervals along its length, and a section can be seen along the east side, the south wall lies beneath the promenade and continues beneath the west wall of the later one into the west corridor. A narrow promenade was constructed along the east and south sides.

A conjecture reconstruction of the reasons for the above two courtyards might be interpolated as follows: It is known that the padre also was in charge of the construction of the missions at Quarai and Tabirá and that this would necessitate his absence from time to time. Consequently, it is presumed that in one such absence his cohorts took a chance upon the building of a kiva within the structure, and from the presence of ashes in the firepit and ash pit must have been used for a short period. Even-

tually upon the return of the father they were forced to abandon this structure which again is indicated by the absence of roof timbers and the ultimate use as a refuse pit by the cooks. The church and monastery were kept clean from time to time by sweeping. Disposal of the trash was made in Rooms 15 and 28, where, upon excavation, lenses of fallen plaster, occasional sherds of pottery, and other everyday sweepings were encountered.

The east court was devoted mainly to stabling the animals belonging to the mission—sheep, cattle, horses, and goats. These have been identified from remains in various disposal heaps of the mission. From the southeast corner of the east court a stone lined drain led to the outside toward the south. The interesting bench within Room 22 is a matter for speculation as this room was definitely used as a stable, judging by the noticeable amounts of dung material on the floor. Adobe walls were used in the construction of the rooms along the north side of the east court, adobe walls were inserted between Rooms 14 and 15, 17 and 27, and adobe altars were added in the sides of the transept. Since stone was the principal building material in the three missions constructed by Father Acevedo and was the easiest material obtainable and since each of these occurrences of adobe appear to be in modification of rooms or additions made after construction of the main edifice had been finished, it is surmised that these portions represent a reconstruction after the original structure was completed.

Of the three odd structures on the map which are labeled A-1, A-2, and A-3, one can only conjecture as to what use they may have had. The most interesting one is that marked "A-2," which has steps and a stone landing leading down from Room 7, but has no apparent outside exit. The outer wall of this structure, judging from the amount of debris removed, was not much higher than is shown at present.

Another interesting and problematical feature is that to be seen within the baptistry, in the center of the floor. Archaeologically, this would have been a post hole, for a roof support, but instead of having a remnant of a beam in it, ashes were found at a depth of eighteen inches and extend downward for several feet. These could not have been the remains of a beam as fire would not have burned down below the floor level.

The Indian Pueblo.

The Indian pueblo lies to the south and southwest of the mission and monastery. The pueblo of the historical period is that almost immediately adjacent to the church on the south. The older sections lie on the southwestern side and extend on down around the spring. The section just west of the spring is possibly the oldest portion, as here is found black-on-white pottery which, in the Southwest, appears before the glaze ware of the pueblo adjoining the mission.



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