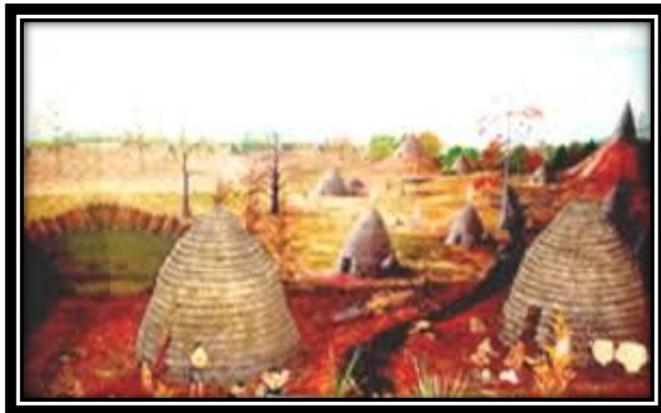


Etzanoa Kansas, Fabled Lost City of Gold?

Section - 1, Edition 2.1, 2017

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Dedicated to Wichita Sunflower Mensa



What might have been one of the fabled cities of gold, may finally have been found in South Central Kansas. Sought by Coronado in 1541, he and his men came close, but never found the legendary city or the riches they craved. Then as now, no precious metals were found. The real treasures were the answers to questions long asked by historians and researchers.

Recent archeological evidence supports the theory that a large city called Etzanoa or Tzanoa existed on the site of present day Arkansas City Kansas. Estimated to have been inhabited by around 20,000 people, it was larger than present day Arkansas City of only 12,500 residents (2016). The ancient cities vast size made it second only to Cahokia, in present day Saint Louis Missouri, as the most populace settlements in what is now North America. The great city had survived and even flourished since it was established around 800 CE. However, by the late 1720's it was deserted and abandoned, soon to be totally forgotten, relegated to ephemeral myths and to the boundless prairie that gave it birth.

This is the story of a once great city and civilization, a confederation of tribes who would later be known collectively as the Wichita. A fascinating tale of honor and bravery tempered by lies

and wanton cruelty. It details the rise of a group of Neolithic hunter gatherers, the founding of one of Americas most populous civilizations, to the tribe's eventual decline and near extinction.

The Great Settlement:

There is archeological evidence that farmer and hunter gatherer groups had established permanent settlements in the area by around 800ce. The confluence of the Arkansas and Walnut rivers in South, Central Kansas was an excellent choice of locations as it afforded easy communication by water, good hunting, rich croplands, and a certain degree of protection from raids by enemy tribes. Due to regular flooding and burning which enriched the soils as well as ample rainfall, the area is optimal for many types of dry land agriculture.



Figure 1: Rendition of a typical Wichita Village circa 1700, before the changes brought by European contact.

The City – The main inhabited areas of the town proper, consisted of roughly 1200 domed, bee hive shaped grass structures which were arranged in clusters of 10 – 20, and spaced at roughly 15 meter (50 feet) intervals. These were interspersed with food drying sheds, shaded arbors, sleeping arbors, numerous storage pits and the occasional teepee. With so many people crowded into small villages, it would have been a noisy place, dogs barking, children shrieking

and laughing, neighbors talking and bickering. The near constant Kansas wind would usually be sufficient to keep smells down, but the occasional doldrums would have made life miserable.

Narrow paths would weave around and connect all the structures, then merge to connect to other nearby clusters. Lush groves of cultivated nut and plum trees would be seen shimmering green in the distance. Groves of cottonwood, willow and elm, along with jagged ridges and limestone bluffs would block the view of the river.

These small clusters of lodges would be separated by fields of maize, beans and squash, to form larger clusters which would merge to form satellite cities. Many smaller satellite settlements would be dispersed along the river banks, and adjacent to ridges and terraces, giving the appearance of pearls on a necklace if viewed from far above.

The clusters were always located close to a water source, always within easy walking distance to make the fetching of water or regular bathing possible. Many paths lead to easily accessible spots along the riverbank or adjacent streams, where the water was fresh and not too deep.

The clusters would be connected by roads and the roads would turn into trails to other related cities, trade routes or paths to Winter hunting grounds. The cities were unfortified, which would be indicative of an extended period of peace, at least up to around the time of European contact.

In the early times before the horse, many dogs would roam the village, not kept as pets, but used as beasts of burden while hunting, as watchers to help guard the village, and as a food item. During the yearly exodus, following the buffalo each Fall and Winter, dogs would be used to haul all of the items required to supply and raise a camp. Two long poles would be lashed on either side of the dog, attached with rawhide bindings. Wooden cross members bound between the posts would hold the load of skins, dried meat and supplies firmly. The ends of the poles dragged on the ground, forming a triangular structure, and would have needed frequent replacement due to wear.



Figure 2: Teepees used during the yearly hunt.

The entire city would be pretty much unoccupied from November to March each year as most of the population had gone North for the Buffalo hunt. They would return in the early Spring to begin again the endless rhythm of their existence. During the hunt they were the quintessential plains Indians, relocating regularly, living in Teepees and following the then great Buffalo herds.

In the Spring the whole tribe would filter back to its home base in Etzanoa. The lodges would be repaired as needed, and the ground would

be cleared, plowed and furrowed, preparing it for sowing, utilizing tools made of bone, wood or a combination of the two.

Labor intensive activities like the raising of a new lodge would be a group activity and ample help would be provided by the peoples of the villages. This activity was supervised by the ruling *Caddi* (head chief) and *Tammias* (tribal police). While the men and older children would be responsible for gathering the raw materials, it was the women who did most of the actual construction. Although needing some sort of repair each season, a lodge was expected to last from 12-14 years before needing to be torn down and being completely rebuilt.

As described to the 17th century explorer Onate, the settlement of Etzanoa stretched for “*ten leagues long and 2 leagues wide*”. That figures to roughly 26 miles long, by 5 miles wide, a substantial sized city by any standard.

There is evidence that the city and surrounding settlements that were not even seen by Onate, would have significantly raised the total population estimates of 20,000. A large number of closely allied villages were dotted up and down the Walnut and Whitewater rivers North well into Butler county and South along the Arkansas river. The present towns of Douglas and Augusta Kansas, both located on the Walnut are sites that have evidence of past Native American settlements.

The lodges – The dwelling places of the Rayado who would be later called the Guichita, and finally the Wichita, were cedar and willow framed, domed, bee hive shaped structures measuring some 6-10 meters (20-30 feet) or more in diameter.

The basic skeleton of the structure began with eight to sixteen cedar branches depending on the size. Transverse beams of cedar would be placed in forks along the uprights and tightly secured with slippery elm bark twine. Between the main cedar supports would be placed cedar poles, sitting on the ground and gathered and bound at the peak. These would be held in place with more transverse cedar poles.

The exterior was made from hundreds of bunches of wild gathered bluestem grass, interwoven with the wooden slats. Applied in bound bunches, beginning at the bottom and working to the top, the grass would be secured by more, thin, subtle willow poles. The structures varied in size, with the largest unit being occupied by the most important family of



Figure 4: Typical Wichita Domed, Beehive Grass Lodge

the cluster.

Four long, slender poles extended about a meter past the top of the lodge, facing in all four cardinal directions.

Each structure would house 12 - 20 close relatives, although the occasional small lodge might have only one family.

Except for small children, each person had use of their own sleeping bunks. Cedar framed beds with Willow rod slats and Buffalo robe covers were arranged around interior walls and were well raised by up to a meter (3 feet) above the floor. The beds were comfortable, with grass stuffed mattresses and had covers made of soft and subtle, tanned hides. Decorated hide blankets would be used in the Winter. Depending on the size of the lodge, there would be six to twelve beds, the head located at one of the main support branches. To afford the occupants some degree of privacy, decorated Buffalo robes would be strategically hung on cords that could be raised and lowered as needed.

The floors which were of dirt were covered in colorful mats and decorated rugs. Wichita women were fastidious about keeping the lodges clean and the floors well swept.

To free up floor space, clothing and other items would be hung on wooden pegs inserted in the rafters. Beautifully crafted spoons made of Buffalo bone would also be hung between meals. There would also be a flesher with an ornate wood or bone handle, which was used to process various types of hides and skins.



There were two small, roughly one square meter, doors on opposite sides of the lodge. They were willow framed, and grass covered, located on each end, fastened securely by ropes for ease of entry. Each is facing the cardinal directions of East, to open each morning, and West, to open in the afternoon. Sometimes a sacred South door was also installed, a vestige of older times when the doors faced North and South, to facilitate the ceremony of the Medicine Man.

The *Caddo* told that the East door was to let in the morning Sun peek into the lodge as it rises. The West door so that the Sun might peer in as it sets. The Sun was to have signaled midday when it shone in through the smoke hole. The symbolic South door was retained so that the great God of the South wind would blow in and bless the dwelling.

Figure 4: Interior of a Wichita lodge.

The entire structure was secured to the ground by long wooden stakes to hold it down during the many and fierce prairie storms.

Despite regularly being filled with acrid smoke, the lodges were rumored to be infested with biting fleas, probably lurking in the many robes and skins present. The Spaniards half joked when they said having to sleep inside of one should be considered a form of torture.

A small vent hole about 20cm across (8 inches) was in the very top to let out smoke from a fire pit dug in the center. The fire pit was considered sacred as it was the place of the fire, the gift from the Gods that made life possible.

A prominent item would be a hollowed out wooden corn mill made from a tree trunk, kept between the West door and fire pit. It was large and heavy, being roughly ½ meter (18 inches) in diameter by 1 ½ meters high. A large wooden mortar with one wide end would be used to grind corn and flatten pumpkin strips on it. Two women were usually needed to grind the corn.

Gourds used as cooking utensils and storage would also be in plentiful supply. They would be filled with water and whatever was to be cooked. Hot rocks would then be dropped in and left until the food was cooked. There was little use for ceramic pots and bowls as gourds would perform the same tasks.

A myriad of sizes, shapes and colors were available, they were very plentiful, easy to modify, durable, not as fragile, and most importantly much lighter to be carried along during the annual migration. Some ceramics were manufactured however, but were utilitarian and of simple construction and were plain in design.



Figure 5: The lodge superstructure is erected.

Propped up against the outer wall were flat granite stone metates that would be taken down and used for grinding herbs, seeds, nuts and roots, for food and for medicine. A long, cylindrical grinding stone would also be kept nearby.

Ancillary structures - Along with the main sleeping hut there could be an oval or rectangular covered open sided arbor of similar construction to the lodge, but with a raised floor, about 1/2 meter high. The open sides would be to about 1 ½ meters high from the ground, the rest of the sides and roof being covered with grass. It was used by the wealthier families as a shady and breezy place of respite during the scorching prairie summers.

More common would be a smaller, square drying hut nearby where vast quantities of meat, thin pumpkin strands, corn cobs or other perishable food items would be suspended in the rafters in preparation for further processing and eventual long-term storage.

Unmarried young girls of age would reside in smaller, specially built raised platform huts called sleeping arbors. They had little privacy and they would be constantly watched over, ensuring the virtue of these maidens would be preserved until marriage.

Teepees could hurriedly be erected nearby the lodge in case of birth or death, and they often were.



Figure 6: Lodge and a nearby shaded Summer Arbor.

Cache pits - A small number of well concealed circular cache pits would also be located around the perimeter of each family unit, used for storage. It was said that they were so well hidden, it was hard to find them even if you knew where to look. The pits were constructed by digging a hole roughly 2 meters deep, with a narrow neck just wide enough for a man to slide through. The cache holes would be bell shaped, being wider at the bottom and having a flat floor.

A small ladder would be used for access, which only happened a few times a year to add or remove items. The pits would be lined in clay to make them more waterproof, and wooden pegs would be inserted into the sides to facilitate the hanging of items off the floor.

The pits were cool and dry even in the heat of Summer, and afforded a great deal of protection to the contents. The top of the cache was covered first by animal skins and then covered in dirt to hide its location, protect it from rain and from the predations of rodents.

When the cache reached the end of its usable life because of damage, leaking or rodent infestation it was converted into a conveniently located trash dump. I would guess that they would also make a good latrine as there would be no sort of sanitation for the village.

All the above ground structures built by the Wichita peoples and most of the contents were made of perishable materials and would decompose within a few years, leaving little trace.

Cache pits are extremely important to present day archeologists as they can remain relatively intact for hundreds of years and provide a wealth of information about the people who created and used them. The pits can be easily located and mapped today with such innovations as

ground penetrating radar, ultra-sensitive magnetic field detectors, and high precision topographic mapping. Once their location is mapped, the search for other less obvious structures and features can begin.



Figure 7: One style of a parfleche food storage pouch.

A wide variety of items could be kept safely for extended periods. It is even said that foodstuffs stored this way in pits, were still perfectly edible more than 5 years after first being sealed up in them.

Tobacco and edibles such as pemmican, corn, pumpkin mats and dried meat were placed in either woven reed baskets, pottery or tanned deer or wolf skin pouches called *parfleche*.

Often kept inside the lodge, larger rectangular box-shaped *parfleche* would house surplus hides, clothing, personal items and/or tools. Food items could also be kept there for use between harvests and hunts, or in case of shortage as well as for storage of next year's valuable seeds. A long, cylindrical *parfleche*

with an attached carrying strap, was used to hold a warrior's quiver of arrows.

The word *parfleche* was used by French fur traders, and is derived from the French *parer* (to defend), and *fleche* (arrow).

It was rumored that the hide used was so tough that it would stop an arrow, and would even make a good shield. Stretching the raw hides, forming and assembling, as well as the final decorating was considered woman's work.

The colorful decorations adorning most parfleche was of distinctive geometric shapes and patterns, governed by tribal tradition. Sometimes even rivers, mountains and other landscape figures would be depicted, as well as even being used as a sort of map.



Figure 8: Parfleches came in many different sizes and shapes.



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Other sections:

Section – 2: The Wichita People. Life and traditions.

Section – 3: The religion, beliefs and mythology.

Section – 4: The land, crops, flora and fauna. The hunt.

Section – 5: The early explorers. Spain and France.

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