

# **REVIEW**

**by Associate Professor, Architect Maria Nikolova Davcheva, PhD**

**Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS)**

**Professional field:** 5.7. "Architecture, Construction, and Geodesy"

**Doctoral Program:** "Theory and History of Architecture"

**Author:** Hector Vokshi

**Form of doctoral studies:** independent preparation

**Scientific organization:** New Bulgarian University (NBU) - Sofia, Master's Faculty,  
Department of "Architecture"

**Topic:** "Traditional Dwellings of the Pueblo Indians"

**Scientific supervisor:** Professor, Dr. Engineer Architect Penyo Stolarov

## **PROCEDURE**

This review is presented in my capacity as a member of the scientific jury, appointed by Order No. 3-RK-294 of July 10, 2024, of the Rector of New Bulgarian University, based on Article 14, Paragraph 3 of the Regulation for the Development of the Academic Staff at NBU and a decision of the Faculty Council of the Master's Faculty from meeting No. 11/07.07.2024, and a decision from the first meeting of the Scientific Jury.

## **BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL DATA ABOUT THE PhD CANDIDATE**

Hector Vokshi completed his secondary education at "Sami Frashëri" High School in Pristina, Kosovo (2003-2007).

At the University of Pristina, in the Faculty of Construction and Architecture, he received a bachelor's degree in architecture (2007-2012), a master's degree in art history and architectural

criticism (2012-2015), and a certificate as an expert in energy efficiency, passive houses, sustainable ecological design, and green architecture (2015-2018).

Since 2015, he has been teaching at the AAB University in Kosovo in the fields of art history and architecture, graphic design, visual arts, interior and industrial design, energy efficiency, and more.

From 2013 to 2022, he annually participated in various specialized formats to preserve cultural and historical heritage.

Between 2012-2016, he worked in teams at Porcelanosa Group (Skopje, North Macedonia), Hansgrohe, and Knauf (Pristina, Kosovo).

## **GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DISSERTATION**

The dissertation consists of an Introduction, seven chapters, and summarized conclusions. It is 144 pages long, richly illustrated, and includes a list of the literature used.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the dissertation "Traditional Dwellings of the Pueblo Indians," the author attempts to summarise and build upon the knowledge (historical, geographical, cultural, architectural, structural, construction techniques and materials, etc.) about the Anasazi Indian people and the anthropogenic environment they created (200 B.C. - 1500 A.D.), as well as the reasons for their disappearance around the 13th century and their succession by other tribes (Pueblo, Hopi, Zuni).

From the outset, it is important to clarify that this dissertation is not a classical architectural scientific work. The research conducted is a retrospective, polyvalent dissection of the culture and heritage of a people, part of which has disappeared, while another part has undergone significant metamorphoses over time. The reason for this research is a natural reflection of the author's own interests—diverse but stable. His interest in the topic began in his childhood and has developed parallel to his educational and academic growth to this day. The relevance and usefulness of research like this can be sought in several directions. One is a systematic cultural-historical study of a specific region and ethnic group. Another is obtaining the most comprehensive database possible as a foundation for further studies, as well as serving as a good guide in the fields of education and art.

## **OBJECTIVES AND TASKS**

The dissertation aims to study, analyze, and define types of residential structures as unique, distinctive forms. The author traces their metamorphoses from the time of the long-extinct Anasazi tribe, through tribes like the Pueblo, to their contemporary use (utilitarian, influential, or direct). For his research, Hector Vokshi traces not only the ancient dwellings by their geographical and historical affiliations but also their artistic value and influence on architecture and the arts in the 20th and 21st centuries.

## **SUBJECT**

The subject of the research in the dissertation is the types of buildings and the specifics of their realization and development in the context of the long historical period of the Anasazi's existence, their successors the Pueblo, to the present day. Construction technologies, materials, and distinctive architectural features are part of the study.

## **METHODS**

The dissertation uses an empirical-analytical and comparative approach in collecting and synthesizing data from various sources.

## **SCOPE**

The work covers the study of the cultural and historical heritage of the ancient Pueblo Indian tribes, who inhabited the area of present-day southeastern Utah, northeastern Arizona, northwestern New Mexico, and southwestern Colorado from 1200 B.C. to 1500 A.D. The author examines their development and their reflections on contemporary life.

## **CHAPTER I - Theoretical and Critical Aspect of Anasazi Buildings**

In this chapter, the author tries to define the geographical, historical and certain characteristics of the Indian tribe Anasazi. I would recommend this chapter to be connected to the following two, due to its compact volume.

## **CHAPTER II - The Descendants of The Pueblo**

The author describes how the Indian tribe Pueblo is living. They are populating the corners of the USA (Utah, Arizona, New Mexico and Colorado) from 1200 BC to 1300 AD. The main topic of this chapter is not the architecture, but the overall rich culture of these ancient tribes - their connection with Space and Earth, the diversity of dwelling forms, religious rituals, household and beauty items, the mindfulness of the environment, and the usage of local materials.

## **CHAPTER III - Anasazi's buildings - the ancient**

Starting the chapter with simple thoughts, the author explores the topic of the specificity of residential forms in their own way by analyzing several preserved ancient settlements. The research journey begins with the Great North Road, along which many archaeological sites have been preserved to this day with sufficient authenticity for analysis.

The first stop is the author of the National Park Mesa Verde, Colorado. It is the biggest and best-preserved archaeological reserve in the USA (5,000 sites, of which 600 are cliff dwellings). This allows for the most in-depth studies of Pueblo culture while simultaneously being an active tourist centre. Hektor Vokshi pays special attention to Cliff Palace, which is the largest cliff dwelling in the reserve. It was built around 1200 AD and abandoned after about 100 years. This residential structure is multi-story and well-preserved to this day. It is located in a rock niche, and 150 rooms are formed using sandstone blocks, wooden beams, and mortar. The author highlights the specifics of this site—the balcony (open gallery), which provides a connection between the rooms; the kivas (rooms for storage, religious, and social activities); the system of

stairs; the ceilings—peculiar inter-floor slabs made of wooden beams, branches, and clay; and the decorative images in some of the rooms.

The next stop in Hektor Vokshi's research is Taos Pueblo, New Mexico, where the authentic substrate is well-preserved. According to the author, one of the reasons for this is the fact that the region is one of the oldest continuously inhabited by the descendants of the Pueblo tribe. The focus is on the specifics of the local construction technology, architecture, and functional solutions. Characteristic features include the small number and size of windows; entry is made through an opening in the roof, which itself is made of large spruce logs and several layers of branches and clay. The author finds the widely used adobe by the local Indians as the main building material for the walls to be unique and a precursor to the highly evolved construction technologies of today. Another identifying feature is that the dwellings are built adjacent to each other and usually consist of only two rooms (one for living and sleeping, and another for cooking, eating, and storage).

The artefacts from another historical national park, Chaco Canyon, New Mexico, show fifteen large complexes, which were the largest buildings constructed in North America until the 19th century. Besides being good builders (they used large sandstone blocks and transported timber from great distances), the Chacoans built their dwellings by the cycles of the moon. The author repeatedly emphasizes in his dissertation the application/adaptation of the ancients to the laws of the cosmos and nature, as well as the use of local materials in all aspects of their lives.

The concluding site focuses on his research on the cultural-historical heritage of the ancient Pueblo tribe in Bandelier National Park and Monument, New Mexico. It has been inhabited for more than 10,000 years with permanent Indian settlements (from 1150 AD). The characteristic feature of the living spaces is that they are dug into the rocks. Unfortunately, for one reason or another, Hector Vokshi did not examine this type of residential structure as thoroughly as the other examples, even though they definitely have their unique characteristics.

Despite the uneven presentation/analysis of the different sites, my personal opinion is that the author has attempted to create a retrospective panorama that encompasses several regions and Indian tribes with their cultural characteristics. I do not find the references to the discovery and the first conservation works of the sites necessary unless it is done for each example, and models for sustainable development and socialization are drawn. It is precisely in such conclusions that we would find the indisputable scientific-applied qualities of a work like the present dissertation.

#### **CHAPTER IV – The Lifestyle of the Anasazi**

After the previous chapters that provided an overview of the culture, lifestyle, and dwellings of the ancient Native American tribes, the author Hector Vokshi presents us with details from this broader picture. These include agriculture, religion, and crafts (basketry, pottery, jewellery made from precious and semi-precious stones, shells, bones, horn, copper,

etc.). Attention is also given to furniture, although it was scarce and made from perishable materials.

#### **CHAPTER V - The creations of the Anasazi**

I would like to state from the beginning that for a better balanced structure of the text, this chapter should be connected to the previous one. The author refers to the pathways, Chaco and trade routes, kivas, signal towers, Moki steps, and astronomical knowledge as creations. The researcher needs to provide an equal and more in-depth presentation of the details of the ancient Anasazi culture that he has chosen. This has not been fully achieved in these two chapters, but I believe the author will address this in his future revisions or upcoming research.

#### **CHAPTER VI - The Main Influence of The Ancestral Pueblo Dwellings on Contemporary Architectural Style**

In this chapter, the author concludes the stated information. While using examples, he tries to prove the influence - totally or partially, directly or indirectly, of the architecture of the ancients on contemporary architecture. The emphasis is on sustainability, environmental friendliness, functionality, and respect for cultural heritage.

The examples are certain objects - individual or complex - where the author has found parallels and applied principles from those he has identified as characteristic of Pueblo architecture (such as Santa Fe style, museums and hotels, churches, inns, libraries, etc.).

I want to address the author for specific attention when using the word “vyzrozhdenska”. In the Bulgarian language, history and architecture “vyzrozhdenska” means a period in the Bulgarian history. In this context, its use in the dissertation "Traditional Dwellings of the Pueblo Indians," and especially in illustrating the reflections of ancient culture on contemporary architecture and art in a broader sense, is not correct. I hope the author will find a more appropriate term to more accurately and correctly illustrate his theory.

#### **CHAPTER VII - The Influence of The Anasazi on Contemporary Culture (comics, cinema etc)**

The author mentions several times in his dissertation that his dream as a child was to research the legacy of the Ancestral Puebloans would be fully explored in this chapter to show the potential of the present study. Based on the collected material and characteristics, they should not only be found in the broad pop cultural space but also tested as models in the contemporary world. Hector Vokshi's expertise and sustained interest in the topic give me confidence that this chapter will be further developed. Personally, the included magazine covers, movie posters, etc., were interesting and visually confirmed his theory about the reflection of ancient Pueblo culture, but this must be demonstrated as expected in a scientific and applied study.

## **CONTRIBUTIONS**

Based on the achieved results I fully accept the following scientific and practical contributions that can be identified in the dissertation;

- Collection, selection, and synthesis of a significant volume of information on the cultural and historical heritage of the ancient Pueblo tribes;
- Definition of unique and distinguishing characteristics of this culture and an attempt to demonstrate their role in contemporary architecture and pop culture;

As an architect, I find the carefully described construction materials, functional zones and methods, approaches and the distinguishing features of the objects, to be particularly interesting. The selection itself is suitable and comprehensive. For any curious or travelling individual, for art historians and contemporary artists, the dissertation is a kind of time machine, in whose matrix fundamental laws of nature, the cosmos, and ancient civilization are encoded.

## **ASSESSMENT OF PUBLICATIONS**

The publications of the author are two and they have been developed separately. One of them shares the topic of this dissertation. Having further acquainted myself with the subjects Hector Vokshi teaches at AAB College, I have reason to believe that he has the potential for more substantial publication activity, not only on his dissertation topic but also on many other indirectly related topics.

## **AUTHOR'S ABSTRACT**

The content of the abstract reflects the main results achieved in the dissertation. I would advise the author to reduce its volume, both in terms of text and graphical content.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

I would like to inform that some of the comments arise from the language barrier and the broad scope in which the dissertation itself is examined. Such comments include those related to the precision of the term "vyzrozhdenska" fragmented thoughts/text, and instances where information is presented in bullet points as an outline. A scientific topic, regardless of the language, needs to be developed uniformly, thoroughly, and with a clear beginning and conclusion that meets the stated objectives.

Comments related to the structuring of the dissertation, clear objectives, and achieved results are a note to both the author and their mentors.

Comments I direct to the author, considering that the dissertation is a step in the scientific development of any researcher, are:

- There is no strong author's opinion, author's graphic materials, developed hypotheses, and their application to contemporary cultural spaces.
- All quotations, descriptions of graphical materials (the source is missing) and the bibliography, and must be corrected.

However, dissertations like "Traditional Dwellings of the Pueblo Indians" are distinguished by two characteristics. The introduction of new perspectives on well-known historical events and the multidisciplinary approach that reflects the author Hector Vokshi himself. Even if it is not entirely balanced, precise, and formatted as a classical dissertation, a work like this is an important construction piece in the overall scientific and applied research database, serving as a multicultural bridge through the centuries.

## CONCLUSION

The dissertation contains results that show the original contribution to science and meet the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, its regulations, and the normative documents of the New Bulgarian University.

The presented materials and dissertation results demonstrate that the author possesses serious theoretical knowledge, professional skills, and a sustained interest in the specific topic, leading to independently conducted scientific research.

Therefore, I give my positive assessment of the research conducted, as presented in the reviewed dissertation, abstract, achieved results, and contributions. I recommend that the esteemed scientific jury award the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" to **Hector Vokshi** in the professional field 5.7. "Architecture, Construction, and Geodesy," doctoral program "Theory and History of Architecture."



Review by:

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04.09.2024

Sofia