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Hopi Economy and Subsistence

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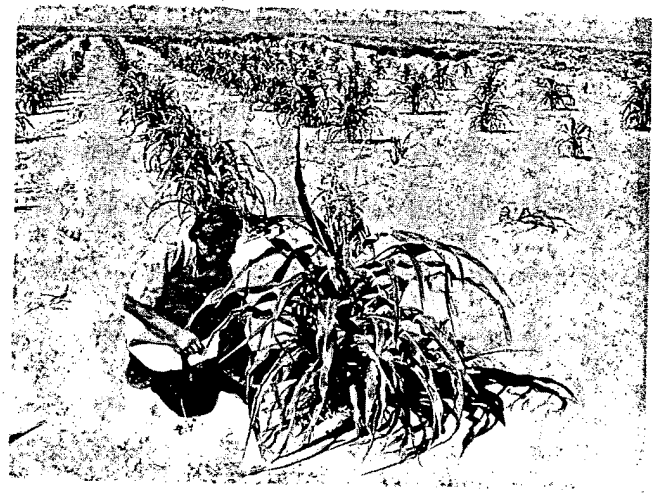
The economy of the Hopi can be best understood historically. The prehistoric foundation was an agriculture based upon the cultivation of corn, beans, squash, gourds, and cotton. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Hopis acquired from the Spaniards domesticated animals—horses, mules, burros, sheep, and cattle. From the same source they derived peaches and apricots. Chili peppers from Mexico were also introduced during this time. The period of American contact, which dates from 1848, has been marked by gradual but accelerating additions of a wide variety of consumption goods, new skills, and a cash economy first supplementing and later displacing the traditional subsistence economy.

Agriculture

Land Tenure

Each village is autonomous and has its own land. The cultivated fields of one are separated from another by sight lines and geographic features, projected southward from the mesas. Along the water courses below the mesas, the fields of each village are divided into large sections assigned to the various matrilineal clans of the village. Formerly, each clan allotment was marked by boundary stones, set up at the corners of the fields, with symbols of the clans painted on them (Forde 1931:368). The clan land system of the First and Second Mesa villages and the boundaries between villages are shown in Forde (1931: maps 2, 3, 4).

Within each clan allotment, fields are assigned to women of the clan, and they are planted and cultivated by the men of the household—husbands, brothers, or sons (fig. 1). With the pattern of matrilineal inheritance and matrilocal residence, fields tend to become associated with specific households. Each clan has land in more than one location so that if one fails, either through lack of rain or from sudden flooding that destroys the crop, the other may still be productive.



middle, Calif. Histl. Soc., Los Angeles: Title Insurance Coll.; bottom, Smithsonian, NAA.
Fig. 1. Hopi farming. top, Corn plants in dune field below Hotevilla, photograph by Cradoc Bagshaw, July or Aug. 1975; middle, men roasting unhusked corn in a field near Oraibi, photograph possibly by G. Wharton James or C.C. Pierce, probably about 1900; bottom, terraced gardens at Hotevilla, photograph by O.C. Havens, 1924.

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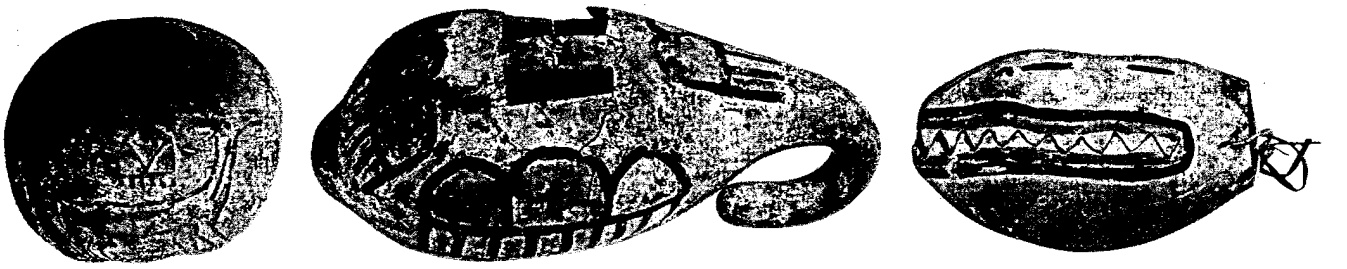


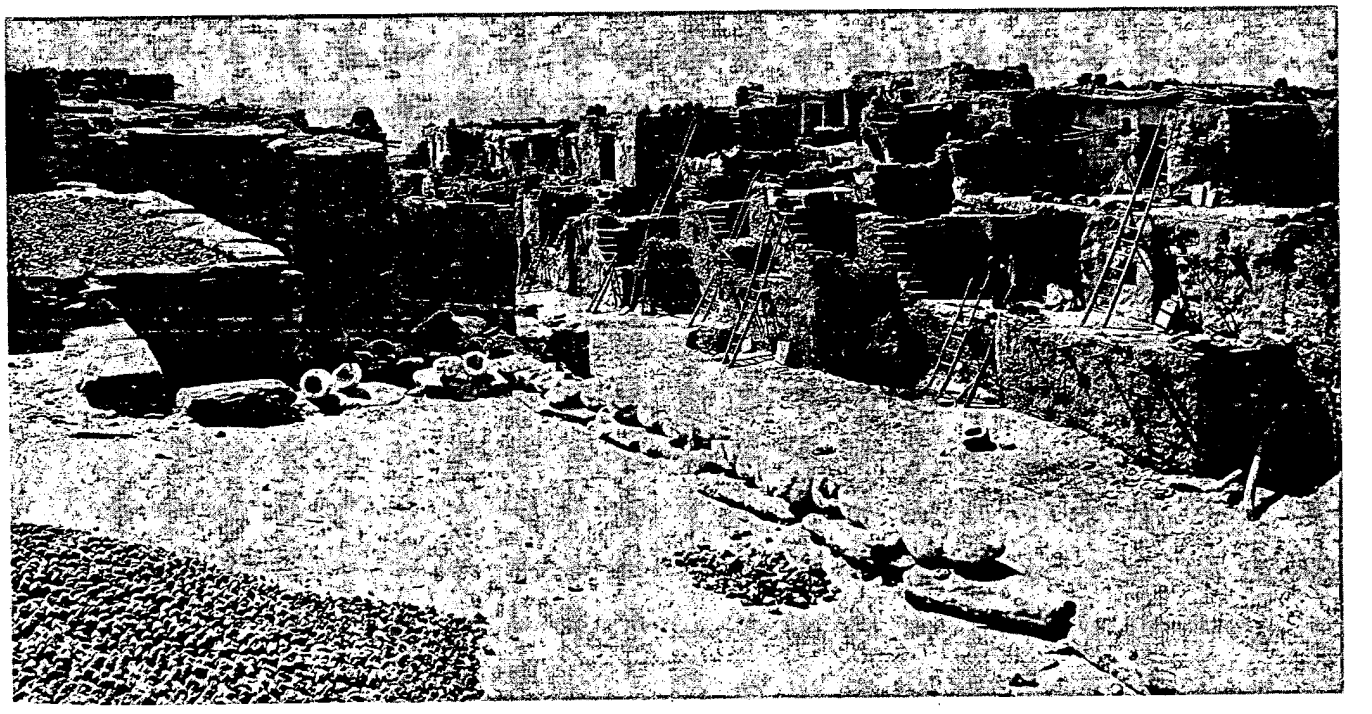
Smithsonian, Dept. of Anthr.: a, 84139; b, 166761; c, 128902.
Fig. 2. Hopi uses of gourds. a, Container decorated with black painted human and animal figures, collected 1883; b, painted ceremonial container, collected 1892; c, painted gourd snout for mask worn by some kachina impersonators, collected 1885. Length of c 27 cm, rest same scale.

Formerly, some fields were allocated to the chiefs of ceremonial societies, and they were planted for them by the men of the village, but this custom has disappeared (Parsons 1925a:87; Forde 1931:map 4).

In addition to the clan lands, any man may establish a field in the area beyond them. He has the right to use it as long as he cultivates it and may assign it to another; however, should he abandon it, that land reverts to the common domain. About 1900, the best fields for the floodwater irrigation employed were along the water courses close to the villages. However, as the Polacca, Wepo, and Oraibi washes grew deeper and wider, much of this land was destroyed. Consequently, new fields were developed 20 and 30 miles south, where the water spreads more readily over the flatter land of the valleys. The possession of horses and wagons, and later pickup trucks, facilitated the development of more distant fields.

Hopi agriculture has always been precarious, subject to long-term wet and dry cycles. In the period 1866–1870 there was a nearly total crop failure, and some villages were abandoned, while the people sought refuge with the Pueblos to the east. In a study of land use in the Oraibi valley, it was discovered that the dissection of the wash had over a period of 50 years destroyed approximately one-third of the fields that had been in cultivation (Bradfield 1971). This may have been responsible for the gradual growth of Moenkopi, a satellite of Oraibi, 40 miles to the northwest, where there was a system of irrigation.

There is no private property in grazing land. Horses



Smithsonian, NAA.
Fig. 3. Peaches and squash drying on the rooftops in the east courtyard of Oraibi. Photograph by John K. Hillers, about 1879.

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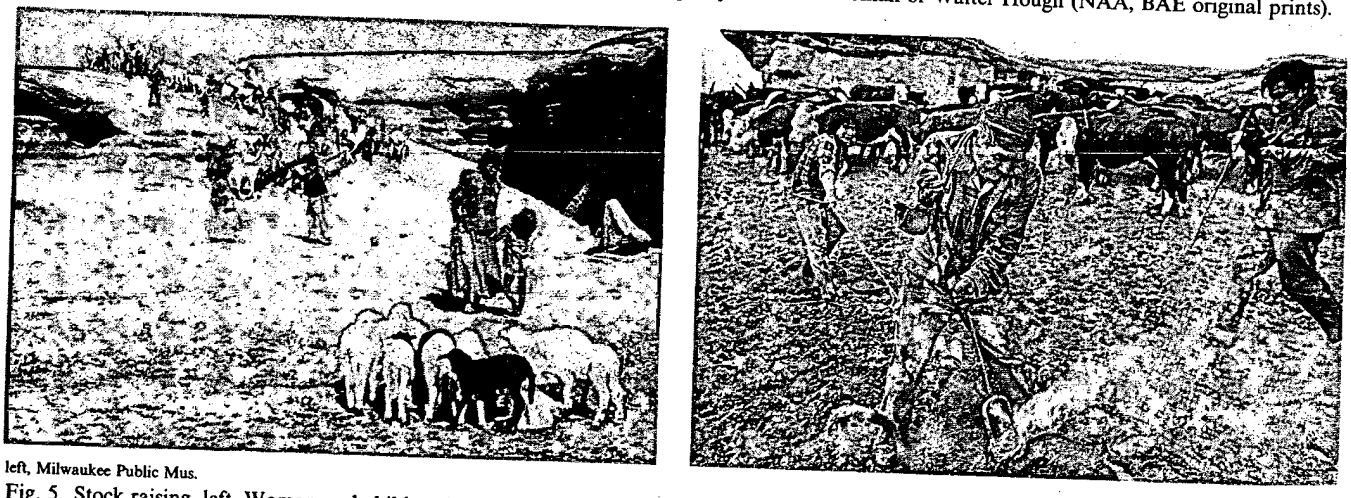
and burros are hobbled and permitted to graze where they will. Cattle are permitted to drift in areas where there is a relatively permanent supply of water. Sheep are herded every day and corralled at night. Most sheep owners have shelters or regular Hopi houses in the area where they customarily graze their sheep. Sometimes they have their major cornfields in the same area in places like Coyote Spring and Burro Spring.

Irrigated gardens watered from nearby springs are utilized for the cultivation of chili peppers, onions, and other vegetables; and titles to these small plots are jealously guarded. A Patki clan plot below Wepo spring was planted every year by men from Shongopavi, whose grandmother had come from the Tewa village at First Mesa (Forde 1931:391).

Although the pattern of land ownership is clear in Hopi theory and reflects the myths of the settlement of each village, adjustments have to be made. Matrilineages vary in size and increase or decrease in a few generations. Should there be a shortage of land in his wife's clan lands, a man may be assigned a field of his own clan's land, or in his father's if there is a surplus (Forde 1931:380). Fields for beans, melons, squash, and gourds are sometimes planted adjacent to a cornfield, but bean fields are also located on the tops of the mesas, as are orchards at both Second Mesa and Hotevilla.

left, Milwaukee Public Mus.; right, Los Angeles Co. Mus. of Nat. Hist.

Fig. 4. Hunting of rabbits done individually or in small groups and as a more organized communal pursuit is connected with ceremonial activities and can itself entail many ritual procedures (Beaglehole 1936:11-17, 23-25). left, Man from Oraibi with a rabbit stick, a throwing stick made in distinctively flat curved shape with a defined handle (and often with painted decoration) that is used to flush out rabbits; photograph by Sumner W. Matteson, perhaps about 1900. right, Rabbit hunters at camp, probably at Kawaika, Ariz., 1901, carrying bows and arrows (also used to hunt rabbits) and apparently mugging for the camera; photograph by Adam C. Vroman or Walter Hough (NAA, BAE original prints).



left, Milwaukee Public Mus.

Fig. 5. Stock raising. left, Woman and children herding sheep and goats, photographed about 1900 by Sumner W. Matteson. In more recent times this, like cattle herding, has been an exclusively men's activity. right, Willie Coin branding a calf; photographed south of Oraibi by Cradoc Bagshaw, July-Sept. 1975.

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