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OLD ORAIBI

A STUDY OF THE HOPI INDIANS OF THIRD MESA

BY

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Chapter V

THE AMORPHOUS HOPI STATE

MUCH HAS BEEN written about the Hopi . . . but little has been said about their political organization and their common law."[1] This comment, published by Dr. Colton in 1934, is equally valid today, chiefly because the Hopi "state" is so unobstrusive that its outlines can scarcely be discerned in the general social structure. The term "Hopi theocracy"[2] which has been used in the past fails to give an accurate picture of the Hopi scheme of government because of the special nature of their priesthood. Formerly, it was the custom among ethnologists to call all participants in every ceremony "priests,"[3] but since every mature man normally participates in at least one ceremony a year, it is obviously absurd to speak of the entire adult male population of the tribe as priests.[4] Even the officers and leaders of ceremonial observances can scarcely be termed priests, for not one of them devotes himself exclusively or even primarily to the performance of religious exercises, no one of them wears distinctive garb throughout the year, and none is sanctified in the eyes of the populace. Instead, as one ritual succeeds another in the ceremonial cycle, various leaders conduct particular rites and then resume lay lives for the balance of the year.[5] Such an arrangement can scarcely provide the framework for a theocracy in the ordinary sense of the word. At the same time it must be admitted that the sacred and the civil are inextricably commingled in the political structure, for pueblo officials are invariably leaders in one ceremony or another, and all have mythological sanctions for their positions.

Dr. Parsons frequently refers to the Hopi system of leadership as an hierarchy, but she notes "that the principle of hierarchy is more developed or conspicuous at Zuni than among the Hopi."[6] According to her account of the workings of the hierarchy on First Mesa, when the members meet in council each man declaims in the order of precedence. But the order of precedence is anything but fixed, for two variant lists of thirteen Walpi chiefs agree only in the first two and the final positions, whereas the ten officers in between are ranked haphazardly.[7] Certainly, where these circumstances prevail, the term hierarchy in the sense of a regularly graded progression of offices cannot be applied.[8]

The problem of whether or not Hopi chiefs can be ranked in a fixed order, however, is far less important than the question of their law-making functions. On First Mesa, it is reported, "The chiefs meet and make rules for Walpi and Sichumovi";[9] but a description of the proceedings reveals nothing of a legislative nature. Instead, the Town chief urges the people to live properly, the other chiefs repeat his words, and the War chief adds a threat of punishment for disobedience.

At Oraibi too there is no evidence of a law-making body, but non-legislative assemblies at which the chiefs talked about the Hopi way of life were held on various occasions. The most important of these assemblages, known as Monglavaiyi (Chiefs' Talk),[10] occurred annually at the conclusion of the Soyal, the major rite performed at Third Mesa. Participating in the Chiefs' Talk were the officers who had just brought the Soyal to a close. The Village chief (Kikmongwi) of Oraibi spoke first, and was followed in order by the head man of the Parrot clan; the Pikyas clan chief; the Tobacco chief (Pipmongwi), normally

[1] Colton, H. S., 1934, p. 21.

[2] Parsons, 1933, p. 53.

[3] This usage is found in the works of Fewkes and Voth.

[4] Compare Parsons, 1939, p. 132, footnote †. Fewkes was also aware that the term priest had been loosely used and calls "for more exactness in this particular." Fewkes and Stephen, 1892b, p. 190, footnote 3.

[5] In 1890 A. M. Stephen wrote, "The priests and chiefs are not privileged persons. . . . They engage in the same labors and lead precisely the same life as the other villagers. . . ." Donaldson, 1893, p. 17.

[6] Parsons, 1933, p. 77; and Parsons, 1936b, p. 145.

[7] Parsons, 1933, pp. 53, 54.

[8] It may be that Dr. Parsons employs the term hierarchy without the connotation of a fixed series of ranks, as the references she has indexed under "Hierarchy" in Parsons, 1936b, generally deal with gatherings of chiefs in which the question of precedence plays no part whatsoever.

[9] Parsons, 1933, p. 55.

[10] Compare Colton, H. S., 1934, p. 22.

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the head of the Rabbit clan; the Crier chief (Tca'akmongwi),[11] usually leader of the Greasewood clan; and the War chief (Kaletaka), who may be from the Badger or the Coyote clan. In every respect these men are the most important officials in the pueblo "and seem to take the position of assistant chiefs to the head chief,"[12] but except for the Village chief and the War chief, their administrative and political functions are limited primarily to their own clans.

The importance of the Soyal officers is verified in the minds of the natives by mythological sanctions. The Village chief has in his possession a sacred stone said to have been brought from the Underworld by Matcito, legendary founder of Oraibi. This stone is supposed to have been kept in the custody of the Bear clan from the beginning and is zealously shielded from profane observation because its markings are believed to convey Matcito's intentions regarding the control of Oraibi's lands. In a most unusual burst of confidence, Chief Tawaqwaptiwa once allowed me to examine this important relic.[13] It is a rectangular block of greyish-white, smooth-grained stone, about 16 inches long, 8 inches wide, and one and a half inches thick, splotched here and there with irregular red dots which the chief[14] interprets as points of land. On both sides there are lightly incised markings which are explained in the following way.

One surface is covered with miscellaneous symbols, including a row of eight little scratches, said to stand for the eight-day period during which the Soyal is observed; cloud and lightning emblems in a random arrangement; an unidentified Katcina figure; two or three sets of bear claws; an old age crook; a poorly executed serpent, said to represent the Little Colorado river; and eight circles, arranged in two parallel rows, which the chief explains as thunder (?) because the sound of a thunder clap is like that of a number of ob-

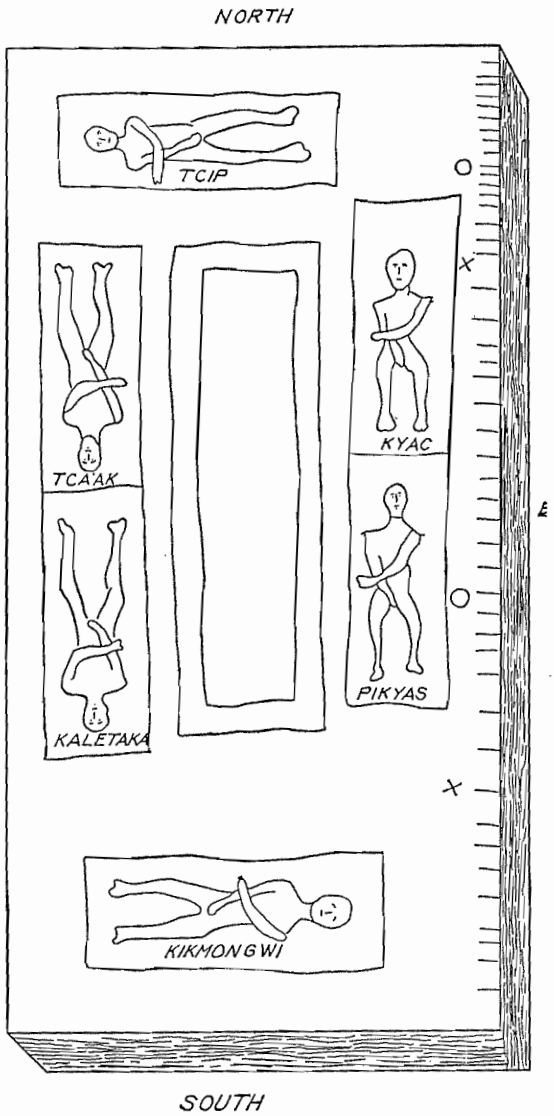

FIG. 4. ORAIBI'S SACRED STONE.

[11] Care must be exercised to differentiate the Village Crier chief from men who call out secular announcements. The real Tca'akmongwi cries out only on the most important occasions and addresses himself primarily to the Cloud people, although the villagers are free to listen if they choose.

[12] Voth, 1901, p. 102, footnote 6. The list of officers here published omits the Pikyas clan chief, but in another publication, Dorsey and Voth, 1901, p. 12, a Pikyas leader is included. Recently, the importance of this official has increased, because he serves as the Oraibi chief's "lieutenant" in charge of the growing colony at Moenkopi.

Parsons, *et al.*, 1922, p. 290, has a list of Oraibi chiefs which omits the Pikyas man but adds a Medicine chief from the Badger clan. I was unable to verify the additional chief's position, or to determine if he were a separate officer.

[13] It was exciting to think that perhaps I was enjoying the privilege of viewing the very stone which the Hopi refused to let Cushing see in 1883. During Cushing's troubled visit to Oraibi in that year, a Hopi speaker referred to "the stone which our ancients made that we might not forget their words." Parsons, *et al.*, 1922, p. 266. My description is tentative as I was never shown the stone again.

[14] When chief is used as a noun without any modifier in this chapter, it refers only to the Village chief.

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jects being struck in succession. Along the edge of one of the long sides of the relic there runs a series of little lines which were not interpreted; and along the other edge there is a succession of conventional cloud and rain symbols to indicate that in Matcito's lifetime there was always plenty of rain. The pictures on the other surface of the stone tell a connected story (see fig. 4). A double rectangle in the center is supposed to represent the Oraibi domain. About this are grouped six figures which depict the Soyal officers. Reading from the bottom in a counterclockwise circuit, they refer to the Village, Pikyas, Parrot, Tobacco, Crier, and War chiefs. Each figure stands with the left hand across the chest and the right extended downwards to cover the genitalia. This posture is said to indicate that the chiefs are claiming the land enclosed within the central rectangles. Along the edge representing the east, there is a line of small scratches, interspersed with occasional circles or crosses, which depicts the proper Hopi path that the chiefs are supposed to travel. The War chief brings up the rear to make sure that no one turns aside from the correct road.

At each Soyal celebration the sacred stone is brought from its repository, the officers examine it closely and then reaffirm their rights to hold office and their claims to the land. After this comes the Monglavaiyi (Chiefs' Talk), at which the Village chief's speech is echoed by the other leaders. Ordinarily, the event occurs early on the morning of the closing day of the Soyal, and the speech tells the populace of the prayers made during the recently-concluded rites and ends with a prayer for good crops and long lives.[15] Whether or not such meetings may rightly be called political may be a matter of opinion, but the intimate connection of pueblo leadership with land control is clearly demonstrated. It is from this viewpoint that we shall now approach the question of Hopi government.

In the matter of land ownership, as with every important aspect of their culture, the Hopi "explain" the existing state of affairs by referring to their mythology. A composite summary of several myths is needed for an understanding of the connection between the authority of the chiefs and their claims to the land.

For some time prior to their Emergence from the Underworld, people had been hearing footsteps above them, but when they reached the surface of the earth it was cold and dark, and nothing could be seen. In due time they noticed a distant light and sent a messenger who returned with the welcome news that he had discovered "a field in which corn, watermelons, beans, etc., were planted. All around this field a fire was burning . . . by which the ground was kept warm so that the plants could grow."[16] Nearby the messenger found a man whose handsome appearance contrasted strangely with the grotesque death's head mask that stood by his side. At once the messenger realized that "it was Skeleton (Masauwuu) whom they had heard walking about from the other world."[17] The deity proved kindly disposed, fed the courier and sent him to fetch all his companions. Here they built a large fire, warmed themselves, and "Skeleton gave them roasting ears, and watermelons, melons, squashes, etc., and they ate and refreshed themselves. Some of the plants were very small yet, others still larger, so that they always had food."[18]

In time the people left Masau'u and set out on the wanderings that were ultimately to bring them to their present settlements. For a while the Bear people settled at Chimopovy but "they all had heard that Skeleton was living where Oraibi now is, and so they all traveled on towards Oraibi."[19] The Bear clan leader, Matcito, asked Masau'u to give him some land and to be the chief of his people, but "Skeleton replied, 'No, I shall not be chief, You shall be chief here. . . . I shall give you a piece of land and then you live here.' "[20] Hereupon he stepped off a large tract of land which he allotted to Matcito. Soon other clans began to arrive, each seeking permission to dwell at Oraibi and each offering in exchange to perform a beneficial ceremony for Matcito. If the trial performance proved pleasing to the chief he would say, " 'Very well, you participate in our cult and help us with the ceremonies,' and then he would give them their fields according to the way they came. And that way their fields were all distributed."[21]

Thus do we find the myths "explaining" how present conditions arose, for at Oraibi the leader of the Bear clan is the Village chief and the theoretical owner of all the village lands, and all the other clans hold land only on condition of good behavior and the proper observance of ceremonies.[22] For himself the Bear leader was said

[15] See Colton, H. S., 1934, p. 22; and Parsons, 1933, p. 55.

[16] Voth, 1905b, p. 12.

[17] Voth, 1905b, p. 12.

[18] Voth, 1905b, p. 13. Other versions ascribe the origin of plants to various deities or leaders, but black corn and squash always belong to Masau'u.

[19] Voth, 1905b, p. 23. In other renditions of this story Matcito seeks out Oraibi only after quarreling with his brother at Chimopovy, Hargrave, 1932, p. 3.

In First Mesa legends the Bear chief overthrew Masau'u and thus won the land. Parsons, 1936b, p. 814.

[20] Voth, 1905b, p. 23.

[21] Voth, 1905b, p. 24.

[22] One of the present sources of contention between

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to have selected a large tract of land southwest of the village, traversed by the Oraibi wash, which was so shallow in those days that its flood waters were a great boon to the nearby fields. (See fig. 5, plot marked Bear.) The western limit of his holdings was marked with a boundary stone (*kalalni owa*) on which a Bear claw was carved. A similar stone, marked with the head of Masau'u, commemorated that deity's original claim to the entire domain,[23] and boundaries and shrines (*pahoki*) were erected at the south and northeast corners. So great a piece of land was reserved for the Village chief that he was able to allot some of it to the War chief (*Kaletaka*) who aided him in the performance of the Soyal ceremony, and to have enough left over to reward the other officers and men who participated in that rite.[24]

Just west of the chief's holdings is another vast plot given over to the Patki clan. When the Bear chief or his delegate impersonates the Eototo Katcina on great ceremonial occasions, the Patki head man plays the part of the Aholi, second in importance.[25] Together they make the rounds of the village on the morning of the Bean dance during Powamu, and Aholi opens the main cistern of the village. It is for this service, as well as for his part in the Soyal, his function as Sun Watcher,

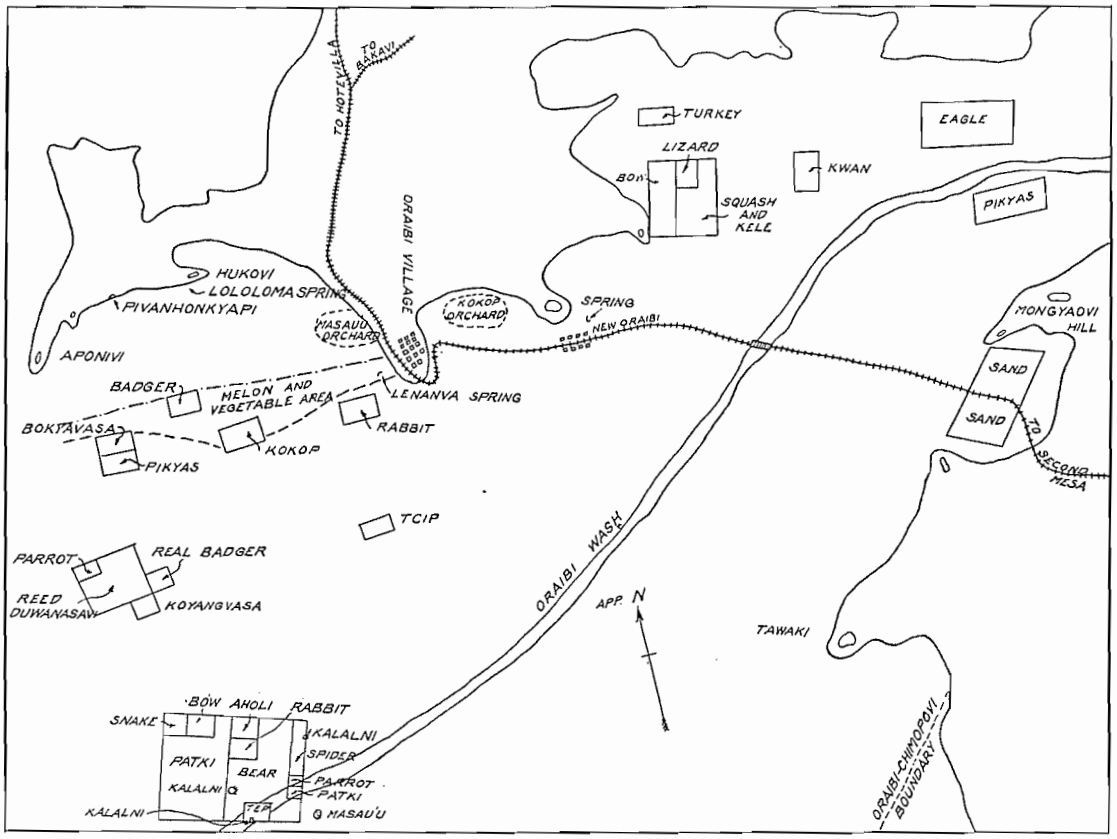

FIG. 5. ORAIBI LAND HOLDINGS.

Old and New Oraibi is that when the latter lapsed their ceremonies they did not give up their lands.

[23] Compare Parsons, 1936b, p. 390, footnote 1, p. 637.

[24] These special plots of ground are supposed to be held by Soyal officers only during their terms of active service. Disputes often arise when retiring officers refuse to cede their lands to their successors. Compare Parsons, 1939, p. 863, and consult "The Pikyas-Patki Conflict" in Part Three.

[25] See Voth, 1901, pp. 110–115.

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