THE SOCIAL DIVISIONS AND ECONOMIC LIFE OF THE WESTERN APACHE

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BY WAY of introduction it would be best to explain what peoples are included by the term Western Apache. The term is here used to designate all those Apache peoples who have lived within the present boundaries of the state of Arizona during historic times, with the exception of the Chiricahua, Warm Springs, and allied Apache, and a small band of Apaches known as the Apaches Mansos, who lived in the vicinity of Tucson. The various peoples thus classed together as the Western Apache are apparently enough like each other, and different from other Apache peoples in certain aspects of their culture, to give reason for placing them in a division by themselves.[1]

SOCIAL DIVISIONS

At the time of the first American occupation of their territory (middle of nineteenth century) the six thousand or so people comprising the Western Apache were divided into five distinct groups,[2] each having its own territory. These groups were: (1) White Mountain Apache, (2) Cibecue Apache, (3) San Carlos Apache, (4) Southern Tonto Apache, (5) Northern Tonto Apache.[3] The five groups felt themselves to be quite distinct from one another, and hostility between certain of them was not unknown. However, among people of the same group there was a fairly close feeling of relationship in custom and speech. It was this that held them together and not any political unity.

Each one of the five groups was in turn broken up into bands or semi-bands. These bands were not equally distinct nor as strongly formed in

[1] The material upon which this paper is based has been collected during the years 1930–1933 under the auspices of the University of Arizona, in a project which entails the study of the culture of the Western Apache now living on the San Carlos and White Mountain Indian Reservations, and at various settlements off the reservations in the state of Arizona, near Camp Verde, Payson, etc.

[2] The terms "tribe" or "tribal group" may possibly be more suitable than "group," but the latter is here used until some one term becomes established for designation of these Western Apache units.

[3] The reasons for the naming of these five groups in the above manner, as well as for naming the bands as they are on the map, is not here explained. The whole subject is fully discussed in a manuscript now completed on the social organization of the Western Apache, which will be published shortly. The three westernmost bands of the Northern Tonto Apache intermingled with Yavapai people who shared the region with them.

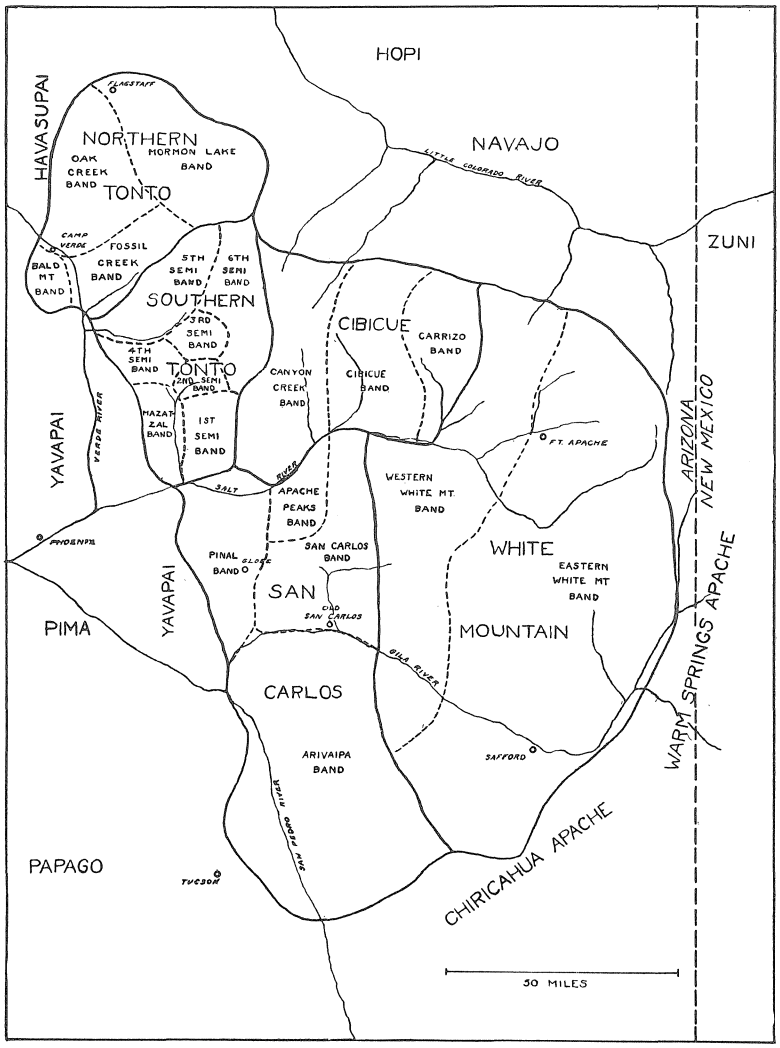

FIG. 1. The distribution of the Western Apache groups, bands, and semi-bands in east-central Arizona. (Erratum: For Cibicue read Cibecue)

all groups. The formations among the Southern Tonto cannot really be called bands in comparison with those of some of the other groups, and are thus termed semi-bands for convenience. Bands and semi-bands again each had their own territory and refrained from encroaching on that of their neighbors. Though the unity within a band or semi-band was naturally more intense than that within a whole group, still the people were not a political unit, and were mainly held together by common custom and clan and blood relationship.

The next unit below the band was the local group. Every band or semi-band was composed of several local groups, each having its own territory. The local group was the basic unit upon which the social organization and government of the Western Apache was built. Each local group had its own chief who led his people and directed it in matters of importance, such as war or raiding parties, food gathering expeditions, farming projects, and relations with other local groups or foreign tribes. Chiefs did not have supreme power, but instead led their people mainly by prestige and good example: attributes for which they were chosen as leaders.

Beside the chief there was another leader in the local group: the head woman or woman chief, as she was sometimes called. Her function was to counsel those about her in the ways of living and especially to organize wild-food gathering parties among the women.

In a local group there were from nine to perhaps thirty houses, and the majority of people in these generally belonged to the same clan, though some might be blood relatives of other clans, relatives by marriage, or even unrelated. This strong clan and blood relationship within the local groups was what really made them such closely knit units.

Within the local group were several family groups, say from three to six in number. These family groups were in turn made up of from three to eight households. The members of a family group were usually related within the limit of second maternal cousin, though a few relatives by marriage would be included also. Each was controlled by a head man, who directed in almost the same way as a chief, and it was from the various head men within a local group that the chief was chosen. The family group was in reality almost a miniature local group, and naturally acted even more in unison. Often it operated as a separate unit in pursuit of economic ends for short periods of time, but never permanently.

Blood relationship among these people was and is a very strong bond, involving mutual aid and responsibility. Obligations thus entailed were felt to be stronger on the maternal side than on the paternal because of

matrilocal residence and the clan system. Blood relatives were considered close within the limit of second or third cousin, but beyond this strict observance of blood relationship obligations depended more on close association between the relatives concerned.

The clan system of the Western Apache is not so easy to fit into the sequence formed by the already described social divisions. Whereas each of the groups, bands and semi-bands, local groups, and family groups belonged to one area only, the clans formed cross strata of relationships which ran through the several groups, bands, etc., joining all together. Many of the clans were represented in more than one group.

Each clan had a name, usually of the place-name type, designating its legendary place of origin or first settlement. Children were born into the clan of their mother. All members of one clan were considered blood relatives and called each other by kinship terms identical with those of consanguinity. Marriage between members of the same clan was not countenanced, though marriage into the father's clan was permissible if the blood relationship was not too close. Members of the same clan were expected to aid each other in time of need, and if it was necessary the whole clan might be called together to avenge a wrong done to one of its members. However, there was no clan government or law beyond the obligations governing the actions of clan relatives to one another.

There existed a varying interrelation among the clans of all groups, and one clan might be related to another clan or several other clans. Between members of related clans the same rules of exogamy and mutual obligation held as between members of the same clan, though to a slightly less degree.

Within historic times, at least, the Western Apache clan was not primarily a territorial unit like the local group, though among certain of the bands there was a tendency to localization. The real power of the clan lay in its far flung web of interrelational obligations between its members in all the Western Apache groups.

Residence was usually matrilocal though not necessarily so. Generally neither boys nor girls married till they had proved themselves fully able to perform the tasks of men and women. In marriage proceedings between two families, the man's family first made a present to the girl's parents, and after that there might be mutual feasting and present-giving. When these evidences of friendliness and esteem were concluded, the young couple set up housekeeping for themselves. From the time of betrothal and marriage the obligations among relatives by marriage were strong, and there was a definite code for the various classes of affinal relatives with which an individual was expected to comply.

In former times a man might have more than one wife (usually not more than two or three) if he could support them, but in doing this he was expected to marry women who were of the same clan as his first wife (usually her true sisters, or daughters of her mother's sister). The same rule applied to a widower, and a widow was under obligation to marry a clan relative of her deceased husband (usually his true brother, or mother's sister's son).

When a man and woman were married, each had his share of the family work and providing. What this really amounted to was that the men did all the dangerous and very arduous or strenuous tasks (war, hunting, heavy digging or lifting, handling unruly livestock, etc.), while the women did all those things which did not require a man's strength and endurance (cooking and camp work, tanning, harvesting, etc.). Thus, though the women had the commonplace tasks, their lot kept them more steadily at work than did that of the men.

Children did not take a serious part in the culture of their people till they were about six years old. From that time on they were taught by their parents or relatives, so that they gradually became familiar with the things which they would have to know in later life. When they had reached the age of twelve or so, they took an active part in the procuring and preparation of foods, and henceforth their serious activities were increased.

The foregoing is a superficial description of the Western Apache social pattern, and it must be realized that it was merely a pattern, not a stereotyped program that the people followed regardless of all circumstances. Also it applies only to the social organization of these people within historic times, and up to the period when the United States Government first seriously started to interfere with the original balance of their culture (1871–1873), when the centralization of the Western Apache on government reservations was accomplished.

After the life on the reservations commenced, the old distinction between the groups began to break down, due to the people being thrown more closely together. At the present time group distinction plays a minor part, though the existence of a sort of rivalry between the descendants of different groups is still quite evident. The same is true of the bands and semi-bands, though with them the distinctions have lapsed even more.

The local group is no longer the close knit unit that it once was. The chiefs are gone, and their power, in great part, is now in the hands of the white agent and his employes. However, the family group still preserves a great deal of its old form. A head man directs the family affairs, and these head men still exert great influence in their communities. In the past

years it has been mainly through them that the people have dealt with the agency.

The clan system also remains partially intact. Thus, though marriage between related clans is sometimes allowed, marriage between members of the same clan is not.

Marriage and family life is much the same now as formerly, except that the presents and feasting at the time of a wedding are not considered strictly necessary, a marriage license and legal marriage ceremony are required by law, and a man may not have more than one wife. Remarriage obligations are still generally in force, as well as those between relatives-in-law. However, children do not take the part in the economic life which they used to take, because they are in school during several months of the year.

At the present time the real economic unit is the family group; the groups, bands and semi-bands, and local groups having given way to the modern, more sedentary, small farming and ranching communities, which are centralized at the seven or eight main farming locations on the San Carlos and White Mountain Reservations, and at two or three localities off these reservations.

ECONOMIC LIFE

To understand the economic life of the Western Apache it is necessary to know something of their natural environment. The country which comprised their historical territory can be roughly divided into two areas. The first lies in the southern and southwestern part of the territory, and is in general lower. It is a country of great open desert valleys, separated from each other by abruptly rising mountain ranges. In the valleys grow creosote bush, mesquite, yucca, chollas, sahuaro, etc., grading into oaks, junipers, and piñons on the lower slopes of the mountains. On the tops of the mountains are pines, some conifers, etc. The climate is hot in summer, mild in winter.

The second area is a more uniform upland country, averaging from five to seven thousand feet in altitude, and covered with growths of oak, juniper, and piñon. It was in this type of country that the people formerly lived during the greater part of the year. The mountains are fewer and less rugged, but higher in altitude than those in the first area. On them are thick stands of pine, conifers, etc. The climate is pleasant in summer, but from November to March and sometimes April the weather is fairly cold, with snowfalls not infrequent.

The climate is generally arid in both lower and higher areas. However,

there are certain rainy seasons: in the last part of July and during August, and again during some of the winter months. The varying altitudes throughout both areas gave rise to differences in the character of the country and plant and animal life, thus affording a variety of foods.

The Western Apache had four sources from which to obtain food: wild animals and birds, wild plants, domesticated plants raised on the small farms, and livestock and agricultural products which could be taken in trade or in raids on neighboring peoples. The last source was the least important, as it was easier to obtain food at home. Its main value lay in the fact that horses, mules, burros, and cattle could be captured from the Mexican settlements in the south, and sheep and goats from the Navajo in the north to be butchered and used as food.

Of meat and plant foods, meat formed roughly about thirty-five to forty percent of the whole, plant foods about sixty to sixty-five percent. This percentage naturally fluctuated throughout the year according to the abundance of game and crops. Of edible game there used to be several kinds: bear, deer, antelope, some mountain sheep and elk as well as smaller game like rabbits, rats, squirrels, and certain birds. The larger quarry was hunted with the bow and arrow; the smaller was snared or shot with arrows, mostly by boys.

Men occupied much of their time in desultory hunting, but there were two principal seasons when hunting was given particular attention. These were late spring and fall. Late spring was a good time to hunt, coming as it did between planting and the first wild food crops of July, when the women would have time to care for hides and meat. Fall was even better, as meat and hides were prime, and a man could leave his family safely at the farms, there being nothing much to do at home. It was in the fall that the big hunting parties set out. They were not highly organized affairs, but composed only of a few men under the leadership of one of the party. Women did not usually accompany them, but instead the men butchered and skinned the carcasses, and packed the meat home to the women on horseback. This was possible because the hunting parties were only gone a few days and never ranged very far from home.

Of the sixty to sixty-five percent of plant food of the total food consumed during the year, about thirty-five to forty percent consisted of wild plant foods and the remaining twenty to twenty-five percent of domesticated plant foods. This proportion applied to those who had farms of average size. Among those who had no farms the domesticated plant foods used were only the few obtained by trade. Thus with the non-farmers the percentage of wild plant foods used was high, often the full sixty to

sixty-five percent. There were many wild food plants, and during the whole growing season (April to November) one or several plants were always available for food. Even in winter there was the mescal which could be roasted and eaten. Certain plants were staples: mescal, sahuaro fruit, acorns, mesquite beans, fruit of Spanish bayonet, sunflower seeds, fruit of prickly pear, piñon nuts, and juniper berries. Of these nine, mescal and acorns were the most important.

In the spring parties set out for the lower country to gather and prepare mescal. In July the sahuaro fruit was ripe there and also certain of the prickly pears. Late July and August was the season for gathering acorns, summer that for mesquite beans. Later, in early September the Spanish bayonet fruit was ripe. When October and November came, the last crops, piñon nuts and juniper berries, were harvested.

As the food was gathered it was either eaten or stored for winter. Storage was usually in caves in sealed olla-shaped baskets, or in the dwellings of the families themselves.

Since most of the principal plant foods grew at different altitudes, it was necessary to keep moving from place to place to harvest them. These journeys lasted from ten days to a month, and as many women and girls were needed to help, the whole family usually went along. However, the men spent the time hunting, as it was not their task to help gather and prepare any of the wild plants except mescal.

Among the Western Apache every family did not have a farm. The farming opportunities of the area varied and even some families who could have did not wish to farm. In the northwestern part of the area many of the people did not farm because of their exposed position to enemy tribes and the resulting danger of living on farming sites. The varying degrees in the amount of agricultural activity between the several groups stands out best when a comparison is made. Among both bands of the White Mountain group and all three bands of the Cibecue group most of the local groups farmed. Among the four bands of the San Carlos group, and the second, third, fifth, and sixth semi-bands of the Southern Tonto group the majority of local groups had farms. In the Mazatzal band and the first and fourth semi-bands of the Southern Tonto group only about half the local groups farmed. Of two bands of the Northern Tonto group the majority of local groups did not farm, and in the other two there was no farming at all.

Farming, as can be seen, was not necessarily carried on by all families in one group, band or semi-band, or clan, but it is true that if some of the families in a local group farmed then the majority of families of that local

group did, usually all at the same site. This does not mean that the farm was a local group institution. It pertained essentially to the family.

Among these people agriculture was not a complex affair. Fields were small: about half an acre or so, often less. On them were raised corn, some beans, squash, and later wheat, but corn was the main crop and formed a staple food. Clearing and tilling fields was done with the digging stick, and in seeding, the planting stick was used. Farming sites located in country high enough to get sufficient rainfall were not irrigated, but those in low country were and the neighbors helped each other in the construction of dams and ditches. Preparing the fields and planting took about a month. All the members of the family group were expected to help if needed. When the corn was about three feet tall, most of the people moved away for the summer to harvest the various wild plant foods. In September they returned to harvest and store the crops, this again taking about one month's time. Much of the corn was stored in large ground caches for future use.

After harvest part of the population remained at the farms, and part moved down to lower country to escape cold weather and to be within close raiding distance of enemy settlements. Though away from the farms for much of the year, yet these were the places that the people considered their real homes.

The old way of life of the Western Apache shows that these people had a mixture of three modes of living. They hunted large game, but did not depend on meat to such a degree that they ever exhausted or drove the game from their territory and had to go long distances for it. They farmed to some extent, but by no means enough so that they could depend on crops for sustenance throughout the year and so remain in one place. They made use of wild plant foods and small game, but this was not sufficient for them to forego the hunting of big game, though it did allow a minority of them to do without agriculture. Thus their existence kept them moving about within a limited territory in which they were able to practice all three ways of living and follow out their seasonal schedule.

One point of importance was the method of travel. In spite of accessibility to the Mexican ranches of Sonora, the horse never became indispensable in travel, and travel by foot still remained general. The horse was used very often as a pack animal. When families had to move on foot they packed their belongings on their backs in burden baskets. The Western Apache, it must be understood, were never a stock-raising people.

Though much of the population had semi-permanent homes at their farms, they moved too much from one place to another to develop

any of the arts that a more sedentary people might have. Their dome-shaped, brush-covered dwellings were easily reconstructed and set up in a new place when necessary. On account of frequent travel their belongings had to be conveniently transportable and thus, though they made some pottery, the art was never carried far. They did no textile weaving in cotton or wool, but made their clothing and blankets from skins. However, there was one real art which they did develop and which fitted perfectly to their mode of life. This was basketry; an art carried to perfection among them.

The old type of subsistence has not been given up altogether: even today a good many of the more common of the wild plant foods are used, mescal and acorns still being staple foods. However, due to lack of game, beef is now the principal meat food. In spite of the many changes of recent years the most popular type of dwelling is still the old style house.

Unfortunately the reliable material already published on the Western Apache is not abundant. What little there is deals mainly with separated aspects of their culture so that it is impossible to get a clear perspective of the people as a whole. Therefore it is interesting to look forward to the time when a thorough understanding of the Western Apache and their position in the Southwest can be made possible not only in relation to the other Apache peoples and the Navajo, but to the whole area.

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