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## Navajo Origins

Charles Amsden

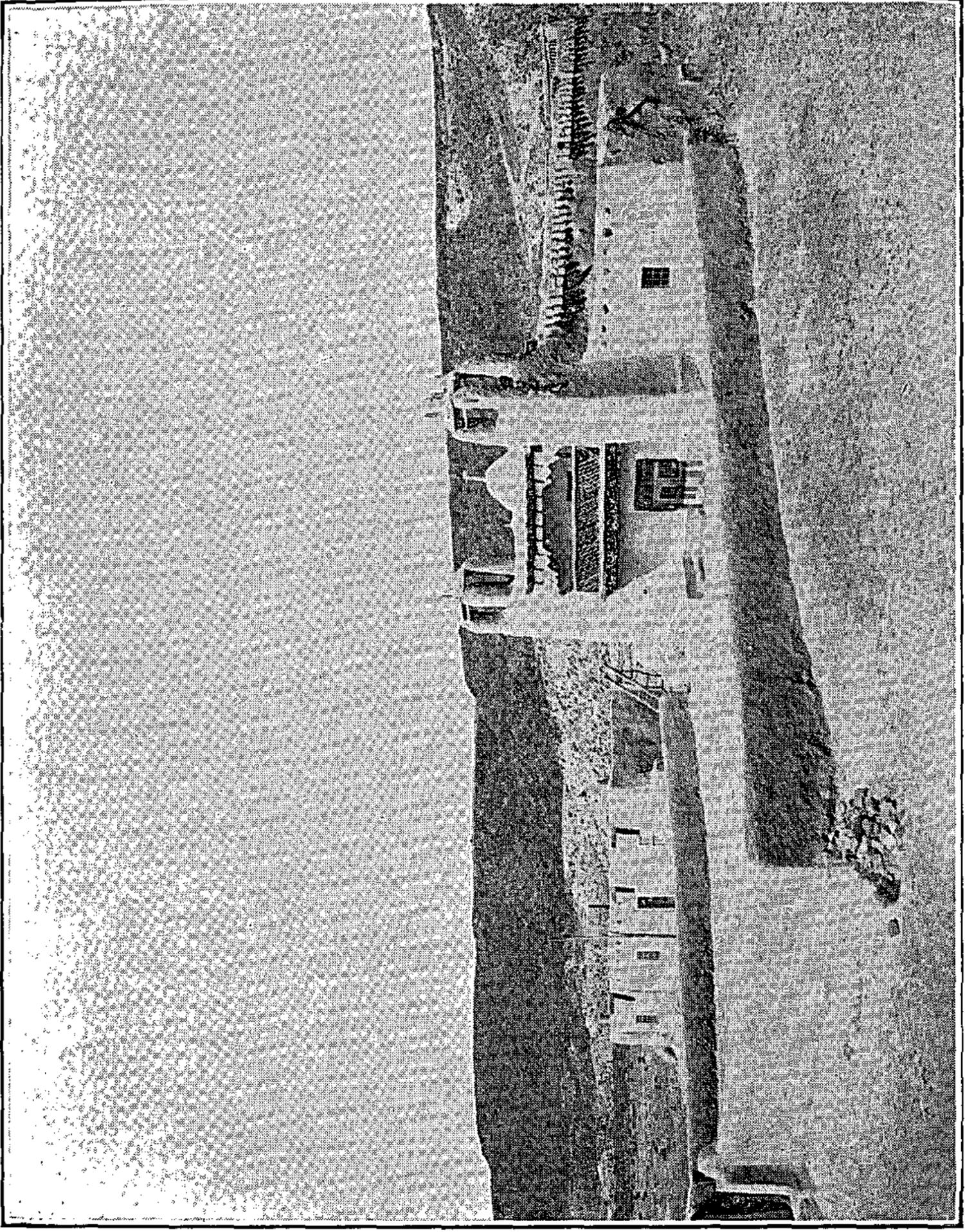
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OLD MISSION CHURCH AT SAN FELIPE PUEBLO

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## NAVAHO ORIGINS

By CHARLES AMSDEN

*Executive Secretary, Southwest Museum*

ONE cannot conceive of the Southwest without its semi-nomadic peoples, the Apache and the Navaho; they are as closely associated with the region today as are the Pueblos themselves. So at first thought it is surprising to find that the early Spanish explorers—Fray Marcos de Niza, Coronado and his several chroniclers, Fray Agustín Rodríguez, and Antonio Espejo—make no mention of either tribe. The various accounts of the Coronado explorations do indeed mention Querechos—"the people of the buffalo country"—a number of times; and it has been conjectured that the easternmost Apache, the Jicarillas in particular, were loosely classified under this head, which became apparently a general covering term for nomads as distinct from the sedentary Pueblos. (See Winship, pp. 527, 587, 580, 588.) Luxán mentions Querechos at war with the pueblo of Ácoma, and Querechos again in the "province of Moqui"<sup>1</sup> (pp. 86, 97); but a single tribe would scarcely cover

1. Were these the Navaho? It is not likely, for the Luxán narrative indicates that Espejo's party, like those of Tovar and Oñate, met no Indians between Cibola (the Zuñi villages) and Tusayán (the Hopi pueblos), their nearest approach to the Navaho country of today.

It is true that Bandelier thought the "Apaches-Navajos were then certainly neighbors of the Zuñis, as they are today" (Documentary History of the Zuñi Tribe, p. 45); but he gives no reason, and admits it is strange they were not mentioned by any of the chroniclers of Coronado's march. That none of the subsequent explorers mentions them is stranger still—unless we conclude that the Navaho were still unknown in Cibola and Tusayán.

Bancroft (p. 20) tells of Navaho advice to the Moqui, in 1692, "not to trust the Spaniards"—indicating that Navaho and Hopi were then in contact, late in the 17th century, it will be noted.

the vast territory extending from the Texas plains to Tusayán, hence it is almost obvious that "Querecho" became somewhat of a byword for "wanderer" as opposed to settled farmer, much as the term Apache was employed in later times, or as "Chichimecos" was used in Mexico to designate any warlike people.

It by no means follows that the Navaho came under this designation, however, or indeed that they were ever encountered by the early explorers of the Southwest. On the contrary, there is every reason to believe that none of the expeditions of the 16th century had any contact with them, or learned of their existence in any specific way. Coronado entered the Pueblo country at Cibola, and marched eastward to Tiguex and the Rio Grande Pueblo territory via Ácoma. Subsequent expeditions reversed the route (coming first to Tiguex by following up the Rio Grande from El Paso) without changing its general lines; and it became almost traditional to make the "grand tour" of the Southwest on a circuit roughly resembling a thin, bent figure 8 laid on its side: the left-hand loop representing the Zuñi and Hopi country, the right-hand loop the Rio Grande Pueblo region, with Ácoma as the central point where the loops meet. If anybody pushed northward at any point along the circuit—toward the San Juan River and the present Colorado-New Mexico boundary—the fact has escaped notice. All accounts indicate clearly that the northernmost lines of pueblos marked the limit of Spanish exploration in the 16th century, and it seems proper to conclude that the Navaho were not encountered because they lived somewhere north of this line, where all but a few of them live today.

### *The Traditional Homeland*

Navaho tradition defines the homeland of the tribe quite as clearly, in general outline, as lines on a map, and Washington Matthews has recorded it all with his usual painstaking care in "The Navaho Origin Legend" (in *Navaho Legends*, 1897).

It is characteristic of a pantheistic folk to associate the outstanding physical features of its territory with the pantheon: Grecian mythology offers a familiar instance. In like manner is the Navaho country marked by points of major and minor importance in the legendry of the tribe. Each of the four cardinal points has its sacred mountain, the cosmic limit in that direction as seen through the mist of tradition. North is marked by a mountain (not surely identified) in the San Juan range of southwestern Colorado; South by Mount San Mateo, later called Mount Taylor, in the region of Ácoma; East by a peak in the Jemez Mountains, thought by Matthews to be Pelado; West by San Francisco Mountain, just north of Flagstaff, Arizona. Those are the major points, the boundaries of the Navaho world as created by the tribal gods. Minor points are Hosta Butte, northeast of Gallup, New Mexico; Shiprock, in the northwest corner of the state; and El Cabezón (Spanish for the Great Head) between Jemez and Mount Taylor. El Cabezón is the head of a god, and the great beds of lava lying south and west of Mount Taylor are his blood (Matthews pp. 221, 234).

Tradition is not fact, to be sure, but the identification of definite physical features with the origin myths of a people is sound evidence of passably long residence amid those features; hence there is no good reason to doubt that the Navaho occupied the region outlined above at a time remote enough to justify its association, plausibly, with the origins of the tribe.

### *Tribal Beginnings*

Of the character of those origins we have some interesting evidence through the patient researches of Mr. F. W. Hodge, who in a paper on "The Early Navajo and Apache" correlated Matthews' legendry of Navaho origins with his own broad knowledge of Spanish historical sources and drew a number of conclusions that seem eminently sound in

the main. These will now be summarized and tested against other evidence on the same point.

The intermediate social unit among the Navaho is the clan. As with the Pueblos, the Navaho trace most of their clans back to a tribal accretion of alien groups or individuals, the founders of the clan. Hodge, taking Matthews' legendary accounts of clan beginnings, shows how successive groups from surrounding peoples joined the original (apparently small) tribal unit, swelling its numbers to the point of making the Navaho an ever-growing menace to the Pueblos round about. We have only the evidence of the tradition for the addition of Utes, of Apaches, of an unidentified Shoshonean group, and of various Pueblo units. But parts of the legend of Navaho origins have their roots in historic time and are subject to factual analysis.

Thus a Mexican clan, originating in a raid on a Spanish colony near Socorro, New Mexico, could not possibly have come into existence before the 17th century, for want of European settlement in that region. Similarly, Hodge shows that a clan group from the salt lake south of Zuñi is identifiable with the abandonment, not long before Coronado came to Cíbola, of Marata, the Zuñi community on that spot, whose walls were found standing by Coronado's party. And the abandonment of Marata is almost of historic record, for Fray Marcos de Niza in 1539 talked with an old Zuñian—living in exile with a tribe farther south—who remembered Marata and thought it still inhabited!

Working backward from these known historic points, with the "age of an old man" as his unit of time measure, in accordance with the traditional Navaho method of reckoning Hodge places the very beginnings of the Navaho tribe at about 1485 A. D. Matthews, working on legendary testimony without the aid of historical evidence, had carried the tribe back to "between 500 and 700 years ago, or seven ages of old men" (Hodge, p. 223); that is, back to 1200 to

1400 A. D. Matthews' is a calculation based on the tribe's own version of its beginnings; Hodge's is a revision of the same body of evidence in the light of historic factors that touch the story at certain points. Both lead very definitely to the conclusion that the Navaho tribe is of mixed ethnic character and of rapid and recent formation: a *parvenu* people like their ultimate conquerors, the Americans; and both calculations rest, in the last analysis, on the shifting sands of tradition.

There is, however, much more evidence pointing toward the conclusions just reviewed. The cliff dwellings and abandoned pueblos of the Navaho country figure in tradition as ruins, formerly the abode of gods (Ethnologic Dictionary, p. 30); and we know positively, through archaeological research checked and verified by the tree ring chronology of Dr. A. E. Douglass,<sup>2</sup> that several of the most conspicuous ruins of the heart of the Navaho country—Pueblo Bonito and others of Chaco Cañon in particular—were inhabited as late as 1100 A. D., while others farther west, in Cañon du Chelly and del Muerto, date well into the 13th century. Inferentially, then, the Navaho came upon these ruins after the dates given.

The mixed physical character of the Navaho, as suggested by the legend of origins, is verified by the anthropological studies of Dr. Ales Hrdlicka (1900), who finds a great diversity of physical traits: so great, indeed, that everyone who troubles to observe the Navaho with more than cursory interest soon sees that the tribal physical types range from the squat solidity of the Pueblos to the tall, sinewy build characteristic of the tribes of the Great Plains.

Navaho culture reveals this same mixed character. On the ceremonial side it appears to have borrowed heavily from the Pueblos; its basketry is strongly Shoshonean; its

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pottery, utterly un-Southwestern, and the earth-lodge type of dwelling or hogán, both greatly resemble those of the Mandan of the Plains; while weaving, the outstanding tribal craft, is Puebloan in its very essence. Language, it is true, fails to support the conclusions of Matthews and Hodge: Dr. Edward Sapir informs me that the Navaho speech is Athapascan of surprising purity, considering the obvious vicissitudes of tribal development. But we might remember in this connection that the Nordics and Latins who figure so largely in the American nation have changed our speech but little from that of England today; and that the language of a dominant people, history reveals, comes little scathed through tremendous changes in the social and ethnic structure. All in all, there is little evidence of tribal antiquity and homogeneity in the Navaho, whether we view them in the light of their own traditions or in that of extraneous circumstance.

#### *Location in Early Historic Times*

If the Navaho tribe grew rapidly from small beginnings, one would expect to find its territorial strength in commensurate increase; and this in fact seems to be the case. There is good reason to believe the tribe centered in early historic times in the northeastern portion of its later broad domain, with the San Juan River marking its northwesterly limit and the foothills of the high mountains lying along the present Colorado-New Mexico boundary as a barrier to the northeast. Southward lay the chain of Pueblo villages of the Rio Grande valley, westward a vast empty area which the ambitious tribe was rapidly to make its own.

The very name Navaho has an association with this northeastern territory in the most generally accepted explanation of its origin.<sup>3</sup> Dr. Edgar L. Hewett (1906) points out that "in the second valley south of the great pueblo and

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3. Derivation from Spanish words (for the Spanish first used the name in writing) has been suggested: from *nava*, a plain, or *navajo*, a clasp knife. But although the words fit the case nicely, the historical connection is hard to establish.

cliff village of Puyé in the Pajarito Park, New Mexico, is a small pueblo ruin known to the Tewa Indians as Navahú, this being, as they claim, the original name of the village. The ruined villages of this plateau are all Tewa of the pre-Spanish period. This particular pueblo was well situated for agriculture, there being a considerable acreage of tillable land near by, far more than this small population would have utilized . . . The Tewa Indians assert that the name 'Navahu' refers to *the large area of cultivated lands.*" This suggests an identity with Navajó which Fray Alonso de Benavides, in his *Memorial* on New Mexico published in 1630, applied to that branch of the Apache nation (Apaches de Navajó) then living to the west of the Rio Grande, beyond the very section above mentioned. Speaking of these people Benavides says: "But these (Apaches) of Navajó are very great farmers for that (is what) Navajó signifies —'great planted fields'." (Quoted in Benavides, pp. 266-267).

The word "Navajo" as a geographical term must have been well established, for Gregg, as late as 1844, speaks of the "ruins of Pueblo Bonito in the direction of Navajo." (Vol. I, p. 285).

#### *The Navajo in History*

The first known historical reference to the Navaho<sup>4</sup> places them in the region whence their name is believed to derive. It is found in the "Relaciones" of Father Gerónimo Zárate-Salmerón, a history of Spanish activities in California and New Mexico between 1538 and 1626. The pertinent portion follows, as translated by Lummis in the *Land of Sunshine* magazine for February, 1900 (Vol. 12, No. 3, p. 183): "When I said to these Hemez<sup>5</sup> that if there were

4. The Apache, cousins of the Navaho through their common Athapascan linguistic affiliation, precede them in history by only a few years: Oñate mentions them in 1599 in a letter to the Viceroy of New Spain, locating them in "this eastern country" along with the people of Pecos (Cocoyes). See Bolton pp. 212, 218, for the translated passage.

5. People of Jemez Pueblo, who had told Father Gerónimo of a nation living to the northwestward, who spoke the ancient Aztec tongue. This nation may have been the Utes, distant linguistic kinsmen of the Aztec.

guides I would gladly go to discover' this nation . . . they replied that . . . [one had only to] go out by way of the river Zama (Chama) and that past the nation of the Apache Indians of Nabahú (our Navajos) there is a very great river (this was the upper course of the Colorado or Buena Esperanza) . . . and that the river suffices for a guide. And that all was plain with good grasses and fields between the north and the northwest; that it was fertile land, good and level and that there are many nations—the province of Quazulas—the qusutas (Utas) and further inland another nation settled.”

The geographic location of the “Apache Indians of Nabahú” is clear beyond question: it was between the Chama and the “very great river” that “suffices for a guide,” which must be the San Juan, largest eastern tributary of the mighty Colorado.<sup>6</sup> North of this river lived the Utes—surely the “qusutas” of the old chronicler—with whom the Navaho have fought and traded for centuries. The intervening country is as described, even today: “all plain with good grasses and fields between the north and the northwest.”

Here, then, lived the Navaho when the light of history first falls upon them. For further confirmation we have the statement of Benavides (pp. 43-53) dating from 1630, that he founded a monastery at Santa Clara pueblo for the conversion of the Navaho; and the note by Hodge in the same, page 243, that the Navaho caused the abandonment of Jemez Pueblo about 1622, by their frequent raids. Luxán tells of trouble between Ácoma and the Querechos in 1582 (p. 87), and it is possible that these Querechos were the Navaho, since Ácoma is not far from the sacred mountain of the south, Mount Taylor. Zuñi and Hopi apparently

6. Despite Lummis, as just quoted, because the Colorado is very distant, with rugged mountain ranges intervening. The only “very great river . . . past the nation of the Apache Indians of Nabahú” is the San Juan.

7. “Ute River” was an old Navaho name for the San Juan, Mr. Earl Morris has told me.

were not molested until a later time,<sup>8</sup> although from early in the 18th century until the subjugation of the fractious tribe by American troops in the middle of the 19th, the Navaho were among their most dreaded enemies.

### *The Navaho Become Weavers*

We have seen the Navaho definitely brought into the historic scene by Zárate-Salmerón and Benavides early in the 17th century, but neither of these chroniclers indicates in any way that weaving was a tribal craft. In the case of Zárate-Salmerón little importance need be attached to this negative evidence, for he is concerned mainly with Spanish affairs.

Benavides, however, is in another situation; his *Memorial* is devoted to a description of the customs and the industries of the natives of New Mexico, and this subject is treated with sufficient thoroughness to assure mention of any activity important enough to serve as a descriptive detail. Weaving in particular is emphasized and lauded by Benavides when he speaks of the Pueblos, for the good friar is writing, in fact, a campaign document designed to impress the high Spanish authorities, that they may be moved to support more generously the colonization of New Mexico and the conversion of its native peoples. He puts the Indians in their best light always, not forgetting to stress the economic aspects of his subject, with a canny appeal to avarice as well as to Christian zeal. The natural resources of the province are not overlooked, nor is the fact that every Pueblo household pays an annual tribute to the Spanish authorities of one *vara* (33 inches) of cotton cloth. If the genteel and economically useful craft of weaving had been found among the Navaho, this shrewd propagandist would not have overlooked it, we may be sure; for he displays a particular interest in that tribe, devoting several pages of

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8. An old Hopi man told Mr. F. W. Hodge that the Ute, not the Navaho, were the traditional enemies of the Hopi, clearly implying that the Navaho came later. Spier was told that the Havasupai first saw Navaho among them about 1860 (p. 362ff).

his *Memorial* to an account of his efforts to convert it to Christianity and to a description of its customs. Benavides mentions Navaho agriculture, describes the Navaho hogán, indicates that the tribe lives by hunting and is skillful at leather work (they made him a present of dressed deer-skins). But of weaving there is not a word; so we may conclude that the craft was either non-existent or of slight importance among the Navaho in 1629.

Unfortunately for this study of Navaho weaving, the remainder of the 17th century is almost barren of available historical records. The Pueblo Rebellion of 1680 came as the culmination of a long period of friction between native and Spaniard, and it undid nearly all that had been accomplished toward settlement and conversion. Every colonist was swept from the land during the twelve troubled years that followed, and most of the Spanish records within the province were destroyed. But we know that the Navaho took no stand in the conflict between native and invader. They used the war as a lever for their own ends, preying on the harassed Spanish settlements and the hard-pressed revolting pueblo communities with complete impartiality, and their flocks and horse-herds grew rapidly in consequence.<sup>9</sup>

The tribe grew as well, during these troubled times. Many pueblos sent their non-combatants into the Navaho country for refuge when capture by the dethroned conquerors seemed the only alternative,<sup>10</sup> and numbers of these refugees were merged into the tribe. If the Navaho were not already weavers, certainly they had a golden opportunity of becoming such during the Pueblo Rebellion, with experts in the craft living among them, and their flocks growing rapidly. In the light of this situation (and bearing in mind that Spanish colonists with their European sheep had been established in New Mexico only one cen-

9. Bancroft gives a good account of Navaho activities during this period. See, in particular pp. 201, 222, 223.

10. Kidder describes ruins in Gobernador Cañon in northwestern New Mexico, which show a jumble of Navaho and Pueblo house structures, and pottery characteristic of both peoples; concluding that they date from this period when Pueblo and Navaho lived for a brief time together.

ture) it is highly probable that the Pueblo Rebellion established weaving among the Navaho, and that we may consider it a tribal craft from then onward.<sup>11</sup> Some beginnings may have been made earlier, to be sure, but it would be rash to assume that a tribe of semi-nomadic hunters could—in the short space of a century—make the fundamental readjustments implicit in the pastoral mode of life and the practice of weaving. For the sheep, like the horse, was predestined to become a dominant factor in the tribal life, making basic and far-reaching alterations in its pattern. This helpless little animal, supplying as it did the meat and the clothing of the tribe, moved into a position of economic dominion over its masters which altered the destinies of the Navaho nation for all time to come. An embarrassing hostage to fortune it finally proved to be, for when the Navaho were at last conquered and induced to live peaceably on a reservation as wards of the American government, it was the slaughter of their flocks that brought them to their knees in submission. Civilization conquered the Navaho, not with the gun or the gospel, but all unwittingly, by means of the lowly sheep!

#### *Historical Records of Weaving*

When research historians shall have laid before us more fully the mass of historical data on provincial New Mexico, now buried in the archives of Spain and Mexico, we shall certainly find in it some reference to Navaho weaving in the early 18th century.<sup>12</sup> But for the present the his-

11. There is a story—vaguely legendary—that the Navaho compacted with the Hopi to teach them weaving. It does not ring true to the anthropologist, who knows that crafts and customs are generally diffused without such conscious and deliberate fostering. The practical American mind sees nothing shocking in the abrupt abandonment of practices hallowed by tradition and custom, in favor of new ones; but the Indian mind would certainly recoil from such a step.

12. For example: Bancroft, p. 247, has a promising reference to an official investigation of missionary affairs in New Mexico in 1745, at which "a dozen witnesses formally told the governor all they knew about the Navahos, which was not much." His information came apparently from "a manuscript in the Pínart collection." It must be said, too, that Hodge in the Ayer translation of Benevides' Memorial, summarizes various unsuccessful missionary efforts among the Navaho during the 18th century, but without mention of weaving (note 45, p. 268.)

tory of this craft begins with a sentence found in a letter from Teodoro de Croix, the Commander-General of the Interior Provinces of New Spain to his superior, José de Gálvez, written February 23, 1780, and recently translated by Prof. A. B. Thomas in *Forgotten Frontiers*, p. 144, as follows:

"The Navajos, who although of Apache kinship have a fixed home, sow, raise herds, and weave their blankets and clothes of wool, might follow the good example of the Moqui . . ." Croix speaks from experience, not hearsay, for he was then in New Mexico, engaged in the task of adjusting (by armed diplomacy) the rebellious tendencies of the various native tribes to the colonial policy of Spain on this northern frontier of its vast empire of the New World.

A task of heroic proportions it was proving to be, as Thomas makes clear. The thin line of Spanish settlements dotting the valleys of the Rio Grande and its tributaries from El Paso to Taos was completely ringed about with marauding and restive tribes. The Comanche menaced the entire eastern face of this fragile wall of *presidios*, missions, and homesteads. The Apache swung in a long curve across its southern and westerly exposures, from the Pecos to the Gila, a constant menace to the northern settlements in the Pueblo territory and to the Sonora frontier (Spain's second line of frontier defense) as well. The Hopi province on the northwest corner of Spanish territory had made good its independence and was a constant source of irritation if not of open trouble. Northward—foes alike of the Hopi and the Spanish—lay the Ute; and between them and the Spanish villages of the Chama valley, as we complete our circuit, were the Navaho, growing constantly bolder and stronger in their challenge to Spanish protection of the Pueblo villages whose spoliation was becoming a tribal custom. And of all these enemies, the Navaho were to prove the boldest and the hardest to control in the century to follow. Unlike the Apache, who lay between the Spanish lines of frontier posts, they could never be hemmed in: at no time

did Spanish or Mexican military strength feel equal to the task of surrounding them and pressing upon them from all sides at once.<sup>13</sup>

From the same work of Thomas upon the vicissitudes of Spanish rule in 18th century New Mexico we catch another interesting glimpse of the Navaho in 1785. The reference is to an expedition of military-diplomatic character by Spanish frontier officials to break up an alliance between Navaho and Gila (western) Apache:

"The interpreter on his part informed the governor that the Navaho nation has 700 families more or less with 4 or 5 persons to each one in its five divisions of San Matheo, Zebolleta or Cañon, Chusca, Hozo, Chelli with its thousand men of arms; that their possessions consist of 500 tame horses; 600 mares with their corresponding stallions and young; about 700 black ewes, 40 cows also with their bulls and calves, all looked after with the greatest care and diligence for their increase. . . ." (Report by Pedro Garrido y Durán, Chihuahua, Dec. 21, 1786, in Thomas, p. 350.)

This brief account is packed with information, as a short analysis will reveal. Seven hundred families of four or five persons in each make a tribal total of some three thousand souls—a goodly number, but perhaps not quite enough to justify the "thousand men of arms."

The tribe is well equipped with livestock, it will be noted, but horses are still more numerous than sheep at this early period, while cattle attain an insignificant total; but the Navaho never were cattlemen—horses and sheep were ever their favorites. Cattle consume the pasturage needed for horses, but sheep can graze fat where those animals would starve.

The "five divisions" mentioned reveal a geographic extension much greater than that suggested by the 17th century references previously quoted: the tribe has progressed

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13. A good contemporary discussion of the Indian menace to 18th century New Mexico is found in "Governor Mendinueta's Proposals for the Defense of New Mexico" (translated by Prof. Thomas) in *NEW MEXICO HISTORICAL REVIEW*, VI: 21-39.

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rapidly in its westward expansion, for Chusca (Chusca Mountains, evidently) and Chelli (Cañon du Chelly), are almost in Hopi territory. Zebolleta (near Laguna pueblo) and San Matheo (Mt. Taylor) indicate its southern extent. Taking the San Juan river as the approximate northern limit and the Jemez region as the eastern, we have the tribal territory quite accurately defined as of the year 1785, and it shows little change today.

The next historical reference to Navaho weaving is quoted by Lansing B. Bloom from Twitchell's *Spanish Archives of New Mexico*, I, document number 1176, as follows, the quotation being an excerpt from a letter from Governor Chacón to the military commander in Chihuahua, written in 1795: (in Bloom, 1927, p. 233).

"The Navajoes, whom you suspect may have aided the Apaches in their incursions, have since the death of their general Antonio been irreconcilable enemies, to such a degree that with us they have observed an invariable and sincere peace. These Gentiles are not in a state of coveting herds (of sheep), as their own are innumerable. They have increased their horse herds considerably; they sow much and on good fields; they work their wool with more delicacy and taste than the Spaniards. Men as well as women go decently clothed; and their Captains are rarely seen without silver jewelry; they are more adept in speaking Castilian than any other Gentile nation; so that they really seem "town" Indians much more than those who have been reduced . . ."

Advancing now to the year 1799, Navaho weaving is set forth as not merely a tribal craft, but an industry which is becoming an economic factor in the province. Don José Cortez, "an officer of the Spanish royal engineers, when stationed in that region," wrote then that "the Navajos have manufactures of serge, blankets, and other coarse cloths, which more than suffice for the consumption of their own people; and they go to the province of New Mexico with the surplus, and there exchange their goods for such others as they have not, or for the implements they need."<sup>14</sup>

14. From "Reports of Explorations and Surveys, etc." Vol. III, p. 120. Mr. Frederick H. Douglas brought this reference to my notice.

Soon thereafter another reference appears, for which I am indebted to Mr. F. W. Hodge. It is found in Pedro Bautista Pino's *Exposición del Nuevo México*, printed in 1812. Pino, who went to Spain in 1811 as a delegate from New Mexico to the Spanish parliament, writes (p. 41) of the Navaho that "their woolen fabrics are the most valuable (*apreciables*) in our province, and Sonora and Chihuahua (as well)."

Of these four earliest known references to Navaho weaving, each is more definite and emphatic than its predecessor. Croix in 1780 merely mentions the Navaho as weavers. Chacón in 1795 concedes them supremacy over the Spaniards in "delicacy and taste" in weaving. Cortez in 1799 makes it clear that the production of blankets more than suffices for tribal needs. Pino in 1812 categorically places Navaho weaving at the head of the industry in three large provinces; significantly ahead even of the Pueblo craft, which mothered that of the Navaho.

On abundant evidence, then, the Navaho had gained a recognized supremacy in native Southwestern weaving in wool as early as the opening of the 19th century; and down to the present day that supremacy has never been relinquished. The Hopi craftsmen may have shown more conscience and conservatism at certain times, but the Navaho women have proved the more versatile, imaginative, and progressive, and the Navaho blanket has always been the favored child of that odd marriage of the native American loom with the fleece of European sheep.

\* \* \*

Thus do tradition, science, and history combine to sketch the nebulous outline of the early Navaho. Vague and meager the details, yet we have a large and significantly harmonious body of evidence bearing upon the romantic career of that handful of Athapascan people who seemingly filtered through the mountain valleys of the southern Rockies sometime between 1000 and 1500 A. D., to become in an astonishingly short time the scourge of a far-flung

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Thus do tradition, science, and history combine to sketch the nebulous outline of the early Navaho. Vague and meager the details, yet we have a large and significantly harmonious body of evidence bearing upon the romantic career of that handful of Athapascan people who seemingly filtered through the mountain valleys of the southern Rockies sometime between 1000 and 1500 A. D., to become in an astonishingly short time the scourge of a far-flung

line of stout Pueblo and Spanish communities, lords of a territory comparable to New England, and the largest tribe of Indians in North America. Warlike, this astonishing people defied the armed forces of the United States within the memory of living men; peaceful, it sent the fame of its distinctive blanket to the ends of the earth. Behind these meager factual details lies an epic human drama. May it—some day—be fittingly sung!

Southwest Museum  
Los Angeles, California.

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