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Commentary I: Celebration

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Figure 2. HOPI TRICENTENNIAL YEAR & ERA
logo design, Artist Hopid
Coochsiwukioma (Delbridge Honanie), 1980
Collection: the Hopi Cultural Center Museum, Second Mesa, Arizona (Courtesy of Artist Hopid, Second Mesa, Arizona; and Robert Suddarth, photographer, Lubbock, Texas)
Celebration

Edna Glenn

In March, 1981, Texas Tech University hosted a conference, “The Hopi Year: A Tricentennial Symposium,” and at that conference discussions centered upon a complex topic, the meaning of HOPI.¹ The conference featured cultural interchanges among experts of both Hopi and non-Hopi origins, and this volume contains the substantive and visual presentations of this unusual gathering. The content is interdisciplinary and presented in the context of both historic and contemporary viewpoints. Also important is attention given to land-use patterns and to environmental systems of human and physical growth and survival as related to the arid regions of the Hopi Reservation. Perhaps most pertinent is the recognized fact that Hopis have existed on their same mesa-lands for over one thousand years. Hopis are the earth; Hopis live “in” the land, not “on” the land.

The make-up of the contributors is diverse: three artists from Second Mesa, spokesmen from the “Artist Hopid” group; a Hopi-Tewa potter from First Mesa; the Chief Judge of the Hopi Tribal Court, from both the Hopi Reservation and the state of California, and the Hopi Tribal Chairman (all of the above are of Hopi origins); an anthropologist from the University of Arizona; an archaeologist-artist-scientist from the Museum of Man, San Diego; and an historian from Arizona State University, (all non-Indian). In essence, the authors and artists present encompassed those knowledgeable in Hopi agriculture, anthropology, art, history, law, politics, philosophy, psychology, religion and sociology.

More specifically, the presentations covered a variety of subjects, such as: the Hopi people, legends and beliefs; migrations, ancient and contemporary practices of ritual and ceremony; the environment, farming and land usage, architecture, and village planning; spiritual strengths and associational relationships to nature forms; arts and crafts movements, historical and contemporary significances of symbol and meaning in the arts; tribal politics, land disputes, and contemporary tribal issues and possible solutions; an historical survey of the Hopi over a period of some four centuries; the Tricentennial celebrations, and prophecies for the future. During the conference and in this volume, rich visual references to Hopi original baskets, pottery, jewelry, paintings, kachina dolls, lithographs, and photographs were and are presented. Indeed, this book provides a composite portrait of the Hopi Nation.

Hopis celebrated “The Year of the Hopi,” in the year 1980, an historical milestone for the Hopi people. In some ways 1980 was the most significant year in a period of three centuries. The year 1680 marked the great Pueblo Revolt ² which brought Hopi independence from Spanish domination and a time for rebuilding souls and sacred tribal practices. The 1980 Tricentennial also was a time of revitalization and extended to a re-evaluation of the “Hopi way of life” in terms both of continuing traditional strengths, historically oriented, and invading alien practices, identifiably twentieth century. A primary intent of the Tricentennial celebration was to share with the people of the Hopi Nation and with the nations of the world the resultant assessments. A clear statement of this intent is brought to
the opening chapter of this volume by the Hopi Tribal Council Chairman. “The people, our Hopi people,” according to Abbott Sekaquaptewa, “have something to contribute to today’s society. And that contribution is our knowledge and the good things of our way, the Hopi way, to this world. That is the significance of the Hopi Tricentennial year and era.”

One of the Hopi spokesmen, HONVANTEWA (Terrance Talaswaima), Cultural Curator at the Hopi Cultural Center Museum on Second Mesa, defines the “Hopi Way.” He explains the meaning of spiritual “essence” as identified with Hopi concepts. This mission, rooted in the disciplines of theology and philosophy, is accomplished through discussions of sacred ceremonies, soul strengths, clan beliefs, and spiritual stability as found among his people. But the revelations of these truths primarily evolve from his symbolic and pictorial analysis of Hopi art forms: traditional motifs, colors, and compositions derived from ancient kiva frescoes but executed in the context of modern art concepts.

In regard to “essence” and the arts, Talaswaima comments, “We (Hopi) live the artistic, aesthetic way.” Further understanding of the “Hopi Way” is established by his references to history, involvements with contemporary politics, government restrictions on certain Hopi customs, and the occasions of ceremonial dances. Knowledge of the succession of festivals and ceremonial calendar time - all are essential to a knowing of “essence.”

The essays and arts contained herein are perplexing to a certain extent, but entirely congruous to the notion that Hopi existence is an ongoing, totally integrated process. There is a unique overlapping and intertwining of content perceived as the authors, one after another, deal with the specific topics at hand. In all instances they felt a need to address the individualized Hopi subject matter within an exceptionally broad framework of related knowledge. Further, that framework repeats components even though they are discussed in different contexts. A certain continuity of thought, fact and feeling, and a harmony of relationships then results from this narrative. It is as if a common thread of understanding passed over, under, and around the complexities of information, tying together ideas in some instances, which produced dominant patterns, and isolating others. There seems to be no fragmentation of content, no interruption to the flow of meaning. Perhaps in a way, this situational development is reminiscent of the “Hopi Way,” so often referred to; it is a unity of “being,” but in reality it is many-faceted.

LOMAWYWESA (Michael Kabotie), an artist-spokesman from the Hopi Cultural Center and Museum, writes of “the land,” bringing a verbal tapestry to a new content pattern, a new interpretation to the Hopi Way. Kabotie’s presentation explains the relationship of his people to “the land” through farming practices and related ceremonial customs. Particularly, he speaks of raising corn, the most vital product to Hopis. Corn pertains both to daily food and daily ritual—“Our Mother, the Blue Short Corn.” Before he begins the descriptions of dry-land farming methods, other significant information is clearly set forth: the circumstances of the physical and spiritual environment, the Hopi feeling for the land, historical reasons for land-ownership, clan kinships, symbolic corn-planting and harvesting festivals. In Kabotie’s words:

The Hopi live in a harsh environment, with not much vegetation. Our people chose to come to this land and to settle themselves among these mesas because during the migrations it was said that we should seek this promised land: a place where there is not
too much green, where it is not too comfortable; a land that we would find barren, and where, to survive, we would be able to develop our strengths and our souls.7

From this rather philosophical orientation to “the land,” which includes the near-total realm of Hopi traditions, the discussion moves to the specifics of dry-land farming:8 problems with wind, and soil erosion, retaining moisture in the sandy sub-surface soil, and step-by-step methods of planting and harvesting corn. Terrace-gardening and irrigation through natural springs are also described. It becomes evident that an account of Hopi farming, to be understood completely, must provide a coherent explanation of all factors of daily living in a Hopi village, encompassing the two most sacred human rites, birth and death, and all of the days in between.

But Kabotie is not the only author to underscore the significance of the land, farming, and corn ceremonies. The mutualities of ideas and commonalities of thought patterns are apparent in other presentations. The Hopi Tribal Chairman mentions rituals and corn: “At birth, the child is given a mother ear of corn, representing the earth mother. This is kept close to the baby, wrapped in his covers, and in this way, environmental sensitivity begins from the moment of birth.”9 And again, “New growth in crops and plant life are celebrated in early spring at the Powamu ceremony, and the abundance of crops and the fullness of life are celebrated in song and dance in late summer.”10 Anthropologist Alice Schlegel also refers to the Powamu ceremony but the context changes. Her interpretation focuses on the gift-giving of kachina dolls11 as symbolic blessings of fertility at the time of Powamu (Bean Dance)12 and Niman (Home Dance) ceremonies. She believes that “Both of these ceremonies have agricultural connotations: the ‘Bean Dance’ anticipates the planting season, with the forced sprouting of beans a foretaste of the good crops to come; while the ‘Home Dance’ anticipates the harvest as the kachina dancers bring melons and other foods into the plaza to distribute among the onlookers.”13

Barton Wright, in his account of the origins of the kachina cult and kachina ceremonial occasions, finds it necessary to comment on “the land” of the Hopi. He provides some descriptions of the mesa-environment and the San Francisco Peaks, concluding that, “The Hopi may very well have chosen an excellent location in which to settle; at least, it has proven worthy enough, for they have remained on the same mesas for one thousand years. It was a location, however, that demanded much from its inhabitants. It is an arid land, one that constantly challenges the survivability of those who live on it.”14

PIESTEWA (Robert Ames), Chief Judge of the Hopi Tribal Court, primarily examines legal problems recently experienced by Hopis. But he, too, recounts some of the complexities of land disputes and land ownership such as those that grow out of Hopi traditional matrilineal society. “The land, the home, the children, and most of the possessions belong to the woman. Fields from the lands of the woman’s family are assigned for each of her children.”15 In regard to the soil and farming, Ames describes the gale-winds “strong enough to blow away the sandy soil. When the field moves, the planter must follow it.” Continuing his comments, “The Hopi have been described as the world’s greatest dryland farmers.”16 According to an 1894 document that involves Hopis and U.S. government officials, Hopis observed that, “The American is our elder brother and, in everything, he can teach us, except in the method of growing corn in these waterless sandy valleys, and in that we are sure we can teach him.”17

A final reference to the land is made by historian Peter Iverson. Choosing continuity as a major theme of “The Enduring Hopi,” he provides a view into the Hopi past and examines ideas about values
and beliefs prevalent today among the Hopi. Reasons for Hopi endurance are explored. Iverson concludes in regard to the land, “The ethnic boundary for the Hopi represents a clear and unshakable understanding that begins with the land. The maintenance of a land base has been central to the continuity of Hopi life.”

The purpose of the above paragraphs was to examine situational examples that illustrate the previously-cited observation: that there evolves from the subsequent words in this volume a significant, unplanned, unforeseen, harmonious intertwining of all Hopi subject matter presented. Seven distinct Hopi topics are considered at some length by seven learned persons. In turn, a singular topic is given emphatic attention, but the quantity of relational content-elements, so carefully selected and structured, becomes mutually exchanged. The variation of emphasis and structure is both subtle and spontaneous, at times intense; a pattern emerges, revealing a rhythmic flow of experience and meaning.

Could such a developmental situation find a parallel event, although somewhat imaginative, to a Hopi ceremonial day in the spring when the matachines dance in the village plazas? The kachinas bring their own special blessings as well as the blessings of rain. The ceremonial day consists of a great variety of continuous activities, some quite serious in mood and intent, others are spontaneous, colorful, even humorous. There is a structure to events, and the drum beats establish rhythm. At intervals, the clowns appear, amusing the audience and bringing a relief from the intensity of more serious costumed dancers and performers. Everywhere there is energy and life, whether below ground in the kivas, at plaza level, or on house-tops covered with onlookers. Such a ceremonial day finds completeness in all of its myriad goings-on and meanings.

Notes


7. Ibid.


10. Ibid.


12. Powamu is one of the most important Hopi celebrations. The sixteen-day ceremony readies children for initiation into the kachina cult and prepares the Hopi world for the planting and growth of another season. Beans are planted in the kiva which are kept heated, forcing the beans to sprout and grow rapidly—thus the English name “Bean Dance.” For a more detailed description, see Titiev, Hopi of Old Oraibi, pp. 71, 91, 189, 201–2, 213, 217–221, 224–5, 313–321; and Heinrich R. Voth, The Oraibi Powamu Ceremony, Field Museum of Natural History, Anthropological Series no. 61 (Chicago, 1901).

13. Niman or Home Dance is the last kachina event of the year. It signals the ripening of the first corn crop and the return of the kachinas to their home in the underworld. For a more detailed description, see Barton Wright, Kachinas: A Hopi Artist’s Documentary (Flagstaff, Arizona: Northland Press, 1973); Titiev, Hopi of Old Oraibi, pp. 4–6, 116, 135, 143, 340–1; and Elsie Clews Parsons, Pueblo Indian Religion, 2 vols. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1939).


16. Ibid.

17. Ibid. A copy can be found at the Hopi Cultural Center and Museum, Second Mesa. The original, “Letter from Representatives of the Hopi Villages to The Washington Chief, March 1894,” is in the National Archives, Papers of the Navajo Agency, Letters Received, #14830.


Figure 3 (following pages). KUWAN HEHEYA KACHINA LINE DANCE
Joseph Mora, photograph, 1904-1906 (Courtesy of John R. Wilson, Tulsa, Oklahoma)