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Chapter 2 Hopi Mesas and Migrations: Land and People

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Hopi Cultural Center and Museum, Second Mesa

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Figure 10. THE LAND OF THE HOPI
Keith Owens, graphic artist and mapmaker, 1982, Lubbock, Texas
Hopi Mesas and Migrations: Land and People

Lomawywesa (Michael Kabotie)

“Here among the sandstone mesas you will find the Hopis. ‘Among them we settled as rain. . . .’”

Survival and revival; the varied landscapes, buildings and environment; agricultural practices, arts and crafts; community institutions, cultural programs, clan beliefs and rituals—these all have meaning to our Hopi people and Hopi land.

The Hopi Reservation is situated in northeastern Arizona, about seventy-five or one hundred miles from the San Francisco Peaks, one of our sacred mountains. We call it Nuvatukwiovi. An examination of the geographical area reveals that to the far eastern edge of the Hopi Reservation is Keam’s Canyon, the region in which the Federal Government offices are located. Westward from Keam’s Canyon are the three Hopi mesas with seven major villages. Identified with First Mesa are Walpi, Sichomovi, and Hano; Second Mesa villages are Mishongnovi, Shipaulovi, and Shungopavi; Oraibi, Kyakotsmovi (New Oraibi), Hotevilla and Bacabi are located on Third Mesa. The Hopi community of Moencopi marks the westernmost boundary of the Reservation.

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. Many of the mountains of the area are volcanic cones, and they are very special to our spiritual beliefs and ceremonies. It is among these buttes where our shrines are, and it is to these shrines that the Hopi make yearly pilgrimages to collect their eagles and to deliver their prayer feathers; or to collect herbs and other materials used in our ceremonies. So, this is the land where we chose to live. Here among the sandstone mesas you will find the Hopi. “Among them we settled as rain,” a Hopi song says. Here we would have to survive with our own personal strength and our soul strength.

The approach to First Mesa is primarily flat sandstone. Atop First Mesa are three Hopi villages. With very careful observation one can see or cannot see the villages. Traditional buildings are made of native materials which blend very well with the surroundings. They are invisible to the naked eye. But today, many of the new buildings are constructed of cinder blocks and are brightly painted. Unlike the natural environment these buildings are easily distinguished from the sandstone mesas. Walpi is the ancient village located at the extreme end of First Mesa; Sichomovi is the “middle” village; Hano, the northernmost of the three. Present-day inhabitants of Hano are descended from Tewa-speaking people, our “Rio Grande cousins” who migrated to the Hopi after 1680, the year of the great Pueblo Rebellion. Many migratory Pueblo groups settled on Hopi land at that time. Today, we have several ruins on First Mesa which remind us that in 1740 some of these groups chose to leave our land and to return to the Rio Grande area. Others, such as the Tewa, or southern Tewa people, refused to go back.
had actively supported the 1680 rebellion; they were front warriors in Santa Fe, closest to the conflict. They feared heavy reprisals which would be brought against them. Hano village, then, was settled by Tewa people from the Rio Grande.

Villages of Second Mesa, such as Shungapovi, show the changes which take place in Hopi environment as the communities grow. Traditionally, a Hopi village is centered with a plaza or plazas where the people dance. Within the plaza area there are the sacred kivas, the religious chambers where much of the Hopi spiritual activity takes place. As an example, the village of Mishongnovi has four kivas within the plaza sector. In this traditional type of Hopi city-planning, clusters of homes made of native materials border the plaza and kiva areas. As the villages grow, the community borders extend outward. Many newer homes in these outer regions have access to running water, sewer systems, and electricity. At Shungopavi a white water tower is clearly seen at the top of the mesa.

During the time of our migrations and when we were building our first Hopi communities, we settled on the mesas as Cloud People. One group migrating from the south was designated as the Water People, my people. We were blessed as Cloud Children by the great Water Serpent, our Father. And so, like clouds, we settled on the high mesas, and as Cloud People we designed our buildings after the cumulus clouds. Our homes are multi-storied structures, made of native sandstone and plastered with mud. Our multi-storied Hopi architecture is a reflection of the high-climbing cumulus clouds.
Figure 12. WALPI VILLAGE, FIRST MESA
Owen Seumptewa, photograph, 1981 (Courtesy of the photographer, Second Mesa, Arizona)
The village plaza at Walpi has a tower in the center which some Hopi say represents the Water Serpent, our Father. Because this one community was founded by Water Clan people, each year in the plaza, people of the Water Clan re-enact the sacred serpent dances.3

Walpi (First Mesa) is situated at the top of steep cliffs some five hundred feet high. The village is not easily seen since the buildings of sandstone blend so well with the cliffs. In the patches of gardens below the cliffs, dry farming is practiced. To control land erosion, windbreaks made of surrounding brush are arranged in lines across the fields. These catch the sand movements and prevent the top soil from flying away. At a distance, corn hills appear as tiny dots in the fields lined with wind breaks. Hopi corn is planted very deep; about twelve kernels are placed in a hole some twelve inches deep. As the corn comes up, little tin cans are set over the young plants to provide them protection. Most of the kernels will grow: some kernels will be taken by the worms and some will be lost through the wind and weather. At a certain time in the growing season Hopi farmers go down the cliffs to their corn fields and select the strongest stems. These are the corn plants which will grow and mature.

Hopi are basically corn people. We believe in agriculture because our greatest symbol is the corn, the Corn Mother. In our truths and in our history it was taught us that at our time of emergence into this world, various kinds of foods were issued to the various peoples: the Hopi was given the corn, or we chose the corn. And instead of picking the long corn, the Hopi decided to pick up the shortest of the corn. Since that time we have been identified with that very short corn: each of us is very short just like our Mother, the Blue Short Corn.

Hopi communities farther west, such as Hotevilla on Third Mesa, and Moencopi on the extreme border of the Reservation, practice farming by irrigation, not dry-land farming. Hotevilla, one of the younger Hopi communities, was developed after 1906, the time of the great split at Old Oraibi.5 On the lands below Hotevilla there are peach orchards, and above the orchards are terrace gardens, small individual family plots watered by natural springs. Because of the natural water sources in the center of the fields, farmers are able to use irrigation methods.

Old Oraibi is also on Third Mesa. It is one of the oldest continuously inhabited communities in North America. It dates back to about 900 A.D. Until the time of the great split in 1906, Oraibi was one of the largest Hopi communities. People who left the Oraibi area at the time of the split formed the newer villages of Kyakotsmovi (New Oraibi), Bacabi, Hotevilla, and Moencopi. But the ancient Hopi community of Old Oraibi is still inhabited.

West and south of the Hopi mesas is Nuvatukwiowi which we call “Snow Cap Peaks.” This is where the sacred kachinas reside. When the Catholics came to our land they wanted to convert us to their ways. They distorted our kachinas. They told us, “It is not the kachinas who bring you rain from the sacred Nuvatukwiowi; it is a saint named San Francisco who comes and brings you rain.” So they named the peaks “San Francisco.” Now it is called the “San Francisco Peaks” instead of our sacred Nuvatukwiowi. This represents a kind of ideological challenge to us, making us rebuild our tribal concepts from 1680.

Hopi people have always been very fine artists. In 1950 we developed the Hopi Arts and Crafts Cooperative Guild which is one of the most successful Indian arts and crafts co-ops in the country, along with the Cherokee Co-op in Oklahoma. The Hopi Co-op supports some four hundred artists and craftsmen: basketmakers, carvers, painters, textile weavers, and silversmiths. Basketry and pottery are the oldest of the art forms among our people. At the village of Shungopavi on Second Mesa, where bas-
Ketry is so old, there is a special basket dance. Most of the young women of that village sing and dance in this ritual using the baskets they have made. It is a sacred initiation ceremony, and the basket songs are said to be blessings. How a young woman decorates a basket becomes her blessing, her contribution to the world.

Hopi are known as fine silversmiths today. Until the turn of the century, we did not know much about working with silver. In 1940, Hopi jewelers developed a special kind of silver technique which we call “Hopi Overlay.” Other craftsmen are skilled at processes of textile weaving and kachina carving. Our people are not only visual artists, but composers of songs. They love to ritualize everything: they love to dance and chant. So, the composer of Hopi songs shares his blessings and inner feelings with all living things.

The Hopi Cultural Center and Museum was recently organized on Second Mesa and it serves our people as an important cultural place. Several murals depicting our heritage have been painted there. These were inspired by a study of murals found in religious chambers at the ancient Hopi community of Awatovi, excavated in 1932. The contemporary art movement began by the Artist Hopi was a result of that study. Our recently completed murals reflect the ancient Hopi way of painting: flat, twodimensional forms using earth colors. School children visit the Hopi Museum and the Hopi Arts and Crafts Guild. They study our art traditions; they learn about Hopi values and the Hopi way of life. They are taught to appreciate those values.

Other modern institutions are operating in our communities right now. The Hopi Tribal Council is a large organization which is working with new ideas and gaining power. Not all villages nor all people recognize the Tribal Council, but all Hopi have to be involved with it. There is a need to know whether you agree or disagree with the Council, whether you are a friend or enemy to Council policies and actions. Community centers are now being built and programs developed in all Hopi villages; these centers are a political arm of the Tribal Council. Traditionally, the people would gather in kivas to listen to the elders and to make tribal judgments. But now we have our community centers where policies are being determined.

Many new social and educational programs are being developed. Community meetings now are arranged so that families in the Hopi villages can meet together, talk together. Also, there are educational conferences where information is exchanged with scholars who come to visit us and who wish to share knowledge with us. Other events focus on athletics. Hopi are known to be great long distance runners. The Tewanima Relays are now an annual event. Tewanima was a Hopi athlete who represented the United States in the 1912 Olympiad in Stockholm, along with James Thorpe. Young Hopi runners participate each year in this running marathon, and after the races they put on their traditional costumes and dance. Other participants in this celebration are the young women, in costumes, and the clowns.

Recently, the Hopi Cultural Center Museum in conjunction with the Hopi Tribal Council recognized the Hopi Tricentennial Year which also this Symposium acknowledges. This was a great celebration, the theme was ‘Revival.’ The Artist Hopi designed a logo for the Tricentennial. The emblem [see Figure 2] is a four-part design utilizing symbols which tell us about the Great Pueblo Rebellion of 1680. One section shows the messengers coming to us from Taos, bringing news of the Rebellion. Another section shows four crosses. Three crosses represent the three Hopi Catholic missions which
were destroyed in the revolt against Spain: the church of St. Bernardo at Awatovi, San Bartolomé at Shungopavi, and San Francisco at Oraibi. The fourth cross stands for the revival of the San Bernardo Mission at Awatovi and its final destruction in 1700. The fourth section of the logo depicts a kiva, a symbol of Hopi religion that is still being practiced.

For the tricentennial celebration, we re-enacted the marathon run from Taos, New Mexico, to our Hopi land, a distance of some four hundred miles. On August 10, 1980, the Hopi marathon runners brought to us from Taos, the message of the rebellion, and also three sacred objects: a corn from the Rio Grande pueblos, a pouch commemorating the Tricentennial, and a paho, a religious prayer feather. We then conducted a small private ceremony for the Hopi runners and for the three sacred objects which were brought to us.

“Revival” was the theme of the Hopi Tricentennial, and basically, that is what the celebration was. It was a time of cleansing, of getting rid of alien concepts, of purifying ourselves. It was a revival.
Notes

1. For a discussion of the three Hopi mesas, see Henry C. James, Pages from Hopi History (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974), pp. 9–16.
3. For a discussion of the Water Clan and other Hopi clans, see James, Hopi History, pp. 17–32.
6. Basket dances are also performed at First Mesa and Third Mesa. For additional information on Hopi basketry, see Frederic H. Douglas’s Southwestern Twined, Wicker and Plaited Basketry (Denver: Denver Art Museum, 1940); Frederic H. Douglas and Jean Jeancon, Hopi Indian Basketry (Denver: Denver Art Museum, 1930); Arizona Highways (Special Indian Basketry Issue), July 1975; and Clara Lee Tanner, Southwest Indian Craft Arts (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1968).
12. The Hopi Tribal Council was established in 1936 as a result of the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. The act was an attempt by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, John Collier, and others to preserve Indian culture and encourage tribal organization. However, the Tribal Council was not accepted by all Hopi. Many traditional Hopi view the Tribal Council as a tool of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and refuse to work with it. The Council continues to be the subject of controversy. For additional information about the Hopi Tribal Council, see William H. Kelly, ed., Indian Affairs and the Indian Reorganization Act: The Twenty Year Record (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1954); Kenneth R. Philp, John Collier and the American Indian (Ann Arbor: Michigan State Press, 1980); James, Hopi History, pp. 201–222; and Peter Matthiessen, “Journeys to Hopi National Sacrifice Area,” Rocky Mountain Magazine, July–August 1979, pp. 49–64.
14. In 1692 Governor and Captain General Don Diego de Vargas reconquered New Mexico. In November 1692, he visited the Hopi villages where he set up crosses in Awatovi, Walpi, Mishongnovi, and Shungopavi. No Spanish came to live among the Hopis and they were largely ignored until 1700 when two priests came to the Hopi. They were received only in Awatovi where they spent several days baptizing many of the inhabitants. After the priests left the Hopis, the inhabitants of Oraibi, Mishongnovi, Walpi and Shungopavi, angered by Awatovi’s reacceptance of Catholicism, attacked the village, killed all the men, captured the women and children and destroyed the village. There is evidence that ill feelings between Oraibi and Awatovi contributed to the destruction of Awatovi. See also Jesse Walter Fewkes, “Awatobi, an Archaeological Verification of a Tusayan Legend,” American Anthropologist (o. s.), 6 (1893); and Christy G. Turner II and Nancy T. Morris, “A Massacre at Hopi,” American Antiquity 35 (No. 3, 1970): 320–331.