

Yaqui

ETHNONYMS: Cahita, Yoeme, Yoreme

Orientation

Identification. The Yaqui, an indigenous people of southeast Sonora, Mexico, belong to a larger ethnic group known as the "Cahita." The great majority of the Yaqui nowadays live in the same region, but other Yaqui groups have settled in Arizona owing to the great Yaqui migration at the beginning of the twentieth century. Ethnographic literature has referred to all these people as "Yaqui" since 1645, when Andrés Pérez de Rivas wrote that people said, "Can't you see I'm a Yaqui?" He goes on to explain that this is what they used to say because the term meant "he who speaks in a loud voice" (Pérez de Ribas 1944, 65).

All Yaqui call themselves "Yoreme" (person or human); they also apply this term to Mayo Indians. When European missionaries heard of the similarities between the Yaqui language and that of the Mayo, they decided upon the native Cahita term to refer to both the language and its speakers.

Location. The original Yaqui group resided in a long coastal valley strip opposite the Sea of Cortés. The Jesuits, however, concentrated the population within eight villages from south to north along the Río Yaqui (27° to 31° N and 10.7° to 11° W). Their original territory has diminished considerably, and as of 1937 it has been restricted by presidential decree to an extension of 485,235 hectares, over which irrigation district no. 18 spreads. This semiarid zone consists of sandy clay and humic ground, with temperatures that vary from 0° C to 47° C; it includes a mountainous area, a coastal area, and an irrigated valley.

Demography. In the 1530s a population of 30,000 Indians was registered, a figure that decreased to 12,000 by 1830. After less than sixty years—1830 to 1887, which corresponds to the period of the Yaqui wars—not more than 4,000 Yaqui remained in the valley. In 1905 there were 18,000 inhabitants. Because of the massive deportation and revolutionary wars, however, only 8,500 were left by 1930. According to the 1990 Mexican census, the num-

ber of Yaqui inhabitants of the state of Sonora has stabilized at about 10,000.

Linguistic Affiliation. The Yaqui belong to the Cahita Subgroup, which is a Taracahita Group from the Sonoran Branch of the Uto-Aztecan Family. The Cahita Language Group now consists of Mayo and Yaqui, which are mutually intelligible.

History and Cultural Relations

With respect to the pre-Hispanic period, a hypothesis of late Yaqui arrival in the river valleys is generally supported by the limited archaeological record as well as by colonial chroniclers. Approaches by the Spanish have been recorded since 1532. The first confrontations were with the ill-fated expedition of Diego Martínez de Hurdaide in 1607.

Toward 1610, the Yaqui accepted two Jesuit missionaries: friars Andrés Pérez de Rivas and Tomás Basilio. The Yaqui revolted against the missionary regime, however, and in 1741 a treaty was signed by which they acquired the rights to keep their own customs. Government would only be administered by members of their own group, and they would have total possession of their land as well as the right to retain their weapons. In 1767 the expulsion of the Jesuits brought the end of the relative peace the Yaqui had so far enjoyed and placed the communities under Franciscan governance. As a result, the Yaqui lost more territory to the colonists. By 1825, the Yaqui rebellion had begun. It would later mark the course of the relationship between the Yaqui and the subsequent regimes of the Mexican Republic. This period is often referred to as the "Wars of the Yaqui." It resulted in a drastic population loss and political imbalance, conditions that permitted the oligarchy, to continue colonizing the entire valley.

The genocidal offensive was intensified during Porfirio Díaz's rule, and thousands of Yaqui were expelled to Yucatán and Quintana Roo to be sold as slaves. Hundreds looked for refuge in Arizona, in the United States, where they have lived ever since in the towns of Pascua, Guadalupe, and Barrio Libre. The Yaqui participation in the revolutionary conflict was based on the promise by General Alvaro Obregón to return their land. The promise was not

fulfilled, and a new revolt started. It lasted until the end of 1929, when President Emilio Portes Gil signed a peace agreement with the Yaqui that forced them to live under supervision by the army until 1936.

Through the agreements reached with President Lázaro Cárdenas, 485,235 hectares of land were ratified and acknowledged as exclusive Yaqui territory. Armed confrontations came to an end, and a period of reintegration began, during which several thousand Yaqui returned to their territories. In 1940 irrigation district no. 18 was created, and new plans for agricultural development arose. Owing to the construction of several dams, the river, a resource indispensable for production, was lost.

Settlements

When the Jesuits arrived, the Yaqui resided in irregularly distributed settlements along the Río Yaqui. Such quarters consisted of wood-and-mud shacks in the form of domes. This pattern was changed by the missionaries when they moved natives into eight towns. Although two of these towns had to be abandoned on account of boundary struggles and floods, their traditional identity was preserved in the new settlements that replaced them. At present there are about one hundred hamlets and villages within the Yaqui territory, assigned for political, religious, and ritual purposes to one of the eight traditional towns. Traditional housing consists of only one or two rooms used for different purposes according to the season. Both walls and roofs are of reeds and mesquite mixed with mud.

Economy

Subsistence and Commercial Activities. Reliable sources indicate that precontact Yaqui were farmers who frequently had to emigrate because of floods. They grew maize, beans, calabashes, amaranth seeds, and cotton. They complemented such activity with hunting, fishing, and gathering, as well as raids on their closest neighbors. During the colonial period, labor was regulated by the missions. New crops were introduced, and production increased to such an extent that it was possible to satisfy local needs. During armed conflicts, the pacified Indians were left in charge of agriculture, whereas the "Broncos" alternated their fighting activities with work as laborers on haciendas. Nowadays the main Yaqui economic activity continues to be agriculture. Since 1940 the collective exploitation of the land has led to the end of subsistence agriculture and to a new need to sell farm products in order to buy food that was formerly produced locally. Other important economic activities are fishing and cattle raising (which are conducted through cooperative societies), wood cutting, coal mining, pitch mining, temporary migration, and the exploitation of salt deposits that have been in use since the time of the Jesuits.

Industrial Arts. The design and manufacture of ceremonial paraphernalia constitutes the main artistic activity of the Yaqui. This has no commercial purpose; the dancers and musicians themselves make the items for personal use. A few families are devoted to the manufacture of *petates* (sleeping mats), baskets, and reed crowns, while others make earthenware cups and saucers that are used exclusively at ceremonies.

Trade. From the time of the Jesuit missions, the farm produce from the eight traditional villages provided for other missions that were situated in less fertile territories. Currently, the crops and the catch are primarily destined for regional and national markets.

Division of Labor. Farm labor is primarily performed by men, but women help with certain activities during those periods requiring a larger labor force. Fishing, cattle raising, and work in the salt mines are almost exclusively done by male workers. Young women take teaching jobs and are employed as social workers and occasionally as home aides.

Land Tenure. Since the presidential acknowledgement of an exclusively Yaqui territory in 1936, the land-tenure regime has been communal. Every head of a family is assigned a piece of land on which to build a home and to work collectively in farming associations.

Kinship

Kin Groups and Descent. Referring to the pre-Jesuit period, some writers, such as Ralph Beals, have suggested the existence of unilineal descent groups among the "Cahita." Currently, however, descent is bilateral and there are no exogamy rules between descent groups.

Kinship Terminology. Kinship terminology is of a Yuman type and similar to the Opata, Tepehuan, and Tarahumara systems from the north of Mexico. The Yaqui system distinguishes relatives on the basis of the speaker's sex and relative age, particularly with respect to the first ascending generation.

Marriage and Family

Marriage. All marriage prohibitions have to do with blood relatives and *compadres*. It is traditional that the bride's and the groom's families reach an agreement and exchange gifts before the actual ceremony takes place. The majority of weddings are performed according to Catholic religious norms; however, this is not an indispensable requirement for the children to be legitimate. Common-law marriages and the separation of spouses occur quite frequently.

Domestic Unit. The basic residence unit is the *ho'akame*, or neighborhood, consisting of a group of relatives who live in one or two lodges. There are no rules for residence, and authority is entrusted to the oldest able-bodied adult male.

Inheritance. When the head of the family dies, the oldest adult is compelled to decide what should happen to the *ho'akame* in general; there is no individual assignation of the land or property.

Socialization. The domestic group as well as civil, military, and religious societies socialize the young. Adults teach traditions and customs to the young, beginning with the mother tongue. The grandmother helps the parents care for the children. Both boys' and girls' education is complemented by school-sponsored attendance at traditional festivities.

Sociopolitical Organization

Social Organization. The Yaqui "tribe" includes every individual born within Yaqui territory or to Yoreme par-

ents. Every Yaqui residing in a small village or quarter in the territory is assigned to one of the eight traditional towns, each of which is a political, military, and ritual unit. The Yaqui leader resides in Vicam Pueblo. The internal political organization of each of the eight towns is identical, consisting of five governing groups, or *yau'uras*: the civil authorities, the military authorities, the fiesta authorities (*fiesteros*), the church authorities, and the Holy Week customs authorities (*kohtumbre yau'uras*).

Political Organization. The highest political authority in each of the towns is comprised of the five elected governors (*cobanaos*) of the civil authority, who are hierarchically organized and are complemented by a group of elderly men. They are responsible for economic administration, relations with external agents, and relations with the Mexican government. The governors of the eight towns do not assemble except on special occasions requiring decisions with respect to the entire tribe and its allies.

Social Control. The military authority is in charge of keeping order and carrying out punishments when offenses are committed during the ceremonies. When there is a robbery, murder, or assault, justice is in the hands of the state courts. The federal and state government have appointed agents in each town to act as police. The presence of these outside authorities has frequently caused friction.

Conflict. Yaqui history has been an almost uninterrupted series of armed struggles—first against the Spanish conquerors and later against a local oligarchy and the Mexican federal government. Since the presidential decrees of the 1930s, the Yaqui struggle has been directed at defining their southern territorial boundary and controlling adjacent marine resources. The governors of the eight towns keep in touch with the inhabitants at weekly meetings. Because of the success of this political system, other types of government imposed by the state have been rejected.

Religion and Expressive Culture

Religious Beliefs. Five days after the first two Jesuit missionaries set foot on Yaqui territory, they had already christened five thousand Yaqui natives. Today Yaqui religion is a complex syncretism of native and Catholic beliefs. There are no contradictions whatsoever between them, nor any supremacy of one over the other. The Virgin Mary is identified with Itom Aye (Our Mother) and Jesus Christ with Itom Achai (Our Father). Jesus appears in myth as a Yaqui culture hero, to whom the Pascola, Deer, and Coyote ritual dances are attributed; the Matachines ritual dance is attributed to the Virgin.

Religious Practitioners. The church authorities are the trustees of the liturgy and ritual knowledge that underlie the cults of the patron saints of each town. They also preside over rites of transition. The members of a *cofradía* (religious brotherhood or fraternity) remain under oath and occupy hierarchical ranks. Their maximum authority is the liturgical master, or *yo'owe*. The *yo'owe* masters and the *temastian* (liturgist) of every single town once assisted the missionary in his teaching, and they remained in charge of performing religious rites after the deportation of the Jesuits. Today a Catholic priest goes to each town on Sundays to say Mass. The "singers" are lower in the hierarchy. Fol-

lowing them are the women in charge of the altars and temples, then the young girls who carry the banners during rituals, and then the boys who participate in the Holy Week ritual and the Matachines.

Ceremonies. The people responsible for the fulfillment of the ritual cycle in every village are the *fiesteros*, eight men and eight women who are responsible for the celebrations in honor of patron saints. As in many areas of rural Mexico, there are two groups: Moors (who wear red costumes) and Christians (who wear blue costumes). The celebrations are a ritual contest between the two. The Yaqui ritual cycle follows the liturgical Catholic calendar but puts more emphasis on particular dates and defines two different periods very clearly: Lent and regular time. During Lent, strict prohibitions are imposed on the people and on the *kohtumbre yau'ura*. During the rest of the year, traditional rites and festivities are classified as follows: organization festivities, religious- and military-fraternity festivities, trade-union festivities, and required Catholic church festivities.

Arts. Yaqui dancing and music go together in their ritual practices. Matachines, Pascola, Deer, and Coyote dancers make a spiritual promise to perform after they are called to their vocation in dreams. The same happens to the musicians who accompany them. Poetry, literature, and plastic arts have evolved in all eight towns.

Medicine. Traditional curative practices coexist with modern ones. Traditional curers, most of whom are female, do not have a superior social status. This occupation is inherited from one of the parents or an ancestor who transmits knowledge of the supernatural, herbs, different types of illness, and curative rites. The main curative techniques are purification, preparation of herbal remedies, and kneading.

Death and Afterlife. Beliefs about death are blended with Catholic elements. Funeral rites, however, have a hallmark of their own. Four godfathers of death are in charge of the funeral rites. At the end of the year in which a person dies, a ritual takes place to commemorate the event.

See also Cahita

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