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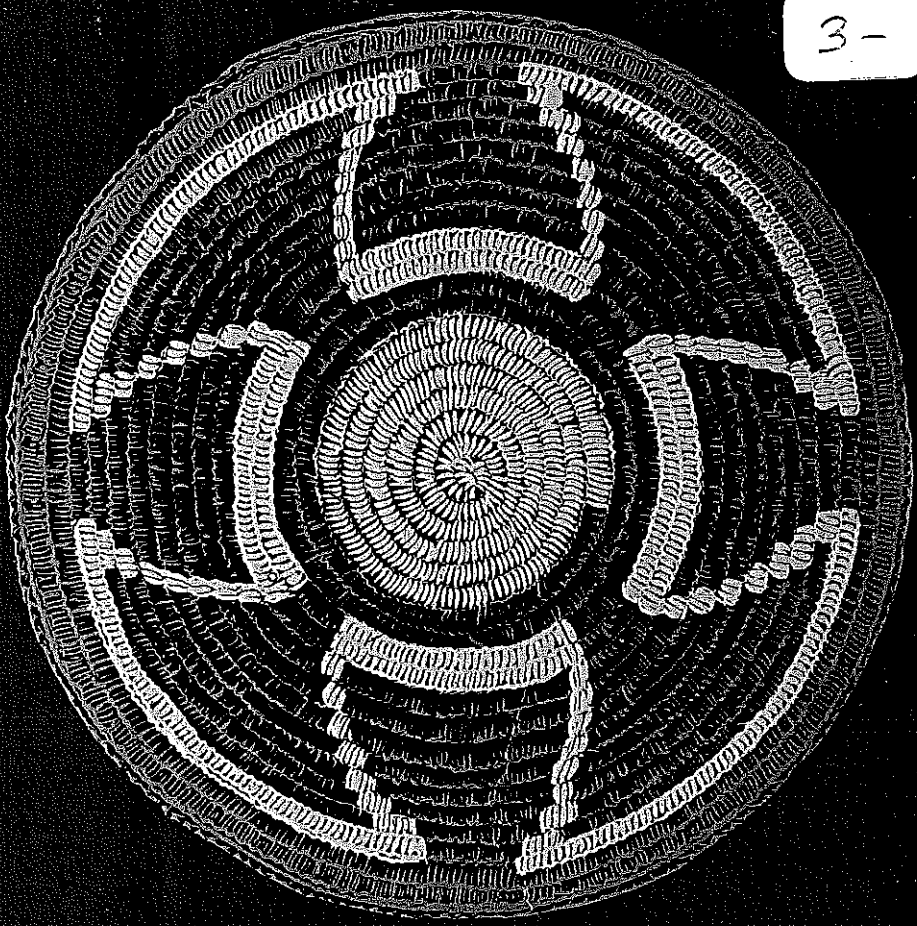

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YUMAN TRIBES OF THE GILA RIVER

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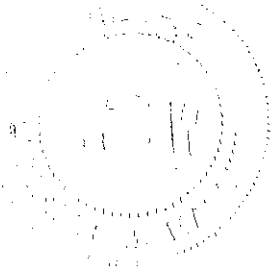

CHAPTER II

BASIS OF SUBSISTENCE

Since the basis of subsistence of the Maricopa and their allies has changed greatly since aboriginal days it is by no means easy to draw a picture of the original food quest. Even before white settlers appeared, Maricopa acquisition of wheat from Mexico had almost entirely displaced the cultivation of corn, and since that day dependence on traders' products has almost obliterated what remained of their original habits.

The staples of the Maricopa and of the Halchidhoma while still on the Colorado seem to have been identical and used in much the same proportion. There is a possibility, however, that the Halchidhoma cultivated corn somewhat more than their Gila relatives and had access to more fish. In contrast, then, they depended less on mesquite and rabbits. This must remain an inference based on what is known of other lower California peoples, since Halchidhoma informants no longer know precisely what ancestral life on the Colorado was like.

The Maricopa seem to have depended largely on gathering mesquite beans, hunting jackrabbits, and on fishing. Relatively little corn was cultivated. The picture of the food quest drawn by informants shows that women were occupied every day gathering mesquite beans during the season, while the men hunted hard by for rabbits or fished. The quest was unceasing: "people starved in those days unless men and women kept at it all day long." Kutox maintained that in those days children were undernourished: "a child of two or more might not be able to stand because it lacked food." On the other hand, Bartlett (1852) makes it appear that Pima and Maricopa cultivation was so great as to allow long periods of inactivity.[1]

Yet mesquite was abundant in the valley, especially in the

[1] Bartlett, *Personal Narrative*, II, 264.

TABLE II

CALENDAR OF THE FOOD QUEST

		Wild Plants Gathered	Cultivation		Hunting and Fishing
			Planting	Harvesting	
January...	Trees bud				
	Floods		Corn		
February...			Beans, black-eyed peas, pumpkins		
March...		Cholla beans	Watermelons		
			Cotton		Mountain sheep
April....	Rainy				
May.....		Berries		Beans, peas	Caterpillars
June.....		Crucifixion thorn berries		Corn, watermelons, pumpkins	
		Giant cactus fruit			
			Pumpkins		
			Watermelons		
July.....	Excessive heat	Mesquite	Cotton		Jackrabbits
			Beans		Fish
			Peas		
			Corn		
August....	Floods				
September.	Rainy	Opuntia fruit			
		Ironwood nuts			
October...		àgwa'và leaves			Caterpillars
				Pumpkins	
November.				Watermelons	Deer
				Corn	
December.	Floods, excessive cold*	Wild seeds			

*The climatological conditions are those of a desert. Temperatures range between the extremes of 120°F. and 18° F., with means in January 51°, July 91°. The temperature is one or two degrees lower above Gila Bend than in the low country downstream. The growing season is 260 to 300 days in length. Variations in rainfall are extreme along the river. The annual precipitation ranges from seven to nine inches in the Casa Grande-Sacaton region down to three and less in the vicinity of Mohawk on the lower river. Rains fall mostly in January, March, and August (*Climatological Data*). Flood stages of the river, affected perhaps more by rain and melting snow along the higher tributaries, occur in March (February to April), secondarily about August and in December (Ross, *The Gila Region*, pp. 106–7). The climatic observations in the table above are those of the Indians.

country included within the juncture of the Gila and Salt Rivers. Indeed, this region was so choked with mesquite and other bushes as to be nearly impenetrable. For that reason, being at the same time relatively near the Yavapai, it was dangerous territory. This was also the best region for fishing and abounded in rabbits. Fish were taken mostly in Santa Cruz slough at the northern foot of the Sierra Estrella and at the Salt-Gila confluence. From there the Maricopa drifted up the Salt fishing and gathering to a point just above Phoenix, beyond which it was not safe to go. They did not fish much in the Gila. Family parties went together, camping under the bushes. As the women went out gathering mesquite beans, men would accompany them for protection and to hunt jackrabbits. Camp was frequently shifted as the bushes were stripped clean. It was also their habit to move back and forth between the Gila and Salt to foil any lurking enemies. It was customary to include the whole family on such expeditions, although younger children were ordinarily left home in the care of friends when women went out on a day's excursion.

WILD PLANT PRODUCTS

The chief interest in wild plant products lay in the mesquite beans and giant cactus (sahuaro) fruit. Other wild plants were more casually used: the following description includes the principal but is not exhaustive.

Mesquite furnished the plant staple. Two or three varieties of the bush grew in this region: screw and straight bean mesquite, and a subvariety of the latter, differing from the common variety in its large thorns. (It is of interest that the straight bean and its bush bore separate names, iya′ and ana′l$_y$: this was not true of the screw bean, i'i'c, nor the long thorned bean, tŏtxaĕ′tk.) The straight bean variety was most plentiful. These bean pods were said to be softer than those growing in the old Halchidhoma country on the Colorado. Mesquite was gathered from early July to the end of August. Certain trees were known for large or sweet beans, but these were not private property. A group of women would go gathering together for fear of the enemy; several men might be within reach. Mesquite was picked day after day until the bushes held no more, even after they thought they had enough, because mesquite was their staple.

On returning home late in the afternoon, the beans were sorted. The dry beans were put on the roof of the house to dry more thoroughly. These were piled, load upon load, until the last load had remained for three or four days. Should it be cloudy or wet, they were taken off the roof and covered. The thoroughly dry beans were then stowed away in huge basket granaries. An average family would have one large granary filled, with a surplus stored in the house in large pots.

The green beans sorted out at the end of each day's gleaning were prepared at once. Mesquite beans resemble our string beans, but while the pods can be readily pulverized in a mortar, it is practically impossible to crack the seeds. These greener pods were pounded up and, without removing the hard seeds, were mixed in water for a drink. Or this was boiled and used as a liquor to mix with other ground seeds.

After the storage receptacles were filled, the beans that were discarded as not good enough for storing were ground to be made into cakes. The ground bean meal was sifted in a Pima tray-basket by shaking it over the edge onto a cloth. An elliptical hole (eighteen inches long, twelve wide, by ten deep) was dug in the ground and sprinkled with water until its surface was firm. The sifted flour was poured into this, sprinkled, another layer of flour added, sprinkled, and so on. Finally it was sprinkled and covered with dirt. The following morning they would remove the hard cake of mesquite flour. A woman kept busily at this until twenty or more were prepared. These cakes (hapa′ndj) were intended for use on damp days when the stored pods could not be ground because they were damp. (Mesquite beans absorb the slightest moisture in the atmosphere.) A bit of the cake would be broken off, soaked in water to be used as a drink, or boiled and mixed with other ground seeds.

Mesquite was ordinarily used only after pounding in a mortar and grinding on a metate. This was a daily task of the women. The ground meal formed the basis of most food preparations.