

THE CREATION MYTH

To understand the Navaho People, even in small measure, it is essential to know at least some part of the symbolic ritual of these Indians. That they have so rich a background comes as a surprise to many. One expects it on foreign shores, but to find it so strongly embedded here in the middle of our own country, seems strange to ~~many~~ those who do not know Navaho heritage. The Navaho have retained their culture (as have the Pueblo People of the Southwest) through many centuries without the use of written language, without centers of education, without a religious head for there is no such office. It simply exists in every person, in every family, in every region of their land. As the myths, the chants, the symbolism are myriad, and as they must be handed down by word of mouth or they perish, Navaho capacity for memory has become very great. There is always a medicine man who carries on these beliefs, who performs the ceremonies, who teaches others.

The Creation Myth, as its title indicates, contains the roots of this symbolism and indicates Navaho ~~ix~~ relation to all of nature. The first ethnologist to study Navaho Religion was Dr. Washington Mathews, an Army physician, stationed at Fort Wingate in the 1880s. While there are several versions of this myth, Dr. Mathews was the first to inscribe it, making his version seem the most authentic. It is a beautiful story and Dr. Mathews has given it a Biblical ring. There is a flood, expulsion from one world to another, and throughout the story a strong suggestion of evolution. Here too are the symbolic plants and animal life, colors and substances:- White and white shell for the East; blue and turquoise for the South; yellow and coral for the West; black and jet for the North. Then there is the sacred number Four- the four seasons- the four directions.

Navajo
Rainbow Bridge
Canyon de Chelly
Chaco Canyon

Sunset
Wupatki
Walnut
El Morro

Aztec
Hovenweep

Three Parks

Navaholand abounds in interest and scenic beauty. Adjacent to the reservation are two National Parks, Grand Canyon and Mesa Verde, Petrified Forest and five National Monuments, the Painted Desert and Petrified Forest, Sunset Crater, Wupatki, Inscription Rock, and Aztec National monuments, while within the area are three more, Chaco Canyon, Navaho, and Canyon de Chelly National Monuments. Here stand the greatest of prehistoric ruins north of Mexico, indicating the extensive population that existed here between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries A.D.; and there are many sites antedating these.

Chaco Canyon with its great Pueblo Bonito and Chetro Ketl ruins are the finest examples of prehistoric building, the earliest of the terraced structures, with many more ruined cities lying in close proximity. Navaho National Monument situated on the rim and extending into Tsegi Canyon, contains the Cliff Dwelling called Beta-ta-kin, the most beautiful of all. Canyon de Chelly National Monument, containing several joining canyons, is the most spectacular for scenic beauty. Here is to be found the area of longest continual occupation in North America, twenty-two centuries. Each of these Monuments has a particular beauty of its own, full of interest and great variety.

Not only do Canyons de Chelly and its adjoining Canyon del Muerto contain these evidencies of ancient habitation, but throughout all these centuries the canyon floors have been farmed by successive tribes of Indians. First there were the Basket Makers of 2000 B.C. to A.D. 300; then followed the Cliff Dwellers who built the famous White House in Canyon de Chelly and Mummy and Masacre Caves, as well

as well as
the Navaho
Pueblo at
Chaco
Valley
& occupied by
the tribe

as others in Canyon del Muerto. Then came the Hopi traveling ^{some} ~~an~~ foot from their rocky mesa villages ^{some} 60 miles to the Southwest to farm the Canyon floors. Lastly came the Navaho in the early part of the eighteenth century. And this is still an inhabited region for some 300 Navaho live and ~~xx~~ raise their crops within the Canyons, sheltered by their high protective walls. As the visitor travels up the canyons to-day he is conscious of small fields of corn and green alfalfa, but it is only from the air that the full extent may be seen.

Throughout the summer irrigating ditches bring water from higher regions as it flows down the canyons following summer thunderstorms. There are small peach orchards in Canyon del Muerto, the origin of these dating back to the days of Hopi occupation, for these Indians had been given peach trees by the early Spanish Padres when they first came to the Hopi Villages in the seventeenth century. The Hopi in turn brought some of them to the Canyons where they have been grown ever since. In September the Navaho dry quantities of peaches to be stored for winter use.

The Canyons can be treacherous as well as beautiful. Few visitors realize how water can accumulate following the great thunderstorms of this western region. Sometimes a storm will be miles away, not even visible from the lower part of the Canyons, yet with incredible speed the runoff accumulates, rushing down the Canyon floors sweeping everything in its path. There are areas of quicksand, too, where many an automobile has become bogged down and even submerged to the dismay of the unsuspecting traveler. The canyons twist and wind, creating one beautiful vista after another when the lowering light of afternoon mystifies and enhances, and giant shafts of rock, sunlit against ^a ~~the~~ shadowed wall are silhouetted in majestic beauty.

There is a Navaho story of how the Canyons were made. Coyote went to the People begging for fire. At first they refused to give it to him for he was the mischief maker. Finally, after repeated entreaties, some one said " OH, give his some." so they gave him some flint stones. He tried and tried but could not make a spark. Finally he became angry and threw the stones down whereupon a great spark was lighted which quickly set fire to the dry brush. In burned and burned into a ^{awful} great fire and Coyote ran away. ~~Water Pourer came~~ The earth split open from the great heat beneath the fire and finally Water Pourer came to put it out. This started the washing down of the Canyon walls, making them deeper and deeper. To-day when you stand on the rim you can see how the canyons would all fit back together.

Plans are now underway for a ^{new development} ~~large hotel~~

The raising of sheep, the spinning of wool, the weaving of textiles, are ago old activities ~~of~~ ^{where} in many parts of the world ~~producing~~ ^{being produced} fabrics of great variety and use. When the Spanish Conquistadores first came to the American Southwest in 1540, they brought with them the first sheep ever seen by the Indian Inhabitants. To the surprise of the invaders they found cotton garments woven by Pueblo Indians, made on a well perfected loom of Indian origin. In later years archaeologists were to find scraps of woven cotton fabrics buried in prehistoric ruins whose dates ~~go~~ ^{go} back to the eleventh century. These first sheep brought here by Coronado were brought chiefly as food for his marching army, so that eventually they were consumed. Later, when Onate came up the Rio Grande Valley to colonize what is now New Mexico, he also brought sheep, fine Merino ~~sheep~~ ^{stock}, for domestic use. In ~~all probability~~ ^{the} the Pueblo ~~People~~ soon learned the use of wool, and as the production of sheep spread, the western Pueblo villages ~~also acquired~~ ^{the} of Zuni and Hopi tribes, soon were weaving woolen garments.

At the time of the great rebellion of 1680, when all the Pueblo People united to drive the Spanish from their land, some groups, fearing the return of Spanish Soldiers, took refuge in Old Navaholand. Here Archaeologists, those intrepid investigators of ancient human habitation, found remains of Pueblo dwellings in close proximity to those of Navaho origin, indicating an association of the two Indian cultures. As the Navaho moved westward in the early 1700s they encountered the Hopi, both in Canyon de Chelly and at their ~~own~~ ^a villages further west. Doubtless the Navaho learned the art of weaving from some Pueblo groups with whom they came in contact, ^{of these} and from whom they often stole sheep.

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The raising of sheep, the spinning of wool, the weaving of textiles, are almost as old as the human race, and throughout the centuries this knowledge has spread far and wide. When the Spanish Conquistadores came to the southwestern area of the United States in ~~AD~~¹⁵1540, they brought with them not only the first horses but also the first sheep ever to be seen by the Indian inhabitants. However, to ^{the} ~~their~~ surprise, ^{of the weavers} they found cotton garments woven by Pueblo Indians which had been made on a well perfected loom of Indian origin. In later years archaeologists were to find scraps of woven cotton fabrics buried in prehistoric ruins whose dates go back to the eleventh century.

The Navaho, being the late comers to the Southwest, doubtless learned the art of weaving from these Pueblo people, with whom they ~~must have come~~^{came} in contact. At the time of the great rebellion of 1680, when all the Pueblos united to drive the Spanish from their land, some groups, fearing return of the Spanish soldiers, took refuge in Old Navaholand. Here archaeologists, those intrepid investigators of human habitation, found remains of ~~the~~ Pueblo dwellings in close proximity to those of Navaho origin, indicating an association of the two Indian cultures.

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In his book NAVAHO WEAIVING, Charles Avery Amsden gives a clear picture of this association between Pueblo and Navaho, and of the development related to weaving which followed. The Navaho are quick to adapt a craft or technique from others, developing a style and character of their own in the creation of their products. The Navaho ~~soon excelled at their weaving and they gained proficiency in weaving~~ commenced their weaving with wool, never cotton, and they soon excelled their teachers in the craft. The remarkable thing is that ~~during~~ ever since the ~~eighteenth century~~ beginning of their use of the loom, they have never made any change in weaving methods with the exception

of their own people, and they go to the province of New Mexico with the surplus and there exchange thier goods for such others as they have not, or for implements they need." In 1812, Pedro Pin@, who went to Spain as a delegate to the Spanish Parliament, wrote of the Navaho, "Their wollen fabrics are the most valuable in our province and Sonora and Chuhuahua as well."

~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~

The picture evoked by these quotations shows that within the thirty two years between 1880 and 1812, Navaho weavers through their Imagination, versatility and increasing skill, gained supremacy in ⁱⁿ weaving the Southwest.

A later picture is given by Charles Bent in 1846. "The Navaho could be found anywhere from Coconino Plateau in Arizona to the buffalo plains of West Texas. They rarely ventured as far north as the Arkansas River. They did, however, go often to Taos to trade, many of their woven blankets finding their way to Bent's Fort 'on the Arkansas) as trade goods highly valued by the plains tribes."

THE PROCESS.

Shearing

Indust — In the earliest times, sheep were shorn with the use of any ~~piece~~ peice of thin metal that could be found, honed to as sharp an edge as possible on a stone. But when shears were first brought to the trading posts, the Navaho were quick to use ~~x~~ them. The shorn wool is sorted carefully, separating the longest hairs to use as warp, removing the shortest to be sold as wool, saving the remainder for spinning. Burrs and other matter sticking to the wool were carefully removed.

Washing

Indust — At first the wool was not washed, but during the early 1800s the traders insisted on it. Using the pounded roots of the Yucca plant for soap (still preferred by most weavers),

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putting these into water and brought to boil, the mixture is poured over the wool as it lies on a slanting rock or board. This is repeated until all the dirt, sand and grease have been removed. The wool is then spread in the sun to dry, then stored in sacks until ~~the weaver is~~ ^{for} ready ~~in~~ use.

~~ixx~~

Carding

When the weaver is ready to card her wool, she first loosens it by hand, then combs it between carding tools until the hairs lie all in one direction. The old cards consisted of burrs held in place by strips of leather, mounted on small boards with handles at one side. These were replaced ~~by~~ when metal cards of American manufacture were procurable at the trading posts.

Spinning

The Navaho still use the same type of spindle that they learned to make from their Pueblo teachers. Since the American occupation, traders and others have tried to introduce the spinning wheel, but the Navaho rejected it., preferring to use their spindles of ancient origin. Wool is spun three times, occasionally more, until the desired fineness of thread is achieved, through the process of twisting and pulling the loose fibers until a firm and strong strand is produced.

Tools used in weaving

Other tools consist of the comb and the batten. The comb is made of wood into which times have been cut two or three inches in length, and a carved out handle ~~at~~ the opposite end. The batten has two purposes, first to open the shed by inserting it between the lines of warp, then after the weft strands have been inserted and pressed down by the comb, the batten is turned and the whole line pressed down as firmly as possible. A shuttle has never been used by the Navaho, who insert the wefts threads

Frank Dyer

WEAVING
Weaving

From about 1890 until the early years of the twentieth century, Navaho weaving deteriorated. The weavers commenced making coarser fabrics largely for sale to the tourist trade as ~~rug~~ floor rugs. To considerable extent the traders were responsible for this change. With this making of rugs, borders were introduced for the first time, with patterns far removed from the vigorous fine designs of the classic period. The making of rugs of this type grew to a great business, with practically the entire output being sold to the American public. A few traders, notably Lorenzo Hubbell, Cozy McSparron and J.B. Moore, revived the use of vegetable dyes in the regions of their posts. Slow at first to find a ready market, to-day, these rugs are in great demand. Some very large rugs have been made, measuring 20 ^{or} feet by 30 ^{feet}. Special looms ^{have} had to be made to accomodate such size. In recent years too, wool has been spun to a very fine strand. One weaver, Dasie Tauglechee, ~~spins strands~~ spins strands so fine that her woven fabric counts 110 threads to the inch.

Weaving is still a major industry among the Navaho whose yearly out put is _____ rugs ~~of various sizes~~ and saddle blankets of various sizes. Throughout the nearly 175 years that the Navaho women have been weavers, they produced ^{have} ~~the~~ an extraordinary variety of product. Moving quickly from the first simple striped blankets to the superb examples of the classic period^{to}, through a time of decadence, and recently ^{limitless} a new surge for fine quality. The variety of design is ~~unlimited~~ in its unique use of geometric shape, the spacing of line and color, and the harmony of the whole. Only in instances ^{With} of the most complicated design is a drawing ever made. ~~In~~ such designs a drawing was made in sand, otherwise the weaver carried her pattern in her mind. Weaving is unquestionably the great art

The sheep that have been produced by the Navaho people ever
by the Govt
since 1869, when the first stock was issued following the return
from Fort Sumner, are small, are resistant to desert heat. sudden
changes in weather, can survive cold winters. and can exist on a
minimum of food and water. Consequently the fleeces from these
sheep are light, and they are also comparatively free from grease.
The staple of the wool is long and wavy, and particularly suited
to Navaho methods of spinning. Under the adverse conditions of
raising sheep on most of the reservation, where the sheep ^{flocks range} ~~range~~
over great distances in order to get enough to eat, heavier breeds,
like the Merino and Rambouillet have difficulty in surviving. The
character of the wool from the old type Navaho sheep compared
with that from these heavier breeds, has been one of the major factors
ⁱⁿ ~~of~~ the controversy over introducing the newer ^{chairs} ~~breeds~~. The traders
or sheep and wool buyers want heavier meat producing animals and
heavy fleeces, but the Navaho women who largely control the sheep,
want their old stock which produces the best wool for spinning.

While only 10% of the wool crop is used to spin, and 40% for
sale to the wool buyer, that 10%, by the time it is transformed into
a fine rug brings a greater return than the 40%. There are some
areas on the reservation where the heavier breeds are being raised, today,
but little of the wool is used for weaving. Weavers in those areas
get their wool to spin ~~fromxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ elsewhere.

Many goats are also raised by the Navaho. They like the meat
to eat just as well as mutton, and goat hair (mohair) is also used
in weaving. More difficult to spin, it nevertheless produces a fine
yarn and rugs produced of mohair ~~xxxx~~ bring a premium.

weft threads only a few inches at a time, though when a long line without pattern is being made, the weft thread is sometimes wound around a small stick which is passed through the shed in place of a regular shuttle. The shed is changed by shifting the healds, ^{small} round sticks to which alternate warp threads have been tied. In intricate patterns several healds will be used. Every thing about the loom is of simple homemade construction, built for the most practical method of use, from the type of wood used for each part, to the method of rigging up the loom for weaving. It can be taken apart easily to move to another location.

The variety of weaves attained by the Navaho seem endless. From the simple basket weave to the diamond twill, and the rare two faced blanket which has a different pattern on each side. Add to this the variations of color and design and the weavers choice is almost infinite.

Dyeing

*Place - before
weaving*

Using a wide variety of native plants, the Navaho produced dyes of varying color and hue. There ~~are~~ ^{were} two exceptions, black and indigo, the former made from a mixture of twigs and leaves of sumac boiled in water for 5 or 6 hours added to a mixture of native yellow ochre, ground to a powder, mixed with an equal amount of pinon gum, stirred over a fire until a fine black powder is formed. The mixture produced a rich black, the tannic acid of the sumac acting as a mordant to produce a permanent color. The indigo was imported in lumps by early traders and used extensively until the end of the nineteenth century. The indigo, tied in a cloth, was suspended in a large jar of urine which acted as a mordant. The wool was dipped into the jar, and left until the desired color was obtained.

Aniline dyes were brought to Navaho country in about 1880 by the trader at Fort Defiance who taught the Navaho weavers how to use them. At about the same time, Germantown yarn, Saxony yarn, and cotton warp were also introduced, soon bringing a great change in the character and quality of from the Navaho looms.

THE BLANKETS.

From the beginning of Navaho weaving, blankets and MANTAS were made for clothing. Blankets worn by both men and women, and mantas, consisting of two oblong pieces, fastened at the shoulders and tied about the waist with a woven belt, were the dress of Navaho women for many years. Surplus blankets were made for trade as the chroniclers have told us. The great period of Navaho weaving was from during the years of 1800 to approximately the time of the exile, 1864. While there were some fine blankets made following the return from Fort Sumner, a period of decadence had set in. This first period has become known as the Classic period. During this time the Spanish traders brought a fabric known as Bayeta for trade with the Indians. This cloth was imported from England (Manchester cloth, or baize) to Spain, thence to New Mexico. Red color predominated which took the fancy of Navaho weavers, who, after careful scrutiny, unraveled it, re-weaving it into the intricate patterns of their blankets. Many of the finest known examples of Navaho weaving contain the beautiful bayeta merged into the textile along with the handspun wool. Some of the Many of the Serapes and blankets of this period were so firmly woven that they were waterproof, they were in great demand and were highly prized.

of the Navaho. The finest examples of this craft are to be found in all the great museums of the world, as well as in many choice private collections. The new building of the Navaho Arts and Crafts ^{guild} ~~building~~ with its contents of weaving, jewelry and other crafts is evidence of the vigorous production of Navaho craftsmen of to-day.