

## The Yaqui People

### 1. Description

1.1 Name of society, language, and language family:

Society: Yaqui people, Language: Yaqui, Language family: Uto-Aztecan>Taracahitic>Cahita>Yaqui

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com):

YAQ

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

Along the Rio Yaqui. The Rio Yaqui's location is 29° 8' (29.133333°) north latitude, 109° 30' (109.5°) as well as in costal areas of Sonora ([29°38'46"N 110°52'08"W](#)) and Sinaloa ([25°0'10"N 107°30'10"W](#))

1.4 Brief history:

Battled with the Spanish conquistadors in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. While they were never conquered by military means they were intrigued by white people's material culture and quickly adopted Christianity when it was spread to them by Jesuit missionaries. When the Jesuits were ordered out of the area by the Spanish colonial government the Yaqui were left without religious leadership which in turn led to the "Yaqui Wars". Attempts were made to unite the Yaqui people with other tribes against the Mexican government but all failed. In 1964 the US government gave the Yaqui 202 acres near Tuscon and formally recognized the Yaqui based on this land on September 18, 1978.

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

In 1617 Jesuit missionaries began to work among the Yaqui. The Yaquis seemed to be impressed with Jesuit bringing a message of everlasting life, the Jesuits impressed the Yaquis with their good intentions and their spirituality. Their concern for the well-being of the Indians won the confidence of the Yaqui people. From 1617 to 1619 nearly 30,000 Yaquis were baptized. The Yaquis peacefully co-existed alongside the Spaniards until the 1740's when there were food shortages which lead to revolts resulting in a governmental land acquisition of the tribe's traditional home lands. Government acquisition of Yaqui lands began in 1768 and lasted to 1877.

1.6 Ecology: Sonora: almost entirely arid or semi-arid covered in deserts and arid grasslands. Only the highest elevations of the region have sufficient rainfall to support other types of vegetation. The Valley of the Yaqui river however is very suitable for raising crops on irrigated farms along the river.

### 2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): corn, squash

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: beans, deer, fish

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: bow and arrow, war club

2.4 Food storage: Cornmeal is stored in bags for later use in familiar Mexican dishes such as tamales, enchiladas, atole and pinole.

2.5 Sexual division of production: - Farm labor is primarily performed by men, but women help with certain activities during those periods requiring a larger labor force. In more recent times fishing, cattle raising, and work in the salt mines are almost exclusively done by male workers. Yaquis have been employed as cheap labor on railroads and production of adobes; it is rare to see any boy older than 15 not working for a wage in nearby towns. Young women take teaching jobs and are employed as social workers and occasionally as home aides.

2.6 Land tenure: No definite assignment of property, houses and land are perceived as jointly owned by all members of the household. The oldest individuals, (male or female) seem to have the strongest voice in the properties management.

2.7 Ceramics: "Pottery is made very occasionally by some of the old women. It is a simple, undecorated brown ware and is made only in the form of shallow bowls. There are not more than a dozen such pieces in the village they are used mainly in the ceremony of mourning which occurs one year after the death of a person"

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns: In the matter death in family the household goes on as before and the needs of the group determine the use of goods. No fixed rules on inheritance. "pascuans do not cooperate with one another in the production aspects of economic life." At the same time sharing with kin is expected, its common for one able body man to provide for 7 or 8 people even if they aren't very close relatives.

2.9 Food taboos: Tabooed animals include: skunk, dog, coyote, kangaroo rat, egrets, and various toxic lizards.

2.10 Canoes/watercraft? Couldn't find information.

### 3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f): Males 5' 6". Females 5' 1"

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f): Males 141 lbs. Females 122 lbs.

### 4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f): Not apparent

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f): Not apparent but likely a year or two after the standard age at first marriage because Yaqui are expected to be pure and abstain from any physical contact until married.

- 4.3 Completed family size (m and f): It is not unusual for a woman to have borne eight to ten children with only two or three living. The mortality is not at childbirth but within the first six or eight years when whooping-cough, diphtheria and small-pox take their terrible toll.
- 4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f): Not apparent
- 4.5 Age first marriage (m and f): Typically 12 to 16 for females and slightly older for males
- 4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: 15%
- 4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: Polygynous marriages are common among affluent men but a percent is not apparent.
- 4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry? – No, however it is traditional that the bride's and the groom's families reach an agreement and exchange gifts before the actual ceremony takes place.
- 4.9 Inheritance patterns: In the matter death in family the household goes on as before and the needs of the group determine the use of goods. No fixed rules on inheritance.
- 4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: Children are taught from an early age to respect their elders, Grandparents to be respected even more highly than parents.
- 4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals: Not apparent
- 4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): All marriage prohibitions have to do with blood relatives and *compadres*.
- 4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized? Not known
- 4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows")
- 4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?
- 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape. Unknown
- 4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin) Not apparent.
- 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms? No, girls are strictly supervised and it is standard practice for a girl to be formally married in a church before her first sexual experience
- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring. Extramarital relations are common place, affluent men who can afford to support additional women generally will they are thought of as additional wives though they aren't legally bound.
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children? A wide range of family members are able to take care of children, the Yaqui family unit seems to be extremely flexible, and able to accommodate peripheral people for extended periods of time.
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades. – No evidence
- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older) Not apparent
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect? Unknown
- 4.24 Joking relationships? Not apparent
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations. – Referring to the pre-Jesuit period, some writers have suggested the existence of unilineal descent groups among the "Cahita". Currently, however, descent is bilateral.
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules. – not allowed to marry blood relatives, certain rules are not apparent.
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? Yes, a persons first marriage ceremony marks their transition to adulthood. For instance if a 50 year old man with many children passes away but was never married he will be given a childs funeral.
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name? Children are named at birth and this name is meant to stick for their entire life.
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?) Not apparent.
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)? It is common for the parents to arrange marriages, often promising their son or daughter to that of another family at very young ages.
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who: none noted

### **Warfare/homicide**

- 4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare: unknown
- 4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death: Outgroup. Yaqui fought many wars against conquistadors but were never conquered
- 4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing: multiple wars with Spanish colonizing forces
- 4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations): Known enemies with the Mayo people, raids for supplies were common but its not clear if they engaged in organized warfare.
- 4.18 Cannibalism? Not present

### **5. Socio-Political organization and interaction**

- 5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: Precontact unknown. Traditionally located in irregularly distributed in and populated villages along the Rio Yaqui. Upon their arrival the Jesuits located the Yaqui in 8 villages running north to south on the Rio Yaqui. During this time frame population ranged from 15,000 – 30,000 placing the mean village size between 1875 and 3750.
- 5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): Reliable sources indicate that precontact Yaqui were farmers who frequently had to emigrate because of floods
- 5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): Class is based upon membership in ceremonial societies, early contact showed that they did have "war chiefs" when fighting Spanish conquistadors.
- 5.4 Post marital residence: Either the house of the husband/his family or newlyweds will plan to construct their own house prior to the marriage date.

- 5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense): They were known to supplement their food supplies by raiding the neighboring Mayo Indians
- 5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex): The Yaqui system distinguishes relatives on the basis of the speaker's sex and relative age, particularly with respect to the first ascending generation.
- 5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: Not apparent
- 5.8 Village and house organization: Not apparent
- 5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses): No
- 5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere? - quarters consisted of wood-and-mud shacks in the form of domes, not apparent if they traditionally slept on the ground or a raised bedding.
- 5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: Ceremonial societies seem to be the basis of the Yaqui social organization. About 25% of men take part in the 5 distinct male ceremonial societies. Maestros are generally at the head of any serious ceremony. Sacristans are in charge of handling religious materials crucifixes/preparing altars ect for ceremonies. Matachinis are costumed dancers that dance at funerals and various other events. Musicians are also included in the Matachini society. Fariseo's have a similar role to Matachinis. Pascolas are generally the more looked down upon ceremonial society because they play the role of a joker. The roles of each of these male societies have very complex rules pertaining to how the classes interact and conduct themselves during ceremonies. Female ceremonial societies are limited to two groups, ki'ostim who take care of altar preparations, repairing images of the Virgin Mary and the like. As well as the ko'pariam who accompany the maestro group in the chanting of prayers and alabanzas.
- 5.12 Trade: No evidence of trade with outside groups.
- 5.13 Indications of social hierarchies? Social hierarchies are based on the social organization outlined above. Maestros are the highest status members but class distinctions become hazy among underlying groups.

## 6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

- 6 Time allocation to RCR: Ceremony are a constant source of interest to the Yaqui. Nearly half the days of a year are wholly or partially occupied with some kind of ceremony – 171 days by Spicer's count, this number doesn't include private observances within a household either.
- 6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): The Yaqui medicine men may have at one point engaged in ceremony because they are highly revered in society however after the spreading of Christian religions they are no longer linked with rituals/ceremony. Deer dancers and pascolas are considered to be the "oldest" ceremonial performers, Maestros, matchitini, and fariseo groups likely arose after the Jesuit missionaries arrived.
- 6.2 Stimulants: No indication of stimulant use but they are very fond of whiskey and incorporate taking shots of it at events such as marriages as well as other joyous occasions.
- 6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): Yaquis honor the "death cumpleano" which is a remembrance of a person one year after their passing, ceremonies are always attended by pascolas. The first marriage ceremony ritually marks the passage into adulthood.
- 6.4 Other rituals: Four yearly ceremonies stand out as being most important. Holy week (Easter), The day of the finding of the Holy Cross, Name day of St. Ignatius of Loyola, and Day of All saints.
- 6.5 Myths (Creation): The Creator made ocean animals and allowed some to emerge onto land. Some evolved into a short human form: the Surem. These are the early ancestors of the Yaquis. The Sureni lived in a time out of mind and were a peace-loving, gentle people who had no need for government. Life in the Sonoran desert was a harmonious perfection for the Surem until God spoke through a little tree and prophesied about new horticultural techniques, Christianity, savage invaders, and disunity. The Surem became frightened about parts of this message and transformed into taller, defensive farming people called Yaquis (Hiakim) or Yo'emem (The People). the world (in Yaqui, *anía*) is composed of five separate worlds: the desert wilderness world, the mystical world, the flower world, the dream world, and the night world. Much Yaqui ritual is centered upon perfecting these worlds and eliminating the harm that has been done to them, especially by people. Many Yaqui have combined such ideas with their practice of Catholicism, and believe that the existence of the world depends on their annual performance of the Lent and Easter rituals.
- 6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): Ornate head dresses worn by all 3 groups of ceremonial dancers. Any pottery is very basic – not ornate.
- 6.7 Sex differences in RCR: Men have a much more extensive function in ceremonies and rituals. Men lead ceremonies, are in charge of preparations, and do the ritual dancing and social interactions as well. Women ceremonial societies are mainly in place to assist male functions.
- 6.8 Missionary effect: 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 is no conflict between beliefs, neither is superior to the other. Virgin Mary is identified with Itom Aye (our mother) and Jesus with Itom Achai (our Father) Pascola, Deer, and Coyote dances all have complex symbolisms which mesh the two beliefs.
- 6.9 RCR revival: No
- 6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: Much interest shown in death and ancestors, Yaqui believe in spirits and that ancestors spirits lingered in places that the person used to spend a lot of time. All souls day is celebrated annually. A saying among Maestros is "never forget the dead at any time; This is the custom". 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.
- 6.11 Taboo of naming dead people? Not present
- 6.12 Is there teknonymy? Not present
- 6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.) 198 199

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## 7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint: no

7.2 Piercings: no

7.3 Haircut: unknown

7.4 Scarification: no

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: Each of the dancing ceremonial groups have traditional costumes. Pascolas for instance wear wooden masks painted black, often with a white cross on the forehead. Sometimes with flower designs on and white horse hair on the cheeks. Pascolas wear nothing above the waist or on the feet, from waist to knees a blanket with a black sash tie. Also around the waist dancers wear a large leather belt with six or more metal bells attached to it by long strings. Around the feet, dancers wear cocoon rattles.

7.7 Sex differences in adornment: Women do not wear any ornate costumes for RCR activities.

7.8 Missionary effect: The current dress worn outside of ceremonies is now very similar to any other people living in the region. It is thought that white peoples culture (material and spiritual) was adopted very quickly by the Yaqui.

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment: no

## 8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system: I don't understand this question.

8.2 Sororate, levirate: no

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.): none noted.

## 9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

Flowers are important to the Yaquis' daily lives and ceremonies. They combine the ancient belief that the deer dancer is from a flower-filled spiritual world of natural beauty with the belief that Christ's grace is symbolized by flowers that grew from blood that fell from Jesus' wounds during the crucifixion. Flowers are believed to be powerful weapons against evil and are a prevailing symbol seen in elaborately embroidered floral designs on traditional Yaqui clothing.

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