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October 1946.

Ethnology

OTOMI INDUSTRY.

Outline.

- I. Introduction.
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- V. Leisure Time.
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I. Introduction.

The third largest Indian tribe in Mexico is that of the Otomi. According to the census of 1930 the total population is 218,311 ; 43 percent being monolingual.

The following information has been gathered over a period of three months, February, March and April of /46. during which time my colleague, Henrietta Andrews, and I lived in the home of a native family, namely that of Julio Montes de Oca, in the village of San Pedro Arriba. San Pedro is one hour by foot from its municipio, Temoaya, which in turn is two hours by bus north of Toluca the capital city of the State of Mexico. The material given here will centre around Julio's family as I have had opportunity to observe them more closely than others of the people.

Here I am treating the subject of industry more or less in general. In later papers I will write more fully on subjects such as weaving and preparation of food.

II. Food Crops.

a. Corn

The second week in February corn shelling became the centre of interest. Corn had been stored in a corn crib back of the house. "Many hands make light work" would appear to be a policy among the people as everyone in the immediate family, and also a number of relatives co-operated in shelling corn.



corn
crib

On the shady side of the house petatis and ayates were spread out on the ground to keep the corn clean. The workers gathered around these, each beside a flat rough stone, and each with a supply of unshelled corn on the petate before ~~them~~ ^{him}. The corn, being very ripe and dry after a period of long storage, shelled off very quickly and easily when rubbed over the rough stones. The work began early in the morning and continued until late afternoon; then the winnowing of the days corn had to be done before nightfall. The girls tossed handfulls of corn from one pile to another, separating the chaff from the corn. The men filled ayates with corn, lifted them and poured the contents out slowly allowing the wind to blow away the last of the chaff. The clean corn was spread out under the roof on the ceiling of the house. The corn cobs were not thrown away but stacked in the shelter of a corner of the porch to be used as fuel for the kitchen fire. In all the corn shelling took less than a week.

b. Avas

Avas are secondary to corn but they require shelling as well. In English, avas are called broad beans, but not many people seem to be familiar with them. The average ava or bean is in size approximately one inch long, half an inch wide and a quarter of an inch thick. The men do not join in the work of shelling avas, nor is the work done all in the same week. The women shell them as they need them, and when they are going to use them. It looks like a very tedious task as they sit outside on their petates cracking them one by one, holding an ava on a stone with one hand, and striking it with a small stone in the other hand. As the shell is very hard it seldom yields with one blow.

c. Wheat and Barley.

Wheat and barley have their place too. During the winter, the sheaves rested up in the branches of trees, drying out in preparation to threshing in April. Thresh is also a primitive process. The sheaves are unbound and arranged in a round pile from ten to twenty feet in diameter in some flat open area in the street. A man stands in the center of the pile, holding the lead ropes of a team of burros and drives them around and round over the straw, thus knocking out the grain. Then comes the winnowing as the grain must be all separated from the straw before the straw is taken away. The last of the grain must be winnowed until it is free from chaff.

III. Animals and Fowl.

Animals play a very important part in the life of the village. Oxen are kept for field work, such as ploughing; burros of course are the beasts of burden, and no less important are the large flocks of sheep and goats. It is the lot of whatever child in the family that is between six and twelve years old to tend the flocks. In the morning the child will drive his or her flock to water and then to pasture, watches them all day, drives them back to water again in the evening and home before sundown. Goats are raised for eating and selling purposes, while sheep are raised for the wool they produce.

Some people keep a few hens, but turkeys receive much more attention as they bring a higher price when sold. The turkey chicks require much care because they are very delicate and sometimes a whole brood will die from catching a chill or having an unbalanced diet. At night the turkeys are kept in a sheltered corner of the porch; during the day they are allowed to feed about close to the house. Corn is fed to the older birds but the chicks are given mixtures of cooked ground corn and mixtures with ground plants such as dandelions.

IV. Hand Work or Manufacture of Raw Materials.

1. Wool.

Wool provides the bases for most of the hand work.

a. Pulling.

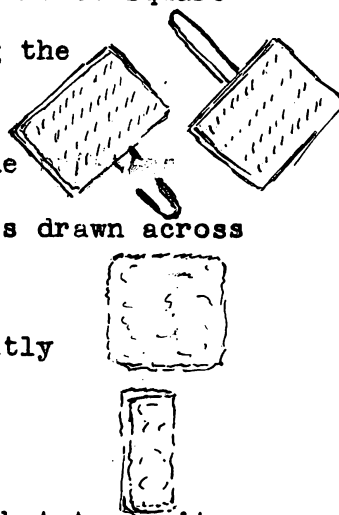
The raw wool as it is taken from the sheep must first

be "pulled". Pulling wool is comparatively simple. The women and girls sit outside in the sun with their baskets of raw wool. They take a hand full at a time and pull it bit by bit between their fingures, changing it from its matted state into a fluffy loose mass, and at the same time removing much of the dirt. Pulling prepares the wool for carding.

b. Carding.

The carders are wooden, about eight inches square each with a handle and wire bristles covering the inside.

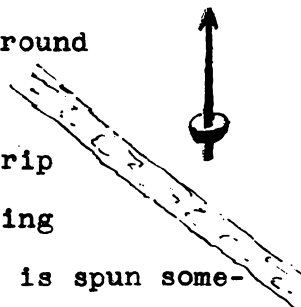
A small amount of wool is placed on the bristles of one carder and the other carder is drawn across it several times. It might be explained more clearly by the word "combing". When sufficeintly combed the thin square of wool is carefully taken off, so that it will not loose its shape, is folded in half and placed in a basket to await spinnig.



c. Spinn^{ing}

The spindle is a smooth round stick of wood with a hook similar to an arrow head on one end a flat round stone head or base on the other end.

The carded wool is formed into a long strip about two inches wide and twisted into a string as it is spun onto the spindle. The spindle is spun somewhat like a top with the short end of the stick beneath the base held between the thumb and third fingure. From the spindle the yarn is wound into a skein.



d. Dyeing.

When coloured yarn is desired the wool is dyed before it is carded. The colours used are usually a combination of natural and blue.

e. Weaving.

Women weave serapes for the men and boys and belts or sashes for themselves on hand looms. In a later paper I plan to give a detailed description of weaving.

2. Maque Fibre.

From maque fibre a tough course thread is made and woven into ayates.

Maque leaves are smoked and partially cooked over a pile of dry branches, then allowed to soak for sometime in water. When the pulp is soft and yielding it is ready to scrape from the fibre. The leaf is laid on a board which has one end in a stream of water and the other end resting on a rock on the bank. One end of the leaf is tucked under the end of the board that rests on the rock to hold it firmly while it is being scraped. The scraping is done with a metal blade that is attached to a T shaped wooden handle. When the pulp has been cleaned from the top side of the lower half of the leaf it is turned over and scraped on the other side. The threads are then divided; knotted and tucked under the upper end of the board while the other half of the leaf is cleaned. Now the fibre is washed and hung in the sun to dry. The dry threads are all separated from each other, the snarled parts

taken out and neat bundles made with the threads all lying in one direction. Maque Fibre is spun in the same manner as wool.

3. Sewing.

Some hand sewing is done but not a great deal. Occasionally a woman will make her own blouse or tribal skirt, but more often some Spanish woman in town sews these garments by machine for the Indians. What sewing is done however is done very neatly. The stitches are small and close close resembling machine sewing. When holes are worn in the clothing neat patches are sewn on.

V. Leisure Time.

The men folk often have a half or a whole day with nothing in particular to do. At such times a group of men gather in the street in front of the house to drink pulque and chat in Otomi. Sometimes the talk is serious, sometimes jesting and sometimes arguing.

The women are very seldom idle, perhaps not so much because they have no leisure time as because they never take it. One sometimes sees a woman or girl with spindle in hand and spinning as she goes to the spring for water. Her water jug is carried on her back so her hands are free to spin. Little time is spent in just visiting but when a relative or friend comes to spend the time of day she will either bring her own spinning or share in pulling wool or whatever the woman of the house is doing.

VI..Ambitions toward Improvement.

Although the people in San Pedro are far from modern in their methods of work many of them do want to learn new things and to adopt new and better ways of doing old things. Women are interested in learning to knit. not all the weaving is done by women on hand looms. One man has a machine for weaving serapes with which he makes large ones quickly⁺ with clever designs. A few men would like to use tractors and better implements but are not able to meet the expenses. Native ploughs are very primitive.

