

**Texas Roots**

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*Chapter 1***INDIAN AND SPANISH  
COLONIAL ORIGINS**

*Now* WHERE IS THE HISPANIC COMPONENT OF Texas culture more important than between the Río San Antonio and the Río Grande. The agriculture of Hispanic south Texas grew out of the interactions of very different traditions. Its roots were the ancient corn-based systems of pre-Columbian Mexico that were enriched beginning in the early sixteenth century by incorporation of the wheat and livestock-based agriculture of Spain. This chapter describes how the hybrid farming and ranching culture of Hispanic Texas developed from these two rich traditions, first supporting the Spanish missions along the Río San Antonio, then evolving into the Tejano ranching culture of south Texas.

**PRE-COLUMBIAN AGRICULTURE**

When the Spaniards arrived in Mexico in the early sixteenth century, they encountered a well-developed agriculture based, in almost all areas, on cultivation of corn, beans, squash, chilies, and a wide array of fruits, vegetables, herbs, and medicinal plants. The systems used to grow these crops varied greatly from place to place, ranging from the commonly used "slash-and-burn" process to more intensive and elaborate systems. Slash-and-burn systems were common throughout much of



the Americas, especially on steep hillsides and other lands with shallow, infertile soils. Indian farmers cut small plots of forest or woodland, usually no more than a few acres at a time, with stone or copper axes and left the plant residues to dry on the ground. Shortly before the beginning of the rainy season they burned the residues, which softened and sterilized the soil, killed insects, and left behind a layer of ash rich in potassium and phosphorus. As soon as the wet season began, farmers planted seeds directly into the ashes, using a *coa*, or digging stick, to make small holes and dropping three to six seeds into each one. When necessary, they also cut or uprooted weeds with a *coa*.<sup>1</sup>

Indian farmers grew many varieties of corn, beans, squash, and chilies, selecting those best adapted to their regional environments and preferences. They planted the crops together, often a few weeks apart, with climbing beans using the corn stalks for support. Farmers bent the corn stalks over just below the ear after the grains were filled but before the plants were dry. This reduced damage by birds and rain, and it allowed the ears to be harvested a few at a time over several months. Corn-grain yields of fifteen to fifty bushels per acre were probably common, with the first crop after the land was cleared normally yielding more than later crops. But after a few seasons, soil fertility declined, weeds became more difficult to control, and farmers abandoned the land for several years while the natural vegetation regrew and soil fertility returned. The Indians also cultivated a wide variety of other vegetables, fruits, and herbs, both in small gardens near their houses and in their fields. These crops included tree fruits, such as custard apples, guavas, sweet sapotas, and avocados, as well as tomatoes and prickly pear pads and fruits. Slash-and-burn systems were common throughout Mexico and Central America, and there must have been dozens of variations on the same theme, each an adaptation to the local environment and needs. Similar farming systems developed in the woodlands of eastern North America. In eastern Texas, the Caddos developed sustainable corn-based, slash-and-burn agriculture, which they combined with extensive hunting and gathering to build a complex and powerful confederacy.<sup>2</sup>

Some farmers practiced more intensive agriculture, especially in areas with high population densities. In dry climates the Indians built small structures of stones, wood, or soil to slow and direct runoff to plots where it could infiltrate and later be used by plants. On steep slopes farmers constructed impressive systems of parallel stone terraces to slow runoff, increase infiltration of water, and provide narrow strips of deep soil on which crops could be grown. Beginning about three thousand years ago in Oaxaca and the Valley of Mexico, communities




developed a variety of irrigation sources and methods. Major canal networks irrigated areas of up to twenty-four hundred acres, and well before the arrival of the Spaniards most of the lands in the Valley of Mexico were producing irrigated crops. *Chinampas*, representing the most intensive agricultural system developed in Mexico, were built in and around large, shallow lakes such as Texcoco and Xochimilco. They consisted of canals surrounding long, rectangular plots or beds that the farmers built up with aquatic plants and soils excavated from the canals. This rich silt and organic matter maintained soil fertility, and the porous soil of the beds allowed water from the canals to infiltrate and subirrigate the crops, producing an abundant and varied food supply.<sup>3</sup>

### SPANISH COLONIAL AGRICULTURE

The Spanish conquistadores and clerics came to the Americas to gain power, fortunes, and souls. They did not come to live within the indigenous cultures, but to dominate, convert, and rule them. This mentality, operating in conjunction with the decimation of Indian peoples by European diseases, produced dramatic changes in food production. Spaniards introduced horses, burros, mules, and cattle, classified as large livestock, or *ganado mayor*, and small animals such as sheep, goats, and hogs, known as *ganado menor*. Horses increased the speed of communication. Oxen, burros, and mules pulled plows and carts. Cattle, swine, sheep, and goats provided much-needed animal protein, utilizing steep grasslands and woodlands that the Indians, without large herbivores, had not been able to exploit. Sheep also produced wool for clothing. Spaniards brought wheat, barley, rice, and sugarcane as well. Fruits included grapes, olives, oranges, lemons, walnuts, apples, pears, figs, peaches, watermelons, mangoes, and plantains. Old-world vegetables and herbs included lettuce, cabbage, collards, cucumbers, chickpeas, fava beans, radishes, onions, mint, rue, cilantro, and parsley. Both the Spaniards, especially the clergy, and the Indians began to select those varieties that were able to grow and produce the best fruit in the wide variety of environments of the New World.<sup>4</sup>

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Spaniards brought a number of European agricultural technologies to the New World. They replaced pre-Hispanic copper hatchets with iron axes. Machetes with steel blades replaced similar wooden tools that had cutting edges made of obsidian. Ox-drawn plows were introduced, and European-style hoes replaced Indian coas. Indian farmers began to use draft animals, including



horses, burros, mules, and oxen, to carry goods and pull carts. Water- and animal-powered mills began to grind wheat, corn, and sugarcane. Indian leaders, or *caciques*, adopted Spanish dress and introduced European tools and crops into the communities under their control. Soon Spanish merchants were encouraging the production of *cochineal* (a bloodred dye made from insects collected from prickly pear cactus), woolen blankets, tobacco, and silk. These products, as well as a wide variety of both indigenous and European foodstuffs, began to move throughout Mexico on the backs of animals and in carts.<sup>5</sup>

Though yields of wheat were less than those of corn, wheat could be produced with much less labor, a real advantage as European diseases decimated the Indian labor force in the sixteenth century. The Spanish farmers sowed wheat by broadcasting the seeds over the field, then lightly harrowing the surface to cover them. The closely spaced plants crowded out most of the weeds, further reducing labor requirements. By the 1560s hundreds of farmers were raising wheat in well-watered valleys near the major cities. Eventually, producers included not only owner-operators who lived on the farm or in a nearby village but also sharecroppers, tenant farmers, and managers working for absentee landowners. During the sixteenth century they established municipal granaries to regulate the amount of wheat on the retail market, thereby stabilizing prices.<sup>6</sup>

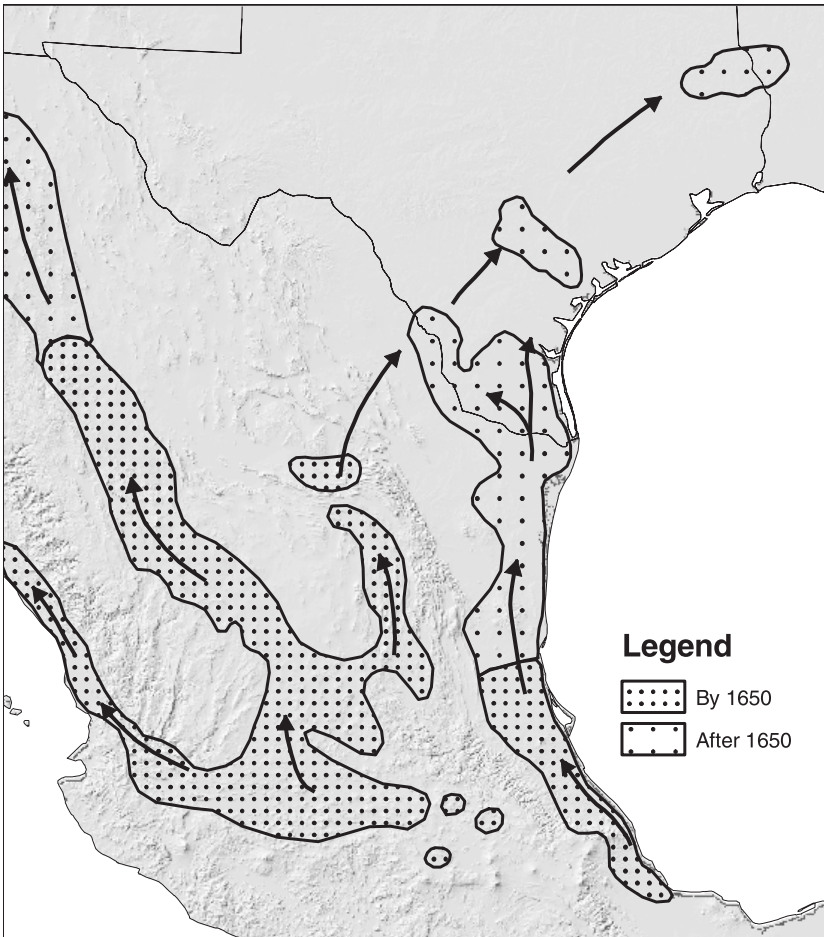
Because Spaniards considered plowing, planting, and harvesting beneath their dignity, Indians provided most of the labor. During the first years after the conquest, many Indian communities were forced to pay Spanish *encomenderos*, conquistadores with the right to demand tribute from these communities in exchange for protection and religious training. In an effort to reduce abuses, the Spaniards introduced the *repartimiento* system in 1549. It required that Indian communities provide labor to Spanish mines and farms, but under the supervision of officers of the Crown rather than the owners or managers themselves. By 1632, in response to declining Indian populations, most *repartimientos* and other forms of forced labor were abolished.<sup>7</sup>

The Spaniards had developed large-scale cattle ranching practices during the Middle Ages on the dry interior tablelands of the Meseta Central. There they began acquiring the techniques that they would later take to the New World, including the use of horses, the open range, roundups, branding, and long-distance drives. Herds were managed by a foreman (called a *mayoral* or *mayordomo*) and several cowboys (or *vaqueros*), who were either bonded servants or freemen, usually contracted annually and paid in cash or livestock. They rode small, hardy horses developed in Andalucía and by the late fifteenth century had adopted light Moorish saddles with short stirrups. Dogs assisted in

guarding and managing the cattle. Another important innovation, the stock-raisers' guild, or *mesta*, was established to regulate the cattle-ranching industry. It assigned grazing rights, set wages of *vaqueros*, regulated the use of brands, set the rate of compensation for crops damaged by livestock, and supervised the roundups, or *rodeos*, that were held in the spring and autumn to brand calves and return strays to their rightful owners. It also regulated the marketing and sale of cattle in town markets, the slaughter of animals, and the sale of meat in butcher shops and town fairs, or *ferias*; mediated disputes; and imposed penalties for illegal activities, including theft, brand changing, and killing another owner's stock. The principal breeds of Spanish cattle included black *ganado prieto*, the reddish or tan *retinto*, and the *barrenda*, which were predominantly white with black markings. The sheep raised were the *chaurro*, lean and hardy animals weighing sixty to eighty pounds at maturity and yielding one to two and a half pounds of coarse wool. The Spaniards' tough, adaptable goats were used primarily for meat, often consumed as *cabrito*, or roasted kid.<sup>8</sup>

The Mexican cattle industry began around Tampico and Veracruz on the Gulf of Mexico and on the Mesa Central near Mexico City. In the late 1530s and 1540s cattle numbers increased rapidly, and the government encouraged ranchers to move northwest of Mexico City to El Bajío, a region that stretched from Guadalajara in the west to Querétaro in the east and provided lush pastures of perennial grasses. But as cattle ranching moved northward, it began to suffer losses from poor, displaced Indians who stole cattle for meat, tallow, and hides. As a result, in 1537 the first *mesta* was established in Mexico, requiring that owners of more than three hundred *ganado menor* or twenty *ganado mayor* become members.<sup>9</sup>

Stimulated by the discovery of silver in Zacatecas and other locations in northern Mexico in the late 1540s, the cattle industry spilled northward onto the north-central plateau, or Mesa del Norte, bringing it into conflict with the fierce nomadic tribes of the region, known collectively as *Chichimecas*. From 1550 to 1585 Spanish authorities waged a concerted war with these tribes. But beginning in the 1590s government policy changed from warfare to religious conversion and assimilation. As a result, the church began to have a more active role along the northern frontier. In order to support their populations of Indian residents, the missions developed herds of livestock. *Presidios*, garrisons charged with protecting the missions, maintained large herds of horses to serve as mounts, and private ranches provided meat for soldiers and civilians. The government, in order to gain some level of control over the expanding livestock industry, began to award *estancias*, or large grants of land, in unsettled areas at a distance from Indian villages. During the late



MAP 1. Expansion of Spanish colonial ranching. Ranches present before 1650 indicated with heavy stippling, those added after 1650 indicated with light stippling.

sixteenth century the great ranches, or *haciendas*, of northern Mexico developed, extending their dominion over hundreds of thousands of acres. But overgrazing began to degrade the fragile rangeland, ranchers killed large numbers of cattle for their hides and tallow, and thieves and packs of wild dogs also took an increasing toll. By the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries cattle numbers had declined, causing meat and cattle prices to increase. Able to thrive on poorer pastures than cattle, sheep became a more important component of many ranches, especially in the highlands of northern Mexico.<sup>10</sup>

By 1650 cattle ranching occupied a large region from the Mesa Central northward through El Bajío, along the moist eastern flank of the Sierra Madre Occidental and to a lesser extent on the western slopes of the Sierra Madre Oriental. Cattle ranching also expanded along the eastern coast between Tampico and Veracruz; and along the western coast northwest of Guadalajara. After 1650 the industry expanded farther northward along the coasts of the Gulf of Mexico and Gulf of California, into the region to the west and northwest of Chihuahua City, and into the valleys of the northern Sierra Madre Occidental. The cattle raisers avoided steep mountain slopes; the Gran Tunal, a large area north of San Luis Potosí dominated by prickly pear cactus and deciduous shrubs; and the even drier Chihuahuan desert, stretching northwestward between the two sierras. The ranchers in the highlands often raised many more sheep than cattle. Their flocks were guarded by *pastores*, or sheepherders, with the help of dogs. In contrast, the ranchers in the grasslands along the Gulf of Mexico north of Veracruz specialized in raising cattle and horses.<sup>11</sup>

The large livestock-based haciendas on the northern frontier took on the characteristics of feudal estates. The owner, or *hacendado*, presided over a largely self-sufficient empire with livestock, crops, workshops, stores, a church, and almost anything else its inhabitants might need. Meat was consumed at the hacienda or sold in the cities or the mines. Hides were sent to dealers for export to Spain, for use in the mines, or for processing into leather. Sheep and goats were other important sources of meat, and wool was sold to mills in the major cities to be woven into cloth, most of which was consumed in the Americas.<sup>12</sup>

By the late sixteenth century the Mexican vaqueros had adopted the basic clothing, equipment, and methods that would be taken to Texas over a century later. Most wore a cotton or wool *camisa* (shirt), a leather *chaqueta* (jacket), tight knee-length *sotas* (pants) laced up the sides, leather *botas* (leggings) wound around the legs below the knees, and a simple flat-crowned, wide-brimmed *sombrero* (hat) made of leather, palm fiber, or felt. Many rode barefoot, but others wore leather shoes, with or without heels. A bandanna and iron spurs with large rowels completed the apparel.<sup>13</sup>

Vaqueros developed their principal tools in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The heavy Spanish *silla de montar* (military saddle) and light Moorish *jineta* evolved into the stock saddle. The *desjarretadera*, or hocking knife, was a crescent-shaped blade sharpened on the inside of the curve and mounted on a pole ten or twelve feet long. A rider following a cow or bull could thrust the blade against the back of the leg,



cutting the hamstring and bringing the animal down. Another thrust at the back of the neck severed the spinal cord, and the animal could be skinned for its hide and tallow. Though the *desjarretadera* was outlawed in 1574 because its use was leading to a depletion of the herds, vaqueros along the northern frontier continued to use it for two centuries more. The other important tool of the vaquero was the *lazo* (lasso) or the *reata* (lariat), a braided rawhide rope with a large loop at the end. The vaquero initially placed the loop of the lasso over the end of a long lance, the *garrocha*, then used the lance to guide the loop over an animal's head. This method was eventually displaced when vaqueros learned to throw the lasso, a technique that could be used from the back of a running horse or on foot in a corral.<sup>14</sup>

Horses were indispensable to the livestock industry. Those brought from Spain were of mixed quality, not the Andalusian bloodlines prized throughout Europe in the sixteenth century. As the Indians of the north learned the value of the horse, they found ways to breed and trade them. By 1600 horses were being raised in what is now New Mexico, and by the middle of the seventeenth century, the Apaches of the southern plains were using them. By 1673 they were reported among the Indians near the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers. The Caddos living in what would become northeastern Texas and adjacent Arkansas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma, acquired horses by the 1680s. The Comanches were raising them on the Great Plains by about 1700. Horses became abundant in Texas in the eighteenth century.<sup>15</sup>

Frontier missions of the Catholic Church brought farming and ranching to northern New Spain in the seventeenth century. The missions were managed solely for the benefit of the Indian neophytes, and life was simple but well organized. The missionaries, and sometimes soldiers, taught the Indians the rudiments of Christianity and the skills needed to plant and care for crops, herd livestock, and manufacture many of the simple goods and tools they needed. Missions were designed to be temporary institutions. Within a generation of being established, they were supposed to attract a stable population of Indians, instruct them in the Catholic faith, and transfer mission activities and responsibilities to parish clergy and the secular town. The objective was to produce a stable community of parishioners and resident landowners, or *vecinos*. Upon completion of their task, which often took longer than a single generation, the missionaries moved to a new frontier.

Throughout New Spain, the army was charged with helping the clerics establish, maintain, and protect the missions from hostile Indians.

Presidios were constructed far enough from the missions to avoid conflict with the Indian residents, but close enough to provide military protection in case of need. Two or three soldiers usually lived at each mission to help train and supervise the Indian residents. The other presidial soldiers kept busy patrolling the area, guarding herds of livestock, escorting the mail and travelers from one settlement to another, and assisting in construction projects. Soon after the presidio and one or more missions were established, a town, or *villa*, usually sprang up to supply their needs and benefit from the protection they provided. The initial residents were often traders, artisans, retired soldiers, and ranchers.

### FRENCH AND SPANISH EXPEDITIONS INTO TEXAS

By the 1680s the northeastern frontier of New Spain reached from El Paso del Norte on the Río Grande; to Santa Barbara and Parral on the Río Conchos; to Saltillo; to Monterrey at the foot of the Sierra Madre Oriental; and to Tampico on the Gulf of Mexico. The Pueblo rebellion of 1680 in Santa Fe had thrown the Spaniards out of New Mexico, and they appeared to have little energy left to push farther north into what is now Texas. But this would change dramatically in 1685 when René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, attempted to establish a French colony near the mouth of the Mississippi. Hoping to strengthen French claims to the Mississippi and from there threaten Spanish mines in Mexico, La Salle led a well-supplied expedition. However, his three ships completely missed the Mississippi and entered Matagorda Bay. Immediately beset by misfortune, including shipwrecks, lost supplies, rebellion, disease, and hostile Karankawa Indians, the remnants of the expedition were able to construct a crude wooden palisade and five houses, which they named Fort St. Louis, on Garcitas Creek near present-day Victoria, Texas. In desperation, La Salle set out with a small party to find the Mississippi River, only to be killed by his own men before leaving Texas. Though the French tried to maintain strict secrecy about the La Salle expedition, rumors soon reached New Spain. To counter this threat, beginning in 1686 Spanish authorities organized a series of expeditions, or *entradas*, into Texas. Led by Alonzo de León, the Spaniards finally found the remains of Fort St. Louis in 1689, where only some of the children had survived a recent attack by the Karankawas.<sup>16</sup>

Still wary of French intentions, de León's next expedition, in 1690, established Mission San Francisco de los Tejas among the powerful



Caddos of eastern Texas and western Louisiana. However, the well-fed Caddos saw no reason to congregate at the missions. The Spaniards were unable to build a functional irrigation system because of the hilly terrain, so crops failed and food shortages occurred. The Indians stole cattle and resented the soldiers' interest in the Caddo women. Epidemics killed both the Indians and the Spaniards. Despite efforts to resupply and strengthen the mission, by the autumn of 1693 the situation was hopeless, and San Francisco de los Tejas was abandoned. But Spain remained interested in the northern frontier. Between 1700 and 1703, in an attempt to convert the Indians along the Río Grande, the Spaniards established three missions and Presidio San Juan Bautista del Río Grande about thirty-five miles south of present-day Eagle Pass.<sup>17</sup>

In 1699 the French finally located the mouth of the Mississippi and established the post of Biloxi. In 1700 Louis Juchereau de Saint-Denis, a Canada-born, Paris-educated adventurer, arrived there. In 1713 he established a trading post in Natchitoches. Initially trading with the Caddos for livestock and buffalo hides, Saint-Denis concluded that trade would be much more profitable if the Spaniards reestablished their missions in eastern Texas. In 1715 he set out to visit San Juan Bautista, the nearest Spanish settlement. Crossing the Texas coastal plains, he reported that Spanish livestock, which had strayed from earlier entradas or had been taken by the Indians, "count by now the thousands, cattle as well as horses, and the land is overrun with them." Soon after arriving at San Juan Bautista with French trade goods, Saint-Denis married into the influential Spanish family of Commandant Diego Ramón. In the spring of 1716 Saint-Denis and Ramón's son, Captain Domingo Ramón, led an entrada of twelve priests, twenty-five mounted soldiers, and forty civilians, including several women, into the lands of the Caddos. Despite the abundance of wild livestock, the entrada took along an additional sixty-four oxen, five hundred horses, and more than one thousand sheep and goats. There, in 1716 and 1717, the Spaniards established six small missions and a presidio in hopes of finally attracting and converting the powerful Caddos.<sup>18</sup>

## THE CADDOS

The southwesternmost representatives of the great Mississippian cultures of middle North America, the Caddos were known as the *Tejas* to Spanish missionaries. For almost a millennium, the Caddos dominated their homelands of northeastern Texas and adjacent areas of Arkansas,

Louisiana, and Oklahoma. By the late 1600s European diseases, transmitted via extensive Indian trade routes, had greatly reduced Caddo populations, probably to less than 40,000. They were organized into two chiefdoms, the Kadohadachos along the Red River north of present Texarkana, and the Hasinai who lived to the southwest along the Sabine, Angelina, and Neches rivers. Each chiefdom was ruled by a priest-chief, the *xinesí*, and was comprised of several city-states, each controlled by a *Caddí* who answered to the *xinesí*. All the Caddos spoke Caddoan, a language related to those spoken by the Wichitas and Pawnees to the northwest. The Caddo economy was based on a productive, unirrigated, slash-and-burn farming system supplemented by extensive hunting, fishing, and gathering of wild plant materials. Their principal crops were the "three sisters," corn, beans, and squash; and they lived in semipermanent villages near permanent streams and their gardens and fields. A village with 150 inhabitants might have had eight to twelve large houses located at intervals of a few hundred yards along stream terraces or uplands near a permanent watercourse "where there is water at hand for household use and for bathing—which is very frequent among them all." Surrounded by a few outbuildings, middens, and outdoor work areas, the houses would have been only a short walk from the fields where corn, beans, pumpkins, squash, and watermelons were grown.<sup>19</sup>

Throughout the southeastern United States, American Indians cleared forestlands for cornfields. The land clearing and agricultural practices were probably similar throughout the region. First, underbrush was burned, and trees were killed by girdling the bark with a hatchet. As the tree died, dead limbs were piled and burned at its base to hasten its fall. Except in drought years, the Caddos produced abundant corn, beans, squash or pumpkins, melons, sunflowers, and tobacco. Forest openings and prairies, especially those on sandy and sandy loam soils in the river bottoms, were the basis of Caddo agriculture. They planted crops in these openings for several years until soil fertility declined or weeds became too difficult to control. The Caddo farmers then moved on to other openings nearby, leaving the exhausted fields to rest and regain their fertility.<sup>20</sup>

The planting season began in March when fields were cleared by burning. Tillage began immediately. It involved a team of men and women who worked together "breaking up just the surface of the earth with a sort of wooden instrument, like a little pickaxe, which they make by splitting the end of a thick piece of wood, that serves for the handle, and putting another piece of wood, sharp pointed at one end, into the



slit." After finishing their work, usually in two or three hours, "the owners of the house give them an abundance of food. They then move to another spot to do the same thing."<sup>21</sup>

Indians throughout what is now the southeastern United States planted corn in rows three or four feet apart with a similar distance between groups of plants in the row. For each group, the farmer made a hole with a long pointed stick or a hoe and planted three to five seeds. The farmer then covered the seeds and left them to germinate and emerge. When the corn was about a foot tall, women and children weeded the crop in the first of three or four passes. During the weeding process they pulled soil into hills around the plants to provide support.<sup>22</sup>

The Caddos, like other southeastern tribes, planted two kinds of corn. The first, the "small corn," was a short-season, popcornlike variety, "the stalk of which is not more than a *vara* [thirty-three inches] in height. However, it is covered from top to bottom with ears which are very small but covered with grain." Planted after the threat of frost had passed, the crop was weeded once while the plants were small. This early-maturing variety normally escaped the mid- and late-summer droughts and was probably eaten both fresh and dry. "Upon the same ground, after clearing it anew," they planted a larger, longer-season flour corn, which was harvested in the late summer and fall.<sup>23</sup>

Most southeastern Indians planted beans and squash between the corn plants after the corn had emerged. The beans were often allowed to use the corn stalks for support. The Caddos also planted their beans "in an odd way." "In order that the vines may run and be protected from small animals and from mildew, they stick a forked cane at each hill. Thus the vine bears more abundantly and it is no trouble for them to gather the crop because they pull up the cane and carry the whole thing home." In addition, their sunflowers grew to be "quite large." The flower was "enormous" with seed "like the piñon."<sup>24</sup>

The Caddos gathered a wide array of wild foods to complement their crops. Berries, plums, and grapes ripened in the summer, and acorns and nuts were abundant in the autumn. Fray Isidro Felis de Espinosa, who participated in several entradas during the early 1700s, noted that "the entire country is filled with various kinds of trees, such as oaks, pines, cottonwoods, live-oaks, large nuts—which yield the thick shelled nuts—and another kind of tree which yields small thin shelled nuts. The Indians use all these as food." Archaeological sites in eastern Texas contain the remains of corn, squash, acorns, hickory nuts, pecans, black walnuts, and seeds of grapes, sumac, honey locust, water locust, and hackberry.<sup>25</sup>

The timberlands of eastern Texas were home to an abundance of wild-life, including deer, turkeys, panthers, and black bears. The river bottoms were excellent habitat for raccoon, opossums, mink, gray foxes, beavers, black bears, gray squirrels, and turkeys. Buffalo were hunted on the prairies to the west. Each autumn, the skies filled with waterfowl, hawks, and other migratory birds as they made their way southward to the coast or beyond. Caddo men were expert hunters and killed a wide variety of game. Archaeological excavations have revealed that between the years 800 and 1300 the Caddos made particularly heavy use of deer, turkeys, box turtles, and to a lesser extent, cottontail, swamp, and jackrabbits. Espinosa reported, "There are lagoons in which an abundance of fish are found. . . . When warm weather comes the Indians go with their families to certain spots and stay for some days, living on fish. They carry home quantities of cooked fish, I ate some of these."<sup>26</sup>

The buffalo hunt normally occurred in November and December and involved most of the population, who moved to the hunting camps and lived in skin tents like the ones used by Plains Indians. In the 1720s Espinosa reported, "The buffalo is distant more than forty leagues [104 miles] from the [Caddo] country, and to secure a supply of dried meat the Indians all go well armed because at this time if they fall in with the Apaches the two murder each other unmercifully."<sup>27</sup>

Prior to their acquisition of European firearms, the Caddos were renowned for their use of the bow. The bow and arrow had replaced the atlatl, or spear thrower, by about the year 800. In 1806 Peter Custis reported that the Caddos' "principal weapon is the Bow & Arrow which they wield with astonishing dexterity & force.—It is said they can with great ease throw the Arrow entirely through a Buffalo. It would be worth a journey of two or three thousand miles to see them use it."<sup>28</sup>

The Caddos, like the Plains Indians, adopted horses as soon as they became available, using them for transportation, hunting, and war. By the late 1680s horses were plentiful among the Caddos, and La Salle traded a metal ax for one. By the 1720s Espinosa could report that the Tejas "ride on horseback with great skill, their feet hanging loose and, traveling at a great rate, they guide their horses with only a slender cord which they use in place of a bridle."<sup>29</sup>

During the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Caddos traded large amounts of furs and hides to the French and Spaniards. Most of these were exported through Louisiana. For example, the Spanish general Terán reported that in less than a year during the early 1690s, the Caddos brought the skins of forty thousand deer, fifteen hundred bears, twelve hundred otters, and six hundred beavers to Nacogdoches for sale



to the French. Most years, the Caddos went north during the winter, where they killed "a great number of bears" and brought back "a great deal of bear fat rolled up in moss and loaded on their horses." After rendering the fat, they kept it "in pots for seasoning for the whole year. . . . It is certainly true that they need nothing else for seasoning when they are supplied with this." As a result of this trade with the Caddos and other tribes, the value of pelts exported from Louisiana increased from about 3,000 livres in 1718 to 120,000 livres in 1756, and to 250,000 livres in 1762.<sup>30</sup>

Caddo women were responsible for all aspects of food production and preparation except hunting and preparing the soil. By about 1450 corn was the most important staple of the Caddo diet. The grain was carefully stored to assure an adequate supply for both food and seed corn. To protect their seed corn, the Caddos made "a string of the best ears of grain, leaving the shucks on, and put it up on a forked stick at a point in the house" where the smoke would deter insects. Enough seed corn was stored to provide for two years' plantings "so that, if the first year is dry, they will not lack seed for the second year." To prevent weevil damage, the Caddos stored their corn and beans in "large baskets made of heavy reeds" and then covered the grain with "a thick layer of ashes."<sup>31</sup>

Caddos used both fresh and dried corn in a variety of dishes. The women scraped fresh corn from the cob, probably using mussel shells from the local streams. The resulting mush could be fried or boiled and consumed immediately. Sometimes, grease was added to the mush, and the mixture was baked. The resulting cake was then broken into pieces, dried on top of an arbor or roof for several days, and stored in sacks hung inside the storage building. A mush was prepared by boiling one part cake in three parts water, with or without dried or fresh meat. Like other American Indian farmers, the Caddos ground dried corn with mortars made from the trunks of trees. These were buried upright in the ground, and the upper ends were "excavated by means of fire to a certain depth." As many as four women would beat the corn with wooden pestles "about five feet long, and they preserve[d] a cadence in the way the blacksmiths beat on their anvils." After pounding the corn "for a certain time, they [took] out the said meal and other women pass[ed] it through little sieves which they [made] very neatly out of large canes." When finer meal was needed, they used "little winnowing baskets . . . in which the finest remains caught on the bottom; the grits and the bran come out above." Cornmeal was prepared in a number of ways: it was eaten alone as a fine dry powder, mixed with beans and boiled, used to thicken stews and soups, mixed with honey, or formed into a patty and

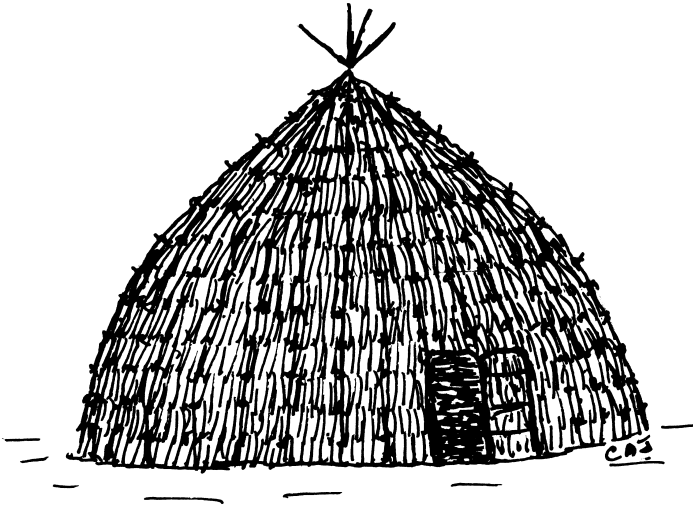


boiled with or without dried meat. Caddo women also prepared a thick paste of ground roasted corn and sunflower seeds called *bajan*. The French traveler Pierre Pagés wrote that the best provision for traveling was “a piece of flesh dried in the sun, and a small quantity of ground Indian corn, named by the Spaniards *pynolé* [pinole]. This meal, when mixed with water, swells to a great bulk, insomuch that a single handful of it suffices amply for one repast.”<sup>32</sup>

The Caddos planted “five or six kinds of beans—all of them very good, also calabashes, watermelons, and sunflowers. The seed of all these, mixed with corn make very fine *tamales*. They also use another kind of seed like cabbage seed which, ground with corn, make[s] a kind of meal.” They prepared beans by “placing them in a big pot without removing the strings even, since they cover them with vine leaves, until they are almost cooked.” They served the beans “in a bark apron” and shelled them as they ate. The women boiled dried pieces of pumpkin with meat and sometimes added ground or boiled nuts to the mixture. They dried and stored wild plums and grapes for future use. Sunflower seeds were also ground, mixed with cornmeal, and made into small cakes or tamales.<sup>33</sup>

Caddo women placed hickory and pecan nuts in the shallow depression of a nutting stone and smashed them with a stone *mano*. They then boiled the mixture and skimmed the oil off the top for seasoning. They boiled whole acorns in water, mashed them, and leached the paste with water until the tannic acid had been removed. They mixed the remaining white paste, as well as the ground kernels of pecans and other nuts, with corn flour to make breads and puddings. Both the nuts and acorns contained protein, and the acorns were a good source of lysine, a valuable amino acid that is deficient in corn. Archaeologists have also found carbonized seeds of lamb’s-quarters, hackberry, and smartweed at Caddo sites. The Caddo women probably parched, ground, and mixed these seeds of wild plants with other grains and meat. The mixture was then used to prepare mush or stew.<sup>34</sup>

Fresh meat was also cooked or dried for later use. The Caddos living in Oklahoma in the 1930s dried meat the traditional way, by cutting it into thin slabs “just as thin as it could be cut.” “This would then be hung on a rope, or sticks, and turned over once or twice a day. It usually took about three or four days to dry, depending on the weather. The meat would keep indefinitely when dried, and was good to eat raw.” In addition, the Caddos often “roasted beef on coals of fire, then put it in a mortar and pounded it up with a pestle” before boiling it in a pot with a little water. They sometimes had two kinds of meat at a meal, “one boiled and



*Caddo house*

the other roasted," which were served on "very pretty platters" made of reeds. Meals were social occasions, and Fray Francisco Casañas, who helped establish the first missions in East Texas, observed that "they take a long time to eat and while they are eating, they sing and talk, and, from time to time, whistle. . . . After eating, the guests are supplied with the requisites of smoking."<sup>35</sup>

The Caddos produced a wide variety of pottery and basketry products, most of which were used in food preparation. Throughout their history, Caddo women made both plain and finely decorated ceramics. Distinctive patterns and styles distinguished specific communities and craftswomen. Many types of coarse and finely woven baskets and mats were made, each for a special use. Raw materials included "willow, hackberry, slippery elm, dogwood, cattail, swamp grass, soap weed, or bear grass. Hackberry was used mostly for sifting corn and washing lye hominy . . . because it has no bad taste."<sup>36</sup>

Because of the stability provided by their agriculture, the Caddos could afford to construct well-built, dome-shaped houses made of wooden frames covered with grass. In 1687 Henri Joutel described them as "round at the top, after the manner of a bee-hive or a rick of hay. Some of them are sixty feet in diameter." He noted that several families could live in a single house, and "in some of them there are fifteen or twenty [people], each [family] of which has its nook or corner, bed and other utensils to itself, but without any partition to separate it from the rest. However, they have nothing in common beside[s] the fire, which is



in the midst of the hut, and never goes out." A wooden mortar for grinding corn was placed between the fire pit and the western door.<sup>37</sup>

For hundreds of years the Caddos were the most highly organized and successful people in what is now Texas. Taking full advantage of the natural resources of their homeland, they developed an economy based on hunting the region's abundant wildlife and gathering wild foods. The Caddo food system was reliable, sustainable, and its communal nature gave the Caddos and other Mississippian peoples the leisure to develop complex hierarchical societies with impressive material cultures. If the introduction of European diseases had not begun to decimate Caddo populations, the confederacies would have probably successfully incorporated European technologies and would have remained a powerful political force well into the nineteenth century. However, as Caddo populations were decreasing under the pressure of epidemic diseases, another type of agriculture and rural economy was pushing northward from what is now central Mexico.

By the early eighteenth century New Spain, in response to French threats from Louisiana, had established a toehold in eastern Texas among the powerful Caddo nation. Entirely dependent on their powerful and well-fed hosts for food, the Spaniards had not begun to develop a sustainable agriculture in Texas. But the distance between the eastern Texas missions and San Juan Bautista on the Río Grande was too great, and Spain established a way station between the two. This station, initially consisting of Presidio San Antonio de Béxar and Mission Valero, would grow into an agricultural and ranching community of five missions, a villa, and the presidio. Known simply as "Béxar" or "San Antonio," this settlement would play a large role in Spain's, and later Mexico's, fortunes in Texas.