

NOTES ON INTERTRIBAL COMMERCE BETWEEN THE ARIKARA AND OTHER TRIBES

The course of the Missouri River formed, in aboriginal times, a great artery of intertribal commerce between north and south, and, along its tributaries, between east and west. By means of these natural travel ways there was much of interchange of natural products of mountains, plains, and valleys, of prairies and forests, much interchange of ideas, of stories, of poetic and mythologic conceptions; of knowledge of their world, its geography and natural resources, habits and customs, arts and crafts of various nations of different racial stocks and cultural inheritances. The Arikara, of Caddoan stock, was a nation of the highest development of the arts of life, of material and mental culture known in the region of the Great Plains or of the areas contiguous to it. The products of their agriculture were eagerly sought by the tribes of the High Plains to the west of them, and of the mountains beyond, in neither of which regions could agriculture be carried on. At the time of green corn the agricultural tribes along the river, among whom the Arikaras were foremost, were sure to have many visitors from the Plains tribes. These tribes noted the time of the appearance of the blossoms of the blazing star (*Liatris scariosa* and *Liatris pycnostachya*). When these flowers came into bloom, they would say, "Now the Arikaras' corn is coming into condition for eating. Let us go and visit them." So, they resorted to the villages of the Arikaras, bringing with them presents from the products of the natural resources of their own country and works of their own handicraft, and enjoyed feasts of green corn with their Arikara hosts. At this time, and again in the fall, when the ripe corn, beans and squashes and sunflower seeds were harvest, foreign tribes came to the Arikaras and other agricultural tribes and for many days engaged in mutual exchange of commodities.

The most common unit of measure of commodities was the *hunansádu*. The *hunansádu* was the measure of content of the common burden basket. The dimensions of this basket have been given in the account of Arikara basket-making. One *hunansádu* of shelled corn was considered equal in value to one ordinary good buffalo robe or two packs of dried meat.

Stesta-kata said, "The commodity of which we got most from the Dakotas was dried tipsin roots. Tipsin (*Psoralea esculenta*), [the Arikara name of which is *hsúoka*,] grows abundantly in our country, but

our women feared the Dakotas too much to go out on the prairie far from the villages to gather it. The Dakotas made strings of it of standard length. The length of a tipsin string was one arm-reach. They also split and dried the roots loose. We traded one *hunansádu* of shelled corn for four strings of tipsin roots, plus one *hunansádu* of dried split roots of tipsin.”

The Arikaras obtained dried chokecherries from the Dakotas, although they also put up some for themselves. When they bought them from the Dakotas they paid one *hunansádu* of shelled corn for one-half *hunansádu* of dried chokecherries. When they bought dried Juneberries (*Amelanchier alnifolia*), they paid for them the same price as for chokecherries. They are easier to prepare for drying than chokecherries, but harder to gather. The chokecherries are easier to gather, but the process of pounding to a pulp and drying is laborious, hence they were equalized in price.

In another place (Vol. ii, p. 197) James says that these tribes or Indians “formerly carried on a limited trade with the Spaniards of Mexico, with whom they exchanged dressed bison skins for blankets, wheat, flour, maize, etc., but their supplies of these articles are now cut off by a war which they at present are waging against that people. They also at distant periods held a kind of fair on a tributary of the Platte River near the mountains (hence called Grand Camp Creek) at which they obtained British merchandise from the Shiennes of Shienne River, who obtained the same at the Mandan village from the British traders that frequent that part of our territory.”

In commenting on the Arikara, Lewis and Clark (Original Journals, vol, vi, p. 90) say: “They maintain a partial trade with their oppressors, the Tetons, to whom they barter horses, corn, beans, and a species of tobacco which they cultivate, and receive in return guns, ammunition, kettles, axes, and other articles which the Tetons obtain from the Yanktons of N. and Sissatones, who trade with Mr. Cammeron, on the river of St. Peters. These horses and mules the Ricaras obtain from their western neighbors, who visit them frequently for the purpose of trafficking.” Lewis & Clark, Thwaites ed. Vol. VI, p. 89.

Mandan Commerce.- “They live in fortified villages, hunt immediately in their neighborhood, and cultivate corn, beans, squashes and tobacco, which form articles of traffic with their neighbors the Assinniboin: they also barter horses with the Assinniboin for arms, ammunition, axes, kettles, and other

articles of European manufacture, which these last obtain from the British establishments on the Assinniboin River. The articles which they obtain thus from the Assinniboins and British traders who visit them, they again exchange for horses and leather tents with the Crow Indians, Cheyenne, Wetepahatoes, Kiawas, Kanenavich, Staetan and Cataka, who visit them occasionally for the purpose of traffic.”