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And Justice for All: The Development of Political Centralization Among Newly Sedentary Foragers

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Although Lee (1979) states that high incidences of violence tend to be restricted to large sedentary aggregated Basarwa (Bushman, San¹) communities, some authors have assumed that the same rate of violence can be found among mobile foraging Basarwa (e.g., Knauff

1987). Contrasts among established sedentary, newly sedentary, and nomadic Basarwa show significant differences in community political centralization, presence of violence, and institutionalized mechanisms for the mediation of disputes. These differences can be directly linked to different mobility patterns. As a result, the Basarwa provide an opportunity to study sedentarization in action. This is possible because of the excellent descriptions available in the literature of both nomadic Basarwa and of sedentary Basarwa (e.g., Hitchcock 1982; Lee 1979).

Nomadic Basarwa culture can be characterized as egalitarian with relatively little sociopolitical stratification and no hierarchies. Research conducted among newly sedentary Basarwa (ranging from still semi-sedentary to sedentary for no longer than 20 to 25 years) illustrates how the shift from nomadism to sedentism necessitates an increase in political centralization in the form of a community-sanctioned arbitrator and what happens if one is not available. This is *not* to imply that sedentarization is the only process that can cause the development of formal political leadership, but rather that if a group becomes sedentary, there must be a consolidation of political power by a single or a few individuals who act as mediators when necessary. The actual details of the operationalization of this within a particular society varies cross-culturally.

One of the best portrayals of nomadic Basarwa politics is Lee's (1979:367) statement that they "vote with their feet." When conflicts arise people simply move and groups disperse. Nomadic !Kung devalue aggression and have explicit values proscribing assault, loss of control, and intimidation (Draper 1978). There are informal sanctions against arrogance, bragging, greed, and manipulation of people that go beyond those common in more sociopolitically complex societies (Draper 1978; Lee 1972). Disagreements and conflicts are discussed among all band members (Silberbauer 1982). Trance dances (Katz 1982) and entertainment dances also serve to heal problems such as intra-

group bickering and discord (cf. Hitchcock 1985). Violence only occasionally occurs in nomadic Basarwa camps (Marshall 1976). Lee records arguments at camps of all sizes but notes their increased frequency at larger sedentary communities. Serious disputes erupt once every two weeks at water holes with large populations (100–150), in contrast to water holes with small populations (50 or fewer) where conflicts emerge only every three or four months (Lee 1979).²

Nata River Basarwa and others, who have been sedentary for at least 100 years and perhaps longer (Hitchcock 1982), provide an example of the development of political centralization. I suggest these groups have been sedentary long enough to have developed incipient formal political leadership which has slightly reduced the number of violent disputes and fights. Charismatic trance dancers are candidates for emerging leadership roles among sedentary Ghanzi Basarwa, consistent with the healers' traditional role of returning harmony to a community (Guenther 1975, 1976). The change from trance dancer/healer in a nomadic context to potential political leader in a sedentary context reflects a general trend towards increased specialization and stratification (i.e., complexity; see Kent 1989a).

!Kung seek outsiders, such as Herero, to arbitrate disputes. The difference is the result of the relatively recent sedentarization of some !Kung observed by Lee (in contrast to the Nata, who have been sedentary for much longer). As a consequence, Nata River Basarwa have initiated the beginning of institutionalized political control and leadership. The use of talking and ritual activities such as dancing are still employed among sedentary Nata River Basarwa to reduce tension and social conflict (Hitchcock and Holm 1985:10). According to Hitchcock (personal communication, 1988), internal conflicts are less violent and homicides fewer among the sedentary Nata than was recorded by Lee (1979) 25 years ago in newly sedentary !Kung communities. This is the result of institutionalized forms of arbitration present among the

sedentary Nata River Basarwa not present in recently sedentary groups.

Political Organization Among Newly Sedentary Basarwa

A new community called Kutse is composed of Basarwa and mixed Basarwa/Bakgalagadi who speak a Central Kalahari Sesarwa dialect. About 12% of the community is also made up of Bakgalagadi who do not own any cattle. Total community population fluctuates greatly but is approximately 145, excluding visitors. There is much mobility within the Kutse community itself. In fact, the sedentism that characterizes Kutse may be seen as more of a veneer than as an established lifestyle. However, the mobility is not sufficient to resolve disputes as was possible when people were still primarily nomadic.

A total of 63 Basarwa, mixed Basarwa/Bakgalagadi,³ and Bakgalagadi were asked their opinion about political leaders.⁴ Traditionally nomadic Basarwa had no chiefs, whereas traditionally Bakgalagadi did (Kuper 1970; Solway 1986). Of those interviewed, 48% said there is no Mosarwa chief, 30% said there is, and 21% said they do not know (Table 1 and 2). This illustrates the ambivalent position of traditional customs among these newly sedentary peoples. All those who said there is a Mosarwa chief claimed that he is a local Kutse resident with the fictitious name (as all names here are) of Nama. There is no significant correlation

between ethnicity and whether or not someone thinks there is a Mosarwa chief in a chi-square analysis ($p = .954$). A relatively large number of people said they do not know if there is a Mokgalagadi chief (14%), while 19% said there is not one and 62% said there is. More people who classify themselves as Mosarwa said that there is no Mokgalagadi chief or that they do not know if there is one than did those who classify themselves as Mokgalagadi ($p = .028$). After the most serious gang fight during my fieldwork at Kutse, a Mokgalagadi Game Scout was asked to mediate. However, in none of the interviewees' answers is the Mokgalagadi mentioned as a chief. He is not perceived as a chief but as a mediator of disputes. This is a subtle yet significant difference. He is not a leader and is not part of the political system per se. He is an outsider who establishes temporary order when necessary. In fact, he is most often sought *after* an altercation has occurred, as if to smooth things over rather than to actually arbitrate or to prevent fights.

According to Nama and others in the community, he was told by a government official to act as the local chief.⁵ In 1987, he said, "I was chief of the Basarwa, but now I'm too old. The government said I can look after the people and give out the porridge [mealie meal flour distributed free by the government]." It is important to note that everyone who considers Nama a chief, including Nama himself, does so *only* because it is generally

Table 1
Interview responses to the question about the presence of a chief of the Basarwa.

| Response | Ethnicity | | | | | |
|--------------|-----------|----------|-------------|---------|-----------|------------------------|
| | Basarwa | | Bakgalagadi | | Total | |
| | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Yes | 6 (35%) | 8 (29%) | 5 (63%) | — | 11 (44%) | 8 (21%) |
| No | 8 (47%) | 14 (50%) | 2 (25%) | 6 (67%) | 10 (40%) | 20 (53%) |
| Do not know | 3 (18%) | 6 (21%) | — | 3 (33%) | 3 (100%) | 9 (33%) |
| <i>Total</i> | 17 (68%) | 28 (74%) | 8 (32%) | 9 (24%) | 25 (100%) | 37 ^a (100%) |

^aOne woman who classified herself as ethnically mixed is not included in this table. She said she did not know if there is a Mosarwa chief.

Table 2
Interview responses to the question about the presence of a chief of the Bakgalagadi.

| Response | Ethnicity | | | | | |
|--------------|-----------|----------|-------------|---------|-----------|------------------------|
| | Basarwa | | Bakgalagadi | | Total | |
| | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Yes | 13 (77%) | 10 (36%) | 7 (88%) | 8 (89%) | 20 (80%) | 18 (50%) |
| No | 2 (12%) | 9 (32%) | — | 1 (11%) | 2 (8%) | 10 (26%) |
| Do not know | 2 (12%) | 7 (25%) | — | — | 2 (8%) | 7 (18%) |
| Unknown | — | 2 (7%) | 1 (13%) | — | 1 (4%) | 2 (5%) |
| <i>Total</i> | 17 (68%) | 28 (76%) | 8 (32%) | 9 (24%) | 25 (100%) | 37 ^a (100%) |

^aOne woman who classified herself as ethnically mixed is not included in this table. She said she thought there was a Mokgalagadi chief in Salawje.

thought that an outside government official conferred the position on him.

Anatomy of a Fight

The Kutse Basarwa do not resemble the pacifist portrayal of the nomadic Basarwa described as the "Harmless People" by Marshall-Thomas (1958). In a single month I observed a similar number of fights as was observed by other anthropologists over a year of research among nomadic !Kung (e.g., Draper 1978; Marshall 1976). The frequency of violent confrontations is similar to Lee's (1979) observation of fights erupting approximately every two weeks in large aggregated Dobe settlements. In every case witnessed at Kutse, drinking homemade beer preceded the violence. According to one informant, people fight only when drunk, although Maholesa disagreed and said people just fight more often when they are drunk. A gang fight observed in 1987 illustrates how people without an institutionalized political arbitrator deal with the recurrent problem of fighting, the role of Maholesa in vying for political recognition, and the mediation of the Mokgalagadi Game Scout in disputes.

Rúca (all are fictitious names) was beaten by his brother-in-law, who was drunk at the time, because he refused to give him money to buy more homemade beer. G/enidzi normally was not hostile when sober. While drunk, he had beaten up several other people before (all males). He had called everyone at Kutse bastards and threatened to kill people with his

hunting spear. According to Rúca, people complained to the regional chief, but to no avail. After recovering from a severe beating by G/enidzi, Rúca went to the Game Scout, who told him to tie G/enidzi up to a tree as punishment, but not to hit him.

The entire community was upset. This beating, one of a number initiated by G/enidzi, represented the last straw. No one had any more patience with the lack of political sanctions available at Kutse. Eleven days after Rúca's fight I went to Maholesa's compound and found an unusually large number of Kutse residents sitting around talking. Most people in camp, both males and females, congregated at Maholesa's hut drinking beer he provided. Voices were loud and agitated and people were already drunk. G/enidzi was absent, although his sister-in-law and brother-in-law were present. An hour later Rúca and I left Maholesa's camp to interview an older couple who were at their windbreak about a ten-minute walk away. During the questioning, G/enidzi, who was sober, came by and sat quietly next to me and Rúca to listen to the interview.

Ten minutes later Maholesa and all the men who had been at his camp earlier came by and jumped G/enidzi. They hit and kicked him, while yelling angrily. The men dragged him to Rúca's camp nearby and tied him to a tree. G/enidzi's legs were pulled back and tied together and his shirt torn from his back while the men kicked and hit him. Several women

also came over and kicked and hit him while shouting. Some of the men cut tree branches which they used to whip G/enidzi, who by then was alternating screaming and crying. Spectators shouted encouragement to the vigilantes.

A man screaming that he wanted to kill G/enidzi had to be restrained. Rúcá, afraid of being accused of starting the fight, stayed a discreet distance away, occasionally pleading with people not to hurt G/enidzi too much because he feared he would be blamed. The attackers eventually left G/enidzi tied to the tree at Rúcá's compound and went to Maholesa's wife's female cousin's compound, within sight of the tree. They sat around the windbreak talking quietly. G/enidzi's wife summoned the Game Scout (approximately one-hour walk from the Kutse community). G/enidzi got loose from the tree once and was caught and tied up again. Someone got G/enidzi's spear and stuck it in a nearby fence, yelling to G/enidzi, "Try to kill us now." G/enidzi sat quietly tied to the tree. Most of the men went to a nearby compound and talked while the women sat at Maholesa's wife's cousin's windbreak.

Approximately 3½ hours later everyone moved near the tree and sat several meters away. A blanket was put over G/enidzi's shoulders. The Game Scout arrived shortly thereafter and G/enidzi was untied. Eleven men sat in a circle with the Game Scout. Seven women plus children sat to one side. Maholesa was the spokesperson and explained the circumstances surrounding the beating. G/enidzi did not say anything in his defense. The Game Scout made a short speech during which people talked among themselves, making it difficult to hear, while others wandered in and out of the area. The Game Scout inquired how the fight began and who was guilty and why. He was told that G/enidzi was guilty because he had started it by beating and insulting people. The Game Scout admonished the people not to fight like wild animals in the bush but to act like humans. I was asked to take G/enidzi to the regional clinic the next day where he could make a formal complaint to the chief. Although I agreed, G/enidzi decided not

to go. When the Game Scout finished talking, people dispersed into small groups.

The next day, G/enidzi and his wife moved from his mother-in-law's camp (which was Rúcá's mother's camp) to a sister-in-law's camp where his mother had moved previously. G/enidzi spent the next several days in camp, recovering from his wounds. Five days after the attack, G/enidzi, his wife, children, and mother left Kutse to live at another Basarwa community with relatives of his mother.

Analysis of a Fight

After unsuccessfully trying to get outside mediation for a community problem, Maholesa (not Nama) organized a punishment that rid Kutse of the problem by causing G/enidzi to flee. Consistent with the traditional resolution of problems, mobility was still the solution to the community conflict—G/enidzi left and went to another village. Because 18 people participated in the beating, no single individual could be blamed. The solution was discussed at Maholesa's camp while people got drunk and lost their inhibitions. Maholesa provided the beer and organized the event.⁶ I believe he took the responsibility in an attempt to achieve a leadership position. Even so, most men and some women actually took part in the fight, while others were witnesses. More women were involved in the drinking before the fight at Maholesa's camp than in the actual beating.⁷

According to the Game Scout, he is summoned to arbitrate disputes at Kutse more often when sugar for making beer is available than when it is not. He said that he merely talks to the people and tries to determine who is guilty. When I asked him why people seek his aid, he replied it is because they know him since he has always lived near Kutse.⁸ Maholesa claimed that he has called the Game Scout only four times in the past several years.

Physical violence is common at Kutse. There was an average of at least two incidents of violence a month during 1987 and 1988. I submit that its frequency is

directly related to the people's newly sedentary mobility strategy coupled with aggregation. Inhabitants at Kutse have a political organization that fits neither nomadic nor totally sedentary ways of life. This lack of fit produces stress when it cannot accommodate disputes. The result is alcohol-precipitated violence. Certainly more attacks can be expected as a result of drunkenness, but to what extent will they occur? Availability of beer does not in and of itself account for the increase in violence at Kutse. Several informants stated that there is less fighting at other villages with an established chief (and in some cases a jail). In these particular villages it is actually easier to obtain the ingredients to make beer than it is at Kutse, where there is no store and money is difficult to obtain. The difference that accounts for the noted increase in fights at Kutse is the lack of a formal mechanism to resolve conflicts. A formal leader is present at the other villages, where beer is more accessible but fighting is less common. On a number of occasions Rúcá sadly shook his head and said that the Kutse people fight too much and that it is bad; the nonviolence ideal is still present. But the reality is that fighting and particularly violent attacks are common at Kutse. It may well be that alcohol is necessary to transgress the traditional ideals of pacifism. I would argue that while alcohol precipitates violence, it is not the cause of the frequency of violence.

Discussion

Physical and verbal violence is endemic in newly sedentary settlements. Although present in nomadic and established sedentary communities, hostilities and violent conflicts are not as frequent or as ubiquitous as they are in recently settled aggregated villages. In the nomadic context, negative reinforcement is employed by everyone to discourage antisocial behavior, including physical fighting (Draper 1975). Unstable nomadic groups usually break up when physical violence threatens to erupt. Newly sedentary !Kung have adopted a response to the internal strife that pervades their sedentary

communities: "Were it not for the presence of a local Herero headman and court . . . strain would develop . . . where group cohesion would be significantly undermined" (Yellen 1984:58). The number of Kutse residents claiming not to know if Basarwa or Bakgalagadi chiefs exist indicates the ambivalence of a centralized political position in a society currently in transition. Innovative ways to adapt the traditional solution of moving from internal problems and the source of disturbance to a sedentary context have been described among some Basarwa groups. Wiessner (1982:82) notes that !Kung maintain *hxaro* with relatives in different areas to keep alternate residences available in times of conflict.

Formal leadership is a consequence of sedentism in aggregated communities. It is true that centralized leadership can arise in nomadic societies. However, sedentary societies cannot exist without formal centralized leadership at some level, be it internal or external. Although partly a result of contact with other more politically centralized/stratified societies, such as Bakgalagadi and Herero, I contend that even if such contact did not exist, centralized leadership would develop in response to established sedentary and aggregated conditions. Despite long-term interaction between Basarwa and Bantu speakers (Denbow and Wilmsen 1986), nomadic Basarwa remained politically noncentralized for centuries. If the line of reasoning presented here is correct, the cause could be attributed to the use of mobility, rather than political centralization and mediators, to resolve disputes among nomadic Basarwa.

It is suggested that individuals will voluntarily submit to a leader because without one they are unable to mediate disputes that continually arise in a sedentary aggregated context. To use traditional means (dispersal) would disrupt their newly adopted sedentary lifestyle. Nama is occasionally sought to arbitrate at Kutse. His relative ineffectiveness is not the result of personal inadequacies but rather a direct result of his situation. The consequence is that numerous fights occur compared to other villages with a rec-

ognized leader who can intervene. Newly sedentary, aggregated societies are in a state of stress because the traditional means of conflict resolution are no longer viable and the new ones are not yet available or culturally acceptable. Settlements such as Kutse are, as a consequence, forced to seek outside help (e.g., the Herero by some !Kung). Such outside mediators are an intermediate solution, one no longer needed by groups such as the Nata River Basarwa, who have a longer history of sedentism. A more permanent solution, again as evidenced by Nata River and Ghanzi Basarwa, is the development of internal formal leadership. The emergence of formal chiefs marks the beginning of increased political stratification. However, until such time as a local indigenous solution, like the centralization of political authority, is developed, a mixed strategy is utilized to adjudicate problems.

Since there is no single person with the authority to arbitrate at Kutse, consistent with the traditional political organization, most of the adults acted together to solve a community problem by the gang beating of G/enidzi. Maholesa attempted to achieve formal leadership status by organizing the solution to the problems G/enidzi was causing and by reporting hunting and other infractions to the Game Scout and occasionally to the regional chief. Many people did not recognize his authority and repudiated his desire for political power. If the people at Kutse had been sedentary for a longer period, the position of authority Maholesa wanted may have been available to him. At this point in time, however, it is not. The organized violence against G/enidzi led to the use of an outsider to intervene, since there is no recognized community mediator. The entire incident was ultimately resolved in the traditional manner of "voting with one's feet" (Lee 1979). The offending person left the community. No one asked him to leave; he and his family just did not feel comfortable remaining there and left. G/enidzi returned to Kutse six months later and again engaged in a number of fights. He was eventually persuaded to leave the community

core and spend a week at a camp on the margin of the community to calm down (located an approximately 35-minute walk away from the community nucleus). If residents at Kutse were still nomadic G/enidzi might have been ostracized much earlier, probably before violence occurred repeatedly. If residents at Kutse had been sedentary for hundreds of years and had evolved the mechanisms necessary to maintain that sedentism and aggregation, they would probably have had a formal leader/arbitrator to resolve the problem without resorting to as much violence.

Another way some families deal with high incidences of fighting is to move their camp to the periphery of the community. This has resulted in a slight dispersal of the community nucleus. New camps are located a 10–20 minute walk from the community center. A number of people who moved to the periphery of the community did so expressly to escape the fighting that characterizes the core area. One family relocated their camp within the Kutse core community in order to escape the noise and potential problems associated with a neighboring household. These are other examples of using mobility to solve problems when no community-sanctioned political arbitrator is available.

It is not appropriate to compare the statistics of violence from newly sedentary societies such as !Kung or Kutse Basarwa to those in the United States, New Guinea, or elsewhere, where the process of sedentarization and aggregation are not recent (e.g., Knauff 1987). Whereas Knauff's explanation (1987) that competition of males for male status and access to women are responsible for the cross-cultural prevalence of violence may be valid in a number of cross-cultural instances, it is not valid for the Basarwa.⁹ There are other factors that need to be studied. The stranger density in a settlement may be a contributing factor to the aggregation or crowding stress that has been widely noted in urban settings and to the general lack of aggregation or crowding stress noted among nomadic Basarwa (Draper 1973). Kutse is made

up of people who are not closely related biologically, although every person living there has been incorporated within the kinship system. We need to determine how the traditional kinship system is coping with the number of strangers living together in newly sedentary Basarwa communities.

Results of this study suggest that the numerous fights recorded for newly sedentary Basarwa communities are the direct consequence of an acephalous society in flux, the result of recent sedentarization and aggregation. These groups lack the cultural institutions necessary to accommodate the side effects of sedentism and aggregation, namely, an increase in potential for disputes and violence. This in no way implies that violence is absent in nomadic societies or in societies sedentary for a long time. It does imply that newly sedentary societies may have more internal strife, particularly physical violence, than they had while still nomadic.

Conclusions

I suggest that endemic violence characteristic of newly sedentary Basarwa only superficially resembles violence endemic in other societies with long histories of sedentism. The violence stems from different origins. While nomadic, Basarwa did not have the high level of tension and hostilities that plague newly sedentary and aggregated groups. Violence is less common in long-term sedentary Basarwa with emerging headmen and political centralization. As Knauff (1987) recognizes, it is crucial not to lump superficially similar phenomena without determining whether or not the underlying causes are also similar. To do so is to mask the very diversity we seek to investigate on both diachronic and synchronic levels.

Notes

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¹Basarwa is the term used to designate Khoe-speaking peoples inhabiting Botswana and adjacent areas by the Bantu-speaking Tswana, who are numerically and politically dominant in the region. It is also the term preferred by the Botswana government and is understood by at least the group I worked with as a term referring to them. Mosarwa is the singular form of Basarwa.

²The relatively high number of homicides and fights with weapons at large gatherings, all of which occurred prior to 1956 (Lee 1979:381–395), may be explained by the reduced intervention by neighboring Bantu speakers in Basarwa political affairs at that time than at the present and by the lack of any institutionalized conflict resolution mechanism available. After 1956, serious fighting in sedentary aggregated settlements, particularly with spears and poisoned arrows, was somewhat deterred by the legal sanctions of the Batswana and earlier British legal systems (Lee 1972:348–349).

³This is an etic category not recognized by most residents. The majority of people assigned to this category considered themselves Basarwa and in most cases, those grouped as ethnically mixed are no less Basarwa than many !Kung (Lee 1979; Yellen 1984) or than most if not all Nata River Basarwa (Hitchcock 1982). There are few significant differences between Basarwa and mixed Basarwa/Bakgalagadi in their responses to the interview questions, but these differences and their interpretations are complex and warrant a separate article (Kent 1989b). To be consistent with the comparative data collected by

other researchers, an emic classification of Basarwa is used here.

⁴My interpreter was a local mixed Mosarwa-Mokgalagadi adolescent who spoke Sesarwa, Sekgalagadi, and English. He had spent all of his approximately 18 years of life at Kutse, with the exception of 5 years in Gaborone, where he learned English (although he had never attended school). I asked the interviewees questions and I also questioned my interpreter during an interview in an attempt to minimize translation difficulties. Furthermore, when the opportunity arose, I questioned people more than once and tried to collaborate times and events with others in the family.

⁵Although Nama classifies himself as Mokgalagadi, some Kutse inhabitants consider him to be Mosarwa.

⁶Noticeably absent during the entire event was Nama. This may have been because Nama knew he did not possess the political backing to either stop the fight or the trouble G/enidzi was creating, and yet he was, at least in his view, nominally responsible for the well-being of the community.

⁷The participation of women in the beating may support Lee's (1982:43-45) observations that women are influential in the sedentary Basarwa political sphere, though to a lesser extent than men.

⁸I later asked Maholesa why the Game Scout was called to intervene in the fight described above. He told me it was because "we made lots of sores. We called the Game Scout to make our hearts together. The Game Scout said to take him to the clinic but he didn't want to go. When someone fights, we are supposed to call the Game Scout. The [regional] chief . . . told me to call the Game Scout whenever there's a fight." Others said that Maholesa made that up. According to Maholesa, the Game Scout does not collect fines or receive payment for his services.

⁹It is also probably not valid for other sedentary groups, such as the Inuit (Eskimo), whom Knauff (1987) cites along with the Basarwa.

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Late Archaic Corn in the Eastern Great Basin

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Evidence is accumulating for the presence of preceramic farmers in the Southwest. Much of the discussion on the topic concerns the presence and antiquity of corn (Berry 1982; Ford 1981; Minnis 1985), and the development and spread of specific varieties (Upham et al. 1987). Recently obtained radiocarbon dates on corn remains from Tumamoc Hill, near Tucson, Arizona (Fish et al. 1986), as well as corn-associated dates from other sites in southern Arizona (e.g., Doelle 1985; Huckell 1984; Martin 1963), and northwestern Arizona (Janetski and Wilde 1989) suggest that horticulture was established in the region prior to the beginning of the Christian era. Additional evidence from northwestern New Mexico (Simmons 1986) and northeastern Arizona (Betancourt and Davis 1984) indicates the practice was widespread in the northern Southwest between 2,000–3,000 years ago, during the Late Archaic period. Results presented here add further support for the presence of corn in the Archaic, and show that horticulture was practiced as far north as central Utah several centuries before the introduction of ceramic technology.

The Elsinore Burial Site

Personnel from the Office of Public Archaeology at Brigham Young University excavated a secondary burial near Elsinore, Utah, during the summer of 1985. The site, designated 42Sv 2111, was found by the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) during construction of a box culvert in the Interstate 70 corridor. The west wall of the culvert trench neatly bisected a bell-shaped pit containing scattered human skeletal remains and more than 200 corn cobs. Prompt reaction by UDOT spared the remainder of the site and led to the discovery of the earliest corn remains yet found in Utah.

Site 42Sv 2111, named the Elsinore Burial Site, was located in a small graben, filled with fine pond-deposited sediments, on the western flanks of the Sevier River Valley (Figure 1). The formation and unusual geology of the site are described in Wilde, Newman, and Godfrey (1986).