



Native Americans of the Desert SW, a brief History

By Teri Ekland

Hunters and gatherers inhabited the Americas by at least 25,000 years ago. Archaic cultures existed in the SW deserts of North America from the end of the last ice age 11,700 years ago, to the beginning of the Christian calendar. Because the ancient people of the SW left no written records, archaeologists must piece together their cultures by examining the bones, relics, and ruins they left behind and through the traditions and beliefs of their modern descendants.

There are three main ancient cultures of the SW--the Ancestral Puebloans, formerly called the Anasazi, the Mogollon, and the Hohokam, an O'odham name that means the people who vanished. These ancient cultures made pottery depicting animals and geometric designs, the sun, the rivers, stars, and dust devils. Most likely, they cast the spiritual auras of the animals into their vessels and the petroglyphs to bring forth the spiritual power of animals. Animal totems include lizards, horn toads, owls, spiders and webs, turtles, deer, bear, eagles, cranes, fish, rattlesnakes, mountain goats, thunder birds, the phoenix, and toad and frogs.

Puebloans, Hohokam, Mogollon, Aztec, Toltec and Mayans traveled the trade routes along the Camino Real. The Aztecs and Mayas travel through Paquime far south of Chaco Canyon. Paquime was a major hub of all the trade roads north south east and west. People from the Sea of Cortez brought shells to trade for copper bells, clay pipes, censers, ear spools, bone necklaces, clay figurines, and bone antler totems. These traders from differing cultures shared stories, legends, and ideas and spoke the lingua franca Ute-Aztecan that stretched from the Aztecs to the cultures of ancient Arizona.

For over 1000 years until the Spanish conquest, the Mogollon culture thrived in regions of SE Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and the Chihuahua desert of northern Mexico. During the Classic period 1000 AD to 1150 AD, Mogollon settlements in the Mimbres Valley of New Mexico produced some of the most beautiful pottery ever made. Their black on white polychrome bowls feature geometric designs and human and animal figures that show influence from Mesoamerican mythology.

From 200 AD to 1500 AD, the Hohokam thrived in the northern Sonora along the Gila, Salt, Verde, San Pedro and Santa Cruz rivers during the time of the Mayas and Aztecs in Mexico. They were River and Desert People, like the O'odham of today. They left behind petroglyphs, ballcourts, platform mounds, and remnants of an irrigation network. The Hohokam made pottery with the anvil and paddle technique. It appears they ritually smashed and broke their pottery perhaps to symbolize death, perhaps to make visions of prophecy happen. In contrast, the Ancestral Puebloans used the coil method with black and white on red polychrome. Like the O'odham of today, the Hohokam roasted and ate agave hearts and spun yucca yarn into cloth." The Salado culture was a wayfaring Anasazi group of people who migrated to the Valley of the Sun about 1200 AD and mingled with the Hohokam of Casa Grande. After 1450 AD, the

Salado people migrated to New Mexico and disappeared. Also called the Sonora Desert Archaic People, the Hohokam cremated their dead unlike the Anasazi and Mogollon who left behind many burial sites.

Originally, the Anasazi were paleo hunter gatherers who may have migrated from regions south of the Colorado River. Like the Fremont culture to the north in Utah, the Anasazi were relatively sedentary farmers of maize, beans, and squash. They constructed pit-house granaries, made coiled and twined baskets, clay figurines, and fine pottery. The sites at Mesa Verde National Park, Chaco Canyon, and Taos were the main settlements of the Anasazi. They lived mostly in the Four Corners Region of the US, in the area of Navajo and Ute reservations.

Nomadic people began populating Chaco Canyon, New Mexico about 2900 BC. By about 200 AD, the Chaco Puebloans developed methods of farming and lived in pit houses. For three hundred years from 850 AD, they built massive stone buildings aligned to solar and lunar cycles. In traditional Pueblo Culture, the men organized into ceremonial sodalities. During the agricultural cycles of the year, the men held both rain and sun dances at round ceremonial rooms called kivas. The high priests ruled the society.

The Anasazi prospered 2000 years until A.D. 1200-1400 when the climate changed, crops failed, and the northern Comanche, Paiute and Shoshone forced them to migrate south and reintegrate with the Pueblo peoples of Arizona and New Mexico. The descendants of the Anasazi include the Hopi and Zuni. These modern Puebloans don't refer to their ancestors as the Anasazi which is a Navajo word meaning "ancient enemy." The Navajo are not descendants of the Anasazi.

Today Arizona has 20 Indian reservations, the Navajo and Tohono O'odham are the first and second largest in the US. The Indian tribes of Arizona include the Apache, Hopi, Navajo,

Southern Paiute, Yaqui, Yuman (Mohave, Maricopa Peeposh, Grand Canyon Indians, Zuni, Tepehuan and Rancheria), Papago, Pima (O'odham) and Yavapai. The Indigenous languages in Arizona include Yuman (Maricopa and Grand Canyon Indians), Yaqui (from Mexico) and Ute-Aztecan, a large language family that includes Aztec (Nahuatl), Hopi, Comanche, Shoshoni, Papago and the O'odham language. Athapaskan is a language group from Eastern Canada which includes the languages of the Apache and Navajo who migrated from east Canada to the SW about 1500 AD, about the time the Hohokam disappeared or assimilated into other cultures. Apache land stretched from the Navajo area in northwest Arizona to the Kiowa area of Texas. Both Athapaskan cultural traditions centered on healing. Through sand paintings, the Apache medicine man creates magical conditions to cure illness and disease. The Eastern Apache traditionally lived in small bands led by war leaders such as Geronimo and Cochise. Raiding was important in Apache economy.

Settlers and the US government viewed the Apache as fierce but they saw the Pima as peaceful farmers and hunters able to sustain a good life in the Sonora desert. The Pima call themselves the O'odham, people of the desert and river. They have lived in the SW for 3000 years. They claim to be descendants of the Hohokam. In traditional O'odham culture women made baskets and the men farmed, wove cotton on looms, and hunted rabbit, deer, elk, and bear. They lived along the Salt, Gila, Yaqui and Sonora rivers in small villages because they often had to flee Apache raids. They raised sheep and goats and grew corn, squash, pumpkin, tepary beans, tobacco, and cotton. After the Spanish invasion, they grew wheat.

In 1859, the US government restricted the O'odham to a fraction of their native land. After the Civil War, settlers began arriving in Arizona. In 1867, German Jesuit missionary and

explorer, Father Kino, established the first mission on O'odham land in the modern community of Sacaton. In 1869 the Gila River first went dry. It last flowed on the Pima reservation in 1886.

There are four federally recognized O'odham reservations in Arizona. The people of Tohono O'odham Nation, south of Tucson, call themselves the People of the Desert and are traditionally known as the Papago. The people of the Gila River Indian Community, GRIC, call themselves the People of the Gila River, Keli Akimel O'odham. South of Phoenix is the Ak-Chin Indian Community, a thirty-four square mile reservation established in 1912. Ak Chin means "Mouth of the Arroyo." In 1879 the federal government established the eighty-seven square mile Salt River Pima Maricopa Indian Community east of Phoenix. SRPMIC consists of two tribes, the On'k Akimel O'odham, People of the Salt River and the Maricopa Indians who call themselves the Xalychidom Piipaash, People of the Upper River. To defend their land against Apache raids, the two tribes mingled as long-standing allies, like the Anasazi Salados and the Hohokam of Casa Grande.

Important people in the traditional Pima village included the headman or the Chief. Some of the most famous Pima Chiefs are Ursuth and Antonio. Another important person in the village was the *See nee gawk um*, the storyteller who told stories about the first man to walk on Earth, Earth Doctor *Si'atcokam*. Another important person in the village was the *Makai*, the medicine man who had power over the crops, the weather, and the wars. The O'odham rarely admitted women to this order. Ruth Underhill wrote that the medicine man had the power to heal the sick and bring the rain. He sat in a circle of elders and waved sticks with eagle feathers to find the direction of the coming rain. Hunters took the medicine man on hunting trips because he could see the deer before it appeared. Warriors took him to war so he could tell them their enemy's location.