Hohokam & Mesoamerica

Long range connections
The myth

• Hohokam thought to be unique
• Interpreted as immigrants from the south
• Shared many traits w/ Mesoamerica

• But were they immigrants?

The Myth

“Hohokam society began as a Mesoamerican culture in search of a new home... They moved quickly across arid northern Mexico until they found their promised land in the Phoenix basin. There they unpacked their Mesoamerican heritage of aesthetics, architecture, and artifacts” McGuire & Villalpando pp. 59
In situ evolution

- Recall:
  - Farming
  - Canals
  - Pithouse villages
  - Red on buff pottery

Evolved within the region
Isolation?

- Was Hohokam culture an isolated group?
- This fits the immigrant myth
  - Does not stand up to new data
Mesoamerican Influence

• West Mexican subarea of Mesoamerica by 900

• West Mexican tradition spread north
  – Reached as far north as southern Hohokam

• Not surprisingly, Hohokam very similar to West Mexican Mesoamerican cultures
West Mexico

McGuire & Villalpando pp. 58
Similarities

- **Uto-Aztecan language** (analogy)
- Dualism in pottery design – bilateral bowls
- **Architecture**
  - Courtyard – patio groups
  - Ballcourts
  - Platform mounds
- **Serpent motif**
- **Maize farming**
Bilateral Pottery Design

West Mexico Traditions

Hohokam Traditions
Sinaloa, northern Mexico

- Northern Mexico
- Chamelta Temprano tradition 200 BC to AD 500
  - Bilateral pottery
  - Red on buff pottery
  - Copper artifacts
  - Shell jewelry
  - Courtyard complexes

- Just like Hohokam
Huatabampo Tradition

• Northern Sinaloa, Southern Sonora
• 200 BC to AD 500
• Similar clay figurines to those made by Hohokam
• Used drop-ended manos
Trincheras tradition

- Northern Sonora, Mexico
- AD 200 through 1400
- Pithouse villages w/ patios & courtyard groups
- Had drop-ended manos
- Defensive hilltop sites
Trade goods & diffusion

- Macaws
- Gulf of California shell (*Glycymeris & Lavicardium*)
- Iron pyrite mirrors (pseudo-cloisonné)
- Copper bells
- Drop-ended manos
Summary

• The Hohokam were not isolated
• They were the northern tip of a continuum
• Mesoamerican influence north through Western Mexico
• Overlapping culture all the way through Jalisco, Sinaloa, and Sonora
Pueblo Grande

A case study
Cultural Resource Management

• Field within archaeology that conducts research to comply with legislation to protect cultural resources

• Pueblo Grande top be impacted by highway

• Soil Systems, Inc. a CRM firm received the contract to excavate Pueblo Grande from 1987 to 1994
  – Included extensive testing
  – Then mitigation through excavation
Pueblo Grande

• Large site occupied for much of the Hohokam millenium
• A large center during Classic period
  – 1000 to 1500 people
• Prime location near head of Canal System 2 from Salt River
Classic Period: Soho Phase

- Soho phase: AD 1150 to 1300 – major growth
- Pithouse courtyard groups
- Health, subsistence, natural resources in decline
- Reflects 600 years of environmental degradation from previous periods

Craig & Henderson, pp. 32
Civano Phase (AD 1300 to 1400)

- Pithouse villages give way to walled adobe compounds
  - Physical boundaries to segregate space
  - Probably relates to resource scarcity
- Population in decline
Civano Phase: environment

• Environmental reconstruction (geoarchaeology)
  – High flooding & punctuated severe droughts
  – Disastrous effect on canal system

• No margin of error
  – Centuries of sedentism
    • Fuel, natural foods, soils depleted
Geoarchaeology

• The field of study that applies concepts and methods of geology to archaeology

• Studies landscape & site processes
  – Site chronology
  – Important in environmental reconstruction
  – Important for understanding site formation

• Archaeological sites = geological deposits
  – Artifacts = sedimentary particles
Civano Phase: subsistence

- Starvation foods: muskrats, beaver, other low rank wild game (*zooarchaeology*)
- Fish size small; overharvested
  - Animal protein compromised
- All deer bone = tools
  - No deer as food, bone traded in for tools
- Overdependence on maize (*paleoethnoobotany*)
  - Wild plant diminish late in the Classic period
Civano Phase: human health

• Based on bioarchaeology of human remains
  – 800 inhumations and cremations

• Life expectancy of only 15 years
  – 99% of skeletons exhibited signs of nutritional stress
  – 33 of first 84 month stressed- iron deficiency

• 66 people per 1000 died each year
  – Maintaining population impossible
  – w/ immigration declining, population diminished
Summary

• During the late Classic Period
  – Environmental deterioration occurred
  – Nutritional & reproductive stress increased

• After AD 1000, the Hohokam Millenium was no longer sustainable

• By AD 1450, Hohokam was gone