

Chapter 1: Roots

Our Community is home to two separate and culturally distinct people: the Akimel O’otham (“River People”) or Pima and Pee Posh (“People”) or the Maricopa. The Pee Posh originally lived along the Colorado River and are a Yuman-speaking people related to the Mohave, Quechan and other Yuman tribes in western Arizona. Our Pee Posh neighbors began arriving in central Arizona in the early 1800s, when they confederated with the Akimel O’otham. Together we agreed to provide for our mutual defense and prosperity. The Akimel O’otham have lived in the Gila and Salt River Valleys since time immemorial and are descended from the prehistoric Huhugam civilization that prospered throughout southcentral Arizona during a time when the river continually flowed.

The Gila Valley has a long history of human occupation, encompassing what archaeologists refer to as nine periods, each of which is characterized by unique social and cultural attributes. Our earliest ancestors are known as Paleo-Indians, a nomadic, hunting people who used spear points to hunt big-game animals and who lived in these valleys more than 12,000 years ago.

About 8,500 B.C. our ancestors began hunting smaller animals and foraging on the wide diversity of plants that then grow. By about 4,000 years ago they began harvesting and eating many of these edible plants. They used metates and manos (grinding stones) and began living in semi-permanent villages. By the Late Archaic period (1,500 B.C. - AD 150) they were growing corn and storing it in large facilities for long periods of time.

During the Early Formative period (AD 150-650) our ancestors expanded their agricultural efforts. They built pit houses and made plain, red and decorated pottery, showing their taste for the arts. During this time they also began using floodwater irrigation. Snaketown

represents the Pioneer period (AD 650-750), during which a distinct Huhugam himdag appeared, with its arts and culture evidenced in the archaeological excavations of Snaketown. The development of this distinct culture originated in the Salt River Valley Basin and is best reflected by the development of large-scale irrigation agriculture.

During the Colonial period (AD 750-950) the Huhugam expanded throughout the river valleys of central Arizona, including the Salt, Gila, Verde and Santa Cruz rivers. Public architecture, such as ball courts, spread throughout the region. During the late Colonial period the number and size of Huhugam settlements increased. Ball courts, canal networks and the use of non-irrigation check farming were all employed. By the Sedentary period (AD 950-1150), the Huhugam expansion weakened with many sites outside the Salt River Basin abandoned and settlements congregated along rivers and streams. Large settlements such as Snaketown and Grewe were depopulated, with our people reorganizing into nearby villages.

During the Classic period (AD 1150-1450) of Huhugam history, settlements became more hierarchal. Villages with one or more walled residential compounds and one or more platform mounds were developed. It was at this time that our ancestors built Sivan Vahki, the present day Casa Grande Ruins National Monument, which was a distinct irrigation community that consisted of a series of smaller satellite villages that included public architecture such as platform mounds and ball courts. Sivan Vahki—and others such as Pueblo Grande and Mesa Grande—served as administrative or priestly centers. Our villages were then built along a single canal or irrigation system.

The collapse of these platform mound communities resulted in a general depopulation of the Salt River basin and marks the end of the Classic period. An extended time of drought and flood conditions likely destroyed or reduced the irrigation systems upon which our ancestors

relied. Breaking up into smaller groups, our ancestors began living in smaller scattered rancherias, living in small subterranean homes called pit houses.

Between 1450 and the arrival of the Spanish our people continued to live in scattered settlements along the Gila River and its tributaries, extending from the San Pedro River Valley to the Gila River west of the Gila bend. Small, loosely clustered homes were organized into villages, each of which was self-sufficient. Each was also politically autonomous and agriculture-based. While our ancestors practiced floodwater irrigation, they later developed an irrigation distribution system as well. The Historic period began with the arrival of the Spanish priest Father Kino in 1694.

This series of readings documents our history since the arrival of these people. Chapter 2 covers the Spanish era and describes our land at the time of European contact. Chapter 3 looks at the deepening water crisis our people faced a century and a half ago and how the government sought to solve our water needs by removing us to the Indian Territory of Oklahoma. Chapter 4 covers the years of famine that resulted with the loss of our water a century ago. Chapter 5 looks at how the government unsuccessfully tried to protect our water by building new irrigation projects after the turn of the twentieth century. Chapter 6 then looks at how we fought to restore our water and the techniques we adopted. Chapter 7 examines the creation of the Pima-Maricopa Irrigation Project ten years ago and what this project means to protecting and putting our water to beneficial use today. The final chapter provides our hopes and dreams for the future. With the restoration of our water, we believe our future is promising and one that will reconnect us to our himdag that is symbolized by life giving waters of the Gila River.