Indigenous History, Religious Theory, and the Archaeological Record

A Holistic Approach to the Terminal Hohokam Classic Period

Will G. Russell,
Nanebah Nez, and
David Martinez

Will Russell, MA, is a Ph.D. student in Arizona State University’s archaeology program. He is project director with The Racetrack Project and the Mogollon Prehistoric Landscapes Project. Russell’s dissertation research takes place in north-central Arizona, where large-scale, multi-identity coalescence in the middle thirteenth century led to the development of a novel religious complex. Russell argues that constituent groups elected to downplay ritual diversity and instead focus on underlying commonalities: ceremonial racing and supra-household feasting. Russell is a National Science Foundation Graduate Fellow, a Ford Foundation Fellow, and a MimPIDD Scholar.

Nanebah Nez is an archaeologist with the National Forest Service (Tonto National Forest) and a doctoral student in Arizona State University’s anthropology program. Her research focuses on Native American affiliations to sacred land and cultural transformation in composite and colonial contexts.

David Martinez, Ph.D., is the author of Dakota Philosopher: Charles Eastman and American Indian Thought (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2009) and the editor of The American Indian Intellectual Tradition: An Anthology of Writings from 1772 to 1972 (Cornell University Press, 2011). He has also published in Wicazo Sa Review, Canadian Journal of Native Studies, the American Indian Quarterly, and the American Indian Culture and Research Journal. In addition to publishing an article about Thin Leather, a Pima medicine man, he is currently writing a major paper about the Hia C-ed O’odham, or Sand Papago, as well as a comparative folklore study of Gila River Pima narratives regarding the Hohokam with respect to the Hopi and Rio Grande Pueblo oral traditions.

More than sixty years ago, North American anthropologist Anthony Wallace defined
revitalization movements as “deliberate, organized, conscious effort[s] by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture.” [1] Four decades later, archaeologist Bruce Bradley applied revitalization theory to Southwest archaeology, writing that it “provides a helpful mechanism for interpretation of the known archaeological record.” [2] Bradley's application was limited to the San Juan Basin but he suggests that revitalization theory holds potential elsewhere in the Southwest.

Our analysis examines historic religious revitalization movements and notes cross-cultural patterns. [2] Some revitalization components, like oration, allegiance, and faith, are unlikely to be recognized archaeologically. Others are obvious, although their social stimuli are not. Thus, the identification of prehistoric movements cannot result from archaeological examination alone. A tripartite comparison of revitalization theory, archaeological evidence, and indigenous histories, however, can determine whether prehistoric social change was consistent with what we know about revitalization movements. If theory, archaeology, and history are inter-consistent and complementary, inferences can lead to testable hypotheses.

The terminal Hohokam Classic period provides an ideal archaeological test case for assessing this approach. The semi-arid environment of Central Arizona results in superior preservation and the recovery of copious archaeological data. An invaluable (though frequently squandered) asset is the presence of descendant groups, several of whom identify the Hohokam as ancestral. Ethnographic data from three—Akimel O’odham, Tohono O’odham, and Hopi—are included here. The histories of each converge in central Arizona at the end of the Hohokam Classic period.

In this paper, we describe components of historic religious revitalization. Certain themes appear consistently in movements worldwide and throughout history. We refer to this corpus of attributes as a "revitalization template" and examine the degree to which it complements indigenous histories and Hohokam archaeology. A compelling number of parallels suggest that a prehispanic revitalization movement, with revivalistic (see below) components, contributed to Hohokam social reorganization. Revivalism recreates the past by adopting anachronistic cultural traits. Thus, we predict, and ultimately identify, anachronism in post-Classic Hohokam archaeology.

**Multidimensional Revitalization**
Following Wallace, scholars have diligently sorted revitalization movements into categories that characterize ambitions and dispositions. For instance, *mimetic movements* idolize successful foreign groups; *nativistic movements* blame foreign influence for local troubles and advocate the removal of non-natives; *revivalistic movements* recall the “good old days” and strive to recapture a romanticized past. Apocalyptic movements foretell cataclysmic destruction or cleansing. These categories are not mutually exclusive and successful movements are multi-dimensional processes, flexible and frequently transforming to maintain momentum and progress. Movements fluctuate along shifting axes, reflecting formative influences and various outcomes (for example, see Figure 1).

**The Terminal Hohokam Classic Period**

Despite more than a century of archaeological attention, researchers know relatively little about why the Hohokam Classic period (ca. 1150-1350/1450 C.E.) ended but are aware that it involved environmental degradation, resource stress, failing infrastructure, deteriorating health, and violence. By the sixteenth century, the Phoenix Basin (Figure 2) was nearly depopulated.

Scientific approaches to understanding prehispanic change are frequently incompatible with indigenous thought and behavior, neither of which adhere to (and seldom approximate) Western constructs and theory. While environmental change undeniably affected Hohokam denouement, such change and its effects were undoubtedly engaged culturally and negotiated through religious practice. Western methods of creating and recording history have traditionally neglected to consider seriously the epistemological merit of such indigenous histories.

Several historic Native groups self-identify as Hohokam descendants and archaeological evidence supports their claims. Akimel O’odham, Tohono O’odham, and Hopi histories reference the Hohokam Classic period and provide insight into Hohokam reorganization and participant perspectives.

Striking parallels exist between the revitalization template and indigenous accounts of Hohokam denouement. These apply to a single dimension—that of history—and for adherents, there is no separation of history from myth or natural from supernatural. Such dichotomies are scientific constructs, seldom recognized traditionally. Thus, historical aspects discussed here
are presented as integrated components within a larger, multidimensional sum. Their examination provides insight, but cannot—can never—describe the whole.

An abbreviated introduction to O’odham and Hopi indigenous histories will be of value. This primer is drawn from written accounts derived from Native consultants; in other words, oral tradition that has been recorded. O’odham ancestry includes the Huhugam, residents of the Phoenix Basin who followed the ritual specialist Elder Brother. [14] The Huhugam were joined by the sisiwañ, immigrant ritualists who built greathouses and integrated with the Huhugam. [15] With command over rain, the sisiwañ grew powerful and despotic. They marginalized Elder Brother, accused him of witchcraft and lechery and eventually killed (or attempted to kill) him. [16] Elder Brother revived, fled south, and recruited an army of people (known as the Wooshkam) that he led north, attacking greathouses and killing sisiwañ. [17] Some Huhugam fled north to Hopi. [18] Others remained and, along with some Wooshkam, became Akimel O’odham. Another Huhugam-Wooshkam union went south, becoming Tohono O’odham. [19]

The Hohokam Classic period is more abbreviated in Hopi tradition. Several Hopi clans came from Palatkwapi, a desert locale where priestly elites on platform mounds oversaw large irrigation canals. [20] Several scholars have suggested that Palatkwapi refers to the Phoenix Basin and the modern Hopi tribe views the Hohokam as ancestral. [21]

Hopi stories are clearly told from a perspective apart from O’odham analogues. In Hopi accounts, leaders were benevolent, protective figures. [22] Chief Tawayistiwa, wronged by infidelity, grew concerned with moral decadence. [23] To scare followers straight, Tawayistiwa convinced his relative, Siwiyistiwa, to masquerade as a ghost. When the ruse was uncovered, Tawayistiwa had Siwiyistiwa killed. Siwiyistiwa became a water serpent and destroyed Palatkwapi by flood, [24] which in both Hopi and O’odham narratives, was stopped with child sacrifice. [25] Refugees of the flood escaped and fled north. [26]

O’odham and Hopi histories converge in space (the Phoenix Basin) and time (the late Classic period). If a revitalization movement contributed to Hohokam collapse or reorganization along the middle Gila and lower Salt Rivers, we would expect indigenous accounts to agree with the revitalization template. Below, we test this expectation and illustrate parallels.

**Tripartite Comparison**
A review of historic revitalization movements identifies a recurring pattern of attributes common to inception, development, and outcome. Below, we summarize these and compare them to indigenous histories and the archaeological record.

**Revitalization Context**

**Theory.** All documented revitalization movements develop amidst heightened social stress and relative deprivation. Conditions include the domination and exploitation of a powerless subaltern, often disadvantaged by niche removal and large-scale environmental stress. Revitalization movements are accompanied by social stratification. They follow substantial population decline, coincide with decreasing authoritative interaction, and correspond with internal segregation, including diaspora. Revitalization-prone groups feel threatened by others and see authorities as interlopers. They take preemptive action to preserve culture and identity despite migration, assimilation, and piecemeal cultural replacement. Movements frequently resist any imposed religion and are increasingly dissatisfied with integrative mechanisms. All are preoccupied with moral decadence.

**History.** O’odham and Hopi histories discuss environmental distress in the terminal Classic Period. Unpredictable rainfall, canal issues, crop destruction, flooding, and epidemic contribute to social unrest. Coincident were issues of immigration, stratification, exploitation, and moral decay. O’odham stories discuss the arrival of northern immigrants who built platform mounds, claimed meteorological powers, replaced local ritualists, and grew tyrannical. Hopi stories are similar, although chiefs are described as compassionate and protective. All agree that moral corruption and hedonism arose: familial and ritual obligations were neglected; children and elders were abused; alcoholism, gambling, and adultery ran rampant; wife-stealing and lechery became common. Religious ceremonies degenerated into social affairs and ritual power was lost. Supernatural phenomena were disrespected, ritualists squabbled, and religious authority was mocked. Though they had been considered heroes at one time, Elder Brother (O’odham) and Siwiyistiwa (Hopi) were treated like witches and executed.

Indigenous histories also clearly portray central Arizona as socially diverse, a condition consistent with historic revitalization movements. They discuss the presence of Â’kol, A’pap, A’pûkî, Sofch kah, and Tua Kuadag peoples among the Huhugam, the arrival and incorporation of immigrants from the north, visitation from the west, the mixture of Huhugam
and Mohave, and the late arrival of Apkigam and Apapgam groups from the south. [32]

Archaeology. People of the Classic period clearly experienced horrible hardships. Agricultural production and overall food resources declined. Rising disease and the structural failure of canals compounded the problem. Flooding in the fourteenth century is archaeologically visible. This undoubtedly wrought havoc on Hohokam communities but did not decimate the Phoenix Basin population. [33]

There is also archeological evidence of marked social change. The Preclassic-to-Classic transition witnessed a piecemeal replacement of earlier Hohokam culture in the Phoenix Basin. Buffware was replaced with redware; pithouses with pueblos; ballcourts with platform mounds; cremation with inhumation. Many Hohokam material standards disappeared or became far less frequent. These dramatic changes were followed by the Salado phenomenon’s arrival. The appearance of Salado Polychrome pottery likely indicated new, perhaps competing, religious beliefs. [34]

Classic period social stratification seems likely. Platform mounds required extensive labor but occupancy was limited and access restricted. [35] Burning and other evidence suggest conflict. [36] Immigrants were arriving and may have usurped power from extant groups. [37]

Revitalization Prophets

Theory. Historic revitalization movements are initiated by single, male, charismatic figures, often called prophets, who lack traditional access to power, claim visionary abilities, and provide inspired interpretation. Prophets usually experience sickness before their first vision, often reporting death and rebirth. [38] Prophets report supernatural contact and relay messages that only they can interpret. They undergo personal transformation, present themselves as spiritual conduits, claim supernatural powers, but rarely claim to be supernatural. Powers are demonstrated – frequently incorporating natural phenomena – to impress and proselytize. [39]

History. Elder Brother resembles many of the charismatic leaders behind historic revitalization movements. He served as an ascetic, ritual specialist, confronting evil but unable to control the weather. When the sisiwañ Sisiwañ arrived from the north, bringing rain, his status declined. He was accused of crimes and banished from ceremonies. His persistent attempts to retain power led to mockery, trial, and execution. He recovered, vowed revenge, fled south, and recruited an army. He had supernatural powers but retained his personal
identity and never claimed to be supernatural. [40]

In Hopi accounts, the prophet-like role is sequentially shared by several figures. Tawayistiwa recognized the need for change. Siwiyistiwa implemented the change and was martyred. Kochoilaftiyo met with the god Masauwu and received supernatural power. Siwiyistiwa was reborn and sought vengeance. Tawahongva led the people in battle and migration. In aggregate, their actions were consistent with historic prophets.

Archaeology. The archaeological record can preserve evidence of individuals, but without literary confirmation it is difficult to identify specific personages. To locate archaeological evidence of individual testimony or action is nearly impossible in non-literate contexts. Thus, we cannot establish archaeologically that Elder Brother existed or determine what he said.

Revitalization Doctrine

Theory. By definition, prophets are compelled to share their visions and interpretations. [41] Movements are portrayed as destined and divine, idealizing past, future, or foreign traditions. [42] They offer “new” religions, but these are recombinations of quondam faiths and invariably emphasize traditional values. [43]

Movements underscore timely social problems, which are often blamed on moral corruption. They offer salvation and moral restoration, if rules are followed. To disregard the warning is potentially disastrous because renewal is inevitable and imminent, requiring transformation or cataclysm. [44] Dogma is generally additive and does not require abandonment of earlier practices, assuming they are not conflictual. [45]

Prophets emphasize and contribute to obstacles, producing a sense of urgency and crisis and establishing escalating cycles of expectation: prophets demonstrate powers and followers prove their loyalty. [46] Given the substantial commitments demanded of followers, prophets promise quick results. [47] Most movements are completed within a generation, although longevity increases resilience. [48] To compensate for lost time and resources, material and supernatural benefits are promised, including vows to heal the sick or raise the dead. [49] Although assimilation contributes to revitalization, prophets initially encourage integration, using diversity for strength in numbers. [50] Prophets claim predictive powers and foresee success despite resistance, promising supernatural protection and victory. [51]
History. Elder Brother’s doctrine seems less polished and idealized than historic analogues. His initial message is one of unapologetic revenge and revolution. No early supernatural missive is recorded, although Elder Brother did meet with supernaturals between death and conquest. Details of the conversation have been forgotten, were never divulged by Elder Brother, or were kept from ethnographers.

Elder Brother did unite disparate groups for strategic purposes. As the movement progressed, he encouraged followers with promises of supernatural assistance and protection. Earth Doctor (Juved Makai, the Creator) is mentioned several times as a guardian who lightened burdens, bestowed powers, and guaranteed success. Elder Brother’s concern with social decay is subtle and linked to his personal agenda, given in terms of his perceived mistreatment. In contrast, Hopi stories blame social irresponsibility and immorality for Palatkwapi’s demise.

Both Hopi and O’odham histories focus on obstacles, tragedies, and triumphs. Floods, earthquakes, attacks, sacrifices, narrow escapes, and exoduses are prominent. These events are consistent and complementary, both intra- and inter-culturally.

Revitalization Transformation

Theory. Revitalization movements seek to restructure entire social systems. Change is dramatic and abrupt, consisting of low-level, furtive operations punctuated by moments of intensity. Crises, victories, and defeats are remembered by history, thus producing irregular timelines and contributing to Western dismissals of indigenous history.

Revitalization movements initially expect reasonable accommodation but quickly “disengage” from society. Resistance is almost always encountered, usually involving scandal and escalating into aggression. Successful movements avoid totalitarianism, preferring a guarded state of political contraction and institutional maintenance.

Over time, revitalization movements become less religious and more political. As obstacles are overcome, the need for supernatural protection lessens and the need for political infrastructure increases. Nativistic sentiment likewise increases, especially concerning immigration. Doctrinal inconsistencies reflect a movement’s adaptive capability.

History. Viewing the Elder Brother stories within a revitalization framework illustrates the
consistent componentry but inconsistent chronology inherent to revitalization movements. Ethnographic accounts of revitalization often begin with the death and rebirth of the prophet, followed by peaceful attempts at change, authoritative resistance, and ultimate action. However, revitalization movements maintained as oral tradition are more likely to have similar parts in different orders.

Like some prophets, Elder Brother may have started his movement before his death and rebirth. Despite the sisiwañ monopoly on religion, Elder Brother repeatedly attended ceremonies and seditiously competed for followers. Perhaps this constituted the beginning of his movement. As his popularity grew, Elder Brother was accused of sorcery and deviancy. Refusing to go away, he was tortured and left for dead.

Elder Brother demanded complete societal change. He attacked platform mounds and engaged in several battles, overthrowing an entire class of Huhugam leadership and causing widespread demographic change. Transformations in religion, material culture, and subsistence are easily inferable. This was not a gradual transformation; it happened swiftly as the Wooshkam descended on the Phoenix Basin, ousted the sisiwañ, and filled the socio-political void.

Following the Wooshkam victory, Elder Brother did not replace Huhugam society with a totalitarian system. Huhugam remaining in the area were incorporated into Wooshkam society, leading to the birth of O’odham identity.

Archaeology. Many of the transformational events described in the Elder Brother conquest are consistent with the archaeological record. Greathouses were destroyed, canals, pueblos, and fields were abandoned, and rooms were burned. Almost assuredly, some people went north and were incorporated into Hopi and Zuni. Those who stayed resorted to small-scale agriculture near the Gila River, where evidence of social asymmetry disappeared.

The Terminal Classic Period as a Revitalization Movement

O’odham and Hopi histories are remarkably similar to revitalization movements that have been recorded during historic times. Increasing social complexity and inequality coincided with environmental stress, political turmoil, and religious disillusionment. Out of this desperate situation came Elder Brother, a charismatic leader who restructured the Hohokam landscape. Aristocrats were killed or driven off and egalitarianism restored. To a compelling degree, the archaeological record is consistent with indigenous historical accounts. The lower
Salt River was almost entirely depopulated. Greathouses were collapsed and canals abandoned. But despite the collapse of Hohokam society, the people themselves endured. They did not mysteriously disappear; they reorganized their life-ways and worldviews and in doing so adapted to a changing landscape. They took active measures to structure their own futures and the end of the Hohokam millennium may, at least for some, have been a welcome change.

**Subsets, Predictions, and Preliminary Evidence**

Within the broad rubric of "revitalization," Elder Brother’s saga contains elements consistent with both nativistic and revivalistic movements. Such movements produce predictable physical results that should be visible archaeologically. Nativistic movements involve opposition to foreign institutions and can manifest in violence, desecration, and emigration. Each is evident in the archaeological record at the close of the Classic period. Revivalistic movements idealize past generations and seek to recreate the past. Below, we illustrate what may be evidence of a revivalistic component within Hohokam reorganization.

Revivalistic movements denounce the status quo and pursue ancestral traits. Thus, archaeological evidence of revivalistic movements should include the elimination of extant attributes and the reintroduction of anachronistic elements. Following the Classic period, O’odham peoples reversed many cultural changes (see Table 1). They returned to semi-subterranean homes, oversized communal pit-structures, pipette shrines and iconography, stone palettes, effigy vessels, red-on-buff pottery, ritualized running, cremation, and structural burning during mortuary rituals. [69] Similar trajectories occurred downstream and to the north. Di Peso even documented the O’odham reoccupation of a Preclassic Hohokam village (Paloparado). [70]

Traditional O’odham and Hopi knowledge includes reference to the terminal Hohokam Classic period and largely complements the archaeological record. They describe social actors, atmospheres, and processes that are consistent with historic revitalization movements, especially those with nativistic and revivalistic properties.

Although environmental change undoubtedly contributed to the collapse and reorganization of Hohokam society, those experiencing the transformation did so in religious contexts and as active participants. Environmental change tested the limits of ecological and political resiliency, resulting in social unrest and challenges to survival. Our analysis suggests that while adapting to such change, the powerless took advantage of instability and created an
opportunity to modify the social landscape through sanctified rhetoric and ritualized violence. Participants were anything but human flotsam in a sea of environmental change. Unlike the tired assumption of failure, collapse, and disappearance, Hohokam society may well have reorganized, transformed, and flourished, though not in the Western sense of affluence.

Using the terminal Hohokam Classic period as a test case, this analysis compared archaeological data, indigenous histories, and revitalization theory in coterminous contexts. Results support Bradley's identification of revitalization theory as helpful in the development of testable hypotheses. The strategy is particularly well-suited to the prehispanic Southwest, where evidence of rapid social transformation is frequently encountered and descendent perspectives are accessible. Revitalization theory holds continued promise for Hohokam archaeology in particular. Future studies can inform longstanding questions of social asymmetry, migration, and violence. Henry Wallace and Michael Lindeman suspect that many of the changes marking the Preclassic-to-Classic transition were the result of revitalization. We agree with their assessment and suggest that the ninth-century movement was largely mimetic, with a diverse array of Mesoamerican archetypes and rapid expansion into the Mimbres region.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Diachronic change in Hohokam material culture.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proclassic Hohokam (ca. 475-1150 C.E.)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential Architecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ritual Architecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ritual Athletics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortuary Treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortuary Conflagration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offerings w/Conflagration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decorated Pottery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Effigy Jars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock Art Production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pipette Shrines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pipette Motif</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone Palettes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1. Comparison of Ghost Dance movement (Mooney 1896) within a one-year period based on data from Mooney (1896). Horizontal bars are of equal length and are heuristically arranged on vertical axes.
Figure 2. Map of Arizona showing the greater Hohokam region (dashed enclosure) and the Hohokam core area (shaded).


65. Donald Bahr et al. *The Short Swift Time of Gods on Earth* (Berkeley, University of


