



SUMMER CEREMONIALS

June 7, 1987 through October, 1987

All human groups reside within an environmental setting. How human groups perceive their physical setting is the main component of their world view. As modern Americans, our world view is strongly influenced by scientific and technical knowledge. The mysteries of nature and the workings of our environment have been explained through scientific knowledge. We are trained to find cause and effect explanations for natural phenomena.

Less scientifically and technologically developed people do not hold as pragmatic a world view. To these peoples, the phenomena of nature are still very mysterious. To reach an understanding of nature, human characteristics are frequently associated with natural phenomena and, in many cases, spirits and supernatural beings are created who are thought to control the natural world. Thus, it is believed that to influence nature one must influence the spirits and supernatural beings who control it.

It can be presumed that similar world views prevailed during prehistoric times among peoples at similar levels of development. The material culture associated with prehistoric groups supports this hypothesis. Prayer sticks, effigy figures, and representations of ritualized activities all give further support to this concept. Although the world view of the prehistoric group is lost, we can reconstruct it to some extent by drawing parallels from living groups which produce comparable material items.

The prehistoric Hohokam of the Salt River Valley had disappeared before the first Europeans entered the area. Archaeology has demonstrated, however, that they made prayer plumes, had ritual shrines, and performed ritual activities. Most likely, they taught their children about a supernatural world by means of carved or sculpted figurines. Prayer plumes found in caves and painted images on pottery support these notions. Caves have also yielded offerings such as cane cigarettes and carved wooden effigies. **Summer Ceremonials** is a reconstruction of a portion of the Hohokam world view. It is only the mechanical side of this belief, but it is enough for us to realize that these prehistoric people did possess a rich spiritual life and world view.

INDIVIDUAL REQUESTS TO THE SPIRITS

Interaction with the environment can be on a number of different levels. The first is the personal level. An individual may feel that everything is not well in his life. He may have had a number of personal hardships such as crop failures, loss of personal items or maybe the death of a favorite pet. To that individual these events may indicate that a spirit or supernatural being has somehow been offended. There are a number of actions that an individual can take to correct this situation. First, he can pray to that spirit and ask its assistance. But how is one to know whether a request has been heard? Some groups solve this problem by making a prayer stick and attaching a feather to the end. If the feather flutters, then the supplicant is sure that the spirit was near and the prayer has been heard.

Sometimes the troubled person wants a more specific diagnosis of what is wrong. He may go to a specialist who will listen to the story, determine what is wrong and suggest a way to correct the problem. The solution may be as simple as the offering of a colorful stone to the offended spirit at a shrine. Or, it might be the creation of a specified design in sand or colored gravels.

All of these are individual activities. They effect the relationship between one person and the supernaturals who control the world in which he lives.

THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY

As an individual grows older, he goes through stages in life which his society must recognize. Growing up or coming of age may mean that a man has proven himself as a provider, or that a woman may have reached child-bearing age. In both cases, this change of status needs to be made public so that marriages can be arranged. In some cases, the family of the boy or the girl may hire a dancer who represents a particular supernatural being. The supernatural may take the form of an old man, representing all the knowledge of the group, or maybe a burden carrier, bearing a pack which contains all the requirements for a long and prosperous life. The individual boy or girl, through the performance of this dance, changes status in the group. No longer a child, others henceforth treat him or her as an adult.

As an individual changes status in the group, he must be initiated into the world of spirits and supernaturals. To identify and "know" these spirits, it is important to become familiar with the spirit's physical characteristics. These traits can be illustrated with dolls or effigies carved from wood or molded from clay. Although the recognition of physical traits is important, the myths and creation stories about these supernatural beings are actually more important to the continuance of the group. Thus, the doll is more than just a play-thing; it is a teaching device. This symbolic character "explains" how a people have come to be where they are, and what they must do to continue their existence.

The individual in these situations is not a single person interacting with his environment, but rather he is a part of a larger group whose existence is dependent on the individual assuming his proper role in the group. To do so, an individual must acquire the requisite knowledge to function properly in his role in society.

SOCIETY REQUESTS AND THE SUPERNATURALS

Often the good of the group becomes more important than the desires of the individual. Here, the individual has to become a part of a larger group ritual ceremony to request aid from the spirit world. For example, some people are concerned with insuring that the seasons continue in their proper cycle. Others must insure that the rains come at the most effective time. To "guarantee" these necessities, a large ceremony must be performed and **all** individuals must assume a part in it. In addition, it is imperative that all phases of the ritual are done according to the rules of tradition. If one person should take a wrong step, the supernatural beings might be angered and turn away from the people. Thus, the individual does not act on his own behalf, but rather for the good of the group. The person acts as a part of his society, and his actions are dictated by tradition.

THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

We can assume that the Hohokam followed a similar pattern and that their interactions with their world were similar. Even today in our own scientifically and technologically advanced world, we often stop and offer a prayer of relief that we have managed to avoid an uncomfortable situation. Many of us have a "lucky" rabbits foot or amulet we wear or take with us. We, too, go through rites of passage that indicate our change of status: birthdays, graduation, marriage, children, and so on. These rites mark age changes, levels of responsibility, and social roles for the individual. We also perform tasks that insure the welfare of our society. Many times during our history, men and women have joined the armed forces to protect the welfare of the group. Some people join other service groups, such as the Red Cross, whose purpose is the good of the society rather than the individual. Thus, while science and technology may alter how we view nature, we still interact with our environment in ways that are timeless and similar throughout history.

Suggested Readings

Parsons, Elsie Clews

1939 *Pueblo Indian Religion* (2 vols). University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Thomas, Charles Matthew, and Jeffrey Howard King

1985 "Hohokam Figurine Assemblages: A Suggested Ritual Context." In *Proceedings of the 1983 Hohokam Symposium, Part II*, edited by Alfred E. Dittert, Jr., and Donald E. Dove, pp. 687-732. Arizona Archaeological Society, Phoenix.

Underhill, Ruth M.

1939 Social Organization of the Papago Indians. *Columbia University Contributions to Anthropology* 30. New York.

1946 Papago Indian Religion. *Columbia University Contributions to Anthropology* 33. New York.

4619 East Washington, Phoenix, AZ 85034, (602) 275-1897, hours: M-Sat: 9-4:45, Sun: 1-4:45

Funded by The Pueblo Grande Museum Auxiliary

Pueblo Grande Museum is a Division of the City of Phoenix Park, Recreation and Library Department.

The PPRLD prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, or handicap in its programs and activities. If anyone believes he or she has been discriminated against in any of the Department's programs or activities, he or she may file a complaint alleging discrimination with either the PPRLD or the Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240. The City of Phoenix does not carry accident insurance to cover participants. Involvement in any activity is done at your own risk.