

PUEBLO

GODS AND MYTHS

By Hamilton A. Tyler



AND MYTHS



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PUEBLO GODS AND MYTHS

THE CIVILIZATION OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN SERIES

PUEBLO GODS



*For Mary and Brenda
who shared experiences and waited patiently
for these explanations*



THE PUEBLO WORLD

Ahul, a Sun kachina

IN THIS BOOK I have aimed to present a composite picture of all the Pueblo gods and many lesser supernaturals. Yet there is no pan-Pueblo pantheon. To that difficulty one must add the fact that myths relating to these gods are as variable as they are viable, even among a single generation of tellers within one town. Any attempt to bring the available material into focus leads inevitably to syncretism—the reconciliation of contradictory beliefs—and the view I present will be to some extent distorted through selection. As a counterbalance I have used the Pueblo's own words as often as possible, and whenever the material was available I have traced changing attitudes toward deities.

Since comparisons are often useful in orienting the reader, I have made frequent reference to Greek religion in the hope that it is well known to a large number of people to whom Pueblo religion is a closed book. I have not sought comparisons at every turn, which could be done, but have rather taken only those which come readily to mind; there is no thesis involved in the process.

Two other attitudes drawn from Greek culture are important in the shape of this book. In Greek drama there was a place above the stage where the gods appeared and spoke directly to the audience. Whenever their words were available I have used this device and let the gods speak for themselves. The Greeks also had a word, *theologos*, which has come down to us in a modified form. To them it did imply knowledge and study, but it was also applied in a general way to "one who discourses of the gods." I would accept that epithet as the best description of my role.

For any reader, and particularly for those who have been raised in a Pueblo culture, I offer a consolation which may quiet objections to some of the particular views offered. Classic mythologies and re-

ligions come to us not fresh, but sifted through writers of various ages and intents, while the Pueblo gods and their stories come to the public almost new. At the very least, the following chapters offer to every reader the chance to become his own Ovid and to rewrite the themes of the gods in his own poetry.

Since *Pueblo Gods and Myths* is my theme on the subject, I will tell how it came into being. I am not an anthropologist by training; whether that is a fact to be rued or a handicap which may be used to some advantage I cannot tell. By way of apology, I hope that the fresh view, even the sudden view, and more empathy than would be allowed in the science, may in another way compensate for variations in standard techniques.

Some years ago chance brought my family to New Mexico. Our knowledge of Indians was only slightly beyond that which popular culture provides. We were led afield by an interest in topography, plant life, and whatever else was once included under the heading of "natural history." Landscape, which includes the human element in a study of vegetation and contour, soon arrested us. There were ruins everywhere. The buildings, even in desolation, had a simplicity and grace which both challenged the immediate countryside and at the same time were a part of it. There was harmony. Since I had been engaged in landscaping, I was keenly aware of the qualities involved in integrating vegetation, structure, and site. The role of people had been of less interest; in our culture they come and go—they rent, buy, and sell, but in any event they move. One reason they do move so often is that they have had little part in the actual construction of their dwellings and surroundings.

Pueblo ruins modified that view with a personal appeal. The construction is so simple one feels that with the help of friends, relatives, and even children, a similar work of beauty might be accomplished. The buildings are composed of adobe or sandstone blocks, of a size which anyone could grasp easily in either hand, and a mortar of the dun earth to bind the blocks together. Such complete simplicity is not an ideal in itself, but it does draw one powerfully. The human element is immediate and one can grasp that too, in a way which can-

not be duplicated in response to the works of artist-engineers in our own culture, even when the art is good.

When looking at these vacated monuments of collective endeavor, a second thought occurs. Pueblo Bonito's great structure is not a desolated temple, nor the tomb of a dead king; it was a safe dwelling place for the whole population of a fair sized town. Pueblo religion, then, must have been expressed not in material construction, but in mental constructs which would be available to all who wished to live within them. The ancients were gone, but their descendants were still very much alive. We determined to find out how mankind joined in the integration of landscape, structure, and human life.

Some of the Pueblo villages appeared quite prosperous, others very poor, but even there the Indians seemed to have achieved a kind of elegant frugality which is not really the same thing as poverty. To the outsider this elegance is most notable in the ritual dances. One cold, bright winter day my family and I attended a dance at Santo Domingo. It was a weekday, out of tourist season, and we were the only spectators. A few old faces peered from windows; all others, down to very small children, were participants.

We sat for several hours, absorbing drumbeats, listening to the shuffle of moccasined feet, smelling the odor of piñon and juniper smoke, and watching the monotonous dancing of scores of people. In such a setting reflection is inevitable, even though the first thoughts are commonplace. An infant begins to lose part of its costume and a clown deftly puts things right without disturbing that line of dancers. How is it possible that these people are still here? What do they mean by this dancing?

A more insistent thought formed and followed through changes of lines and kiva groups. What we are seeing is not a performance, since no one else is here and it would go on without us, as similar dances doubtless have gone on for centuries. The rite must have, then, interior meanings for the performers which are sufficient and strong enough to keep this complexity of ritual alive within a few miles of the centers of a vastly different culture.

I asked myself, "Why do the Pueblos still dance? For whom do

they dance? What do they mean by their dancing?" I asked friends the same questions.

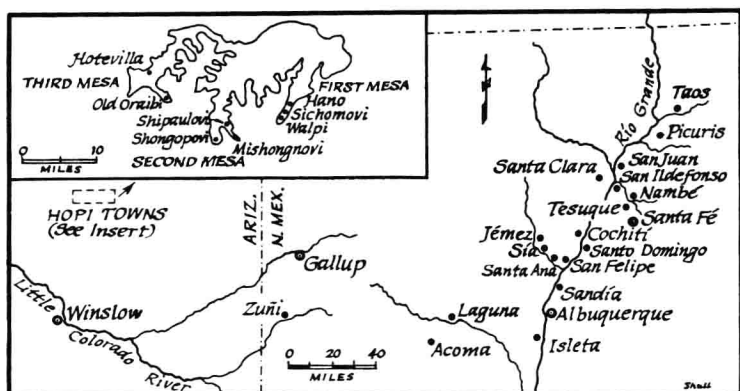
"For rain," they said.

The first books I read agreed and added material on times and places. Rain is not a wrong answer, perhaps, but it is a very limited one. My first premise was that people do not worship rain, they invoke it. If no human audience is required, there must be supernatural powers to whom the dancing is addressed, and these divinities were unknown to me.

I began to study more learned books and found to my surprise that most students were not greatly interested in the gods. The most comprehensive of Pueblo scholars noticed, in the middle of one paper, that she had neglected the pantheon altogether, because: "In a religion as highly ritualized as is Pueblo religion, the Spirits tend to become negligible, for the observer, if not for the believer." In such a case I want to leave the ranks of the observers and join those of the believers, at least until I comprehend what they mean.

The invisibility of deities is not an answer; they are not negligible merely because we cannot see them, but only because we are blind. I wanted to see. When one cannot find the book he needs, the next best alternative is to write it himself.

Who are the Pueblos? I assume that the Pueblo Indians are known to most people, by name at least, but a few facts may be of use to place them solidly on their ground. The Pueblos and their ancestors are closely bound to the Plateau region of the southwestern part of the United States. That area contains about 130,000 square miles, but much of it, which is now in the state of Utah, was not of great importance to the Pueblos or their antecedents, although there are Basketmaker burials as far to the northwest as Baker, Nevada. In southwestern Colorado the famous ruins in Mesa Verde are a most important link with the past, but the Pueblo present is confined to New Mexico and Arizona. The Plateau is high country, with an average elevation of about 6,500 feet. At the present time the valley of the Río Grande forms the eastern edge of Pueblo country and the Acoma reservation marks its southern extent, although related cul-



The Pueblo Territory

tures once spread somewhat east and considerably south of the area presently occupied.

The present western limit of the Pueblo world is in the poorly defined Hopi reservation, northeast of Flagstaff, in Navaho County, Arizona. At no time was the population dense in any of the area. There were small towns and clusters of even smaller villages. The name "Pueblo" was used by the Spanish to designate all of the Indians who lived in similar permanent towns. While we still follow that classification there are differing groups of Pueblos, which I shall call tribes. They speak widely differing languages and, as we shall see, worshiped distinct gods. In economy and ceremony the tribes were quite similar to one another.

In the year 1540 a warrior named Castañeda accompanied Coronado in his fruitless quest and later wrote down his opinion of Zuñi religion:

There are no regular Caciques as in New Spain. Neither are there any councils of old men. They have priests who preach; these are aged men who ascend to the highest terrace of the village and deliver a sermon at sunrise. The people sit around and listen in profound silence. These old men give them advice in regard to their manner of living, which they think it their duty to observe; for there is no drunkenness among them, no unnatural vice; they do not eat human flesh; there are no thieves; on the contrary, they are very laborious.

At that time the Spaniards defeated the Zuñis, but more than four centuries have since passed and the miniscule republic is still intact. Another adventurer in the same sally added a note on what the Zuñis worshiped.

They perform rites and sacrifices to certain idols; but what they most worship is water, to which they offer painted sticks and plumes, or bunches of yellow flowers; and this they do commonly at springs. They also offer turquoises, which are, however, poor in quality.¹

The orderly culture described by Castañeda was but one branch of the Pueblos. Taken together, Pueblo culture has a rather specific date of origin, which is placed in the year A.D. 800. I find that kind of dating highly suspect, but it is handy enough. Behind the Puebloan were a number of earlier cultures. An agricultural society whose members raised corn in the Mogollon area has been given a date somewhere around 2000 B.C.² Whatever the date of its origin, the Puebloan, or Anasazi, culture advanced swiftly and reached at least one kind of climax between A.D. 1100 and A.D. 1300.

During this period the monumental towns of Mesa Verde, the unfortunately named "Aztec" in northern New Mexico, and the complex of towns in Chaco Canyon flourished. Domestic architecture reached a peak; the great kivas, or underground ceremonial chambers, far surpass anything of the present, and pottery reached a level seldom duplicated since. It should be noted that the still existing towns of Keres Acoma and Hopi Old Oraibi were founded in that age.

Very little is known about the religious life of those times. Surviving artifacts of ceremonial import do not seem to differ greatly from those in use today. By its nature, *Pueblo Gods and Myths* is based upon evidence from the historical period, and even there early reports are thin. Consequently, almost all of the book is based upon evidence gathered within the last one hundred years. Change, at least

¹ A. F. Bandelier, "An Outline of the Documentary History of the Zuñi Tribe," *Journal of American Ethnology and Archaeology*, Vol. III (1892), 46-47.

² Emil W. Haury, ed., "Southwest Issue," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. LVI, No. 4, Pt. 1 (1954), 579. Beans were added to corn and squash, 1000 B.C.

until recently, was not rapid and much information about the gods can be projected backwards in time. Another loss is most lamentable; for several tribes there is not sufficient comparative material available to make a study of their gods. In consequence, this book is limited to a consideration of the views of Hopis, Zuñis, and Keres. The loss is acute, since, pantheon-wise, Pueblo religion seems to be a constellation of separate approaches to the supernatural world, rather than a single one.

At the time of Coronado's *entrada*, Castañeda estimated the Pueblo population at twenty thousand souls. Bandelier, who didn't like the man, thought this number was much too high, but after arranging all the population figures across the centuries, I think it not a bad guess. The U.S. Census of 1948 lists the Pueblo population as nineteen thousand. They are not, of course, all of the same tribes, nor do they all live in the same places. In the four intervening centuries extinction, starvation, pestilence, war, revolt, and exile have joined to make any correspondence between the figures nearly meaningless.

Nevertheless, the general drift of population statistics seems clear. In remote times there were large numbers of small groups, possibly clans, who were widely distributed and whose towns were often isolated. Sometimes these groups united to form larger units. Occasionally these were cities of a thousand or more people. These cities do not seem to be the result of a trend. Pueblo Bonito was such a place in the classic period; Pecos, now gone, and Sía, nearly gone, were cities in historic times. Today Acoma, Laguna, Santo Domingo, and Zuñi have populations over one thousand. Even there and under present circumstances, they tend to split up once more, either into summer farming villages, or into religiously based units.

Cliff Palace in Mesa Verde was a town of about four hundred, which was perhaps an optimum population for Pueblo society. Near by were other smaller villages, who doubtless joined in ceremony, friendship, and trade. A similar pattern exists today, for example on the Second Mesa at Hopi. Three pueblos exist there in proximity, but with elbow room. One had a population (1932) of 266, another of 123, and the third of 307. My guess is that such an arrangement was

a basic pattern, close enough for defense and spread out enough to utilize farming possibilities and allay hostilities which grow in an isolated group.

In their *entrada* the Spanish carried a double-edged sword into New Mexico. On the one side it presented the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse to the Pueblo Indians. On the other side it presented new crops, new methods of farming, and above all, domestic livestock. The positive force of these innovations was not immediate. Notably Pueblos do not ride horses. Those who took to sheep overgrazed their land, and cattle are not a Pueblo road, but I do think that these Indians must admire a burro, when it carries his load.

At some time before the arrival of the Spaniard, other enemies entered the Pueblo world. It would be inexact to say that they lived in peace before, but beginning at some time before the historical period the Pueblo world was entered and surrounded by tribes most famously known as Navaho-Apaches, Utes, and Comanches. Accommodation is the Pueblo's great skill. Among the variety of enemies the Pueblos were forced to choose a number of strange alliances and techniques which were to turn some Pueblo groups against others.

By the mid-seventeenth century Comanches, or similar people, had forced the abandonment of Piro and Tompiro pueblos east and south of the Manzano Mountains. As a culture they are lost to us. In the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 the Pueblos, stung by suppression of their religious and cultural life—possibly also by the use of Indians as slaves in Spanish mines, and certainly in households—revolted and drove the Spaniards entirely out of New Mexico for a long decade.

The rebellion was a considerable feat of organization on the Pueblo side, but only by their own non-military standards. As a warlike operation it was just the reverse of that first encounter between the two races at Zuñi, except that this time it was the Spaniard who was disorganized and uncomprehending in the face of sudden and seemingly unwarranted attack. I quite agree with L. C. Powell in his suggestion that a monument be erected to Popé, the leader of the revolt. From what he could have known a much greater Pueblo victory must have seemed within reach. Perhaps he did win one point which was worth winning. I note that many of the Pueblo land

grants from the king of Spain, which are still valid under our law, are dated 1689.

On the other hand, the victory was ephemeral and costly, culminating in the extinction of the Piro, as a cultural group, the abandonment of many towns and mass migrations from others, as well as the usual cleavages and devastations of war. Prior to this war a document found by F. V. Scholes,³ dated 1664, listed the Pueblo population at slightly above 20,000. If the list is limited to the three tribes considered in this book, his total comes to 6,766: 1,200 Zuñis, 2,966 Hopis, and 2,600 Keres (of whom 800 were at Sía).

During the eighteenth century the effects of the rebellion were reinforced by a series of famines and pestilences which kept the entire Pueblo population hovering around 10,000 persons, and these had no very certain future. Almost every Pueblo group has stood on the rim of extinction at one time or another, and not all of them have stepped back. While the totals for the Pueblo population in the seventeenth century and today are similar, the Hopis, Zuñis, and Keres have about doubled their share of Pueblo numbers, since they are now 13,000 strong.

The population figures indicate that at no time were there more than a few hundred adults in any pueblo. It is startling to think that such small groups could face the universe nearly alone, could cope with a most unpromising environment and call it to a draw on terms of physical existence, and still find the energy and ability to challenge and meet so many of the religious or philosophical questions which trouble mankind. In the final chapter I hope to outline some of the problems common to Pueblo and contemporary thought.

The successes and failures of the Pueblos have often been related to their agriculture. In prehistoric times food was, of course, an absolute; on this fact they built an agrarian religion. Today live-

³ F. V. Scholes, "Documents for the History of New Mexican Missions of the Seventeenth Century," *New Mexico Historical Review*, Vol. IV, No. 1 (1929), 46-50. For contemporary population statistics of New Mexico pueblos, see S. D. Aberle, *The Pueblo Indians of New Mexico, Their Land, Economy and Civil Organization*. For population figures on the Hopis of Arizona, see Stanley A. Stubbs, *Bird's-Eye View of the Pueblos*.

stock has in some cases altered the picture, but agriculture rather than grazing is still the base. Let us look at a few more bald figures. Zuñi has 2,833 acres of agricultural land to support a population of 2,671. The Western Keres' pueblos of Acoma and Laguna have 2,979 agricultural acres for 4,341 inhabitants. These three pueblos also have extensive grazing land.

The Eastern Keres have very poor grazing, but good agricultural land. The pueblo of Santa Ana has 585 acres of good irrigated soil—enough to make three or four farms by midwestern standards—but there are 273 people who must live for the most part off that land. The Hopis are not as well off as the other two tribes. They depend upon rain, seepage, or flood water to irrigate their crops. Something of the limitations imposed on plant growth by short seasons and tenuous rainfall can be seen in the peach "orchards." At Zuñi these grow about four feet tall and in clusters that remind one of abandoned family orchards. On the Hopi mesas in winter they barely protrude above the swirling sand, and they look like something the Japanese might have grown in pots for ornament. The fruit they bear is more a sign of man's triumphant struggle with nature than something one would wish to eat—if there were a choice.

The Pueblos do have recourse to outside jobs and to arts and crafts for income. Except for a few individuals, such income merely provides coffee-money. For the majority, who survive by working a small plot of land, there will never be enough of anything to make the friendship of the gods unnecessary. But if the Pueblos' economy is spare, their ceremonial life is rich. In the following pages I hope to show something of this richness in so far as it applies to their gods.

Over the past half-century or more, the names of Pueblo gods have appeared in a variety of transliterations. Some of these versions are simple Anglicizations, while others are based on differing phonetic systems. The latter have a place in linguistic studies, but create an unnecessary problem for the general reader. For example, if you know ahead of time that capital "C" indicates an "sh" sound, all is well. If not, you fall into the error of some writers who have come to believe that the Zuñi Shalako ceremony is spelled and pronounced Calako.

I have rather arbitrarily selected the forms of the names that I have

preferred for one reason or another, and the reader will not always find the same spellings in other works. Since the spelling of the name of the Hopi god Masau'u is subject to an impossible number of transliterations, I have taken the liberty of changing these, even when they occur in quotations. The general reader should be aided by this change, and the student is warned to check the texts before he uses them.

I use the word "tribe" often in the very loose sense of "social group," much as Kroeber in *Zuñi Kin and Clan* speaks of a Zuñi "tribal ceremony." The stricter meaning of the word tribe, that of a group based upon real or supposed kinship, certainly does not apply. The most meaningful grouping of Pueblo subdivisions is that based upon linguistic classification. There are no political groupings, since each town is a completely independent entity.

Fortunately, Pueblo linguistic units parallel cultural groupings. That is to say, for example, the seven Keresan towns share a common language and have a very similar, though not identical, religion.

The linguistic groups which concern us are three in number. (These as well as others are correlated with their respective towns at the end of this volume.) Zuñian is a language apparently unrelated to any family of languages and is spoken today only in the single town of Zuñi. Keresan may also be an unaffiliated language, as Boas thought, or it may belong to the Hokan-Siouan group. There are seven Keresan towns: Acoma and Laguna lie between the Río Grande and Zuñi; Santa Ana and Sía (also commonly spelled Zía) are on the Jémez River; San Felipe, Santo Domingo, and Cochití are on the Río Grande. The third linguistic group which concerns us, Hopi, is a Shoshonean language in the Uto-Aztec stock. The Hopis are represented by seven historical towns distributed on three Mesas, and also by a number of modern offshoots. The names of the basic towns will be found on the map in this volume.

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