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HOPI LEGENDS OF THE SUNSET CRATER REGION

Introduction

Sunset Crater, Polotsmo (the Red Hill) is the home of the beneficent Kana-a Kachinas of the Hopi, and with its surrounding phenomena has long been an object of veneration. This group of Kachinas (or supernatural beings) seem quite different in character from those who make their home in the San Francisco Peaks; they are kindly and compassionate, while the latter are always regarded with awe.

While these friendly dieties make their home in the Crater of Sunset, a very different personage dwells below. Yaponcha, the Wind God, lives in a great crack in the black lava and issues forth to bluster and storm across the Painted Desert and drive the white clouds before him. When you see a great whirlwind of sand rushing down the valley of the Little Colorado, know that it is Yaponcha, twisting and twirling in the rushing golden cloud in an ecstasy of mad action.

Yapancha's dwelling place is located in the lava flow which appears to issue from below Sunset. On the north side, it is extremely rough and traversed by a series of long crevasses. The most extensive of these is peculiar in that a stream of air is always perceptible issuing from it like a cold breath and its bottom is not visible, while a stone dropped into it can be heard for a long time fainter and fainter, falling to a great depth below. The Hopis say that this

is the home of the Wind God.

Long ago there was an ancient trail that crossed the desert from the Hopi Mesas and traveled up from Heiser's Spring along the great Kana-a lava flow and coming in south of Sunset Crater, crossed to the Ice Caves and so, to the Hopi shrines on the main peaks. From prehistoric times the Hopi and his ancestors left offerings in the Ice Caves to the Gods and there, it has been reported, various pieces of pottery were found in the early days.

Though the Hopi have always regarded the Sunset region with religious awe, as well they might, they did not apparently associate its strange forms and rivers of black stone, with heat and fire. There is one legend of Oraibi, however, which may refer to Sunset's last period of volcanic activity.

In prehistoric times the Sunset region was rather densely inhabited by pit-house dwellers of Pueblo II period and it seems probable that these people retired in alarm before the increasing activity prior to a volcanic outburst. Today their deserted homes have been uncovered from deep beneath successive ash falls all about Sunset Crater and its great lava flows—how many lie beneath the lava no man will ever know. Thus it will be seen that Sunset Crater and its stygian lava fields have been associated with man from prehistoric times and have played a dramatic

part in his affairs even down to the present day.

—MARY-RUSSELL F. COLTON.

Yaponcha, The Wind God

Many years ago the Hopi were very much troubled by the wind. It blew and blew all the time. The sand drifted away from their fields, and they tried to plant their crops but the wind would sweep the soil away before the seeds would even start to germinate. Sadness and worry were upon everybody and they made prayer offerings of many pahos but there were no results.

Many councils were held by the old men in the kivas, where they smoked their pipes earnestly and asked one another why it was that their gods should turn such strong wind upon them. And after awhile, they decided that they would ask the "little fellows" (the two little War Gods Po-okonghoya and Balongahoya, his younger brother)* to help them. Now these "little fellows" were called in. When they came in they wanted to know why they were called. The Hopis said that they needed their help, something must be done to the wind. The "little fellows" said yes, they would see what they could do to help the people.

They told the men to stay in the kiva and make many pahos. Then the "little fellows" went to their wise old grandmother, the Spider Woman, and they asked her to make some sweet corn meal mush for them to take along on a journey. Of course they knew who Yaponcha (the Wind God) was and where he lived—over near the Sunset Mountain in the big cracks in the black rock.

When the corn meal mush was made they came back to the kiva and found the pahos were ready and also the ball which they always liked to take along to play with wherever they went, and the bows and arrows had been made for them, because it was much like going on the war path for them. So the arrows were of blue-bird feathers which were considered most powerful in those days.

The two "little fellows" set out

toward the San Francisco Peaks. The old men went with them as far as the Little Colorado River and there they sat down and smoked their pipes.

The little warriors went on and on, playing with their ball. They reached the home of the Wind God, Yaponcha, on the fourth day. The Wind God lived at the foot of Sunset Crater in a great crack in the black rock, through which he is ever breathing and does so to this day. They threw the pahos into the crack and hurriedly took out their old grandmother's sticky cornmeal mush, and they sealed up Yaponcha's door with it. Now he was awfully angry, and he blew and blew, but he could not get out. The "little fellows" laughed and they went home, very pleased with themselves, indeed.

But bye and bye, the people in the villages began to feel that it was very hot. It was getting warmer and warmer every day. Down in the kivas it was so awfully hot that the men came out and the people came from their houses and they stood upon the housetops and looked and looked toward the San Francisco Peaks, to see if there were any clouds coming. But there wasn't even the tiniest bit of a cloud to give a pleasant shadow, and not a breath of air, and the people thought that they would smother.

They thought they must do something right away, so the men made some more pahos and called the "little fellows" again and they begged them to go back to Yaponchaki (House of Yaponcha) right away and tell him that there must be peace, and then give him the pahos and let him out, because this heat was much worse even, than the wind. So the "little fellows" said that they would go and see

* The two little War Gods are the grandsons of the good old Spider Woman (No-okiang or Sowuti, Spider Grandmother). When the Hopi are in trouble they always turn to her or the "little fellows" for assistance and advice. They live together in a kiva near the villages.

what could be done to make things better.

On the fourth day they arrived at the house of Yaponcha and they talked together and decided that the best thing to do would be to let Yaponcha have just a little hole open, just enough to let him breathe through, but not large enough for him to come out through, altogether. So they took out some of the cornmeal mush and right away a nice cool wind came out, and a little white cloud appeared and went over across the desert toward the Hopi towns.

When the "little fellows" got home again to the villages, everybody was pleased and they have been very grateful ever since. Ever since that time the winds have been just right, and just enough to keep the people cool without blowing everything away.

Ever since then prayer offerings of pahos, to this day, are made to the Wind God, Yaponcha, in the windy month of March by the chiefs and high priests of the three villages of the Second Mesa.

—EDMUND NEQUATEWA.

The Kana-a Kachinas of Sunset Crater

At old Mishongnovi the people lived and at the San Francisco Peaks * the Kachinas were living. Over in the old town of Mishongnovi there was a young maiden who would not give up to any young man. Her parents were getting old and the father was not able to do as much work as he used to, so he wished that his daughter would get married. But she had refused all proposals from the young men in her town and also from all the towns around. The old man, her father, was very much discouraged to think of all these young men who had tried their chances with the maiden and had met with failure.

Sometime after this, at the San Francisco Peaks, a young Kachina man heard about this. So he thought he would go over to Mishongnovi and propose to the maiden. When evening came he started out across the desert over to the Hopi towns, but being unknown in

the town, he was very much in doubt of what the outcome of his undertaking would be. When he did get there some time early in the night, he found the maiden grinding corn up in the second floor of her house. He went in and stood around for awhile and finally sat down. Then he asked her to stop for a moment and listen, because he would like to speak to her. But she would not stop and just kept on grinding. But finally, after awhile, she did stop grinding.

"Why did you stop?" asked the youth.

"You asked me to stop," said the maiden. "Where are you from?"

"I am from the west," he said, and at this, she thought that he was from Shungopovi. She saw that he was a very handsome looking young man.

Now the parents, in the room below, had noticed that their daughter had stopped her grinding and they wondered, for they thought that something unusual must be happening up there, but they dared not go up to see what or who it was who had come to see the maiden. Now the girl thought that it was getting late, so she asked the young man to go on to bed and as the boy was going out through the door, she asked him to come back and see her again. She herself now came downstairs to bed and the parents asked her who the young man was. She said she did not know him, though she had asked him to come back again to see her.

Now the very next night the youth went back to see the maiden again and found her grinding corn the same as usual. The parents heard someone go up the ladder and walk over the roof to where their daughter was grinding. She stopped her work and then they

* The San Francisco Peaks are called by the Hopi, Nuva-tekia-ovi, Place of the Snow on the Very Top, or freely, the Snow Mountains. They are the mythical home of the Kachina people, a kind of a Parnassus toward which they look with reverence and awe.

thought that it must be the same young man who was there the night before. They hoped that the maiden might be interested in this handsome youth and indeed he did interest the maiden. So she asked him again, "Where is your home?" And he said as before, "Over in the west," and again she thought that he meant that he lived in Shungopovi.

Now the maiden liked this handsome youth very much indeed. She said, "In four days I will go back with you. I will be prepared by that time. So come back upon that day and take me to your home."

When the fourth day came, she prepared herself and had her hair done up in butterfly wings (poliia-na) * and got ready some corn meal and some piki, which she must take with her on her journey. When the boy came everything was ready and he took the tray of corn meal while she carried her piki. They started out and when they got outside of the village the youth said, "Wait awhile, I will see if we can travel easier and faster than we could walk, for we have some distance to go."

He then reached into a little pouch which he was carrying and pulled forth something and threw it from him, westward, across the country and the maiden saw it was a rainbow like a path before them and she was very much afraid. But she had already started out with him and she could not turn back.

"Now let us get on," said the youth, and when they stepped upon it, the rainbow drew itself up to the other end and when they landed they found that they were close to the Little Colorado River. From there again the youth threw his magic in the same direction. The rainbow appeared and they mounted it again and this time they landed on the south side of Palotsmo, Sunset Crater, or the home of the Kana-a Kachina. Here there was a little cloud hiding itself among the pine trees and he was a Kana-a Kachina and he spied the Kachina youth from the San Francisco Peaks taking a Hopi girl with him. The maiden was weary and begged to take a rest

and asked the youth to wait a little where he was, for her.

She walked away some distance and presently she heard a voice which seemed to come from under her feet. The voice said, "Be careful, so you may not step on me." And the maiden stopped and looked about her but could not see anyone. It was the Spider Woman who spoke to her, and as the maiden moved to one side, she saw the light down in a little kiva where the good Spider Grandmother lived. She asked the maiden to come in and when she entered the Grandmother said to her in deep sympathy, "My dear child, I have to tell you because you do not know, being only a child. Down in my heart I sympathize with you very deeply. You are out on your first and it may be your last trip, and you may not ever see your father and mother again. We cannot hesitate very long. Now I am going with you and I am prepared to go. If we win or lose I am willing to die with you. The youth is a Kachina from San Francisco Peaks and when you reach his home the Kachina people will give you some very difficult tasks to perform, and without my help you would surely fail. Quickly, put me in your ear and let us be on our way." The little Spider Woman was so invisible inside of the Hopi maiden's ear that she could not be detected by anyone, even a Kachina youth.

When the maiden joined the boy again, he threw the rainbow up towards the Peaks and they mounted upon it to take another leap. Now all this time the Little Cloud who was hiding in the pines, knew what was going on, for this little cloud was one of the Kana-a Kachinas who lived in the Sunset Crater. This time the youth and the maiden landed right close to a great kiva for up in the Peaks and they descended from the rainbow and walked up to it.

The youth approached the opening and calling in, he said, "Be courteous to this guest who is my

*The hair whorls of Hopi maidens have been misnamed squash blossoms.

companion, for I am come and am not alone."

And a voice called out from the kiva, "Come in, come right in."

They went in and there they found one old lone man sitting by the fire in the fire-place. The old man begged the young maiden to sit down, and getting up he spread out his own wildcat skin robe for her to sit down upon. Now the whole kiva was very quiet and after she had seated herself she noticed that the youth had disappeared and she did not know where he had gone.

The old man was slowly poking into the fire trying to get more light and he called out saying, "Mother of the House and you, young maiden, come forth. Some stranger has come and she has entered into our kiva."

All this time the Spider Grandmother was whispering her advice into the ear of the Hopi maiden and telling her what she should do.

Now from the north side of the kiva a handsome woman came forth. She seemed suspicious, although she acted with great politeness. The grandmother of the Hopi maiden had already told her of the character of this Hahy-ia.

Now the maidens of the house came fourth also, and they served her with food and when she was through they cleared it away.

By this time it was quite late in the night, so the old man said, "It is time to go to bed," and the handsome Kachina woman, Hahy-ia, then opened the door on the north side of the kiva and she asked the maiden to enter and she told her that this was the room where she was to sleep. Now this was the place where the North Wind lived, and as Hahy-ia was leaving the room, she said to the maiden, "It is quite cold in here but you will have to do the best you can to get through the night."

Just as soon as the door was closed the Grandmother hastily pulled out some turkey feathers from the bosom of her dress and putting one down on the ground, she asked the girl to lie down on top of it. Then she put one over her, one at her feet, then at her head, and one on either side. And

the maiden soon fell asleep, for she was very tired, and the good little Grandmother's turkey feathers kept her warm. Now the wind was blowing very hard all night and it hailed and it snowed and when she woke in the morning she was under a pile of snow. Just as she became awake, Hahy-ia opened the door and peeked in, thinking that the maiden had frozen to death. But finding her still alive, she was surprised and asked, "How did you rest?"

"Very comfortably," said the maiden, and she got up and went out into the kiva room. No sooner had she done this than she was shown to the mata (the place for grinding corn) and instead of corn Hahy-ia came out with a basketful of icicles and put them into the mata for the maiden to grind. The poor maiden felt very cold and unhappy to think she had to grind these icicles and then she thought of her turkey feathers and she took one in each hand with which she would hold mata-ki (the mano) so that her hands would not get cold. The icicles were very cold and hard to grind, but she had to go on; she had to grind and grind. The icicles were cold and slick and she could not hold them between the two rocks. Every once in a while Hahy-ia would come and take a look to see if she was getting the icicles melted, which she had intended the maiden to do.

Now the Spider Grandmother took a bit of her magic root of an herb and put it in the girl's mouth and asked her to chew it well and then spray it over the icicles. She did this, and no sooner had it touched the icicles than they melted and turned to water in the mata. Now this was the maiden's first test, and when Hahy-ia came again and saw what the bride-to-be had done, she was glad. The maiden continued to do this for four days and she spent four nights in the cold room with the North Wind. At the end of four days she finished her test and it was found that she had won over the Kachinas, so she was married to the youth who had brought her there from Mishongnovi. The Grand-

mother was glad to have been able to serve the Hopi maiden and bring her successfully through her trials. She had put up many jars of water for the Kachinas by grinding the icicles and snow.

Now the maiden's wedding robes and many other presents were brought to her and she was ready to be sent home. Many Kachinas were to go along with her to carry the presents to Mishongnovi, and the bride and bridegroom were dressed in their wedding robes.

This day was rather a joyful day for the bride for she thought of how wonderful the Spider Grandmother had been and how she had helped her to win. And now she was going back home and taking her husband along. And she was very thankful indeed to the little old woman.

On the way back to Mishongnovi at Sunset Crater, the girl stopped just as she had done on the way over and walked away a little to take a rest. But this time, she took her little Grandmother back to her home, and when they got there they both cried for joy. For the last time the girl thanked her again. The Little Cloud who detected the couple on their way up to the San Francisco Peaks was again hiding in the pines and he saw everything that took place.

Now during these four days the parents of the maiden had been very much worried because they did not know where she had gone. So in Mishongnovi this was rather an exciting afternoon for the people to see this girl who had been missing so long coming home with the Kachinas and bringing all kinds of presents. Kachin-num* gave all their presents to the villagers and then returned to their home.

From this time on the Hopi were very prosperous for a number of years until finally the men of one kiva, and these were the trouble-makers of the village, plotted to see how they could break up the happiness of the Kachina youth and the Hopi maiden and win her love away from her husband. These wicked men made a costume exactly like that which the Kachina

man wore and so one day, one of these young men dressed up like him and went to see the Kachina's wife while he was away. On his return he found that his wife cared for someone else, but she herself did not know that it was another man because of the costume and everything being exactly like her husband. So the Kachina man, without making any further trouble, told his wife that he had to go away to his home in the San Francisco Peaks and back to his own people, and so he did. But as he was leaving, he took one of the longest ears of corn from the stack in the house and carried it back with him to the San Francisco Peaks.

Two years later a famine came upon the Hopi people. They prayed and prayed for rain and held ceremonies of many kinds, all of which were of no use. No result came from any of them.

Finally Kana-a Kachin-num at Palotosmo, Sunset Crater, felt compassion for the people and took mercy upon them. Now they knew that the Mishongnovi maiden had not been treated fairly and they knew of all the hard tests that she had had to go through in the kiva of the San Francisco Mountain Kachinas, and they did not think it right for these Kachina people to bring this terrible calamity upon the whole people. The Kana-a Kachinas then took much sweet corn and strung it up with yucca and many other good foodstuffs. They came across the desert to the Hopi villages to make the people happy and to relieve their hunger. Now when they got there they went dancing through the streets and distributed their sweetcorn and food to the people. But they asked the people not to eat everything up that day which they had received and told them that each family must leave an ear of corn in the corner of their empty storage room.

All the people were made happy and glad so they asked these Kachinas not to go back to their Sunset Crater home, but to live with

*Kachin-nub is the plural of Kachina.

them always there. But they, being supernatural beings, could not do this, so of their own choice, they went to a little butte which stands by Mishongnovi today, and they opened it up and went in. So that to this day the little butte is called Kana-a Katchin-ki.

Waking up the next morning, to their wonder, the people found that their empty rooms were full of corn and from then on joy was with the people again. After this the Kana-a Kachina dance was celebrated every year until 1902.

—EDMUND NEQUATEWA.

A Possible Hopi Tradition of the Eruption of Sunset Crater

Although the eruption of Sunset Crater took place over 1000 years ago, the Hopi Indians who dwell at Oraibi some 60 miles northeast of the crater, have a tradition that may perpetuate a dim memory of the event. The tradition is a common one and has been repeated to the author several times. It was recorded by Voth (1905), whose version follows.

"They all at once noticed a light in the San Francisco Mountains and remarked about it, mentioning it also to those in the kiva. The latter ridiculed them, and took no notice of it. The next night the same thing was repeated, only the fire in the mountains appeared to be larger. Those who were outside of the kiva, looking on and watching the gambling, again mentioned the fact to the others, but the latter again showed themselves skeptical. During the day also they had observed smoke at the same place, without, however, taking special notice of it. During the third night the fire became larger, and those who noticed it became somewhat alarmed, but their remarks upon the fact again met deaf ears. On the following day the smoke arising from the San Francisco Peaks seemed to be threatening, and those few that were considered the better class of people became alarmed. During the fourth night the people again continued their gambling and carousing, those outside watching with great alarm the fire on the

San Francisco Mountains, which now began to spread itself toward the Hopi villages."

To anyone familiar with the accounts of the eye witnesses of eruptions of recent cinder cones, such as the descriptions of the eruptions of Monte Nuevo near Naples in 1538 by Del Nero, by Via Como del Toledo, and by Falconi (Lyell 1854) and of Jurullo in Mexico in 1759 by Sayago (Gadow 1930), the account of the Sunset eruption has a ring of truth. It is possible for the Hopis to hold such a tradition because archaeologists are confident that the ancestors of the Hopi dwelt at Oraibi and there about, for much over 1200 years and because the prevailing westerly winds would have drifted the ash in a cloud over the Hopi towns.

Although the tradition may be considered to refer to a volcanic eruption, yet it should not be given too much weight. The tradition deals with the destruction of a pueblo seven miles northwest of Oraibi, Pivahonkiapi, which, from the pottery, we know existed from about 1100 to about 1300, dates much too late for the Sunset eruption. That the eruption is supposed to have lasted four days has no significance, as all events in Hopi traditions take place in fours; four being the Hopi ceremonial number. The tradition, therefore, must be digested with a grain of salt. It may not refer to anything more than a forest fire.

—HAROLD S. COLTON.

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