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Xeroxed on Stone

Times of Origin and the Navajo Holy People in Canyon Landscapes

Polly Schaafsma and Will Tsosie

Introduction

Jii ne' is the Navajo word meaning "it is/was said." Oral tradition references cited in this essay dealing with the Navajo Holy People comes from *jii ne'*. Oral tradition from the orthodox Navajo traditionalist has many versions because it comes from many perspectives. When the events that are related occurred, not just one person, but many were there to witness them—this is where the different versions come from. In the Navajo world, it is good to hear as many versions as one can. These different versions are different perspectives that see the same object from different angles. What does this mean for Holy People and rock art? What is shared freely in oral tradition and what is pictured is not gospel; these are individual warps in the tapestry of knowledge related to the Holy People. The reverence Navajo hold for the Holy People in oral tradition should be used carefully and with respect.

There are many narratives that recount how human beings and their supernatural associates related to each other during the turbulent times of the creation and origin of the Navajo people. As noted, the narratives concerning the Navajo creation do not comprise a single story but a kind of "boundless, sprawling

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narrative with a life of its own, so to speak, fixed in its actual limits only by what might be recited during a particular performance. From telling to telling, it could change" (Zolbrod 1984:19). Navajo oral traditions recount that during the creation, the Holy People were immediately present among the Navajo, also known as the Diné, and they taught the Navajo the ceremonies necessary for survival and readied the world for living. A central theme of their teaching was how to achieve and maintain *hózhó*—beauty, balance, and harmony.

While oral traditions are "a dynamic flux emerging from a central core of basic values" (Schaafsma 2004:631; Schaafsma and Schaafsma 1996:173), it is the purpose of this essay to explore Navajo concepts of how things came to be and how they pertain, often indirectly, to the rich legacy of Navajo religious art on the walls of canyons of the upper San Juan drainage. The region of concern, known as the Dinétah, can be roughly described as being east of Farmington, New Mexico, north of Cuba, and south of the New Mexico/Colorado border (see Towner 1996:15 for further discussion). Here imagery and myth conflate with landscape and, for the archaeologist, establish these canyons as landscapes of origin during a time when a Navajo cultural identity was forged. The mid-twentieth century "rediscovery" of the wealth of Navajo rock art in the Dinétah and neighboring regions was due in large part to the salvage archaeological work in preparation for the construction of Navajo Dam (Schaafsma 1963) and to oil and gas exploration in the Largo Canyon drainage to the south (Olin and Hadlock 1980).

Before describing the upper San Juan landscape and its rock paintings and petroglyphs, it is crucial to define the broader principles of the Navajo landscape in the current and fifth world in which living takes place. This world was created by the Holy People in the beginning and into which the Navajo themselves emerged, first as insect-like beings, and eventually, with the aid of the Holy People, into fully human form. The Navajo world is bordered on four sides by sacred mountains. Frequently cited as the bounding mountains—as known to the world of the Bilagáanna, or white man—are Blanca Peak in the Sangre de Cristo range (east), Big Sheep Mountain (north), the San Francisco Peaks (west), and Mount Taylor on the south. It is, nevertheless, essential to point out that even these fundamental boundaries, easily identified within the topographic scheme of things, can vary according to the narration (see Zolbrod 1984:364n8). The important point, however, is that whatever mountains are named as boundaries, these the gods created, and each is sanctified in several ways. First of all each is built out of materials brought up from similar mountains in the fourth world (Zolbrod 1984:86). Each is attached to the sky by either lightning, a great stone knife, a sunbeam, and a rainbow; each is adorned with jewels such as turquoise, shell, and other valuables; blessed with feathers and birds, and to each is

assigned a supernatural pair that permanently dwells within (Zolbrod 1984:86–92, 345n20). The boundaries established by the variously conceived four sacred peaks define a landscape within which Navajo order and stability are found and within which numerous important events took place during the time of creation, as the earth was made suitable for living.

Within these boundaries, other natural features or smaller mountains were named and sanctified during the time of creation (Zolbrod 1984:89–90), and places where important supernatural events took place are named in oral accounts and myths. Some of these may have been places where rock art was made but whose original significance has been lost. Places named in oral traditions are often ambiguous (Schaafsma 2004:630) and cannot be assigned to a specific place to be pin-pointed on a map, or they shift according to the narrator. Topographic locations designated in oral accounts often relate to places with which the narrator is especially familiar and tailored to the audience, thus synthesizing story and place in a meaningful way in order to empower the message conveyed.

Therefore it is problematic for the archaeologist, but not necessarily so for the Navajo, that the Dinétah (Towner 1996:15) as the "traditional Navajo homeland" and its sacred places, is often forgotten by the Navajos themselves,[1] an exception being the Junction Site where the Pine River meets the San Juan. As for rock art sites that denote where major events took place at the time of creation, the importance of this confluence was never lost from Navajo memory. Here the Hero War Twins were painted on the cliffs and are said to reside still, coming there after the world was rid of the monsters. As described (see following) this location was visited by Navajos for ritual purposes until the mid-twentieth century when Navajo Dam was built and destroyed the area. The Junction Site is also referenced in several myths (Schaafsma 1963:63–64).

At this location and in the broader region, the images of the Holy People carved and painted on the cliffs and in rock shelters of the sandstone canyons tell a story of the Navajo beginnings as they synthesized their beliefs with Rio Grande Pueblo worldview between roughly 1670 and 1760. In addition to rock art, the deteriorated remains of hogans (the traditional house), stone masonry pueblitos, lambing pens, a variety of ceramics, and a few well-preserved caches of ceremonial paraphernalia comprise much of the material evidence of this phase of Navajo culture history (Brugge 1994, 1996; Carlson 1965; Dittert et al. 1961; C. Schaafsma 2002; P. Schaafsma 1963, 1965, 1980:301–333, 1992:26–41; Towner 1996, 2003).

The Navajo as a discrete ethnic group came into being in protohistoric times. Deriving from Apachean populations entering the Pueblo region of the Rio Grande Valley from the Plains around A.D. 1500 (Hester 1962; Schaafsma 2002), the people now known as Navajo distinguished themselves from other

Apacheans in the seventeenth century by adopting numerous Puebloan practices and many aspects of Pueblo cosmology and ritual, including a definition of the sacred landscape. Both maize horticulture, borrowed from the Rio Grande Pueblos, and sheep and goat husbandry (Spanish) characterized Navajo life by the early seventeenth century. Conflict with both the Pueblos and the Spanish, eventually pushed the Navajo north and west out of the Rio Grande into the canyons of southwestern Colorado and northwestern New Mexico. Dates for the earliest appearance of the Navajo in the Dinétah region vary and are the subject of debate among scholars. Evidence indicates that hogans constructed possibly as early as the 1670s were built of scavenged wood. Beginning around 1710, masonry pueblitos were constructed as defense against the Utes. Seven hundred and ninety-eight tree-ring dates from pueblito sites establish a continuous occupation of the Dinétah from the early to mid-1700s. The exception here is Tapacitos Ruin with cutting dates between 1690 and 1694. There are no Navajo dates after 1755 in the Dinétah (see Towner 2003:129–31 for details).

The earliest known Navajo rock art is ritual in nature and, as indicated in the previous discussion, pictures the Holy People and other supernatural beings important in the time of origin. This rock art, although dating from the historic period, is fully indigenous in content and incorporates a worldview derived from the Pueblos in which beliefs pertinent to maize horticulture, and masked and other supernatural beings figure prominently (Figures 1–3). The imagery features not only multitudinous representations of supernaturals, but also corn (maize), cloud, lightning, snakes, eagles, shields, and star ceilings. Included among the Holy People, are the *ye'i*, the masked supernaturals associated with the various ceremonials but most significantly the Nightway performances.

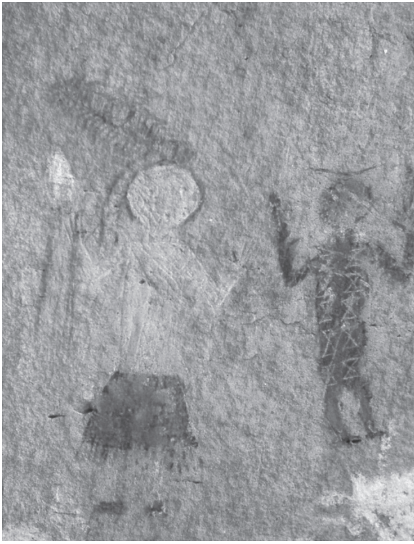
The Holy People are supernatural powers that are "personalized in the Navajo mind as beings . . . capable of assuming human form," and whose powers are "interdependent complementary items in a well-ordered universe" (Wyman 1983a:17). Although, as discussed previously, according to oral tradition the *ye'i* and other Holy people were present and active among the Navajo after the emergence from the underworlds and while the earth was being made suitable for human life, ultimately, "The creation of the Navajo world concludes with the departure of the Holy People . . . to their own spiritual domains. [They] depart, announcing that they will never again be seen in their primordial forms, but that they will be forever overlooking and directing life in the Navajo world" (Gill 1983:505). Oral tradition states that they departed to the east and toward the Rio Grande. At this critical juncture, the Holy People are said to have put their images on the cliffs—"like a Xerox"—so that they would not be forgotten and as reminders of their continued spiritual presence among the Navajo.

Holy People on Stone: Some Possible Functions of Navajo Ceremonial Rock Art

The rock art from this period has been described and its content interpreted in numerous publications (Brugge 2001; Chamberlain and Rogers 2001; Chamberlain and Schaafsma 2005; Copeland 2001; Copeland and Rogers 1996; Schaafsma 1963, 1965, 1980:301–333, 1992:26–41, among others). The imagery pictured in the landscape of the Dinétah is closely allied with that of the much later ritual sandpaintings, also known as "drypaintings," first recorded in the late nineteenth century (Matthews 1887, 1902; Stevenson 1886). The latter, however, due to their ephemeral nature, are not known from archaeology. Whether drypaintings replaced rock art imagery or whether they once occurred simultaneously in time but with different ritual functions is not known. While today the sandpainting tradition is ongoing, the practice of rendering ceremonial themes and supernaturals on cliffs or under shallow rock overhangs was rare by the end of the 1700s or possibly shortly after 1760 when the Dinétah country of northwestern New Mexico was vacated for points west and south in Southern Utah and northern Arizona. In Canyon de Chelly, for example, although there is an occasional rock art figure of a Holy Person, ritually coherent groups, including figures replete with symbolism, are rare, if they occur at all. Pictures of dance impersonators replace representations of the Holy People themselves. The scarcity of religious content in later Navajo rock art would seem to signal a significant change in ritual practices and how rock art functioned within Navajo culture. While later Navajo rock art may feature Yeibichai dancers (*ye'i* impersonators) and much more commonly social dance scenes at Enemyway gatherings—known as the Girls' (Squaw) Dance (Haile 1938:11)—depictions of the Holy People themselves are absent from these renderings (Schaafsma 1992:Figs. 44, 45). Alternatively, secular drawings, incised or sketched in charcoal, picturing horses and other livestock, Navajo cowboys, trains, shoot-outs and so forth (Kolber 2001; Schaafsma 1992:46–47; Yoder 2001) became popular.

In the following discussion we address the possible ways in which the permanent protohistoric rock art images from Navajo cosmology may have functioned on canyon walls and overhangs, as opposed to the fleeting images of the historically known sandpaintings. In so doing, we explore certain Navajo values in regard to image making and ways in which ceremonial practices and some attitudes may have changed over time. An examination of the purposes served by the transitory depictions of the Holy People in drypaintings is critical in order to understand the possible roles played by these same images, or sets thereof, in their landscape settings.

The ceremonial Navajo rock art in the upper San Juan drainage was produced in an inspirational milieu and florescence of creativity during the formative



Top, Figure 1. Paintings in red and white of the Hero Twins in Largo Canyon. The hourglass motif incised through the red paint on the body of Born-for-Water is his symbol. Lightning is incised on the side of Monster Slayer's face. Photograph courtesy Polly Schaafsma.

Bottom, Figure 2. Four *ye'i* and a corn plant symmetrically arranged in a linear pattern similar to the layout of a sandpainting. Their attire typically consists of tasseled kilts and sashes. Note the baseline and the central maize plant with disproportionately large ears of corn, Largo Canyon. Photograph courtesy Polly Schaafsma.

years of Navajo cultural development (ca. 1670–1760). By this time, Navajo religion as we know it today was synthesized, incorporating important selected elements of Pueblo cosmology, myth, and symbolism (Schaafsma 1963:57–60, 1980:Figure 199). The related rock art displays a complex iconography in which images and symbols of the Holy People are not only commonly present but also often predominate. Although cautionary advice on interpretation is well taken (Blackhorse 2001:74), and some figures are unidentifiable, others are easily tied to supernaturals still evoked in Navajo ceremony. Distinguishing attributes include headdresses, body form and design, and hand-held paraphernalia. The War Twins (also known as the Slayer or Hero Twins), and/or their symbolism, occur frequently (Figure 1). In some localities along cliff faces or under overhangs, linear sequences of *ye'i* or other Holy People suggest groups pictured in historic/contemporary sandpaintings (Figure 2). In numerous instances, complexes of these deities are even assignable to chantways still ongoing. This is

especially true of the Nightway, Mountainway, the Shooting Chant, and possibly others (Wyman 1983a:Figures 6 and 7; Schaafsma 1963:60–63). Unrecognizable or seemingly nonspecific imagery may relate to chantways long since abandoned by Navajo medicine practitioners. Oral traditions state that masks depicted in rock art that are no longer recognized by the Diné are those that were taken away from the people as punishment because of conflicts and lack of respect. This state of affairs provoked a keeper of the knowledge to take the masks and destroy them. They were never to be used again.

Among the many identifiable figures, the Night Chant *ye'i* appear more prominently in the Dinétah rock art than any others (Figure 3). Although the masks of these *ye'i* may be used in other Navajo Chantways, they are *borrowed* (emphasis Faris 1990:158) from Nightway *jish* (ceremonial bundles) (see also Copeland and Rogers 1996:225). As James Faris (1990:235) points out in his extensive work on the Night Chant: "In Navajo terms, the Nightway is a healing practice undertaken for stricken people. It is a healing practice by which human beings attempt to re-harmonize and re-order and re-balance their relationships with one another and with a Navajo universe." He goes on to explain that the Nightway was given to the Navajo by the Holy People after the Diné appeared in the present world, "after the earth was rid of monsters . . . and after the Holy People became invisible." Faris (1990:236) further notes the unchanging nature of this ritual over the last hundred years or so when it has been known from ethnographic studies. It is worthwhile pointing out that this ceremonial stability appears to extend into the more distant past as well, as the same persons, with the exception of Talking God, who is rare or absent in rock art, are pictured in the Dinétah. Talking God, however, is not pictured in these groups because he is still here and never left. Thus his image as a reminder of the Holy People's presence is not necessary. Similarly, because Changing Woman and White Shell Woman are also still with us—they do not have to be sought—they also are not represented in the rock art.

Both rock art content and ethnographic evidence can be marshalled to indicate that one of the important functions of rock art for the early Navajo as recent immigrants was to establish themselves in place and render it meaningful. Their landscape was infused with significance by identifying sacred places, including those important in origin mythology. Within a wide geographic region, the significance of major topographic features was borrowed from the resident Pueblos, who had already established their sacred landscape "texts" centuries earlier (see Ortiz 1969:171n15; Parsons 1939:221; Reichard 1963:20; Thompson 1879:321). In the Dinétah itself, however, long abandoned by the Anasazi (early Ancestral Pueblo people) by A.D. 950, the landscape was

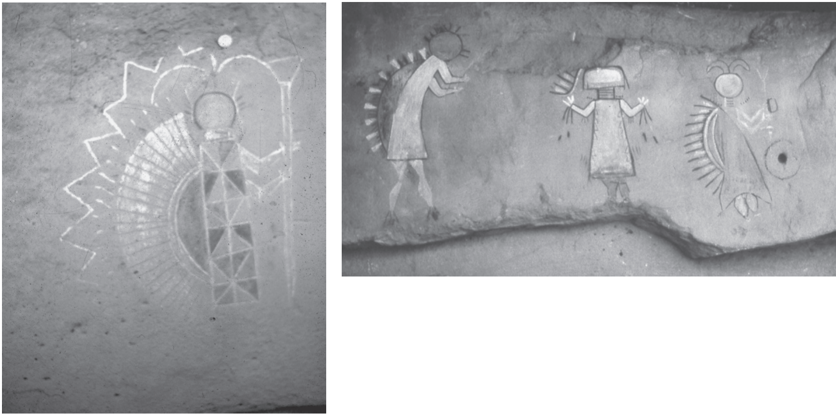


Figure 3. Two photographs of sections of a Night Chant rock painting from Delgadito Canyon, Carrizo Canyon drainage. The rock face has been abraded and smoothed, and drilled holes may have held paraphernalia. The large humpback mountain sheep *ye'i* (left) leads the group. He was painted in white, red, orange, azurite blue, and turquoise. To the right he is followed by supernaturals that include other humpback *ye'i* and the female god of the Night Chant distinguished by her manta dress and square mask. Missing in these photos is Fringemouth God who was located in between. Unfortunately, the entire group fell from the cliff in 1965 and was subsequently destroyed. (For the complete panel in place see Schaafsma 1980:Figure 258).

open to rewriting and redefinition. Making rock art at chosen localities was one means of doing so.

It is apparent that the issue of "power" was present early on, as many locations selected by the Navajo for making rock art were places already "marked" by Ancestral Pueblo figures, the presence of which had connotations of power. Some Navajo rock art sites have the appearance of shrines that were revisited, refurbished, and thus revitalized on numerous occasions. Signs of repeated "use" of these sites include worn rock surfaces, evidence of "handling" such as soiled spots, rubbing, smoothing of the sandstone in preparation for making a painting, or erasing an older figure to receive another, and the repainting of figures (Copeland and Rogers 1996:228). In some instances, holes were drilled in the vertical cliff face for the probable insertion of prayer sticks or feathers in or near the rock art. In this regard, the paintings at the junction of Todosio Canyon with the Pine (also known as the Los Pinos) River (Schaafsma 1963:64–65), the numerous petroglyphs at the mouth of Crow Canyon at its junction with the Largo drainage (Schaafsma 1980:Figures 253, 254, 261), the Delgadito site in the Carrizo drainage with its Nightway iconography (Figure 3), and others in the upper Largo (Copeland and Rogers 1996) are noteworthy sacred places that were revisited from time to time.

The Junction Site, or "the Place of the Meeting Waters," mentioned earlier was also of this nature. Described in detail elsewhere (Schaafsma 1963; 1980:310–312), the locality is an excellent example of a synthesis of landscape, the Navajo Creation story, and rock art. This "place of the meeting waters," has been noted on various occasions in the archaeological literature as well as documented in Navajo myths themselves. The rock art at this site was dominated by two large shields, reputedly representing the sun and moon, on whose faces the War Twins are sketchily pictured (Schaafsma 1980:Figure 256). The Twins are said to have retired to this location once they had destroyed the monsters. These monsters were entities that resulted from disharmony—a malevolent state of affairs caused by the inability of First Man and First Woman to get along. Once the monsters were demolished, the world was then safe for the Diné, and "the celebrated twins went to a place called Tho-hyel-li, the junction of the two rivers in the valley of the San Juan, where their images may yet be seen reflected in the waters. They still dwell in a mountain cavern near this place" (Matthews 1883:224). The images are purported to have been made by the Hero Twins themselves (Van Valkenburgh and Kluckhohn 1974:150), an ascription consistent with observations cited earlier. Other images in the Junction vicinity relating to the Twins were eradicated in a major flood in 1912 (Van Valkenburg 1941:155–156). Historically Navajos returned there to pray after their return from Bosque Redondo (Roessel 1983:510–519) in the 1860s when the people were in a state of semi-starvation, when they again faced hard times during the stock reduction program in 1929, and in various times of drought (Van Valkenburg and Kluckhohn 1974:146). In the early 1950s just before the dam was built, Navajo men slated for duty in Korea sought protection from the power of this sacred place.

While it is possible that some rock art sites may have served as mnemonic devices for some Navajo singers, it seems dubious that this was the primary reason for creating images of the Holy People in the landscape. Pertinent to this discussion is a Nightway account by Hosteen Klah in which the Dreamer, or Hero (the Navajo visionary who makes a supernatural trip to acquire religious knowledge for his people) is asked by Fringemouth god to draw the *ye'i* gods on a rock wall (Faris 1990:131). There is, however, no implication that these *ye'i* were made for mnemonic purposes by the visionary. More likely any rock art whose origins were (are) so ascribed, were viewed as validating the spiritual journey, and therefore perceived as having sacred origins and links to the supernatural realm. Once engraved or painted on stone, however, this imagery could have at least secondarily functioned to preserve ceremonial knowledge. Traditional practitioners today regard the ceremonial rock art as a validation of the traditions but not as needed to trigger their memories.[2]

The use of other kinds of imagery, however, as mnemonic devices by Navajo singers is known ethnographically. Frisbie (1987:54, 56, 60, 439n6) describes sketchbooks containing memory aids in *jish*, otherwise known as "medicine bundles" (see Frisbie 1987:12–17 for a full definition of *jish*). One Shootingway bundle from Waterflow, New Mexico contained pictures largely done in watercolor and felt-tip pen of the Twin War Gods, one of the Twins on the Sun, and Female Snakes Crossed on the Wind, and other supernaturals (Frisbie 1987:56). Such notebooks described as "common" in *jish* (Frisbie 1987:439n6) were the property of accomplished singers. Elsewhere, however, Frisbie (1987:86–87) notes that traditionally, mnemonic props were not used by apprentices learning the chantways.

Navajo sacred places are described in some detail by Frisbie (1987:186). These places include various landscape features such as mountains, caves, creeks, river junctions, springs, bluffs, and rock crevices, as well as rock art sites. Activities traditionally conducted in designated sacred areas include gathering of materials for ceremonial use, praying, and leaving offerings. Frisbie notes that such places are sacred because of mythological associations with particular deities and that only ceremonial practitioners can visit these spots. This information fits well with what is known about the Junction site previously described and was probably true of other Dinétah rock art sites.

The remaining question is not whether these rock art locations were regarded as "sacred," but what the underlying perceptions might have been that facilitated the use of these sites in religious or ceremonial contexts. How did these images function? To examine this issue more deeply, the values ascribed to depictions of supernatural beings or Holy Persons in the ritual contexts of sandpaintings must be considered in order to understand the dynamic forces at work pertaining to similar imagery in landscape settings.

The Power of the Image

Pictures of the Holy People in the ceremonial dry paintings are said to be invisible powers made visible. As explained previously, the Holy People represent the human inner forms of natural phenomena, the "lying-in-ones." These powers may be dangerous, and Navajo sandpainting rituals are designed to control these Holy People for positive and specific ends (Wyman 1983b:552). Navajo ceremonies are held for restoring harmony, balance, and health. The focus of these ceremonials, that may last as long as nine days in some cases, is the sandpainting with its elaborate images of the Holy People and other spiritual beings that are coerced into attendance as described below. While these rituals are being conducted within the hogan, the landscape is engaged in the process of compelling the

Holy People to attend, by the planting of prayersticks in designated surrounding locations (Reichard 1963:xxxv).

The purpose of drypaintings is to attract holiness, to restore, and to reorder (Faris 1990:120). Drypaintings act both as magnetic fields and diffusers of supernatural power (Kenneth Foster 1964, p. 3 in Wyman 1983a:33). While they are perceived as indifferent to human affairs, the Holy People are irresistibly attracted or even compelled to the ceremony being performed through prayers, offerings, song, and "by their own likenesses drawn in the colored pigments of the drypaintings" (Wyman 1983a:16). They come to look for their portraits, and once arrived they become their likenesses. These dry paintings are likened to holy altars and are called *'iikááh*, meaning the entry of several entities or beings (Wyman 1983a:33). The powers thus invoked by the images are then actively engaged during the healing processes of the ritual, when the dry pigments from different parts of the images are applied to various parts of the patient who, in turn, sits on the painting itself. In this way the patient absorbs the powers pictured and becomes strong and immune to danger (Wyman 1983a:33). As the patient is identified with these supernaturals (Reichard 1963:112), the sands, in turn, absorb the "evils" that have caused the illness being treated. Therefore, ritual disposal of the dry sandy pigments, that have absorbed the malevolent powers that caused the illness, is necessary at the end of the ceremony.

This information regarding Navajo cosmological concepts and the perception of the power of imagery may provide some insight into understanding how similar imagery and rock art sites themselves may have functioned in landscape contexts. If the drypaintings representing the Holy People command their presence, then logically their portraits painted and carved on sandstone cliffs and in rock shelters would have had a similar effect. The locations in the landscape where their images are found, therefore, would seem to be where the supernaturals pictured are perceived to reside in spirit form and where communication with the Holy People is facilitated. A little-known rock art image of the Humpback *ye'i* in southern Colorado is located in a canyon in the upper San Juan drainage that is still remembered as being a favorite home of the *ye'i* (Jeancon and Roberts 1923; Matthews 1897:238). Historically the previously described Junction site is another case in point, further validating this interpretation.

As well, cliff faces and rock shelters where the Holy People are pictured give the impression of being removed from places of habitation, in which case they may have been places visited only by ceremonial practitioners who could control the powers pictured. Future surveys of these Navajo sites could verify this perceived distribution. Visitation to sacred sites was said to have been limited to religious practitioners, mentioned earlier.

In spite of the formal similarities between the sandpaintings and the rock art in terms of iconography and the presumed ability of both to attract the supernaturals they represent, a basic difference has yet to be pointed out. The sandpaintings are ephemeral and in their ritual functions, during which they are destroyed through application, *process*, not *product*, is paramount. The sands of the paintings, having absorbed the illness, are ceremonially disposed of (Wyman 1983:32–34). In turn, the powers of the supernaturals they represented are absorbed by the patient. During the ritual, the short-lived image becomes more *valuable*—a term denoting spiritual importance. As the aesthetic and emotional impact of the "fleeting image" empowers the ceremony within which it is created, the temporality, on the one hand, becomes an important aspect of the power of art itself. The rock art images, on the other hand, remain permanent in the landscape, thus implying a significantly different functional role.

Images, Context, and Taboos

When the Navajo moved out of the Dinétah in the mid-eighteenth century, for the most part—the Junction site being a notable exception—they abandoned the memory of this region with its many images as they resettled to the west and southwest. Van Valkenburgh (1941: see especially pp. 86–87, 111, 123) in his review of Navajo places notes that there were no oral traditions in regard to Largo and Carrizo Canyon and other locations in the Dinétah region where Navajo ceremonial rock art is prevalent. In moving, the Navajo often "took their sacred locations with them" in that they redefined the cultural landscape to conform with new surroundings and reascribed the places of importance and mythic times to new topographic features and places (Jett 1982; and see Luckert 1977:24–26 for the significance of confluence of the San Juan and Colorado for Navajo Mountain Navajo). Meanwhile, the practice of painting and carving the Holy People on stone nearly stopped by the end of the eighteenth century. The new landscape, even when important topographic features are identified with mythic events and times, usually lacks the pictured presence of the Holy People. Holy People in Canyon de Chelly and Del Muerto rock art are depicted only rarely. In canyons east of Chinle Wash near the New Mexico–Arizona line, social gatherings revolving around the Girls' Dance of the Enemy Way, are carved at many sites, all probably dating after ca. 1760 (Gilpin 1996:195), but renderings of the Holy People are scarce. A single figure, also post-dating 1760, is hidden under a tall rock slab near the San Juan River in Utah. The belief in the presence of the Holy People in the landscape, however, has not waned (see interviews with western Navajos in Luckert 1977). The Holy People pervade the landscape via their travels as described in myths, but their rarity in rock art after the late eighteenth century is notable.

It is significant that the rock art in the Dinétah region with its emphasis on the Holy People, the Navajo creation story, and other cosmological themes was made when the Navajo were establishing themselves in the Southwest. At this point in their history they were creating a cultural identity, and constructing a newly synthesized cosmology that they tied into the landscape of which they were recently in possession. This phase lasted less than 100 years. By the late 1800s, from which the first ethnographic records derive, although they continued to command the assistance of the gods that had been with them at the time of their creation, these gods were pictured ceremonially only in the context of sandpaintings.

Beginning in the late nineteenth century and continuing into the twentieth, the ethnographic documents cite taboos regarding the picturing of the Holy People outside of ceremonial contexts (Reichard 1977:6). As we have seen, notebooks in *jish* bundles contained sketchbooks with the Holy People pictured for mnemonic purposes. These, however, were (are) still carefully under the control of the owner of the *jish* and not publically available. The discussion of taboos frequently has to do with picturing *ye'i* on rugs or as *ye'ibichai* dance impersonators in sculpture, both for sale to a white market.[3] Picturing "a reflection of the divine form of the Holy People"—images that actually compel their presence—outside of a ceremonial context, and therefore beyond ritual control, is clearly deemed inappropriate and even dangerous (Reichard 1977:6–7). A "Yeibichai curse" resulting in paralysis and blindness and even death is specifically cited as a result of breeching this taboo (Valette and Valette 2000:54, 56; Valette and Valette 1997:68n3).

Prohibitions against invoking the Holy People outside of the controlled ceremonial environment are deeply rooted in Navajo traditions, even within the myths themselves.[4] When the Holy People taught the Hero in the ways of a particular myth and the images to be invoked, it is said that Navajo were to represent them in sand so that they would not be lost (that is, abandoned or forgotten), or "wear out or be stolen, soiled, or damaged" (Wyman 1983a:43). In the course of instructing the Hero, the Holy People are said to have made these paintings on sheets of sky, on sheets of cloud, or on black fog, or cotton blankets, which were subsequently rolled up and taken away or thrown away to the north in the manner of sandpaintings today (Wyman 1983a:43). In one case: "The yéi who unfolded it [the painting] to show the prophet said: 'We will not give you this picture; men are not as good as we; they might quarrel over the picture and tear it, and that would bring misfortune; the black cloud would not come again, the rain would not fall, the corn would not grow, but you may paint it on the ground with colors of the earth'" (Matthews 1902:165).

Provocative in this regard is a rock painting on the Pine River (LA3041), executed prior to ca. 1720, that consists of a panel of Mountain Chant Holy People

pictured against a background of blue clouds (Schaafsma 1963:Plate IV). This is very reminiscent of Matthew's reference to a Mountainway story (1887:404): "They drew from one corner of the cave a great sheet of cloud, which they unrolled, and on it were painted the forms of the yays [*sic*] of the cultivated plants." At a minimum, the rock painting indicates that a similar concept—painting the *ye'i* on a "sheet of clouds"—was present at an early date. The rock painting, however, was "lost" and subsequently damaged (Schaafsma 1963:46), thus justifying the admonishments against permanent imagery reiterated above by Wyman (1983a:43).

Prohibitions against permanent imagery, so poetically expressed in Navajo mythology, were apparently developed after the rock art featuring Holy People in the Dinétah was created. Following the evidence provided by archaeology, these prohibitions came into place, seemingly gradually, sometime after 1760 when the Dinétah was vacated. The question has not been answered, however, of why the Holy People gradually ceased to be pictured—and thus conjured—in rock art. It appears that changes occurred in ceremonial and social practices and related values that dictated a ban on ceremonial landscape imagery. There is little ethnographic documentation in this regard, except for the evidence already cited. Any hypothesis to explain this change has to be grounded in inferences based on tangential ethnographic information, and a certain amount of speculation is inevitable.

It is likely that prohibitions against painting and carving these figures in the landscape were responses to several issues. Among possible factors for change in this regard were increased social tensions as Navajo culture interacted more closely with dominant Western society during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One well-documented response to these tensions was witchcraft (Kluckhohn 1944:95). Given the forces that these images are perceived to embody, left unprotected in their landscape settings, they may have been increasingly viewed as dangerous and a source of power that could be used toward malevolent ends. That "power" in and of itself is conceived as neutral, but once tapped it can be manipulated for any purpose. Therefore, to avoid these powers being controlled for harmful ends, prohibitions against picturing the Holy People outside of well-controlled ceremonial contexts may have evolved over time in an environment of increasing uncertainty, social conflict, and distrust, as traditional values were threatened.

Once an extant image has been targeted by an evildoer for its power, a counter-response has been to destroy the figure in question, thus voiding it of its potency and rendering it useless. Fear in times of stress, such as periods of epidemics, has promoted the purposeful destruction of rock art on the San Juan River and elsewhere on the Navajo Reservation.[5] In summary, one possible explanation

for the later scarcity of pictures of Holy People in landscape contexts may have resulted from a taboo against their representation, thereby both avoiding a power source for evildoers, as well as protecting the supernaturals from maltreatment, hereby recalling the admonitions described previously, given by the Holy People themselves to the Dreamer.

Xeroxed on Stone: The Persistence of the Rock Art Images of the Dinétah

The power of rock art takes many forms, and imagery is never mute. Once made, rock art becomes a dynamic force in the landscape, evoking new meanings as time goes on and assuming new roles in the historical\cultural process. For the archaeologist, these images document the first evidence of Navajo religious history with a continuity with today's traditional beliefs, forged in synthesis with Pueblo worldview in the early historic period. The rock paintings and petroglyphs of the Hero Twins and Holy People of the Night, Mountain, and Shooting chants and possibly others are the earliest documents of these stories and ritual practices. For the traditional Navajo, although concepts of space change through time, these images tell of times of origin and validate the spiritual knowledge given by the Holy People.

As noted in these pages, stories are modified to retain pertinence to the moment. Notions of "history" in the Western sense are of lesser value to the Navajo people than the immediacy of a religious account that maintains health and harmony here and now. Although traditionalists have maintained their awareness of this geographic region, the Dinétah was largely forgotten by most Navajos. The general absence of knowledge about this primal landscape is grounded in historical events that took place around 1864. When reservations lines were drawn, for a time Navajos were forbidden to travel outside of these boundaries. The Dinétah was no longer accessible, and thus it became less pertinent in Navajo affairs. For traditional Navajos, the historic "lock out" converted Dinétah to a mystical place somewhere nearby "just on the other side of the fence."

Today the Navajo people are once again gaining the knowledge of and access to Dinétah. They are starting to feel comfortable visiting the sites. They are in the process of getting acquainted with the places that oral traditions tell of the time when the Holy People were among them. For the Navajo—wherever they now live—pictures of the Holy People on stone, wherever they occur, contain a spiritual message confirming an earlier time when the Navajo world was being created. Left by the Holy People themselves, the images infuse the landscape with their ongoing presence, as they bespeak of a time when these supernaturals

moved among the Navajo and taught them how to live in harmony on the earth. The presence of the *ye'i* images watching over the land today distinguishes the Dinétah region from all others in the history of the Diné.

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Notes

1. In reference to the contemporary loss of memory of places identified as important in the Navajo religious past, it is worth noting that in 1995 at the Navajo Studies Conference in Farmington, Alfred Yazzie, a noted Nightway singer from the Window Rock–Fort Defiance area stated that he had never learned about the mesas east of Bloomfield when he studied to be a Nightway singer in spite of the fact that the Nightway is perhaps the most important chantway pictured in this rock art.

2. Hosteen Klah described to Franc Newcomb (1964:93–95) the discovery of a cave with *ye'i* paintings on the west side of the Chuska Mountains. This finding evoked the suggestion from Klah's uncle that the paintings might have been made to preserve ceremonial knowledge before the forced evacuation to Bosque Redondo. This is probably a cave known today as the home of Fringemouth, Zah-dohl-Jiah. The cave, unlike those in the Dinétah was well hidden, and medicine bundles had been left on the floor. If the interpretation offered is correct, the Chuska paintings would postdate the Dinétah rock art by over 100 years, and the motivation would have been specific to a particular historical crisis.

3. Because these products were attractive to whites, they brought money, and therefore, traders in the early twentieth century, emphasizing their rarity to white customers, encouraged the Navajo to produce *ye'i* rugs and wood carvings of *ye'ibichai* dancers for sale, in spite of cultural prohibitions against them (Valette and Valette 1997; Valette and Valette 2000). A fury against the making of *ye'i* blankets is described by Amsden (1990:105–106) who also mentions that a transgression will result in blindness. *Ye'i* rugs are described as "bad taste," and a sacrilege and out of context of ceremony. He notes that there is nothing ceremonial implied in the weavings or their use. An even more conservative view has been expressed by Harry Walters of Tsaile who explains that the human body is a "reflection of the divine form of the Holy People" and therefore a ceremonial context is the only one appropriate to rendering the human form at all (Valette and Valette 2000:54).

In the face of strong pecuniary pressures, individual weavers and other artists have been persuaded to render these images for sale. It should be noted, however, that often ceremonial protection is sought for these transgressions.

4. Note that these oral traditions cannot be dated. Whether they developed as a creative response to a gradual development of restrictions in regard to rendering the image of the gods in permanent media or whether they preceded it is simply not known.

5. A multitude of Basketmaker anthropomorphs (ca. 200 B.C.–A.D. 400) were defaced and even obliterated with chisels by Navajos during a flu epidemic in the late 1950s. The Navajos responsible believed that the illness was caused by a person who got power from these images and used it for pernicious purposes.

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