

# "THE YELLOW WOMEN" PREHISTORIC KACHINA MASK PAINTINGS OF THE KERES

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The Kachina cult has been a cultural marker for the migrations of the Pueblo people. The word "Katsina" is thought to be of Keres origin, (Malotki, 1978:203 and 1992:50-51) and the cult itself developed by the Keres and acquired by the Hopi and Tanoan pueblos. This paper hopes to show evidence that the oldest Katsina masks/cult originated in the San Juan Basin area with the Keres during Pueblo II, III period around 800A.D. These Anasazi people eventually abandoned the San Juan Basin and resettled to the south along the Rio Grande, and Rio Puerco river. They are the Keres pueblos of Cochiti, Santa Domingo, Santa Ana, San Felipe, Sia, Acoma and Laguna. With their migrations from the north, they brought not only the Katsina cult, but the myths of these deities that they still revere today. The following is a comparison between the Katsina masks of the historic pueblos and those depicted in a series of prehistoric paintings found in Canyonlands of the San Juan Basin. The Katsina cult was gradually assimilated by the Hopi at a later time, sometime after the 1400's.

In order to understand the context behind these paintings, one must examine the culture and myths associated with the Katsina dances and rituals. These mask paintings are obviously female and the following myths involving females makes it clear of their Keresan authorship. There are no comparable myths and female deities in the Hopi traditions. The Zuni myths and mask paintings represent Corn Maidens, with multicolored faces and corn ear stands. Those found in Canyonlands will be examined in another paper.

## Keres Mythology

The Keres origin myth has been recorded by several ethnographers during the past century. It is fundamental to the religious beliefs of the Keresan pueblos located along the Rio Grande River. This myth was recorded by Father Noel Dumarest in 1894, versions of it are retold at Zia Pueblo (Stevenson 1894), San Felipe and Acoma (White 1932; Stirling 1942) and Laguna (Gunn 1917; Boas and Parsons 1928).

At Acoma, in the beginning Spider Woman<sup>1</sup> sang the two sisters into being, and then taught them the rituals to use to sing everything else into being. They were in the interior of the earth, and they emerge from an opening in the north and eventually migrated southward.

Stirling writes: "Spirit, *Tsichtinako* (Spider Woman) gave them (the sisters) two baskets of seeds and little images of different animals that were to be in the world, with instructions to plant seeds of trees to climb up to the light. *Tsichtinako* told them to face East. "Your right side will be South. Your left side will be North. Your backs to the West. Your Father lives in *Yunami*, Four skies above.

The girl on the right, *Iatiku* was named "bringer to life." It took a long time to find a

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<sup>1</sup> Boas (1928) the spirit creator = *Ts'its'tc'i.'na.k'o*, "Thought Woman"; Gunn (1917) *Sichtchenako*, "Creator of All"; Stevenson (1894) Sia, *Sus'sis tinnako* "Creator of all" a Spider; White, Santa Ana, *Tsi'ty ostinako*

name for the other, but they noticed her basket had more things so they named her *Nautsiti*, "more of everything in the basket". (This is the only translation of these names thus far reported.) These two women are sisters." (Stirling, 1942:3)

At Cochiti this myth is told and the sisters called *Uretsete* and *Naotsete*. There is a series of petroglyphs dating around 1400 A.D. that depicts these sisters and Spider Woman. They are located at the La Cienega site east of Cochiti Pueblo. See figure ( 1 ) In the myth, the sisters challenge each other to contests to win the right to populate the land to the south. Uretsete, mother of Indian people eventually wins, and Naotsete, mother of all alien people is killed. Uretsete decides to retire to her home below the ground. But before she leaves, she creates a corn fetish, with the help and advice of Spider Woman, to represent her in a physical form. The corn fetish is made with a head, a heart, a body, feathers, and a perfect ear of corn as described here by White and Stevenson. See Figure ( 2 )

Stevenson (1894: 40) describes the corn fetish: " The Iariko or ya'ya (mother) is an ear of corn which may be any color but must be symmetrically perfect, and not a grain must be missing. Eagle and parrot plumes are placed in pyramidal form around the corn. In order that the center feathers may be sufficiently long they are each attached to a very delicate splint. The base of this pyramid is formed of splints woven together with native cotton cord and ornamented at the top with shells and precious beads. A pad of native cotton is attached to the lower end of the corn. When the Iariko is complete there is no evidence of the corn... The Iariko is Sia's supreme idol."

Leslie White (1962:307-309), in a later documentation of Sia Pueblo, writes, "Iariko (or Iatiku) is 'the Mother of all the Indians' in Keresan mythology (Utstsiti, in our Sia myth is equated with Iariko). This fetish consists of a decorated ear of corn... The ear of corn used must be perfect, with straight rows and fully kernalled to the tip. Feathers of the wren, especially, but also magpie, roadrunner, turkey, duck or mocking bird are glued to the ear with honey of the bumblebee. The pith of the cob is removed from the butt end about half way to the tip. Into this cavity the 'heart' is inserted. This may be either a small round black stone called Dyatca'aicti or a bit of quartz crystal (witcatsi)... Then a number of narrow strips of bamboo are cut in lengths of the corn ear. Each is wrapped with cotton string, and at the top end a fluffy eagle feather, taken from beneath the tail, is tied. These slats are then placed longitudinally alongside the ear of corn. They are securely held with a wooden hoop at the top and bottom of the ear. Then parrot tail feathers are inserted in the top of the fetish, inside the circle of eagle feathers. The fetish has a 'face' on one side of the tip end. At the back of the 'head' two long parrot feathers are inserted. A necklace of turquoise, obsidian, and beads is placed around Iariko's 'neck'. Iarikos are placed upright upon the altars during ceremonies, always facing the door." (figure 3)

The petroglyph emphasizes the fetish's head, neck, body, and appendages as a partly human, partly corn-and-feather object. At Cochiti this fetish is called an *Iariko*, or *YaYa*, mother. At Acoma is called a *Honani*, "Corn Mother".

Tyler (1964:117-118) gives a description of these deities and their names as they differ from pueblo to pueblo. The first being the Indian Mother, and the second being the Alien Mother.

Cochiti, (Dumarest) - Uretsete and Naotsete

Zia, (Stevenson) - Ut'set and Now'utset

Santa Ana, (White) - Uttsitye and Nausity

Acoma, (White) - Iatiku, and Nau'tsitic

**The Yellow Women**

*"Before Ut'set left this world she selected six Sia women, sending one to the north, one to the west, one to the south, one to the east, one to the zenith, and one to the nadir, to make their homes at these points for all time to come, that they might be near the cloud rulers of the cardinal points and intercede for the people of Ha'arts; and Ut'set enjoined her people to remember to ask these women, in times of need, to appeal to the cloud people for them." (Stevenson. *The Sia BAE 11- 1889-90* pg. 41)*

She sends Yellow Woman to the North, Blue Woman to the East, Red Woman to the South and White Woman to the East, Pale Yellow Woman to the Zenith and Black Woman to the nadir. She tells the people that in a time of need, they should ask for help from these women to intercede with the Cloud People and ask them to bring rain.

At Zia Pueblo they sing this song:

Hen'-na-ti White floating clouds.	he'-ash clouds like the plains	O'-shats Sun	Ta'-wac Moon	Mo'-kaitc Cougar	ko'hi Bear	Tu-o'-pi Badger
Ka'kan Wolf	Ti-a'-mi Eagle	Mai-tu-bu Shrew	Ma'-a-se-we Elder Twin	Uyuuyewe Younger Twin	Sa'-mai-hai-a Warrior of the North	
Shi-no-hai-a warrior of west	Yu'-ma-hai-a warrior of the south	Ah'wa-hai-a warrior of the east	Pe'ah-hai-a warrior of the zenith	Sa'ra-hai-a warrior of the nadir		
Wai-ti-chan-ne medicine water bowl	ai-wan-na-tuon-ni cloud bowl	Shi'wan-na-wa-tu-un ceremonial water vase		hi-an-ye I make a a road of meal		
Hi'-ah-ar-ra the ancient road	hi'-a-mo-ni the ancient road	Hi-shi-ko-ya-sas-pa white shell bead woman who lives where the sun descends		sho'-pok-ti-a-ma whirlwind		
Sus'sis-tin-na-ko Creative Thinking Woman Spider Woman	ya'-ya' Mother	ko'-chi-na-ko Yellow Woman of North	Mer'-ri-na-ko Blue Woman of West	Kur'-kan-ni-na-ko Red Woman of the South		
Ka'-shi-na-ko White Woman of East	Quis-ser-ri-na-ko Slightly Yellow Woman Zenith	Mu-nai-nako Dark Woman of Nadir				

**A Rain Song of the Quer'ranna Chaian.**

*free translation:* "White floating clouds. Clouds like the plains come and water the earth. Sun embrace the earth that she may be fruitful. Moon, lion of the north, bear or the west, badger of the south, wolf of the east, eagle of the heavens, shrew of the earth, elder war hero, younger war hero, warriors of the six mountains of the world, intercede with the cloud people for us, that they may water the earth. Medicine bowl, cloud bowl, and water vase give us your hearts, that the earth may be watered. I make the ancient road of meal, that my song may pass straight over it - the ancient road. White shell bead woman who lives where the sun goes down, mother whirlwind, Creative thinking woman, Sus'sistinnako; Ya'ya, mother; Yellow Woman of the north; Blue Woman of the west; Red Woman of the south; White Woman of the east; slightly yellow woman of the zenith, and Dark woman of the

nadir, I ask your intercession with the Cloud people."

At Zia, the katsina masks that depict the Yellow Women are shown here. The face is yellow, the hair and eyes are black and the beard is black. There are feathers in the beard. (Figure 4, Stevenson, Sia, BAE 11, plateXXXI)

At San Felipe, the *Ko'tcininako* mask is described by White "is yellow in the face with black hair and black eyes and a black line across the bottom of the face. There is no mouth, a red amole beard with turkey feathers hanging down, soft white downy eagle feathers and roadrunner feathers on top of her head. The beard represents rain coming down from under the cloud. The yellow in the face represents corn pollen, and brings rain, perhaps in accordance with the familiar Pueblo Indian principle of like producing like - corn pollen through rain, and so in turn causing rain." (WHITE: The Pueblo of San Felipe - Leslie White Memoirs, AM Anthro Assoc. No. 38) (Figure 5)

At Laguna the Female Katsina dancer, Kuchinninaku (Figure 6) (Parsons, Notes on Laguna) At Acoma (figure 7, White, Notes on Acoma).

Stirling has illustrated the Keres Fire Society altar showing the pantheon of deities that include Iatiku, Corn Mother, the Yellow Women, and the Twins. (Figure 8) (Stirling, 1942)

A description of the colors and names of the deities follows:

#### Fire Society altar (Stirling 120)

The frame (green), *ichini*, is the house of everything on the altar;

On the right end, *Masewi* (face yellow; hair black; three feathers white; body brown and black; diagonal twisted rope white); On left end, *Oyoyew* (face blue, otherwise coloring same as *Masewi*); The arc (buff) is the Milky Way;

Over it the middle figure is *Iatiku* (yellow face, 3-lobed tan headdress, feathers white); On each side *Kuishanako*, Blue women (blue faces; forehead white with curved black stripe; headdresses, green triangle in stepped black design topped with white feather);

The next two are *Kuganinako*, Red women (red faces; headdress, orange triangle surmounted by green ball; black petals on either side suggest fleur-de-lis; feathers, white);

The two end ones (tall) are *Kochininako*, Yellow women (faces tan, body and headdress green, feather white). (These women are the mothers of the first-born girls, clan mothers, the first to be born after *Iatiku*.) The feathers (white, black-tipped) from the horizontal bar represent rain; under the Clouds (white, rims red fringed with black, feathers white) the lines and the suspended feathers (white, black-tipped) also represent rain;

At each end, lightning (red); the five corn fetishes at the bottom are *honani* (*Iatiku*) in front, the medicine bowl (white with tan design' inside white with yellow border); On each side, left paws of bears (black) and stone points (gray, brown) used for killing; in front, stone fetishes (black, gray, brown) of Bear, Lion, Wolf, etc.

Songs for the rain to the Rain Women have been recorded at Cochiti. This song refers to the ancient myth of Sun Youth and the Yellow Women.

#### Cochiti - SONG PRAYER:

*Life, take it, Sun-Youth, Grow, that I may, and all clothes, and beads is what I ask food, fruits, children that they may grow is what I ask, I, Yellow-Woman myself, sage clan, one only life is what I ask. (literal)*

Free translation: Sun Youth take it (cornmeal) that I and my children may flourish and have clothes, beads, food, fruits, that I, Yellow Woman, *tseiatsa* of the Sage clan, may have life, that is what I ask.

The mask of Sun Youth from Acoma is reproduced in Figure 9. *Oshyach Paiyatiuma*, Sun Youth has parrot feathers, three squash blossoms, a median line that represents the trail over which Sun

goes. The blue represents the sky and the striped quarters are for the rainbow around the Sun. He wears eagle-feather earrings, and there are buckskin thongs to fasten a spruce-twig collar. (Stirling:1942:118)

Sun Youth is associated with the Yellow Women in the Corn grinding songs and the Rain making ceremonies to grow the corn. The prayers for sun and clouds to bring nourishment to the earth include the Yellow Women to bring the rain for the corn so as to sustain the life of the people.

### **5 Faces site and 4 Faces site in Canyon Lands, Utah**

The archaeological record of Canyonlands shows a multicultural occupation from the Archaic Hunter through the Pueblo III period. Within the Needles District of Canyon Lands, are some unique sites that Noxon and Marcus (1985) refer as the **Faces Motif**. They include it as the Canyonlands Anasazi Style associated with the late Pueblo II-III occupation (approximately A.D. 1000-1050 to 1300). (See Chart on Time Periods) There are over a dozen of these sites, but a few in particular that are of special interest in this study. The first group under discussion are two sites with similar characteristics. Five Faces site and Four Faces site. These characteristics distinguish them both culturally and symbolically from other sites in the Canyonlands area.

#### **Description of visual elements**

##### **5 Faces in Davis Canyon (figure 10)**

The faces seen here in the alcove seem very placid as they look outward. They are obviously female figures, distinguished by their hair buns and ornamental necklaces and lockets at their throats. The hair buns resemble an archaic hair style of wrapping the hair around a thin piece of wood and tying it with colored cord or string. The hair buns lie upon the shoulder. The bangs are straight across the forehead. There is no nose or mouth, only triangle or rectangle eyes. A dark line encircles the chin area. From there a cascade of dots in rows or semi circles fall from the chin area. All that is painted are the outlines of the faces, the ornaments, hair ties, chin and throat elements and body decor. The face area has been abraded or smoothed before the image was put on. The face area is not painted.

There are four female figures, two on either side of a male figure in the center. He is distinguished by his diagonal quiver strap for his quiver of arrows and the absence of hair buns. He wears only ear plugs.

##### **Four Faces Site in Salt Creek (figure 11)**

A second site in Canyonlands National Park is the 4 Faces site that shares these characteristics. These figures have round faces, the square hair bundles, abbreviated chin ornamentations with a necklace and "locket" at their throat. They have very short torsos of striped lines and two have patterned belts, one with lightening descending from it. All have flat topped heads with an arch but the 4th has zigzag lines. Light blue paint has been used to silhouette hand prints around several of the figures. Four Faces is similar in that the face area has been smoothed before it was outlined. There is a characteristic dark line under the chin, and dots. Rain and lightening symbols are shown. (Noxon and Marcus 1985) Sun Youth is not portrayed.

The dominating features of both of these sites are the decorated beards that hang from the chin area marked by a dark line, and the use of rain, lightening and cloud symbols. These themes are specific to the Keresan Yellow Women, who are called upon to bring rain to grow the corn. They communicate

to the *Shiwanna*, the cloud people, and sometimes are represented in the dances as assistants to the *Shiwanna*. The katsina masks that were recorded by early ethnographers show a striking resemblance to these faces. In order to understand the use and the meaning of the katsina masks, a brief account of the accompanying mythology is given here.

#### **Abstract of the Keresan "Yellow Women" Myth:**

Keresan mythology includes many stories of Yellow Woman and her sisters, Blue Woman, Red Woman and White Woman, collectively called "Yellow Women." One such story relates how these maidens were adverse to marrying and refuse each suitor. This angers Sun Youth who vows to punish the maidens with the help of his mother. He comes down to the earth with a butterfly inside his flute and releases it to fly into the maiden's house. They desire to capture it to copy the beautiful wing designs for their baskets. They chase it around the house, taking of articles of clothing to use to catch it. They chase after it outside, running out over the hills, throwing everything else they had on after it, until eventually they get tired and thirsty. They meet Sun Youth, disguised as an old man and ask him where they can find some water. He directs them to a spring where he has put a sleeping potent in the water. They drink and fall asleep under a tree. Sun Youth summons all the young men around to witness what he has done and explains that he is going to punish the Yellow Women for refusing to marry. When they awake, Sun Youth takes them to his home where his mother makes them grind corn in a room full of stinging ants and wasps. Spider Woman gives them medicine to rub on their bodies to protect them. They grind all of the corn, with the help of Spider Woman. When Sun Youth returns the next evening, he is impressed and agrees to return them to their homes, with the condition that they will marry and have children. He takes them home on the rainbow. The Yellow Women become the first Clan Mothers. They are known as the female katsinas or the Mythical Women.

#### **Conclusion**

The characteristics found in the paintings of 5 Faces and 4 Faces are specific to the Keres Katsinas and ceremonies that call upon the "Yellow Women", or *Ko'tcininako* to bring rain to grow the corn. They communicate to the *Shiwanna*, the cloud people, and sometimes are represented in the dances as assistants to the *Shiwanna*, (Cloud people). These paintings depict "rain" symbols and are distinctly different from the "Kastina Mana" Corn maidens of the Hopi. or the Corn Maidens of the Zuni. Nor is there a mythology that describes these women in any other tribal tradition.

The ancient myth of the Yellow Women and Sun Youth illustrates the balance with the nourishment of the sun and the rain brought by the Yellow Women. Without both of their participation and cooperation, the crops would fail and the people would suffer. The myth reestablishes this balance and the people pray to both the sun and the Yellow Women to continue to bring prosperity to the people.

The masks portrayed in the canyons of Utah represent a response perhaps to the drought that caused eventual abandonment in the 1200's. The simple masks with symbolic rain clouds, rain beards, and triangle slit eyes were still used in historic times. The eyes, nose and mouth features of the Mexican masks and of the Jornada style are very different. This author believes the influence on the Katsina cult from the south to the Rio Grande Pueblos came around 1400-1600s. But the Katsina Cult originated with the Keres in the San Juan Basin much earlier.

Figure 1, The Origin Myth depicted at La Cienega, featuring Uretsete, (the small one) and Naotsete, (the larger one), both daughters of Spider Woman.

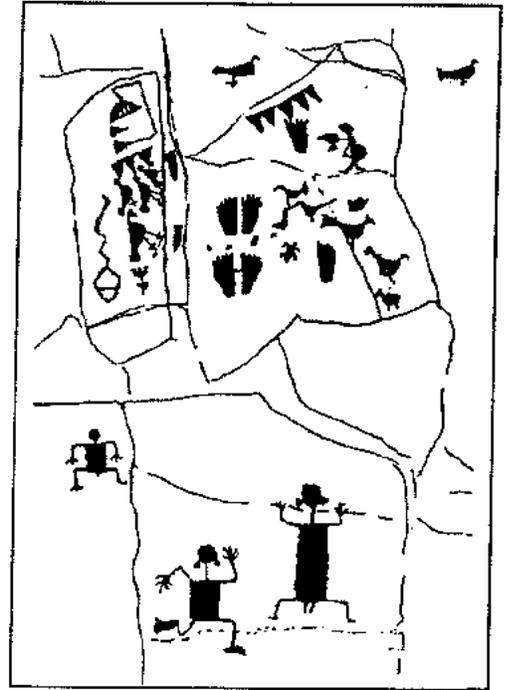
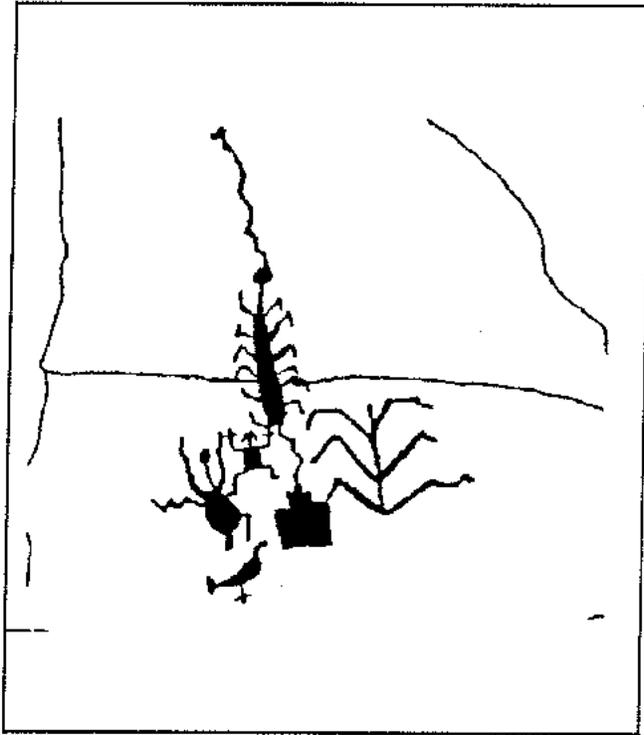


Figure 2, The Iariko panel also found at La Cienega, featuring Uretsete creating the corn fetish out of a perfect ear of corn, (corn plant) and attaching feathers. Spider woman is by her side giving her instructions. The terrace symbol below them both is the home underground that Uretsete returns to. The line coming down from the top to the "head" of the Iariko, and down to the terrace symbol represents the line of communication between the people and Uretsete in her home below, through the "Corn Mother" fetish.

Figure 3, is the actual Iariko from Zia Pueblo, reproduced by Stevens in 1889.

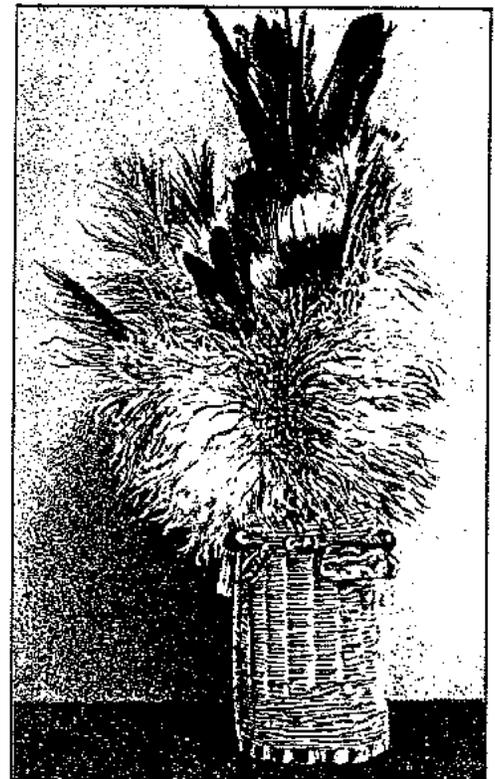
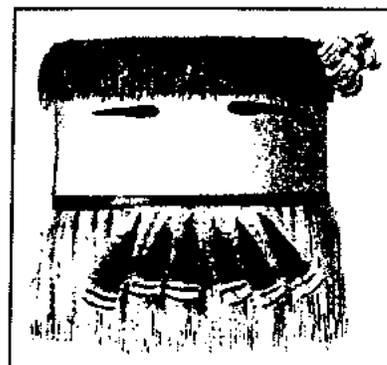
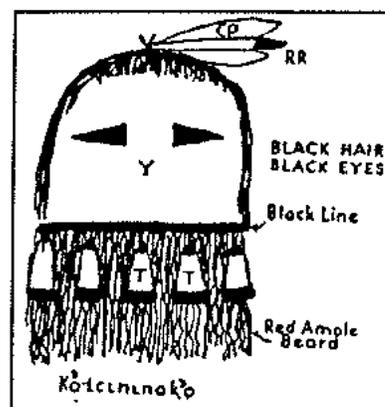


Figure 4, is a Ko'tcininako (Yellow Woman) mask from Zia recorded by Stevens in 1890.



4, Ko'tcininako Mask, Zia

Figure 5, is a Ko'tcininako (Yellow Woman) mask from San Felipe drawn by White in 1932.



5, Ko'tcininako, San Felipe

Figure 6, is a Ko'tcininako mask from Zia, drawn by White in 1962.



7, K'o tcininak'o, Acoma

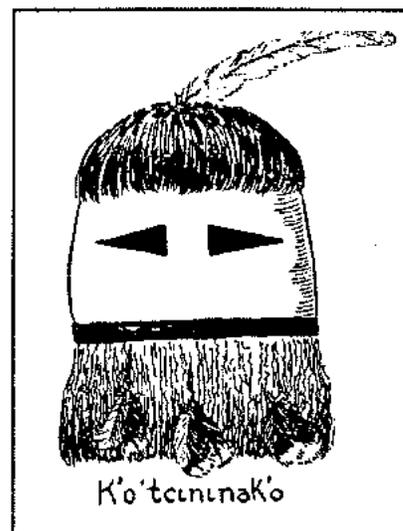
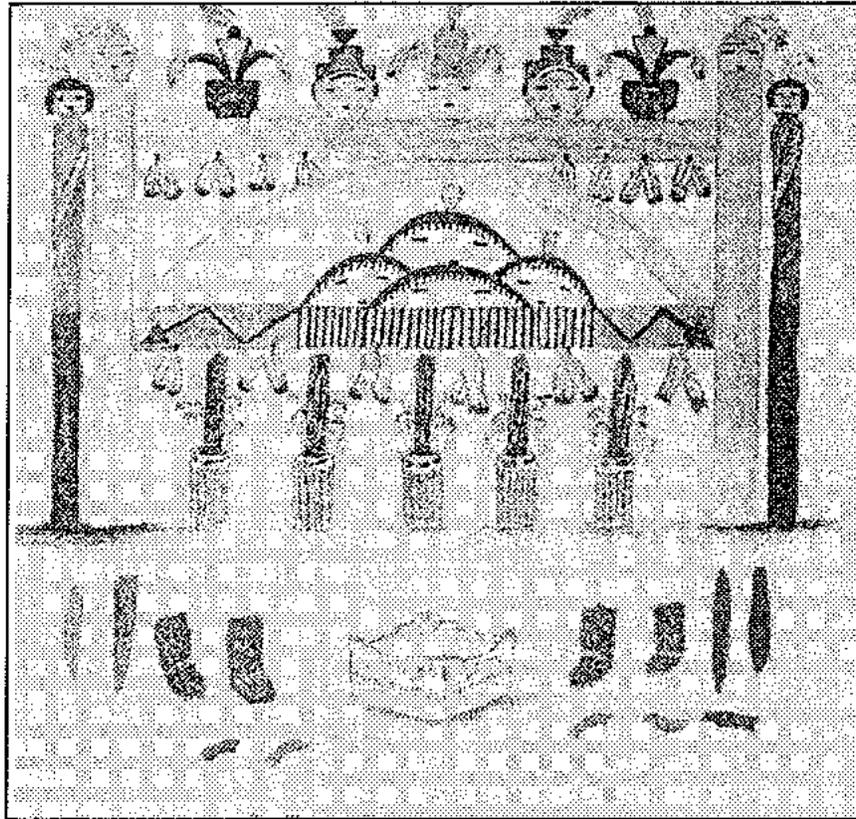


Figure 7 is a K'otcininak'o mask from Acoma drawn by White in 1929.



**Figure 8**, is the Fire Altar of Acoma, drawn by Stirling in 1942. The frame (green), ichini, is the house of everything on the altar; on right end, Maswei (face yellow; hair black; three feathers, white: body brown and black; diagonal twisted rope white); on left end, Oyoyew (face blue, otherwise coloring same as Masewi): the arc is the Milky Way; over it the middle figure is latiku with yellow face: on each side are Blue women; the next two are Red women; the two end ones are the Yellow women. The feathers from the horizontal bar represent rain; under the Clouds the lines and the suspended feathers also represent rain; at each end, lightning, and five corn fetishes are at the bottom, (Honani) In front is a medicine bowl, and each side left paws of bears, stone points used for killing and in front, stone fetishes of Bear, Lion, Wolf, etc.

**Figure 9**, is the mask of Oshach Paiyatiuma, Sun Youth drawn by Stirling in 1942. It has parrot feathers; three squash blossoms; median line is the trail over which the Sun goes; blue for sky; striped quarters of the rainbow around the Sun; eagle-feather earrings; buckskin thongs are to fasten a spruce-twig collar.

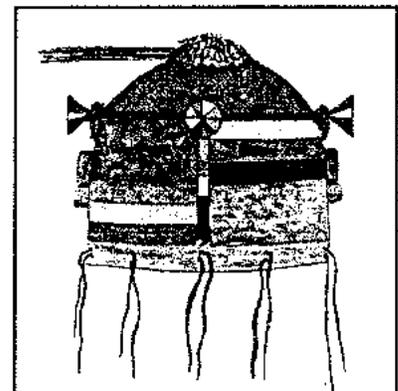


figure 9, Sun Youth, Acoma

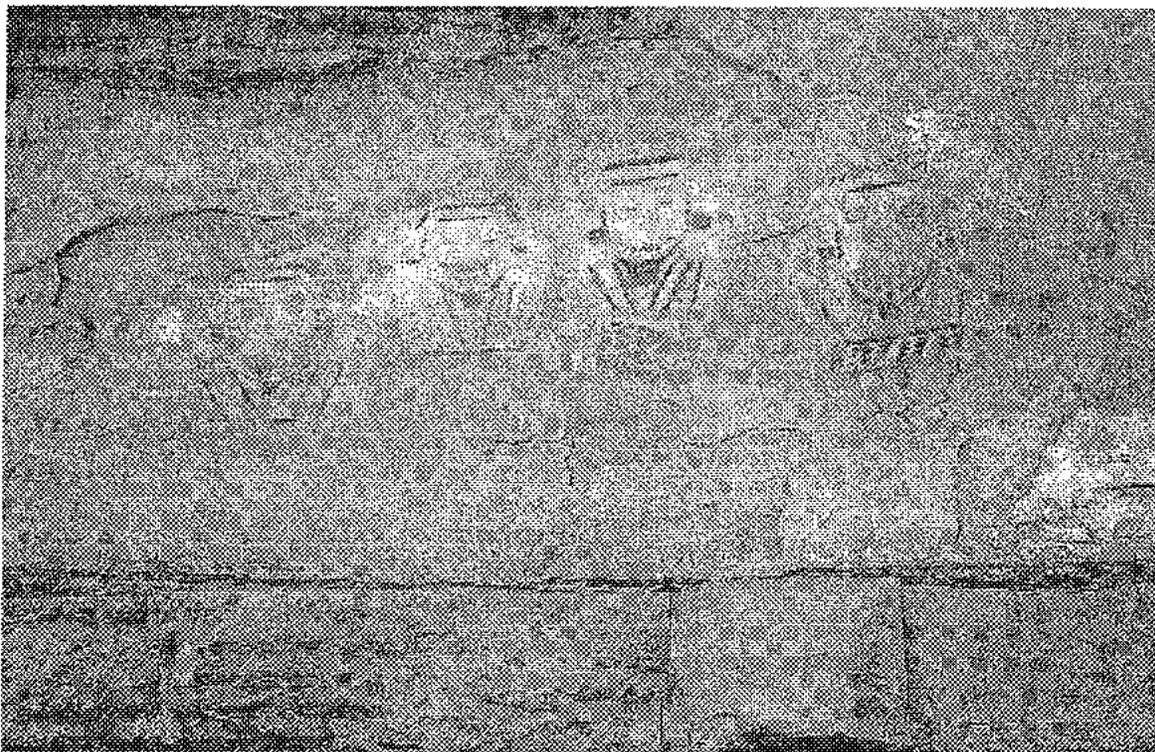


Figure 10, **Four Faces** from Salt Creek in Canyonlands National Park. It is Pueblo II-III and dates around 800 -1100 A.D. The rain symbols of lightning and clouds are shown on the far right figure. All have rain beards.

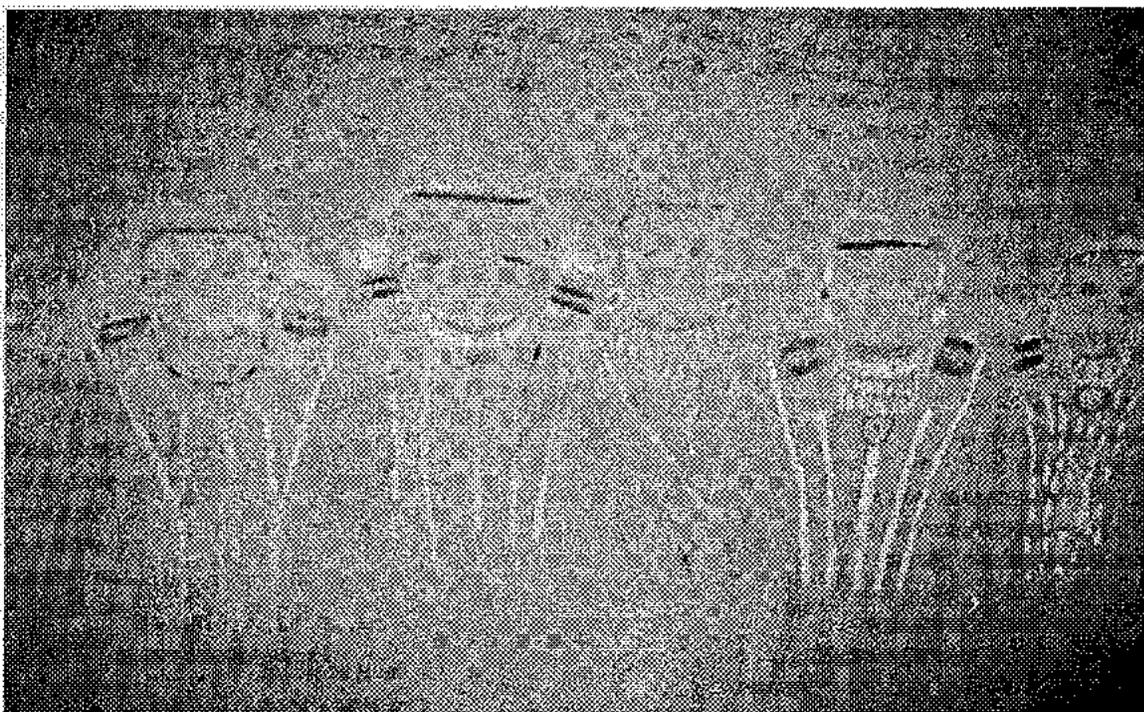


Figure 11, **Five Faces**, Davis Canyon, Canyonlands National Park It is Pueblo II-III and dates from 800-1100 A.D. Pictured here are more detailed Mythical Women, with a male figure in the center that represents Sun Youth.

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