

By Hook or By Crook. More on the Shaman's Sacred Crook in Native American Rock Art

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INTRODUCTION

In Canyon de Chelly, near Sleeping Duck Ruin, is a petroglyph panel containing two large crooks (Figure 1). On the left side, next to one of the crooks, there appears to be a sprouted seed. At the right side, next to the other large crook, are two human-like figures, the upper one is upside down. In the center, moving right to left, is a rubbery-legged individual holding what appears to be a snake in one hand and a crook in the other. There are then two figures, both appearing to be blowing flutes, with the larger being hump backed and phallic. Finally, next to the large crook on the left, and facing in the direction the flutes are being played, is a snake petroglyph. Campbell Grant (1978) has the following caption under a drawing of this panel: "Great Pueblo petroglyphs near Sleeping Duck Ruin, site CDC-34. Note sprouted seed at left and crooked digging sticks. The snake and rubbery legs show strong Chaco-Mesa Verde influence" (Grant: 1978:203).

If the sprouted seed and crook were the only features, the "crooked digging sticks" could certainly be unquestioned, but the upside down figure, next to the larger crook on the right, suggests illness or death. In that context, the regenerative power of the Shaman's Crook might be involved. My Navajo guide, Daniel Staley, suggested that it might be better to refer to the crooks as

"Ceremonial Staffs" rather than crooked digging sticks. Ethnographic data on the role of the Shaman's Crook in fertility has been discussed (Gough 1996). The Shaman's crook gave "to all the world a plentiful supply of plants bearing edible seeds" (Laird: 1976:153). They also provided regenerative, resurrecting and curative powers—for with a touch of the sacred crook, they "raised up their slain companions and restored them to life" (Laird 1984:370). The crooks in CDC-34 seem to have both generative and regenerative power, with the figure appearing to hold a crook in one hand and a snake in the other. The flute players pointing toward the snake, also possibly have a curative, life-giving dimension.

Kasner (1992) refers to "snakes to guard the people" and that for the Navajo artist-healer "the healing powers were in the forming of the symbols." She also wrote of how "Shamans placed pebbles in hollow wands where they rattled convincingly like aroused rattlesnakes—adding to the healers powers." She commented as well on the "reputed strength and power" of snake symbols (Kasner: 1992:113,124, and 128). Payne (1993) tells of Flute Society healing ceremonies, which involved curved sticks:

Before the altar appeared various persons who were suffering from those diseases within the purview of the Flute Society. Sufferers from lightning

shock (stroke?), stabbing chest pains (angina pectoris?), epilepsy, or injuries incurred by guns, arrows or other weapons, appeared for treatment. Supplicants for long life came to the altar and paid homage to the curved sticks with the dangling prayer feather known as the 'old men' (longevity crooks) (Payne 1993).

According to Payne, the ceremony culminated about the altar with "the music of singing and flute playing". Payne also provides a panel of pictures showing a "Kokopelli" with a crook in one hand and a rattle in the other, with a flute player and Flute priest on either side (Payne 1993:24-25, 49). These references from Kasner and Payne, which are illustrative of many types of ethnographic data available, are meant to at least offer sufficient insights into the generative and curative possibilities of the symbols in Canyon de Chelly. They support a more complex meaning than a simple "crooked digging sticks" interpretation might involve.

UTILITARIAN USES AND SACRED CROOKS

Nevertheless, the reference to "crooked digging sticks" by Grant does raise a question on utilitarian crooks versus the Shaman's sacred crook in rock art interpretation. Laird makes a case for the poro or sacred crook being the Shaman's "one indispensable piece of equipment," which revived the dead, was associated with fertility, and was an object of great power (Laird 1976:31). She further wrote that "In mythic times, the one essential piece of equipment for a shaman was the poro, the sacred crook or wand by means of which he restored the dead to life," and that even in the recent past the shaman was known as

one who "carried the poro" (Laird 1984:273).

On the other hand, Laird (1976) refers to the utilitarian uses for a crook:

Since Father Garces noted, on encountering a party of Chemehuevis in 1776, that 'They all carried a crook besides their weapons' (Coues, p. 225). It is obvious that a crooked stick for pulling lizards, gophers, etc. from their hiding places was an ordinary piece of equipment. Is it not possible that this implement, like the shepherd's crook in other times and in another part of the world, became in certain hands, the rod of power? (Laird 1976:244).

Carobeth in a further note observes:

George Laird always translated poro as "crooked stick", but I do not know if poro was the word used here in the Chemehuevi text. When we are told that Coyote used his poro to hook the North Wind down from the sky, a practical usage is implied. I do not know whether the tool used for hooking lizards or small rodents out of their hiding places, killing rabbits caught in bushes, or even beating seeds from plants was also the most sacred symbol of shamanistic power; but there would have been nothing contradictory in this dual usage (Laird 1976: 259).

McLane (1996) comments on different uses: "Canes, hooked sticks and crookneck staffs are some of the terms used to describe these curved features. Hooked sticks are of two lengths. The cane-size ones were used for pulling lizards and animals from burrows, and taller shoulder length ones were objects

of great power" (McLane 1996:1). Later in his paper, he develops this differentiation more fully:

In the southwest Great Basin region there appears to be two predominant sizes of cane-shaped sticks used mainly for two different purposes. Those that are hip-high, around 120 cm and less, were used for taking lizards and rodents from burrows. Those that are longer, reaching head high, from about 140 cm to 180 cm in length, were either power implements, signifying ones high status, fertility symbols or signs of a long journey (McLane 1996:5).

Alvin McLane surveyed early references to hooked sticks by Francisco Garces, John C. Fremont, and others, relating not only to their use in pulling creatures from burrows, but also in agriculture, i.e., making holes for planting seeds. Moreover, he lists a number of archaeological sites where crookneck staffs have been found.

To differentiate between utilitarian crooks and ceremonial crooks based on length alone may not be always dependable, especially in diverse regions. In the San Bernardino County Museum in California, for example, crooks are exhibited which would fit the shoulder or head-height variety. These were used to reach branches with acorns and pine nuts. This would also be true for a crook found in a pinon pine tree on the Nevada test site.

However, with respect to Crooks found in rock art contexts, all have, I believe, shamanistic and ceremonial rather than utilitarian features, including the Canyon de Chelly sites. I have found five crooks in fertility contexts, four in curative/regenerative context, five seemed to

relate to a journey, six were in high/sacred places, three were associated with what appeared to be supernatural beings, and four were in ceremonial settings, with what appeared to be dancing or ritual events. In addition, in every case but one, the crook was grasped mid-staff, which in my mind suggests a ceremonial rather than utilitarian positioning.

WOMEN, SHAMANISM AND SACRED CROOKS

Gorden (1997) displayed a photograph of a petroglyph depicting a humpbacked woman holding a crook (Figure 3). Usually the humpbacked figure in southwest rock art is male, with a prominent phallus. However, the above-mentioned figure, which is in Ferron Box, Utah, has the pronounced breasts of a woman. If, indeed, a shaman is one who carried the poro or sacred crook, this petroglyph might depict a woman shaman.

While some archaeologists have insisted shamans were male, the existence of a petroglyph suggesting the possibility of a female shaman tends to complement ethnographic references to women as shamans. Laird (1976) notes several references to women as shamans:

When a hunting party had failed to secure deer, a member who owned the deer song would be asked to sing. The singing would be a way of assuring success in the hunt for the next day. A very long time ago, a woman who was a deer shaman would sing in this way for and with the hunters (Laird 1976:16).

Women shamans were not uncommon (Laird 1976:34).

Tuukwatsi, Stretched, Herbert Chapo's wife, was suspected of being a shaman because of her power to will disaster or illness by use of the mangasuyaganuh (may that one...) formula (Laird 1976:37).

Women's voices were heard at the Gatherings, and fierce and implacable women incited their men to take the warpath. The Chief, so it was said, was always a man. But in the older, darker and more awesome world of the shamans there were at least as many women as men (Laird 1976:213).

Laird (1984) also has a comment on the mythological stories:

In the texts, no woman is called puh aganti, shaman; but George frequently referred to shaman's as those who "carried the poro". Coyote's daughter carried wolf's poro; Dove Boy's mother claimed to have killed a jackrabbit with her poro; and the mother of the two stars threatened the snake with hers (Laird 1984:314).

The relationship of crooks to known fertility symbols (the vulva and the enclosed and encircled crosses—emblems of fructification) by the Grass Valley panel in the Eastern Mojave, California has been illustrated (Gough 1996). A boulder in Bridge Canyon near Spirit Mountain in Nevada has three pairs of crooks on the same surface as vulva and enclosed cross symbols (Figure 4). Both ethnographic data and numerous instances of vulva and enclosed/encircled cross symbols in direct relationship have been reported (Gough 1994). Just as the humpbacked figure was thought to carry symbols of fertility, seeds and babies, in the hump, which would seem to apply to the

humpbacked woman petroglyph as well; so also the relation of crooks to known emblems of fructification would add further insight, since the humpbacked woman also carried a crook.

TWIN CROOKS AND SHAMANISM

Patterson pictures twin crooks near Kachina Bridge in the Natural Bridges National Monument in Utah (Patterson 1992:190). High above the Kachina Bridge, as part of the Rock Ruin petroglyph panel, there are also twin crooks (Gough 1996:7). Both sites have shamanistic implications, not only because crooks have such associations, but also because of the powerful physical settings. In addition, twins were thought "to have special shamanistic powers" (Keyser 1992:77). Keyser also notes "a significant number of painted and carved twin figures that denote the supernatural aspects of twins" (Keyser 1992:78). In some traditions, if twins were born, one of them must be devoted to be a shaman.

Twin crooks also have implications for fertility and are found along with symbols of fructification. The twin crooks at the Grass Valley site (Gough 1996:5) are in proximity with vulva, and the encircled and enclosed cross symbols. Also, a boulder in Bridge Canyon, previously referred to, not only has the three pairs of crooks, but in proximity with the twin crooks are fertility symbols (Figure 5).

In Sevenmile Canyon near Moab, Utah, there is a petroglyph panel along a narrow ledge under a majestic overhang, which features a waterfall in rainy weather, and a pool of water was at the bottom when I visited the site. In the panel there were paired or twin figures

holding crooks. Precisely what these twin figures with crooks meant to those who carved them can never be known fully by us today, however, the site certainly lives up to known ethnographic data relating to the supernatural attributes of twins. In Mojave mythology, for example, twin supernaturals represent different dimensions of creation and the duality of life (Johnson 1993:1).

OTHER CROOK INSIGHTS AND USAGES

As just indicated, crooks may be present in places having high or sacred implications. The Sevenmile Canyon site is one example. The panels at Kachina Bridge and the Rock Ruin site towering high above the Kachina Bridge, in the Natural Bridges National Monument, are further illustrations. Another case in point is the crook in the lower left-hand corner of the pictograph panel in the Vallecito Potrero grotto in the Anza-Borrego Desert of Southern California (Figure 7).

Crooks are also found in association with what appear to be supernatural beings. A crook above such a design is found on the sandstone cliff west of Bluff, Utah (Figure 8). Even more provocative are two figures holding crooks in a panel which includes a figure with a unique headdress, located along the Little Colorado River (Figure 9). Such panels suggest great powers invested in the shaman's crook.

McLane (1966) suggests that crooks may be "signs of long travel," and the Cane Man Hill petroglyphs (Figure 10) may be an example:

Based on the archaeological and ethnographic evidence from regions to the south and west, it is surmised that the Cane Man Hill Petroglyph canes represent a long distance of travel associated with a person or persons of high status. Like the Cane Man Hill panel, the staff is generally shown in other petroglyphs carried by its mid-section, which is analogous to the worn sections found in physical specimens in archaeological contexts (McLane 1996:5-6).

The travel hypothesis certainly holds true for the "Processional Panel" of Butler Wash in Southeastern Utah (Manning 1992), and the "Migration" Panel in the Coso Range (Gough 1996:4).

Payne (1993:24) referred to curved sticks with dangling feathers, as "longevity crooks". While visiting the Dickson Mounds Museum in Illinois, I saw two contemporary Indian paintings featuring crook-necked staffs with two feathers dangling from the crook end. One was by Dan Quiver, Sioux, and titled "Sioux Man in Old Costume;" and the other by Calvin Tyndall, Um-Pah, entitled "Horse Tail Dancers."

These references to crooks and feathers made me take a second look at a petroglyph panel located two miles downstream from Grand Falls on the Little Colorado River, northeast of Flagstaff. It was described to me as an "animal headed staff or crook with flute player to the left." Could the two ears on the crook (Figure 11) really be two feathers on a longevity crook? At least the question shows how tentative our assumptions must be.

I proposed a stratigraphy or layering of crook symbolism and usage, with the

oldest examples being Shaman's Crooks of great power, giving way in time to more widespread and secular usages, and finally being completely corrupted in Post-European Contact times, when the Spanish and American officials gave "canes" to Pueblo leaders to promote their own authority over the First Americans (Gough 1996). The presence of crooks in petroglyph panels of the Anasazi, the "ancient ones," certainly suggests antiquity. Grant, Baird, and Pringle (1968:17,18,24) place petroglyphs of atlatls in the Early Period (Before 200 BC) and Transitional Period (200 BC to 300 AD). Since crook petroglyphs in Renegade Canyon are found in relation to atlatl panels, we might assume an early origin. Given the difficulty in dating petroglyphs, of course, assigning an early date to crook symbols will have to be a tentative conclusion until more accurate dating is possible.

CONCLUSION

One of the finest bronze sculptures dramatizing the crook is "The Rainmaker," by Fritz White (Gough 1996). Fewkes (1914) illustrates such a crook: "A crooked stick is said to be used to draw down the clouds when the rain they contain is much desired" (Fewkes 1924:29). Perhaps the most interesting demonstration of the growing "mystique" and awareness of the Shaman's Crook is what I regard to be a fake crook "geoglyph" a half mile from the Field exit on Interstate 15, northwest of Afton Canyon in the Mojave Desert (East of Barstow, California). A crook about 25 feet long has been created, with the center raked clear and a ridge left around both edges in Intaglio style. Then rocks were placed along the ridge

on both sides to outline the crook, in Rock Alignment style. The mixed styles, and the lack of patination on the rocks, along with the convenient proximity with a desert dirt road, suggests the work of a trickster, who has learned enough about the power of the Shaman's Crook to add a modern "graffiti" to the study of this fascinating symbol of shamanic office.

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FIGURES

Figure 1, top left. Drawing of CDC-34 Panel. Figure 2 top right, Photo of CDC-34 panel Figure 3, center left. Woman with Crook, Ferron Box, Utah. Figure 4, center right. Crooks with Vulva Glyphs, Bridge Canyon, Nevada. Figure 5, lower left. Twin Crook Symbols, Bridge Canyon, Nevada. Figure 6 lower right. Paired Figures with Crooks, Sevenmile Canyon, Utah.

Figure 7, top left. Vallecito Potrero Site, Southern California. Figure 8, top right. Sandstone Cliffs site near Bluff, Utah. Figure 9, center left. Little Colorado River near Holbrook, Arizona. Figure 10, center right. Cane Man Petroglyphs near Tonopah, Nevada. Figure 11, bottom left. Petroglyphs below Grand Falls, Arizona. Figure 12, bottom right. Crooks in Renegade Canyon, Coso Range.