

Katsinas Come to Kohta Circus

Eileen Green and Elaine Holmes

We will be known forever by the tracks we leave—Dakota proverb (Zona 1994).

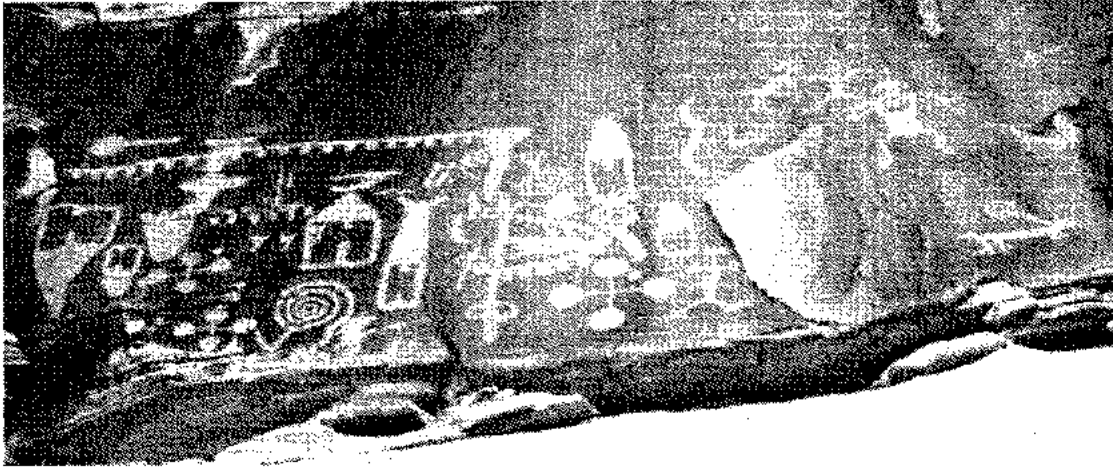
Dawn's rays brighten the cliff face and then move downward to warm panels of etched shapes on patinated sandstone: strange shapes, shapes foreign yet familiar, some of which are unique in southern Nevada. These panels (Figure 1), discovered in June of 1998, are undoubtedly the most important assemblage of petroglyphs found in the southern part of the state since the panels were found nearby in Valley of Fire, now a state park.

Located in a natural, large depression reminiscent of an amphitheater, seven of the eight panels face due east. The Virgin peaks dominate the northern landscape of the Moapa Valley, adjoining the Muddy Mountains and Virgin piedmont archaeological area.

Named Kohta Circus by discoverer Bob Ashbaugh for the profusion of zoomorphs, the largest of the eight panels here is 22.5 m (75 ft.) long, and reflects mainly Puebloan influence. These panels, in particular the highest panel (approximately 10 m above ground level), are the subject of this paper.



Figure 1. Overview of Kohta circus. Arrows indicate long and high panels.



The pristine quality of this high panel is what first attracts the eye (Figure 2, above). It's as if fine craftsmen selected the perfect surface and then carefully displayed their talents. Although there is light repatination, the elements have been kind; these glyphs appear as if they were chiseled yesterday. The puzzle of this high panel, indeed several of the panels, is that many of these glyphs are absolutely unique to this area.

The red sandstone, the high, signaling panels, the natural enclosed plaza with twisting, turning entrances, fill us with a sense of awe and drama. Ritual, ceremony, dances—something has been going on here.

When regarding the esoteric katsina ceremonies, one usually envisions the Pueblos of New Mexico or the Hopi of Arizona's mesas. What is the relationship of a rock art site in southern Nevada to such faraway places? There are parallels, the first being the archeological connection and the second the rock art links to the Four Corners area.

Archeological and Rock Art Connections

Prehistorically, as now, the southern Nevada area served as a locus for a melange of people. Located along a major trail (Brykit 1995:12; Hughes and Bennyhoff 1983:239) connecting the seacoast with the Arizona Strip, the Pueblo Grande de Nevada in Nevada's Moapa Valley offered more than respite to weary travelers. Inhabited from circa 300 BC to AD 1150, the Lost City was located at the confluence of the Virgin, Muddy, and Colorado Rivers and provided a natural trail stop. It was a large complex, and the westernmost Puebloan settlement with architecture (Amsden 1949:115; Harrington 1937:10; Shutler 1961; Soule 1975:8).

Archeological evidence (Harrington 1937:14, 15) shows extensive mining of large deposits of almost pure salt in hillside caverns. According to Harrington, turquoise and paints were also mined. Also available in the area were quantities of agave (as attested to by many large roasting pits), mesquite, yucca, piñon, gypsum, chert, quartzite, and feathers, all of which could have been easily added to traders' packs. According to Green (1987:180), "Implications for a route connecting this area to other Puebloan regions can be drawn from three types of data: 1) the rock art exhibits strong affiliations with image types distributed across the area between Lost City and the Four Corners; 2) pottery from the eastern Virgin Kayenta is present in the site area; 3) historic wagon



Figure 3. One of the recumbent flute players at Kohta circus.



Figure 4. The birds of Kohta circus.

roads followed what was probably an aboriginal trail from the lower Moapa Valley to mines and ranches in the Arizona Strip via Mud Wash." In addition, marine shell has been recovered from many small sites, showing contact with coastal resources (Harrington 1937:16, 17).

The extensive rock art in sites occurring in the adjacent Valley of Fire State Park and on the Virgin piedmont is predominantly Puebloan in character. Petroglyphs and a few faded pictographs depict many of the images illustrated to define Puebloan affiliations with the Four Corners area. For instance, the recumbent flute players (Figure 3) on both the long and the high panel at Kohta Circus can be traced to northeastern Arizona by Turner (1971:Figure 94) and McCreery and Malotki (1994:172, 173). Wellmann (1979:89) states that recumbent, stick figure, non-phallic flute players are consistent with the those found in Tsegi Canyon, Arizona, which he credits Schaafsma as classifying in the Tsegi Phase—the last fifty years of PIII (AD 1100–1300). A number of small, well-executed figures, particularly birds (Figure 4), are also well illustrated in McCreery and Malotki (1994:77–80). A ladder (Figure 5) on one of the high panels is replicated in Turner (1971:Figure 93). Similar ladders also appear at Palatki Ruin, Arizona, and Sand Island, Utah. The petroglyphs of what are apparently crooks (Figure 6), found in three places at Kohta Circus,

Figure 5. Ladder at Kohta Circus.



Figure 6. Crooks at Kohta Circus.



may be representations of paraphernalia on ceremonial altars, as depicted by Fewkes (1986:274, 283). However, it is with the unique symbols on these panels that we mainly concern ourselves.

The Katsina Connection

The orientation of seven of the eight panels at Kohta Circus is due east. North is easily identified by a natural split in a fallen boulder and, on the long rock art panel, there is a V-wedge of small, bird-like figures seemingly migrating directly north. This was our first indicator of seasonal affiliation. According to Renaud (1948:18), the flute player which occurs on both long and high panels also heralds the spring rites of fertility. Repeated at least 14 times on several panels is the figure we labeled with the inelegant sobriquet of conehead (Figure 7, below). This figure, we theorize, is a representation of a katsina mask.



Green (1987:189) states that spiritual intentions may be implied by rock art because rock art can be a tool for expressing ideology. Schaafsma (1980:10) concurs that interpreting rock art ethnographically is acceptable because proof of katsinas is through the ethnographic record. Adams (1991:17) declares, "If the depiction [of a mask] is not portable, such as rock art or kiva murals, then the argument for presence of the [katsina] cult is considerably strengthened." Cole (1992:23) states, "It is the katsina masks that most obviously and specifically characterize and symbolize katsinas and the katsina cult; the masks and their pictorial representations are definitive examples of katsina iconography. An effective and conclusive method for distinguishing mask-katsina representations is to isolate examples that are identified as such in the ethnographic record and those that are in association with katsina cult ceremonial paraphernalia."

As will be documented in the following pages, the ethnographic record shows that cone-shaped headdresses are such unique ceremonial paraphernalia that the ancients who were acquainted with Puebloan cosmology would have had little trouble identifying the headdresses as part of the ceremonial costume of one of three deities or katsinas:

- one of the Twin War Gods;
- Sotuknang, creator of the fourth world of the Hopis; or
- Aholi, lieutenant of Eototo, chief of all the katsinas.

The Twin War Gods

Vivian (1994:88, 89) identifies the painted figure at Pottery Mound in kiva 8 as one of the Twin War Gods because of the conical cap. Smith (1952:302) also links the Jeddito mural figures and the Twin War Gods "mainly on the basis of the black faces and conical white caps that seem to be (plate 9) characteristic of the latter, at least at Walpi." He also states that a Hopi informant regarded "the cap as characteristic for a War god". Adams (1991:26) states, "... many of the masked figures and anthropomorphs in the Mimbres area also have pointed head-dresses or heads...."

These generally resemble the major, and perhaps early, deities of the Pueblos and some priestly katsinas. Best known and pan-Pueblo are the war gods.”

Sotuknang

The case for Sotuknang is harder to document, perhaps because of his close association with Quetzalcoatl. Or perhaps, because of his antiquity and accoutrements, the characteristics of other, later katsinas are often overlaid on him, even those of the Twin War Gods and Aholi.

Colton and Simpson make it clear that Sotuknang started, at least, as a deity not a katsina. Colton (1959:78) says he is “the god of the sky, the clouds, and the rain, is good, dignified and powerful... When masked the impersonator wears a white case mask with one horn or a high peaked headdress or hat.” Simpson (1953:16, 18) discloses, “There are seven principal deities in Hopi religion: (1) Co-tuk-inumg-wu was the all powerful one who created the earth... Originally, only the gods or ancient beings were represented by kachinas, but now the term is applied more generally to all occupants of the great spirit world...” Waters (1977:20) refers to Sotuknang as the creator of the sequential four worlds of the Hopi and as the destroyer of three of those worlds. Patterson (1992:74) shows two masks and one kiva mural with a conical hat. He says, “Sotuknang-u, a deity, not a kachina; horn on top of head, cloud symbols under eyes also high conical mask painted white.”

Several ancient deities such as the War Gods, earth and sky deities, the horned serpent, and others are recognizable in the fifteenth and sixteenth century kiva murals “...and apparently are the oldest, and are often the simplest in appearance. Perhaps the simple round-headed or cone-headed figures in Mimbres iconography are these priestly katsinas...,” Adams (1991:94) explains.

Most of these *mong*, or chief, katsinas have counterparts in Mesoamerica. One of the offshoots of Quetzalcoatl. “Ehecatl was a kingly fertility spirit who concerned himself with life-giving water, like the Hopi Sky God, Sotuknang-u, who still wears the latter’s high, cone-shaped Huastecan hat...”, according to Di Peso (1974:553). Young (1994:114) states “Polly Schaafsma (1975) documented similar Quetzalcoatl-like figures with conical caps in Jornada style rock art at Hueco Tanks State Park, Texas... These figures are associated with cloud and water symbolism as are the Hopi and Zuni Twin War Gods and the Hopi deity Sotuknangu.” Young (1994:115) further elaborates, “Quetzalcoatl may also be linked to the Hopi deity Sotuknangu, ‘god of the sky, the clouds, and the rain.’” She says he is personated only occasionally and his white mask is topped with one vertical horn.

Aholi

The katsina Aholi (Figure 8, right), principal lieutenant to Eototo, chief of all the katsinas, makes his appearance at Powamu, or the Bean Dance. Waters (1977:180) describes Aholi, who walks a step behind Eototo, as wearing “one of the most unusual of all kachina masks. It consists of a tall conical or funnel-shaped head mask with shoulder cape fastened in front



and hanging down to his knees behind. Both are made of buckskin spotted with variegated colors.” Dockstader (1985:49) suggests a Jeddito figure may be the Ahola kachina, who wears a conical cap and painted skin robe. [Note that Ahola according to Colton (1959:20) is different from Aholi. Ahola is the “germ god kachina.” However, the accompanying description matches the characteristics of Aholi.] Adams (1991:26) also says, “Ewototo’s lieutenant, Ahooli, had a pointed head.” Understanding of the association of Aholi and Eototo to the Powamu spring fertility ceremony is critical.

Powamu

Breunig and Lomatuway’ma (1992:5, 7) state, “In the lunar month of Powamuya (February), a major ceremony emphasizing the concept of germination takes place before fields are cleared and readied for planting. The Powamuy Ceremony, also known as the Bean Dance, is a sixteen-day ceremony that features the forced growth of bean sprouts in the warm atmosphere of the kiva. These sprouts foretell the coming growth of the crops.” According to Waters (1950:301), “The Powamu ceremonial is popularly called the Coming In of the Kachinas. Another common name for it is the Bean Planting Ceremony. Powamu means simply ‘put in order,’ and this is what it is—a ceremonial for exorcising the cold and wind of winter, for cleansing the fields for spring planting, obtaining crop omens from beans, initiating children (every four years), and curing the people of rheumatism. To put all these things in order the kachinas come back from their home...”

Besides the nurture of the ceremonially important bean plants, Vivian (1994:85, 86), describing this ceremony as a welcoming back of the katsinas, further states most of the katsinas appear at Powamu “including Eototo, the chief and his assistant Ahola.”

A livelier, more philosophical description is added by Waters (1977:180, 181), “After finishing his call, Aholi turns completely around once to the left, stomping his right foot and the butt of his staff upon the ground seven times, once for each of the seven successive worlds in the universe.... To complete their rituals, Eototo and Aholi go to the Tipkyavi (Womb), the open plaza in front of the Snake Kiva, and stop in front of *sipápuní*, the small hole representing the place of Emergence from the underworld. Eototo with cornmeal successively marks lines from it to the west, south, east, and north. Both Eototo and Aholi then pour a little water into the *sipápuní* from the water jars on the *mongkos*, thus purifying as well man’s routes of Emergence between all his successive stages of evolutionary existence. They then go to the Powamu Kiva, where the Powamu Chief blesses them by blowing smoke from his pipe over them, and return to the One Horn Kiva.”

Conclusions

Our preference of the three choices (the Twin War Gods, Sotuknang, Aholi) for identification of the glyph we’ve called the conehead is the katsina Aholi. There are several reasons for this. The flute player and the wedge of birds flying north are indicators of spring. Powamu is a spring fertility



Figure 9, Eototo.
Sekakuku 1995:9

rite. The katsinas affiliated with that important ceremony are Aholi and Eototo. Aholi is the only one of the three linked with a spring katsina ceremony. There are other indications that these may be katsinas and not deities.

Looking at the configuration of the conehead itself gives us a clue to which being this is. Part of what makes this glyph so recognizable is the lower portion shaped like the letter "H." Fewkes (1990:295) states, "The one garment worn by the male Katchinas is the ceremonial kilt Every male Katchina, what ever his helmet, has one about his loins. It is made of coarse cotton, on the ends of which are embroidered symbolic figures of rain-clouds, falling rain, and lightning. . . . the lower edge is black, with nine square blocks of the same color at regular intervals."

Roediger (191:116) concurs, saying the kilt is the "most characteristic ceremonial garment." She describes it much the same, with "A band of black about an inch wide is often embroidered or crocheted around the bottom of the kilt with small black squares. . . . breaking into the white body at intervals above the lower border." We postulate the H part of this key glyph may be the kilt, and the conehead part a mask, thereby making this a katsina ceremonial site.

Adams (1991:17) lends support to this hypothesis by stating, "(1) that the katsina cult is a recognizable entity in the archaeological record, and (2) that the katsina mask is an undeniable indicator of the existence of the cult." Cole (1992:20) has examined specific elements of katsina design and has concluded that the mask is the only reliable indicator of the presence of katsina ceremonials.

A meddlesome question intrudes: if Eototo (Figure 9) is so important to the Powamu ceremony, being called father of the katsinas, the one who knows all the ceremonies, controller of the seasons and husband of Hahai-I Wuhti, the mother of katsinas (Young 1994: 116, 117), why is he not represented with a glyph? There may be two reasons for this:

(1) some of the oldest, most venerated katsinas, even today, are not represented visually or kinesthetically (dolls) out of respect, and

(2) Eototo's mask is very nondescript, as befits an older, simpler deity. It is a white leather case-mask of the helmet type with circles for mouth and eyes (also according to Young). This mask would be difficult to make an outstanding feature of a petroglyph panel—not so Aholi's.

Besides, Eototo may be represented on the high panel, with a bearpaw glyph (see Figure 2). Eototo, according to Waters (1977:84, 85), is the deity of the Bear Clan.

Rock art can be interpreted as serving many different functions. Certain petroglyphs are reminiscent of maps, travel routes, celestial happenings, secret initiations, ceremonialism, and perhaps the old stand-by, hunting magic. How is it possible to differentiate one aspect of rock art from another?

One feasible answer is context. Krause (1995:11) makes the point that in modern society, art can be placed anywhere without changing the significance of the art, but "rock art is meaningfully related to its location and cannot be considered separate from its surroundings."

Incorporating panels within a site complex also implies different meaning than would a single panel, a single element. Krause (1995:19) maintains, "Redefining natural space by cultural means transforms it into social areas which becomes emotionally significant through repetitive use over time and adds a transcendent element to natural surroundings—the landscape becomes permeated with meaning and is not simply a source of provision."

The location and environment of the Kohta Circus site is a clue to which form of rock art these

petroglyphs represent. The highest panel, with a bear paw and six Aholi glyphs, stands out as the attractor to the area. Sloping downward from it are several other panels and shortly, across a maze-like aisle, we come to the Circus panel itself. All panels about a natural amphitheater, or plaza, containing concealed passageways that could be utilized for dramatic entrances or exits.

We traveled a four-state area seeking petroglyphs that resemble the katsina figure. We have not yet been able to find any. The combination of archaeological and rock art connections, the ethnographic evidence, the seasonal glyphs of flute players and migrating birds, and the natural theatric setting lead us to conclude Powamu rites, attended by Eototo and Aholi, were conducted at Kohta Circus.

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