

FOXPELT OR PHALLUS?

Elaine Holmes

"Things are not what they seem; or, to be more accurate, they are not only what they seem, but very much else besides." — Aldous Huxley 1894-1963. Mr. Huxley certainly could have been speaking of rock art.

Years ago Nancy Wier, coordinator of Southern Nevada Rock Art Enthusiasts, and I speculated on why many more of the gender attributes in anthropomorphs are male rather than female. After listening to Jesse Warner's oft-repeated questions, "Well, if it's not this, what is it? If it's not that, what else could it be?" and seeing Gerald Dean's presentation of a maze that could be a fish weir and vulviforms that might be antelope rumps, I began to take the question a little more seriously.

Research led me to the conclusion that, indeed, these gender attributes may occasionally be something other than male vanity, crossing the ages. A small percentage of the apparent phallic symbols could be the foxpelts worn in western Pueblo katsina ceremonies, as in Figure 1.

Colton (1995:15) states, "The typical katsina costume characteristic of over seventy kachinas, consists of a white, handwoven, cotton kilt with embroidered ends, called a katsina kilt, and a man's white, handwoven sash with brocaded ends, called a katsina sash, over which is worn a woman's narrow belt in red, green, and black. A fox skin, suspended from the sash, hangs down behind." Further, the foxpelt tail is "considered as a relic of the earliest days of man, for the kachinas were transformed while mankind was still tailed and horned," according to Bunzel (1984:870).

The foxpelt used in ceremonies received particular attention. Roediger (1991:136) elucidates, "A noticeable feature of many of the costumes is the pendent foxskin, worn tail downward at the back of the belt. This particular fox, formerly indigenous to the mountainous country of the Pueblos, is a small animal with gray hair intermingled with amber. It was hunted during the season of the year when the hair was long and thick and the hide tough. When killed, the body of the animal was skinned very carefully and all the parts were retained: the paws remained on the legs and the ears were kept on the full head covering."

Figure 2. Ahul, Sun Katsina, from Walpi, Hopi.



Figure 1. Mahu or Cicada Katsina.





Figure 3. Kokochi Dancer, Zuni. These foxpelts clear the ground by only a few inches

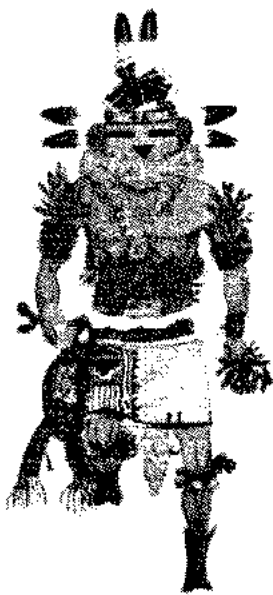
For several days prior to each occasion on which they were worn, the pelts were buried in damp sand in order to bring suppleness to the skin and a soft, live quality to the fur, mentions Roediger (1991:66). She also says (p. 135) that Hopi and Zuni performers use the foxpelts as a convention with the traditional katsina costume, while the Rio Grande Pueblos apparently do not have an association with animal tails but, instead, "affect the fringes of the plaited sash or a fan of eagle feathers on the belt at the rear."

What other distinguishing traits should our foxpelt katsinas have? As Figures 2 and 3 suggest, katsina dancers also wear headdresses or accessories in their hair.

"The true marks of identification in ceremonial costumes are found in the headdresses.... Every performer wears some ornament in his hair, even if it is no more than the white, downy, 'breath' feather or a red, downy badge of office," declares Roediger (1991:155,156).

Since katsina dancers are the topic here, we should expect to see petroglyphs or pictographs in a dancing posture. Bunzel (1984:898-899) alleges that katsina dances are line rather than circle dances, and at Zuni,

There are no elaborate dance figures, no interweaving of dancers, no use of grouping as an esthetic feature. It is all dancing in place. The group itself does not have movement. Bodily movements are restricted to movements of the feet and some slight use of gesture with the arms. There is no running or leaping, no high, deep, or wide movement, and no posturing with the body.... According to Zuni ideology, the dance is compulsive magic. The supernatural are constrained by the use of their corporeal substance, i.e., the mask. They must come with all their attributes, including rain [Bunzel 1984:898-899].



She also points out (p. 897) the customary dance step used by the katsina personators is a vigorous stamping with the right foot, to which is usually attached a turtle-shell rattle or a string of sleigh-bells to mark the rhythm. On alternate beats the heel of the left foot is slightly raised, see Figure 4, left.

In summary, how shall we differentiate "foxpelt" glyphs from other gender attribute glyphs? As so often appears with rock art, context seems to hold the clue:

A vertical line appearing between the legs (certainly not ithyphallic);

A headdress of some sort;

A dancing posture, a bent leg or legs, bent arms;

And judging from pictures of katsinas, they may have something in their hands: wands, bows, staffs, crooks, rattles, spruce sprigs, yucca leaves, *mongkos*, lightning wands, rabbit

Figure 4. Mona Katsina, also known as River or Thunder katsina, Third Mesa, Hopi.

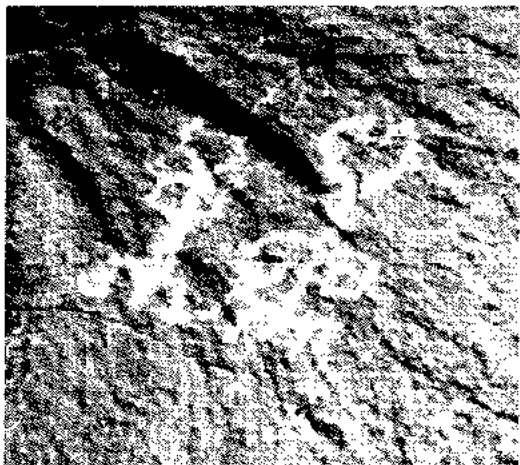


Figure 5, top left. Ravensite, Arizona.
 Figure 6, top right. Atlatl Rock, Valley of Fire, Nevada.
 Figure 7, left. Orange Pipe, Gunlock, Utah.
 Figure 8, above. Mt. Trumbull, Arizona.
 The graphic at the top of this paper is from a glyph at Little Red Rock, Nevada.

sticks, or dance wands.

Foxpelt or phallus? Interpretation is in the eye of the beholder.

Acknowledgments. Photos for Figures 5, 6, 7, 8 and the graphic at the top of the paper are by Jack Holmes. Figures 1 and 3, Wright 1998, used with permission of Northland Publishing. Figures 2 and 4, Roedigger 1991, used with permission of Carl S. Johnson.

References Cited

- Bunzel, Ruth L.
1984 *Zuni Kachinas*. Bureau of American Ethnology Annual Report 47, 1929-1930. Washington, D.C 1932. Reprinted by The Rio Grande Press, Glorieta, New Mexico.
- Colton, Harold S.
1995 *Hopi Kachina Dolls, with a Key to their Identification*. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque.
- Huxley, Aldous
1998 "Man and Reality" in *Vedanta for the Western World*, edited by Christopher Isherwood. In *Quotationary*, edited by Leonard Roy Frank, p. 37. Random House, New York. (Originally published 1945.)
- Roedigger, Virginia More
1991 *Ceremonial Costumes of the Pueblo Indians: Their Evolution, Fabrication, and Significance in the Prayer Drama*. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Wright, Barton
1998 *Kachinas: A Hopi Artist's Documentary*. Northland Publishing with the Heard Museum, Flagstaff.