Before Corn: “Sotuknangu” and the Origins of the Gods in Archaic America

James Farmer,
Virginia Commonwealth University
The Three Kings, Catacomb of Priscilla, Rome, c.250 CE
Barrier Canyon Anthropomorphic Style (aka: BCS)

THE ROCK ART OF UTAH
FROM THE DONALD SCOTT COLLECTION

Polly Schaafsma

“Holy Ghost” Panel,
Great Gallery, Horseshoe Canyon,
Canyonlands National Park, Utah
FIGURE 68 Map showing locations of Barrier Canyon Style sites. Each circle represents one site. Note: not all sites have numbers. Site locations are approximate.
As of 2016, c.400 BCS sites, and counting.....
BCS “Thunderstorm” Iconographic Complex:

- Some BCS anthropomorphs (“proto-Tlaloc”?)
- Serpents:
  - **vertical**: lightning
  - **horizontal**: flowing water, flashfloods
    (“proto-Palölökong”, Hopi horned serpent?)
- Raincloud/rain/waterfall
- Rainbow
Rain

- Horizontal line with vertical lines descending from it


Mary Miller & Karl Taube, 1993: *Tlaloc*: god of “rain and lightning”; often “appears with lightning, *maize*, and water”: 
Sotuknangu

Created by/Nephew of “Taiowa”, the Sun God,

“Sky”, “Lightning”, “Thunder”, and “War”

Creator of the (first) Nine Worlds,

Creator of Spiderwoman
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sotuknangu,</td>
<td>“Heart of the Sky God”</td>
<td>Polly Schaafsma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sotuqnang-u,</td>
<td>“God of the Sky”</td>
<td>Harold S. Colton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sotuknang,</td>
<td>“Creator God”</td>
<td>Harold Courlander and Frank Waters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotokinunwu,</td>
<td>“Sky-heart”</td>
<td>J Walter Fewkes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sho’tok-unungwa,</td>
<td>“War God”</td>
<td>Tyler A. Hamilton, citing Mischa Titiev</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sho’tokununwu,</td>
<td>“War/Lightning God”</td>
<td>Alexander Stephen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sotuknango,</td>
<td>“Thunderstorm God”</td>
<td>J. Farmer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sotuknangu Figurines

Single Horn, Star, or Feather

Conical Helmet

Lightning Sticks
Robert Naha, 
Hopi Snake Dancer, 
c.1970

“Snake Dance, Hopi” 
Anonymous photograph, 
c.1912
“Palölökong” Kiva Mural, Pottery Mound, New Mexico, 1300-1600 ce

Tewa “Avanyu” Horned Serpents petroglyph, Galisteo Basin, New Mexico, 1300-1600 ce

“In other words, the [pre-existent] symbol was of itself a power capable of generating a more tangible change: the appearance of the farming economy.”
Near Moab

Rain cloud w/rain or waterfall

Vertical Serpent

Horizontal Serpent

Snake in the Mouth

Vertical Serpent
Near Moab
Single horn?
Buckhorn Wash
“High Panel” Horseshoe Canyon

vertical serpent
Great Gallery, 4 Sept 2005, c.11:00 am
c.4 ft.
Earliest “landscape” painting in North America??
Head of Sinbad
Head of Sinbad
Head of Sinbad
Patterson, Alex,

Pictograph, Hueco Tanks, Texas
I

Ancient Pueblo

1500 ce
1000 ce
500 ce
1 ce
1 bce
500 bce
1000 bce
2000 bce
5000 bce

Archaic

Mesoamerica

Aztec
Toltec
Teotihuacan
Maya
Olmec

BEFORE corn!
The Three Kings (Adoration), Catacomb of Priscilla, Rome, c.250 CE
The Three Kings (Adoration), Catacomb of Priscilla, Rome, c.250 ce
This is as this is..
Before Corn: “Sotuknangu” and the Origins of the Gods in Archaic America

2017 URARA SYMPOSIUM, GREEN RIVER, UTAH
James Farmer,
Virginia Commonwealth University
Image Sources
All images are copyrighted by the presenter, except as noted in the presentation, or as follows:


Slide 8  “Tlaloc” priest, from *The Codex Ixtlilxochitl*, Folio 110 verso, 16th-17th century Aztec manuscript, held in the Bibliothèque Nationale, in Paris.


Slide 19  Upper: Hibben, Frank C. *Kiva Art of the Anasazi at Pottery Mound*, Las Vegas, Nevada; KC Publications, 1975: Figure 34.
Lower: Schaafsma, Polly. Quetzalcoatl and the Horned and Feathered Serpent of the Southwest”, in *The Road to Aztlan: Art From a Mythic Homeland*, Virginia M. Fields and Victor Zamudio-Taylor, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2001: Figure 134.

Slide 29  Photo courtesy David Sucec, 2005.