

**FLOWER WORLD ICONOGRAPHY,  
AND METAPHOR IN THE ROCK  
ART OF THE SOUTHERN  
COLORADO PLATEAU**

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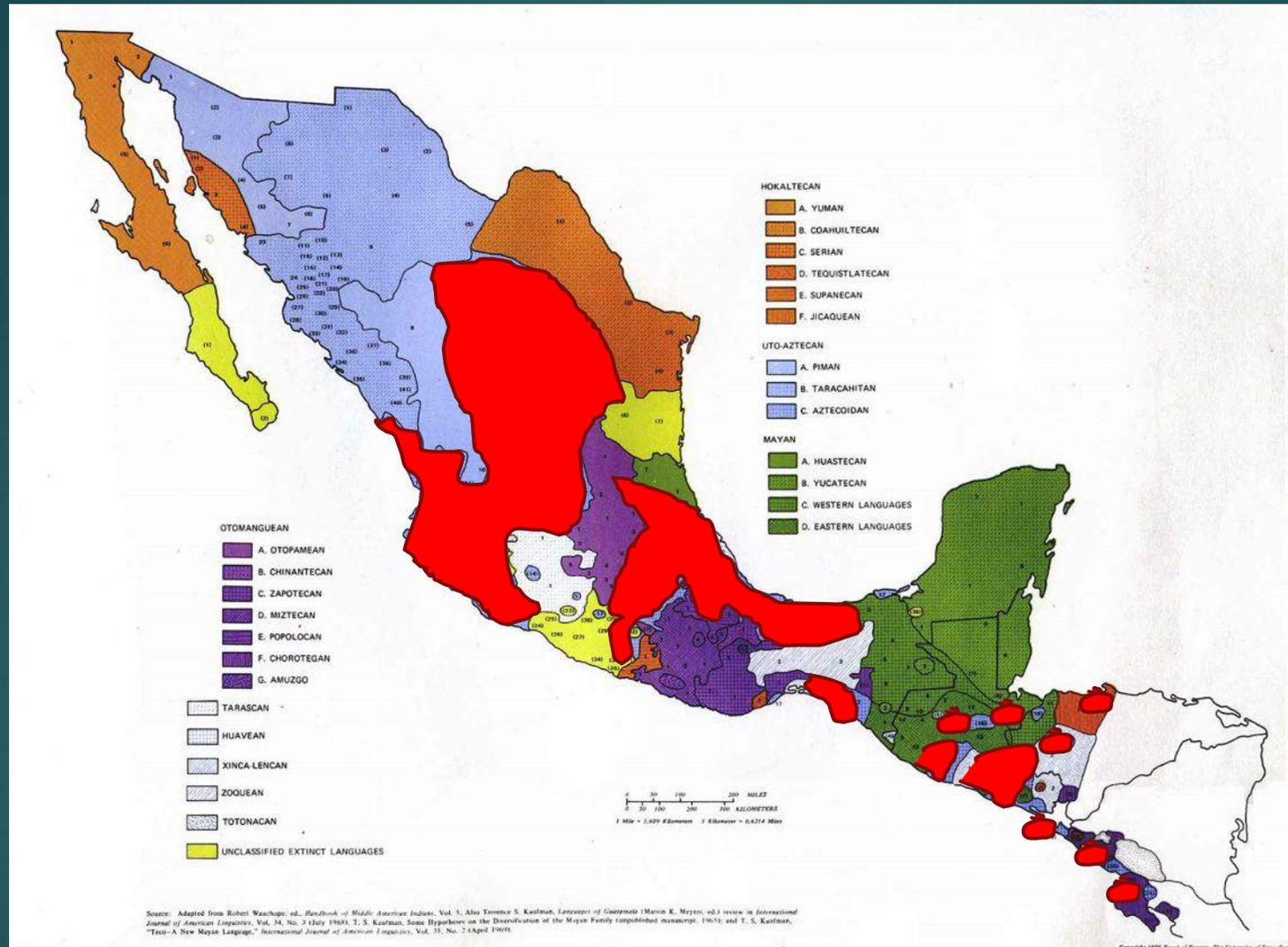
## Bernardino de Sahagún (1499 –1590)



Of the Uto-Aztecan languages, Nahuatl is one of the best documented, contact period languages and cultures due to the studies and records of Bernardino de Sahagun. As a Franciscan friar, missionary priest and ethnographer who followed Cortez into Tenochtitlan in 1529, and spent more than 50 years in the study of Aztec (Mexico) beliefs, culture and history. Learning Nahuatl, teaching scribes to write Nahuatl using the Spanish alphabet into which he translated the Psalms, the Gospels and a basic manual of religious education.

His fame is derived from the manuscript of the *Historia General* or the *Florentine Codex*. It consisted of 2400 bilingual pages organized into 12 books with approximately 2,000 illustrations drawn by native artists. It contained cosmology (worldview), ritual practices, society, economics, and history of the Aztec people. Twenty of the texts included the “flower-song” poetry by the author Nezahualcoyotl ‘Hungry-Coyote’.

Modern Nahuatl is spoken by 1.5 million people.



Source: Adapted from Robert Washop, ed., *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, Vol. 5, Also Terrence S. Kaufman, *Languages of Guatemala* (Marvin K. Meyer, ed.), review in *International Journal of American Linguistics*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (July 1968); T. S. Kaufman, *Some Hypotheses on the Diversification of the Mayan Family* (unpublished manuscript, 1965); and T. S. Kaufman, "Teco-A New Mayan Language," *International Journal of American Linguistics*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (April 1969).

Modern Nahuatl is spoken by 1.5 million people.

As Spanish grew in use, there were notable things of Mexico with no word in Spanish, so the Spanish speaking population adopted Nahuatl words:

How do you say  
“avocado” in Spanish

Aguacate      **Spanish**

Ahuaca-tl    **Nahuatl**

“Guacamole”    Ahuaca-mulli!

<u>Spanish</u>	<u>Nahuatl</u>
Coyote	coyotl
Metate	metatl
Tecolote	tecolotl
Zopolote	zopolotl
Mesquite	mizquitl
Tamale	tamal-li
Chocolate	chocolotl
Temescal	temascal
Chapulín	chapolin
Mole	mulli

Ahuacatl is a *metaphor* in Nahuatl...

“Testicle!”



For many centuries  
the Mexica and  
numerous other  
cultures have  
viewed avocados  
as an aphrodisiac.

Sir James Fraser's  
'Law of Similarity'



Friar Diego Durán, a Dominican Friar who grew up fluent in Nahuatl in Texcoco, describes Aztec poetry in the year 1570:

“All the native [songs] are interwoven with such obscure metaphors that there is hardly a man who can understand them unless they are studied in a very special way and explained so as to penetrate their meaning...”

# The Flower Metaphor

In Aztec poetry and song it was commonly noted that the Nahuatl word for flower (**xochitl**), was used to refer to things that didn't seem to have anything to do with flowers! Local, stylized 'wars' that the Mexica were involved in were called "flower wars" and that deaths were metaphorically referenced as "flowers"

A Flowery War death was considered to be more noble than dying in typical warfare; this can be seen in the word for a flower war death, *xochimiquiztli*, ("flowery death"), blissful death, fortunate death.) It was also thought that those who died in a Flower War would be transported to the heaven...





# Jane Hill, University of Arizona

## Viking Fund Medal, Anthropology, Linguistics

1992 *The Flower World of Old Uto-Aztecan*, Journal of Anthropological Research

In Arizona and New Mexico, Hill noticed frequent reference to chromatic flowers, birds, butterflies, hummingbirds in song and oral history similar to the southerly Uto-Aztecan peoples.

***Si-hu*** “flower” --Hopi

***Sikya*** “yellow”

***Sipna*** “umbilicus”

***Sipáapuni*** “yellow flower, umbilicus” = ‘place of origin’

(a yellow travertine dome in Grand Canyon; every kiva has a *sipapu*)

She suggests ***Flower World*** was a *place*, a parallel universe. A place of eternal summer and happiness related to the sphere of the rain god, a fertile place of bountiful, natural splendor and abundance.

FLOWERS THEN, WERE A **METAPHOR** FOR CONNECTION TO A SPIRIT UNDERWORLD, A PATH TO *EMERGENCE* AND A SYMBOL OF SPIRITUAL POWER SUCH AS FERTILITY, BIRTH, THE BREATH OF LIFE DEATH.

**Hill : Proto Uto-Aztecan  
2001 American Anthropologist**

**Hill suggests a southern, Mexican  
origin for Proto-Uto-Aztecan,  
spreading with maize agriculture  
northward into the American  
Southwest**

**The 'Tepiman  
Freeway' of  
agriculture, trade  
and ideology.**

**Earliest maize agriculture  
9,000 BP Balsas River,  
Morelos.**

0 400 800 1200 1600 2000 Kilometers



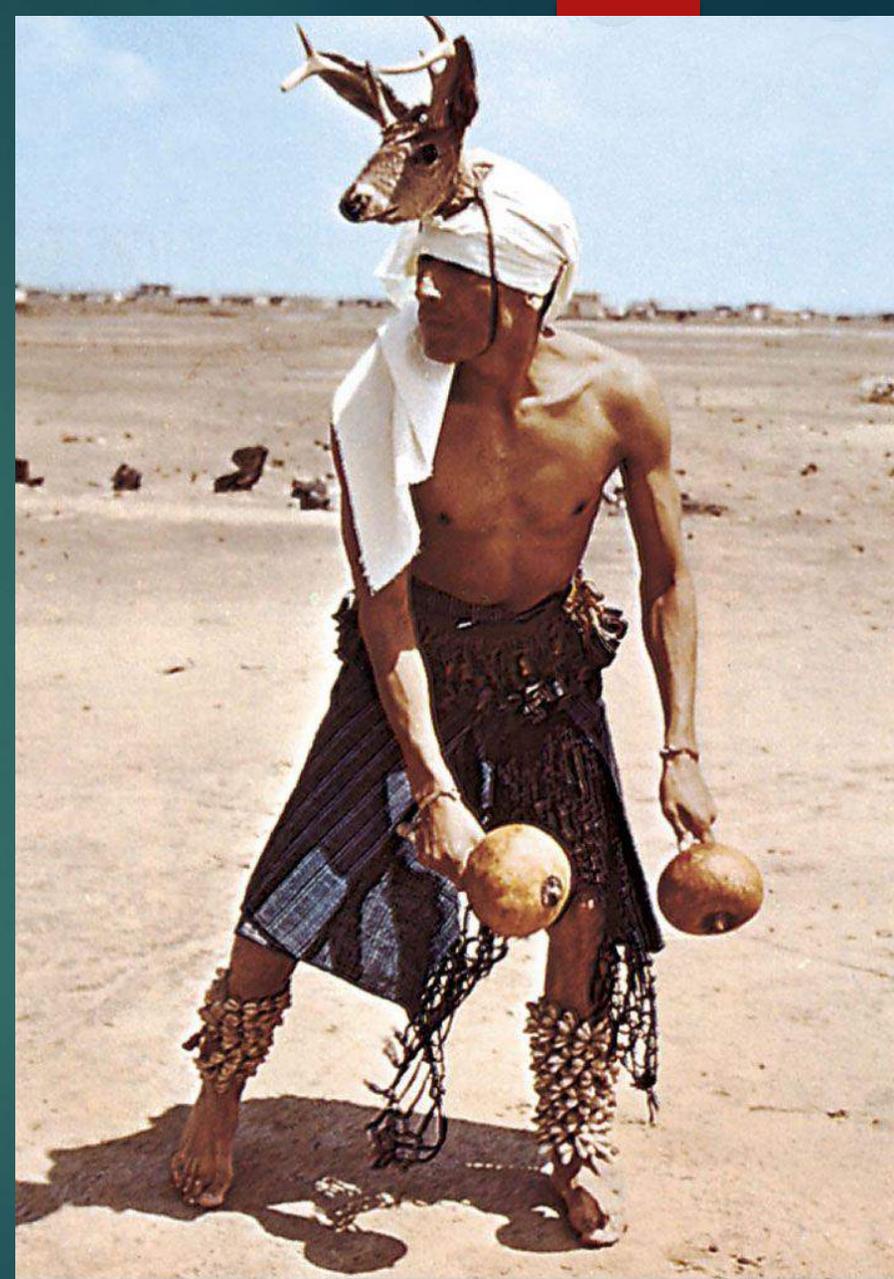
# Yaqui Deer Songs

The Easter/Pascua dance the deer is depicted as a magical being from the sea ania, the flower world where beauty and life abound.

Flowers pervade Yaqui culture. Some Yaquis believe that the blood that flowed from the wound in Christ's side turned into flowers when it fell to earth. But the flower symbolism is more ancient as well. Flowers also represent the sea ania, the flower world "beneath the dawn."

Flowers are metaphors for all that is good and beautiful in Yaqui life, including the beauty of the deer and all the other beings who inhabit the magical pre-Christian world.

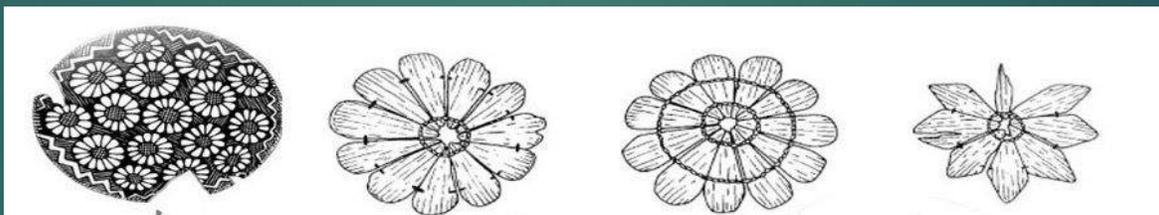
Sheridan and Parezo 1996



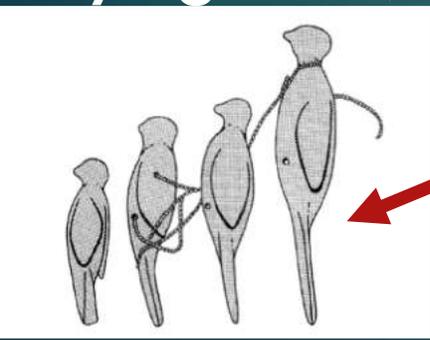


Jane Hill and Kelley Hays-Gilpin, Northern Arizona University, Curator Archaeology, Museum of Northern Arizona  
*"The Flower World in Material Culture: An Iconographic Complex in the Southwest and Mesoamerica"* 1999

They proceeded to describe Flower World imagery on Pueblo material remains such as **ceramics, wooden flower caches, wooden birds and kiva murals.**

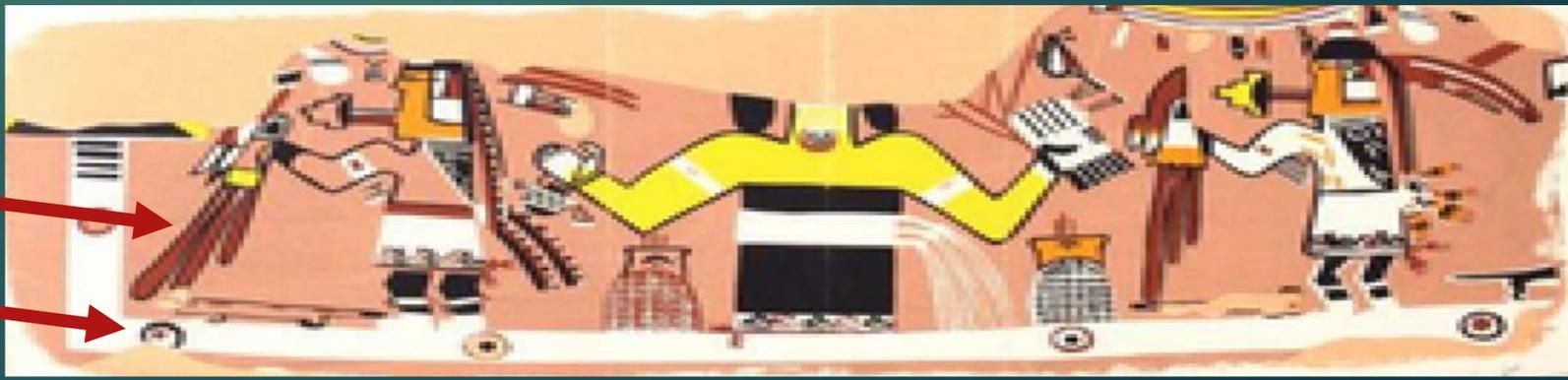


Pueblo III and IV Kiva murals provided the strongest case for depiction of a colorful flowery Spirit World including: flowers, plants, butterflies, dragonflies, flying birds, and macaws.

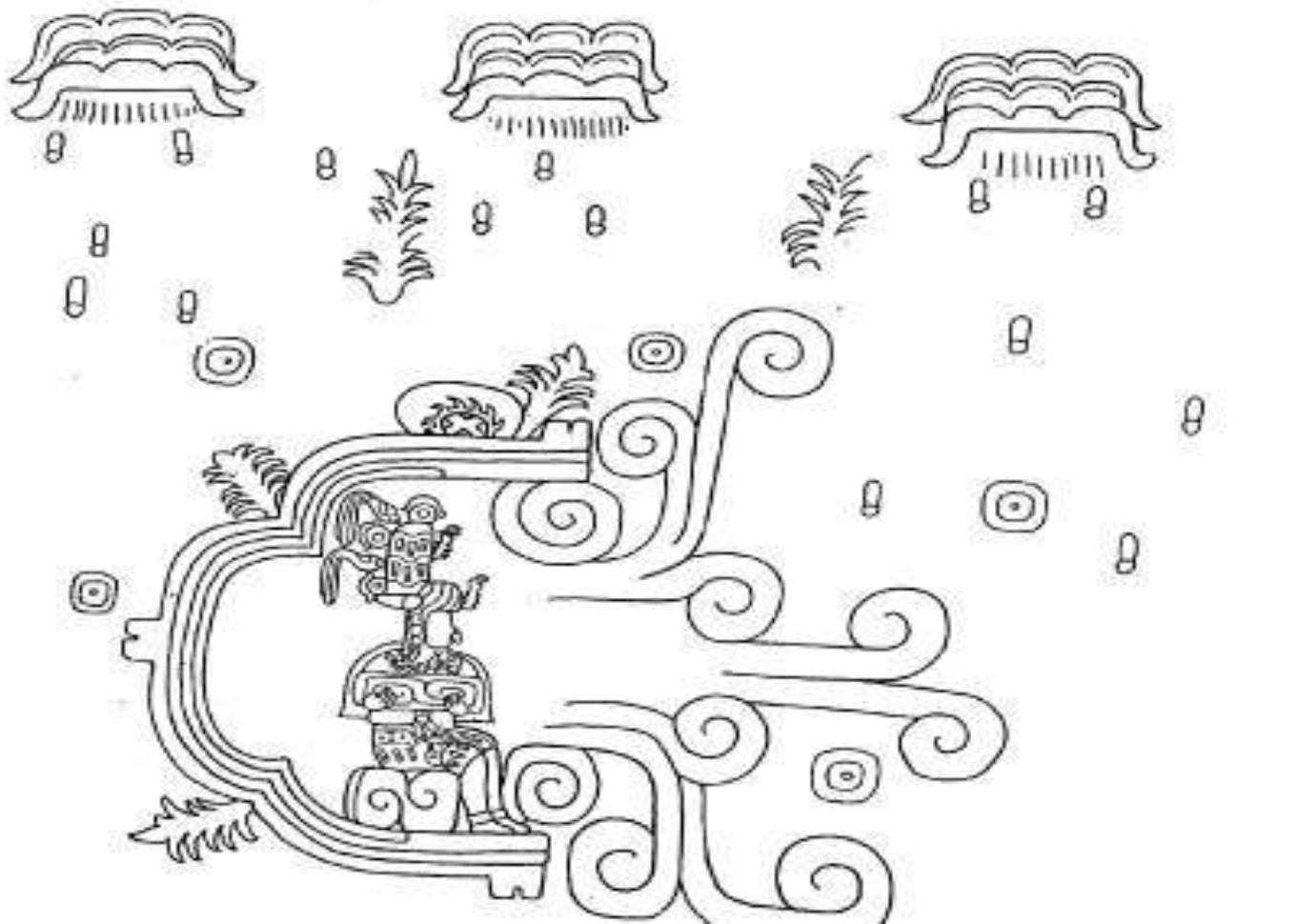


Birds

Flowers



**The Mesoamerican concept of a Flower World paradise was located within a “Flower Mountain” where a watery underworld, or breathing cave existed (Karl Taube)**



The underworld was controlled by a rain man; the source of the wind, and the breath of life. Note “breath” leaving the cave.

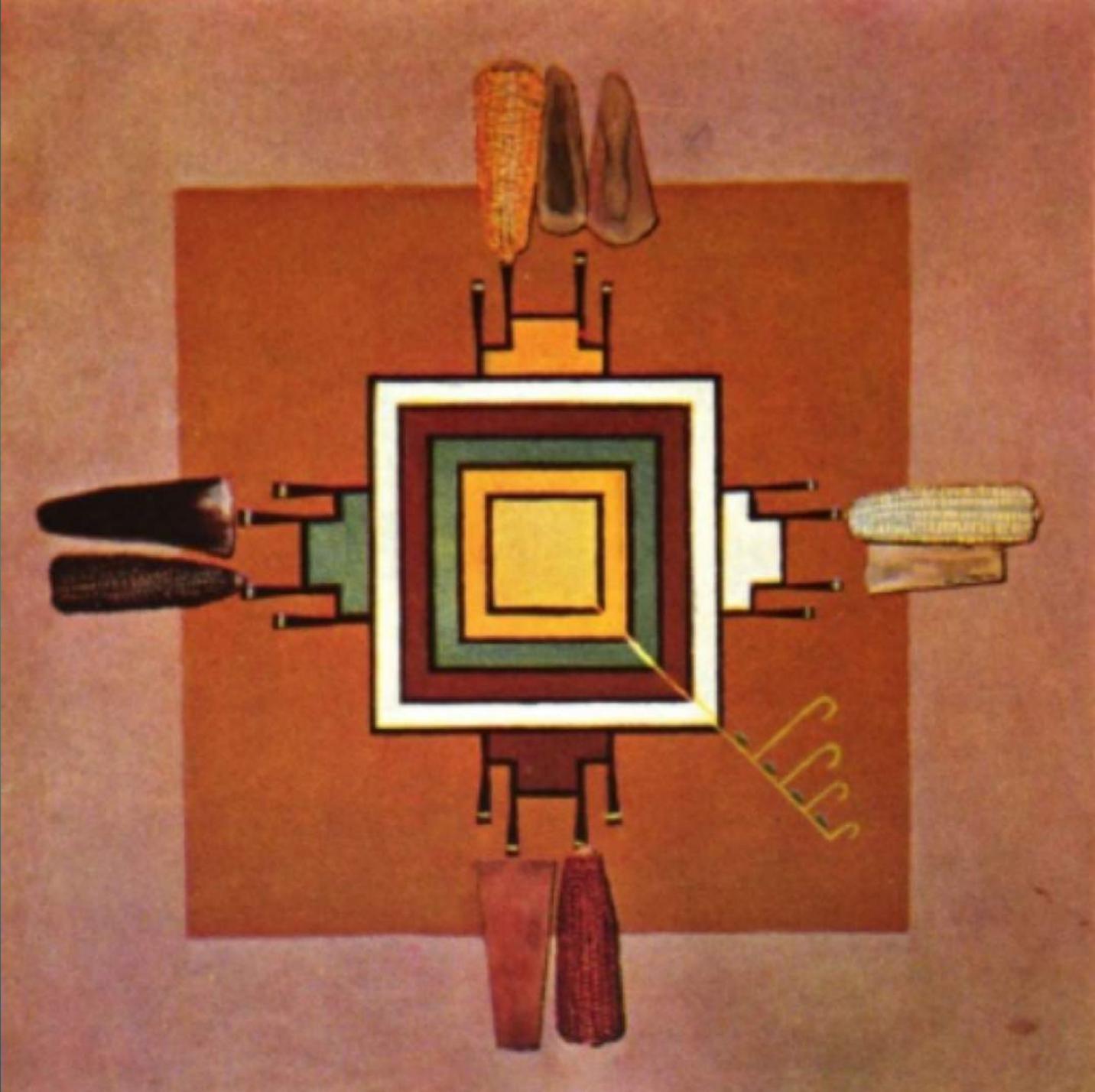
Olmec, Chalcatzingo,  
Morelos, Mexico, ca.  
4,000 B.C.



Quatrefoil flower motif  
as cave mouth, or spirit  
passageway for  
“breath”.

Mesoamerican

The Uto-Aztecan speaking Hopi of the American Southwest, also have the concept of a cave-like underworld from which the breath-of-life flows as new life. This wind, or breath emerges from a **flowery opening termed the si'papu**. Every kiva has a si'papu. Kivas are microcosms of the middle world of man.



Hopi oral tradition describes this underworld as the home of **Muy'ingwa**, the **germination spirit**. His home is described as a lush, well watered world, full of life, with **dragonflies, butterflies, birds, especially humming birds, green grasses, flowers in full blossom, and abundant corn.** Certainly a paradise for farmers in the desert.

Muy'ingwa lives, or  
"sits" on Sihchomo,  
(Flower Mound).  
located  
metaphorically  
below the si'papu of  
the kiva.



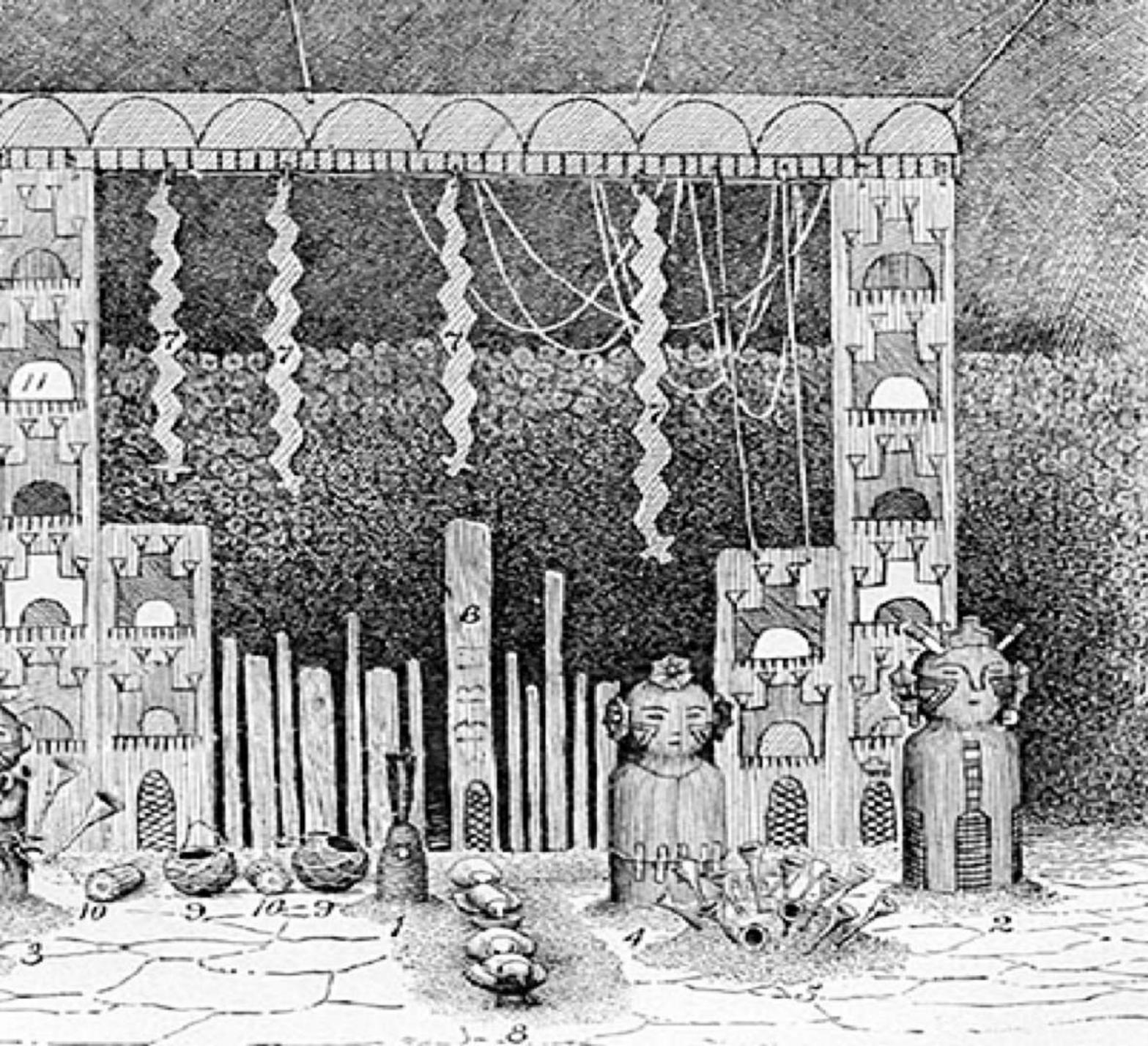
**Muy'ingwa** is associated with the underlying essence, energy, or the life spark, for all living things. He is also chief of all clouds.



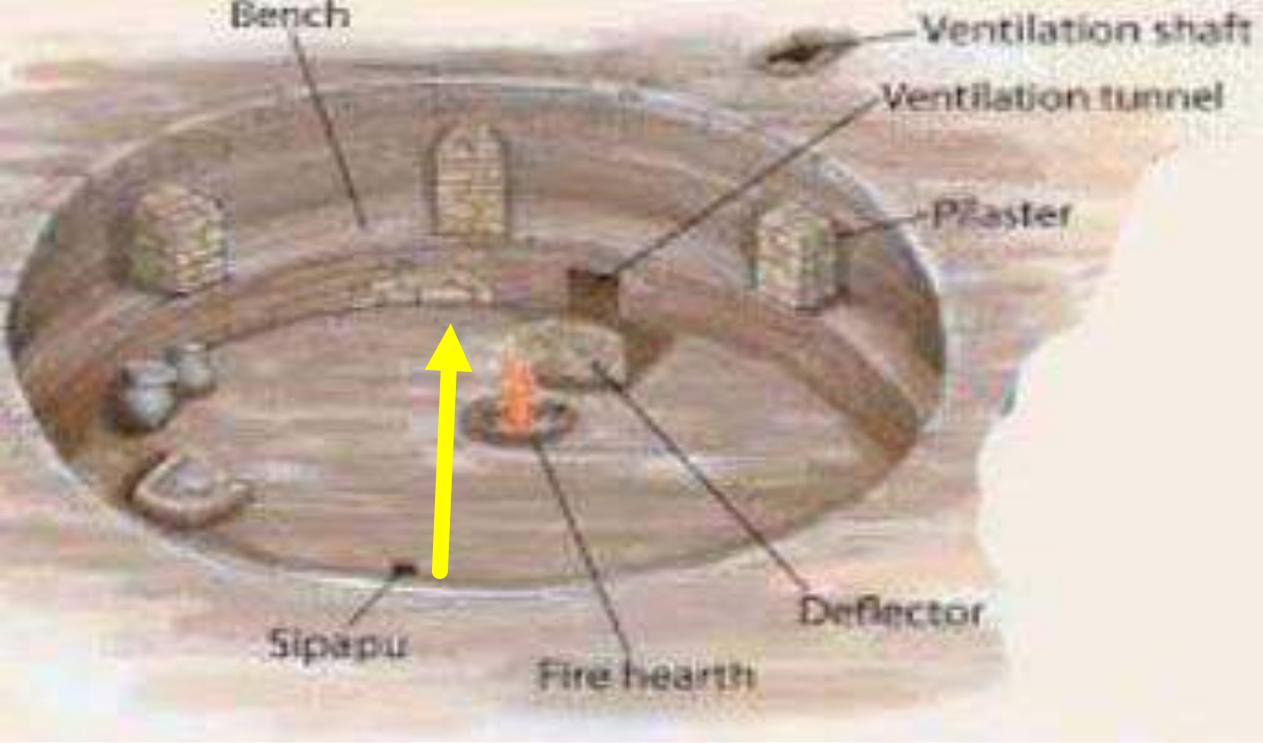


Older Hopi ethnography and contemporary Hopi people recognize that sincere prayers, songs, and actions directed toward the spirit world can bring forth the reality of **Muy'ingwa's** home, a "land brightened with flowers" into the world of man.

Spirits can be manipulated using all modes, or media. Each mode can carry the same message of need.

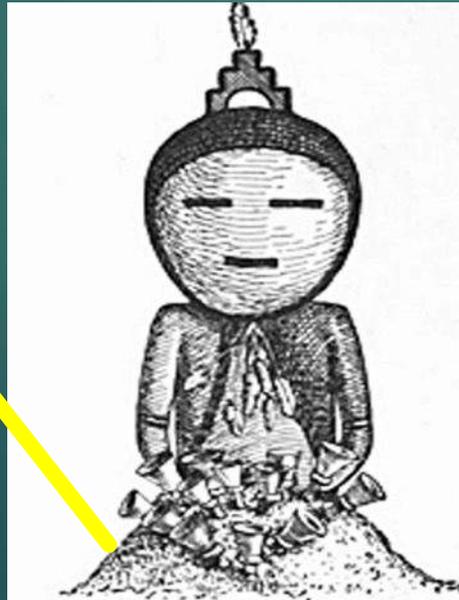


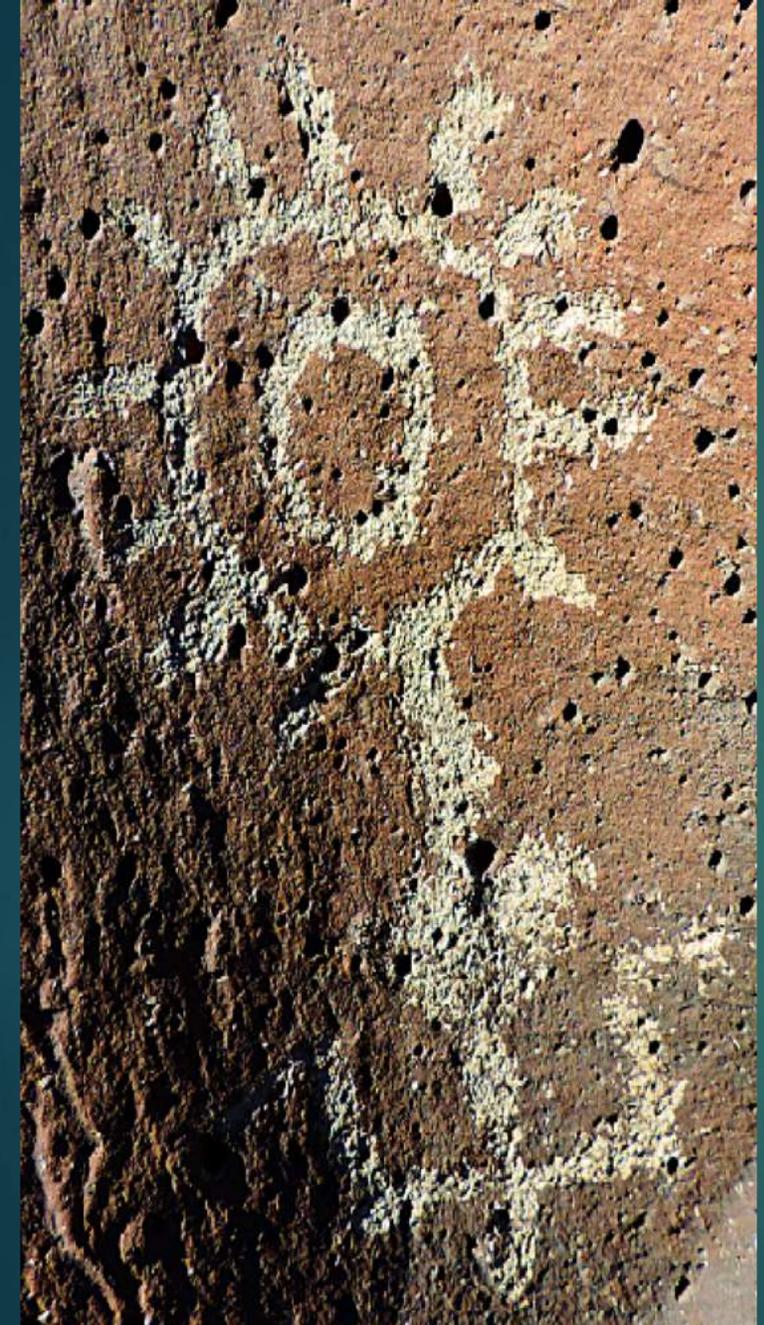
Spiritual manipulation of wimi on altars is a good example of using visual images as metaphor suggesting a particular association of what is desired in the world of man.



Muy'ingwa's response to sincere prayer is to send the living germ, "breath", or seed of all vegetation that grows on the surface of the earth along the spirit path, connecting the underworld to the si'papu, and through the si'papu into the kiva. The kiva is a ritual microcosm of the middle world of man.

Spirit path





Flower metaphor, used to illustrate the movement of new life, or the “breath-of-life” through a spirit passageway (the flower’s stem) from Muy’ingwa’s underworld center, through the si’papu opening symbolized by the flower’s stigma, and petals into the kiva, symbolically the middle world of man.

Similar metaphor

Stemmed  
flower growing  
from a flower  
mound



Metaphoric, or permanent “visual prayer”  
developed as petroglyphs depicting flower  
mounds.



Flower mound icons requesting new life in the the four corners of the world. Water symbols, lightning, and plants growing from Sand-Altar-Woman, mother of all plants.



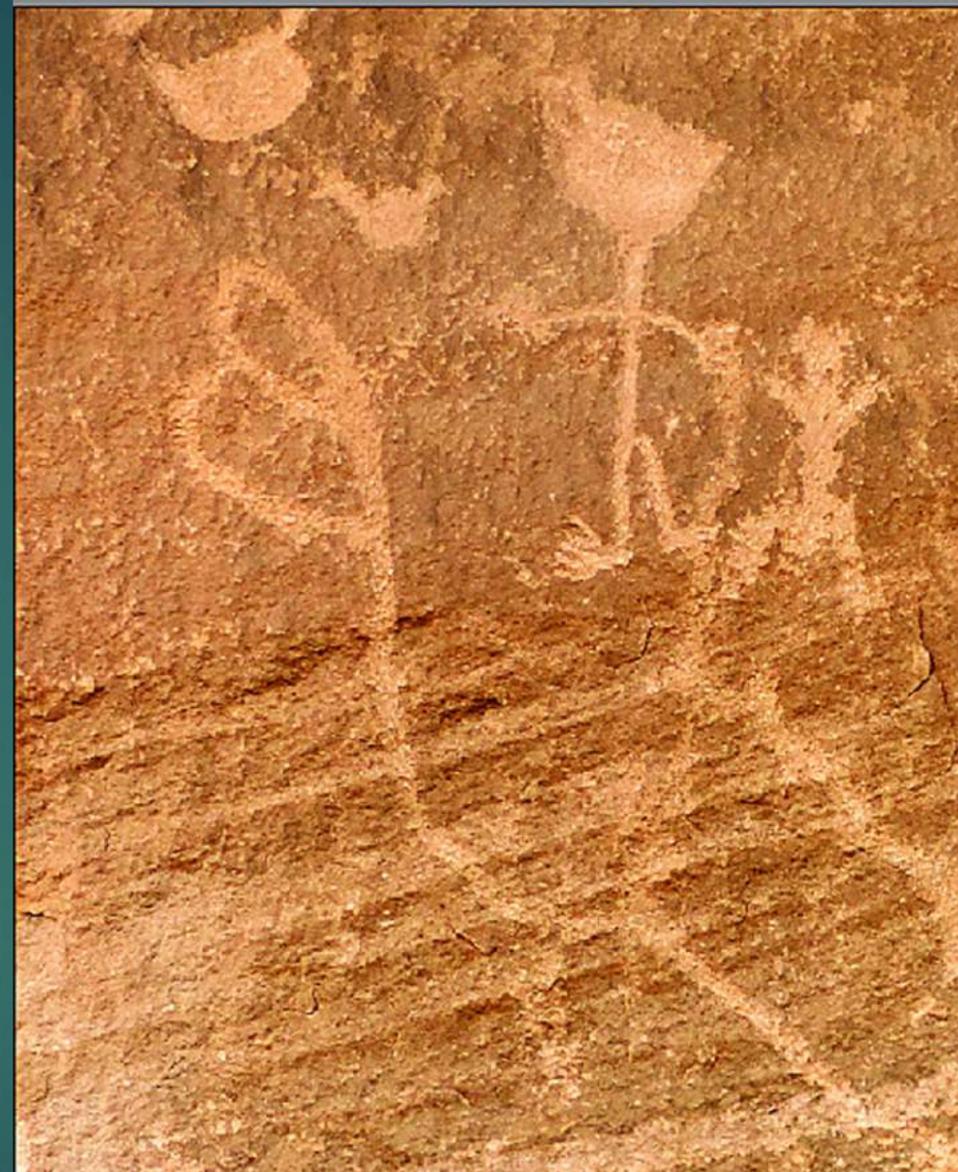


Like verbal poetry, song, or prayer, we suggest certain petroglyphs are metaphoric permanent visual prayer.



Metaphoric flower mounds, dragonflies, butterflies, and corn as visual prayer. Like begetting like.





Butterflies, or “**water-flower-wings**”, implies the fluttering of butterfly wings.

Visual metaphors form a nexus of imagery used to communicate need without the use of words.



Hummingbirds associated with flower symbols, a strong visual prayer requesting the birds of spring, and summer to arrive.



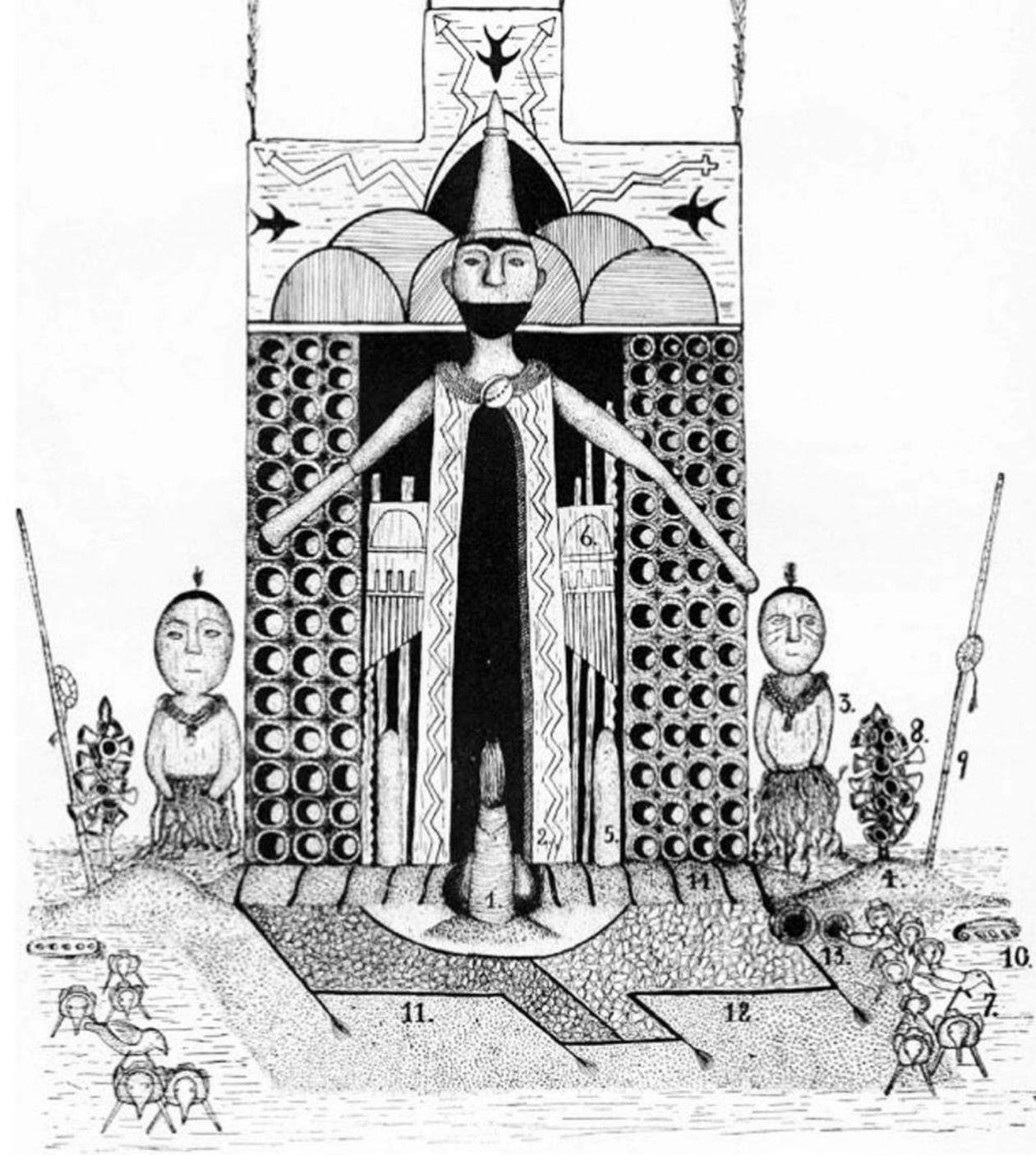
Hummingbird  
and flower  
**motifs**

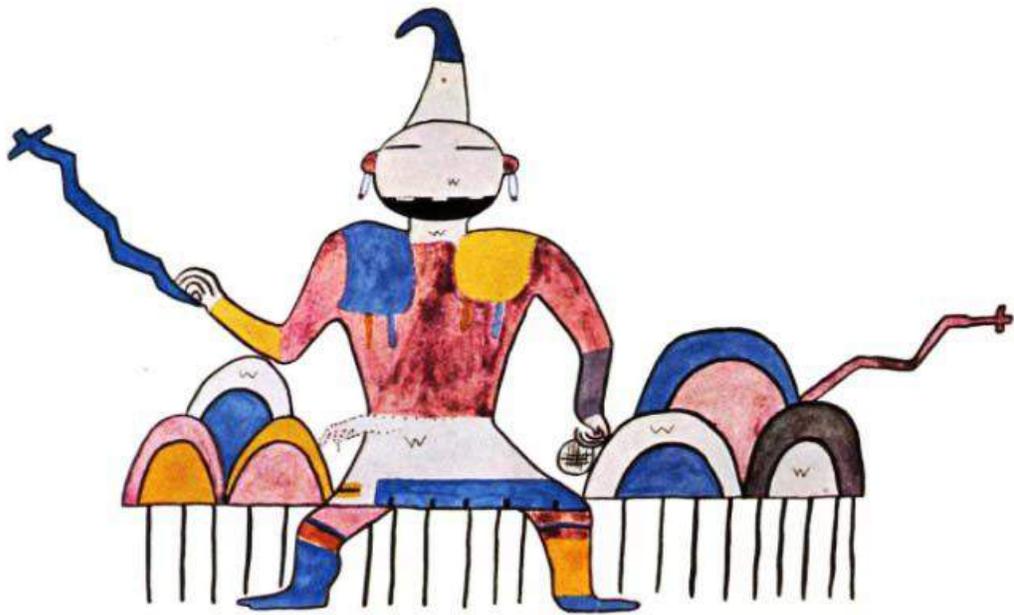


Visual metaphor  
from mural  
paintings at the  
ruins of  
Kawayka'a.  
Lightning fertilizing  
a flower mound,  
from which  
flowers and corn  
grow.

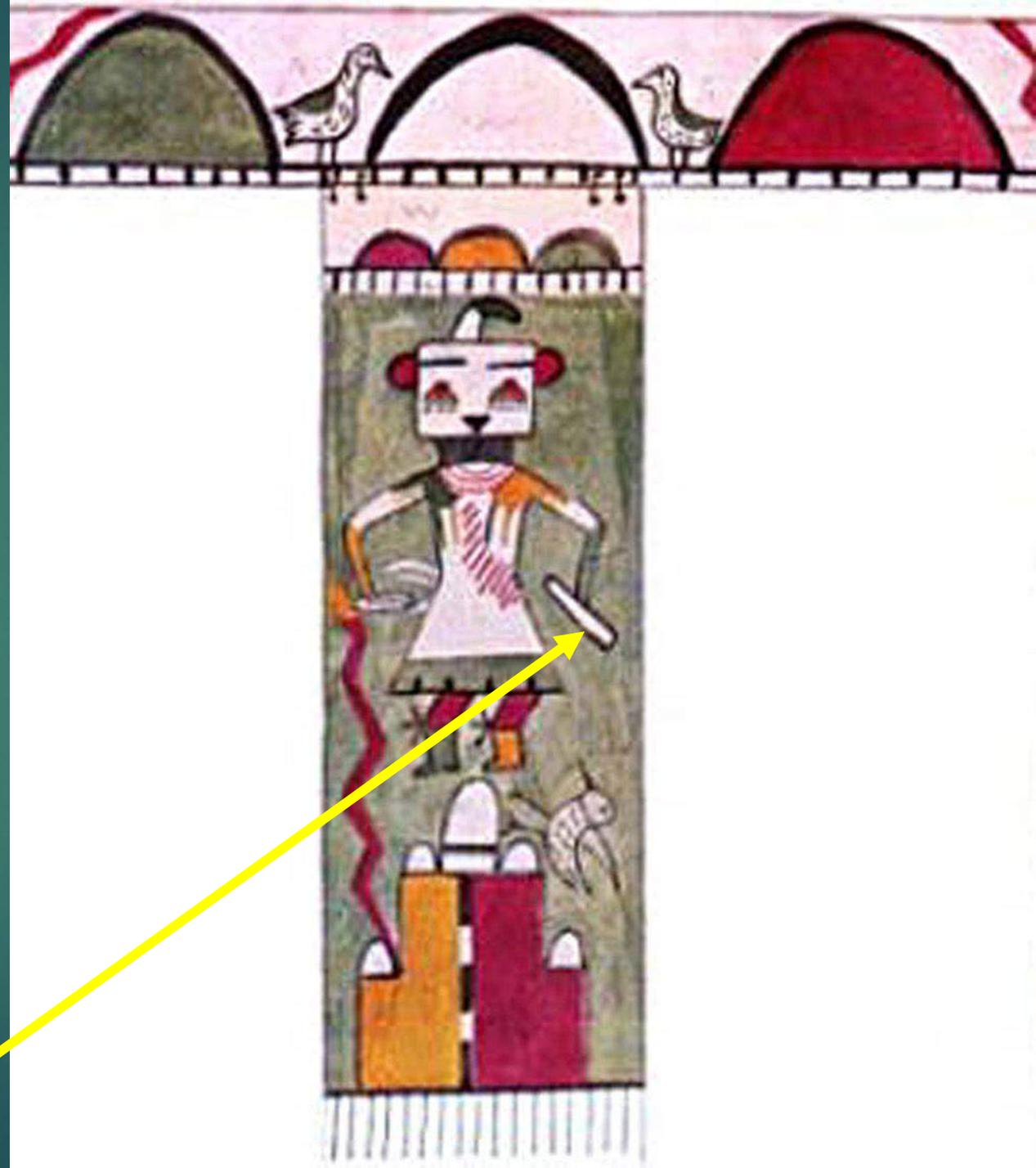


Sho'tokünûñwa is  
appealed to for  
fertilizing lightning.



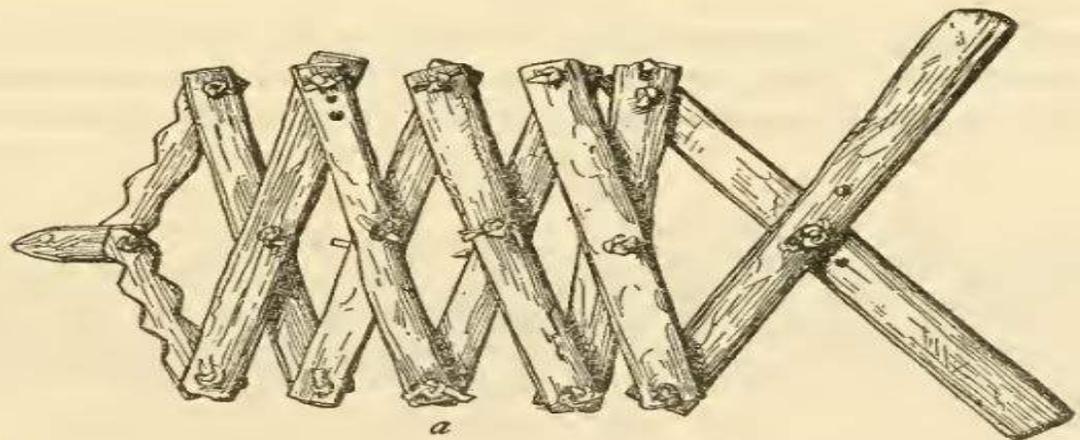
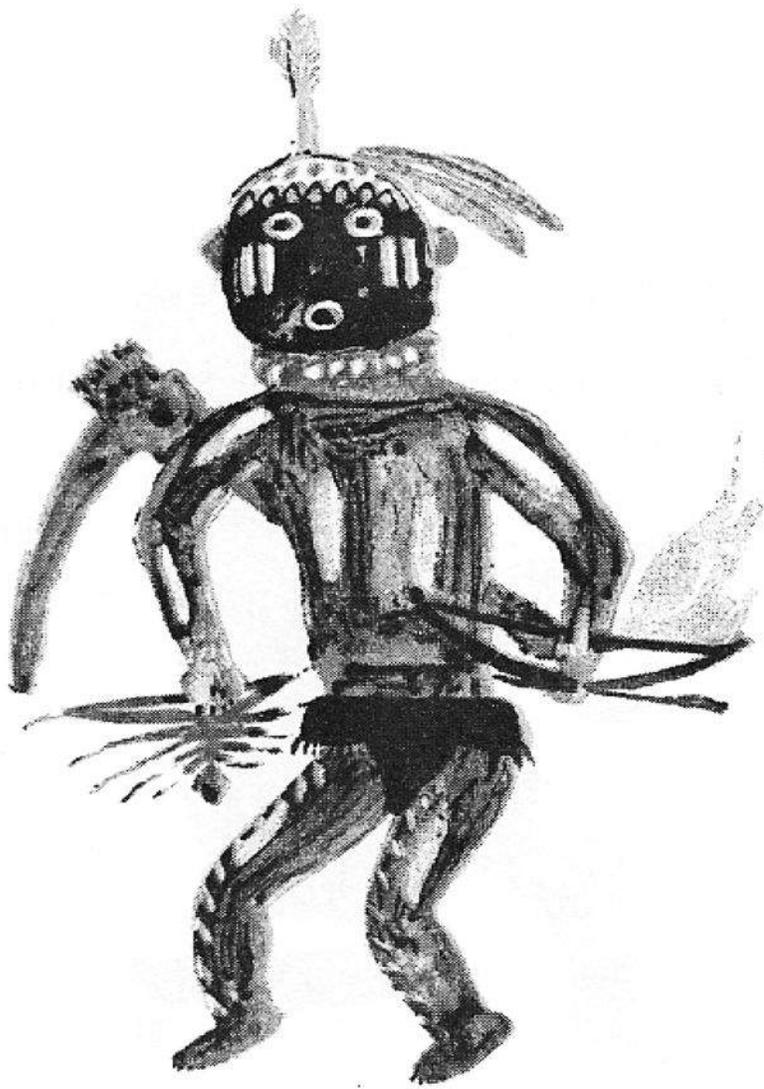


Sho'tokünũñwa in mural paintings, and on kiva curtains, holding lightning, corn, and a



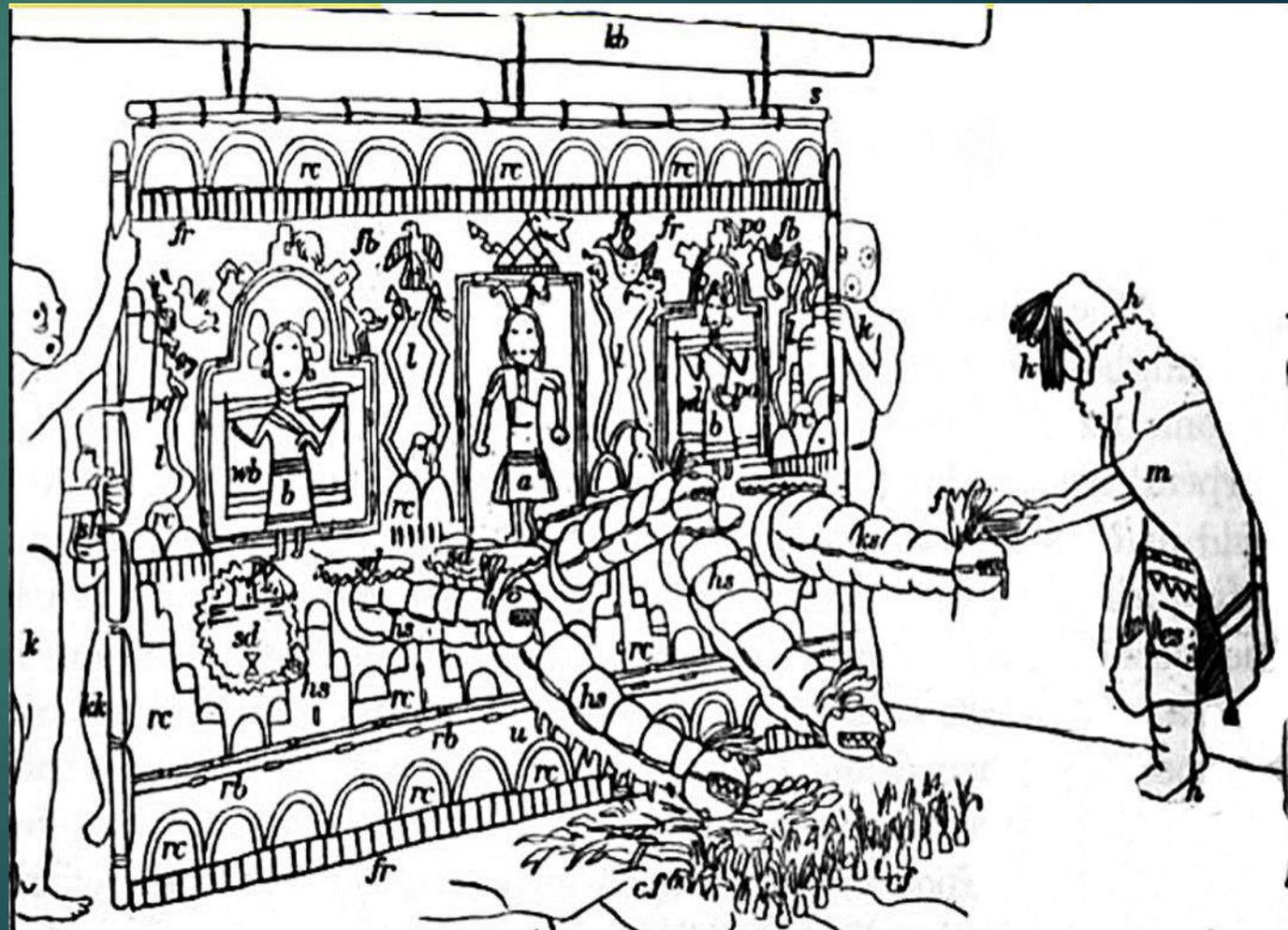
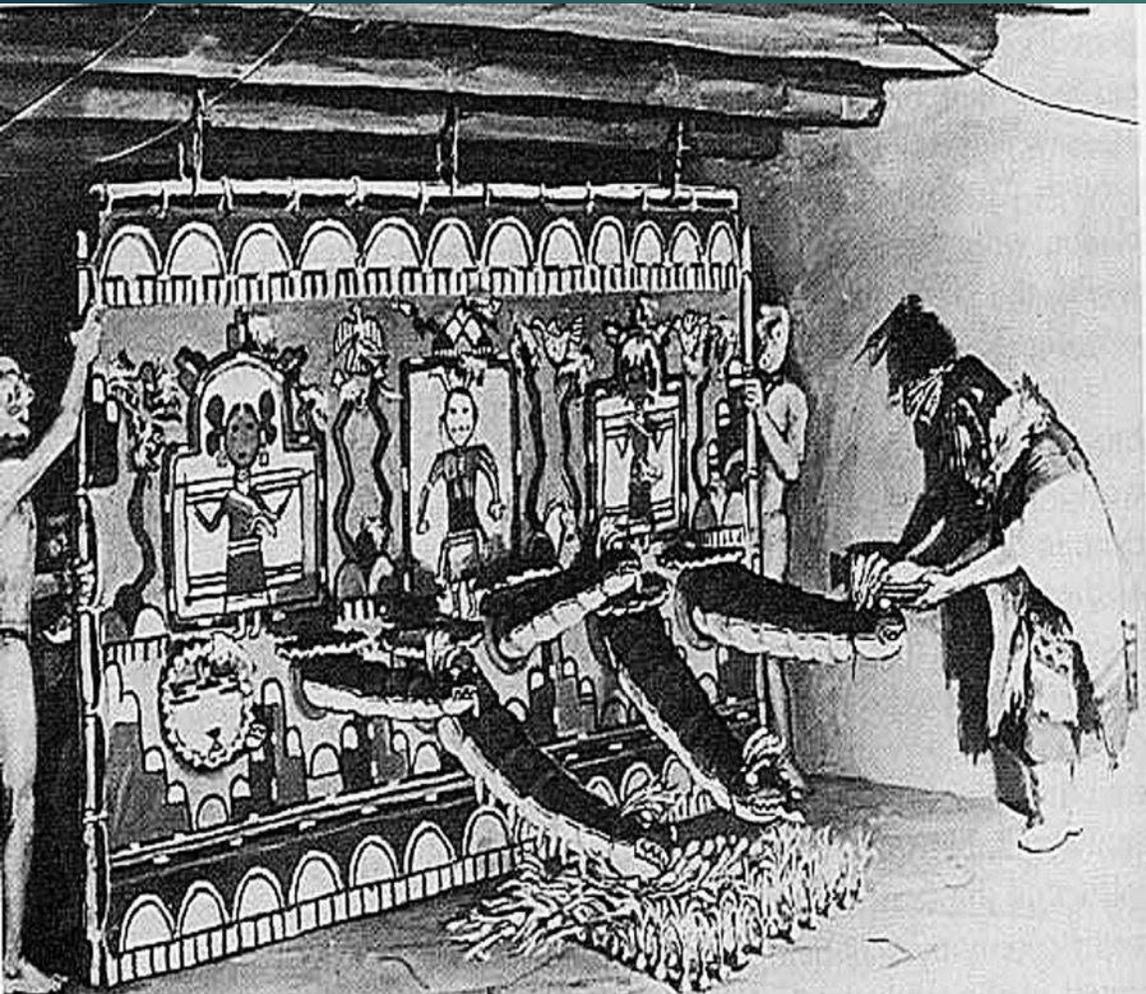
Pueblo tradition suggests that associations among serpents, lightning, and arrows, are ritually, and metaphorically analogous.

The lightning-snake, or lightning arrow is the fertilizing instrument used by **Sho'tokünûñwa**, or his impersonator.

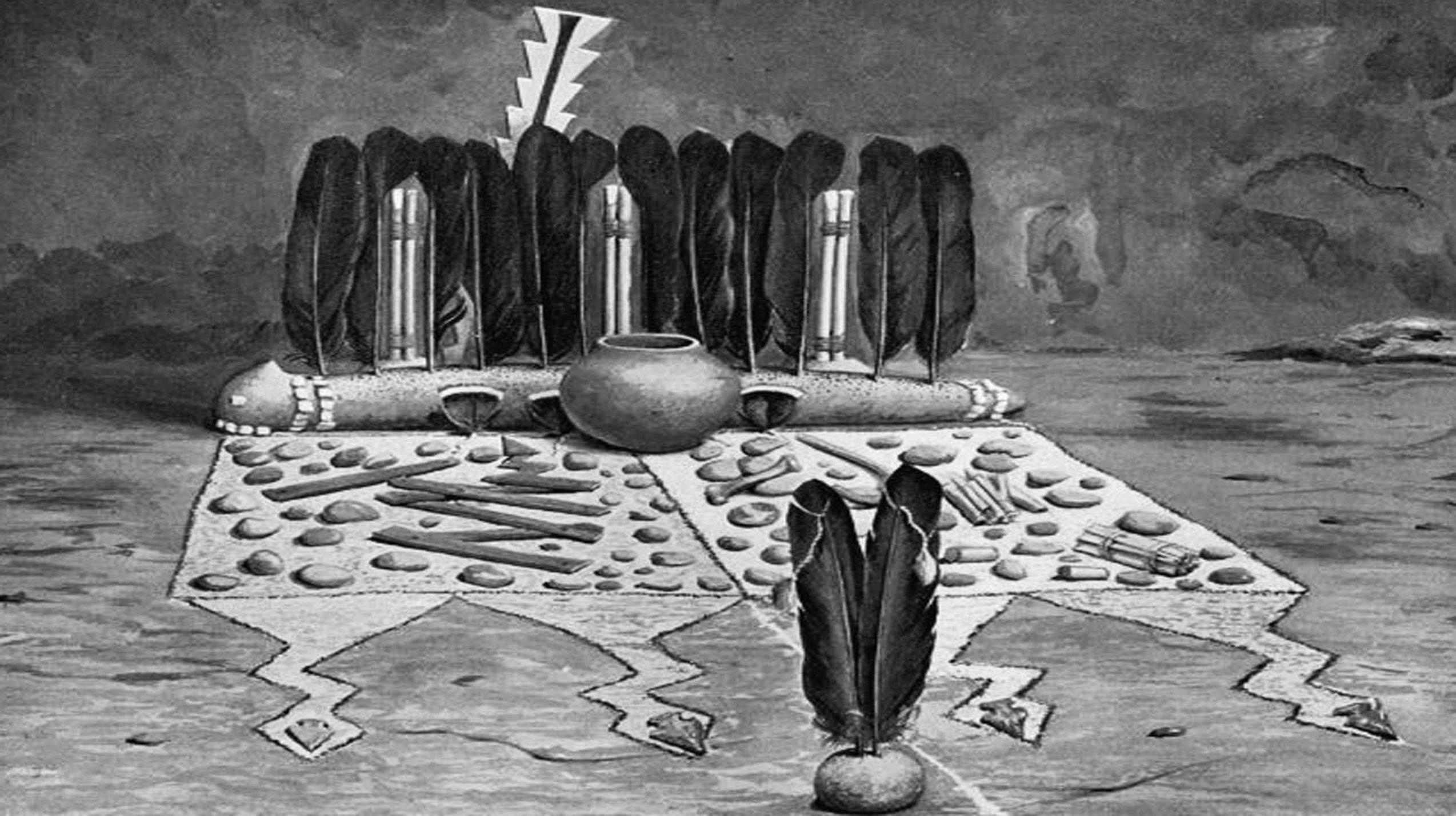


Lightning frame

# Lightning-serpents ritually fertilizing flower mounds in the Kiva.

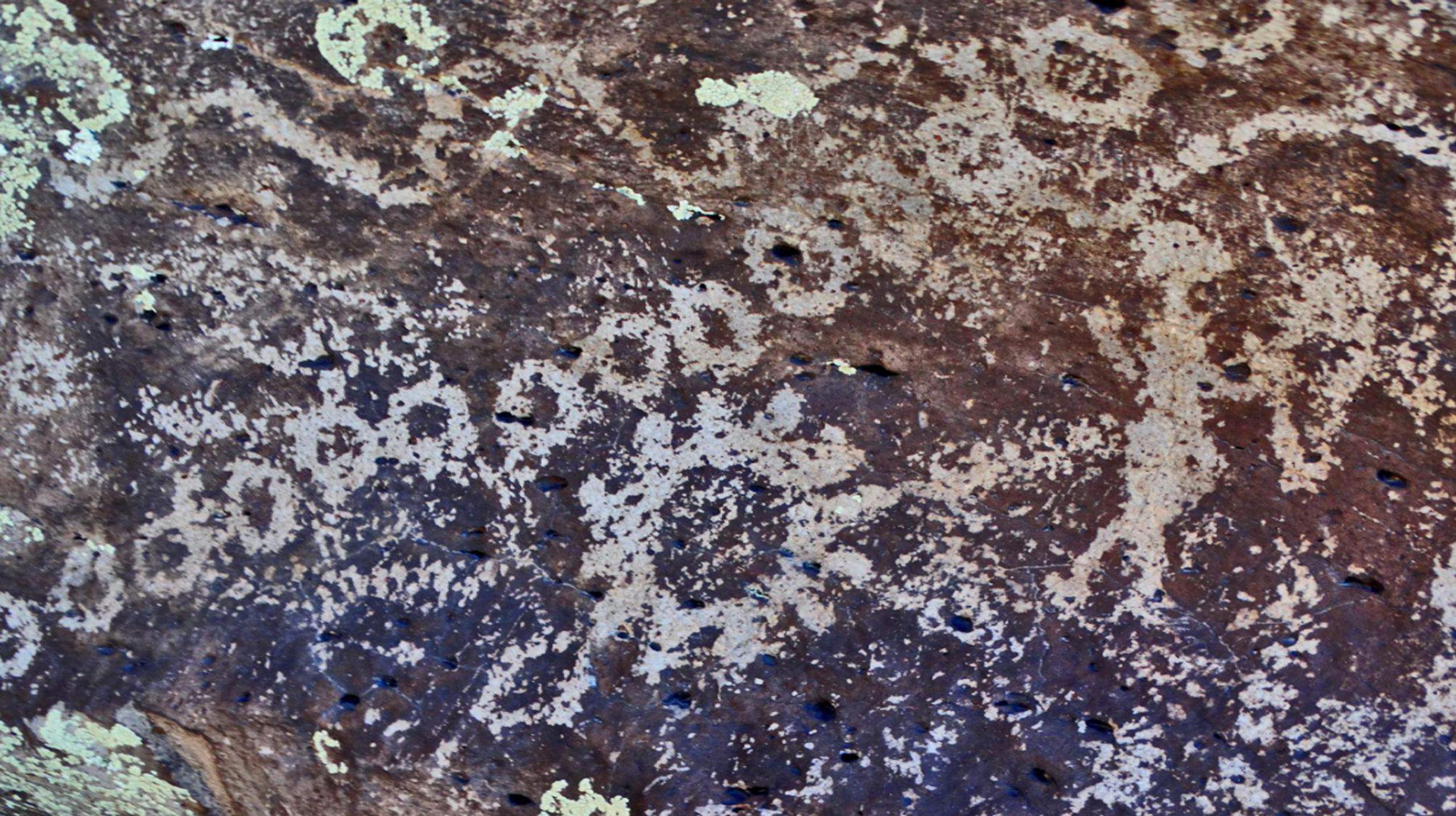


The prevailing belief among the Hopi is that a lightning strike leaves an arrow-like object, or yoysiva, metaphoric sperm, buried in the fields making them fertile



The serpent is vitally linked to the earth's fertility, and that fertility, of course, depends on rain. The serpent's phallic shape and its entrance into the female earth both suggest the human sexual metaphor through which agricultural fertility was symbolically rendered.

At Hopi, "this way of metaphorically referencing the process of fertilization as an arrow being shot, is also found in the way Hopi think about the process when a man impregnates a woman. It is said that a man is 'shooting his arrow'"







Corn  
Flowers

Muy'ingwa guiding an interwoven grouping of natural metaphors including lightning, serpent, seeds, and katsina to the si'papu. Metaphorically fertilizing, and watering a flower, allowing it to grow in the middle world of man.



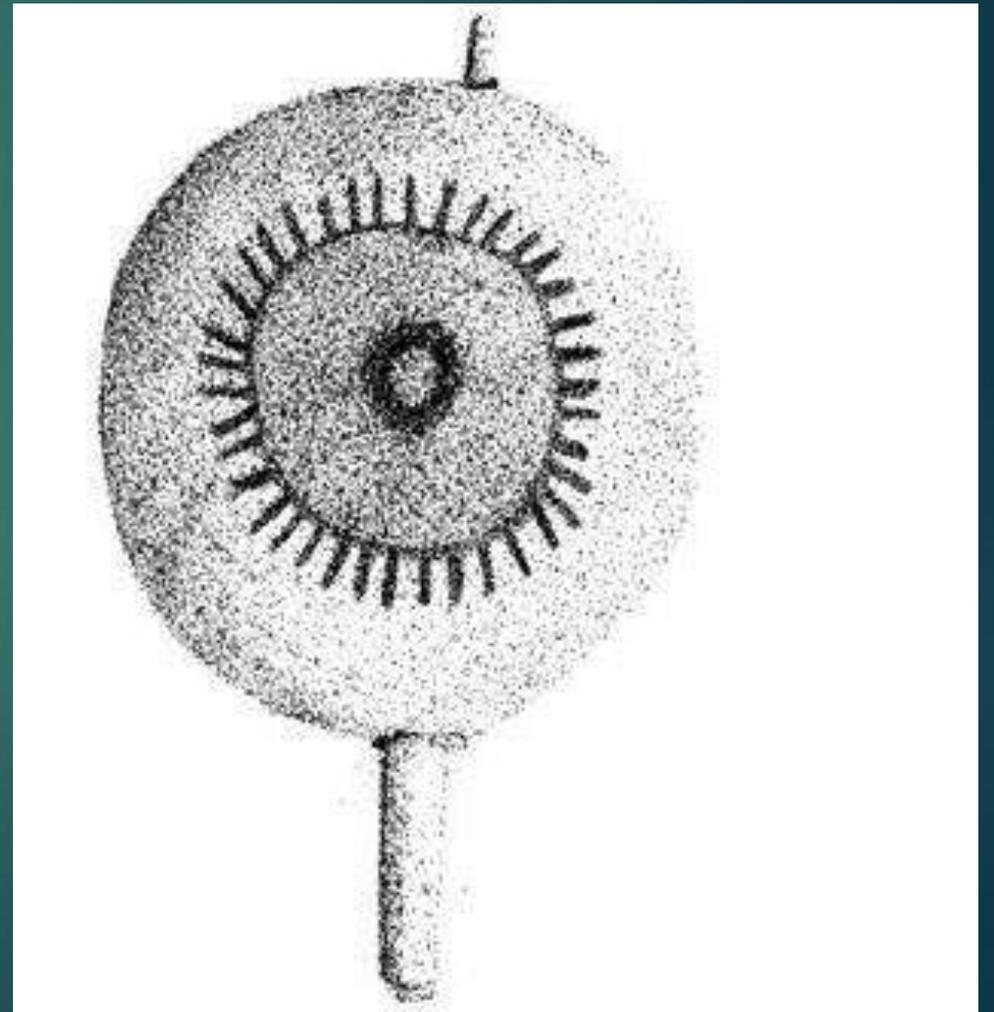
Sho'tokünũñwa,  
Muy'ingwa,  
lightning snake,  
Tuwa'boñtumsi, or  
Sand Altar  
Woman, and the  
sister of  
Muy'ingwa.



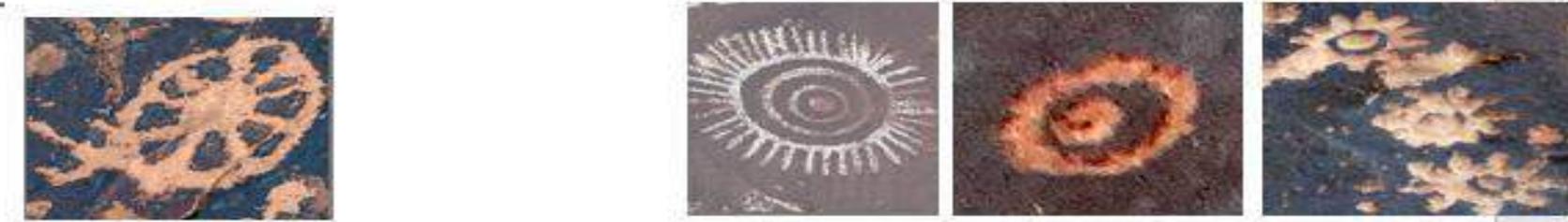
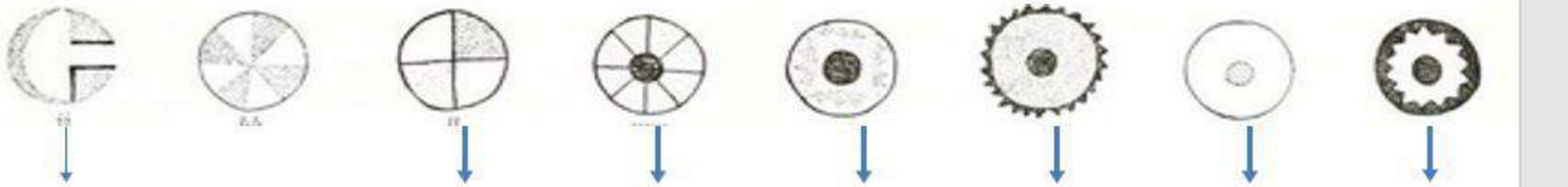
Hopi elders, interviewed by Watson Smith during the excavation of Awatovi in the 1950's, stated that a circle, or concentric circle can represent any flower depending on context. One flower can stand for many, or all.



The Hopi do not draw biologically correct flowers, but show a conflation of shape, germ, seed, or life spark, (soona'at). Sekaquaptewa.



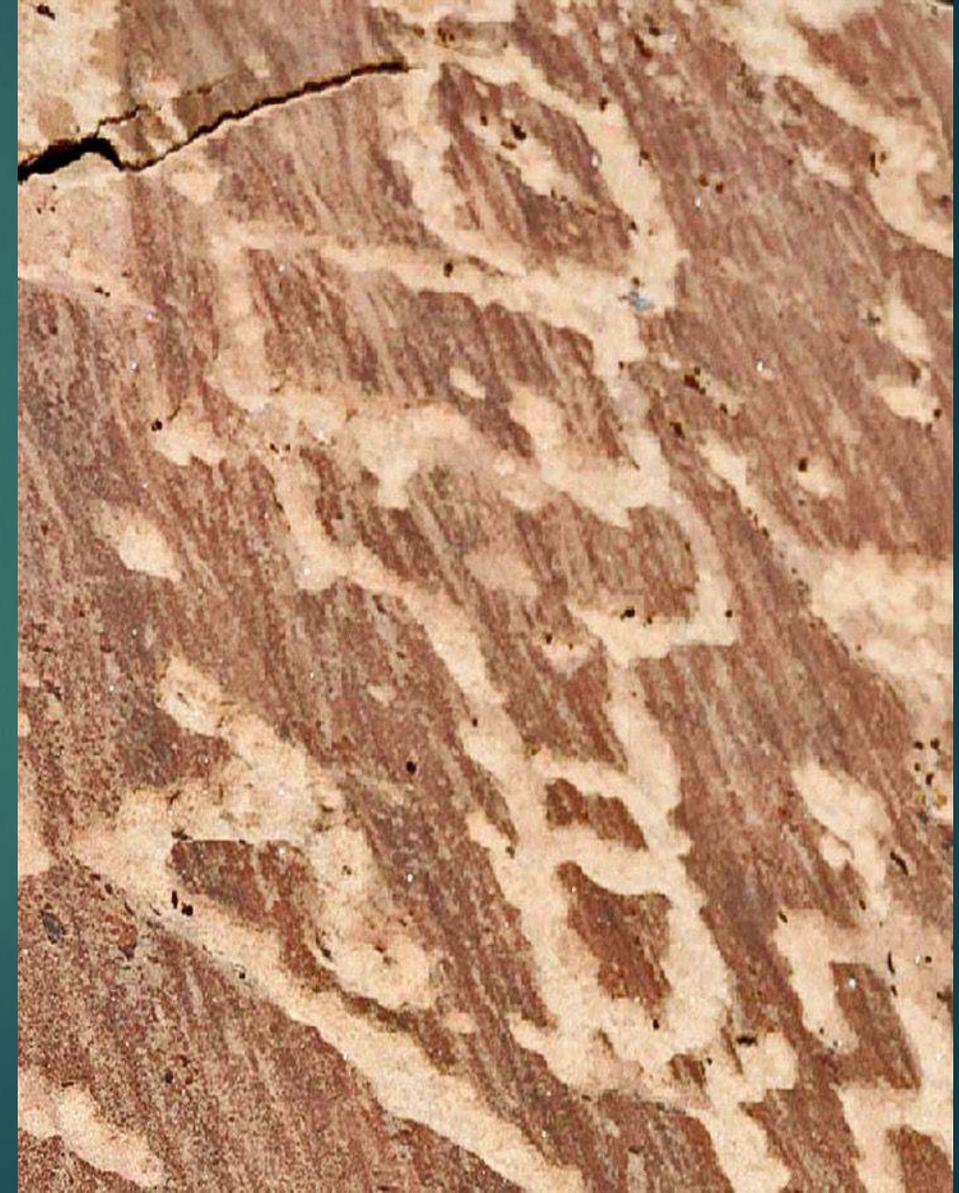
# Watson Smith's baseline mural flower types found as petroglyphs



Earlier versions of some flowers are found on Mimbres ceramics



# Petroglyphs of slab pahos with flower metaphor, and soona' at



























Hopi oral tradition includes a mythic “paradise.” A state, or place where food (corn) was plenty, and rains abundant - A world of perpetual summer, and flowers.

Uto-Aztecan speaking Hopi, of  
the American Southwest, have  
numerous **spirits**, associated with the  
“Flower World”, “breath-of-life”, new  
life, and fertility.

To simplify we will be discussing  
**Muy’ingwa/Alo’saka**, and  
**Sho’tokünûñwa**.

This otherworld , with fields in bloom, a place that  
“shines forth” “covered with colored blossoms , birds,  
and butterflies ”” can be brought forth in this world  
through human prayers, songs and actions”

Kelly Hays-Gilpin, Elizabeth Newsome, and Emory  
Sekaquaptewa

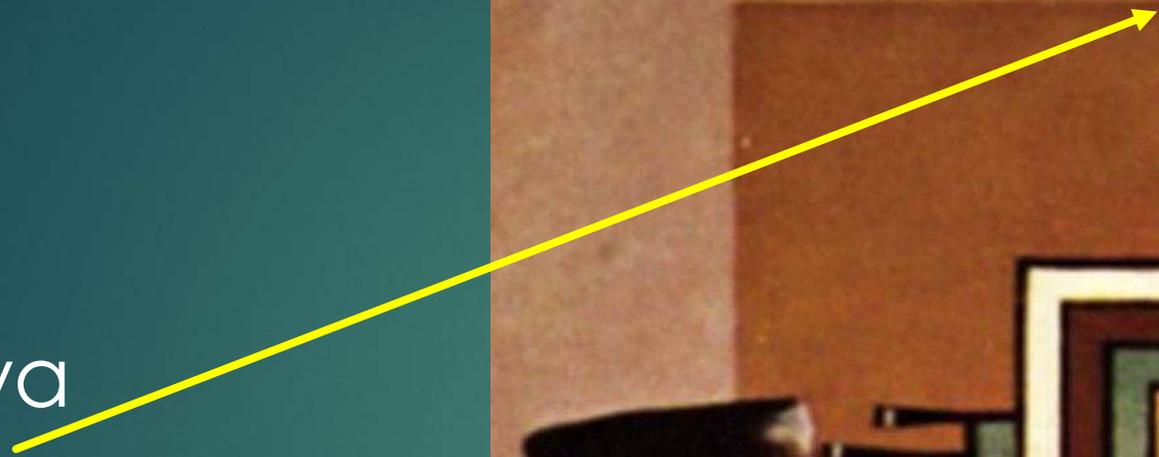
Ethnography informs us that spirits can be  
manipulated using all modes, or media, and  
that each can carry the same message of  
need.

Conflated  
images of  
Muy'ingwa,  
Sho'tokünûñwa,  
and  
Tuwa'boñtumsi,  
or Sand Altar  
Woman in  
petroglyph form.



# Si'papu sand painting

Muy'ingwa  
corn



Sho'tokünûñwa  
Chamahiya



Flower mound with  
flowers

