Rock Art of Dinetah: Myths and Cures of Navajo Ceremonialism

Purpose—Since these images are not so old and the traditional core of Navajo culture is still intact, we can identify cultural material that is associated with these images.

- Dinetah location: NW New Mexico
- Navajo occupation: 1600's and 1700's
- Time and place where Athabaskans and Puebloans combined and formed Navajo culture.
- Location of the origin of many Navajo ceremonies.
- When Navajos moved west to the Canyon de Chelly area, sandpaintings took the place of rock art for depiction of images related to ceremonies.

Navajo Ceremonies

- Healing
- There are seasonal restrictions, but ceremonies are not tied to the calendar.
- Images are made to attract the Holy People to the ceremony so they can help in healing.
- Rock art images have been replaced by sandpaintings.

- Diseases are caused by spiritual imbalance.
- The goal of all ceremonies is to bring the patient back into spiritual balance (hozho) and balance in all relationships (k'e).
- Healing is achieved through the arts, especially song, visual imagery and dance.
- There are several locations in Dinetah that appear to be associated with particular ceremonies.

Hozhooji--Blessingway

- The only positive ceremony: not for healing, but for blessing.
- Often performed in association with births, weddings, new homes, etc.
- Associated with plants and the earth.
- The mythology is the story of Changing Woman.

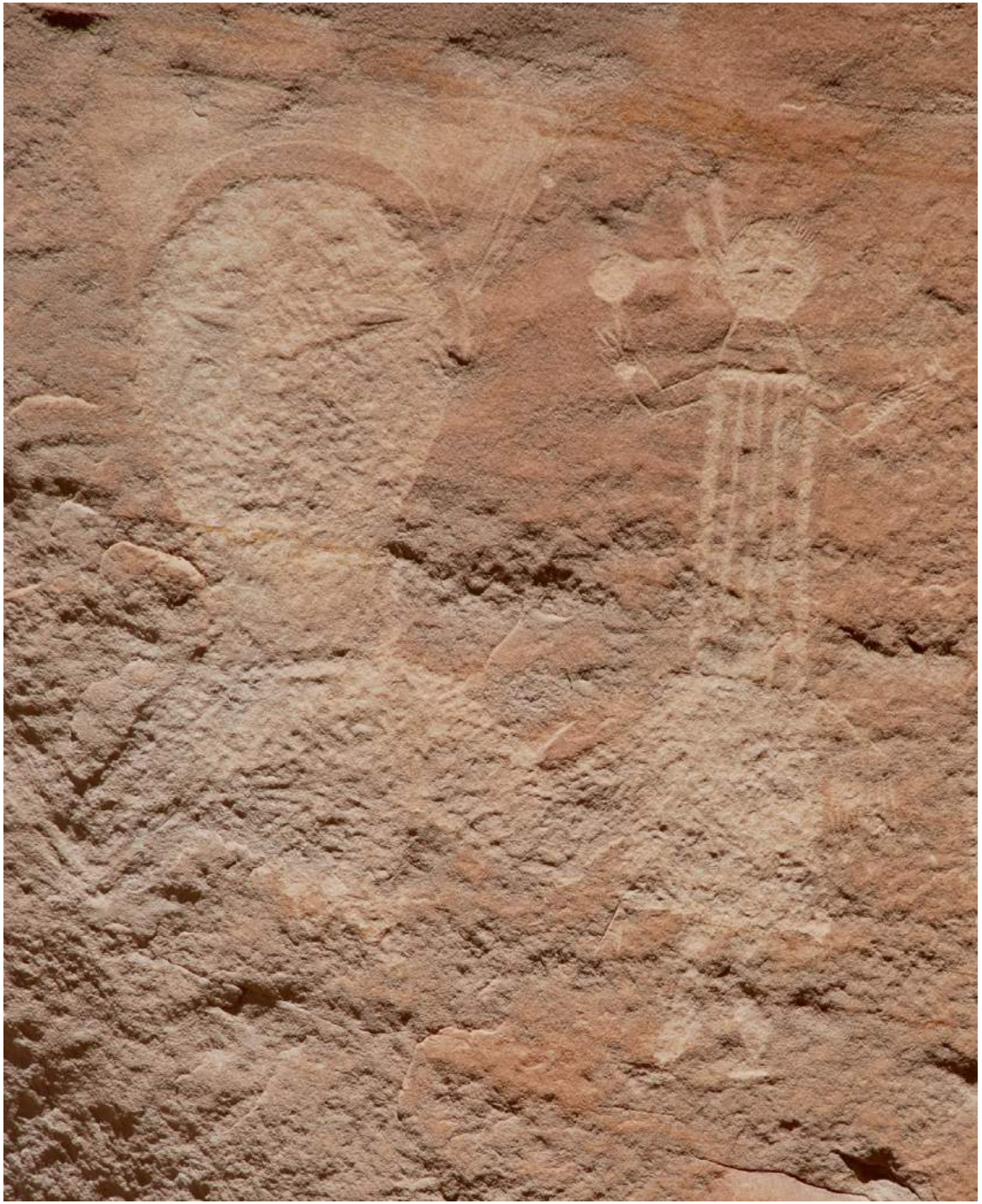
- Hozhooji--Blessingway

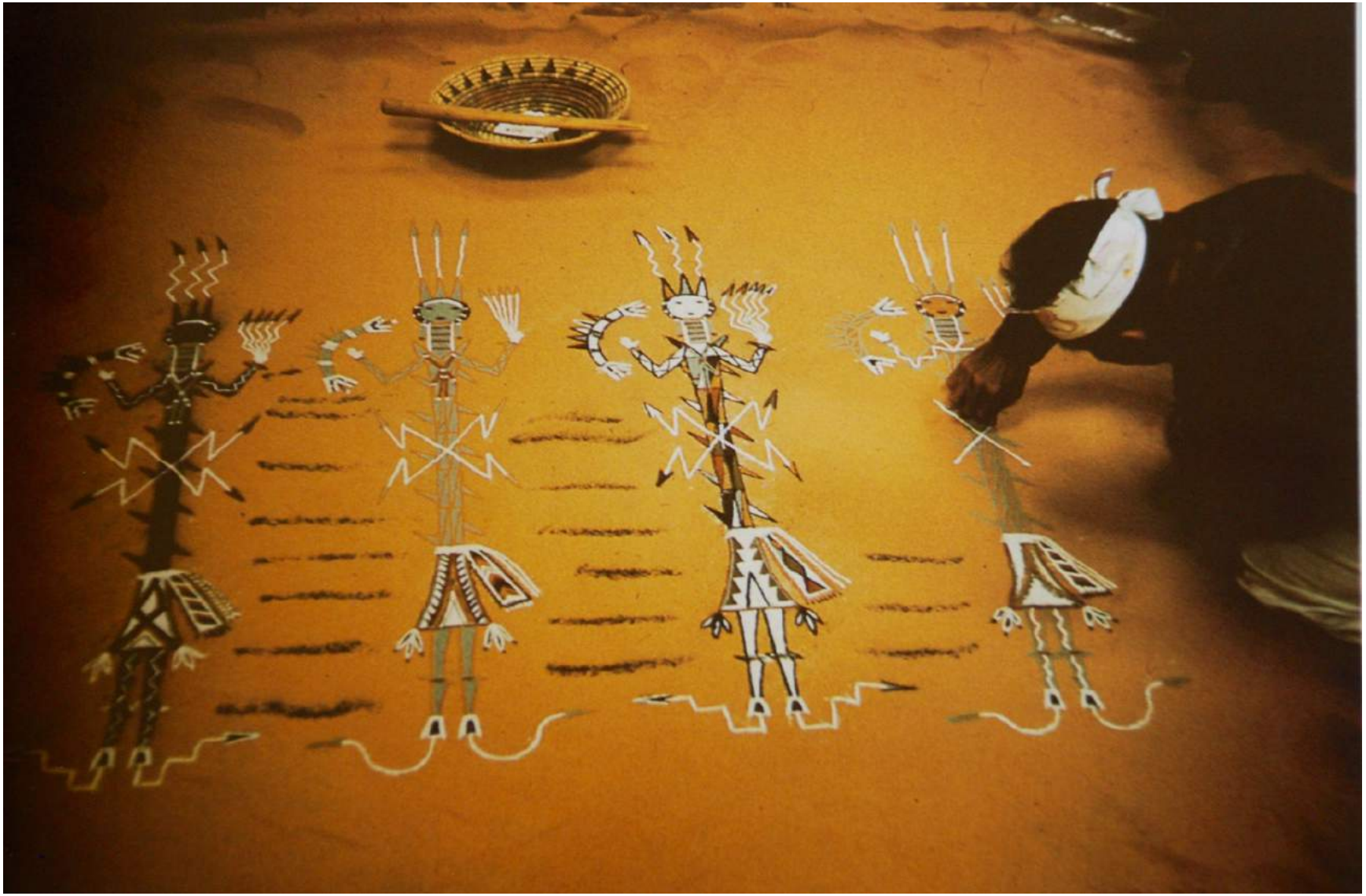
R J
V R

- Tl’ee’ji--Nightway

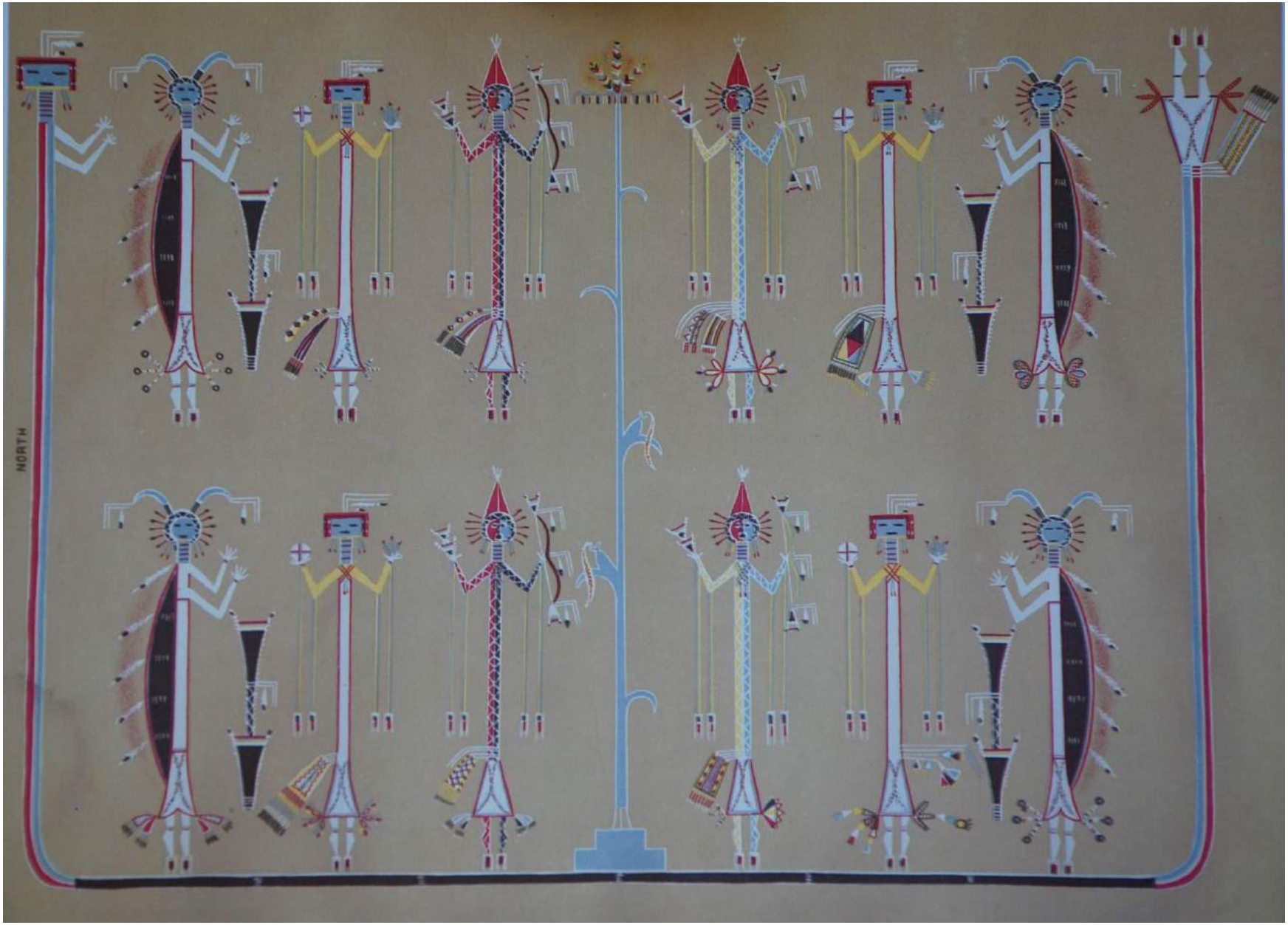
Tl’ee’ji--Nightway

- Also known as the Yeiibichai.
- Cures paralysis, blindness, deafness, and maladies of the head.
- The main characters of the myth are The Visionary and the Stricken Twins.

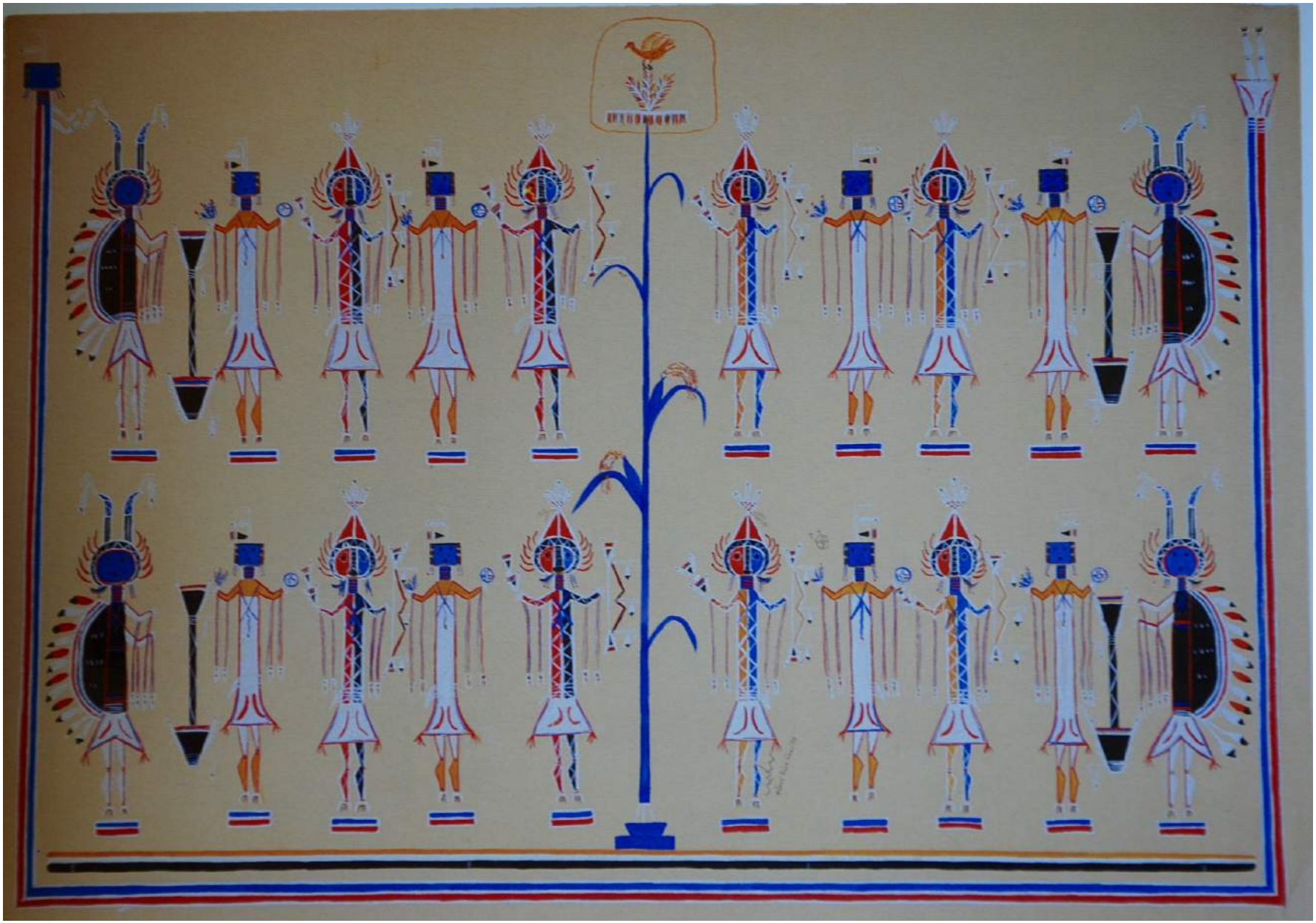




Wyman—Southwest Indian Drypainting—p. 91



Matthews—Night Chant—Plate 8

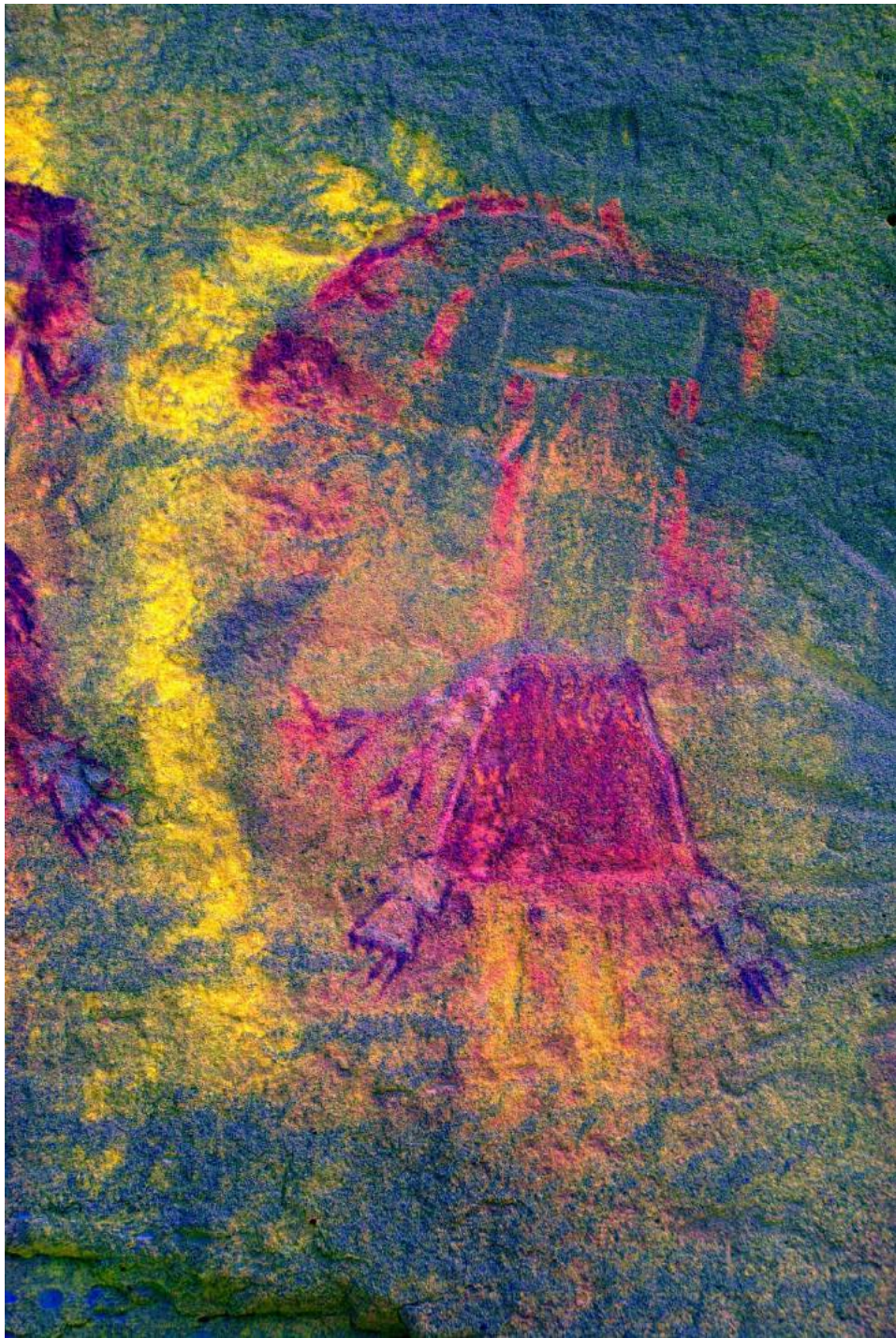


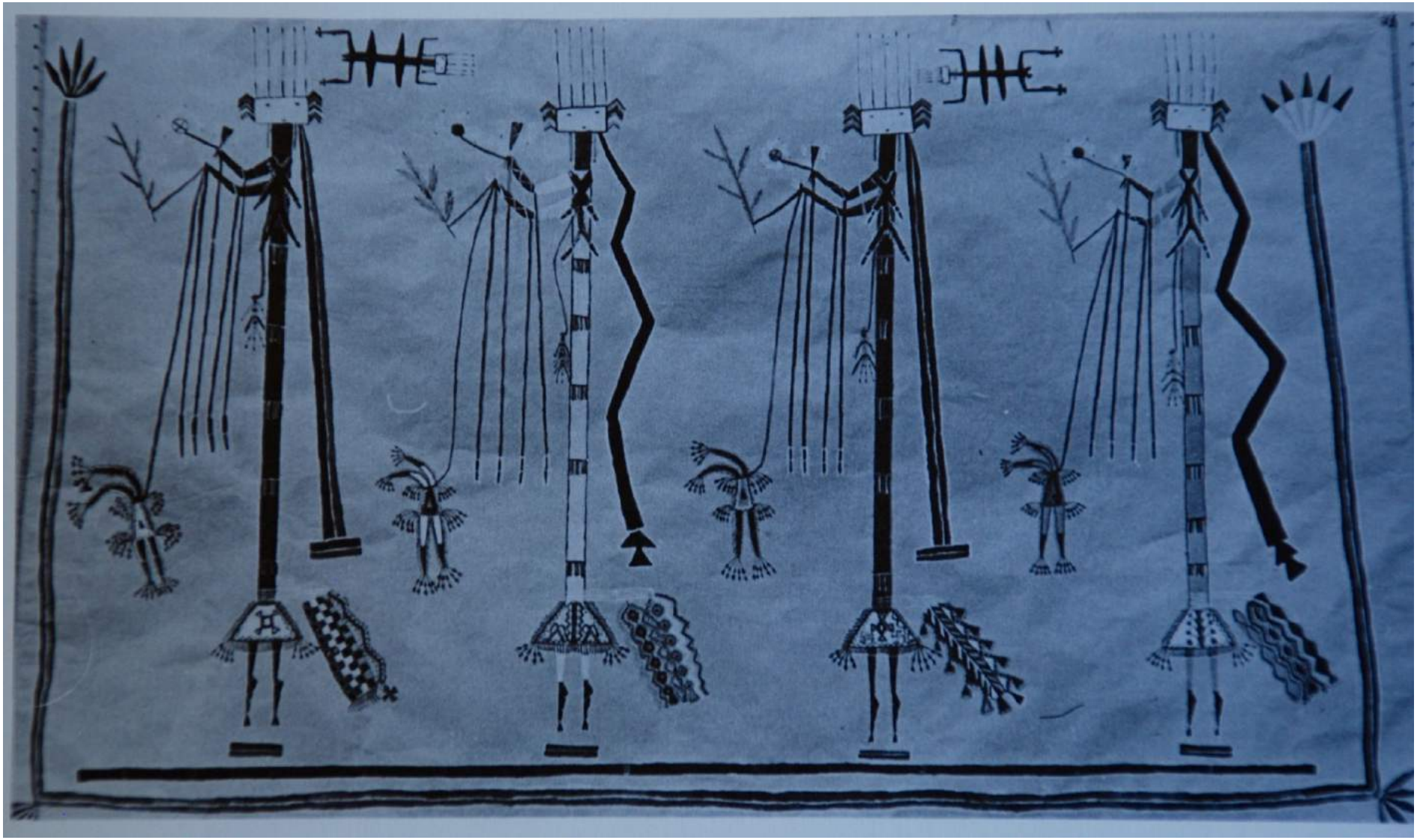
Faris—The Nightway—Plate 8

Dzil latajhi--Mountainway

- Cures bear sickness: arthritis and mental disturbances
- The Fire Dance is a part of Mountainway.
- The heroines of the myth are two sisters. One marries Bear, the other marries Big Snake.

- Dzil latahji--Mountainway





Wyman—Southwest Indian Drypainting—p. 40

Hozhonee--Beautyway

- Cures snake-related issues: snake bite, snake nightmares, rheumatism, sore throat, stomach trouble, kidney and bladder trouble and skin diseases or sores.
- Closely related to Mountainway.
- The heroine of the myth is the sister who marries Big Snake.

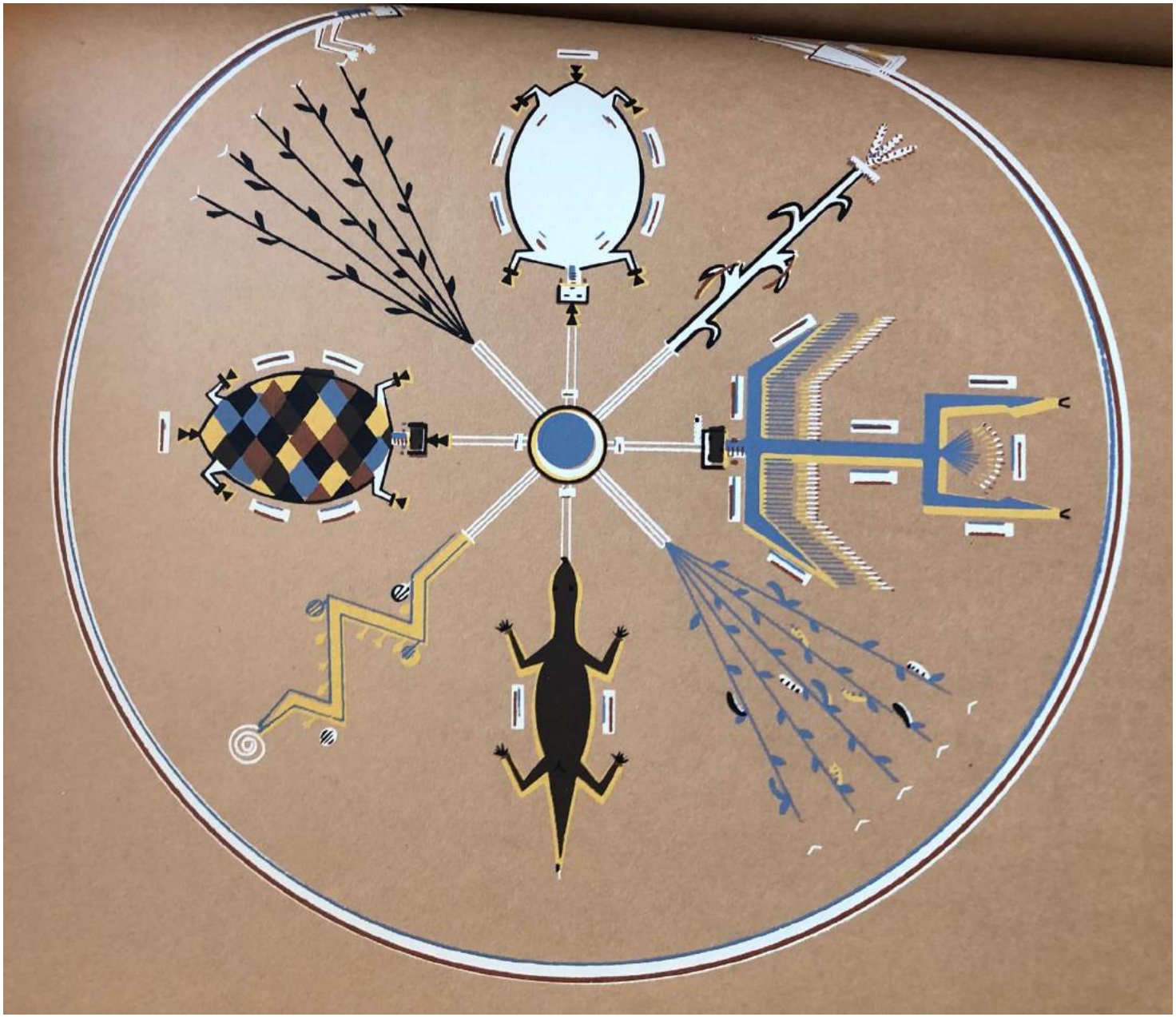
Tl’iish tso—Big Snake (Photo: Bob Young)

(Haile, Oakes and Wyman—Beautyway, Plate 1)

- Tl’iish adaaninigii—Endless Snake

- Haile, Oakes and Wyman—Beautyway, PlateVI.

Tabaastiin Tso—Big Otter

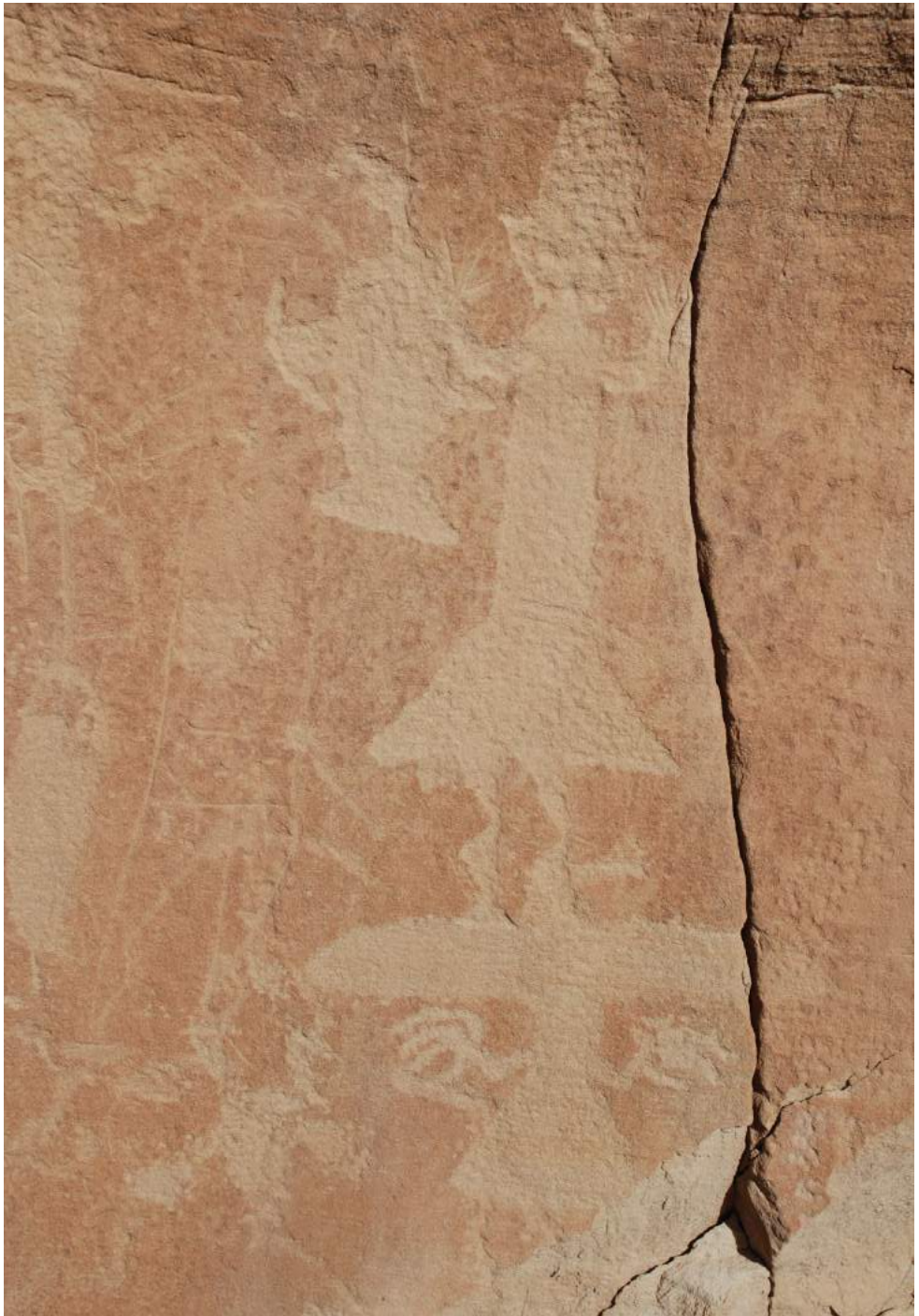


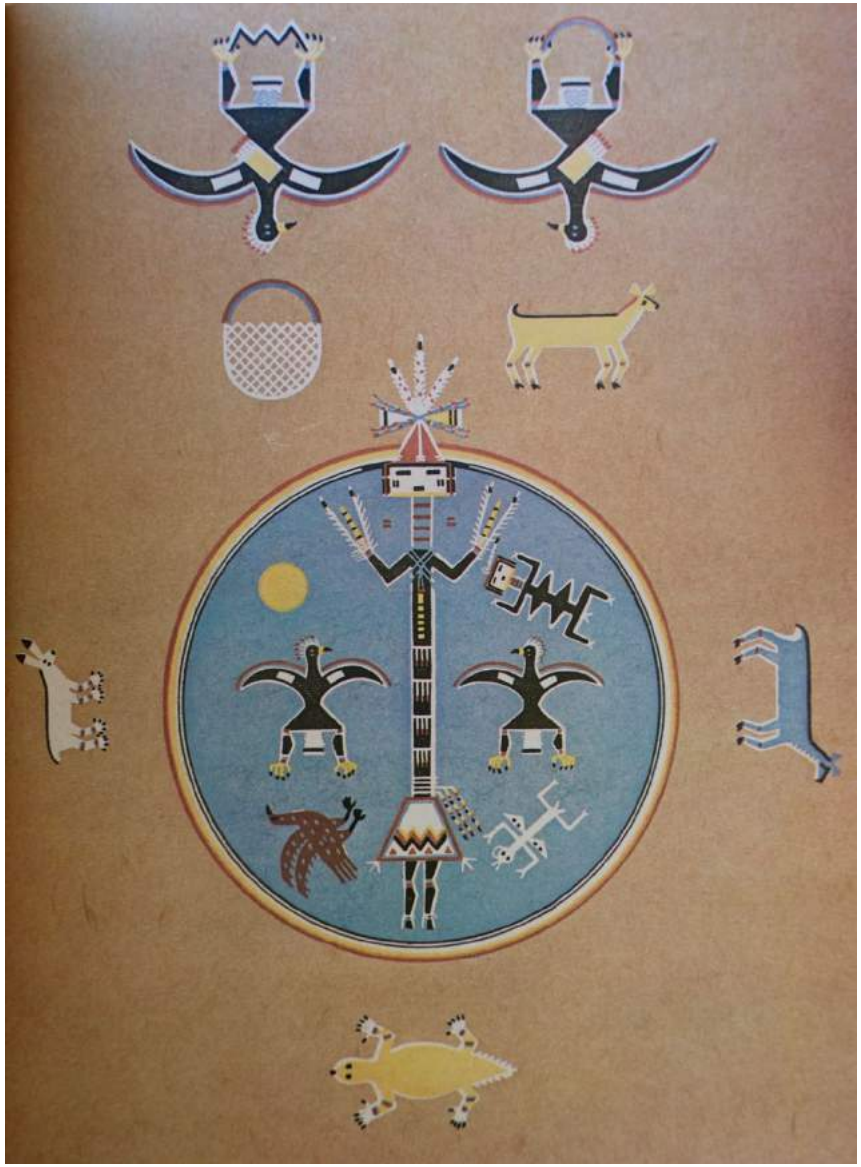
Haile—Beautyway—Plate XIII

Yoo’ee--Beadway

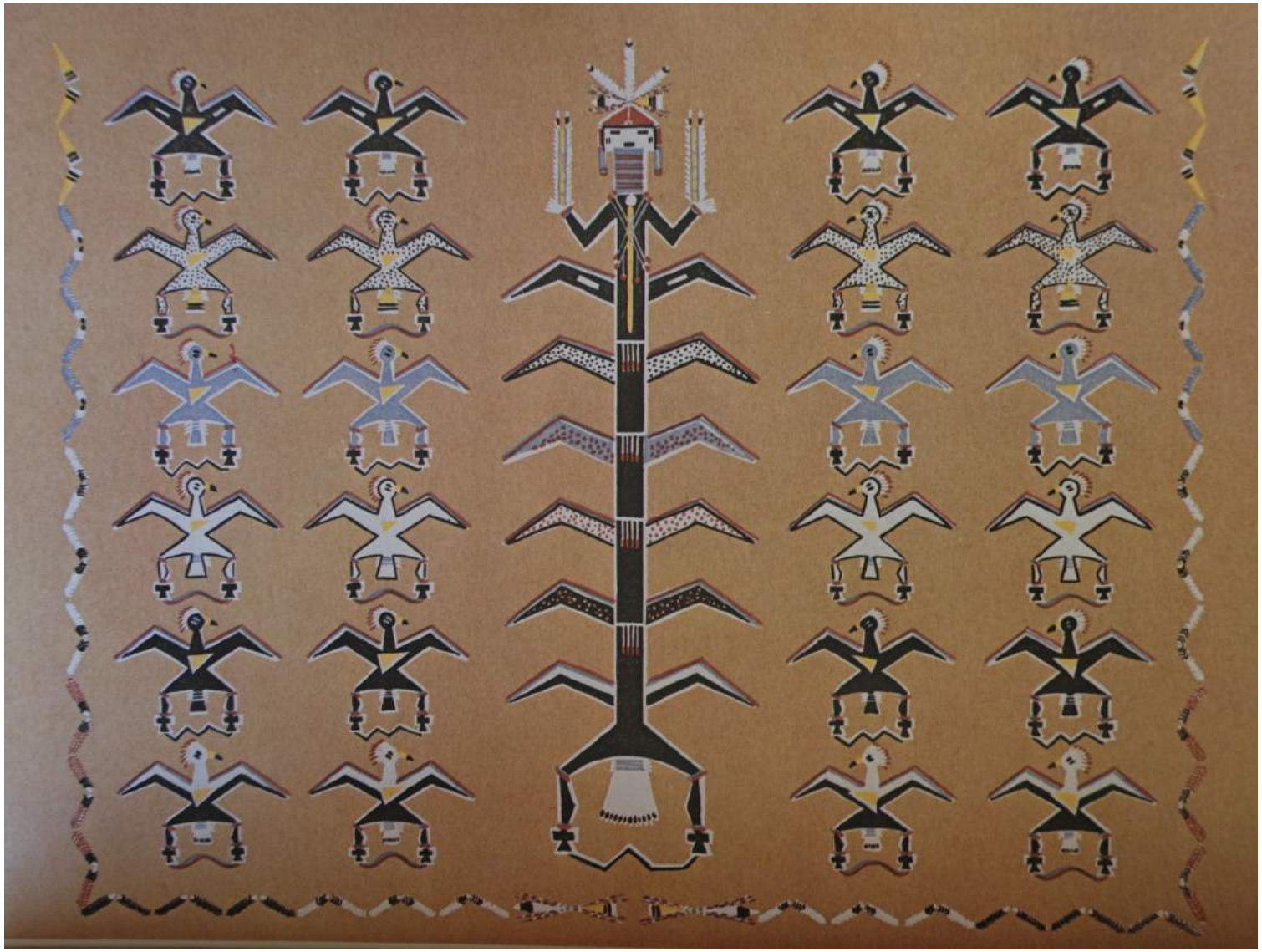
- Closely related to Eagleway
- Cures head diseases, skin disease, anorexia, nausea, swollen legs.
- These diseases are caused by exposure to eagles, usually through hunting and trapping.
- Hero of the myth helps eagles and is taken to their home in the sky where he learns the ceremony.

Yoo’ee--Beadway



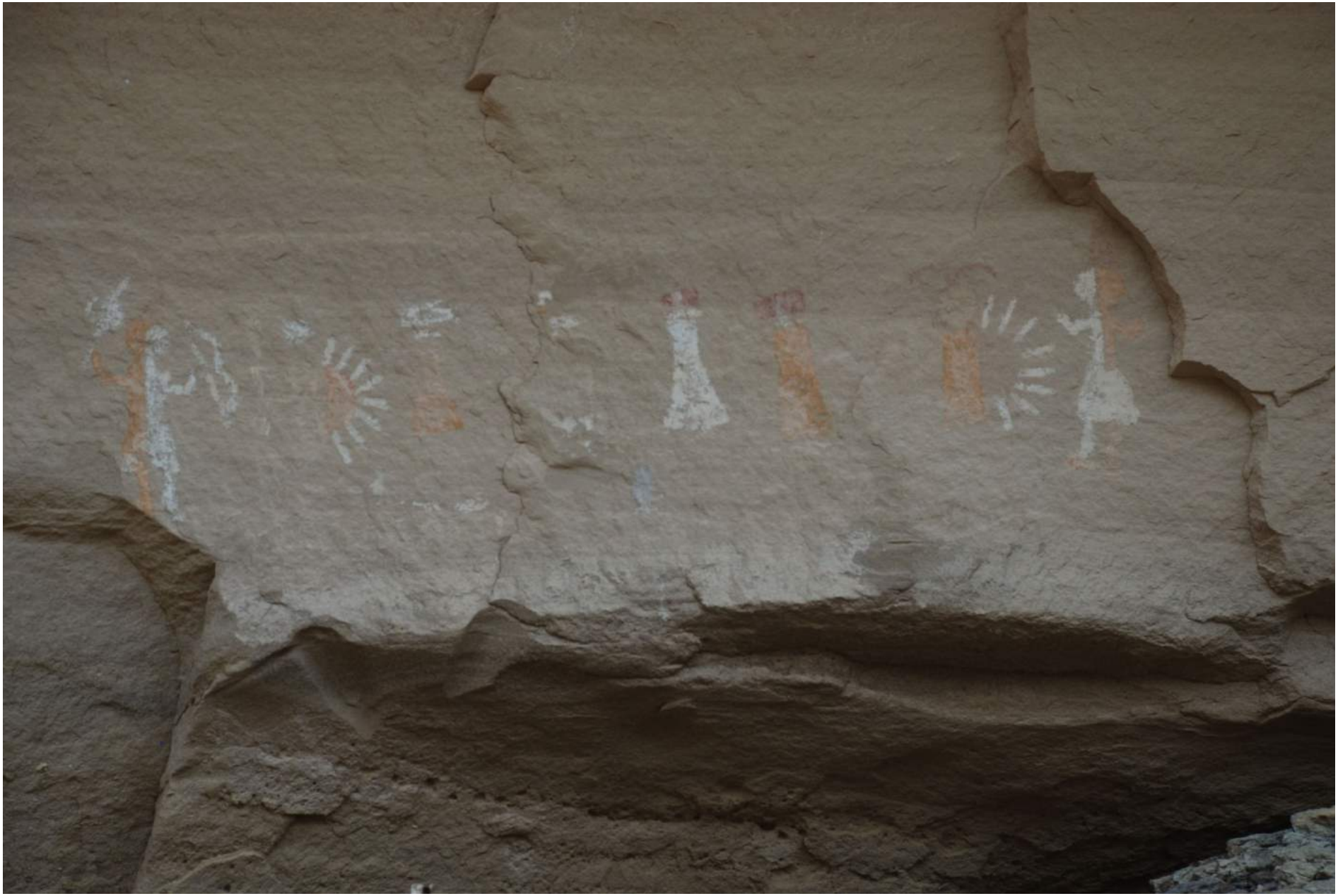


Reichard—Navajo Medicine Man Sandpaintings—Plate 1



Reichard—Navajo Medicine Man Sandpaintings—Plate 8

- Ceremonial?



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