

ANTHROPOMORPHIZED CROOKED STAFFS

CROOKED STAFF BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Visual symbols of crooked staffs are found in a wide variety of size, shape, and length (Figure 1). They can be placed vertically, horizontally, diagonally and/or upside down within rock art panels (Figure 2). In the literature, these objects have been termed crooked staffs, crooked wands, crooked sticks, crooked prayer sticks, crooked canes, and canes. To date 25 cultural names for crooks or crooked staffs have been recorded.

Crooked staff symbolism has what Eliade termed multi-variant or deeply layered meanings (Eliade 1991:15). For instance, a crooked staff may be a tool used by shepherds to control sheep or as a support device for older people. On another level, crooks have manifest as well as spiritual symbolism. This duality is displayed using a wide variety of methods. In this example, the two manifest crooked staffs are displayed in a juxtaposed fashion (Figure 3). Their concomitant spirit or supernatural aspects are presented as lightly pecked, almost effluvium-like, emanations of crook images.



Figure 1. *Inscription Point, Arizona. Thick staffs.*



Figure 2. *Hummingbird Point, Gila River, Arizona. An upside-down crook image.*



Figure 3. *Picacho Mountains, Arizona. Note the ghost-like spiritual crook forms moving up and away from the dual manifest crook images.*



Figure 4. *Inscription Point, Arizona. An anthropomorph holding a crooked staff.*

When a manifest crooked staff is carried by a priest or shaman it can become a symbol of authority (Figure 4).

In certain cultures an opening or crack in a rock's surface is considered a pathway or opening into the supernatural. Likewise, crooked staffs can generate a passageway from the human lived world into the supernatural. In some societies the crook itself is the "road" over which spirits travel (Parsons 1996:198, 280, 569).

In many Native American cultures crooked staffs are metaphors representing and substantiating the underlying quintessential essence of all things. This essence is characterized as an invisible, magical, omnipotent substructure permeating all things, while giving them life and movement. Words used to describe these phenomena vary from culture to culture. However, most of these descriptors can be loosely translated as medicine, supernatural power or simply power (Eliade 1996:19–23; Hultkrantz 1976:9–14).

The omnipresent, moving aspects of power are seen as swirling inseparable, interconnected energy patterns which could be called powerscapes. It is in this numinous world of power that spirits of all types exist. Observation of ever changing energy patterns generated by the movement of power compelled visionaries

throughout Native America to illustrate these extraordinary phenomena using a very similar series of linear devices and patterned motifs. Arrays of sinuous lines and patterned shapes are observed in many North American rock art styles and other cultural materials. Sinuous lines, snaking from crook configurations, radiating from spirit and other forms are displays of symbolic numinous energy. This power symbolism has been variously described as representing life energy, force lines, power lines, or tignas (Figure 5).

When manifest crooked staffs are imbued with power, they become numens capable of accomplishing fantastic feats. Native American mythologies tell of crooked staffs in the hands of cultural heroes, gods, and shamans, blasting a tunnel through a mountain, parting the waters of an ocean, and bringing the dead back to life.



Figure 5. *Little Black Mountain, Arizona Strip, Arizona. A crooked staff is displaying power imagery. Note the power or energy lines moving from the crook.*

Other stories of their exploits abound (Bahr 1994:212; Laird 1976:196, 1984:37).

Anthropomorphized Crooks

Fragments of unique ethnography, oral tradition and mythology from a number of cultures appear to have similar connotations that are replicated in rock art. Isabel Kelly and Carobeth Laird, working forty years apart, with separate bands of the Chemehuevi people, recorded parallel ethnographies. The stories collected tell of crooked staffs speaking to their owners who, of course, were shaman. Crook staffs in their spirit form are described as giving instructions to dreamers. Finally, it was thought that certain crooked staffs had lives of their own (Kelly 1936:132; Laird 1976:49, 216).

Corresponding tales in the Pima creation narratives also anthropomorphize crooks. For instance the mythic Earth Doctor's cane had "eyes on it just like a person." During its adventures it is described as "looking around." In one of the stories its owner uses his crook to vault into the sky and fly with it to his designation (Bahr 1994:72, 240, 241).

Leslie White's 1930s research at the Acoma Pueblo revealed that prayer sticks in the form of a shepherd's crook, are felt to be animate (White 1930:126). At both Acoma and Jemez Pueblos many prayer sticks have eyes and a mouth, while their colors identify them as being male or female. Elsie Parson's 1920's research at Jemez Pueblo discovered that prayer sticks bound together with crooks were both male and female (Parsons 1925:100–101, Figure a and b).

A number of rock art panels scattered throughout the American west provide visual confirmation that these oral traditions, myths, and cultural thought processes were transmitted, understood, and illustrated over time and distance. An amazingly similar pattern of crook symbolism depicting crooked staff motifs having anthropomorphic legs, feet, arms, and heads is



Figure 6. Picacho Mountains, Arizona.

widespread. Many of these petroglyphs give the impression that these anthropomorphized crooks are indeed carefree and moving about pursuing "a life of their own."

A fine example of the anthropomorphized crook motif created by the O'odham people can be found in the Picacho Mountains, located in the desert of southern Arizona. This animated petroglyph's head is the staff's crook (Figure 6). Arms and a leg have been added to complete the figure. The anthropomorphized crook figure appears to be sauntering through a segment of the highly-spirited supernatural world surrounded by other crook imagery. Compare this image to Figure 7 a., b., c., and f.

The canyons of southeastern Utah have a number of anthropomorphized crook figures as part of involved petroglyph panels. Like the figure in Arizona's Picacho Mountains, an Anasazi figuration (Figure 7a) just as his Arizona O'odham counterpart, affects a relaxed, unconcerned manner. His head is turned casually to the left as if he is looking over his shoulder. His arms are carried in a parity of today's comic book tough guy characters. The feet of this figure are executed in detail and illustrate nicely the spirit crook's forward motion.

In this detail (Figure 7b), the anthropomorphized crook figure appears to be alarmed. It seems to have jumped back from an object to its left. The

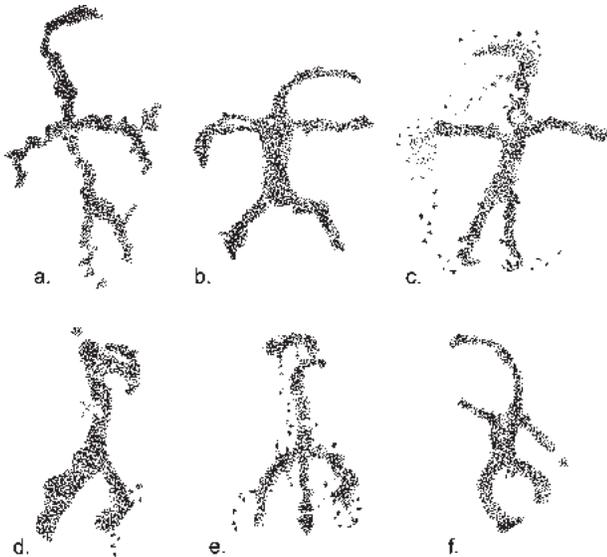


Figure 7. a. Southeastern Utah; b. San Juan County, Utah; c. Butler Wash, Utah; d. Little Black Mountain, Arizona; e. Rochester Creek, Utah; f. Mill Creek, Utah.

crook keeps a close watch as he assumes a classic, broad legged stance, with outthrust arm to fend off unknown advances.

A small anthropomorphized crook is found as part of a large, Basketmaker II and III petroglyph panel (Figure 7c). This figure is looking to his right. His feet are turned inward. His arms are outstretched in what may be a welcoming gesture.

Another small anthropomorphized crook, located in the Arizona Strip, was likely created by the Virgin Anasazi culture. It is found on a tumbled down boulder with only a few other images (Figure 7d).

A legged crook is also found in the lower right quadrant of the famous Rochester Creek panel. This beautifully interrelated panel is attributed to the Fremont and other cultures (Figure 7e).

An anthropomorphized crook, with a sauntering posture, is part of a rock art panel found in Mill Creek, Utah (Figure 7f).



Figure 8. Upper Pima Canyon, South Mountain, Arizona.

The South Mountains of Arizona shelters a unique dance scene (Figure 8). In this detail, a Hohokam adept cunningly crafted a rock art panel in which a crooked staff, displaying its spirit power, leads a group of dancers. The dancers and crooked staff are heavily pecked into the rock. The apparitional arm, leg, and crooked staff displayed by the spirit crook are lightly scratched using simple lines, furnishing the visual paradox necessary to render the crook a spirit dancer.

Unique among these motifs is a petroglyph grouping found near a beautiful perennial spring in John's Canyon, Utah. The spirit crook has underpinnings of feet. The legged crook's association with two other individuals and a legged staff, perhaps in dance, implies a supernatural camaraderie (Figure 9).



Figure 9. John's Canyon, Utah. Photo, Chris Rhodes.



Figure 10. Butler Wash, Utah. Photo, Chris Rhodes

An extraordinary example of this mythic reflection is a petroglyph of a spirit figure on a journey, carrying a burden basket, with a casually suspended tump line (Figure 10). This figuration is rendered with a full sized crooked staff thrust in front of its body. The tilt of the staff and body, plus an additional “leg,” provides the illusion of forward motion. Perhaps the crooked spirit is traveling or is being pulled in an occult manner with the crooked staff being both the mode of travel and numinous pathway.

Like the more masterfully pecked figure in Butler Wash, this smaller delineation is also holding its own crooked staff (Figure 11). He is grasping the staff as figures of power do; a firm two-handed grip, with the arms locked and the crooked segment of the staff situated away from the body. However, the position of this crooked staff is rare, perhaps unique. In most occurrences the crook



Figure 11. Wolf Man Site, near Butler Wash, Utah.

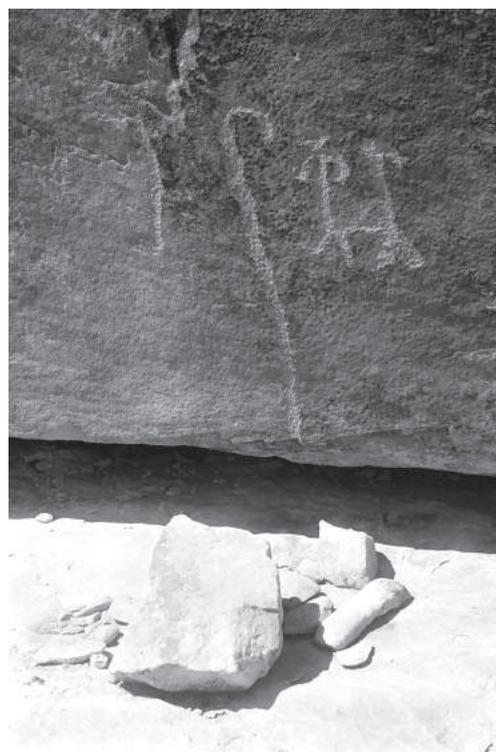


Figure 12. Upper Step Canyon. Photo, Chris Rhodes.

portion of the staff is shown pointing away from its proprietor. This image has additional peculiarities. It appears to have a developed body draped with clothing.

This cluster of petroglyphs (Figure 12) includes one and possibly two crooked staffs. Two anthropomorphs are located below and to the right



Figure 13. *Rock Shelter within the Esplanade, Grand Canyon, Arizona. Photo, Chris Rhodes.*

of the larger staff's crook. It has been suggested that these figures are engaged in copulation and that the crook(s) are part of fertility symbolism. While there is interaction between these figures, based on the graphic nature of rock art depicting the sex act, it is not clear that these figures are engaged in an act of sexual intercourse. Closer examination reveals that the figure on the right is, in fact, an anthropomorphized crook supporting a hominine head or headdress of some sort. An alternate sub-text of this panel may suggest an intimate spiritual connection with the supernatural. Perhaps the supposed phallus is a symbolic "road" over which the anthropomorphic crook is traveling to reach its owner.

The anthropomorphized crook phenomenon is also found in painted form (Figure 13). This tall, thin slightly swaying legged crook is painted in

white and outlined using a rich red/brown pigment. Its stubby legs are similar to the legs on the crooked figure found in Upper Step Canyon. The style of this panel is likely Archaic. Certain Pueblos paint their crooks. For instance, at Cochiti the lower end of the crooked staff is painted in the cardinal colors of this group (Goldfrank 1927:54). Two cob-like masses bisect the crook's body. These shapes may represent spiritual aspects of corn. A power line issues from the lower corn-like mass and touches a number of figures in an elaborate painted composition to its right. At Hopi, the chief Powamu priest carries a long crooked staff with corn and other ritual objects tied to its center (Voth 1901:Plate LVIII). Perhaps the anthropomorphized crook in this painting is participating in a spiritual ceremony.

The hand that crafted the pecked cluster of glyphs in Figure 14, positioned a legged crook, expelling power imagery from its tip, above a natural concavity. The spirit crook form appears to drift



Figure 14. *Picacho Mountains, Arizona.*



Figure 15. *Sand Island, Utah.*

from this vent-like opening into the embrace of a classic manifest crooked staff. This panel may illustrate the arrival of a spirit crook from the numinous. Using magical mobility, it comes forth to imbue an incarnate crook staff with power.

The huge and intricately involved petroglyph panel at Sand Island is home to a powerfully energetic legged crook (Figure 15). Located next to a powerful shamanic figure, the anthropomorphized crook's power lines spawn energy paths that connect with many of the major elements of this panel. Close examination reveals that most images on this panel are interconnected, juxtaposed, or joined in some fashion. Spiritual adepts report "seeing" these collective, ever-changing powerscapes of the spirit where shimmering lines seem to pass through translucent forms and connect all things.

A legged crook with distinctive form has been rendered replete with an elaborate headdress. This image is a major component of a beautifully worked assemblage of petroglyphs (Figure 16). The headdress may indicate an individual with a high rank or shamanic abilities within the society that created the petroglyph panel, likely Fremont. The cluster of finely pecked stipple marks issuing from the crook's "mouth" is reminiscent of the



Figure 16. *San Rafael Reef, Utah. Photo, Chris Rhodes.*

Pueblo's spiritual breath-of-life imagery. The etherealized snakes, crosses, stars, sets of dots, and abstracted shapes of the panel give a nod toward shamanic activity or images viewed in altered states.

A legged crook, with a feather in its "hair," hovers over a complex petroglyph panel at the Riverview site (Figure 17), near Bishop, California. This spirit crook, likely created by the ancestral Owens Valley Paiute people, is placed above a shallow, pecked, cup-like depression. This cup has been situated over intersecting cracks in the rock's face. These narrow apertures and cup indicate a nexus from which the crook spirit has flown. The



Figure 17. *Riverview site, Owens Valley, California.*

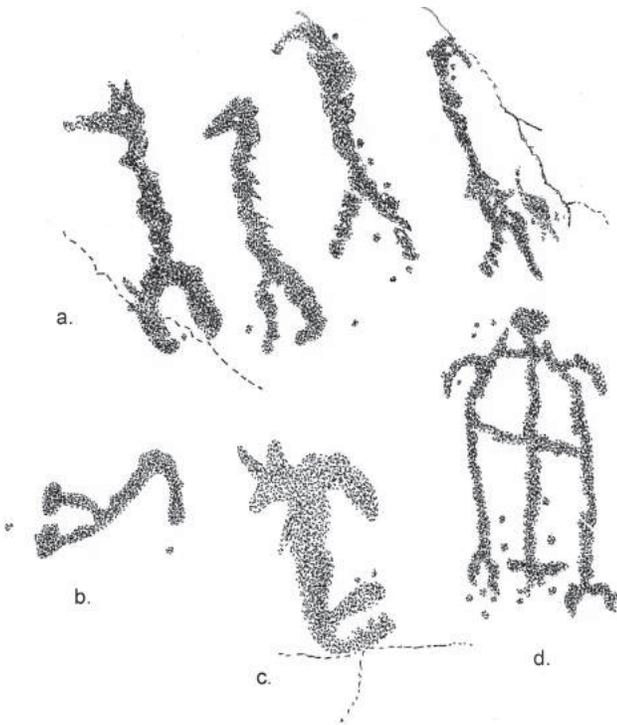


Figure 18. a. Comb Ridge, Utah; b. Painted Desert, Arizona; c. Whitney Pockets, Nevada; d. Newspaper Rock, Utah..

intricate petroglyph panel located below the “flying” crook form is certainly a powerscape. Note the crooked staff placed in the center of the powerscape composition.

There are many interpretations of the Procession Panel. It certainly has its share of powerful shamanic figures carrying crooked staffs. A segment of the procession figures may illustrate anthropomorphized crooks (Figure 18a). A number of these figures appear to have eyes. As with others of its kind, this grouping of crooks displays a carefree physical attitude. They walk as in a group of friends, staggered, curious, and with an unhurried gait. One of the group looks over its shoulder and peers into a crack in the rock. The crack in the rock and the strike marks, forming a dotted pattern among the figures, suggests supernatural attachments.

A floating legged crook appears to hover near the top of a boulder in the Painted Desert (Figure 18b). The balled feet of this legged image are similar



Figure 19. Long Lake, Oregon.

to the feet of the flying crook at the Riverview site.

A legged crook image at Whitney Pockets (Figure 18c), gives the impression of relaxing and is engaging in the very human inactivity of sitting. Like a number of other anthropomorphized crooks this figure is connected to a long crack in the rock. This character is also wearing what may be head gear or a feather bundle at the back of its “head”.

A notable variation of the spirit crook motif, involves two bandy-legged crooked staffs giving the appearance of transporting an elongated personage (Figure 18d). This petroglyph grouping provides a visual metaphor of a shaman, in trance, grasping the crook portions of each anthropomorphized staff and being held aloft by power lines connecting him to both legged assistants. He passes through time and space along an esoteric thoroughfare of the supernatural.

A legged crook form emerges from a layered, transparent powerscape created on a boulder at Long Lake (Figure 19). The body tapers to a small crook at the apex of the staff. Its arms, opened wide, are reminiscent of the welcoming gesture



Figure 20. Hieroglyphic Canyon, Arizona.

of the figure at Butler Wash in Utah. One arm of this figure touches a major opening in the rock.

Heiroglyphic Canyon (Figure 20) is on private land near Joseph City, Arizona. A relatively small canyon contains a wealth of spectacular Basketmaker images and rock art from later cultures. The legged crook appears here as a somewhat later addition to the rock art of this panel. Again, the figure gives the impression of walking through the scene without a care. It is moving up the face of the rock above a crack in its surface. The nearness of the crack and the circular dot pattern surrounding the figure may suggest numinous activity. This crook figure may have hair. The shapes at the top of the crook could be hair pulled into a roll at the back of the “head.” The figure may also be wearing headgear or the shape at the top of the crook could be another part of its hair statement.

An uncommon and striking example of the legged crook phenomenon occurs in the Black Mountains of Arizona (Figure 21). Experienced Chemehuevi or Walapai hands created the illusion of an excited spirit crook jumping out of the supernatural through a crack in the rock. The head, body, legs,



Figure 21. Warm Springs, Arizona.

and feet of this spirit form are symbolic and use double crooks in close proximity to form the spirit shape.

CONCLUSIONS

Anthropomorphized crooks not only have human characteristics, but many have what appears to be body ornamentation; they wear or carry important ceremonial paraphernalia and seem to be involved in ritual dance or ceremony. Often they are associated with abstract or dot-like patterns, openings, or cracks in the rock faces suggesting interaction with or movement to and from the supernatural. Most of these figures seem animated and give the impression of “having a life of their own.”

The physical distance between sites displaying anthropomorphized crooks is amazing. The distance between the Long Lake site in Oregon and the Picacho Mountains in Arizona is nearly 800 miles. Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of this phenomenon is that anthropomorphized crooks were created in nine separate cultures: the Archaic, Basketmaker, Anasazi, Fremont, Hohokam, O’odham, ancestral Northern Paiute, Paiute and Chemehuevi. A conservative time span of 1,600 years separates the creation of the Archaic

anthropomorphic crook images presented in this paper from the making of the O'odham, Paiute or Chemehuevi symbolic figures. These figures obviously played a universal, cross cultural role in these cultures' mythologies, oral traditions, and rock art practices.

Acknowledgments. I would like to thank Chris Rhodes for permission to use his outstanding photographs as part of this paper, Ann Fenton for taking me to the wonderful rock art sites near Bishop, California and Ed Rice for his patient instruction in the use of technology. A special thank you to my wife Kathy for her understanding of the time involved in research, her insights, and helpful suggestions in writing.

REFERENCES CITED

Bahr, Donald, Julian Smith, William Smith Allison, and Julian Hayden.

1994 *The Short Swift Time of Gods on Earth, The Hohokam Chronicles*. University of California Press. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California.

Eliade, Mircea

1991 *Images And Symbols, Studies in Religious Symbolism*. Translated by Philip Mairet. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.

1996 *Patterns In Comparative Religion*. Translated by Rosemary Sheed with an Introduction by John Clifford Holt. A Bison Books reprint of the 1958 Sheed and Ward, Inc. edition. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London.

Goldfrank, Esther Schiff

1927 *The Social and Ceremonial Organization of Cochiti*. American Anthropological Association Memoirs No. 33, Volume XXXIII. Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

Hultkrantz, Åke

1976 *The Religions Of The American Indians*. Translated by Monica Setterwall. A reprint of the original 1967 edition by the University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California.

Kelly, Isabel T.

1936 *Chemehuevi Shamanism. Essays in Anthropology*. Essay Index Reprint Series. Books for Libraries Press, Inc. Freeport, New York.

Laird, Carobeth

1976 *The Chemehuevis*. Rubidoux Printing Company, Riverside, California.
1984 *Mirror And Pattern, George Laird's World of Chemehuevi Mythology*. Malki Museum Press. Banning, California.

Parsons, Elsie Clews

1925 *The Pueblo of Jemez*. The Department of Archaeology, Phillips Academy, Yale University Press. Andover, Massachusetts.

1996 *Pueblo Indian Religion, Volumes I and 2. An Introduction by Ramón A. Gutierrez*. A Bison Books reprint of the 1939 University of Chicago Press Edition. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London.

Voth, H. R.

1901 *The Oraibi Powawu Ceremony*. In *Field Columbian Museum Publication No. 61*, Volume III, No. 2. Chicago Anthropological Series, pp. 63–158.

White, Leslie W.

1930 *The Acoma Indians*. The Forty-Seventh Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology. United States Printing Office Washington, D.C.