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# PETROGLYPHS, THE RECORD OF A GREAT ADVENTURE

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IN THE Painted Desert of northern Arizona, one mile south of Willow Springs, and six miles west of Tuba City, several large boulders of Wingate red sandstone have broken from a cliff and rolled into a valley. One of these rocks bears petroglyphs on every side, including the top (see pls. 4 and 5). These petroglyphs date from late prehistoric to modern times and are quite unlike the ancient ones associated with pueblo ruins and cliff dwellings. Although lying 50 miles northwest of Oraibi a particularly well-informed Hopi Indian<sup>1</sup> has identified the petroglyphs as Hopi clan symbols.

Though unable to identify all the drawings, he has identified most of them. Depending upon the skill of the artist, different forms of the same symbol appear. At other times different symbols stand for the same clan. These apparently unrelated symbols for a given clan are explained in the clan legend (figs. 1 and 2). Where the same symbol is repeated with the same technique, we were informed that this represented repeated visits by the same individual. Among those that our informant recognized are two extinct clans. He suggested that the unrecognized symbols may also be extinct clans.

Our Hopi informant recognized the following clans, which list has been compared with those of Mindeleff<sup>2</sup> and Fewkes<sup>3</sup> and shows some differences. As Voth<sup>4</sup> has pointed out, Hopi clans grade into one another, so that no two informants will agree; thus, confusion results. The asterisks indicate the clans whose symbols have been recognized on the rock.

- Agave.
- Asa (tansy-mustard).
- \* Badger. Symbol, footprints.
- \* Bear. Symbol, footprints.
- \* Bluebird. Symbol, small bird.
- \* Bow. Symbol, bow.
- \* Butterfly. Symbol, butterfly.
- Cactus.
- \* Cloud. Symbol may also be a rainbow, lightning, duck, tadpole, frog, or any aquatic animal.
- \* Corn, melon. Symbol is usually a corn plant, but may also be the "germ god."
- Cottonwood.

<sup>1</sup> Edmund Nequatewa.

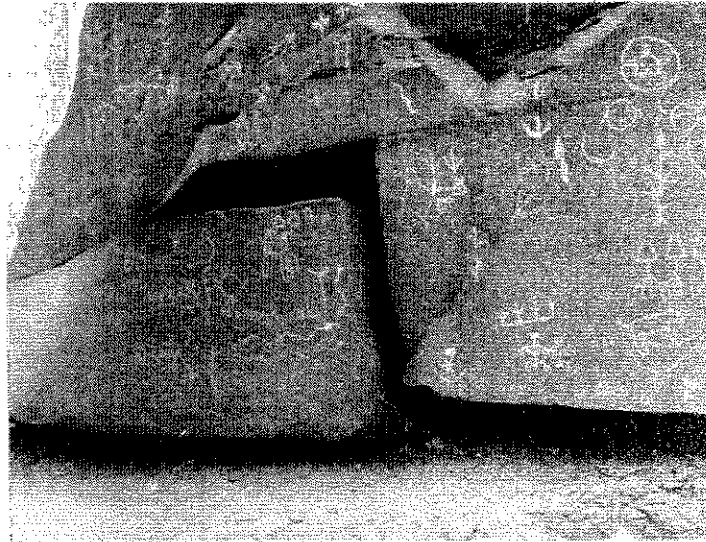
<sup>2</sup> Cosmos Mindeleff, *Localization of Tusayan Clans*, BAE-R, 19: 639-649, 1900.

<sup>3</sup> J. Walter Fewkes, *Tusayan Migration Tradition*, BAE-R, 19: 577-633, 1900.

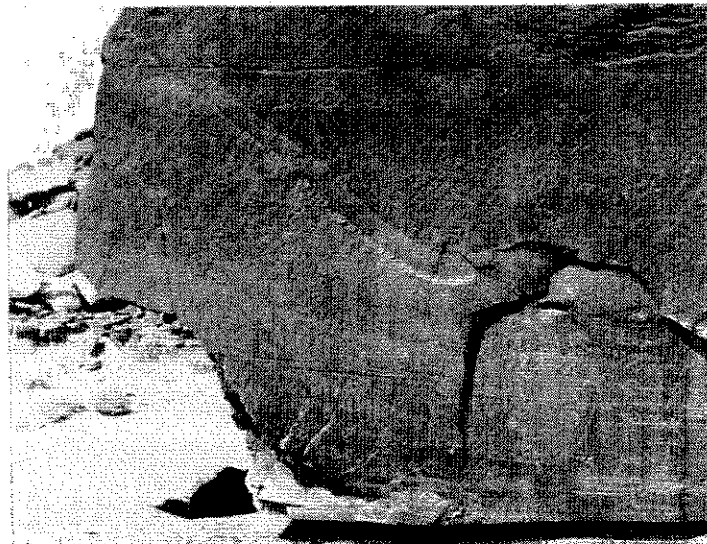
<sup>4</sup> H. R. Voth, *Hopi Proper Names*, Field Columbian Museum, Publication 100, 1905.



*a*, Picture Rock near Willow Springs. All sides and top are covered with pecked petroglyphs of the symbols of Hopi clans. *b*, south face of Picture Rock. Typical petroglyphs have been chalked. The rest are invisible in the photograph.



*a.*



*b.*

*a.*, part of the east face of Picture Rock. Typical petroglyphs have been chalked. *b.*, part of the west face of Picture Rock. Petroglyphs are unchalked.

- \* Coyote. Symbol may be a wolf, yellow fox, gray fox.
- \* Crow. Symbol, a crow or track.
- \* Eagle. Symbol may also be a turkey or turkey buzzard.
- Fire. Symbol may be firewood, piñon, juniper, or the face of Masauu.
- Hawk. May include turkey.
- \* Horn. Symbol may be antelope, mountain sheep, deer, or anything with horns.
- \* Katchina. Symbol, katchina masks or spruce bough.
- \* Lizard. Symbol includes horned toad and snake. The latter may confuse it with the Snake clan.
- Mescal cake.
- \* Moon (extinct). Symbol may also be a star.
- \* Oak (extinct). Symbol, the wooden stick on which the maiden's hair whorls are built up.
- \* Parrot. Symbol, a bird with a curved beak.
- \* Rabbit. Symbol, a rabbit or a rabbit's ears.
- \* Red ant. Symbol, an ant.
- \* Reed. Symbol may also be an arrow or road runner.
- Tobacco. Symbol may be either a plant or a pipe.
- \* Sand. Symbol, a circle or square representing a field sometimes inclosing a cross. The cross represents the points of the compass.
- \* Sivapi (rabbit bush). Represented by the blossom.
- \* Snake. Symbol, a snake.
- \* Snow. The symbol is a cloud without lightning and can therefore be confused with the Cloud clan symbol which is frequently drawn with lightning.
- \* Spider. The symbol is either the spider or web.
- Squash. The symbol may be also dove or crane.
- \* Strap or rope. Symbol, a rope with noose.
- Sun.
- \* Sun forehead or rising sun. Symbol, a half sun.
- Young corn.

The Hopi informant explained the rock and its petroglyphs as follows:

Down in the labyrinthian depths of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado river and the gloomy box canyon of the Little Colorado, abide the spirits of the Hopi. From the great canyon they emerged in the dim past and down into its mysterious depths the dead return to reside in Hadean gloom. Weird legends deal with the ghostly inhabitants who, arising from the abyss with glowing eyes and monstrous form, travel out across the Painted Desert to revisit their earthly homes on the Hopi mesas, where they maintain a lively and beneficent interest in human affairs.

It is natural, therefore, that these great canyons, the abode of the dead, should have been regarded from time immemorial with superstitious dread. In the bottom of the canyon of the Little Colorado, on the west side near its

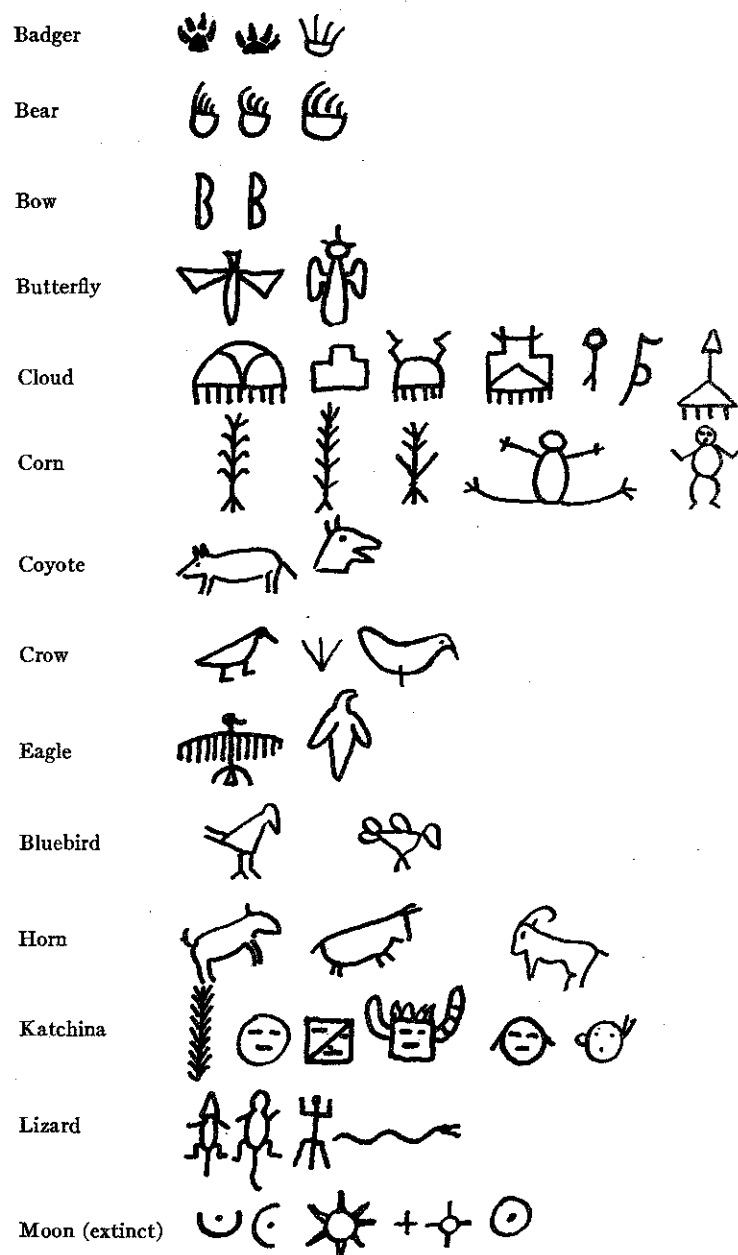


FIG. 1. Typical clan symbols.

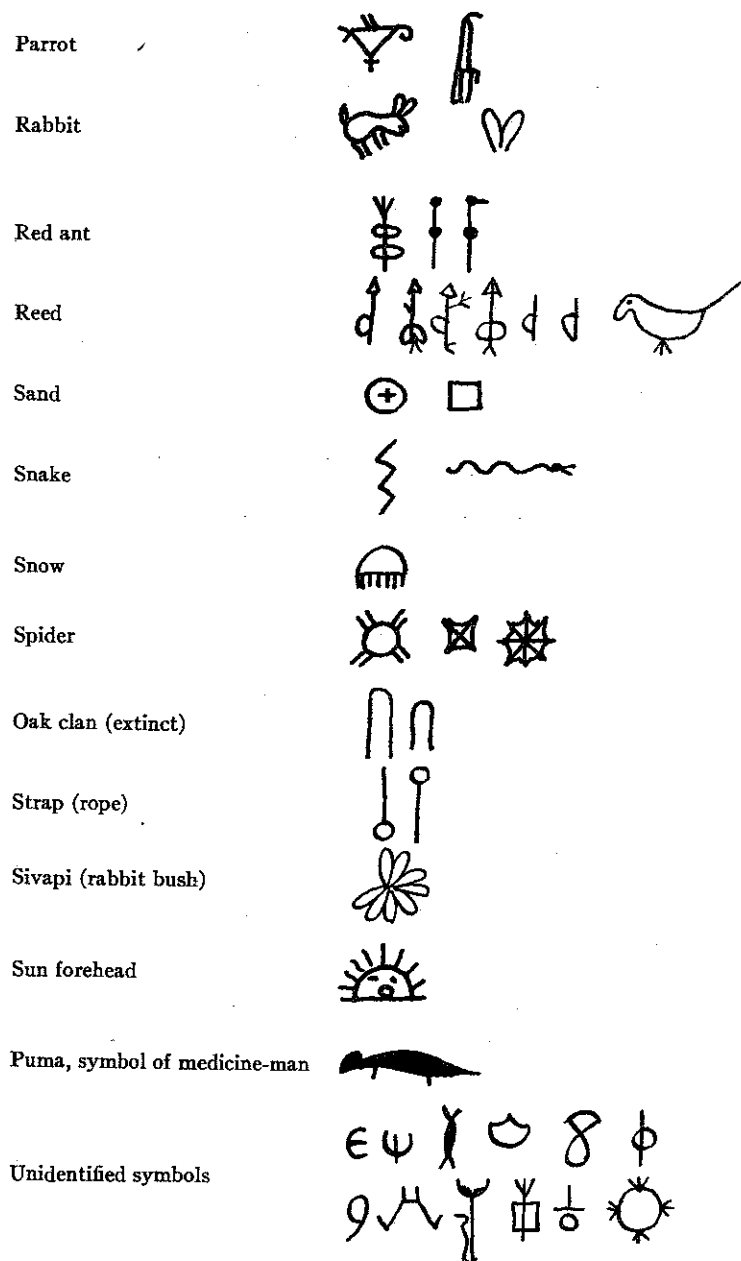


FIG. 2. Typical clan symbols.

junction with the Colorado, there is a salt deposit formed by dripping springs in the canyon wall. An ancient trail runs from the Hopi villages across the mesas to the valley of the Moencopi, along the foot of Echo cliffs and thence across the desert to the rim of the Grand Canyon where it plunges in and follows the south side to the mouth of the Little Colorado and crosses it to the west shore

At the point where the old trail enters the Grand Canyon there stands a pinnacle of rock just below the rim. To this it is necessary to attach a rope to lower the adventurer to the trail below. It is said that the remnants of an ancient yucca rope still hang from the pinnacle and that it was the custom of the Hopi salt gatherer to bring with him a generous supply of cornmeal mush, boiled until as sticky as chewing gum, to assist in holding the rope against the rock and to prevent chafing.

From prehistoric times the ancient peoples have made this precarious journey down to the old salt mines, through the dreaded underworld, and back up the rope way, with heavy burdens on their backs, where a single slip would mean a drop into the abyss thousands of feet below. Only a man with a strong heart would dare to let himself down out of his sunlit desert world into the eerie gloom, where a terrible silence engulfs every living thing. Such a man would be proud to return alive and his desire would be great to have a permanent record of his adventure. But would he undertake so hazardous a journey for salt alone? It is true that salt was an epicurean treat before the advent of the white man, but it seems likely that there were other and more accessible sources of supply. The salt from the old mines in the Little Colorado was not common salt. It possessed magic properties. This salt had once been the possession of the two brothers, Brave Boy and Echo, now commonly called the Two Little War Gods though they actually have no connection with war. They were the mischievous grandsons of the wise old Spider Woman, kindly protector of the Hopi people.

A whimsical legend gives a detailed account of a prank perpetrated upon their grandmother, the Spider Woman, which so infuriated the old lady that she chased the bad boys all the way from the Hopi towns to the Grand Canyon. They descended into the depths to escape pursuit and sat down to rest in a cave at the junction of the rivers. Here one of the boys laid aside his lump of salt which he had carried with him, and when they commenced their return by the way they had come, he left it in the cave. Just before they reached the top they decided to sit down and wait for awhile in order to make sure that the old Spider Woman was not lying in wait for them there. They sat so long that they turned into two pinnacles

of rock, side by side, and as they never returned for their lump of salt it is there today. No matter how much the people carry away, it is continually renewed by the magic of the Two Little War Gods.

It is believed that the family of the Spider Woman always enjoyed good health and that those who eat the magic salt will be healthy likewise. Of the two pinnacles of the War Gods, only one now remains at the head of the trail and to this the yucca rope was attached.

When the early salt gatherers trotted down the trail by the red Echo cliffs, they felt a great urge to leave a record of their daring. They came upon a great sandstone boulder close beside the way and here they stopped and each man, with the point of a sharp rock, laboriously pecked into the smooth surface of a boulder the symbol of his clan, that all who passed that way might read. They may have been men of the Cloud clan or the Bear clan or, perhaps, a clan long since vanished and forgotten. But they set their mark, their record of a great deed.

Through the centuries many brave men came down the old trail upon the same errand, an unending line back into the dim past. Each man paused beside the boulder and placed his clan symbol beside those of his clan brothers who had preceded him. Finally the great boulder became crowded with an intricate record of the clans, an overlapping network which covered every surface of the rock. And still men came along the slender trail bound upon the great adventure and now human desire had become a ceremonial necessity, as they paused to leave their symbol on the enduring rock. And the record moved on to another boulder and to another, and who can say they do not still pass that way? There are symbols there of recent date, whether idly placed or with ceremonial intent.

The Willow Spring rock may be a rosetta stone. Perhaps we can interpret many of the earlier petroglyphs as clan symbols placed on a rock to record some great adventure.

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