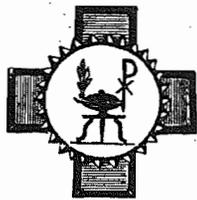


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# RECORDS OF THE PAST

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## SACRED SPRINGS IN THE SOUTHWEST

**S**PRINGS are none too many in the southwestern United States, and for this reason they have been from ancient times prized as a most valued possession. The peoples who dwelt in this region saw in these sources of life-giving water the founts of continuance and well-being, and in confidence located near them their pueblos.

Save air, no elements of nature are nearer to human life than those combined into the primitive fluid which must always be within reach of the men who put themselves into the grasp of the desert. The primary knowledge of the tribes who were the pioneers, and of every human being that has since made his home in the great "American Desert" was complete as to the location, distribution, and idiosyncracies of water supply. No scientific survey could be fuller and more accurate except in the paper record, and no men save those who are at one with, almost part of, the environment, could develop the water sense to such a degree as did the Indians.

There is a story of a troop of Texas Rangers about to perish from thirst who gave their Indian guide the alternative of death or a reward, based on his failure or success in finding water within two hours, and the Indian earned the horse and gun by a display of desert craft that astonished the seasoned frontiersmen.

Since that band of Coronado's veterans pushed into the unknown country and stopped enchanted on the brink of the Grand Canyon,

travellers and explorers have marveled at the skill of the desert people and have caught an inkling of the way in which he reads the trail, the plants, the weather, and the "signs" that give a clue to the initiated.

By removing a stone which caps a secret spring whose location in such a spot seems improbable, or by pointing out a "seep spring" or tank among barren rocks, the Indian earns a regard and respect that has true sincerity from those who know the trials of parched lips and the suffering of thirsty animals.

Those who travel in the southwest move on a checkerboard where the plays are from water to water, and woe betide the man who makes an error. Much more was this important to large bodies of migrants who passed from one locality to another unceasingly during earlier times, traveling afoot, carrying children, food, and other burdens on their backs, and helping the aged on the toilsome journey. One may imagine the vast preparation necessary for a move on the part of the people in a pueblo, who may have been forced to migrate by perhaps many causes besides necessity, such as clan enmities, pressure of outside peoples, superstition, or the command of some powerful medicine man. For many days men have run to spy out the favorable locations in the region, hastening back to report.

When a choice is made, the able-bodied cache jars of water at points along the route and the transfer begins, not in most cases *en masse*, but by gradual infiltration of groups, and with many back and forward journeys to bring supplies. An unenforced migration may require several years before it is complete and the old pueblo, sacked and abandoned to the dead, gives place to a new pueblo laboriously built many miles from the former settlement.

In such manner the ancients traversed the solitudes of the desert land and brought to every spot where there was living water and a hope for subsistence the active life of the Pueblo housebuilders.

Thus, if one has a map of the springs and live streams, he would need no further information as to the distribution of pueblos, for water is the key.

Spring water is necessarily most prized, because it is drinkable and always at hand, while the watercourses, which, during the greater part of the year are sinuous reaches of dry sand, furnish at flood a quickly disappearing supply of thinned mud, distasteful to man and beast except in the distress of thirst.

The uniformity of religious belief and practice among the Pueblos is a striking fact, perfectly intelligible by reference to the compulsion of environment, which has had much to do with making this vast region a culture area. It is not to be inferred that the Indians of the southwest are peculiar in the worship of springs, since the sentiment is world wide, and has had a vast range in time, perpetuates itself in the folk lore of the highest civilizations, and presents in its manifestations a most interesting body of myth and fancy. In the Southwest, however, the arid environment has so intensified this feature of primitive culture



CANELBRA SPRING, ARIZONA

that no spring in the region is without evidence of many offerings to the deities of water.

It is small wonder, then, that the Pueblo Indians came to regard springs with special veneration; and that they wove around them myth and tradition, and made them objects of religious worship. To one acquainted with the environment and its radical needs this seems to have been a natural, even though unconscious generalization.

Perhaps offerings to springs will not admit of such simple explanation. Perhaps the mystery of the underground source of water welling up from unknown depths, impressive always even to the observer who believes himself free from the trammels of superstition, has also had a powerful effect on the imagination of the Indian, leading like many other natural phenomena to an attitude of worship of unseen powers behind these masks.

The religious philosophy of the Indian animates the natural world and furnishes beings of different ranks and occupations as moving forces that work for his benefit or harm. With these he is always striving to enter into communication and of the vast number of methods embodied in rituals, from the most complete to the simplest, the offering to the spring is one.

The feathered stick set in the edge of the water by the Hopi are messages to the gods of the underworld and the snakes employed

in the Snake Dance are set free at the springs to carry the petitions of the people to the gods. The miniature water vessels thrown into the springs may be petitions and reminders to the ruler of the waters of the world and the rain gods to pour out plentifully from their vessels upon the lands of the people.

Sacred Springs may therefore be regarded as altars, and the offerings as sacrifices, whose essence may be carried by the water in the same way as the fire offering is carried by the fire.

There are many kinds of these offerings, perhaps the most common being pottery vessels, at least objects of this character are generally the only ones which survive. In an ancient spring near the Hopi pueblos, numerous small pottery vessels of unusual forms were found; similarly from the ancient spring in Socorro Co., N. M., several hundred miniature vessels were taken recently. Stone beads are also very common in the sands of springs, and this form of offering was quite extensive. The writer observed in Lake Xochimilco in Mexico, a vast mass of offerings lying on the bottom of the "Ojos," or sources of the lake, which are two crater like depressions, perhaps 40 ft. deep. These consisted principally of pottery whole or in fragments.

There were also bones of animals, two horse skulls especially showing with distinctness in the limpid water. That the Plains Indians also venerated certain springs is shown by the remarkable series of chipped flint implements found in the Afton spring by Prof. W. H. Holmes.

It seems probable that a more complete knowledge of the beliefs in relation to springs among the different Pueblo Indians, will reveal an interesting chapter in the history of the dwellers of the semi-arid southwest.

Mrs. Stevenson says the Zuñi believe that there is a god who owns the springs of the six regions, from whom the shadow people or rain-makers beg water. These shadow people collect water in vases and gourd jugs from the six great waters of the world and distribute it through the clouds. The Zuñi also believes that the sacred springs are used for the gods to look through to the upper world, and the Spanish word *ojo* (eye), which is part of so many names of springs in the southwest, would corroborate this statement, and has probably the same significance.

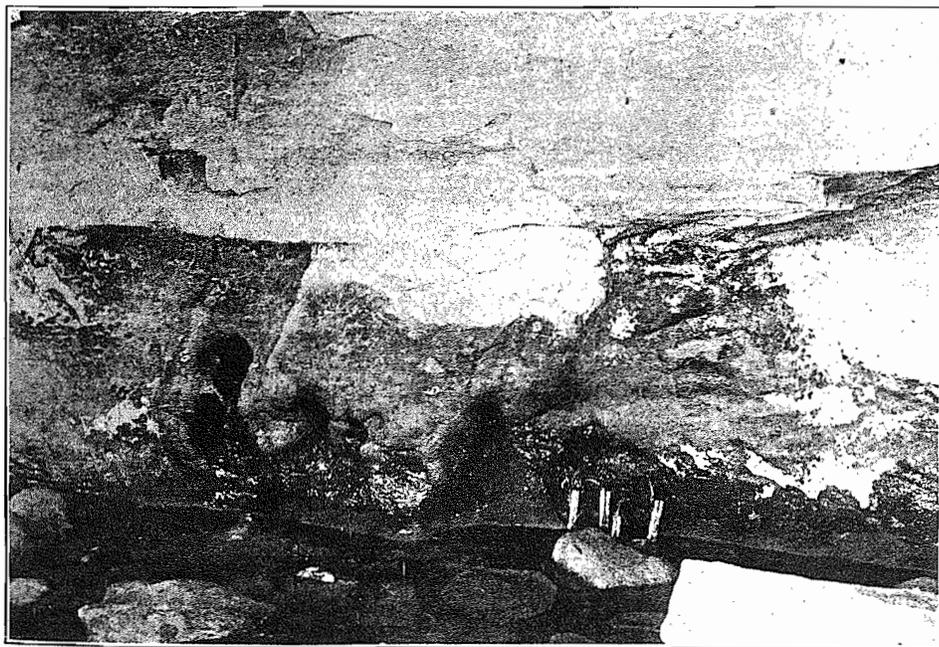
Many of the decorations on modern Zuñi pottery are conventional representations of springs, ponds, lakes, and animals associated with springs.

The Hopi believe that the waters under the earth are controlled by a great plumed serpent, and that he has favorite springs for his appearances. Montezuma's Well, in northwestern Arizona, is said to be one of these.

The Tewa believe that a dragon-like aerial being floats about over the springs, and that to his presence is due the perpetuation of the water supply.

Among the Pueblos there is displayed a profound veneration for all natural phenomena, the sun as first cause, the sky, clouds, wind, rain, mist, hail, snow, ice and frost, the ocean, lakes, wells, springs, water holes, marshes, rivers, brooks and even mountains, as purveyors of water, having a share in Pueblo worship. The animals and plants whose habits and diffusion connected them with water were generally held in esteem, and were intimately woven into the texture of religious and symbolic art.

Some springs are more sacred than others; for instance, the one at each group of Hopi pueblos developed with great labor by digging out the earth around it, forming a pool walled up around the sides, and having steps leading down to the water, where certain cere-



KENALABAH SPRING, SHOWING FEATHERED PRAYER STICKS, ARIZONA

monies are performed. Though many examples of large walled springs have been found in connection with ancient pueblos, it remains to be seen whether or not this custom was general.

Springs of this character may have been improved by a single fraternity for the performance of a particular ceremony like that of the Flute society at Hopi. Still, the largest spring, its size giving evidence of the favor of the nature deities, was entitled to be the chief spring of the village, and as such was chosen for the center of remarkable rites.

It may be said in passing that one of the chief causes of friction between the Hopi and the agencies of the Government who sought

to better their condition was the profaning of the sacred springs by the location of school buildings, wash houses, etc., near them. The Hopi have now accepted the situation, and most of them, no doubt, see the practical value of the plan, but the benighted conservatives deeply disapprove of this evidence of progress.

It is not necessary that springs held in great esteem should be located near the present villages, they may be in fact 100 miles away, and the one delegated to bring "sacred water" from such a spring religiously makes the journey and returns with a tiny vase filled at the command of the priest who conducts the ceremonies. During a ceremony at a Hopi pueblo one may see toilworn men returning from quests to the sacred springs, bringing water, rushes, clay and other things required in the observances.

On one occasion the writer saw a party, then 70 miles from home, going to fetch water from a spring some dozen miles farther along the trail. This custom is an important clew to the location of the former seats of the clans that inhabit the present villages; because the old though ever vital traditions prescribe for ceremonies which are perpetuations of clan observances, water from springs at which their ancestors drank. Where the inquiry is made one may learn that near the springs visited to obtain water as prescribed were the old pueblos of certain clans.

It may be pointed out in this connection that the history myth of the Zuñi is in large measure a recounting of the springs at which they halted in their wanderings from the earth navel whence they issued, to the traditional center of the world where they now live.

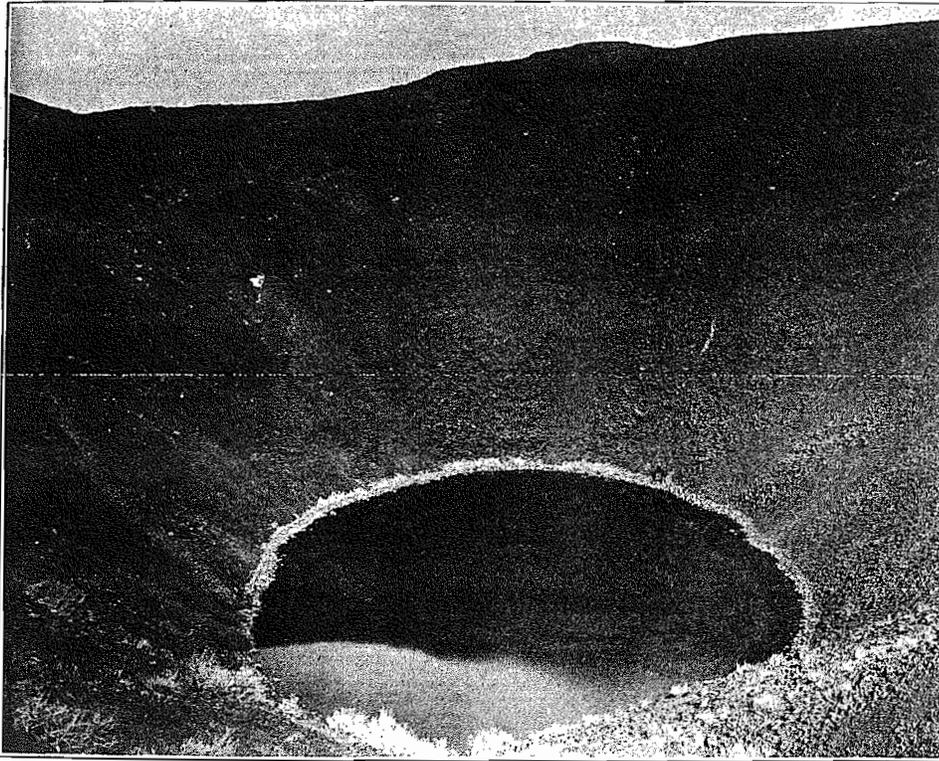
In reference to the care of springs, Dr. Fewkes says that the clearing out of sand drifts is one of the few instances of communal pueblo work performed by the Hopi. Notice of this event is given by the town crier at the direction of the chief and all the men of the pueblo aid with a will. When the Sun Spring was cleaned out in the autumn of 1898, the men of Walpi worked there for 3 days, and the women cooked food nearby; so that at the close of each day there was a feast.

While the work was going on a circle of the old men smoked native ceremonial tobacco in ancient pipes.<sup>1</sup> Among the Zuñi the cleaning of these sacred springs is also a ceremonial observance, and one spring, it is noted, is quite appropriately renovated by the frog clan.

There is evidence that on abandoning a pueblo the Indians "killed the spring," that is, covered it over and cunningly hid it from view. One such spring was accidentally discovered near San Mateo, New Mexico, by a horseman who noted that the ground at a certain spot gave way under his horse's feet. On digging, first a layer of long strips of cedar bark was uncovered, then a floor of pine logs, and so on for several feet, when a spring of clear running water was found.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Tusayan migration Traditions*, 19th An. Bu. A. Eth. page 615.

<sup>2</sup>Bandelier. Final Report. Pap. Arch. Inst. II Cambridge. 1892 P. 308.



LAKE IN VOLCANIC CONE—THE HOME OF THE GODS OF WAR. A SACRED LAKE OF THE ZUNIS IN ARIZONA

Another, discovered 3 miles west of Chaves, N. M., on the Santa Fe railroad was choked with rubbish containing entire vessels of pottery, and the whole was covered with a layer of clay mixed with flint implements. In this spring was found a serpent fetish of wood.\*

Other fetishes like this have been taken from a spring at Tule, Arizona, and Mangus spring on the Upper Gila, southwestern New Mexico. The association of the snake with water and the myth of the great serpent who lives in the underground water would seem to have been widespread and sufficient to account for the placing of these effigies in springs.

Near Zuñi, the engineers who are building a great dam to impound the waters of the Zuñi river cleaned out in 1904 an excellent spring, and in the debris found many ceremonial objects, which, unfortunately, were not preserved. This spring, which has an important place in Zuñi tradition, wells up through a deposit composed of the remains of pleistocene animals, and on the completion of the dam it will be submerged.

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\*Op. cit. P. 325.