The one who flies in the sky, na-ya-ya.
Above the top of Black Mountain, I fly in the sky.

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the Navajo Hunter Tradition

Karl W. Luckert

With field assistance and translations
by John Cook, Victor Beck, and Irvy Goossen

and with additional translations from manuscripts
by Father Berard Haile, O.F.M.

The University of Arizona Press
Tucson, Arizona

About the Author . . .

KARL W. LUCKERT has maintained a continuing interest in the fields of philosophy and religion. At the University of Chicago he was a student of Mircea Eliade, eminent historian of religions. After receiving from there a Ph.D. degree in the history of religions, Luckert accepted a position as Assistant Professor in the Humanities at Northern Arizona University. He has held a National Endowment for the Humanities fellowship for the study of Southwestern Indian religions and mythologies, during which time he worked under the supervision of well-known anthropologist Morris E. Opler. Author Luckert's other works include journal articles and a book (in press) entitled *Olmec Religion: A Key to Middle America and Beyond.* A more recent involvement has been in field research on the Coyoteway, a Navajo healing ceremonial.

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA PRESS

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I.S.B.N. 0-8165-0548-9 cloth
I.S.B.N. 0-8165-0439-3 paper
L. C. No. 75-9142

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Author's Note

This report on the Navajo hunter tradition tells first and foremost the accomplishment of generations of Navajo hunters who have preserved their traditions and who, in moments when these traditions drifted toward oblivion, entrusted them to outsiders for the expressed purpose of having them survive. When a representative of an archaic way of life grasps for what little continuity he can still achieve through electronic recording tapes and books, a truly humanistic researcher cannot help but be overcome with melancholic sorrow. Together with his informant he would like to struggle against the current of change which washes away the wisdom of men simply because the world for which this wisdom was meant has disappeared also. In the course of this study I was often haunted by the awesome feeling that, in fact, I was recording the last gaspings of a religious faith — that with my interpretations I was writing a requiem for that faith. The Navajo memory which is celebrated by this "requiem," let it be sung to the memory of the hunter ancestors of all human kind!

Without the willing and the enthusiastic assistance of able interpreters, my field resarch would have been impossible. From among my interpreters I wish to mention especially the assistance of John Cook, a Navajo Presbyterian lay minister at Indian Wells. His excellent command of the Navajo religious vocabulary has helped clarify many points which otherwise would have remained archaic obscurities. I also deeply appreciate the help of Victor Beck, a Navajo student at Northern Arizona University, and of Irvy Goossen, a professor at this university, who, on different occasions, have accompanied me in the field; with me they have wrestled faithfully with portions of Navajo recordings. For the transliteration of place names I owe equal thanks to two persons, William Morgan, Sr., of Navajo Community College, and to Irvy Goossen — both professors of Navajo language. And I gratefully acknowledge the financial assistance of Northern Arizona University during several weeks in the summer of 1971. Copies of my recording tapes have been archived at the Museum of Northern Arizona at Flagstaff.

I am grateful to Leland C. Wyman who helped me in the pursuit of Father Berard's hunter texts and encouraged me to go ahead on the project. Then, of course, my sincere thanks go to the Franciscan Missionary Union for releasing Father Berard's manuscript, "Pertaining to the Creation of Game," for publication in this book. They have graciously implemented the wish of the late Father Berard, who desired that as much of his work as possible be printed.

Additional thanks go to the staff of the Museum of Northern Arizona Library, the Special Collections librarians at the University of Arizona, and the staff of the Museum of Navaho Ceremonial Art for having made available to me unique manuscripts and source materials. To Jim Rominger, professor of botany at Northern Arizona University, I am indebteded for help in identifying some key plants.

Further, I am grateful to David P. McAllester, Charlotte J. Frisbie, and Editha L. Watson for having answered my inquiries. I also wish to thank Bernard Fontana, David Brugge, and Martin Link for the time they spent conversing with me on various aspects of my research, and Robert L. Potter and Timothy Hunt for having read portions of the manuscript.

During the finishing stages of this work, Morris E. Opler read the manuscript and alerted me to a number of inadequacies. His thorough knowledge of Apache religious traditions, and his time spent in conversation with me, are reflected in several important points of comparative interpretation. For this help I thank him very much. To Leland C. Wyman, who also has read the manuscript, I am equally grateful. His admirable gift for detail and precision has benefited this work at a number of places. Any inconsistencies, which in spite of the help of these gentlemen, might still remain in my presentation, are all mine.

In addition, I should like to thank the University of Arizona Press for effecting publication of this work.

Last, but not least, I wish to thank my family, especially little Heidi, for having gotten along without me more often than was desirable. I offer my compliments to Martin for having taken good pictures while his father was the patient of Claus Chee Sonny, to Ursula for finding two dozen typographical errors in the finished manuscript, and to my wife Dora for the lunches she packed and her willingness to part with the cherished household items which I traded for Navajo hunter stories.

KARL W. LUCKERT

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PART ONE

The Navajo Hunter Tradition

Perspective and History

shepherds. Thanks to the extensive and often forbidding pine forests in the high Chuska and Tunitcha mountain ranges, and thanks to a certain love for learning among some very intelligent hunters, the Navajo hunter tradition could still be found alive on these mountainous hunting grounds in the year 1971.

3. Pueblo Contacts

The "emergence" of the Navajo as a distinct tribe in the Southwest has already been referred to in the previous section. Whether the reader agrees with tracing the early Navajo Apacheans as far back as the Dismal River Culture (Young 1968, p. 5), or whether one prefers — as this author does — the more conservative and more certain date of about 1500 for Navajo entry into history, the mythic birth of these people, from the underworld "womb" of Mother Earth, is nevertheless associated with southern Colorado. There are the sites to which the Navajo point and which they regard as their places of emergence. Their emergence stories could therefore not have entered their minds earlier than their arrival in the area at about 1500.

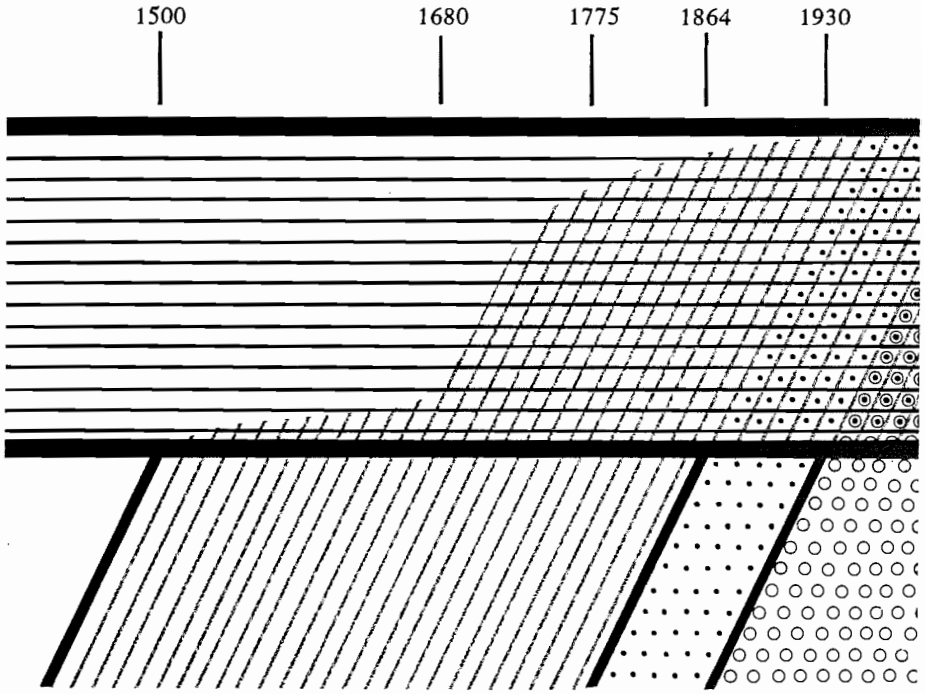
The possibility of early contacts with Pueblo Indians nevertheless exists. If the Largo and Gallina Canyon people of northern New Mexico, 1106–1254 (Underhill 1956, pp. 16f), can be linked on the basis of pottery either directly with the Navajo or be identified as victims of Navajo invaders, then the emergence mythology could have permeated Navajo life already at that time. This to me seems very unlikely. After all, still in 1971 Claus Chee Sonny (Chapter III) insisted that the emergence myth is unrelated to the Huntingway.

When Vasquez Coronado and his conquistadores came in 1540 to explore the "seven cities of Cibola," they did not specifically mention any Apache or Navajo hunter bands. This, however, is no proof that they were not already in the vicinity. They might simply have used some common hunter-sense and kept themselves hidden. Whatever conflict until that time might have boiled between the sedentary Pueblo Indians and the Apachean intruders, it was greatly overshadowed by the Spanish occupation that followed. On the other hand, judging from present events, an extremely great friendship between Pueblo and Apacheans cannot be postulated either. Some friendly trading might have been going on among them, and in their meetings undoubtedly some basic beliefs and stories were transmitted.

In the year 1680, when the Pueblo towns along the Rio Grande revolted successfully against the Spanish missionaries and settlers, the hard-pressed governor of Santa Fe, Don Antonio de Otermin, reported that "many Indians who were captured have declared that all the nations of the kingdom that laid siege to the villa were confederated with the heathen Apache enemy" (Dozier 1970, p. 57).

Whether or not some Apache or Navajo Indians actively participated in the revolt is an open question. Dozier, an able Pueblo scholar, doubted this (1970, p. 59). On the other hand, Young (1968, p. 17), who writes from the Navajo perspective, makes Navajo participation seem more probable. Wherever the truth for that might lie, the consequences of the revolt are much more important for our present discussion.

NAVAJO RELIGION IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE



ATHAPASCAN HUNTER TRADITION
northern heritage: "prehuman flux" mythology; animal elders, hunter tutelaries
1775 Navajos in Chuska, Tunitcha, and Canyon de Chelly; elaborations of hunting rituals

PUEBLO INDIAN INFLUENCE
1500 contacts with Navajos in Dinetah; "emergence" mythology; four-directional gods, dry-paintings
1680 Pueblo Revolt: refugees, maize agriculture; results in large-scale ceremonial ferment, defamation of hunter gods

ANGLO-AMERICAN INFLUENCE
continuous increase since the Fort Sumner deportation (1864–68)

PEYOTE CULT
continuous increase since the 1930 s

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Prior to the arrival of the Spanish, around the year 1600, the total Pueblo Indian population appears to have been between 30,000 and 40,000. After the revolt only about 14,000 nominal Pueblo Indians remained. Some had lost their lives in forced labor and in war; others fell victim to new diseases for which they lacked immunity; some were converted to Christianity and moved to the villages of Spanish colonists. But perhaps the greatest part of the population loss, especially among the eastern Pueblo Indians, has resulted from migration to Hopi, Navajo, and other Indian groups (Dozier 1970, p. 63).

It goes almost without saying, that among the Navajo-Apachean hunter bands, who had to accommodate such massive waves of refugees, their social structures and religion were extremely strained. As a consequence the Navajo and other western Apachean hosts of Pueblo refugees, while they seem to have already possessed matrilineality, apparently adjusted to the more elaborate Pueblo matrilineal clan system. In contrast, the eastern Apache groups retained a loose band organization without matrilineal clans.

Perhaps the earlier suggestion of ideological interchange between Pueblo and Apacheans, as early as 1500, requires an alternate date at this point. It is entirely possible that the years following the revolt in 1680, when Pueblo Indians fled the Spaniards to join Apachean groups by the thousands, mark the actual beginning of massive intellectual interchange. Judging subjectively by the overall appearance of the Navajo, their physical features, I think it possible that perhaps one-fourth of the resulting number could have been Pueblo refugees. This proportion would, of course, vary with different clans.

Undoubtedly, among the refugees were not only simple folk, but there must have been many highly trained Pueblo religious leaders — of secret curing associations, hunter associations, and warrior associations. Thus, regardless of possible earlier cultural contacts during the *dinetah* phase, the greater cultural synthesis and the Puebloization of the Navajo may have taken place with the actual mingling of people. This therefore is the most probable moment in Navajo history when Apachean-Pueblo in-laws became fully acknowledged children of Mother Earth through the myth of emergence. Moreover, this seems to have been the time when the Apachean guardian deities of hunters began appearing as masked *yé'ii* dancers, kachina style. At the same time, this was the period when the Navajo learned or revived their weaving skills.

If I am permitted to speculate one step further at this point, I would venture to say that at this time the Pueblo refugee farmers brought along their domestic animals, and most Apachean nomadic hunters turned from the chase to the herding of animals. In this fashion, the economic basis for a cultural compromise or synthesis — between the sedentary life of agriculturalists and that of nomadic hunters — was given. The emerging Puebloized Navajo-Apacheans became seminomadic herders.

How precisely has this synthesis of culture affected the dimension of Navajo religious thought? This shall be the subject matter of a later portion of this study (see Part Three). Before I undertake to offer a more comprehensive interpretation of the Navajo hunter tradition and its gradual Puebloization in history, I shall in Part Two arrange for the Navajo hunters to speak for themselves.

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PART TWO

Navajo Hunter Mythology

A Collection of Texts