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The Cultural Significance of the Pueblo Indian Flute

Kevin Brewer

Ouachita Baptist University

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SENIOR THESIS APPROVAL

This Honors thesis entitled

The Cultural Significance of the Pueblo Indian Flute

written by

Kevin Brewer

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for completion of the
Carl Goodson Honors Program
meets the criteria for acceptance
and has been approved by the undersigned readers.

thesis director

second reader

third reader

honors program director

April 15, 2004

In recent years few other pieces of Native Americana have attracted more attention than the Native American Plains flute. It is widely admired for its beautifully lyric, yet often haunting tone quality. The layperson interested in nonwestern music can delight in its relative ease of performance, while those interested in Native crafts will find that with basic woodworking skills and a bit of patience a Plains flute is easy to construct. The Native American flute has inspired numerous recordings by such artists as R. Carlos Nakai, Doc Tate Nevaquaya, and the Grammy Award winning Mary Youngblood. There are hundreds of amateur and professional flute makers around the world. In addition, the International Native American Flute Association, co-founded by R. Carlos Nakai, has been established to connect individuals and flute circles worldwide, as well as to promote the continuation of the traditional and contemporary flute, among other things. Such enthusiasm has spawned a flurry of scholarly research in recent years, yet much remains to be discovered.

While it is impossible to state definitively the exact meaning and symbolism of the flute to the ancient peoples whose culture existed in the Southwest thousands of years before European contact, it is equally naïve to suggest that the flute had only one symbolic association in their minds. It is likely that the flute meant many things to many people. What is clear, however, is that the significance of the flute in the culture of the Pueblo Indians did not lie in its inherent musical qualities but rather was due to its importance as a cultural symbol. The prominence of the flute in tribal myths, and the nature of these myths, the abundance of rock art images depicting a humpbacked flute player, the nature of these depictions, and the accounts of the ceremonies in which the flute played a role all give clues as to the nature of that symbolism. Due to its strong

association to fertility, the flute was given a prominent status among the Pueblo tribes of the Southwest.

The origin of the flute in the Southwest is shrouded in mystery. The earliest surviving examples of aerophones are bone whistles found in the Anasazi area of Northeastern Arizona, dating from the early Basketmaker period (300 B.C.-300 A.D.). Tubular flutes of a narrow bore dating from the later Pueblo I times (800-900 A.D.) have also been found in the Anasazi area. The narrow bore whistles show an increasing sophistication and sensitivity to sound by offering more tonal possibilities through overblowing. Dating from Pueblo II and Pueblo III periods (900-1300 A.D.) are several flutes with tone holes.¹ These flutes are evidence of early attempts to cultivate the myriad of tonal possibilities aerophones offer.

Little is known about early Native flutes as there are few surviving examples of instruments constructed of perishable material. However, during a 1924 archeological expedition into the Prayer Rock District of Northeastern Arizona, Earl Morris made an astounding discovery. He uncovered four well preserved specimens made of boxelder in a cave later termed "Broken Flute Cave" by his team.² The flutes date from approximately 625 A.D. and contain six finger holes. These flutes are now housed in the Arizona State Museum. Prehistoric flutes of a somewhat later vintage have been found in Canyon de Chelly and in the Verde valley of Arizona. These flutes have the five finger hole pattern that is characteristic of historic Hopi flutes. Other end-blown flutes have been found along the Colorado River drainage area.³

These archeological discoveries have shown that the earliest inhabitants of the North American continent developed an acute musical sense and an increasing sensitivity

to music's power. They also indicate that the majority of flutes were of the vertically held type, though some transverse flutes have also been found among the Yuman.⁴ There seems to have been no standard of uniformity from maker to maker or tribe to tribe with regard to length, diameter of the bore, number of finger holes or material used.

Of the vertically held flutes found among the tribes of the Southwest two types can be distinguished with regard to the way sound is produced. The first type is similar to the Japanese shakuhachi. For example the flutes of the Santo Domingo Pueblo usually contain six finger holes drilled or burned into a piece of bamboo or cane. The finger holes are placed in two groups of three. At the proximal end a V-shaped notch was carved into the rim. Sound is produced by directing air toward the V-shaped notch.⁵

The second type of vertically held flute was also made of cane or bamboo. Cane and bamboo both have naturally occurring nodules that partially block the interior of the tube. The flute maker would carve two openings on the upper surface of the flute towards the proximal end, one on either side of a nodule. He would then carve out the finger holes distally to the two openings. Sound was produced by directing air into the proximal end of the flute while covering the uppermost opening with a finger from the left hand and opening and closing the finger holes with the right hand. In this way a column of air would travel down the tube and encounter a partial blockage. It would then split into two segments with one being deflected out the open notch, while the other continued down the tube. Sometimes a "bandage" of buckskin would be used to cover the uppermost notch.⁶ This type of flute was found among the Apache Indians.

Flutes of various kinds of material have been found, ranging from bone, reeds, various woods, clay and metal. The flute maker used whatever material was available in

his region. There was even an example of a flute made out of the barrel of a gun found among the Apache Indians.⁷ The length, number of finger holes and distance between the finger holes all varied as well. All of these were determined by the flute maker according to what felt most comfortable and were not determined by any system of scales or harmonics.⁸

The modern Native American flute that is so widely played and admired is known as the Plains flute, courting flute or end-blown flute. Here it will be referred to as the Plains flute. While there is still much variation regarding material, length, number and distance of the finger holes, tuning and ornamentation, there is much more uniformity from maker to maker than in the past. This standardization is due in part to a desire to play the flute in combination with other instruments, both Western and non-Western, and in part due to the technological advancement of tools. Today there are hundreds of amateur and professional Native American Plains flute makers around the world, both Native American and non-Native American.⁹

Construction of the Plains flute is similar to that of the bamboo flutes of the Apache. Much like the Apache flute the column of air is directed down the proximal end of the flute where it encounters a partial barrier one third of the distance from the proximal end. Here the column splits in two with half of the air leaving the flute at this point and half of the air traveling the rest of the way down the tube. Where a finger or piece of buckskin covered the uppermost opening of the Apache flutes, a wood block is now used. The wood block, also called the baffle, is held securely by a wrapping. The type of wrapping used is determined by the flute maker and ranges from any kind of leather or buckskin. The physical characteristics of the wood block also vary from maker

to maker. Traditionally the block would be constructed in the image of an animal. Often the animal depicted is a bird, a reference to the common legend attributing the origin of the Plains flute to the woodpecker. However as Dr. Richard W. Payne points out in his book, *The Native American Plains Flute*, often “the figure represents animals of particular tribal reverence, enviable sexual prowess, totemic significance, or magical potential.”¹⁰ Flutes have been found with blocks resembling the horse and elk, figures of sexual prowess, the bear, a symbol of strength, and the mountain goat, representative of sure-footedness. Another important ornamental feature of the Plains flute is decoration of the distal end to the likeness of an animal, such as a goose, snake, elk or eagle. For example Dick Foolbull of St. Francis, South Dakota, made many flutes with the distal end in the likeness of a goose, “whose ducklings follow the mother’s voice like the girls follow the flute player.”¹¹ It is clear then that the flute has taken on a symbolic role of extramusical importance.

One of the most important aspects of the modern Plains flute is the standardization of tuning. This is not to say that all flutes made today are constructed to a diatonic scale or that they all play in the same key. However the length, diameter of the bore and number and placement of the finger holes of almost all flutes made today are designed to align with a Western diatonic or pentatonic scale. This has helped tremendously to spread the popularity of the instrument to non-Native Americans. Especially the development of the pentatonic flute, pioneered by R. Carlos Nakai, has helped the instrument gain a wide following of amateur players, as the pentatonic flute has a pleasing and somewhat forgiving timbre for the beginning student.¹²

Few examples of Plains flutes date from the mid-nineteenth century and there are no examples before 1850, though legend tells of an earlier birth. The Ute tribe created the earliest Plains flutes out of Utah juniper. They contained a characteristic baffle and a fipple edge made from a flattened .22 caliber bullet. Early Ute flutes were made by Sam Mike of the White Mesa Mountain Ute community. Sam passed on the tradition to his son, Billy Mike, who, in 1997 was 117 years old. Billy has taught his grandson, Aldean Ketchum, who continues the tradition to this day. From the Utes the Plains flute traveled south to Taos Pueblo. Examples of Taos flutes are similar to the Ute flutes, though made of red juniper. Taos was an important trading post between the Pueblo, Great Basin and Plains tribes, and it is from here that the flute eventually moved east into Oklahoma and Nebraska.¹³

The physical remains of flutes and knowledge of their construction give insight into their significance and extramusical associations. The evidence also indicates that the modern Plains flute has a much later origin and is constructed differently than the ancient Anasazi flutes. However to many Native Americans the story of the flute is a continuous story from its ancient creation to the present. This is made clear in the many myths that incorporate the flute.

Myths are important vehicles for the transmission of tribal customs, rituals, morals and history. As Kathleen Joyce states in her doctoral dissertation on the Plains flute, "Often times, myths and legends explain the unexplainable to the Native Americans."¹⁴ Intertwined in these stories are often important moral lessons which pass from generation to generation and help ensure continuity and stability within the tribe. They are a vital source of information about Native customs and ideas and should be

studied as such. While often archeological and other physical evidence fails to corroborate these stories, it is less of a concern to the ethnologist trying to understand how a group of people view their world than it is to the historian trying to understand what actually took place.

The flute plays a prominent role in the mythology of the Southwest tribes. While there are many similarities between the myths of different tribes, many are unique to one group of people. These myths serve as a testament to the importance of the flute both musically and symbolically.

Perhaps the most widely known myths involving the flute are those about the humpbacked flute player erroneously named “Kokopelli” who is depicted on hundreds of rock art sites in the Southwest. Indeed this fanciful character has become a staple of the pop culture of the American Southwest. As a popular icon he has lent his image to all manner of commercial endeavors, including everything from yard art to record labels. While today we are experiencing Kokopelli overkill, in 1970 Clause Wellman claimed that “the euphonious name of ‘Kokopelli’” was still relatively unknown.¹⁵ Ekkehart Malotki, in his book, *Kokopelli: The Making of an Icon*, gives several reasons for the surge in popularity of this character. A general interest in Native American religion, an interest in harkening back to a perceived simpler time, the popularity of the Plains flute, New Age thought and the explosive interest in Southwest rock art and iconography¹⁶ have all brought wide commercial success to many businesses and spawned a great many flights of fancy concerning the flute player’s origin and meaning.

The flute player rock art image originated in the Four Corners area north of the present-day Hopi villages.¹⁷ The first images were simple stick figures that were

nonphallic with a distinct flute but no hump. They appeared in this region as early as 800 A.D. By 1000 A.D. the image occurs in large numbers with a distinctive hump and flute on Anasazi rock art, wall paintings and pottery.¹⁸ Gradually the image spread all across the Four Corners region as far east as the Rio Grande River Valley, as far north as the Great Salt Lake region, as far west as the Grand Canyon region and as far south as the valleys below the Mogollon Rim.¹⁹ Malotki states that “The correlation of this widest distribution with the maximum extent of the pueblo-dwelling Native American farming cultures of prehistoric times is striking and suggests that the fluteplayer image is uniquely characteristic of these cultures.”²⁰ With this migration came many regional variations. For example the image became elaborately embellished in the Black Mesa region of Arizona especially during the period of 1100 to 1400. And in the San Juan Basin and upper Rio Grande Valley the image was often depicted with a hugely exaggerated phallus.²¹ After about five hundred years the humpback flute player image began to decline, first becoming smaller and less dominant and finally disappearing almost completely by 1400, with a few isolated areas producing the image up to 1600.²²

Many theorists have tried to explain the origin of the humpback flute player. One theory suggests that the flute player was inspired by traders from Mexico and possibly South America known as *pochtecas*, who traded with the Pueblo. These traders would carry their goods in sacks on their backs and walk with walking sticks. It is thought that these sacks were the inspiration for the depictions of a hump while the walking sticks were simply stylized into “flutes.” However the pictographs (rock paintings) and petroglyphs (rock carvings) depicting the humpback flute player appear hundreds of years before the great influx of these traders.²³ Another interesting theory states that the

humpback flute player was an actual person afflicted with Pott's disease, a spinal chord deformity which results in priapism, a humped back and a club foot (which the flute player possesses in some depictions). The most widely held belief, however, is that the humpback flute player is a depiction of the Hopi fertility katchina, *Kookopolo*, popularly called Kokopelli. This is despite the fact that the Hopi katchina traditionally does not carry a flute. Only the *tihu* (carved figurine) of the katchina made by younger Hopis carries a flute. Malotki explains this by saying that the younger carvers are simply bowing to the demands of Anglo buyers.²⁴

Further evidence that the flute player depicted in rock art is not the same as the Hopi katchina, *Kookopolo*, is given by Christy Turner, who thirty years ago conducted a survey of the rock art of Glen Canyon before the construction of the Glen Canyon dam. Hopi informants repeatedly insisted that the flute player was not "Kokopele."²⁵ Scott Thybony was corrected by Hopis as well after he made the mistake of referring to the flute player image as Kokopelli. They corrected him by saying that the figure represented a *Lahlanhoya*. Correctly spelled in First Mesa dialect, *leelenhoya*, and in Third Mesa dialect, *lelenhoya*, the word means "flutist," or more precisely today, "musician."²⁶ To further support this, Secakuku, a Hopi elder, stated that "Kookopolo is a katsina with a humpback. He is not a Flute player, though he has been mistakenly referred to as such."²⁷

Reasons for this confusion are numerous. Early ethnographers tended to extrapolate the functions of the Pueblo gods from the petroglyphs they found. The many sexual depictions of the flute player were associated with the often explicitly sexual rites of *Kookopolo*. The fact that *Kookopolo* has an enlarged "flute-like" nose and a humped back was seen as representing of the flute player. The first appearance of the name of the

Hopi god in ethnographic research occurs in Jesse Walter Fewkes 1898 Report for the Bureau of American Ethnology. Here it is spelled “Kokopeli.” Later researchers such as Parsons, Hawley, Colton, and Waters all cited Fewkes’ work in their reports, with each one becoming increasingly derivative, so that by the time Waters wrote in 1963, he refers to *Kookopolo* as “the well-known humpbacked flute player.”²⁸

While the exact identity and meaning of the humpback flute player is debatable, it is clear that he had great importance as a bringer of warmth, rain and fertility. He is often depicted with sun-loving snakes who appeal to him to play his flute to warm the earth and melt the snow. This role would promote the growth of crops. He has also been identified as a rain priest who calls forth clouds with his flute. This role is entirely consistent with his identity as a fertility priest, as rain was thought to fertilize the soil so that crops could grow. The flute player’s role in human sexuality is clear from the many sexual and phallic representations of him in rock art. He is also depicted in a number of animal scenes which are believed to demonstrate his role as an insurer of game to hunt. It is clear then that the flute player had a different function at different times and to different regions.

Often the flute player is referred to by Hopis as *maahu*, “the cicada.” Nearly universally mistranslated as “locust”, *maahu* is the *pooko*, literally “pet,” but often translated as “patron” or “totem,” of the two Hopi flute societies.²⁹ Cicadas have a humpback as well as a long proboscis which resembles a flute. To the Hopi ear the distinctive buzzing sound produced by male cicadas to attract females is reminiscent of the Hopi *leena*, “flute.” For this reason they use the word *leelena*, a reduplicated form of *leena* to describe the cicada’s buzzing.³⁰

Cicadas buzz more on hot days. To the Hopi mind, however, this idea is flip flopped, so that the cicadas call in the warm weather by “fluting.” This is important as Malotki states, “Hot weather induced by the music of the cicada is considered desirable and highly beneficial by the Hopis. They believe that warm temperatures promote growth and maturation of crops.”³¹ According to Hopi informants: “The cicada has the heat; so the weather gets warm when the insect flutes.”³² “The cicada roams the corn plants playing its flute. It goes around encouraging them, for it owns the heat.”³³

The cicada also plays an important role in several versions of the Hopi emergence or origin myths. This fact alone testifies to the importance of the insect, and by association the flute, to the Hopi. In the version presented by Waters, the people are being led on their migration by two cicadas:

On top (of the mountain) they met a great bird, the eagle. One of the *màhus*, acting as a spokesman for the people, asked the eagle, ‘Have you been living here very long?’

“Yes,” replied the eagle, “since the creation of this Fourth World.”

“We have traveled a long way to reach this new land,” said the *màhu*. “Will you permit us to live here with you?”

“Perhaps,” answered the eagle. “But I must test you first.” Drawing out one of the arrows he was holding in his claws, he ordered the two *màhus* to step closer. To one he said, “I am going to poke this arrow into your eyes. If you do not close them, you and all the people who follow you may remain here.”

Whereupon he poked the point of the arrow so close to the *màhu*’s eye it almost touched, but the *màhu* did not even blink. “You are a people of great strength,” observed the eagle. “But the second test is much harder and I don’t believe you will pass it.”

“We are ready for the second test,” said the two *màhus*.

The eagle pulled out a bow, cocked an arrow, and shot the first *màhu* through the body. The *màhu*, with the arrow sticking out one

side of him, lifted the flute he had brought with him and began to play a sweet and tender melody. “Well!” said the eagle. “You have more power than I thought!” So he shot the other *màhu* with a second arrow.

The two *màhus*, both pierced with arrows, played their flutes still more tenderly and sweetly, producing a soothing vibration and an uplift of spirit which healed their pierced bodies.

The eagle, of course, then gave the people permission to occupy the land, saying, “Now that you have stood both tests you may use my feather any time you want to talk to our Father Sun, the Creator, and I will deliver your message because I am the conqueror of air and master of height. I am the only one who has the power of space above, for I represent the loftiness of the spirit and can deliver your prayers to the Creator.”³⁴

In this myth we see that the flute was used as an instrument to heal the cicadas wounded by an arrow. By blowing into their flutes, the cicadas were able to create melodies to heal their pierced bodies. This fact helps explain why the Hopi Flute Priests were often sought to help heal arrow or gun wounds and demonstrates an idea that is pervasive in Native American cultures across the United States, the supernatural power of music. Music, many tribes believe, has a supernatural origin and contains potent magical powers. If used correctly this power can be directed to heal the sick, change the weather or communicate with divine spirits and ancestors.³⁵ If used incorrectly, however, a musical instrument such as the flute can become an instrument of “bad medicine.”³⁶

Another version of this story occurs in the Mimbres origin myth. In this version the Mimbres people are led by Cicada and Badger. Here again the people come across some land already occupied by Eagle. Eagle agrees to let them stay if Cicada can refrain from flinching when an arrow is thrust towards his face. The cicada passes the test,

whereupon Eagle pierces the cicada with an arrow. The cicada heals himself by playing his flute, and Eagle allows the people to stay.³⁷

At Zuni Pueblo there is a story of a flute carrying rain priest named “*Chu’lu’laneh*.” He is named “*Chu’lu’laneh*,” because that is the name of the flute used by rain priests. His purpose is to bring rain and fertility to the land by using his flute to summon rain clouds for the crops. He also plays his flute to convince Winter to give way to Spring. Much like the cicada, the flute melts the snow and brings warmth to the land.³⁸

Another myth originating from Zuni and incorporating the flute is the story of Paiyatemu. According to the version of this story presented by Kathleen Joyce in her doctoral dissertation:

Paiyatemu is a clever, athletic young man who is extremely competitive in nature. Each day brings Paiyatemu sprinting past the abode of a family with eight daughters. These young women have corruption and depravement in their hearts. Because they are jealous of Paiyatemu and his great prowess as an athlete, they decide amongst themselves to pit one of them against Paiyatemu in a game. The young women chose the game of hide-and-seek. This game is not the simple child’s version, with the loser returning home with a heavy heart. In this game, the loser pays with his or her life. As the contest begins, Paiyatemu and the chosen woman mentally select their secret hiding places. She chooses to conceal herself in a fluffy mass of clouds, and she is successful because Paiyatemu is baffled as to her whereabouts. Next, it is Paiyatemu’s turn to shield himself from the woman’s detection. Thinking he is quite clever, Paiyatemu slides behind the sun. Much to his dismay, the young woman ascertains his location. The nefarious woman sneaks up behind Paiyatemu and hacks his head from his shoulders. In addition, deciding that that is not enough punishment, she steals his heart from his chest, and stashes Paiyatemu’s body in a secret place. Satisfied, the woman and her seven siblings return to their home.

After noticing that Paiyatemu has not come home from his adventures, his own sisters set out on a mission to find him. The women are distraught, because they cannot locate their brother. Much to their relief, they receive aid from the animals in the area.

After much searching, the women find his body and his heart. Next, one of Paiyatemu's sisters takes his flute and begins to perform a sweet melody, with a different hued butterfly emerging from the end of the flute after the presentation of each love-filled pitch. A total of seven butterflies come forth from the end of the instrument, with the final one being Paiyatemu himself, beautifully decorated in a multitude of colors. Paiyatemu, incognito, then sets off in search of the eight abhorrent young women. He flits and whirls around them in the hope that they will chase after him. The women become mesmerized by the butterfly's beauty and begin to pursue Paiyatemu. As they are trying to capture the alluring butterfly, they take off their apparel in the hope of trapping the butterfly in the folds of their cloth. Finally, the women give up and succumb to exhaustion. As they are sleeping, Paiyatemu turns into a man again and begins to play his flute. As a result of his tuneful melody, each of the eight horrid women take the shape of a butterfly. These butterflies lack the beauty and grace that Paiyatemu had when he was in that form. Instead, he turns the women into erratic butterflies, forever crazy in their flight. Before he returns to his home, Paiyatemu dispatches the butterflies to the four important directions, North, South, East, and West, in order to bring the much needed moisture for the crops.³⁹

In this moral tale the flute has a central role in that it is used to both bring the hero back to life and turn the villains into erratic butterflies. Clearly the flute is depicted as possessing magical powers.

An interesting myth about the origin of the flute comes from the Papago tribe. It is entitled "How the Yaqui Won the Flute from Us." In this tale a man is suffering because his wife is being unfaithful. Though he is very sad he mourns her "loss" in silence, because it is unmanly to cry. Finally he decides to set out to find a cure for his woes. He feels that the misery must find its own way out of his heart. He decides then to construct a flute that will imitate the crying sound of a whip-poor-will. That way he can pour his sorrow into his flute and people will not know he is crying. After he finishes making his reed flute he finds a secret place and begins to play. Though the flute does succeed in easing his grief he does not fool the people. Women from his tribe search for him to ease

his pain, because they are attracted to the flute playing. Women from another tribe also hear the flute. Four sisters set out from the community to search for the source of the music. On their journey they come across a coyote who tries to deceive them by claiming to be the one responsible for the music. They also come across four different men from different communities, but the women continue on, because the men are not able to create the beautiful music. Finally the women find the young man. He is attracted to the youngest of the women and decides to marry her. Because of this he goes off to her village and takes the flute with him. Therefore the Papago say "The Yaquis learned about the flute from us and we don't have the flute anymore."⁴⁰

Another flute origin myth comes from the Apache tribe. This tale is presented by Muriel Latham for the New Mexico Folklore Record, a publication of the New Mexico Folklore Society. The story was told to her by an Apache Indian from the Mescalero Reservation.

Once there was a restless baby boy. He could not sleep, though his mother tried to soothe him. Now the wind is a very powerful spirit, and today it is said that only the Wind Spirit's tones can hush a sleepless child. The Wind Spirit sought out the boy and whistled, but the child did not sleep. The Wind Spirit whistled louder and louder until finally the child slept. As the years passed the little child became a boy. He felt the Wind Spirit in him, and he always tried to imitate the sound of the wind. He blew on the grass, across birds' feathers, into the trees, but he was never able to imitate the sound of the wind. The closest he got to the sound of the wind came from his own voice, but even this did not satisfy him. So near was his voice to the sound of the wind that even the leaves would begin to rustle when they heard it. People heard his voice too, even from a great

distance, and he became very famous. One day while he was walking in the woods, he heard a robin singing. The robin was speaking to him, saying, "My friend, my friend! Here it is! Here it is! Eee ha. Eee ha." There were some reeds growing where the robin was singing. The reed was making a tone—a bubbling and whistling tone. The boy noticed that there was a hole in the reed, and water came up and covered the reed and then went away. He took the reed and blew, but was still not satisfied. He tried to make the sound of the wind, but he could not. Now the people of the village heard this too, and they called him the son of the Wind Spirit, but he still was not satisfied. After many years, the boy grew to be a man. The Wind Spirit was getting low in him because it had been a long time since the spirit had entered him. One day he took his knife and his reed and went into the woods. There he accidentally tripped and his knife pierced a hole in the reed. He quickly picked up his precious reed and blew, fearing that the song of the reed would leave him because of the hole. To his surprise, he heard a wonderful sound. He cut another hole in the reed and blew. Still the Wind Spirit came closer. He cut another hole and another. Each time the Wind Spirit came closer. Finally the Wind Spirit came from within him. With the Wind Spirit coming through him, he played the song of the mourning dove. At last he could sing the song of love he had kept within his body since he was a little child. As he played his song, a Corn Maiden came through the woods. She greeted him and he was no longer lonely. His life was filled with happiness. Many youths heard the son of the Wind Spirit and came into the woods. They saw him there playing his flute, and they too took reeds and made flutes. They grew old and taught their sons, and their sons grew old and taught their sons. Today, the spirit of the wind sings through the love flute in all the Indian villages.⁴¹

Several key ideas can be taken from this story. First the flute had a supernatural origin, having been shown to the boy by a robin. Also the flute itself has magic powers, as all who play summon the power of the spirit wind. Finally the flute is called “love flute” as it did not take much time at all for a Corn Maiden to marry the flute player.

An interesting folktale from the Apaches is recorded by Michael Lacapa and is called *The Flute Player: An Apache Folktale*. This story is termed “folktale” because it is on a somewhat lower level than the more substantial myths concerned with deities and religious matters. In this story a young man and woman fall in love at a social dance. He is a flute player. The woman tells him that if he plays a sweet melody for her, and she is pleased, she will place a leaf in the river as a sign of her approval. The next day the flute player finds a spot next to the river and begins playing a beautiful melody on his flute. The woman hears the melody and being pleased, places a leaf in the water. Downstream, the flute player sees the leaf and knows the maiden liked his song. Because the man was of the right age, his uncle came to show him the ways of the hunter. The day the flute player and his uncle go hunting the maiden waits by the river but hears nothing. She is devastated, because she thinks the man has lost interest in her. She dies of a broken heart. When the man returns he goes to his same spot by the river and begins playing a sweet melody but finds no leaf. He tries again the next day but still finds nothing. Finally someone from the village tells him that the girl has died. He goes to her burial spot and begins playing his flute. From that day forward the man is neither seen nor heard in the village. “Now, when the wind blows through the trees, and leaves float by on the water, it is known by all that the young man’s flute melody is still enjoyed by his sweetheart.”⁴²

The flute is not used in a magical way in this story, but rather is simply a part of the courtship process, the custom practiced by many tribes in the Southwest of using the flute to woo and marry a maiden. The girl would know the identity of her suitor by the tune he played and would leave him a sign if she were interested. This is the most popular ritual incorporating the flute known to non-Native Americans as well as the best documented.

These examples are by no means a complete compilation of the many myths and folktales from the Southwest that incorporate the flute. They demonstrate the importance of the instrument not only in musical terms, but also on a symbolic, and ultimately much more meaningful level. Besides playing a role in a number of myths, the flute was used by the Native Americans in several different ceremonies. In each ceremony the Pueblos used the flute to varying degrees, from simply placing it as a decorative item or background accompaniment to giving it a central role in the ceremony itself. Clues as to the nature of the symbolic role of the flute in Pueblo cultures can be gathered from observations of these rituals.

To the Hopi the flute is an ancient and revered instrument. This is true even today, as the flute plays an important role in Hopi ceremonial life. This is most clearly seen in the two Hopi *Len*, "flute," societies, which will be discussed shortly. Also the Hopi have a number of kachinas which carry or incorporate the flute. Kachinas, which means "spirit of the invisible forces of life,"⁴³ appear in all the Pueblo societies of the Southwest. The kachinas are most important by far to the Hopi and Zuni peoples, as the Hopi have about two hundred and fifty kachinas, though they are not all of equal importance.⁴⁴ Each kachina has a specific and important function. They are considered to be the spirit of a

dead ancestor or animal who has passed to the Otherworld. For six months out of the year they reside with the people. Kachinas are represented by humans dressed in elaborate costumes and masks. The spirit of the kachina is said to embody the person who is representing that kachina in the ceremony.

The Hopi flute kachina, *Leenangkatsina*, appears as part of the group of *Soyohomkatsinam*, “mixed kachinas,” where he dances with his flute. However he does not play the flute. Also *Palhikwtiyo*, “Moisture Drinking Boy,” carries a flute as a masked dancer in the night dance of the *Saasa'lakt* and as an unmasked social dancer during the plaza exhibition of the *Paavalhikwt*.⁴⁵ It should also be pointed out that the Hopi have a cicada kachina. However this kachina carries no flute and has no hump.⁴⁶

The Zuni Indians also have a flute kachina named *Paiyatemu* or *Nepayatamu*. This kachina is representative of the hero of the Zuni legend given above. As a kachina he is associated with flowers, beautiful melodies, comely butterflies and poetry. His primary role in ceremonies is to bring fertility to the land. To this end he plays his flute to entice the sun to come from its winter home. He also plays his flute to accompany singing to ensure healthy crops.⁴⁷

At Zuni Pueblo there was a ceremony involving flute playing and corn grinding by men dressed as women. The central figure in this ceremony was the Zuni phallic kachina named *Ololowishkya*. According to Slifer, Zuni informants told him:

Some males dressed like females and stretched out with grinding stones. There were fluteplayers and rain dancers. *Ololowishkya* had a dingaling made out of a gourd. He peed a sweet syrup into a big pot that had sweet corn in it. He peed to the directions of the earth six times. He made balls of the juice and corn and gave it to everyone. It tasted good. This ceremony was done so there wouldn't be any problem with men's urine. We don't do this now because white people watch.⁴⁸

To understand the importance of this ceremony, we must understand the sacred position of these “men dressed as women.” To the Pueblo humanity was seen as a kind of personification of cosmic forces. In the Pueblo understanding, men were associated with the sky, sun, clouds and rain, while women were associated with the earth, moon and seeds.⁴⁹ Thus complex symbolic relationships developed that are integral to their understanding of the natural and spiritual worlds. These relationships and gender roles were symbolized by rites in which young people were periodically initiated into the next step in life. For example when a boy was born water would be sprinkled on his genitals to ensure his fertility, while his umbilical chord would be buried in the cornfield, signifying his role outside the home. Girls, on the other hand, would have gourds filled with seeds placed on their genitals, and their umbilical chords would be placed underneath the grinding stone, signifying their place in the home. At pubescence boys were initiated into the world of ceremonies, ritual and the kiva, while girls were initiated into one of three women’s societies. Marriage and sexuality signified one as an adult, at which point the cycle of life would begin anew. While men were responsible for hunting, warfare and the harmony of the Pueblo societies through ritual and contact with the supernatural world, women were responsible for feeding, childbearing and incorporating and pacifying society. Thus a balance of power was established that was constantly threatened by war, famine and jealousy. Only the esoteric knowledge the men possessed concerning ceremony and the spirits could keep the world from a state of chaos. Through this dialectic that developed between men and women emerged a third sex which represented the synthesis of opposites, what the Pueblos called the half-man/half-woman. This biological male would be raised from birth as a female. They could not marry, but rather

were free to younger unmarried males to do with as they pleased. This was considered a sacred position, and there were always four of these half-men/half-women in a Pueblo. While their symbolic role was that of demonstrating harmony between the sexes, they also lessened the competition between older and younger males for rights to women.⁵⁰ It is possible then that at least for the Zunis, the flute served in the *Ololowishkya* ceremony as a symbol of harmony between the sexes.

At Jemez Pueblo there are two flute ceremonies. The first, called Flute Dance, is performed by the Women's Societies of the Jemez and is associated with the propagation of crops. Elsie Clews Parsons observed this ceremony on September 17, 1921 and gives an account of it in her book, *Pueblo Indian Religion*. "In this ceremony, the flute's importance to the Jemez in regard to the fertility of the land is clearly evident. The role of the flute is extensive in that it, and the flute player, are a representation of a successful harvest."⁵¹ The flute appears in the mid-summer rain ceremonies of the Jemez as well. During these ceremonies the flutist plays in order to bring forth the *dyasa*, "rain people." The rain people then bring the rain and nourish the crops. Here the Jemez use the flute for the propagation of their crops.⁵²

One of the most revered and well-known of all the Hopi ceremonies is the flute ceremony. As already mentioned there are two flute societies, *Masilelent*, the "Gray Flutes," and *Sakwalelent*, the "Blue Flutes."⁵³ Also, as already noted, the cicada is the *pooko* of the two flute societies. This is further evidenced by the fact that flute playing cicada symbols have been found on flute alter tiles.⁵⁴ The Gray Flutes are more conservative and are considered to be the dominant group while the Blue Flutes are more liberal. Legend tells that the Gray Flutes came from the East while the Blue Flutes came

from the West. The activities of the two groups are not coordinated except on the last day of the ceremony.⁵⁵ The head of the Gray Flutes is chosen from the well respected Spider Clan, and the head of the Blue Flutes is from the *Patki*, "Water-house," Clan. Other members of the clans are chosen arbitrarily. However those with lightning experience are particularly eligible. They may be someone whose field or house was struck by lightning or even someone whose person had survived a lightning strike.⁵⁶ Also those who show proficiency on the Hopi flute or those caught spying on the proceedings of the flute societies would also be eligible.⁵⁷ The business of the two flute societies was supplication for rain, fertility of man and animals and prayers for relief from illness caused by lightning and lightning related illness such as gunshot or arrow wounds. It was also the responsibility of the flute societies to monitor the movement of the sun from the Winter Solstice to the Summer Solstice.⁵⁸ The most important activity of the two flute societies, however, is the flute ceremony.

This ceremony is designed to bring rain and warm weather for the growth and maturation of the crops. Pueblos, and especially the Hopis, live in one of the harshest and most unforgiving environments on earth. Perched on top of a high, arid mesa in Northeastern Arizona, the Hopis can experience long droughts in the summertime which threaten their livelihood and flashfloods in the winter that decimate their crops. In their precarious situation the ability to control the weather is most highly prized. Therefore it is no surprise that most of their dances are prayers for rain. The flute ceremony takes place every other year in alternation with the snake society's ceremony, which is also performed to bring rain.⁵⁹ Also the flute ceremony is designed to reenact the Hopi's emergence into the Fourth World.⁶⁰

The ceremony is very reverent and solemn and takes a total of sixteen days to complete. As Waters writes:

It begins three days after the sun rises between the rounded hill to the north and the second terrace to the south of the cliffs know as Munyà'ovi [The Porcupine], lying east of Oraibi. This position signifies that the sun has reached Tàwaki, its summer house at the northernmost point of its journey at the Summer Solstice, and is journeying southward again.⁶¹

The sixteen days are divided into groups according to specific events. The first eight days are devoted to making the flute alters. The two societies work separately during this phase with the Blue Flutes working in a kiva and the Gray Flutes in the home of the Blue Flute Chief. After they make the alters, the two flute societies take one day to initiate new members. For this the two societies hold a combined ceremony whereby they acknowledge and sanctify the initiates.⁶² The next four days are devoted to intense prayer by the flute priests. Upon the arrival of the last day, the two flute societies, breaking their isolation, “converge upon, and consecrate, the sacred Flute Spring.”⁶³ Here, they reenact their emergence into the present world. Following this the flute priests form a procession towards town. Here the Gray Flutes precede the Blue Flutes, while at the head of the procession are two “Flute Maidens,” who carry “small reed rings on slender rods.”⁶⁴ During this procession the Gray Flute priests throw cornmeal on the ground in the shape of clouds, into which the Flute Maidens throw their reed rings. After this the company sings songs to the accompaniment of the flute while the chief priest of the Gray Flutes prays. The ceremony is concluded with the symbolic sprinkling of water.⁶⁵

In his book, *The Hopi Flute Ceremony*, Dr. Richard Payne writes:

“there is evidence of reverence for the flute among the Hopi for at least 2000 years, clearly assigning it a central role in the biannual flute ceremony. Whether the flute is competently played is of

relatively minor importance; like the snake in the alternate ceremony, the flute represents an important channel to the supernatural. The musical beauty of the Flute ceremony is embodied in the singing, while the flute, as revered host, is allowed free range of expression and whose musical proficiency bears no criticism.”⁶⁶

Clearly then the importance of the flute to the Hopi lay in its symbolic meaning more than its musical quality.

A final Hopi ceremony in which the flute plays a role is the Winter Flute Ceremony. This ritual takes place on even years and is not nearly as long or involved as the late summer ceremony. The entire ceremony lasts one day and takes place in a kiva. The flute is played to provide a melodic line that interweaves with singing, while the flute priests dust prayer sticks and other sacred objects with cornmeal.⁶⁷ The prayer sticks are ornamented with cicadas, and pieces of cicadas are thrown in the fire, presumably to ensure warmth in the summertime.⁶⁸ The ceremony concludes with priests smoking various pipes.⁶⁹

These examples clearly show that the flute played a major role in the ceremonial life of the Southwest tribes. However the flute was by no means restricted to a ceremonial function. It was used for a number of different purposes, the most important of these being courtship. Without exception the early ethnographers who came to the Southwest to record and describe Pueblo music would refer to the flute as a courting instrument. Indeed many Indians refer to the instrument in the same manner. According to Woody Crumbo, a Potawatomie Indian, the flute is essentially a courting instrument. “However, occasionally it was used to relay messages while in hostile territory and also to communicate with the spirits in sacred ceremonies. Women and children are not permitted to handle or play the love flute for fear of breaking the love charm.”⁷⁰ As the

story is generally described, a young man who had his eye on a young girl, but who was too shy to speak to her, would instead play his flute outside her home or near where she would go for water. If she was favorable to his advances, she might leave a sign for him, such as an ear of corn or a flower. After this there would be an exchange of gifts between the two families, and the young couple would be married. If the girl did not favor the boy, she would simply ignore him until he would lose heart and give up.

Coronado's 1540 expedition into the present day southwest United States gave account of the use of the flute among the Pueblo societies. He found widespread use of the flute in celebrations, to accompany singing and by men to entertain women while they worked.⁷¹ While Coronado found the flute to be a very popular instrument in everyday life, by the late nineteenth up through the first three quarters of the twentieth centuries, the flute was largely ignored both on and off the reservations. Reasons why can only be speculated. Perhaps the flute's decline was due to pressure from early missionaries who may have felt the flute's sexual overtones were unacceptable. The Indian schools established by the United States government to educate the Indians in the ways of the civilized world discouraged the practice of flute playing and was also a major reason for the flute's decline.¹ There simply may have been a waning of interest on behalf of the younger generations concerning older traditions. Whatever the case may be, the Native American flute has fortunately seen a tremendous burgeoning of interest within the past thirty years, thanks in no small part to the efforts of both Native and non-Native Americans to exploit the flute's commercial possibilities to the hilt. Out of this burgeoning interest has emerged a small group of scholars anxious to uncover the secrets of this ancient instrument, both musical and symbolic. While much remains to be

uncovered, it is clear that the flute had a symbolic role in the minds of the Pueblos partly because of, but at the same time separate from, its musical life. The hundreds of petroglyph and pictograph representations of flute players, the rich history and mythology ascribed to the instrument and its important place in the ceremonial and non-ceremonial life of the Native Americans of the Southwest are all evidence to this fact. Hopefully in the coming years much more will be discovered about this fascinating instrument as new archeological remains are uncovered and rock art sites discovered. However our greatest resource will continue to be those Native informants eager to share their knowledge of the legends and lore of the flute.

¹ Richard W. Payne, *The Native American Plains Flute* (Oklahoma City: Toubat Trails Publishing Co., 1999) 1-3.

² E. B. Renaud, "Flûtes indiennes préhistoriques du sud-ouest Américain" *Bulletin of the Société Préhistorique Française* (Le Mans, France: July 22, 1926) 1.

³ Payne NAPF 1-3.

⁴ Kathleen Joyce, *The Native American Flute in the Southwest United States: Past and Present* (Michigan: UMI Dissertation Services, 1997) 12.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Joyce 13.

⁷ Joyce 14.

⁸ Payne, Telephone interview. 10 November, 2003.

⁹ Joyce 15.

¹⁰ Pain NAPF 36.

¹¹ Payne NAPF 28.

¹² Payne interview.

¹³ Payne NAPF 7-8.

¹⁴ Joyce 26.

¹⁵ Ekkehart Malotki, *Kokopelli: The Making of an Icon* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000) 7.

¹⁶ Malotki 3-4.

¹⁷ Malotki 6.

¹⁸ Dennis Slifer and James Duffield, *Kokopelli: Flute Player Images in Rock Art* (Santa Fe: Ancient City Press, 1994) 4.

¹⁹ Malotki 6.

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *ibid.*

²² *ibid.*

²³ Slifer 5-7.

²⁴ Malotki 12.

- ²⁵ Malotki 11.
- ²⁶ Malotki 11-12.
- ²⁷ Malotki 12.
- ²⁸ Frank Waters, *Book of Hopi: The First Revelation of the Hopi's Historical and Religious Worldviews of Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977) 61.
- ²⁹ Malotki 67.
- ³⁰ Malotki 65.
- ³¹ Malotki 66.
- ³² Malotki 65.
- ³³ Malotki 66.
- ³⁴ Waters 35-36.
- ³⁵ Francis Densmore, "The Belief of the Indian in a Connection between Song and the Supernatural" Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 151 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1953) 217-223.
- ³⁶ Pain NAPF 9.
- ³⁷ Joyce 30.
- ³⁸ Joyce 31-32.
- ³⁹ Joyce 32-34.
- ⁴⁰ Joyce 34-36.
- ⁴¹ Muriel Latham, "The Sound of a Wind" *New Mexico Folklore Record*, Volume XI (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1964) 27-28.
- ⁴² Joyce 38-40.
- ⁴³ Waters 341.
- ⁴⁴ Joyce 44.
- ⁴⁵ Malotki 24.
- ⁴⁶ Malotki 138.
- ⁴⁷ Joyce 46.
- ⁴⁸ Slifer 130-131.
- ⁴⁹ Ramon A. Gutierrez, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500-1846* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991) 14.
- ⁵⁰ Gutierrez 35.
- ⁵¹ Joyce 50.
- ⁵² *ibid.*
- ⁵³ Malotki 67.
- ⁵⁴ Malotki 71.
- ⁵⁵ Richard W. Payne, *The Hopi Flute Ceremony* (Oklahoma City: Toubat Trails Publishing Co., 1993) 12.
- ⁵⁶ *ibid.*
- ⁵⁷ *ibid.*
- ⁵⁸ *ibid.*
- ⁵⁹ Payne HFC 12.
- ⁶⁰ Joyce 51.
- ⁶¹ Waters 210.
- ⁶² Joyce 53.
- ⁶³ *ibid.*
- ⁶⁴ Joyce 54.
- ⁶⁵ *ibid.*
- ⁶⁶ Payne HFC 49.
- ⁶⁷ Joyce 55.
- ⁶⁸ Malotki 71.
- ⁶⁹ Joyce 55.
- ⁷⁰ Payne NAPF14.
- ⁷¹ Slifer 20.