

## **Boundary Objects in Hopi Prophecy and Myth**

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### **Abstract**

This paper will examine the political nature of myth in Hopi culture. The control of ritual and of the interpretation of myth in Hopi culture is the control of power. The paper will also examine the conflict between the Hopi Traditional Movement and the Hopi Tribal Council and how that conflict was played out as an intra-tribal attempt to control prophetic myth. This means the Hopi have at different times interpreted their anticipated savior and sign of purification as a US citizen, a Mormon, and, at one point, Hitler. The Hopi village of Hotevilla was founded in 1906. Many Hopi view this village's leaders as having transformed Hopi myth without the required knowledge or authority; however, it is Hotevilla's version of the emergence myth, through the Hopi Traditionalist Movement and their recruitment of outside groups, that most Hopi outsiders and non-Hopi believe is the authoritative version<sup>1</sup>.

### **1. Introduction**

The Hopi "Prophecy Stone" is a boundary object defining the boundary between two factions of Hopi as well as outsiders associated with one of the Hopi groups. The known history of these Hopi groups differs in that one faction has been more vocal in their history and myth while the other faction keeps their history and myth within their own society. Between these groups there is a use of prophecy and the fluid nature of myth to achieve political goals.

### **2. Literature Review**

#### **2.1 Boundary Objects**

The idea of a boundary object is a 20th century concept presented by Susan Leigh Star and James Griesemer in the essay *'Translations' and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology*. "Boundary objects are objects which are both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites."<sup>2</sup> The basic idea is that the same object can be interpreted and reinterpreted by different groups of people without the object losing its identity, it is still the same thing. In the article they also state, "[Boundary objects] are weakly structured in common use, and become strongly structured in individual-site use"<sup>3</sup>. The meaning of boundary objects is more stable within an interpretive community, but across communities that meaning is contested.

The authors continue, "[Boundary objects] have different meanings in different social worlds but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognizable," essentially saying the use and interpretation of the same object are different to different peoples, but they are still similar enough that even with different interpretations they are still recognizable to different worlds<sup>4</sup>. "The creation and management of boundary objects is

key in developing and maintaining coherence across intersecting social worlds,” suggesting that the establishment of boundary objects serves a social function as well<sup>5</sup>.

The example used by the authors as highlighting the “boundary” between different social groups is a map: one map can be used by some people as a way to find camping spots; the same map can be used by ecologists to find ecologically significant areas<sup>6</sup>.

In the context of this paper, as will be shown, the boundary object is a petroglyph near Oraibi, Arizona, sometimes called “Prophecy Rock.” The petroglyph is sometimes described as depicting the ‘Hopi life-plan,’ while others describe it as depicting an attack upon a Hopi settlement. The petroglyph serves as a boundary object between groups of Hopi depending on their interpretation of the meaning of the rock-drawing.

### 3. History

The Hopi are descendants of the Anasazi. The Anasazi have been located in the Four Corners area, the shared borders of Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Utah, since “at least the beginning of the Christian era”<sup>7</sup>. As Ragsdale states, “...some current scholars believe that the myths of the contemporary Indian people are more than mere fictitious illustrations of contemporary morality; they feel that such myths may represent precise, orally transmitted composites of the beliefs, values, and actual histories of the prehistoric societies”<sup>8</sup>. This is significant in that it gives a historical context for the Hopi emergence myth, along with a sense of its origins. While the myths describe mythic individuals, they also describe tribal migrations across recognizable portions of the Southwest, combining mythic elements with historic events.

According to Ragsdale, “... the covenant to keep the world in balance— “was the sacred fountainhead of the Anasazi people”<sup>9</sup>. This balance and the task of caring for the land is fundamental to the Hopi emergence myth in all of its forms. In 1054, a supernova illuminated the sky for two years before fading; the supernova was so bright it was visible during the day. There is evidence the appearance of the supernova affected the Anasazi, and it is also possible it was the supernova that influenced what would become the Hopi emergence myth and the wait for the return of the ‘White Brother’<sup>10</sup>. Because in the myth the two brothers are depicted as being white and red, “modern understandings of the myth seems to treat the human and coloration images literally and thus make the myth a prophecy about the community of humans,” rather than addressing astronomical or other eschatological possibilities.

### 4. Myth and Prophecy

Hopi prophecy has substantial diversity due to its political nature, in that the linkage between prophecy and political power in the Hopi nation lends itself to the generation of new prophesies and interpretations by those seeking power, as Geertz suggests; however, there are general themes that are ubiquitous to the prophecy in all of its forms. All of the prophecies include previous worlds from which the Hopi ancestors emerged from; the previous world or worlds were corrupted by confusion and evil which provoked the good people to flee; once in the higher world the Elder brother, known as Pahaana and Maasaw, promises to return when the Hopi are in trouble; a “... process of destruction and creation will result in yet a higher-level world where new social relationships and new cultural forms will accompany better material conditions”<sup>11</sup>.

Within these general themes there is a huge amount of discrepancy. The number of preceding worlds ranges from one to three; the return of Maasaw will be recognized by “... (1) the fact that he speaks Hopi but is not a Hopi, or (2) a mark on his forehead, or (3) his ability to read the Hopis’ stone tablet...”<sup>12</sup>.

Just about every aspect of the Hopi prophecy has lists like this. There are discrepancies in the prophecies in what precedes Pahaana’s arrival, what form destruction will come in, who will destroy the world, who will purify the world, who will judge the purified, what punishments will be, and what comes in the next world. Perhaps some of the most relevant discrepancies is how Maasaw will be recognized.

The majority of Hopi have been discreet when it comes to their rituals and prophecies, as Clemmer, Geertz and other scholars note. “Until the rise of the Traditionalist Movement during 1940s, the knowledge attached to the clan myths and to the narratives of the secret brotherhoods were kept secret”<sup>13</sup>.

“A common Hopi view is that [Hotevilla’s] leaders attempted to create the ritual system in the first half of the twentieth century without the proper knowledge or authority,”<sup>14</sup>. Geertz notes, “Traditionalist prophecy is not the only prophecy among the Hopis, and that it is couched in a radically different context than indigenous prophecy is,” which

calls attention that there are differences in interpretation between the Hopi Traditionalist Movement and the Hopi Tribal Council.



Figure 1. Prophecy Rock

In Hopi-land, there is a petroglyph that acts a boundary object between Hopi factions. The stone itself shows a figure to the left, with smaller figures atop a building or path, with a figure supported by a cane to the right. In one interpretation, “It shows the ‘Great Spirit’/Creator/Masaw/Elder Brother, the world after emergence, and two parallel horizontal paths: an upper path, the false path of materialism and the White Man’s way, leading to destruction and a lower path leading to old age and everlasting life, represented by growing corn and a staff, upon which the elderly lean in old age,”<sup>15</sup>. When the rock is viewed in this context it is known as the “Hopi Life Plan,” and is this interpretation favored by Thomas Banancya and the Traditionalist Movement. Geertz explored the history of the prophecy rock; he notes that the earliest evidence of the petroglyph’s existence was by John Wesley Powell in 1875. Powell’s report states a native, Tal-ti, told him the petroglyph “was made by their ancestors” and that it represented when “[t]heir town was attacked by the Spaniards; the commander was a gallant fellow, who attempted to lead his men up the stone stairway to the town, but the besieged drove them back with rolling stones, and the Spanish captain was wounded and left by his followers,”<sup>16</sup>. The story continues the Hopi took him to a spring and poured water on his head; Tal-ti even recounts the Spanish war cry of “Santiago!” thus validating this story further. In this interpretation, there is no mention of a ‘Hopi life plan;’ the rock describes a specific event within a historic time span.

New Age groups also are interested in the Hopi Prophecy Rock. “LaVan Martineau copied and translated the strange marks and revealed a message that has special meaning to Native Americans and all people of our planet-- especially during the impending new cycle,” the impending new cycle being a New Age term<sup>17</sup>. The translation and definition of the petroglyph used by New Agers comes to them from “elders of the Hopi Hotevilla faction,” and is the version that Thomas Banancya and the Traditionalist Movement proliferated.

## 5. Factions

There are two groups that struggle for power in the Hopi political stage: the Hopi Tribal Council and the Hopi Traditionalist Movement. The Hopi Tribal Council was founded and a constitution made in December of 1936<sup>18</sup>. The members of the Hopi Tribal Council are chosen by individual villages according to their constitution<sup>19</sup>. For the constitution to be ratified at least 30% of eligible Hopi needed to vote and then win a majority vote; afterwards, the American Secretary of the Interior approved the Hopi Constitution.

The other group is the Hopi Traditionalist Movement. "In meetings held from 1946 to 1948, the Hopi Traditionalist Movement formally emerged, calling itself the 'Hopi Indian Nation,'" Haley states<sup>20</sup>. "They were convinced that the 'ash bomb' motif of their mythology was a prophecy of the atomic bomb and that it was a crucial sign indicating that the advent of Maasaw and the end of the world were near,"<sup>21</sup>.

During these meetings various clan traditions were assembled into a body of prophecies "to be spread throughout the world in preparation for the coming apocalypse,"<sup>22</sup>.

Geertz has catalogued of Hopi prophetic statements; he says, "During the period of 1962 to the present, almost one hundred per cent of the prophetic statements, which have appeared in print, stem from the Traditionalist Movement, and about ninety per cent of them are from three men: Dan Qötshongva (Katchongva), David Monongya, and Thomas Banancya,"<sup>23</sup>.

The Hopi Traditionalist Movement's ideology was "clearly anti-American," and "claimed that US government had no legal authority over their sovereign nation and that the Hopi Tribal Council did not represent legitimate, 'traditional' villages,"<sup>24</sup>.

Geertz states, "...it should be noted the Traditionalist Movement could neither maintain a clear divide between traditionalism and progressivism -- the very bastion of their political platform-- nor maintain a clear distinction between itself and the Tribal Council-- perceived as being their major opponent-- in neither means nor ends"<sup>25</sup>. "... the Traditionalists were deeply engaged in reformulating their religion, including its prophecies, and they attempted to change the local, agricultural concerns of traditional Hopi religion to universalistic and missionary ones," showing that the Traditionalist movement was far from Traditional and the name largely a rhetorical device; however, they were successful in recruiting white Americans<sup>26</sup>.

The basic issue between the two groups is who deserves the authority to rule. The Hopi Tribal Council believes authority to rule is theirs, while the Hopi Traditionalist Movement believes the right to rule lies with village leaders. Cox states, "I see support of the Council, and support of the village leaders, as alternatives between which every Hopi political leader must choose. It is not possible to enter reservation politics without taking a position on this issue"<sup>27</sup>. This quote exemplifies the polar nature of this issue; it is impossible to avoid it if you are active in Hopi politics. As Cox says, "What the Progressives stand for then, is generally what the Traditionalists oppose: oil exploration, roads, land claim suits, and installation of utility lines in the villages"<sup>28</sup>. Cox then goes on to suggest that the Traditionalists do not oppose these actions "for their intrinsic harm, but because the Council supports them"<sup>29</sup>. Therefore progress obtained for villages by the Tribal Council is seen as a loss to Hopi Traditionalist Movement because it was provided by the Tribal Council; this is evident because "Traditionalists do *not* absolutely oppose the economic development of the reservation,"<sup>30</sup>. Cox states "Traditionalist leaders will accept oil exploration and the like 'when the time is right'," and then states that it is not clear when the time will be right, but it definitely "will never be under the regime of the Tribal Council,"<sup>31</sup>.

Gossip plays a significant role in the way the Hopi Traditionalist Movement and the Hopi Tribal Council communicate with each other. Gossip is a way to manage information; some information is intentionally circulate while other information is intentionally withheld all to serve self-interests. Bruce A. Cox states "that political gossip, gossip concerning others' fitness to have access to power, has the particularly salient point of permitting an increase in one's own party's access to power"<sup>32</sup>. Bruce also notes that gossip is typically not face-to-face<sup>33</sup>. Essentially what Cox suggests here is that the Traditionalists goal with gossip is to decrease the authority of the Tribal Council to rule while increasing their own authority to rule. Cox describes a clown act critiquing the Tribal Council. Through the impersonation and caricaturizing of Council supporters the clowns suggest to their audience that the Council are progressive "sell-outs, since they seek alliance with White governmental power." He then states that the Council, through its attempt of seeking social change, may lose the title to Hopi lands<sup>34</sup>. Another form the political gossip between the two factions has taken is anonymous letters to the reservation newspaper; a supporter of the Tribal Council calls out the legitimacy of the Traditionalists' authority by writing to the "So called Traditionalist leaders."

A huge base of support for the Traditionalist Movement came in the form of outsiders because unlike the Tribal Council they were willing to share their myth and history. This relationship began during World War II. In Hotevilla, "two village leaders claimed the Hopi prophecy foretold of the war and of the need for Hopis to stay out of it,"<sup>35</sup>. One of the village of Hotevilla's leaders, Katchongva, said Hitler could be the 'White Brother,' citing the similarity between the swastika and a Hopi symbol, as well as prophecy, so "he counseled young men not to register for the draft as the war approached, which is the main reason why most of the eleven Hopis convicted of draft evasion were from [Hotevilla]"<sup>36</sup>.

Ammon Hennacy, a writer for the *Catholic Worker*, was a conscientious objector during the war. He learned of the Hopi imprisoned for draft evasion and began to contact them. It was in this way that Hennacy formed a relationship with Thomas Banancya, who would be a Traditionalist Movement leader. Hennacy worked with Katchongva and Banancya to express concerns directly to President Truman in DC, but they were unable to meet the President. Instead,

Hennacy was able to introduce the two to his network of Catholic Worker and pacifist activists. “Ammon Hennacy’s impact can be summarized in two parts. He helped develop and popularize an inaccurate image of the Hopi Traditionalist Movement as ‘the real Hopi,’ ‘the true Hopi,’ or ‘the traditional Hopi.’ And he helped them obtain a network of support among radical pacifists, anarchists, the post-war Left, and spiritual seekers”<sup>37</sup>.

Thomas Banancya, born in 1902, was one of the first Hopi to receive a college education, although he never graduated. He was a “highly articulate spokesman for the Traditionalist Movement,” and was successful in recruiting members “whose talents were not based on traditional values and social status but in their ability to deal with the White world,”<sup>38</sup>. Banancya was especially successful at the recruitment of Euro-Americans to the Hopi Traditionalist Movement’s cause. One of the reasons he was so successful in recruitment was because he changed his interpretations of prophecy for different audiences, “... he not only changed his interpretations for changing audiences, but he also changed his drawings to fit the interpretations!”<sup>39</sup>.

It was because of this work that Thomas Banancya was able to become an international figure. Craig Carpenter joined the Traditionalist cause and was directed by Banancya to recruit support for their movement in Los Angeles. Carpenter brought support to Hotevilla in the form of counter-culture youth, the so-called ‘Hippies’. The Hopi Traditionalist movement “eagerly obliged young people’s hunger for cultural alternatives, especially from Native American sources”<sup>40</sup>. The Traditionalists were “involved in a variety of seminal counterculture events, such as the ‘Human Be-In’ and ‘Death of Hippie’ march in 1967”<sup>41</sup>. “The underground press also played a vital role in popularizing Hopi Traditionalists.”

In this manner, the views of the Hopi Traditionalists came to be those which were popularized through the media as if they were the views of the majority of the Hopi -- when they were in fact primarily the views of a small group of Hopi from Hotevilla, while the larger Hopi was more inclined to keep their secrets to themselves. In particular, the views of the Hotevilla faction about the Hopi folkways and religion were popularized, such that New Agers came to feel a particular kinship with the Hopi -- much to the bemusement of many Hopi.

The interest of the “hippies” in the Hopi was caricatured by the Hopi “clowns,” often without the “hippies” understanding they were being caricatured (Geertz); and “In spring of 1967, Rolling Thunder [a man who claimed to be Cherokee but lacked any Native ancestry] confirmed that hippies were indeed reincarnated Indians, as many hippies thought,”<sup>42</sup>.

This interest in Hopi by whites continued with New Agers in the 1980s and 1990s. “New Age is a persistent attempt to reconstruct a cohesive and viable worldview, an attempted reconstruction of meaning,”<sup>43</sup>. Geertz notes that many Native Americans acted as New Age shamans with a disproportionate amount of them being leaders and spokesmen of the Hopi Traditionalist Movement. A New Age “global happening” in 1987 saw “a sensationalized misrepresentation of Hopi prophecy with a little help from Thomas Banancya. About 50 non-Hopis met with Banancya at Prophecy Rock for two week until the Hopi Police Department was sent out to disperse them.” There were some Hopi that were against New Agers though; Thomas E. Mails, a New Ager, was protested by Hopi who were upset about the “disrespect for their culture as well as [the] commercialization of sacred objects and practices,”<sup>44</sup>. Mails’ response was that he had support of Hopi elders, such as Thomas Banancya and “that the Hopis do not have a patent on the Great Spirit”<sup>45</sup>.

## 6. Conclusion

The Hopi Prophecy rock is therefore a boundary object. It creates a clear division between the Traditionalist Movement and the Tribal Council. The Traditionalist Movement believes and preaches that the petroglyph shares the “Hopi Life Plan” while the Council believes it is a historical recording of an invasion by Spaniards. Similarly, it acts as a boundary between outside groups; hippies and members of the New Age who have taken the preaching of Thomas Banancya and the Traditionalist Movement at face value are unaware of the historical significance of the petroglyph and the history that it records, while historians and ethnological researches are likely aware of the petroglyph’s historical significance as it relates to the Spaniards.

Hopi prophecy is a system both of eschatology and of politics. Shown here is that the history and myth of the Hopi is largely kept secret except by the Hopi Traditionalist Movement, who have their own political agenda in sharing the information. In their sharing they have accommodated prophecy to fit their needs. Furthermore, the releasing of the prophecy to a general public has allowed for Hopi beliefs to become part of Hippie and New Age doctrine much to the frustration of the Hopi Tribal Council and other non-‘Traditionalists’. In addition, shown here is that the “Prophecy Rock” serves as a boundary object, in the sense Star uses the term, dividing the Traditional faction from the Tribal Council faction, in the interpretation of the petroglyph.

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