

ASB 321 Indians of the Southwest
Fall Semester 2005
Dr. Martin

First Examination

Question B:

“The origin account of the Tewa of San Juan, New Mexico provides an account of the origin and form and in that a warrant for the organization of San Juan religious and political life. How is this true?”

Paul Wren

INTRODUCTION

The Tewa origin myth describes how the Tewa people came to be in this world. The origin story also details the supernatural beings and “Made” people who play a significant role in their migration to this world. These supernatural beings, and the groups to which they belonged, provide the framework for religious belief and ritual behavior in Tewa society. The strong links between their rituals and their origin story help to maintain the relevance of both to the lives of the Tewa.

TEWA ORIGIN STORY

Before entering this world, the Tewa lived in a dark land called Sipofene, beneath a lake to the north. Humans, animals, and supernatural beings all lived together there. At some point, White Corn Maiden and Blue Corn Woman (the supernatural mothers of the Tewa, representing Winter and Summer, respectively) sent a man to explore the world, and then to explore the world above. This man was later made the Hunt Chief, the first “Made” person (Ortiz 1972, p. 14).

The Hunt Chief selected two men to be the Winter and Summer Chiefs, charging them with leading and caring for the people during their respective

seasons. The Winter and Summer Chiefs were also Made People (Ortiz 1972, p. 14).

The new chiefs sent six pairs of brothers to explore the world. Each pair was known by a different color, and each explored in a different direction. The blue pair went north, the yellow pair traveled west, the red to the south, the white to the east, the dark pair ventured to the zenith, and the all-colored pair to the nadir. All of these brothers were known as the Towa é. They are special people, but are not Made (Ortiz 1972, p. 14).

The chiefs, the Towa é, and the rest of the people tried several times to venture out into the new world, met with some adversity, and returned each time. Upon the first return, the medicine man (Ke) was created as the fourth Made Person to help keep the people well. Upon subsequent returns, the following roles and organizations were established: The Kossa and Kwirana (clowns) were created to entertain the people; the Scalp chief was instituted to ensure success in war; and the Kwiyoh (women's society) was created to help the Scalp chief (Ortiz 1972, p. 15).

Finally, the people were complete, and could successfully move into the new "above" world. Before they left, the Hunt Chief divided the people between the Winter and Summer Chiefs, with the Summer group directed to proceed south along the west side of the Rio Grande, and the Winter group would go along the mountains to the east of the river. The two groups founded several villages. After some time and a lot of migration, the Winter and Summer peoples came back together, such that Tewa communities were made up of people from both the Summer and Winter (Ortiz 1972, p. 15-16).

TEWA CULTURE

The organization of a Tewa village will look quite familiar if you already know the basics of the Tewa origin myth. To begin with, all Tewa are members of either the Summer or Winter moiety (Martin/McCarty, p.21), connecting them back to the Blue Corn Woman and the White Corn Maiden. Each moiety has its own Chief: Human counterparts to the Winter and Summer Chiefs who were Made Persons in the origin story (Lecture, 19-SEP-2005).

There are also secret societies with very exclusive membership corresponding to other Made Persons and groups from the origin myth: The Medicine society, the Kwirana clown society, the Kossa clown society, the Hunt society, the Scalp society, and the Women's society (Lecture, 19-SEP-2005).

The Summer and Winter Chiefs each have a left-arm assistant and a right-arm assistant, as do the heads of all the secret societies. All of the members of these special societies are considered living Made People, also known as "Patowa" (Ortiz 1972, p. 81).

Each of these eight groups of Made People plays a special part in Tewa society. The Summer and Winter Chiefs rule the village, each for half the year (Ortiz 1972, p. 82). It is also their responsibility to nominate non-Made people to the political positions within the visible government (Ortiz 1972, p. 64).

All the Patowa carry out significant duties at village ceremonies, leading or participating in important moiety rituals. For example, the medicine men plan and preside over communal cleansing rituals (Ortiz 1972, p. 70); The Kwirana

and Kossa trace the journeys of the deities during ceremonies, and bring the masked dancers who imitate the deities (Ortiz 1972, p. 94); and the Hunt Chief plays a major role in the water giving ceremony (Ortiz 1972, p. 34), where infants in their first year join the moiety of their fathers (Lecture, 19-SEP-2005).

There are living Towa é who correspond to the 6 pairs of brothers from the origin myth who are said to be watching over the villages. They make up one of the three levels of the official political system, originally installed by the Spanish (Ortiz 1972, p. 61). The Towa é are selected to serve in the government by the moiety chiefs for a term of one year. In addition to their government duties, they have the greater responsibilities of watching over the Patowa, and helping them to make all the ceremonies function properly. Whenever these Towa é participate in village rituals, they perform their duties in pairs, just as the Towa é from the origin myth did (Ortiz 1972, p. 73).

CONCLUSION

The Tewa origin myth describes a well-defined structure and hierarchy which acts as a template for Tewa society. Nearly all of the important players in the origin myth are represented by members of Tewa society, with the exception of those who stayed behind in the other world beneath the lake.

The strong connections between practice and tradition serve to justify the rituals, and also to validate the origin story itself. The clear relationships between the two should help to insure continuity of Tewa ceremonial practice.

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