

## The Flower World Symbols in Rock Art

By Boma Johnson, Archaeologist

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Boma began his presentation by defining the symbolic “Flower World” of the Ancestral Puebloan/Anasazi people as the achievement of a state of being in beauty, balance or peace of mind, through proper choices and behaviors. It represents a spiritual condition, not a physical place.

Kelley Hayes-Gilpin, et.al. (**Painting the Cosmos: Metaphor and Worldview in Images from the Southwest Pueblos and Mexico**, edited by Kelley Hayes-Gilpin and Polly Schaafsma, Museum of Northern Arizona, 2010, p122) states:

*“Throughout the Southwest and Mesoamerica, songs describe a colorful, glittering, flowery paradise evoked through singing and the sound of bells, rattles, flutes and songs. Hopi songs describe **siitalpuva**, “along the flower land”, “along the fields in bloom”, “the land brightened with flowers”, as a place that shines forth with colored blossoms, birds, and butterflies. This flowery world is not a separate place, like Christian Heaven, but a reality that can be brought forth in this world through human prayers, songs and actions.*

*Speakers of the Uto-Aztecan languages share a complex imagery including flowers, butterflies, colorful birds and rainbows. Flower world traditions thrive in many Native communities today...*

*...The Flower World is probably an ancient idea that has pervaded Mesoamerica and the Southwest for thousands of years.”*

Boma then provided a brief summary of the history of the Ancestral Puebloan peoples.

The years 600 to 1050 had adequate rainfall and the southwest was relatively prosperous. The people showed their thanks to the spirits and asked for continued good climate by holding ceremonies and dances.

In about 1100 the climate began to change. The years 1150 to 1300 saw two severe droughts. This brought about a time of starvation and societal unrest, with subsequent food & water conflicts. There was a collapse of the previously successful Chaco Canyon trade system with Mesoamerica. This trade empire had been based upon social stratification with a Chacoan ruling elite, and went down due to unrest caused by the extreme differences between the "haves" and "have-nots". As a result of this conflict, a new socio-political and religious system developed – the kachina religion that was based on the concept of ancestor spirits. The previous stratification of society, as practiced in Chaco was regarded as a failed social experiment. New cultural ways evolved that would

knit the people together - uniting people through cross-cultural contacts in clans, marriage, religious societies with varied ceremonial obligations, and moieties such as the division of the pueblo into the Summer People and the Winter People. The kiva was used for religious ceremonies, but many ceremonies were now held in public plazas.

The Ancestral Puebloans had a 3-tier belief system consisting of the upper world or sky world, the earth or center place and the underworld. These concepts were symbolized by use of the kiva. The sipapu symbolized where the people emerged from the underworld. The floor of the kiva represented the earth or the center place. The kiva ladder represented leaving the earth and going to the sky world.

The Puebloan creation stories describe people coming from the first world (the ant people), from the second world (the lizard people), and from the third world (the mudheads) and then the humans who are currently in the fourth world.

The Puebloans believe that the current world, the 4<sup>th</sup> world, would be difficult, but they believed that they selected this way of life at their emergence. They also believed that the 5<sup>th</sup> world, could consist of beauty, plentiful water and happiness and they would gather with their gods and ancestor spirits. In other words, have a better life – A Flower World- but only if the proper behaviors and ceremonies were followed.

The symbols of the flower world appear in Southwestern rock art and kiva murals, and in Mesoamerican murals, sculpture and artifacts. The main Flower World symbols, always associated with water, are:

- Flowers – the key symbol representing beauty, often seen in Mesoamerican art and in kiva murals.
- Corn plant or the tree of life – the plants roots, trunk and flower connect the earth to the sky.
- Trees and Green foliage
- Butterflies, birds, and feathers– to take prayers to the sky world and ancestor spirits
- Musical instruments – to send prayers to the ancestor spirits
- Water symbols – clouds / mountains, rainbows and rain
- Dragon flies – signify water or spirit beings
- Sunflowers – edible seeds / food source, looks like the sun – the source of life, tracks the sun during the day.
- Water creatures- fish, frogs, tadpoles, water spiders

Boma showed photos of these Flower World symbols, and other rock art symbols associated with Puebloan belief in contact with the ancestor spirits, such as:

- Portals and ladders - that show where the people have been, and they will go in the future
- Ancestor spirits and bird people
- "T" shape doorways, sacred portals to rooms used for ceremonial purposes - no longer used after the change to the Kachina religion
- The Milky Way symbol, representing a path to the Beyond World
- The "J" shaped "Hole In The Sky" located in the Milky Way, near the constellation Scorpius, as a portal to the Beyond World

In conclusion, Boma stated that it is necessary to have a better comprehension of the Ancestral Puebloan/Anasazi culture and belief system if one is to begin to understand the meaning and significance of the rock art symbols seen throughout the Southwest.

John Mangels

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