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KOKOPELLI



The Magic, Mirth, and Mischief  
of an Ancient Symbol

SLIFER

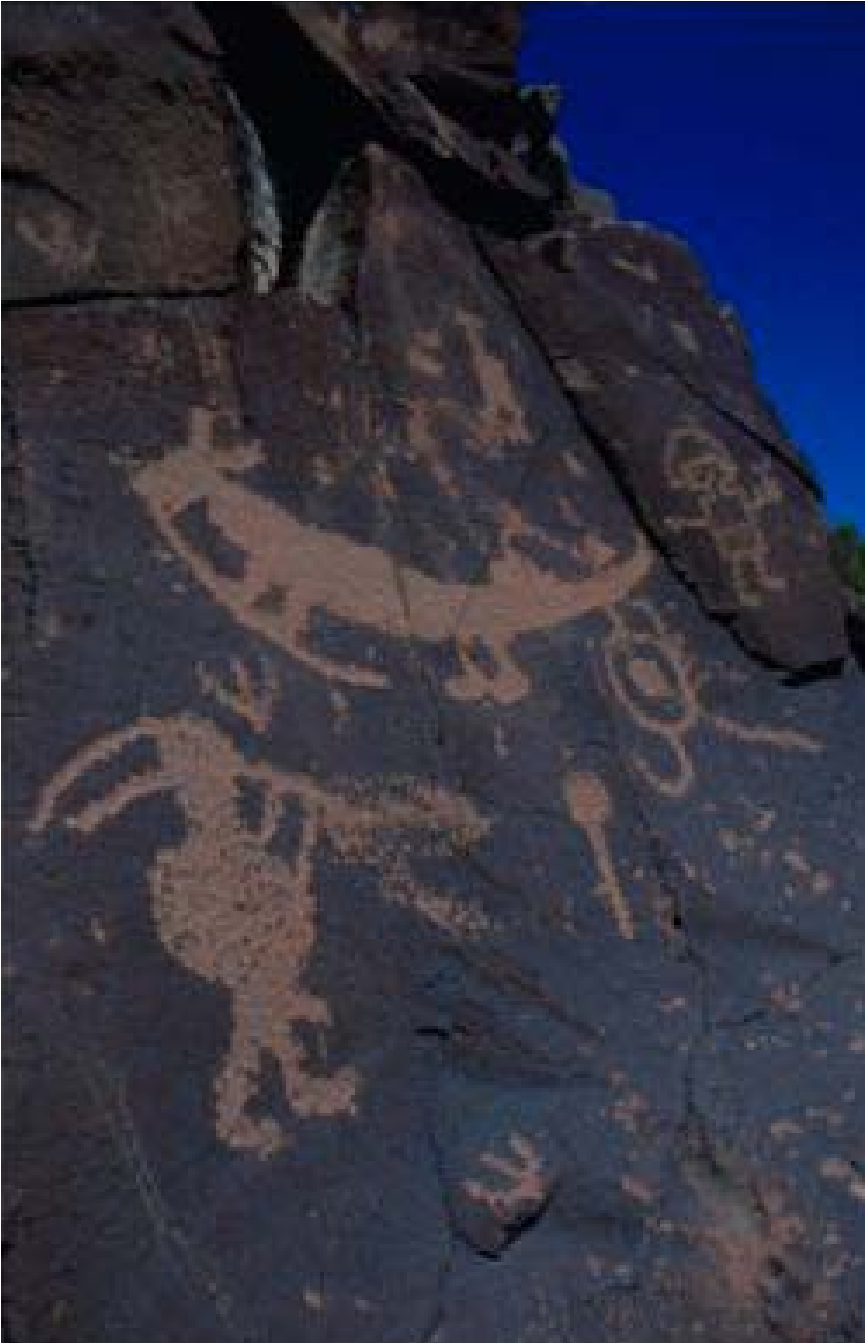


# KOKOPELLI

*The Magic, Mirth, and Mischief of an Ancient Symbol*

DENNIS SLIFER

*with a foreword by R. CARLOS NAKAI*  
*introduction by ROBERT WAYNE MIRABAL*



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# The Magic of the Flute Player— Enduring Icon of the Southwest

One of the most enduring and ubiquitous figures in rock art of THE Four Corners region is the flute player, which usually occurs in contexts related to fertility and abundance. Often phallic, sometimes hump-backed, these curious images occur in prehistoric rock art, as well as ceramics and kiva murals, over a large area of the American Southwest (fig. 1.01).<sup>1</sup> That this symbol is prevalent within such a large area and for more than a thousand years suggests that the flute player character was very important in prehistoric times. More than 500 flute player images have been recorded in the research for this book.

In recent years, this figure with the misnomer of Kokopelli has become an extremely popular icon of the Southwest. Kokopelli is the name of a Hopi *katsina* (“respected spirit”) associated with fertility and rain. Although the Kokopelli *katsina* never plays a flute, he has a humped back and an erect penis; he is notorious for his libido. His name has come to be associated with the prehistoric flute players depicted in rock art throughout the Southwest. This may be appropriate for some rock art images, but by no means all. The flute player depicted in rock art is probably a complex merging of various myths, deities, personalities, and traits that evolved over a period of at least a thousand years in the Ancestral Pueblo world. The Hopi never identify the flute player figure in rock art as Kokopelli, preferring the traditional term *Maahu* (cicada) or *Lahlanhoya* (a symbol of the Flute Clan).<sup>2</sup> Other Pueblos as well have different names for the flute player figure—at Zuni he is called *Chu’lu’laneh*, the name for the type of flute used by the rain priests.<sup>3</sup> The modern Kokopelli *katsina*

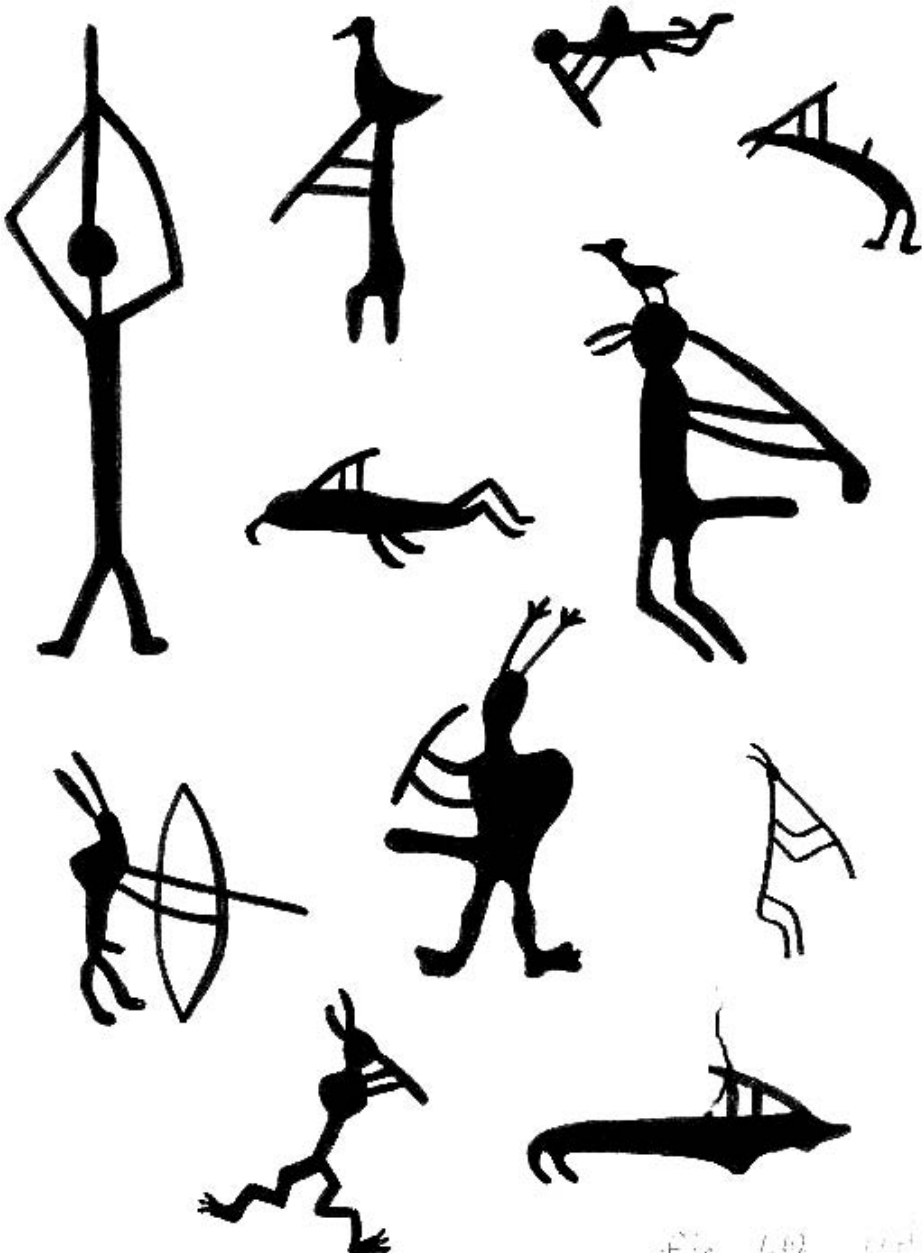


FIGURE 1.02: Examples of the variety and diversity of flute player expressions in rock art of the Southwest.