

WC0803010

Hopi Kachina, circa 1880

This is a great Kachina. Like most of the really old Kachinas, it is hard to identify. When a Hopi introduces a Kachina and its rituals, it is considered to essentially belong to him. When he dies, the Kachina and its performances are frequently lost. All that remains are a few symbols that indicate his purpose.

In this Kachina, the body is blanked out with red stripes but the tightly held arms, bent knees as well as the slab feet indicate a doll from at least the 1880s or earlier. The oversize head is also an early trait.

The elements on the head are not sufficiently specific to compare with contemporary dolls but can still be equated by certain aspects. The cone-shaped head is like the single horn found on a few other chief Kachinas. The eagle feathers carved flat to the side of the "horn" would have projected horizontally. The small crosses on the front of the cone are stars and these usually connote a being from the heavens. The diamond shaped eyes are those of a guard or watchman Kachina. The broad mouth would normally have a beard from its lower margin.

Considering these separate elements; the cone-shaped horn with stars comes most closely to that of Sotuknangu, Heart of the Sky god. This Kachina varies by Mesa and villages and this specimen could be an early version. Sotuknangu has many aspects, one of which is a fearsome warrior who blasts his enemies or evildoers with lightning. Of particular interest is the fact that the Kachina has neither ears nor indications of any hair bangs attached. In most Sotuknangu renderings, he has ears so that he can hear the prayers of men.

This hypothetical identification is based on massive comparative material from over 50 years accumulation. It does not guarantee identification; it is merely the most logical base on remaining elements.

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