

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24215/26840162e008>

What Did it Mean When Knowledgeable Hopi Called the Moon Chief *Qahopi*?

McCluskey, Stephen C.

stephen.mccluskey@mail.wvu.edu

Professor emeritus

Department of History

West Virginia University

Morgantown, WV USA

McCluskey S. C.; 2024 "What Did it Mean When Knowledgeable Hopi Called the Moon Chief *Qahopi*".
Cosmovisiones/Cosmovisões 5 (1): 111-119.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24215/26840162e008>

Recibido: 18/03/2023, aceptado: 07/06/2024.

Este artículo se encuentra bajo la [Licencia Creative Commons de Atribución-NoComercial-CompartirIgual 4.0](#).



Resumen

Este estudio utiliza la metodología de la historia de las ideas científicas para examinar críticamente varios aspectos de una discusión etnográfica inédita en la que Alexander Stephen describe la comprensión hopi de la Luna en el siglo XIX. Como es común en la interpretación de textos antiguos, extraemos información sobre el significado de un texto de otros escritos del autor y sus contemporáneos.

El Jefe de la Luna es un hombre—y se llama así (*Mü'iyawû Moñwi*) pero no parece ser muy venerado, de hecho dicen que es *Kaho'pi* = tonto. No tiene casa, aunque como el Sol, lleva la Luna en su brazo, a modo de escudo; durante su viaje [a través del cielo].

Alexander M. Stephen, (1891-94, 18 de enero de 1894)

Aquí nos basamos especialmente en los escritos etnográficos de Alexander Stephen para arrojar luz sobre cómo interpretó las concepciones astronómicas Hopi del Sol y la Luna y cómo entendió los términos Moon Chief y *qahopi*.

En primer lugar, preguntamos a qué tipo de ser se referían Stephen y sus sabios Hopi cuando hablaban del Jefe de la Luna. A continuación, preguntamos qué significa la palabra *qahopi* o, para usar ejemplos específicos, ¿qué quiso decir un Hopi cuando dijo que un hombre o una mujer o el Jefe de la Luna o un tipo de comportamiento era *qahopi*? Después de haber aclarado el significado general de *qahopi* e identificado la naturaleza del Jefe de la Luna como un ser espiritual que llevaba la Luna a través del cielo, preguntamos qué aspectos del comportamiento del Jefe de la Luna consideraron *qahopi* los expertos Hopi de Stephen. Luego preguntamos cómo, o si, los aspectos *qahopi* del comportamiento del Jefe de la Luna influyeron en la forma del exitoso calendario luni-solar de los Hopi. Finalmente, ¿qué luz arroja sobre nuestra comprensión de la astronomía hopi y de la astronomía de los antecesores pueblo protohistóricos de los hopis el hecho de que algunos hopis informados consideraran que el Jefe de la Luna carecía de una casa y, por lo tanto, era *qahopi*?

En esta sección final nos basamos en estudios tempranos de astronomía en culturas prehistóricas para arrojar luz sobre los conceptos astronómicos, principalmente las paradas lunares, que iluminan la falta de una casa de la Luna en la astronomía Hopi.

Palabras clave: Hopi, etnoastronomía, paradas lunares, calendario lunar, Jefe de la Luna.

Abstract

This study uses the methodology of the history of scientific ideas to critically examine several aspects of an unpublished ethnographic discussion in which Alexander Stephen describes nineteenth-century Hopi understandings of the Moon. As is common in the interpretation of early texts, we draw insights into a text's meaning from other writings by the author and his contemporaries.

The Moon Chief is a man—& is so called (*Mür'iyawû Moñwi*) but does not seem to be held in much veneration, in fact they say he is *Kaho'pi* = foolish. He has no house— although like the Sun, he carries the Moon on his arm, shield fashion; during his journey [across the sky].

Alexander M. Stephen, (1891-94, 18 Jan. 1894)

Here we draw especially on the ethnographic writings of Alexander Stephen to shed light on how he interpreted Hopi astronomical conceptions of the Sun and the Moon and how he understood the terms Moon Chief and *qahopi*.

First, we ask what kind of being did Stephen and his knowledgeable Hopi mean when they spoke of the Moon Chief? Next, we ask what does the word *qahopi* mean or, to use specific examples, what did a Hopi mean when they said that a man or a woman or the Moon Chief or a kind of behavior was *qahopi*? After having clarified the general meaning of *qahopi* and identified the nature of the Moon Chief as a spiritual being who carried the Moon across the sky, we ask what aspects of the Moon Chief's behavior did Stephen's Hopi experts consider to be *qahopi*? We then ask how, or whether, the *qahopi* aspects of the Moon Chief's behavior influenced the form of the Hopi's successful luni-solar calendar. Finally, what light does the fact that some knowledgeable Hopi considered the Moon Chief to lack a house and therefore to be *qahopi* shed on our understandings of Hopi astronomy and of the astronomy of the Hopi's protohistoric Pueblo predecessors?

In this final section we draw on early studies of astronomies in prehistoric cultures to shed light on the astronomical concepts – principally the lunar standstills – that illuminate the Moon's lack of a house in Hopi astronomy.

Keywords: Hopi, ethnoastronomy, lunar standstills, lunar calendar, Moon Chief.

As his work on Hopi culture was drawing to an untimely close (Hieb 2004, 354, 372), Alexander Stephen was investigating various elements of Hopi astronomy: chiefly the months of the lunar calendar, the horizon markers of the solar calendar, and the framework of the four solstitial directions. In the letter discussed here, he addressed some complexities of Hopi understandings of the Moon, presenting the surprising comment from some Hopi experts that the Moon Chief is *kaho'pi*¹. Although Stephen translates the word *kaho'pi* in several places (Stephen 1891-94) as foolish, further investigation of the meaning and uses of the word indicate that it has much stronger negative connotations than Stephen's simple translation suggests. And yet we know from Stephen's and others' ethnographic records, and from subsequent investigations, that for the Hopi the Sun and Moon work together, with the Hopi alternately watching the Sun and the Moon to regulate the times of plantings and rituals (McCluskey 1977, 1990). This is not consistent with any broad claim that the Moon's general behavior is erratic.

What did they mean by the Moon Chief?

Even the apparently simple concept of the Moon Chief is ambiguous. Stephen and his Hopi experts described the Moon Chief as a man which, taken literally, would suggest

that he is an ordinary human being, perhaps a Hopi who has special knowledge and responsibilities concerning the Moon. Comparison with Stephen's other writings, however, shows that the phrase "The Moon Chief is a man" is not that clear-cut. In his *Hopi Journal*, Stephen uses the phrase "X is a man" to describe three different kinds of beings. He states "Au'halani **is a man**, is the Shoy'al kachina " (1936, 63). The phrase also applies to the Sun, "Sun is called upon for every kind of petition and in prayer for success in any undertaking; he is addressed because he **is a man**; and knows what it is they ask for" (1936, XLI, 1302; cf. Stephen 1929, 61). Besides these spiritual beings (Au'halani kachina and the Sun), Stephen also uses the phrase to describe an ordinary human being: "The soldiers from Fort Wingate have taken Wě'wě, To'maka, and four other Zuni... to prison at the Fort.... Wě'wě **is a man**, but... a hermaphrodite" (1936, 276). For Stephen the term "a man" often refers to a spiritual or mythological being.

The term *mongwi*, or chief, which Stephen here applied to the Moon Chief, is also ambiguous, as it applies to a broad range of entities. The closest analog to the Moon Chief in Stephen's *Hopi Journal* is the Sun Chief, a term which he gives three different meanings: first, a person who has special responsibilities for watching the Sun (30, 723, 1302); second, a kachina who represents the Sun in ritual performances (28, n. 3), and third, the Sun himself (116).

Since Stephen says that the Moon Chief, "like the Sun, carries the Moon on his arm, shield fashion" this claimed similarity

¹ Except when quoting or paraphrasing Stephen or other early sources, I will use the modern Third Mesa spelling of the *Hopi Dictionary* (1998).

offers a way to draw on Stephen's discussions of the Sun to flesh out his brief description of the Moon Chief's action. Several times, Stephen (1891-94) described how the Sun Chief (or the Sun) and his kinsman, *Tai'owa*, took turns carrying the Sun as a shield across the sky from East to West.

[Sun Chief] and his male relative *Tai'owa* (indifferently called brothers and relatives) divide the labour of bearing the shining shield across the sky, each carrying it four days alternately².

The role of the Sun Chief and *Tai'owa* in carrying the Sun as a shield is a direct parallel to Stephen's later description of how the Moon Chief, "carries the Moon on his arm, shield fashion." Since the Moon Chief carries the Moon, like the Sun Chief and *Tai'owa* carry the Sun, the Moon Chief is best understood as a similar spiritual being and not as an ordinary human being.

Stephen's Uses of the Word Qahopi

The word *qahopi*, which the Hopi Dictionary defines primarily as a "badly behaved person, misbehaving, nonconforming, or naughty one" and secondarily as "bad behavior" (Hopi Dictionary 1998, 458; see also Brandt 1954, 91-2; Glowacka and Sekaquaptewa 2009, 176-7), is a strongly value-laden term. *Qahopi* literally means

un-Hopi, combining the negative prefix *qa-* with the word *hopi*: "behaving one, one who is mannered, civilized, peaceable, polite..." (Hopi Dictionary 1998, 99-100). Stephen's own uses shed further light on how he understood the term.

Stephen (1936, 1004) described a man who abandoned his wife and child as "*kaho'pi* (not Hopi, good for naught)." Before the first Hopi emerged from the Underworld, Stephen (1929, 3) records that "all the people were fools [*qahopi* (Hieb 2008, 109)]. Youths copulated with the wives of the elder men, and the elder men deflowered virgins. All was confusion, and the chief was unhappy." One of Stephen's last recorded references to *qahopi* (1936, 1271-2) tells that the prayer offerings of *qahopi* people will be rejected and their prayers for specific material benefits will go unanswered. These examples of *qahopi* behavior demonstrate that Stephen's translation of *qahopi* as merely foolish both understates the gravity of the concept as recognized by his Hopi contemporaries and ignores its ethical and social consequences for individuals, the family, and the larger Hopi community.

Stephen's knowledgeable Hopis' description of the Moon Chief as *qahopi* suggests that they saw a significant shortcoming in at least some aspects of his behavior. Given this judgement, we must identify those specific aspects of the Moon Chief's behavior that Stephen's experts did not hold in much veneration.

² In a later description, Stephen noted that when "*Tai'owa* relieves him, [he] takes another path, a little removed, either North or South according to the season, holding that path for four days." This agrees with later Hopi accounts that when the Sun rises at a calendric horizon marker, it rises at the same marker for four days (Malotki 1983, 435).

How was the Moon Chief Qahopi?

In our text Stephen addresses three aspects of the Moon that were potentially qahopi: the fact that the Moon has no house; Stephen's confusion over how the manipulation of the Moon-shield causes the lunar phases; and some gaps in his understanding of how the Hopi reckoned the number of the lunar months. If we are to understand what these thinkers had in mind when they told Stephen that the moon is qahopi, we should consider which of the Moon's characteristics discussed here they were likely to consider qahopi.

Stephen's earlier research into Hopi understandings of the Sun and the Moon provides valuable context for examining what his Hopi experts told him about the Moon. Stephen (1891-4) had been trying to identify calendric horizon markers and by December 1893, he sent Fewkes a description of the Sun's houses:

Now anent your horizon points — first let me say there is no *Tawa'ki* [Sun's house] at *Ho'poko* [the direction of June Solstice Sunrise], nor at *Te'vyüña* [December Solstice Sunset] — But at *Tat'yüka* [December Solstice Sunrise] is **the** *Tawa'ki*, and at *Kwi-nin'yüka* [June Solstice Sunset] is also *Tawa'ki* but which is really the House of *Hüz-rü'iñwuhti* [Hard Objects Woman]³.

By 11 January 1894 Stephen had clarified

his understanding of the regular sequence of month names in the Hopi calendar, although his sources sometimes used alternate names for the summer moons. On this detail he noted that he had “often said the moon and the month are provokingly obscure subjects.... [Soon], I will be at this subject again.” His desire to clarify the names of the months may have been his motive for calling together “two or three thinkers” to discuss the Moon, which led to our ambiguous Kaho'pi passage.

By 18 January, when Stephen heard these thinkers describe the Moon as qahopi, he had already acquired a solid grasp of the Hopi understanding of the annual motion of the Sun along the horizon, of the role of *Ta'wa* and *Tai'owa* in carrying the Sun-shield, of the role of the Sun's houses marking the turning of the Sun at the solstices, and had determined the general sequence of the lunar months. Stephen's uncertainties of some details of the number and reckoning of the lunar months and of the relation of the Moon Chief's shield to the phases of the Moon reflected gaps in his research into Hopi concepts. They would not lead his Hopi experts to call the Moon Chief qahopi. The issue that these Hopi raised was that the Moon, unlike the Sun, “has no house” —that is, no fixed rising or setting points marking the northern and southern extremes of his monthly journeys along the eastern or western horizons where prayer offerings to him may be deposited. They apparently saw the Moon's lack of a house as critical— as disregarding the Hopi Way.

³ Stephen's ethnographic account of the Sun's houses is confirmed by 20th century field observations of Sun shrines marking the Sun's houses. (McCluskey 1990, S2-S10).

The Moon Chief's House and Lunar Astronomy

Stephen's Hopi experts apparently had spoken of the concept of the Moon Chief's house by analogy to *Tawa'ki* (the Sun's house), which fits in the system of four named Hopi directions, marking the solstitial directions as the northernmost and southernmost points of the Sun's annual paths along the eastern and western horizons (McCluskey 1990; Hopi Dictionary 1998, 890).

We can gain insights into the possible meanings of the "Moon Chief's house" by considering discussions of the related concept of the lunar standstills⁴ in the archaeoastronomical community (Thom 1971, 5, 18-26; Ruggles 1999, 36-7). To the extent that the Moon Chief could be said to have a house, it would be at the extreme positions where the Moon rises or sets on the horizon. Unlike the Sun, which rises or sets at its northern or southern house twice each year at the solstices, the Moon reaches the northern and southern extremes of its monthly path twice each month (a tropical month of 27.3 days rather than the common synodic month of 29.5 days), yet each month it rises at a different extreme point (Fig. 1). Over the course of an 18.6-year cycle, the Moon's northernmost and southernmost risings or settings occur in a region on the horizon within 7 degrees of the solstitial di-

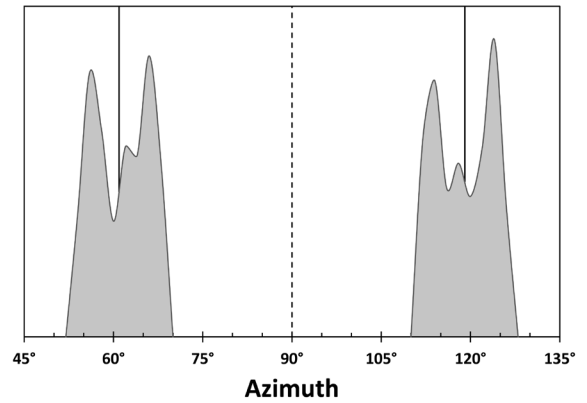


Figure 1 Azimuths of Moonrise at the Lunar Extremes. Histogram of computed azimuths of rising full moons nearest the time of the summer and winter solstices at the latitude of Walpi Pueblo (35° N). Solid lines indicate the directions of solstitial sunrise; the dashed line indicates equinoctial east.

rections, although tending to avoid the exact solstitial directions (Fig. 1). However, it does not seem like what a sedentary people like the Hopi would mean by a house, since the place of the Moon's rising (or setting) would not be constant.

Alternately, we could follow Walton's (2012, 335, 345) suggestion that the Hopi observed full moons at major and minor lunar standstills at the times of the equinoxes and solstices in an "as yet speculative lunar standstill calendar". Unaware of Stephen's unpublished manuscript, Walton attributed the absence of "Hopi terminology for 'lunar houses'" to inadequacies of the ethnographic record (2012, 346). In this

⁴ We use the term "lunar extreme" to refer to the northernmost or southernmost azimuth or declination that the Moon reaches each month; the value of this extreme is not constant; the extreme declination varies $\pm 5.15^\circ$ over a period of about 18.61 years. Following Ruggles (1999, 36) we use "lunar standstill" or "lunar standstill season" to refer to the intervals, lasting a year or more, during which the lunar extremes fall near their theoretical maximum or minimum; "lunar standstill limit" refers to those theoretical maximum or minimum azimuths or declinations.

interpretation the Moon would have two different houses, but would sometimes rise (or set) near one, would then rise (or set) near another some nine years later, but most of the time would not rise (or set) near his house. This would be unlike the case where the Hopi consider that there is one true Sun's house.

By either interpretation, the Moon would not have a single house, which seems to be what Stephen's Hopi experts meant when they said that the Moon Chief did not have such a house.

This labeling the Moon Chief's lack of a house as qahopi suggests that the Hopi may have been aware of the fluidity of the lunar extremes, and possibly of the existence of intervals when the lunar extremes approached the standstill limits⁵. However, they judged this wandering to be a deviation from the orderly behavior expected of a Hopi and there is no ethnographic evidence that they tried to find a pattern for this qahopi behavior. Tree ring dates provide strong archaeological evidence that the protohistoric people of Chimney Rock Pueblo observed successive lunar standstills (Malville, et al. 1991, S46-S48; Malville 1993; 2016, 86-7); however, there is no known evidence that they took the further step of identifying an orderly pattern in the lunar standstills.

Ethnographic studies have shown that the Hopi calendar is based on observations that reconcile the place of the Sun on the horizon with the phases of the Moon (McCluskey 1977; Malotki 1983, 365-79; Zeilik 1986). González-García and Belmonte's world-

wide study of archaeological sites marking the lunar extremes, drawn from a wide range of cultures, indicated that none of these sites used the place of the Moon on the horizon "to define or refine a calendar" (2019, 180). This evidence, combined with Stephen's account that Hopi considered the Moon Chief's lack of a house was qahopi, makes it extremely unlikely that the Hopi used observations of the Moon's place on the horizon as an element of their calendar.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for the assistance of various unnamed members of the Hopi tribe during my field work in the summers of 1978 to 1980; to the holders of archival materials pertaining to the Hopi, especially the American Philosophical Society, the Columbia University Library, and the National Anthropological Archives; to Juan Belmonte, César González-García, and Kim Malville who commented on earlier versions of this presentation, and to an anonymous referee who pointed out the issues raised by Stephen's statement that "the Moon Chief is a man."

Cited references

- Brandt, Richard B. (1954) Hopi Ethics. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.
- [Crow Wing]. (1925) A Pueblo Indian Journal, 1920-1921, Parsons, Elsie Clews (ed.) Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association, 32. Menasha, Wisconsin.
- Fewkes, J. Walter. (1892) A Few Summer

⁵ I owe this insight to César González-García.

Ceremonials at the Tusayan Pueblos. *A Journal of American Ethnology and Archaeology*, 2: 1-161.

Fewkes, J. Walter and A. M. Stephen. (1892) The Mamzrau'ti: A Tusayan Ceremony. *American Anthropologist*, 5: 217-245.

Glowacka, Maria and Emory Sekaquaptewa. (2009) The Metaphorical Dimensions of Hopi Ethics. *Journal of the Southwest*, 51: 165-185.

González-García, A. César and Juan A. Belmonte. (2019) Lunar Standstills or Lunistics, Reality or Myth? *Journal of Skyscape Archaeology*, 5: 177-190.

Hieb, Louis A. (2004) Alexander M. Stephen and the Navajos. *New Mexico Historical Review*, 79: 353-395.

Hieb, Louis A. (2008) The Hopi Clown Ceremony. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 32: 107-124.

Hopi Dictionary Project. (1998) Hopi Dictionary/Hopiikwa Lavàytutuveni: A Hopi-English Dictionary of the Third Mesa Dialect. Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Press.

Malotki, Ekkehart. (1983) Hopi Time: A Linguistic Analysis of the Temporal Concepts in the Hopi Language. Berlin / New York / Amsterdam: Mouton.

Malville, J. McKim. (1993) Chimney Rock and the Moon: The Shrine at the Edge of the World. In Malville, J. McKim and Matlock, Gary (eds.) *The Chimney Rock Archaeological Symposium*. Fort Collins, CO: Rocky Mountain Forest and Range Experiment Station. 20-28.

Malville, J. McKim, Frank W. Eddy, and Carol Ambruster. (1991) Lunar Standstills at Chimney Rock. *Archaeoastronomy*, 16

(Supplement to *Journal for the History of Astronomy*, 22): S43-S50.

McCluskey, Stephen C. (1977) The Astronomy of the Hopi Indians. *Journal for the History of Astronomy*, 8: 174-195.

McCluskey, Stephen C. (1990) Calendars and Symbolism: Functions of Observation in Hopi Astronomy. *Archaeoastronomy*, 15 (Supplement to the *Journal for the History of Astronomy*, 21), S1-S16.

Ruggles, Clive. (1999) *Astronomy in Prehistoric Britain and Ireland*. New Haven / London: Yale Univ. Press.

Stephen, Alexander M. (1891-94) Letters to J. W. Fewkes. Archived in: National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Fewkes papers, ms. 4408(4).

Stephen, Alexander M. (1929) Hopi Tales. *The Journal of American Folklore*, 42: 1-72.

[Stephen, Alexander M.] (1936) Hopi Journal of Alexander M. Stephen. Parsons, E. C. (ed.) 2 vols. New York: Columbia Univ. Press.

Thom, Alexander. (1971) *Megalithic Lunar Observatories*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Walton, James. (2012) Lunar Ceremonial Planning in the Ancient American Southwest. In Jonathon Ben-Dov, Wayne Horowitz, and John M. Steele (eds.) *Living the Lunar Calendar*. Oxford: Oxbow Books. 331-348.

Zeilik, Michael. (1986) The Ethnoastronomy of the Historic Pueblos, II: Moon Watching. *Archaeoastronomy*, 10 (Supplement to *Journal for the History of Astronomy*, 17): S1-S22.