SCIENTIFIC NOTE

Is the banded alder beetle *Rosalia funebris* Motschulsky (Coleoptera: Cerambycidae) the model for an ancient Hopi clown?

The Pueblo Indians of the southwestern United States comprise several tribes that are well known for the Pueblo architecture of their prehistoric and historic villages and for their religious ceremonies that involve masked dancers known as kachinas. (Some authors prefer *katsina* and *katsinam*, pl., as more accurate translations of the spoken Hopi language, which has no *ch* sound; see Secakuku 1995). Archaeological evidence indicates the kachina religion is an ancient one, dating from at least the early 1300’s (SchAAFMA 1994).

Kachinas are spirit beings who serve as messengers to the gods for the purpose of ensuring ample rain, a bountiful harvest and a life in harmony with the rest of the world. They are anthropomorphic embodiments of objects and beings both animate (plants, animals, historical persons and mythological beings) and inanimate (clouds, thunder, sun and stars). The kachina dances of the Hopi and Zuni tribes are the only ones open to non-Indians and they have been a source of fascination for tourists and ethnologists since the late 1800’s. In addition, the Hopi and Zuni carve kachina dolls (called *tihu* by the Hopi) that are eagerly sought after by museums and numerous collectors. The sale of these dolls is a major source of income, particularly for the Hopi.

The Hopi pantheon includes over 300 kachinas. Of interest to entomologists is that several generic insects and at least one arachnid are represented. They include the death fly (blowfly), robber fly, dragonfly, cricket, cicada, bumble bee, wasp, butterfly, moth and scorpion. Surprisingly, no beetle is represented, unless it is the dung carrier, who is a runner kachina that chases a member of the audience and, if he catches him, smears him with dung! However, none of the authoritative treatises on kachinas refers to the dung carrier as a beetle, although I have seen one doll for sale on the Internet (by Hopi carver Ramson Lomatewama) that is referred to as both a dung carrier and a dung beetle (see cited URL 31 August 2007).

Here one must realize that a kachina may not be recognizable in whole or in part as the object it represents. For example, the kachina *Poli Taka* is easily identified as a butterfly by its four wings, proboscis and knobbed antennae. In the cricket kachina, *Susopa*, the only recognizable insect characteristic is a pair of long thin antennae, while the dragonfly kachina, *Sivaftotovi*, bears no resemblance to a dragonfly. Presumably, tradition alone identifies the latter.

Also participating in the kachina ceremonials of most Pueblo villages are several types of sacred clowns that are not kachinas but who entertain the audience between dances and whose antics are meant to reinforce cultural mores by parodying inappropriate behaviors. Principal among these for the Hopi, and by far the most popular ‘kachina’ figures with outsiders, are the Koshari (also known as Koyala) or Hano clowns, who are painted from head to foot in broad, contrasting black and white stripes and who have two long, banded antenna-like appendages on the head (Fig. 1).

Ross (1993) has noted that the Hano clowns bear an unmistakable resemblance to the banded alder beetle, *Rosalia funebris* Motschulsky (Cerambycidae) (Fig. 2). The late E. G. Linsley, who collected Koshari dolls carved by the Hopi, remarks that he and several colleagues had independently noted the similarity (Linsley 1995).

Ross speculates, *Rosalia* “must have been drawn to the hypnotic glow of Hopi fires. Did the Indians, watching its antics, add the beetle to their worshipped spirits, calling him Hano the clown?” Ross further asserts that because Arizona alder (*Alnus oblongifolia* Torrey), the only known Arizona host for *R. funebris*, shares the same habitat as Arizona cottonwood, which the Hopi use to carve kachina dolls, “the beetle should have been well known to the Hopi.”

Although the potential *Rosalia*/Koshari relationship should be of interest to students of Hopi culture as well as to entomologists, there is apparently nothing in the ethnological literature to that effect. Indeed, Wright (1994), in his definitive work *Clowns of the Hopi*, makes no mention of a possible beetle model for the Koshari. It is the purpose of this note to amplify upon this intriguing possibility and to correct some errors in Ross’ article that could