

The place of the snake dance is a small open court facing eastward, opening on the cliff, where are several sacred rooms cut in the rock, reached by tall ladders. At the south end of this court is the "dance rock," a natural pillar about fourteen feet high. Midway between this and the north extremity of the court is the sacred *keé-si*, or booth of cottonwood branches, with a curtain before the opening; and in front a shallow cavity, over which is an old plank with a hole in one side; this cavity, *Shi-pa-pú*, the Black Lake of Tears, is held by Indians of the Southwest to be the original source of the human race, and even the name is not to be spoken aloud!

The time for the dance is just before sundown, and, for hours before, the approaches to the court are thronged. A score of men of the Antelope Order march in single file thrice around the court, going through religious rites before the booth, their captain sprinkling them with sacred fluid from an eagle feather, while they shake their *guajes* or gourd-rattles. Then they take their stand by the booth, their backs to the wall of the court, and the seventeen priests of the Snake Order file by, making the circuit of the court four times, stamping with the right foot on the sacred plank as they pass, to let the *cachinas*, or spirits, know that they are now offering prayer. The captain of the order reaches the booth and the procession halts. He kneels before the booth and draws out of the buckskin bag a big snake, which he holds with his teeth, some six inches back of its head, and rises to his feet. The captain of the Antelope Order now puts his left arm around the other's neck, and with his snake-whip "smooths" the angry rattler; and the two captains start forward in their dance. The next snake priest draws forth another snake, and another antelope partner joins him, and so on until each of the seventeen snake priests has a snake between his teeth and an antelope partner in the hop. These couples thus dance toward the rock, thence to the north, and so circle back to the booth. On reaching a point at the third quarter circle, each snake man by a swift motion of his head to the left flings his snake to the rock floor inside the ring, and dances back to the booth for another rattler and another round. The performers are painted black down to the mouth, then white to the neck, then dark red to the waist, with dancing skirts to the knee and rattles on the legs. The three antelope men, in excess of the snake priests, gather up the snakes and put them back in the booth, and often have five or six snakes in hand at once. If the rattlers show fight, they tickle them with the snake-whips until they uncoil and start to run, when they seize them as before. In one dance as many as a hundred snakes are sometimes used, and three fifths of them rattlesnakes with fangs unextracted! Mr. Lummis saw a snake dance in 1891, and one performer was bitten in the right cheek. His companion coolly *unhooked* the reptile and threw it on the ground, and the dance went on heedless of the trivial incident. The bites seem to be powerless to harm these prepared performers.