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PRESENCE AND ABSENCE

Depending on our involvement with rock art, most of us have dealt with the concepts of presence and absence. Because of a relative vagueness, rock art researchers have not placed this in an appropriate perspective or taken full advantage of it. These, like many other omnibus words, imply different meanings with the ways they have been applied. The terms are not ambiguous; they only lack proper attention in relation to rock art. No one has defined their applications, or the limits they have with rock art.

This should help petroglyphologists be aware of the implications, potentials and value of using presence and absence. Because of its scope, and the necessity of treating it as a unit, each area will receive only a brief introduction. Each area could be treated in an in-depth study of its own. Hopefully, after a consideration of the subject, subsequent research should be more complete and definitive than it has been. After considering the facts, the value of such a tool, when used to its fullest, can be appreciated.

Even though presence and absence are very important factors, it is obvious that rock art researchers seldom realize their full potential. Most of the emphasis on presence is placed in very limited statistical element lists and cumulative data tables. Because of poorly selected and constructed terms, *element lists* at present are inherently lacking in the amount of information presence and absence can provide. Because of their inadequate structure, a broad spectrum of valuable information is ignored. Most can only imply the presence of an element in a given area. A few are expanded to show the importance of an element by its frequency of occurrence.

Schaafsma (1971) improved the application and status of lists in her Tables 1-8 and Figure 7. Some of her contributions include: lists of the attributes of anthropomorphs, and statistical comparisons of elements within a style and between various styles. She also introduced charts that show profiles of occurrence percentages (presence) of major element categories between several styles. This will be referred to as a *style profile* (Figure 1).

Even though improved, the overall information present is very limited. The potential of expanding presence information is limited only by our ability to record more precise information and construct more informative charts. By including classes or types of figures, based on a combination of presence and absence of features and variations of body form and appendage expression (arms, legs and head gear) rather than Schaafsma's three categories of large, small and flute-playing anthropomorphs, the derivable information will be tremendously increased.

Also by eliminating generic and category terms, redefining element names, restricting variations of form and including classes of elements, lists can be better suited to present this additional information. Since element lists would be the best area for these expressions, these lists should be modified to include as much of this information as possible. More benefit can be obtained when it occurs in chart form.

To fully understand the importance of presence, consider the archaeological procedure that identifies or distinguishes cultures or styles by the presence or absence of many features of material culture. In most cases,

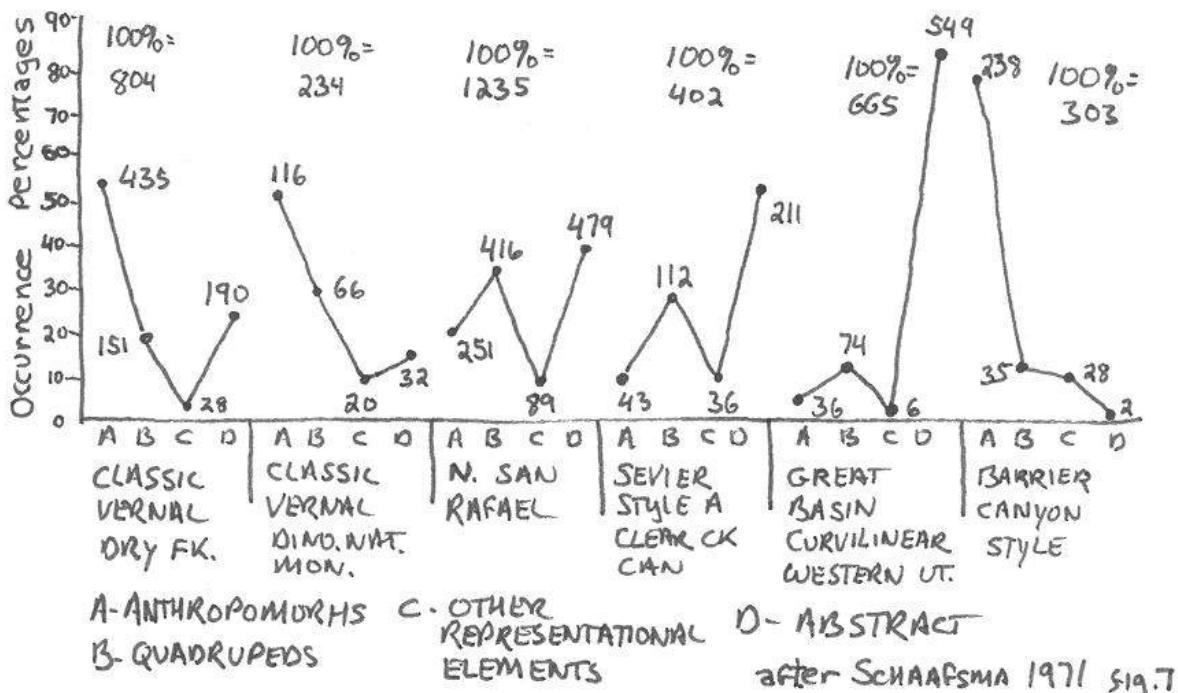


Figure 1

culture cannot be defined or identified by nondescript rock art, any more than any other item of nondescript material culture. However, pottery or lithic techniques and form can show the peculiarities inherent in specific social groups. It also shows the beginning of traditions, concentrations of associated traits, the discontinuance, evolution and the diffusion of various traits.

When a study includes presence and absence, a considerable amount of information can be retrieved. Rock art by its nature also carries some cultural impetus. It has the capability to provide similar input on both the *organic* level, represented by the sphere of the physical and tangible objects and degree of abstraction, and the *superorganic* level, represented by conceptual and intellectual ideas or elements representing organic, tangible objects, which are so stylized they are presently unrecognizable. It also has spatial as well as temporal dimensions.

Each of these has their particular areas of contribution. The main thing inherent in

iconography, and not derivable from projectile points and pot shard technology, is that graphic representations, whether on rock panels or decorations on pottery, are one of the only physical evidences of the concepts that their mental processes expressed. Marshack (1975, 1979) has revealed many areas and means in which man has expressed his mental activities. Eliada (1959:129) shows that what happened in the sacred past, must never be forgotten. Once created, these symbols never die (Eliada 1959:137, 142, 183). He also states that:

Symbols not only make the world open, but help him to attain the universal. It is through symbols that man finds his way out of his particular situation. Symbols awaken individual experiences and transmute it into a spiritual act, into metaphysical comprehension of the world. In the presence of a sacred symbol a man can attain to a highest spirituality. By understanding the symbol he can live the universal [Eliada 1959:211-212].

These symbols were important to those who made them, and it is important that they be recorded. Taking full advantage of presence and absence will help us make a more complete record.

The real importance of presence and absence is illusive. It is difficult to grasp their full potential at one time. It is not simple presence and absence of a form alone that is most beneficial to rock art studies—it is the *presence and absence of multiple aspects*.

When given temporal and spatial dimensions, or when used with repetitions and variations, it is presence that indicates a rock art style on the cultural level and distinguishes its various regional art styles. In the same manner, presence can isolate and distinguish local and regional glyphic systems within a style. It is the main aspect of rock art that shows whether or not traits were shared between regional or temporal cultures, styles or groups. It is the main characteristic of rock art that expresses movement of style bearers.

This brings to point an important issue where the solution will be based on presence. It is assumed that a comparative analysis between regional distributions of rock art will not directly correspond to other portions of material culture or the people assumed to have produced the rock art. Evidence seems to exist that styles of Fremont material culture, and rock art styles used to identify the same regional group of Fremont, do not exactly correspond (Warner 1979:91).

Only modified and more complete element lists and tables, with presence lists of other items of material culture and total inventories of rock art, will show the proper interrelationships of the problem. To fully define the differences expressed between material culture and rock art, every aspect of the element, panel and site, needs to be considered. Archaeologists have already documented the presence of shared items of

material culture. What they have not done is an equally comprehensive analysis of the rock art. It will be up to us, with the expression of presence within rock art, to show the types, variations and representations of element features that were not previously relatable in former lists and charts. It will be this additional information from the new expanded tables that will be more effective in providing the clues that identify and isolate local, sometimes regionally restricted expressions and their variations, as well as, wider conventional usages within styles.

With only a partial survey, it seems that when more detail, and thus indicators, are present within a style (particularly in the Vernal area), the better the chances are for *one* style of material culture to share more sub-styles of rock art. While in western Utah, where detail in rock art is almost absent, several different styles of pottery (i.e., Promontory gray, Salt Lake, and Sevier gray, and different types of projectile points) can be found in repeated, isolated associations with what now seems to be the same basic general style of rock art (Warner 1979:91). At this point too little has been done in this area.

When studying presence or absence, two further items must be considered because of the influence they have on presence. These concern the sphere of element tangibility and the degree of abstraction. The sphere of the physical tangible object is referred to as the *organic*. The *superorganic* sphere consists of the conceptual, intellectual ideas or elements representing organic, tangible objects that are so stylized they are presently unrecognizable.

Examples of this concept, on the *tangible organic level*, are two different types of Fremont necklaces. One Vernal type consists of repeated, individual, detached, rhomboid pendants in necklace form without the curving necklace attachment drawn. This is only one of several features that serve as stylistic indicators of one Vernal style. Even

though many points can imply style, and thus be indicators when they show a constant repetition of presence, it is the multiplicity of indicators, when present, that creates the specific definition and isolates the various segments of style. Some anthropomorphs contain up to eight different characteristic features that can be used to identify their style of sub-variants. It is obvious that with more detail there are often more indicators.

Another distinct form of necklace comes from Capitol Reef. There, the typical form consists of solid, circular pendants suspended from a curving line with short strings. This style is represented with similar feature categories used with the Vernal figures, except that like the necklaces, these are expressed with the Capitol Reef preferred difference in type or form.

Mapping out the presence distribution of these elements show the places the carriers of these preferred forms went. The areas expressing an absence are also important to consider. Centers of higher concentrations show probable habitation areas. These are the central locations that the people frequented who shared these specific forms. Many panels show the presence of these forms in finger-like corridors radiating out along natural passageways. Presence decreases as the distance from the concentrated centers increases. The Vernal type is present in three panels at Capitol Reef. The Capitol Reef forms are absent in the Vernal area, and as is now known only occurs once in the Dinosaur National Monument area. After careful deliberation, the implications of these become obvious.

In addition to the semantic content, presence in element concentration implies group identity and domain. Presence in isolated areas implies identification and movement. Compare the figures with the necklace type at Capitol Reef to the concentration of related forms in Indian Creek. This illustrates the

problem discussed earlier about mapping out presence of material culture and rock art styles. One type of occurrence not mentioned is the presence of material culture, where the associated rock art style is absent. The probable reasons for all these possibilities should be considered.

The second aspect of presence is more problematical. The *non-tangible super-organic sphere* and highly abstracted glyphs are more difficult to identify. It is easy to identify a lizard, but what do specific ideas look like? Even though some of Martineau's explanations seem logical, others do not have sufficient consistency. Many other explanations are as reasonable, and a few that are more logical show a greater consistency.

Ethnographic accounts help us to understand some of the ways the symboling of ideas has been done, but few of these occur in rock art panels in our area. Marshack (1979:271, 287, 304, 309) also points out some of the problem in using ethnographic evidence referring to rock art of other cultures, or in areas too far in the past for oral traditions to preserve accurate information. The broader one's acquaintance with different worldwide symboling processes, the more one is aware that there are an infinite number of ways to express similar non-tangible concepts. Seldom do more than a few non-related cultures express singular thoughts the same way.

There are some basic universals, but the differences in the thinking and symboling processes are too numerous. Many glyphs from different cultures show that symbols are very stylized, even to the point of abstraction. The more abstract a glyph becomes, the less it probably represents an object, and the greater are its changes to represent concepts associated with that object, e.g., a natural heart becomes a valentine-shaped heart with implications of love. This is a concept extension. However, even this is not always

the case. The greater the abstraction, the more impossible it is to identify the object and the concept. One thing important to remember, is that one does not need to interpret a glyph to receive benefit from its study (Marshack 1979:290). Here, the importance of presence is stressed. At the moment, it is the presence of a glyph and its form and context that we should be concerned with, not the various levels of interpretation.

Simple presence represents many varying concepts. The simple presence of a figure in a panel equals a corresponding counterpart in either the organic or super-organic sphere the artist. The presence and absence of this information has value. The source of the symbol that the artist drew upon, whether sacred or profane, whether physical or conceptional, was an expression of his ordinary reality (Levine 1971:421-434). These glyphs may also be an expression of his non-ordinary reality (Hedges 1982:1-6). The types of presence, and the presence within contexts, are crucial in examining these possibilities. In this sense, any glyph is representational, no matter how abstract, because it represented the concept present in the mind of the artist who made it. This is still true, whether any one else understood it or not. Thus, the term "nonrepresentational" is meaningless.

Depending on the glyph, its nature and the concept behind it, presence can express and identify the symboling level of his cosmology. Johansen noted:

Prehistoric "art" is not necessarily to be considered as the ... attempt at ... representing for decorative purposes something in the real world. Rather, it is to be regarded as the end product of complex syntactic symbolic behavior in a special context [Johansen 1979:299].

Because rock art is a relatively new area of investigation, little is known about the realms of man's symboling processes. It is assumed that one symbol will seldom, if ever, restrict itself over time and space to one concept. It is the presence of similar elements in different contexts that suggest element extension, and the care needed to be taken in element terminology. The Fremont culture, beginning about 450 A.D., must have had their own set of symbols from their predecessors. At 1360 A.D. (Marwit 1970:137-145) an element, or context, could have retained its original form and changed its meaning in this thousand year period. It is also possible that the meaning could have remained somewhat the same, and the shape of the element, or its context, could have become more stylized, etc.

With this in mind, it is easy to see why meaning cannot be considered universal, i.e., one glyph cannot mean the same whenever it occurs. This is why interpretations cannot be consistent in their meanings, or be universal from paleo-situations to historic times, and from Egyptian contexts to St. George, Utah. Rather than interpretation, presence and absence can help us determine significance and relationships and, hopefully, an idea of what the source of the glyph was.

The nature of presence also implies the psychological makeup of the group to which the artist belonged. When considering philosophical outlook, aspects of presence need to be considered. These include the presence or absence of: size, detail, attitude, poise, and specific relationships of element placement, i.e., the total context. A small figure has an absence of a large factor, and the concepts size implies. A plain figure has an absence of detail, and the concepts detail implies. When placed in association with a detailed figure, its presence has significance relative to the presence and absence of detail, relative placement, etc.

The attitude, or position present in a figure, is directly related to the concepts of the context. Size, detail, attitude, and context find their expression relative to the outlook of the individual and the group that gave him his philosophical structure. Culture predicates figures be made from extremely large to the very small, from the very detailed to the very plain and when figures are to be represented in those ways. The outlook is also relative to the degree of detail and thus the amount and types of indicators present. An interesting comparison could be made between one complex Vernal style and the Western Utah petroglyph styles.

The heroic, highly detailed, sometimes head-holding anthropomorphs of a specific group from Vernal express (by their attitude, extreme detail and associated objects) an egocentric, somewhat conceited, often arrogant-looking group, whose style mainly consists of portraiture. Over fifty percent of the glyphs in the overall Vernal style, considered by Schaafsma (1971), are portrait-like. "Quadrupeds" represent 20-30 percent; other "representational" figures 3-5 percent, and "abstract designs" consist of 13-25 percent (Schaafsma 1971:14, her terminology). My statistics will not be complied until my survey is completed. At this point my percentages of portraiture are higher.

It is easy to see what the main emphasis of panel content is when presented in a style profile. The main emphasis present within panel content is an expression of what the culture considered at that time most important to represent, and probably the most acceptable way to represent it. To a large extent, it also expresses their attitude toward these categories.

The San Rafael, Western Utah and Great Basin Curvilinear Styles, by a percentage of presence, place a minimal importance on portraiture, or representations of anthropomorphs, and a greater emphasis on abstract

forms. As mentioned earlier, it is believed that abstract designs most likely represent the conceptional, non-tangible, super-inorganic parts of reality. It seems that they considered it more appropriate to represent what they thought about, rather than representing themselves—as anthropomorphs at least. In observing the style profile for a specific context of the Barrier Canyon figures and a few Anasazi contexts, such as the Salt Creek Faces, anthropomorphic percentages are as high as Vernal anthropomorphic figures.

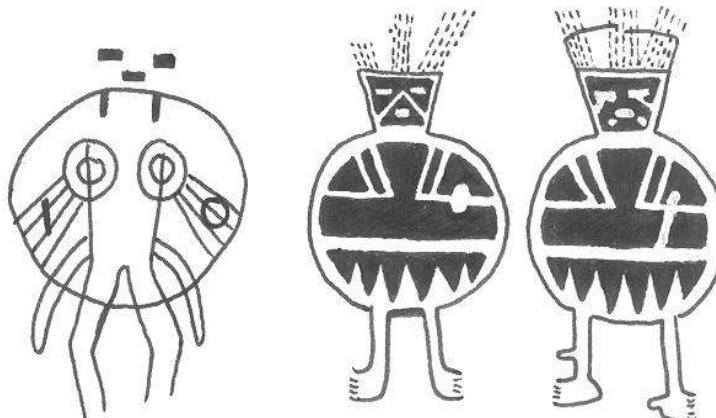
Because of the presence of their specific attitude toward the anthropomorph (as revealed in panel and site contexts), contexts, like the Barrier Canyon Style figures, are not considered portraits. This may seem at first a contradiction. Because of the likely religious or ceremonial context, and a more sacred attitude or poise, they are taken as representing deities, intermediaries or shaman, instead of personal portraits. This exemplifies the sacred aspect of this cosmological context, and thus the sacredness of the site, verses the profane poise, content and context of the Vernal figures. Barrier Canyon figures and the way they are represented are not viewed as actors in a variety of roles like the Vernal figures, but rather mark the arenas where specific roles should be performed (Sakett 1977:370; Elida 1959:21).

There are several other considerations of presence and absence. These involve the presence of a feature as a part of an element, from the closest contiguous relationship, to those most far ranching.

The first consideration is ***presence within or as a part of an element.*** This type of presence can be a clue to several types of facts. This can indicate identification to a more specific group, or distinction from other regional, socio-political or religious groups that share a specific style. It can also indicate an extension, combination or alteration from the main concept of a glyph. When there is a

constantly repeated presence within an element, such as two horns on a snake or similar geometric designs over the left breast of several anthropomorphs, a specific distinction is being made with those where there is an absence.

The specific type of horn form, or the representation of the geometric designs in other



contexts, expresses a shared distinction of the group by their preferred forms (Figure 2). With differences in feature presence, the concepts differ. With differences in related forms, the groups differ. The repetition of one horn and two legs on a sheep marks a distinction from the presence of two horns and four legs on a sheep. With occurrences of incorporated features, a distinction and possible personal or group identity is being made. That odd combinations or types of horns, legs, feet and body shapes in sheep occur, may imply references to the groups who mainly produced those types. The presence of modifications or additions (changing sheep from a two-horned, four-legged type to one with one horn and two legs) reinforces other concepts (Warner 1982a:117-130).

The second consideration is *presence between elements*. This establishes contexts and special or similar relationships. There are many associated elements that reoccur within similar contexts. Study of these will

help imply semantics. With sufficient repetition of the relationships, the more important the context. The importance of an element is, in part, derived from the specific relationship of relative element placement. It is often the presence of associated abstract elements in specific relationships with naturalistic elements and the repetitions of contexts, that provide the concrete concept association for proper identification. To properly identify concepts, sufficient repetitions need to be examined to find the presence of the concept in several concrete contexts in as many situations as possible. This provides an unquestionable association for what the concept represents. This does not indicate what the element may mean—only the idea behind the form (Warner 1982).

Third is a high degree of *presence between panels* with an extreme rarity elsewhere.

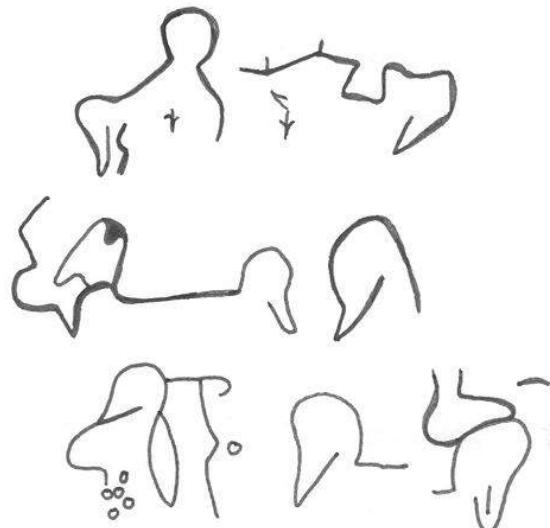


Figure 3

This implies an extremely limited sphere in which the elements circulated. This is an area from a personal level, to that of a small group—if the glyph never occurs beyond the vicinity. An example of this is a site east of

Richfield, Utah (Figure 3). At this site there are ten stones, each with designs resembling a bird-like head. With the amount of repetition and its predominance it stresses the importance it had for those who made it. Since this immediate vicinity is the only one where this glyph is known to be depicted like this, it restricts the importance of that form and context to a group of people in a very local area (Warner 1982b). At three other sites this element only occurs once: Bocks Canyon, Manning Canyon and Diamond Valley.

Fourth, is ***presence between associated sites***. This expresses a larger, but still limited, sphere of circulation. Evidence that it is just

corresponds to the area over which it occurs. A broader importance may be stressed by a limited repetition with occurrences over more associated sites. An example of this is a unique element found near the previously described bird-like heads. This element referred to as an "enclosure" occurs just under 250 times at eight very localized sites (Figure 4). The presence of different associated elements and contexts within the panel, and the physio-geographical situation at the site where they occur, provides strong evidence for three different associated concepts. It is probable that there was only one basic concept and two different extensions (Warner 1982b).

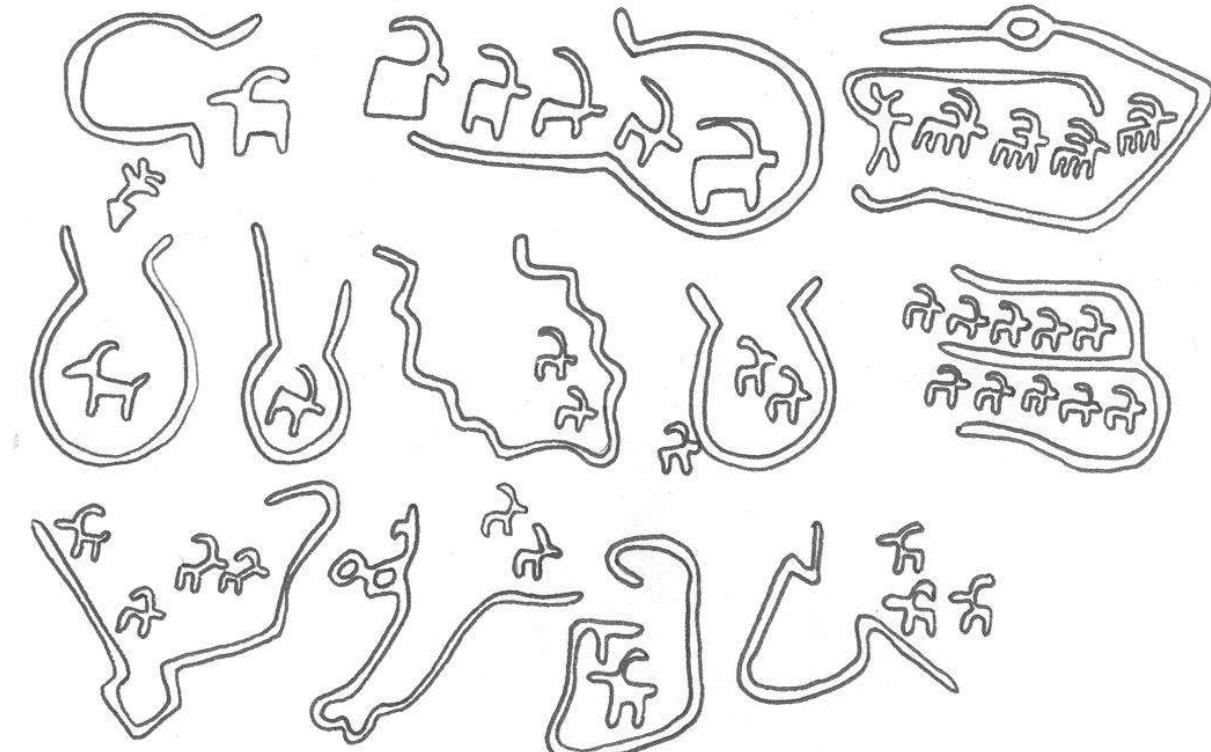


Figure 4

an element of local importance can be supported by its absence elsewhere. Actual glyph importance is a relative and comparative consideration. The importance of a glyph is not as relevant to the area over which it occurs as much as the presence of detail, specific attitude, specific context and degree of repetition. Its degree of conventionaliza-

Fifth, is ***presence between more distant sites***. An element's occurrence at a number of other sites, if similar or identical in form and context, could imply the movement of those who produced the glyph at its concentrated location. When the enclosure, with its specific type of associations in its limited

contexts, occurs at other distant locations, with an exact duplication of form and especially consistently associated forms of elements, it can be assumed that there was a movement of this group. This occurs at

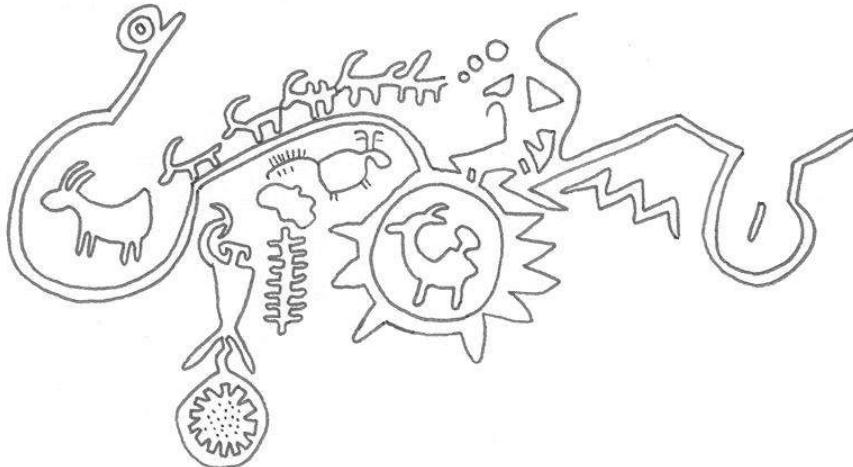


Figure 5 Conners Spring

Connor Springs, about 200 miles north of Richfield, Utah. The forms at Connor Springs duplicate six points of correspondence (Figure 5).

When wider representations of the same motif occur with less similarity and different contexts and attitudes, it would not imply the

same, similar or shared contexts, by its production by other groups. An example of this is a variation of the enclosure (Figure 6). The similarities present represent the same concept, but the variation implies a different

style group as the author. A different element repeated with similar form comes from: Connor Springs, Standsbury Island, Utah Lake, Parowan Gap and Manderfield, Utah (Figure 7). The Vernal and Capitol Reef necklaces fit those types of presence. If the element is present only in isolated clusters in sites with fairly equal

distributions from one point to the next, or if intervening examples are not present, implications would be relative to its occurrence. Similarities and differences between the Capitol Reef figures and those similar forms from Indian Creek show the Capitol Reef necklace with marked variation. The Indian Creek figures show several other Capitol Reef

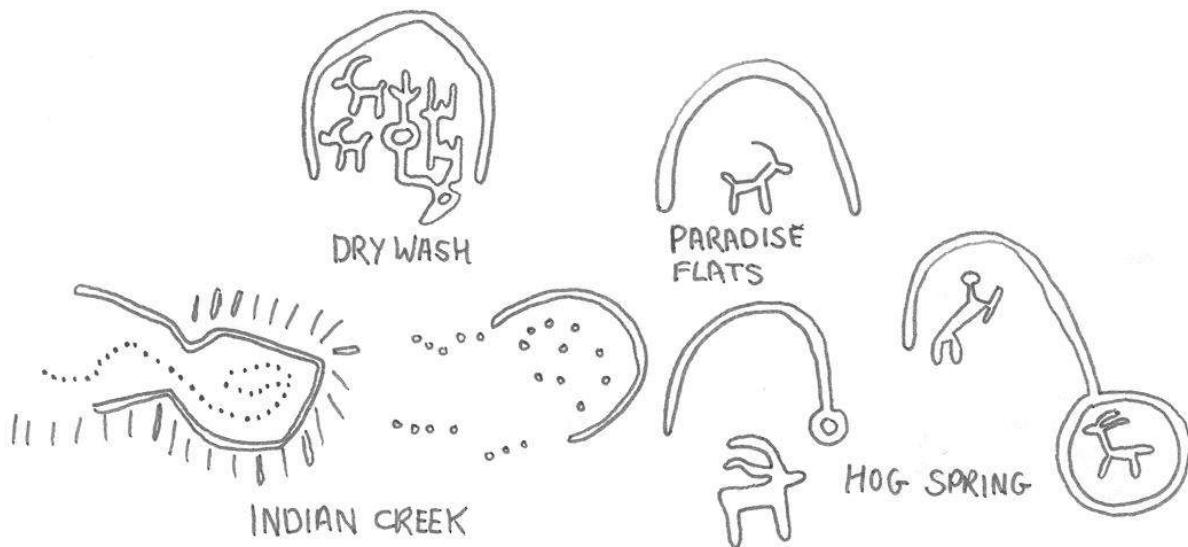


Figure 6

indicators along with Anasazi influence.

Sixth is *presence between styles*. This may indicate a level of greater or lesser intellectual intercourse between groups. This type of presence implies different levels of symbol circulation, which emphasizes various cultural interactions restricting, altering or expanding the presence of the form or context of an element. The philosophical or cosmo-

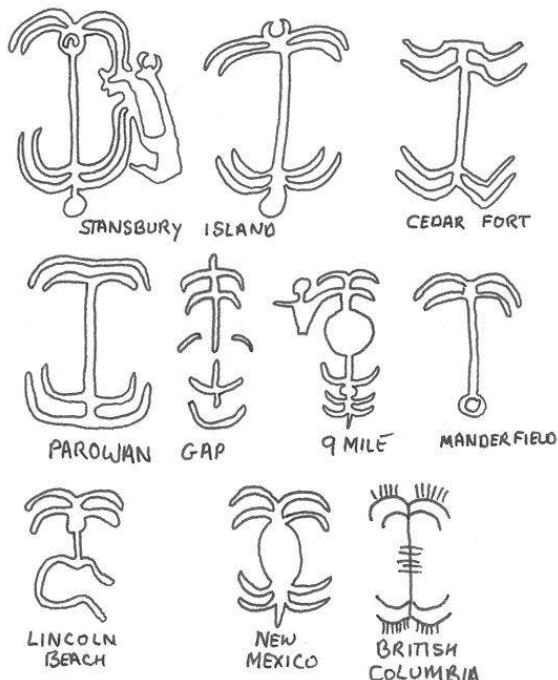


Figure 7

logical importance of a symbol is not increased with a wider expression of presence. Wider spatial expression simply implies greater style interactions, which may produce more similarities in style and uniformity in their style profiles and outlook. The closer the style profiles (an expression of presence), the closer the styles are socially or philosophically related.

Figure 1 shows this between two contiguous areas of the Vernal style and two other Fremont style areas—the San Rafael and the Sevier. The later two Fremont styles express a profile very close to that of the Great Basin Curvilinear. These styles cannot be consid-

ered to be unacquainted—the similarity in presence and form of elements is too strong. The converse is also true—if profiles or presence are more diverse, either little acquaintance or little philosophical agreement can be assumed.

The more the elements share similarity, the closer the two styles should be. The more the dissimilarity between elements or forms, the farther apart in time, space and attitude the styles would seem to be. This is the basis for stylistic indicators. An example of this is that each area of the Fremont express the treatment of the human body, yet each treats it differently. These are also different from those of the Barrier Canyon, Anasazi and Ute forms.

The seventh consideration is *presence or absence between cultures*. This implies a much broader cosmological base which shared whatever ideas that have presence on a basis relative to the degree and type of representation. Again, the degree of element similarity that is shared would express the closeness between those who shared it—culture, style or group. The predominance of an element between one culture and another, and the numbers of associated elements that each have in common, imply the breadth of the cosmology that was shared. The degree of presence between the cultures, or the balance of presence, may imply the donor, if one has more or earlier or later representations than the other. An example of this is the predominance of the flute player in the eastern Fremont styles and its absence in the western Fremont styles. Another example is the large number of two horned snakes in Barrier Canyon and Fremont art and their rarity in later Pueblo art. Yet, their predominance occurs in later Basketmaker.

With this brief introduction, the types of information derivable from an improved recording system, analyzed with such an approach, becomes apparent. Without considering these more detailed points of

view, rock art research will remain un-definitive. There are many more examples that illustrate these principles. However, because of the restrictions of space they cannot be included here. For further information, please contact Rock Art Research of Utah, 960 West 700 South, Salt Lake City, Utah 84104.

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