

THE U-BRACKET IN A UNIQUE ASSOCIATION

There are several elements that can be used to illustrate the problem of how one form of a glyph can probably represent several different concepts. One of the most distinctive is the U-bracket. Before any concepts can be seriously considered, repeated contexts need to be located. It is doubtful that the contexts of the U-bracket examined here have any of the concepts previously discussed under fertility (McGowan 1977, 1978; Warner 1984) or hunting (Thomas

1976, Warner 1982), see Figure 1.

In the many sites on Stansbury Island, Utah, the U-bracket occurs many times in several different contexts with different variations. The U-bracket shapes on Stansbury occur mainly in the inverted position. In Figure 2 the contexts and associations are very ambiguous. Figure 3, however, provides a concept association that may be considered. In this panel there are two U-brackets. One

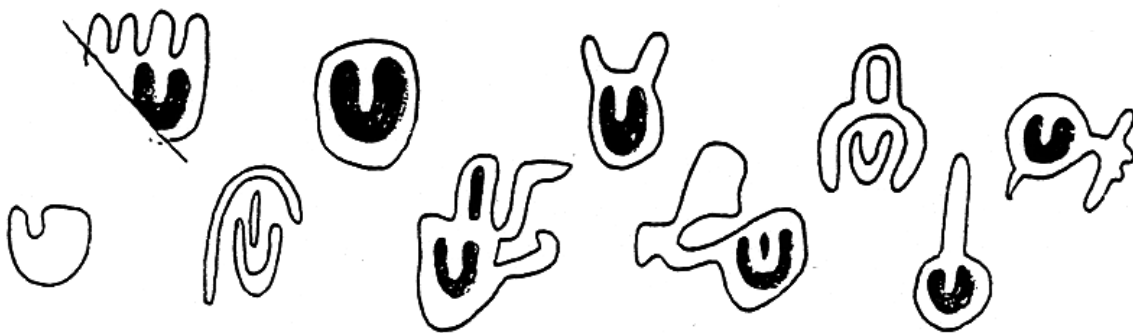


Figure 1. Examples that do not occur in a context

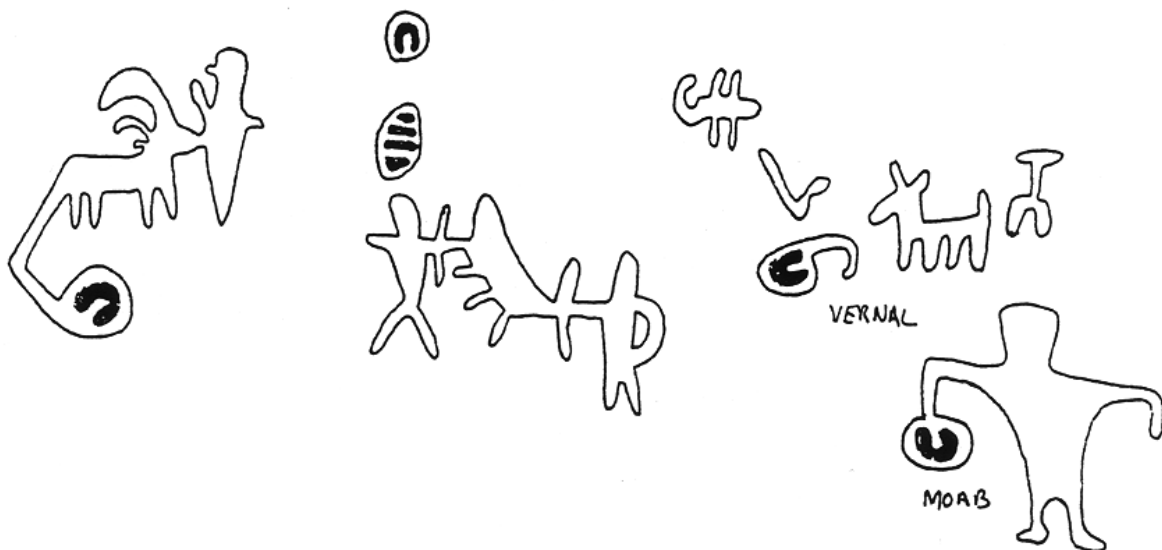


Figure 2. Examples that do occur in context.

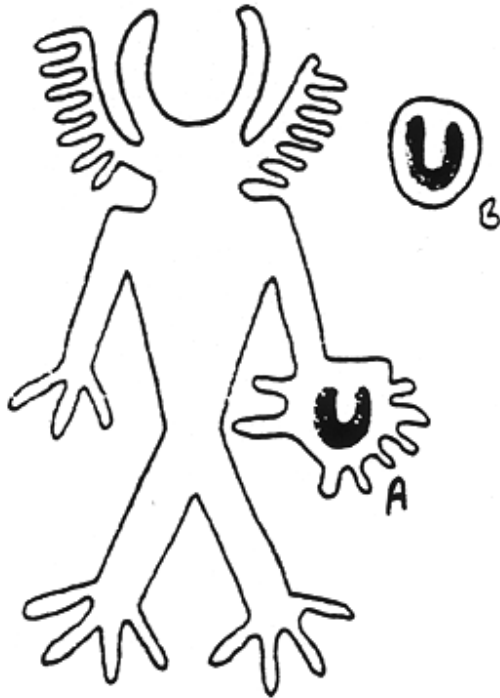


Figure 3.

is positive and is incorporated into the main glyph. The second one is negative and is not attached to the main glyph. A positive glyph is one that is formed by pecking away at the patination to obtain the form of the glyph itself. A negative glyph is made by pecking away the background area, leaving a patinated section in the form of the glyph (Figure 3A and 3B). Because this element is drawn in close association with the anthropomorph's head, and forms the eye of what can be described as a bird-like head held in the anthropomorph's hand, the association seems to be that of an eye.

Since the incorporated U-bracket takes the same shape of the one next to the anthropomorph's head, it seems to provide a key to the concept of the upper U-bracket. This does not fit the contexts of the examples in Figure 2. The former examples may relate to either fertility or hunting connotations. Since these contexts are more abstract than those usually found in fertility or hunting situations, the concepts may yet represent

another area of application. Without more concrete associations we cannot be sure.

Since eyes on an engraved figurine (Figure 4) consist of U-brackets, my first assumption is that these U-brackets may also be related to that feature as well. This is the second occurrence and the first supportive example. If one wishes to argue that the main position of this incorporated form is inverted, we could also argue that the head-like object may also be held by the neck—

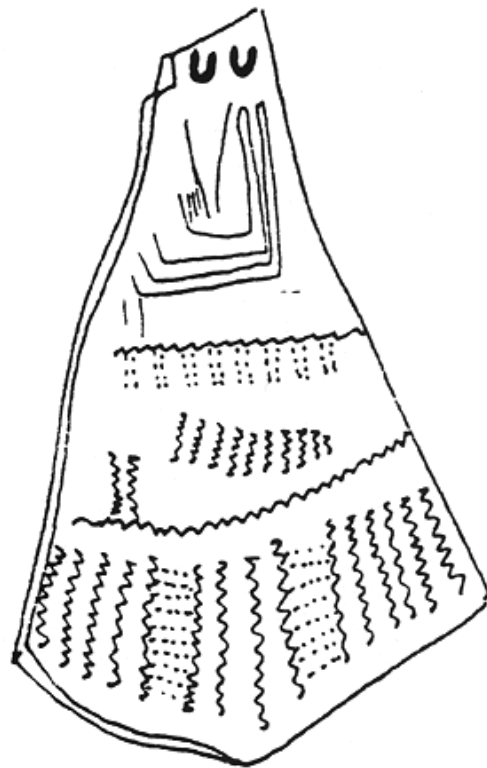


Figure 4.

which is immaterial. In glyph identification shape is most important, while orientation is secondary.

Without other similar contexts to back up this assumption or provide other different contexts, the assignment of a particular concept is still speculative, no matter how strong the evidence. Why? Because, if the context changes, a different or extended concept must be assumed. If other associations can be found that will back up and

support these two eye contexts, then the identifications of these associations will be given more credibility. The more similarities there are in the associations, the more definite the relationship. From the relationships shown in Figure 5A, which possibly

face, then the center of the spiral would terminate in the area of the eye.

Here is another example of the idea being considered. My intent is to illustrate that two or more different, but similar symbols,

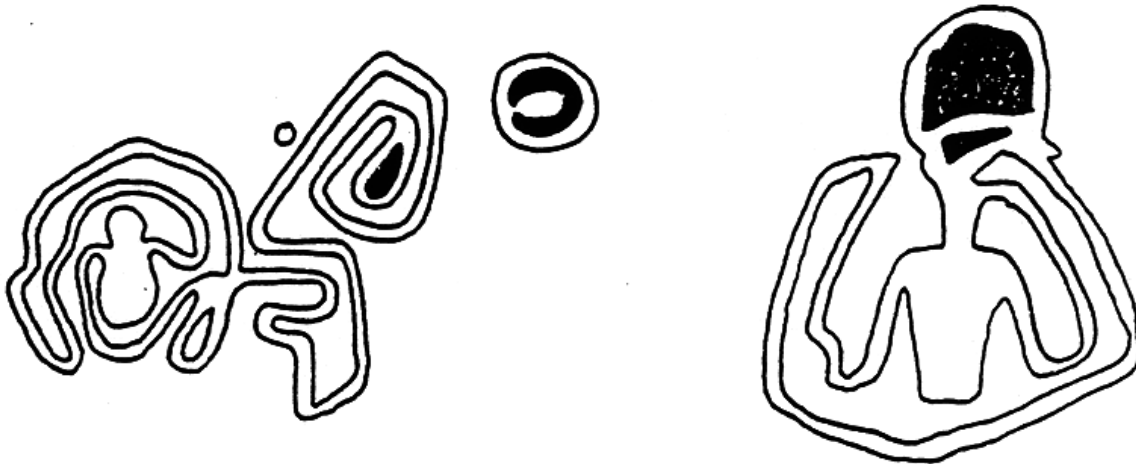


Figure 5.

provide another eye context, some conclusions can be drawn concerning the idea of eye. Because of its abstract nature, this association at first may be a little difficult to identify.

The basis for this conclusion is the assumption that the abstract meandering lines, which end in a spiral on the right side of Figure 5A, may indicate a face. If they do, then a definite repeated association with the U-bracket eye concept again can be made. This is possible because the U-bracket was placed in a position relative to the eye almost identically to Figure 3. This would be the third occurrence and the second supportive example.

The verification of this abstract as a face depends on what is occurring with the legless anthropomorph-like figure to the left. It looks as if its arm-like extensions surround itself, meet and enter what is believed to be the mouth of a profile abstract face. The upper portion of this face is formed by a spiral. If this is a mouth and

can be used to represent the same object or concept; or the same symbol can be used to represent different objects or concepts. The suggestion that a spiral may also be used to compose a face and particularly an eye is not acceptable unless, again, other more concrete forms in the nearby area can be found to support it. This association is indeed rare and may be the only one of its kind. If it were the only occurrence of such an association, the assessment of the spiral as a face or eye could only be tentative at best. There are, however, many other examples of spirals that have been used to represent eyes. It is interesting, though, that the contexts where these occur are very limited. When the eyes are engraved on a large number of stone figurines from two nearby areas, the eyes consist of spirals (Figure 6) (Warner 1981:97). This adds to the possibility that Figure 5A is a face and eye formed by a spiral.

The possible mouth concept of the abstract face can be supported by Figure 5B. This representation also contains another stylized



Figure 6.

legless anthropomorph, whose arms again surround and enter its head at an area presumably at the mouth. These examples seem to be two different, but related ways to represent the same idea. In other words, many different graphic representations can be used to represent any concept. These last two compositions are on the same panel, while Figure 3 is about 60 miles to the north.

Two other examples that may support the eye association are shown in Figures 7A and 7B. These are the fourth and the fifth occurrences and the third and fourth supportive examples. Both of these are abstract profile representations of what may also express bird-like qualities. Each, facing to the left, has within the head-like area, where

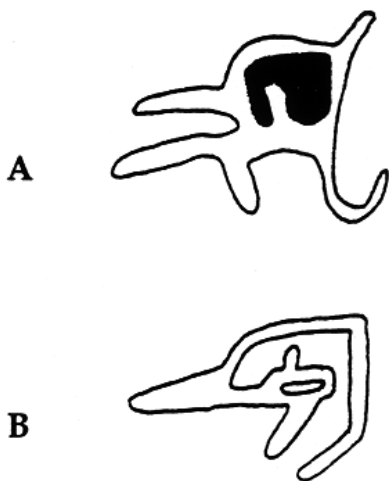


Figure 7.

the eye would be, a variant of a U-shaped element. The first example has a deformed U enclosed. The next one has one side flowing down into an open, neck-like area. Even though these are not exactly the same as Figure 3, they are well within the realm of possible variation. Before we can be totally familiar with an element, the form needs to be examined to establish a type and possible variations in each area of application. At what point do similar examples cease to represent the concept of the main form and begin to represent another concept? Two characteristics provide sufficient evidence that Figures 7A and 7B are within that realm. One, if these are heads, they have bird-like attributes; and two, the heads have within them, in the vicinity of the eye, a similar U-bracket form.



Figure 8.

That most of these examples are bird-like may imply that this concept may be further defined as relating to bird's eyes, or some bird-like characteristic. Figure 8 also strengthens this notion. This is the sixth occurrence and the fifth supportive example. This may possibly be an inverted, stylized bird-like form, which was found at the same site as Figures 2 and 3. In this case, the possible U-bracket-like element forms the head of the bird.

Even though the identification of a new concept for the U-bracket may be made, like any glyph that represents attributes of an object rather than of the object itself, this concept cannot involve in-depth interpreta-

tions. Interpretations on a higher level, which would draw out more than subtle meanings, cannot be made. This concept may not only represent the object itself, but activities or attributes associated with that object.

When there are sufficient similar examples that depart from the concept depicted in an established context, a different or extended concept may have been expressed. This could be the result of two factors. One, the form, and a concept of the original form, could have been extended to express a related concept; or two, the form just considered could simply have a shape coincidentally identical to another.

Knowing that repetition, variation and contexts are the keys to establishing a glyph's significance, and without being able to find enough conclusive examples for concept association, an identifiable concept cannot be made. Like the first examples, each variation could represent ambiguous elements in more natural, complete or identifiable associations (Figure 3). When more examples are found, the conclusions will have more credibility. One of the most important things to look for and consider is whether it could represent something else.

The U-bracket has long been known to have definite associations with fertility (McGowan 1977). Another association of this concept has been identified with hunting contexts (Thomas 1976). Here is sufficient evidence to establish that there is probably no end to the limits of variability in graphic

representations. One interesting thought is that the idea of "bird" may also be related to the idea of fertility. There may be no end to the possibilities of extensions and combinations of associated symbols. We are only beginning to discover how and where to look at rock art to understand the symboling process. Each new insight helps us gain a better understanding of other possibilities. This type of recognition is based on sufficient files of total inventories containing similar examples of element associations.

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