

A NEW APPRAISAL OF FREMONT ROCK ART

BY

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In reviewing the literature on Fremont Rock Art and viewing some "classic" rock art sites in Utah attributed to the Fremont Culture, I found myself questioning what actually links the Fremont Culture of Marwitt (1970) to the Fremont Rock Art Style of Polly Schaafsma (1971).

Schaafsma defined the Fremont Rock Art Style as "characterized by the presence of a distinctive type of dominating anthropomorphic figure with large head and a broad-shouldered, basically trapezoidal torso. In some regions, this figure is highly elaborated with necklaces and body decorations and complex headgear...". No mention is made by Schaafsma as to whether this rock art style is found in approximately the same area as was assigned to the Uinta and San Rafael Fremont subdivisions by Marwitt (1970).

Marwitt does not use rock art style as criteria for the Fremont Culture or any of its subdivisions. Marwitt's 1970 report on the excavation of Median Village in Iron County, Utah, describes the site as "Classic Fremont." He makes no mention of any associated or nearby rock art.

Aikens' 1967 report on the excavation of Snake Rock Village (the name derived from a nearby petroglyph) in Sevier County, Utah, describes it as a "Classic Fremont site." However, the rock art shown in this report does not contain any of the distinctive designs of the Fremont Rock Art Style as defined by Schaafsma.

Berge's 1974 report on an archaeological survey in the Castle Valley area of central Utah says, "a high percentage of the archeological sites found in the Castle Valley area are locations of the remains of the prehistoric Fremont Culture, which emerged about A.D. 700 and disappeared by A.D. 1300." Again, however, none of the distinctive designs considered by Schaafsma to belong to the Fremont Rock Art style are shown by him in the six rock art panels illustrated.

Wormington's 1955 paper does not directly tie any Fremont rock art to the Fremont culture. The Turner-Look site in Grand County, Utah which "represents a manifestation of the Fremont Culture", had no associated rock art reported. None of the rock art panels shown by Wormington at Turner-Look nor the one pictograph in Diamond Canyon nearby contain any of the distinctive designs considered by Schaafsma to be traditional to the Fremont Rock Art style.

In another segment of the Wormington report, some rock art panels in Westwater Canyon about 12 miles northeast of the Turner-Look site do contain elements characteristic of

Schaafsma's Fremont Rock Art style. However, these Westwater Canyon rock art sites have no reported habitation sites nearby, nor were any habitation sites seen by myself on any of four trips made to photograph the numerous rock art panels present in the area.

In a 1970 report on the excavation of Swelter Shelter in Dinosaur National Monument, Breternitz indicates the presence of artifacts primarily attributed to the Desert Culture tradition and to the Basketmaker tradition. However, the rock shelter contains some Fremont Rock Art style figures as described by Schaafsma (1971).

Circumstantial evidence does occur, mainly in the form of area association, to indicate a relationship between what Schaafsma defines as the Fremont Rock Art Style and what Marwitt defines as the Fremont Culture. However, direct evidence linking the Fremont rock art style to Fremont Culture appears to be lacking. I hope future work in rock art will begin to place as much or more emphasis on cultural association as it now does on element analysis. In most rock art reports the design elements found at a site are compared to the literature and assigned a cultural association by this means. As indicated here, this method of defining the styles of a rock art site is only as good as the literature used, and may not always be the best way to go.

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