

## SUNHEADED FIGURES: A STUDY IN SYMBOLISM

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When it comes to a point in one's study of rock art where a familiarity with many sites and symbols occurs, one begins to observe the consistency and repetition of a few elements that become prominent motifs. Some of these are very obscure while others are not. To many casual observers, without sufficient exposure and interest in rock art, these figures may not have an obvious consistency and repetition and thus do not possess the same importance. Depending on the symbols themselves, they may not have even paid any attention to them. The repetition of motifs often occurs many times within local regions and again, depending on the symbol, less often between more distant locales. When one finds a symbol that has a lot of repetition and consistency over a wider area, that symbol must have had a special prominence within the societies which used it (Fig. 1). Its exact significance will be the result of its frequency of occurrence and the context in which it occurs.

It must be assumed logical that each of these symbols upon sufficient repetition became common motifs as they went through different stages of cultural acceptance from its conception through the height of its usage. With this, there must have also been corresponding periods of conventionalization and possible stylization. This occurs not only in a linear or spacial sequence but also in a temporal one. In other words, an element once conceived, probably went through various degrees of graphic change in time as well as locality.

For example, Sunheaded figures can be found in Desert Archaic sites in western Utah, Pueblo sites in southern Utah, Basketmaker and Ute sites in eastern Utah, and Fremont sites all over the state and beyond Utah's borders.

This symbolic theme occurs with three basic variations: The most natural form consists of human figures with a solar symbol above or on top of the head (Fig.2). The next more stylized form has the head replaced by the sun symbol itself (Fig.3). The last variation is much more stylized to very abstract. Most of these are variations of sun (headed) poles or ticked shafts (Fig.4).

What was the significance of these figures within each symbol system and how did they function within their societies? To help determine this, a study of their context is necessary. Figure 2 shows both Basketmaker and Fremont anthropomorphs with spirals, concentric, bisected, horned or feathered circles above or attached to the top of the head. This symbolic association takes two different, distinct forms with different concepts and combines them to portray a compound and extended idea. It could possibly be the original way the concept behind actual "Sunheaded" figures began. From it, the more stylized versions of Sunheaded figures could have developed.

It is also possible that actual Sunheaded figures did not develop from figures with suns attached to or above the head, but as representations of a similar but slightly different concept altogether. After some consideration, it is not felt that these three categories represent a total chronological sequence of stylization. It is obvious that some Fremont anthropomorphs with

sun symbols on or above their heads were made long after some actual Basketmaker and Fremont Sunheaded figures. Even though Sunheaded figures are possibly a more stylized version, they may not necessarily be a more recent version. All three variations have been used within the same area and probably at the same time. The meaning and significance of the more divergent forms, may or may not be somewhat different.

Stylization takes a popular element and creates an abbreviated or more short hand form (Lee and Bock, 1982:26). It is difficult to determine if most of the figures with the sun attached to the top of the head have more naturalistic body forms. A few have the conventionalized, appendageless figurine body form. So far most of the actual Sunheaded figures do not have full, complete, naturalistic bodies. The more stylized bodies often occur as a stick torso with arms or appendageless figurine body types. If the figurine form occurs as a stick figure, the form moves into the third category. On top of these stylized bodies, the heads have been replaced by a solar symbol. Actual Sunheaded figures also have the most numerous representations. A contemporary descendant of this type figure could be the Hopi Sun deity, Tawa, instead of a figure representing the sunpriest or sunwatcher (Fig.5A).

Since the last example provides another possible concept for this symbol's application, these may be two distinct concepts for Sunheaded figures. The context of the sun next to or within the face could probably represent either idea just as well. The concept behind one association is probable, that what is on or within the head outline, or replaces the head, is on the mind. The other concept is that it represents the identity of the figure. These then would be the concerns of that particular representation, and the problems in identifying the specific concept expression.

Since the object associated with the head is the sun, this figure could be a sunpriest or sunwatcher, several of which are in the act of solar observation (Figs.7,8). The second alternative is that it could represent the sun deity itself, as embodied by representations of Tawa.

There are several situations that support the idea that Sunheaded figures represent sunwatchers rather than the Sun God himself. First, is an analogous situation of another symbolic association at Waterflow, New Mexico, where an Anasazi fertility site exists. At that site many blocks or "blankets" are decorated with club or sprout-like designs. Because of the contexts in which these occur and the fertility symbolism associated with them, they are assumed to be directly related to the idea and desire for conception. Some of these figures have the decorated blocks directly above or attached to the top of the head (Fig.5B). On many others, the blanket-like design actually becomes the head or face itself (Fig.5C). This duplicates the same type of symbolic association used with Sunheaded figures. On another, it has been placed between the head and shoulders (Fig.5D). In still others the blanket design becomes the body (Fig.5E). These are similar to "Sunbodied", "Sunched", and "Sunwombed" figures and the bodies of a group of "Sunbirds" (Fig.6). A unique variation of this basic concept represented in a different manner than these are two almost identical sets of hand-holding couples which have the sprout-like design within the face itself. This has been done in such a manner that the curl of each sprout would seem to represent the eyes (Fig.5F) (Warner, Judith 1986:29-39). Another similar situation exists with "U" brackets which were placed next to or within several heads (Fig.5G) (Warner, Jesse 1986:16-20).

In Barrier Canyon, a set of sun-like eyes have been placed on a cliff face above a talus to look out between two monolithic pillars. This alignment fixes an orientation involved in a Winter Solstice alignment (Fig.7A). While

not an actual Sunheaded figure, the concept is still there, like the sprout-eyed couple at Waterflow. The eyes represent the concept, instead of the head. Thus they are probably a variant synonym of a Sunheaded figure. One thing that makes these examples so interesting is the probable pun intended. These images literally have the sun in their eyes. To get the sun in one's eyes at this same spot in Barrier Canyon on Winter Solstice as the artist did, one would have to place his own eyes where these sun eyes have been pecked to watch the watch the sun set between the pillars. There are other figures that have similar eyes, most of which are solar observation markers or interacters (Fig.7).

The basis for the extended meaning of this symbolic association is achieved by the placement of an object of concern, whether fertility, U-bracket, or sun symbol next to, or within the head. This demonstrates that the Anasazi and Barrier Canyon culture used the basic idea of concern by association with the head, within, or replacing the head itself instead of or along with the anthropomorph actually representing what the head depicts (i.e. a sun god such as Tawa). This first area of support has been taken from an internal analysis of its symbolism.

The second situation that supports the idea that Sunheaded figures (or at least some of them) are sunwatchers, comes from several sites in Utah. This support is derived from a study of their context, form and function. These figures are a few of a large number found so far that have been placed on the cliffs to interact with light and shadow. A couple of these have actually been placed so as to symbolically observe the sun as active participants (Figs.7,8). These representations are in a sense the sunwatchers themselves placed on the cliff to eternally watch the sun. Today they still observe the sun, long after they themselves have gone.

The first 10 or 12 figures placed on the cliff to watch the sun were more or less typical, normal looking, non-Sunheaded figures. But, one Sunheaded figure was discovered quite by accident to be an active solar observer as well. The enlarged concentric circle head occurs on a very simple, smaller stick figure body (Fig.8A). The head has been enlarged to the same height as the body, like the one at Black Point (Fig.8B). This stresses the importance of what it either represents or is doing. The interactions that make this so very important occur at sunrise on Winter Solstice. The site consists of two large blocks of sandstone, with the right one projecting several feet beyond the one with the main panel. The Sunheaded figure occurs on the far right side of the left, recessed block. This site sits on a high plateau, so at the instant of sunrise, light immediately floods onto these boulders. At that moment, on Winter Solstice, the shadow of the right block vertically bisects the dot in the center of the face of the Sunheaded figure (Fig.8A). With this eternal observer, the ancient Basketmaker "sun priests" not only made a very accurate seasonal sundial, but placed a figure in a position so that at any time of the year one would know the point on the otherwise flat horizon that the sun would rise on its shortest day. From this location sunrise could be determined by placing ones head on the pecked sunwatcher and identifying the position on the horizon past the corner of the right block like the panels in Barrier Canyon and Indian Creek (Figs.7A,10).

From the middle of September, when the sun first lights up the far left side of the panel, each day the shadow moves farther to the right as Winter Solstice draws near. The dot in the center of the sunwatcher's face represents the end of the sun's travel. This dot is the farthest right position the shadow will ever reach at the instant of sunrise. From there, the shadow retreats back to the left, as the sun moves north again.

This is the incident that created serious interest in analyzing Sunheaded figures. Over half of the Sunheaded figures in our files occur at or immediately nearby known active (direct) or passive (indirect) observation sites. Many others occur at sites on our priority list of potential solar interacting sites waiting to be observed.

The San Rafael figure is not the only Sunheaded figure to actively participate at solar observation sites. Previously, one was reported from Indian Creek. That figure, almost identical to the one just described, has the edge of the shadow bisect the face of a small figure, a dot in a spiral, the center of that spiral and then the center dot within its face (Fig.8C). Figure 8B from Black Point hasn't actually been observed to interact, but from observations thus far we have no doubt that it will.

Figure 8D shows what was originally thought to be a Sunbodied figure. This character is now believed to be a very complicated Sunheaded figure. This has some very interesting solar interactions. On Winter Solstice a triangle of light and a triangle of shadow touch the central portion of the concentric circle face. Figure 8E illustrates a possible encrypted variant of a "Sunheaded" figure. This figure has a form of light conform to the interior shape of its headdress that transforms it into what seems to be a solar symbol. After that conjunction a point in the shadow touches the center of the spiral on the chest of the figure to its right. These are unique variants of Sunheaded and Sunbodied figures and provide evidence that some of the later are also associated with the act of solar observation.

Some of the figures that have not been observed to interact may simply indicate the presence of a solar observation shrine, or where to stand to see a horizontal observation. The "suneyed" figure at Quitchupah (similar to the suneyes at Barrier Canyon) illustrates this (Fig.7D). Because of the number and the vast area over which they occur it will be several years before all the rest can be observed for possible interaction.

One further step in the stylization process may take the body and reduce it to a straight apendageless shaft. This varies from a wider figurine body form to a simple thin line, as previously mentioned. Again some of these may or may not represent the idea of the Sunwatcher. Most of the figures in the top row of Figure 5 should be included in the most stylized section of Figure 4. To illustrate the possibility of some figures possibly being a further reduction in body width, they have been included. These figures could also represent something else such as a sunpole, solar observation notations, sequential periods of interaction, etc. But there is still a probability that some at least represent a sunheaded figure. There are so many variations in this category that some figures may be variations of other concepts.

Sunpoles would probably be the final stage in the stylization process, because any further reduction would reduce the figure to the sun-face symbol itself. If that would be the case, the isolated sun symbols used for the face of the Sunwatcher would be unidentifiable from symbols intended to represent the sun. This would create confusion, that would result in ambiguity and lead to a misidentification. The horned concentric circles at Clear Creek and Short Creek may be an attempt to indicate this difference (Fig.10). It is unlikely that this would be done because of the ambiguity it would create. The panel in Barrier Canyon has two sun symbols to alleviate this confusion. The conclusion that simple solar symbols would not represent the sun watcher is logical, but in a few situations the authors wonder if a concentric circle might not represent the Sun-watcher, or at least where he would stand to see a sun rise or set.

At the Barrier Canyon style site in Indian Creek, there is a remarkable

situation. Even though there are no actual Sunheaded figures, two anthropomorphs have their heads cupped by notches in the shadow on equinox and cross-quarter dates November 6-7 and February 6-7 (Fig.10). The eyes of one of these figures consists of rings of dots. The connection between this and other sun-watchers is very similar. In these cases, figures are forever watching out past the corner of a rock wall to see the sun face to face at prime solar periods. The Indian Creek Ambassadors, however, like Figures 8B-E do not see the sun on the horizon.

There is another situation just to the right of the Ambassadors where this can be demonstrated. At that location, on equinox, a dot-centered circle is cupped by a shadow from another man-made notch in the cliff. One can place one's head in front of the dot centered circle and look out through the notch and see the sun rise on the horizon on Winter Solstice (Fig.10).

In Indian Creek and in the San Rafael, from the position of the sun, the view would basically be the same. At both sites the sun would see a concentric circle. One would have a body attached and the other could simply be a concentric circle face, or the face of a sunwatcher if present. We will never know for sure, but the possibility is there.

After observing these situations we begin to understand a little more about the complex use and nature of symbol systems. We have opened the door to the existence of a deeper cosmological concern than simply a figure with an odd target or rayed face observing solar movement.

Now whenever one sees a Sunheaded figure there will be thoughts of more than just another unusual figure. We are now beginning to place these inscriptions into a better symbolic perspective and cultural context. We are also able to realize the fact that what we call "rock art" is not art but a record of very special, and in these cases very sacred events. By doing two things we can start to unravel more of their mysteries. First, we must assimilate many examples of a given motif, with regional distributions of similarities and differences. Second, we must analyze all the situations with the contexts and associations with which they occur. These examples of "rock writing" records a vibrant source to contribute additional information about their makers. Sunheaded figures are only a very small part of what will be the total contribution these records can make.

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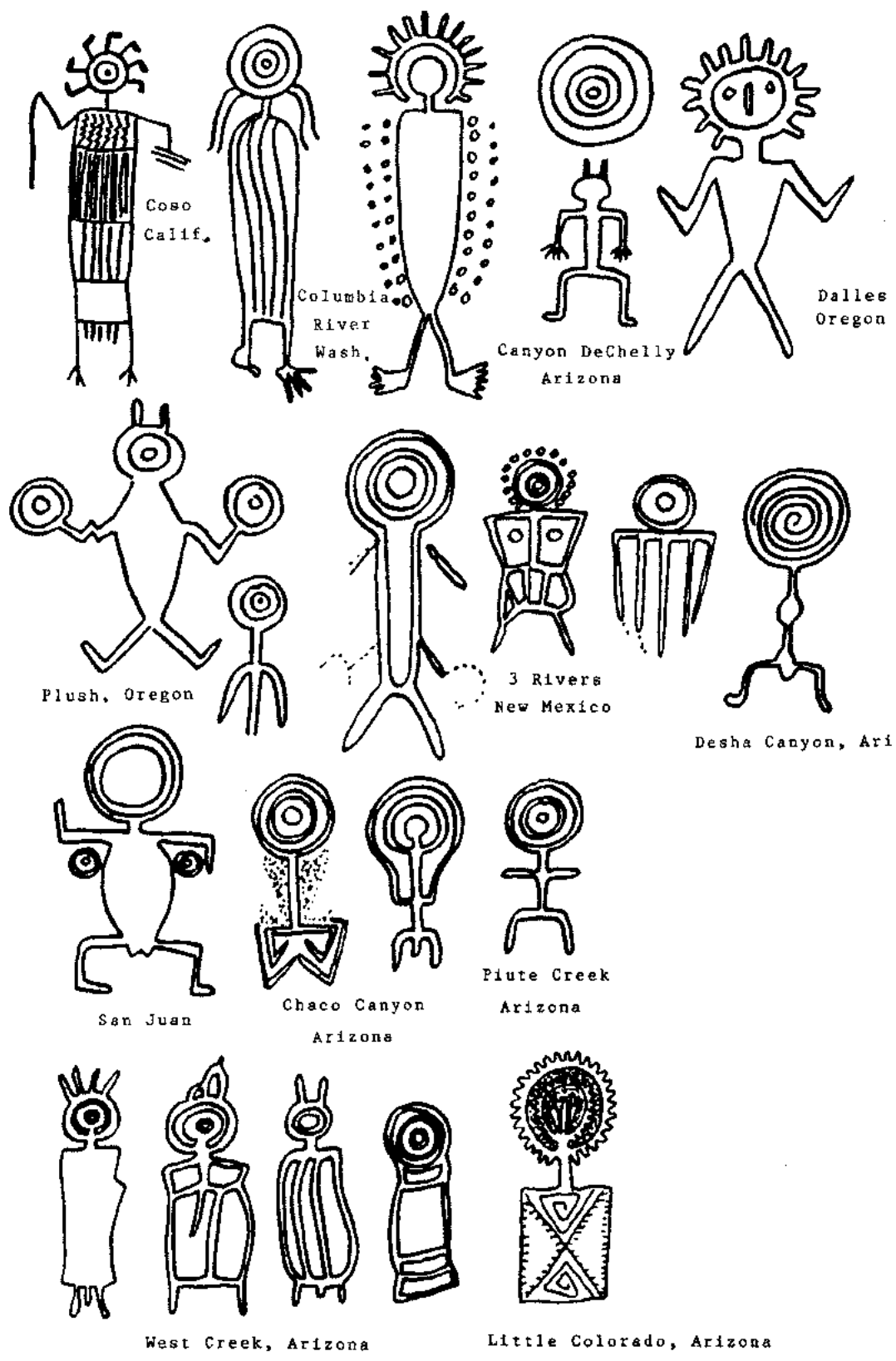


Figure 1

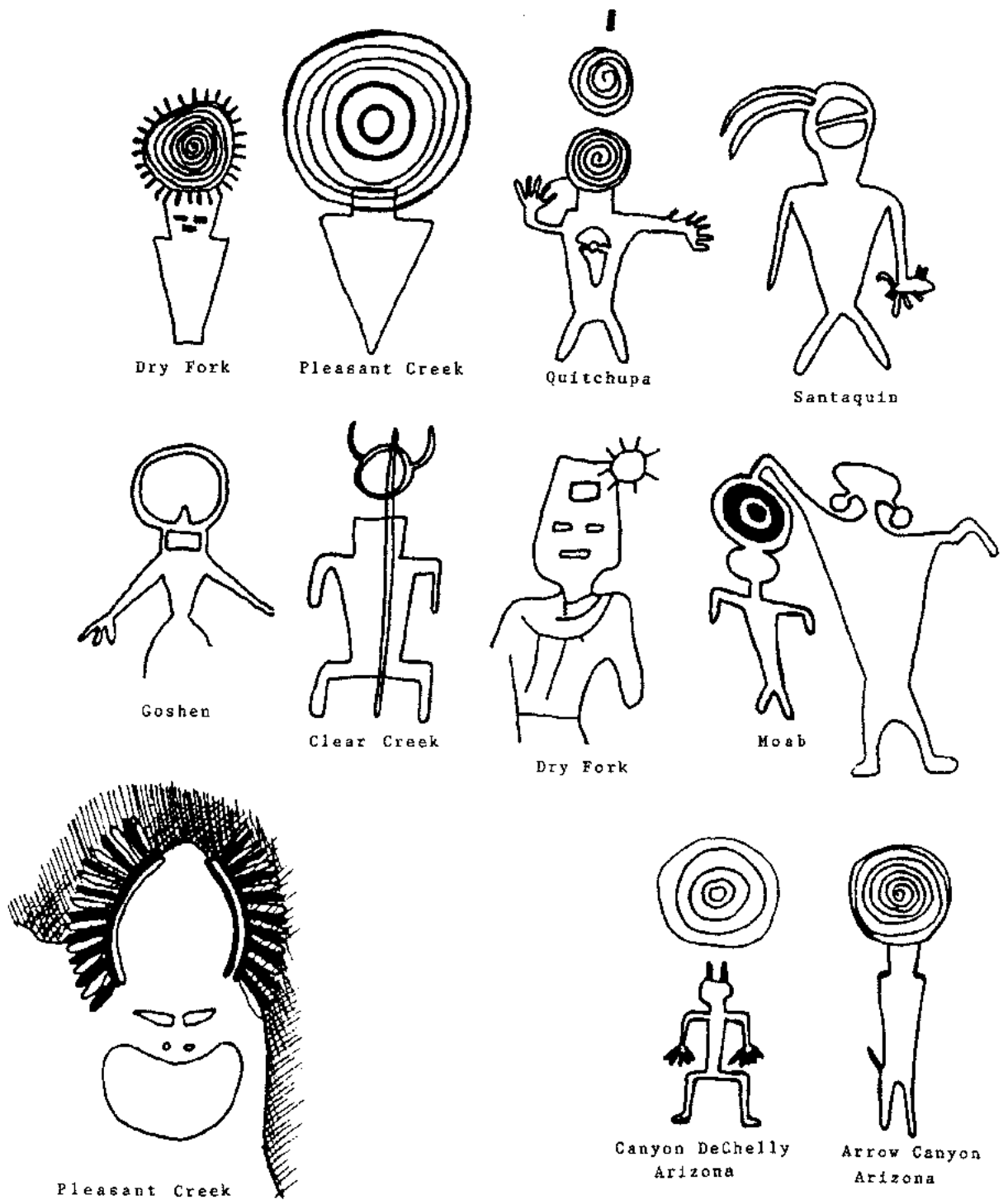


Figure 2

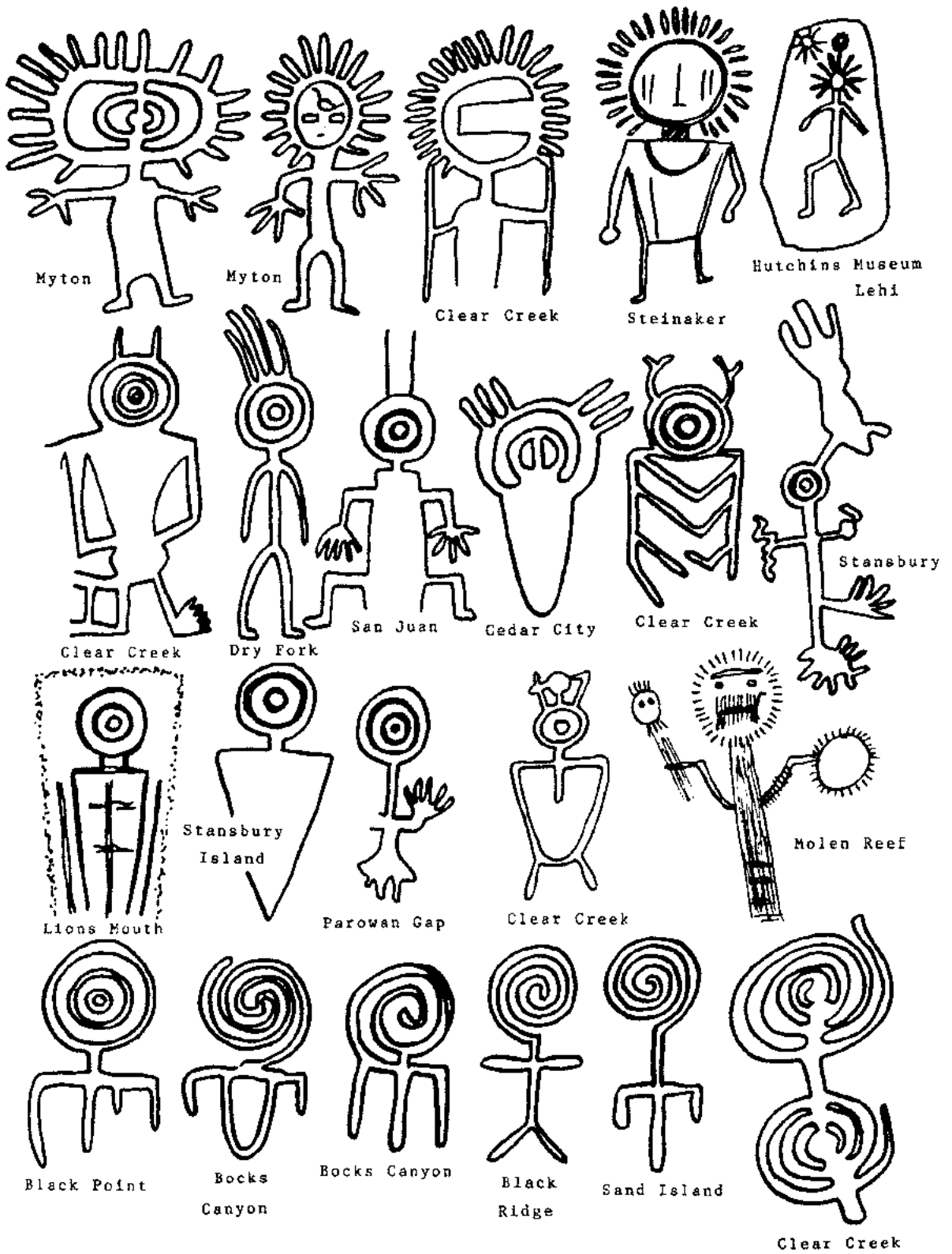


Figure 3



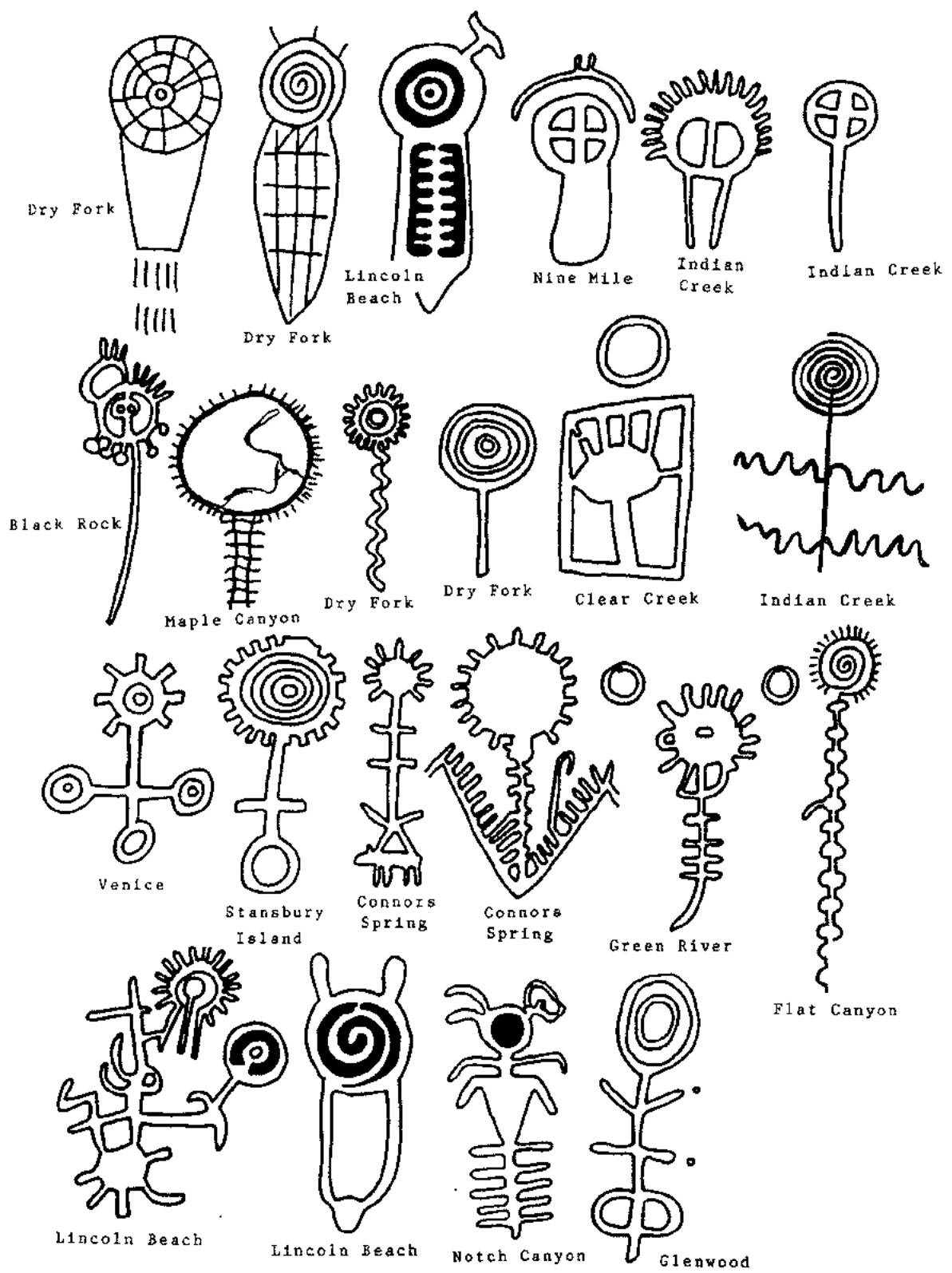


Figure 4

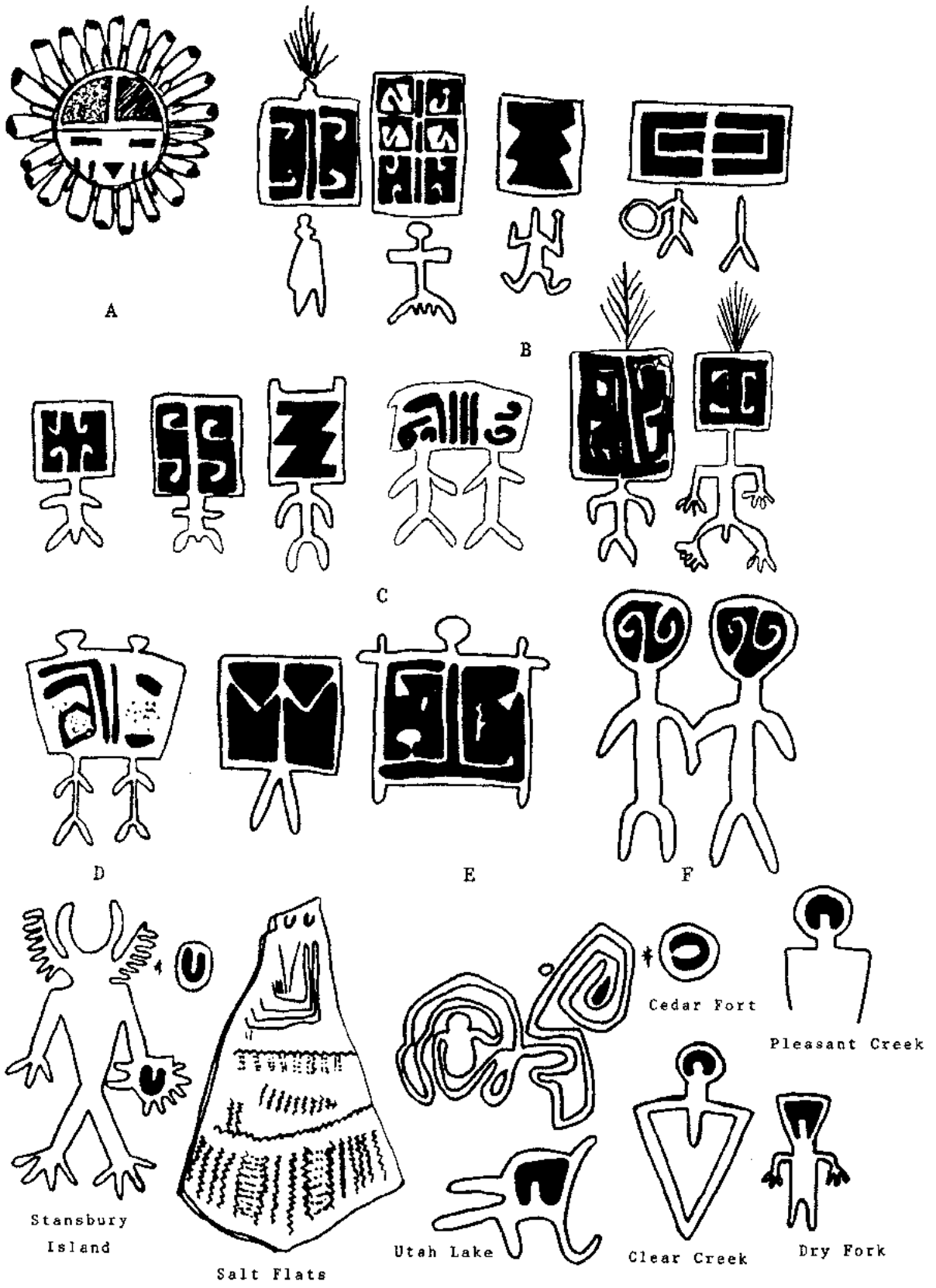


Figure 5

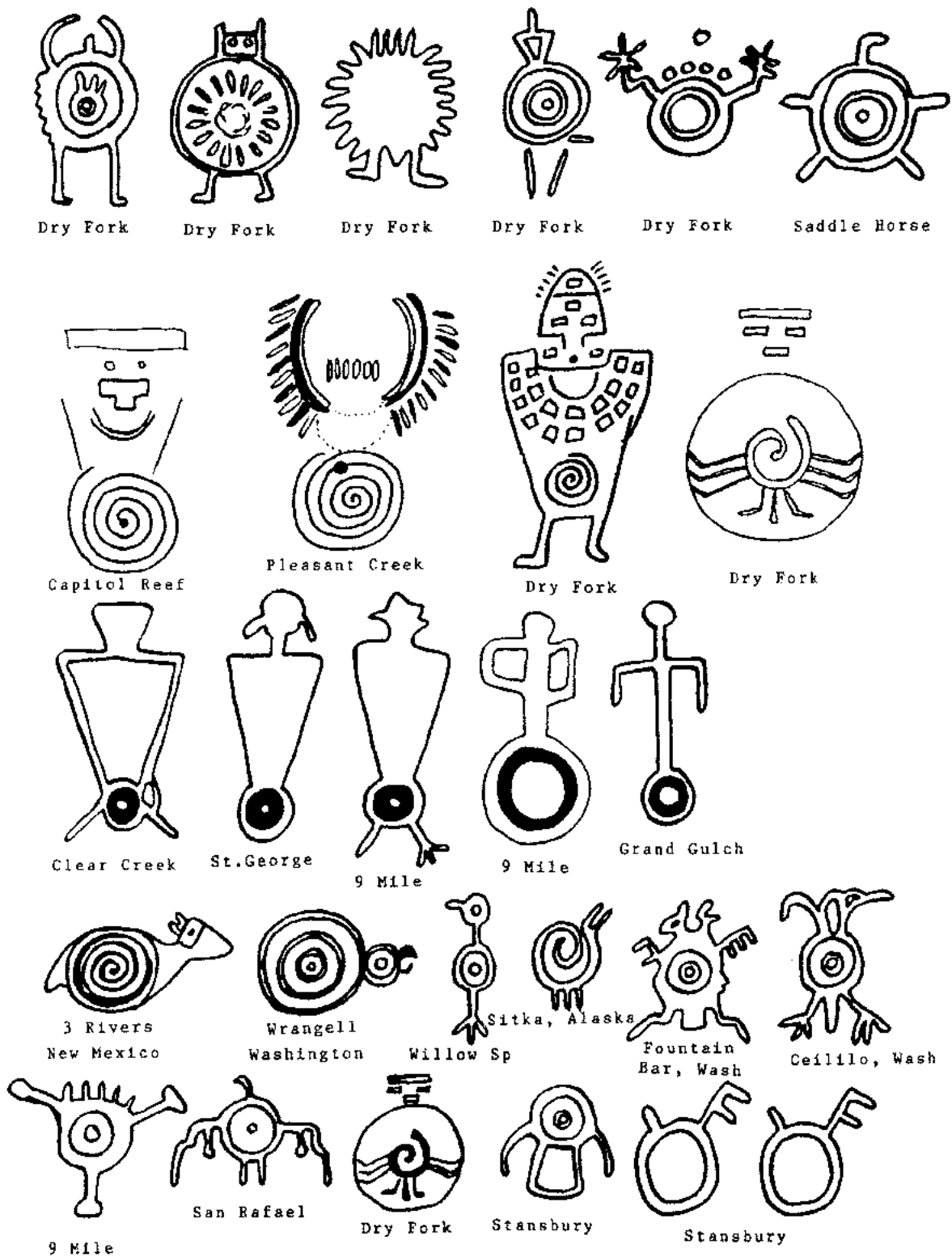


Figure 6

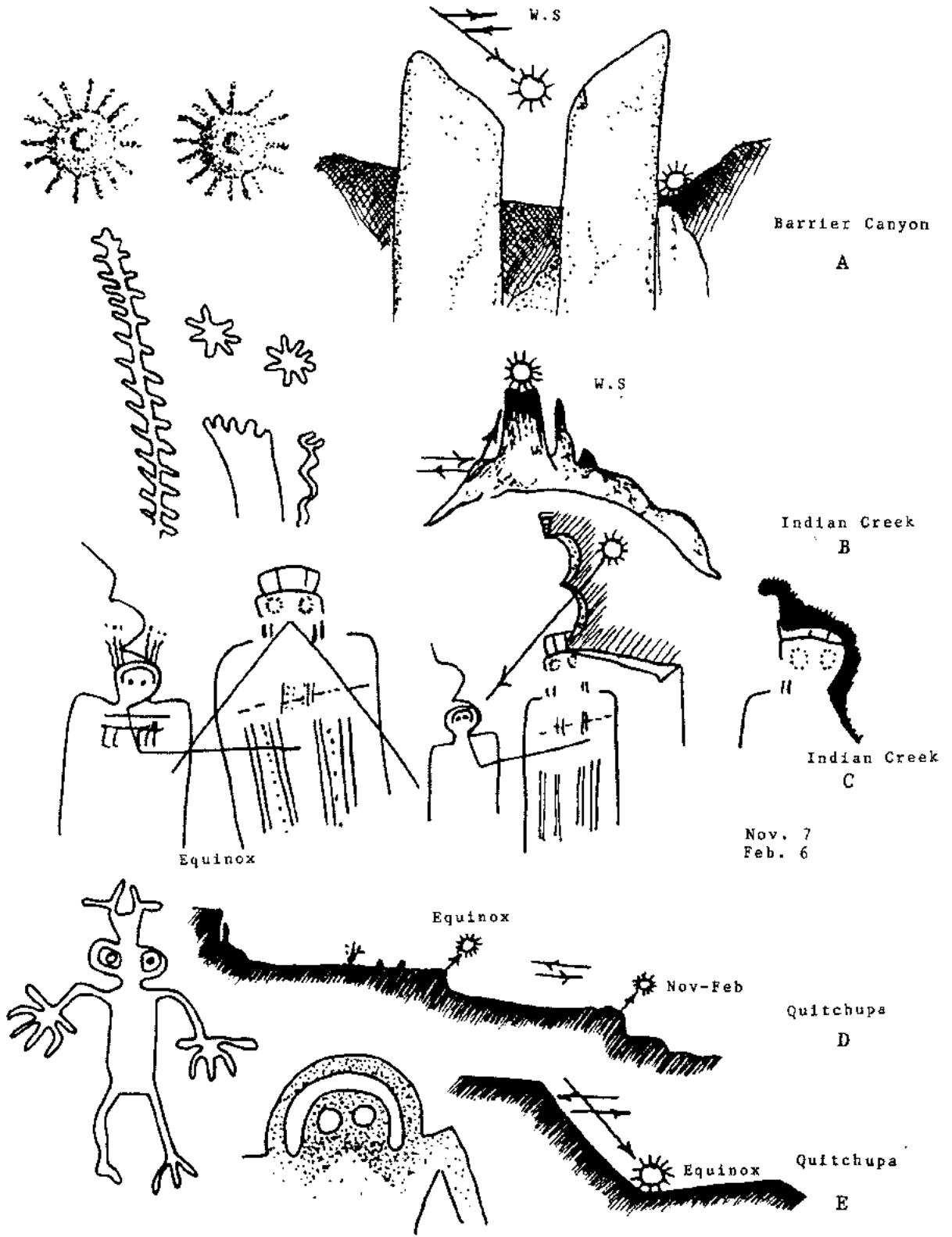
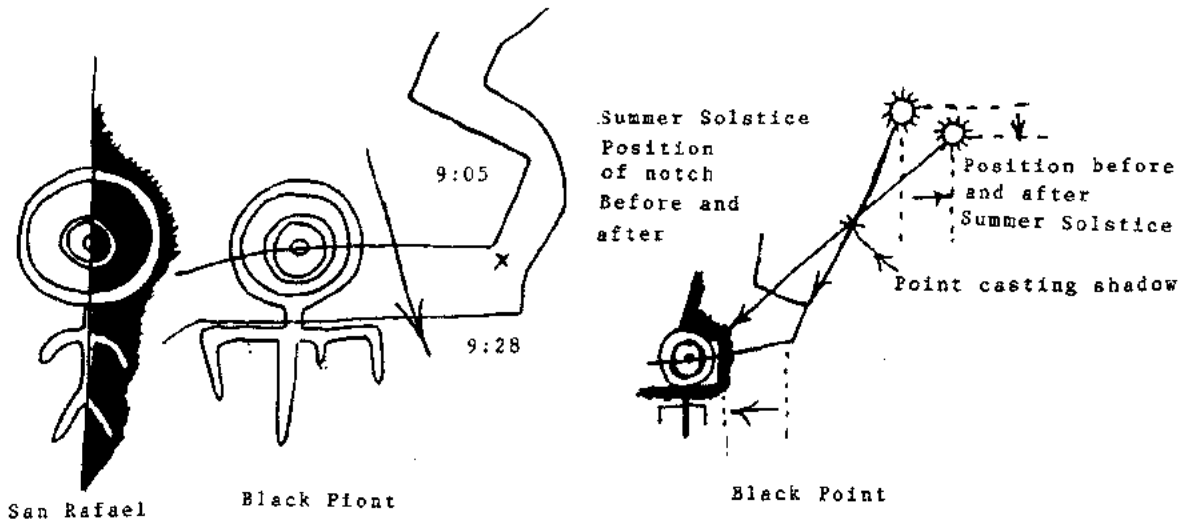


Figure 7



A

B

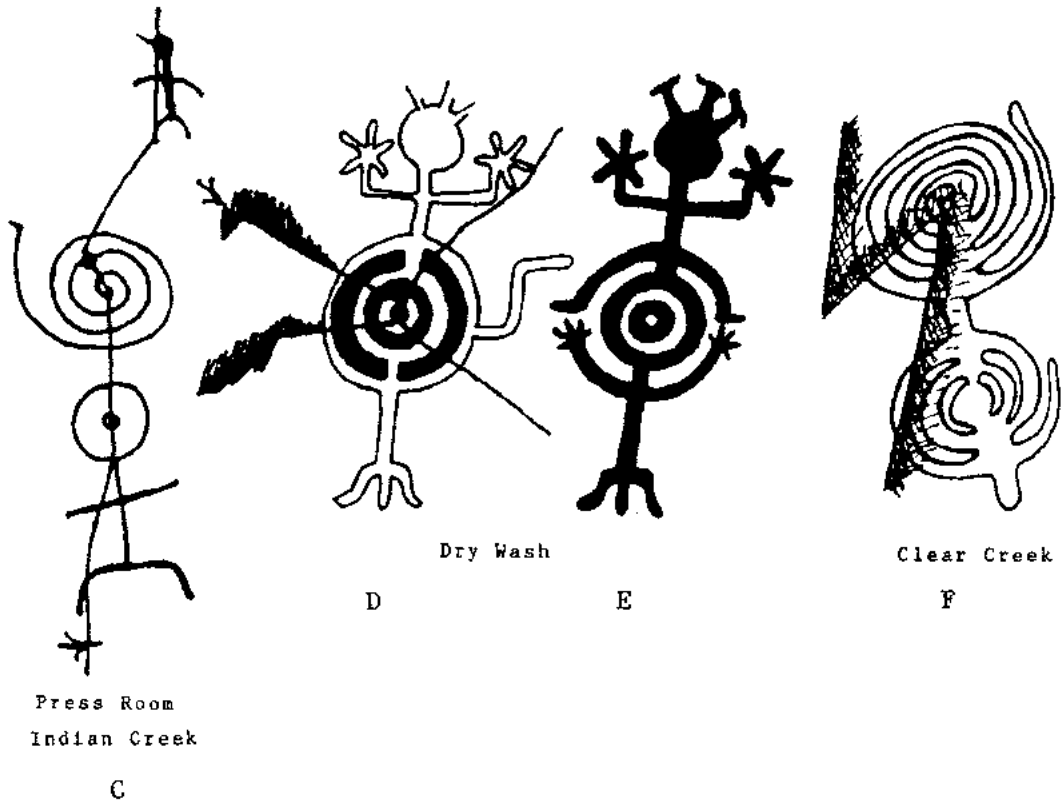


Figure 8

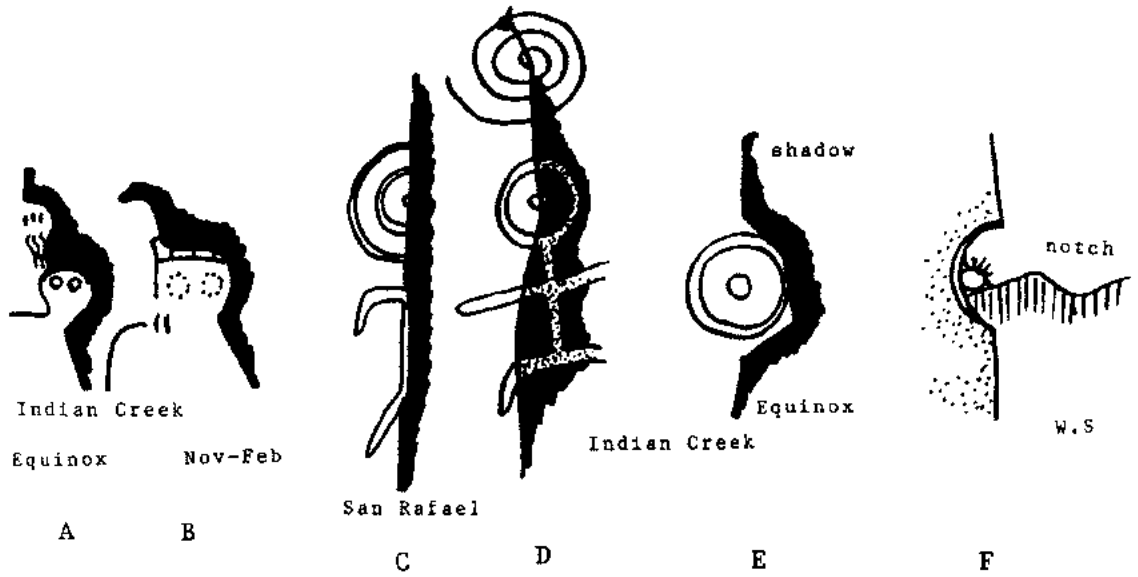


Figure 9

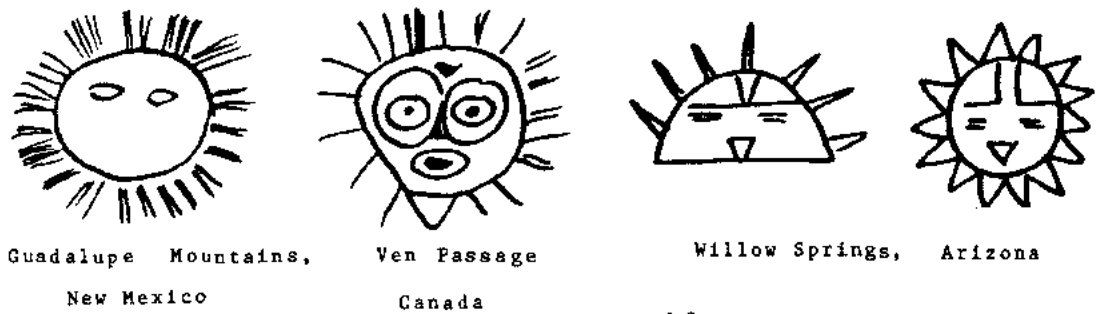
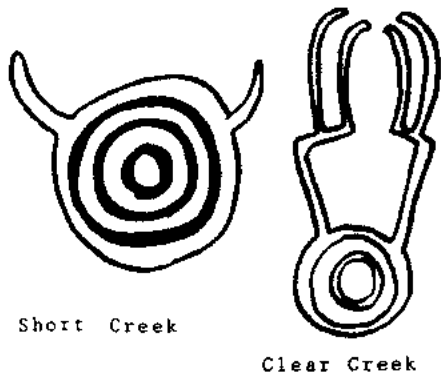


Figure 10