

A POSSIBLE ROUGH DATING METHOD FOR THE CUB CREEK ROCK ART  
SITE IN DINOSAUR NATIONAL MONUMENT, UINTAH COUNTY, UTAH

BY

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The Cub Creek Rock Art Site in the Dinosaur National Monument contains a series of petroglyphs that can be assigned to a pre-Classic Vernal Style through a Post Classic Vernal Style. This dating is based on the changes of styles of the anthropomorphic figures found at the site. Within a panel representing the oldest form of figures is found a design that resembles some southwestern designs attributed to the super nova of A.D. 1054. Using a series of design changes, based on the degrees of abstraction proposed by Faris (1987), the Post-Classic Vernal Style can be subdivided into three or four generations of change. Using the timespan advanced by Breternitz (1970) of ca A.D. 1054 to ca A.D. 1200, the rock art at the Cub Creek site would represent five of six generations of change from A.D. 1054 to ca A.D. 1200. This would make each generation cycle about 24 to 29 years, a time frame not unreasonable for what we presently know about the Indian life span.

Jennings (1978) gives a time span for the Fremont culture as roughly A.D. 900 to A.D. 1300, with the culture beginning to wane by A.D. 1150. Many believe the Fremont Culture evolved in-situ from Archaic antecedents (Rudy 1953; Wormington 1955; Marwitt 1970). Such a change may be reflected at a rock art site in Dry Fork Valley (Fig.1), where elements resembling Desert Archaic and Fremont are found together. Not far from this site is found the famous Ashley-Dry Fork Valley Classic Vernal Style petroglyph site (Fig.2).

At this site, on some protected figures found under a slight overhang, can be found some petroglyphs that still retain traces of paint. These were probably not just petroglyphs, but elaborate panels of painted petroglyphs.

Burton (1971) did a thesis for his master of arts degree at the University of Colorado on the Rock Art of Dinosaur National Monument. He concluded "The sequence of petroglyphs within the monument starts with solid figures, passes through a stage of outlined figures with elaborate decorations, and ends with simple figures containing only a few interior elements. In general, the amount of pecking needed to complete the figures decreased through time".

Farris (1987) did a study of the Cub Creek site, and noted the same changes Burton had seen, but with his art background took it a step farther. He categorizes the anthropomorphic figures along the ledge above the canyon as "simplified and abstracted versions of the Classic Vernal Style anthropomorphs and can be designated as defining a Post-Classic Vernal Abstract Style." He further divided the degree of abstraction into four main categories.

Breternitz (1970) assumes a timespan for the Fremont occupation in the Dinosaur National Monument area to be from A.D. 1000 to A.D. 1150 plus or minus 50 years. The oldest anthropomorphic style assigned to the area by Burton (1971) is that of the solid figure (Fig.3).

Along with these solid figures is found a crescent (Fig.4) and a spinning droplet-like design (Fig.5). This design may represent the super nova of A.D. 1054, as it bears some similarity to other southwest sites attributed to this event (Brandt and Williamson 1977). Such a date would be compatible with both Breternitz' (1970) and Jennings' (1978) timespans for the Fremont Culture, as these show more care in production than the ones shown earlier in the Dry Creek Valley area.

The period of this style would be followed by the fully outlined figure of the Classic Vernal Style. This form is rare, or even possibly absent at the Cub Creek Site. There is one with both body outline and appendages (Fig.6), which is similar to the Classic Vernal Style.

That period of style would be followed by what Mr. Faris (1987) terms "the first degree of abstraction". This he defines as "A trapezoidal outline represents the torso, or upper torso, of the figure which displays no arms or legs. This torso is adorned with the necklace or pectoral typical of Fremont outline figures. The head is indicated by spots representing the eyes and mouth and the familiar ear pendants or hair-bobs, but lacks the outline defining its contour. The top of the head is defined by a horizontal bar, perhaps representing a headband. With no arms or legs these figures are extremely static and provide a rigidly solid representation of the human figure, however, the omitting of the outline of the head indicates that, no matter how static, these figures represent the result of a process of creative modification and development." Such a figure can be seen above the road on the cliff face (Fig.7).

This style, in turn, is followed by forms lacking an outline and having the torso consisting of rows of dots (Fig.8). Mr. Faris (1987) shows that the use of rows of dots allows the representation of details of costume and adornment while providing enhancement for the overall design. Moreover, these dots establish the outer contour of the figure.

Mr. Faris (1987) defines a further degree of abstraction as one in which there is no attempt to define a form for the torso at all (Fig.9). He says "The torso is established by the inference inherent in the presence of adornment that would be worn on the torso, specifically the pectoral, in this case with embellishments to enhance its ability to define the space."

The final stage is defined by Mr. Faris (1987) by this trio of identical figures that appear to have no identifiable human features but that do have the elements involved in defining each figure (Fig.10). These images define the torso with a vertical centerline, a horizontal line across the bottom may represent a belt, and the top arc is in the position of the pectoral or necklace.

Mr. Faris (1987) feels, "The span of time between the end of agriculture and the abandonment of the area by the Fremont would appear (based on the progressive changes in the development of the abstract style of figure portrayal) to have covered three or four generations."

This would mean that the timespan from A.D. 1054 to ca. A.D. 1200 would be represented by five or six generations. Thus, the generations would each be represented by a 24 to 29 year period, a timespan that does not seem unreasonable based on what we know about the Fremont Indian's life span.

Figures representative of this type of abstraction can also be seen at the Classic Vernal Style sites at Ashley-Dry Fork Valley (Castleton 1978; Schaafsma 1971).

Like the protected areas at Ashley-Dry Creek Valleys, a naturally protected area here at the Cub Creek Site also contains traces of red paint. I feel that the reduction in pecking needed to complete figures decreased through

time while the use of paints to make what are now the missing parts increased. All of these anthropomorphic figures may have been complete forms made up of pecking and paint, and all we see now is the pecking. If so, the next stage would have been the pictograph, which is basically what we see following the Fremont style rock art.

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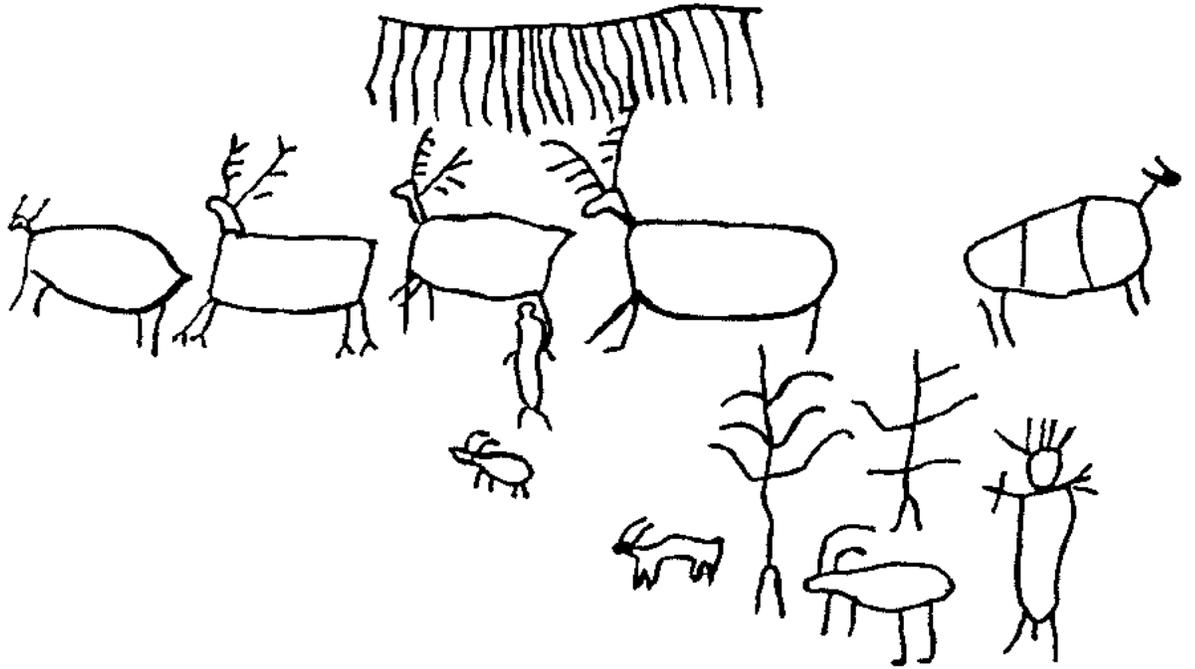


Figure 1. A Desert Archaic panel with some Fremont overtones, Dry Fork Valley area, Utah.

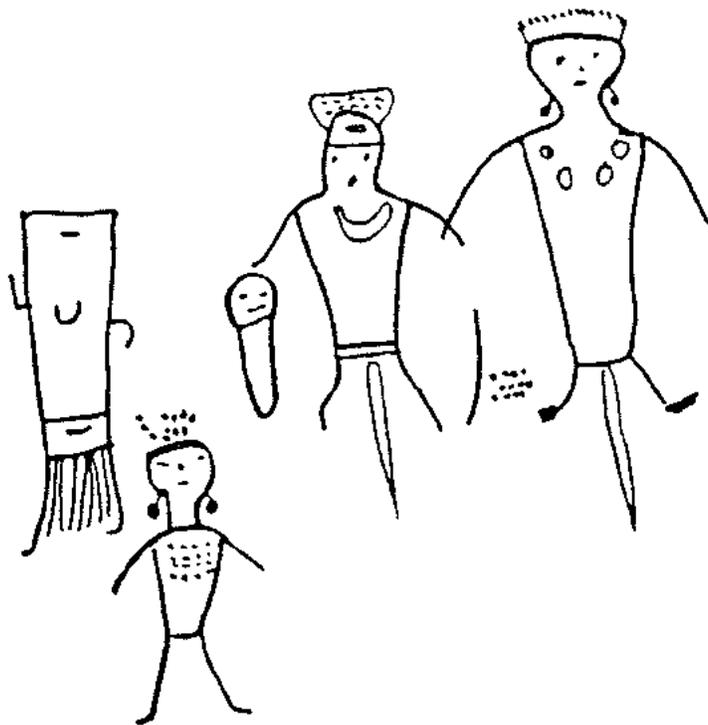


Figure 2. A Classic Vernal Style Fremont panel from Ashley-Dry Fork Valley area, Utah.

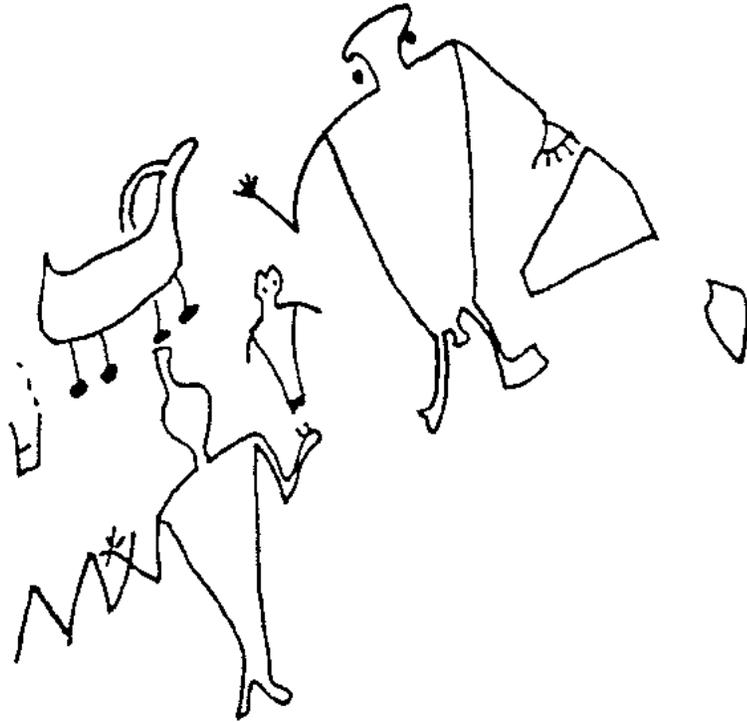


Figure 3. Some of the Early Fremont Style solid figures at the Cub Creek Site, Utah.



Figure 4. A crescent design from the Cub Creek Site, Utah, that may represent the "Super Nova" of A.D. 1054.



Figure 5. A spinning droplet-like design from the Cub Creek Site, Utah that may also be a representation of the "Super Nova" of A.D. 1054.

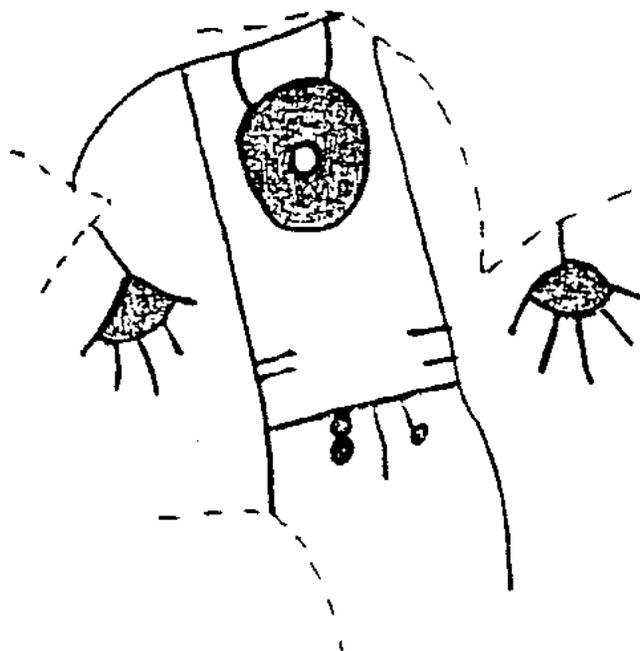


Figure 6. A possible Classic Vernal Style Fremont design from the Cub Creek Site in Utah. A portion of this figure has been broken off the wall.



Figure 7. A representation of what Faris (1987) refers to as the first degree of abstraction in his Post-Classic Vernal Style. Body is outlined, but there are no arms or legs.



Figure 8. An example of the next degree of abstraction in Faris' Post-Classic Vernal Style. Outline of body is inferred by dots.

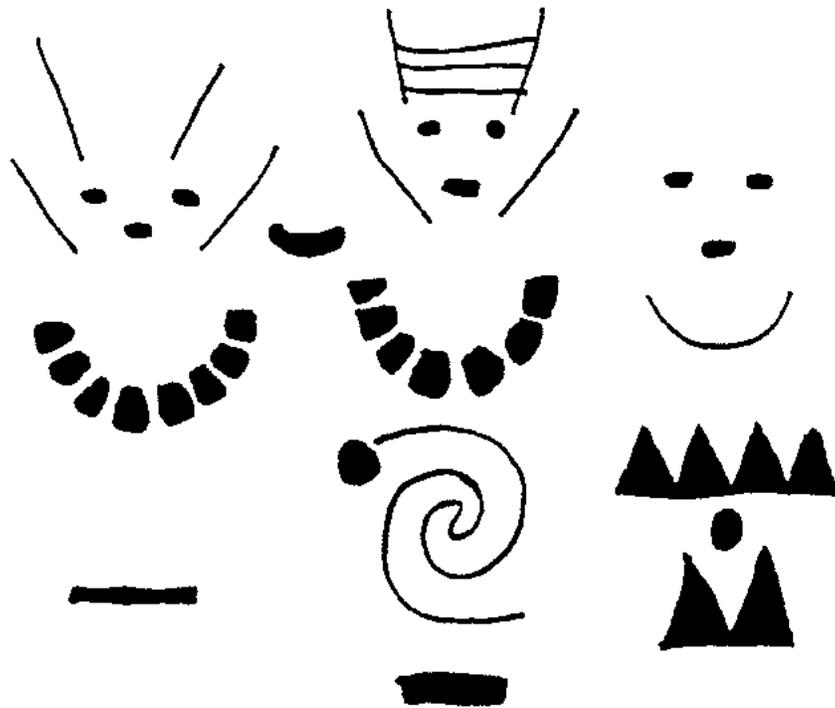


Figure 9. An example of the next to last abstraction in what Faris (1987) refers to as the Post-Classic Vernal Style. Body outline is inferred only by the adornment and facial features.

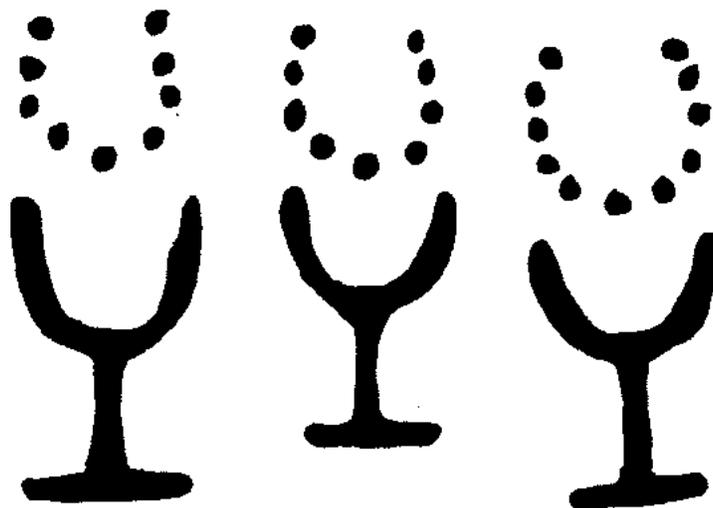


Figure 10. The final abstraction in what Faris (1987) refers to as the Post-Classic Vernal Style. The body outline is inferred by only a few lines and adornment.