

**SUMMER SOLSTICE OBSERVATIONS AND SYMBOLISM AT A**

**BARRIER CANYON STYLE PANEL IN**

**PLEASANT CREEK, UTAH 1987**

**BY**

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In Pleasant Creek there are many beautiful panels of rock art that have been produced by at least four different cultures. The panel to be considered here contains remains of at least two styles. One of these is composed of Barrier Canyon Style anthropomorphs that have been suspiciously placed, so as to form two diagonally descending rows of figures, instead of more typical linear placements. These figures were later (but still prehistorically) vandalized. The upper panel has seven typical Barrier Canyon figures and quadrupeds that have been severely pecked at in an attempt to obliterate them, a characteristic found in many Barrier Canyon panels. This was probably done to void out or nullify their intent, influence or steal their power (Fig. 1). This practice is not uncommon and even occurs today (Castleton 1979:229, Garn 1985). Below this panel there is what is assumed to be a section of Basketmaker petroglyphs. In this part of the panel there are several glyphs that were felt to be solar indicators. The main figures consist of two circles, one of which has been quartered, with a pecked dot within each quarter of the circle containing smudges of red pigment (Fig. 2A).

Next to this circle, there are some other figures that are very simple, yet very strong in the impact that they have. Two of these figures echo a symbolism and a basic familiarity to other panels that share both their form and associations. Figure 2B is a stick figure seeming to represent an incomplete personage with its arms outstretched, almost bird-like and similar to the small scratched bird under one arm (Fig. 2C). This context at first leaves the impression of shamanistic transformation. The bird and the partial figure in the same bird-like pose gives the feeling that it represents the attitude of flight. It was suggested that its incompleteness may represent the idea that he is no longer grounded. What makes that possibility a little more convincing is the two unusual figures to their right (Fig. 2D,E). These have a head composed of a unique form of a reversed, patinated "U" bracket, similar to ones that were analyzed in an earlier paper as having bird associations, especially with the face or eye (Fig. 3) (Warner 1984:16). If similar symbols, repeated in many different contexts as a bird eye occurs next to a figure that we suspect to represent the act of transformation of man to bird, then this may represent the sight that the transformed bird eyed figure has, once he has been transformed -- a seemingly good possibility. This was the reason for observing solar interactions on this panel to hopefully discover any additional symbolism that would help in supporting that hypothesis.

On the morning of Summer Solstice a little after 7:00 A.M. MDT, the sun rises across the canyon to the northeast of this panel. If the quartered

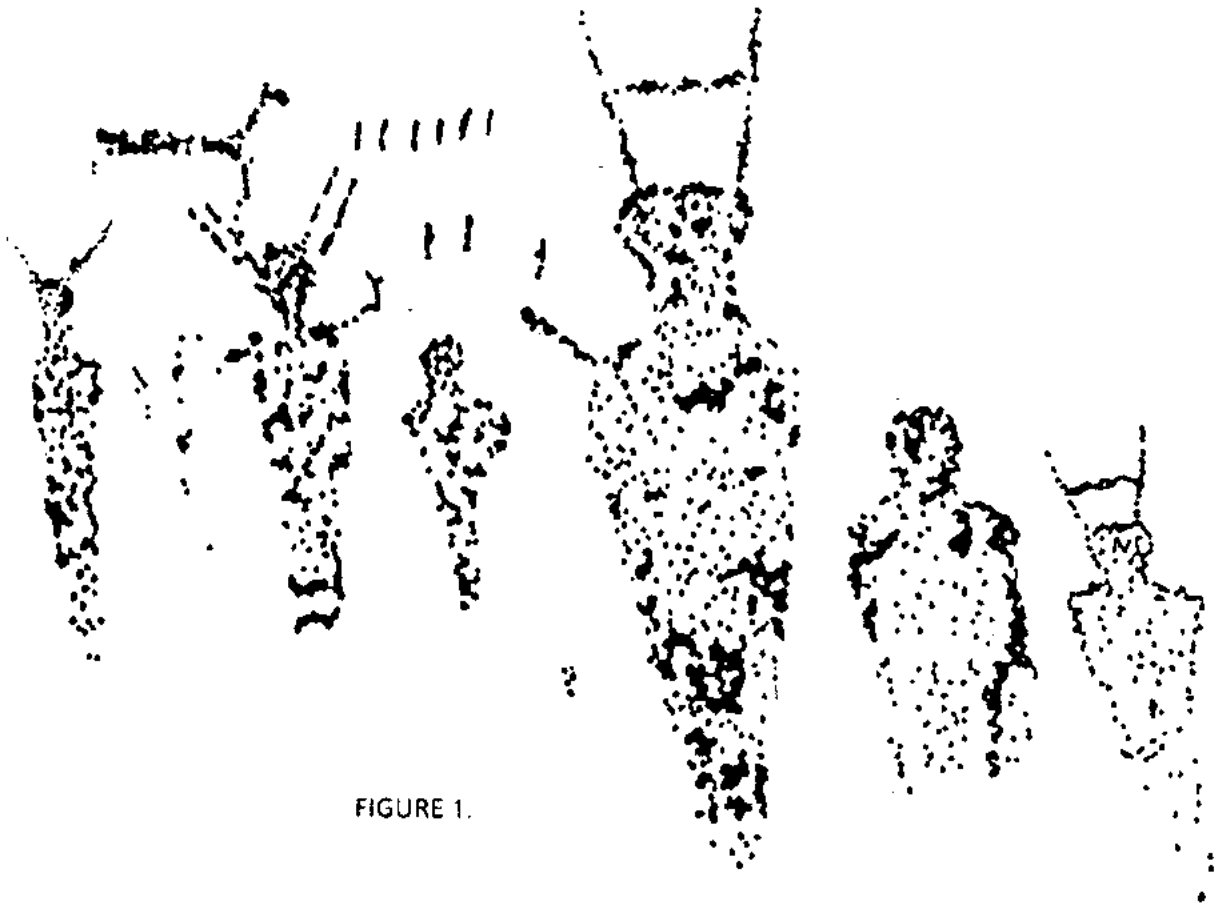


FIGURE 1.

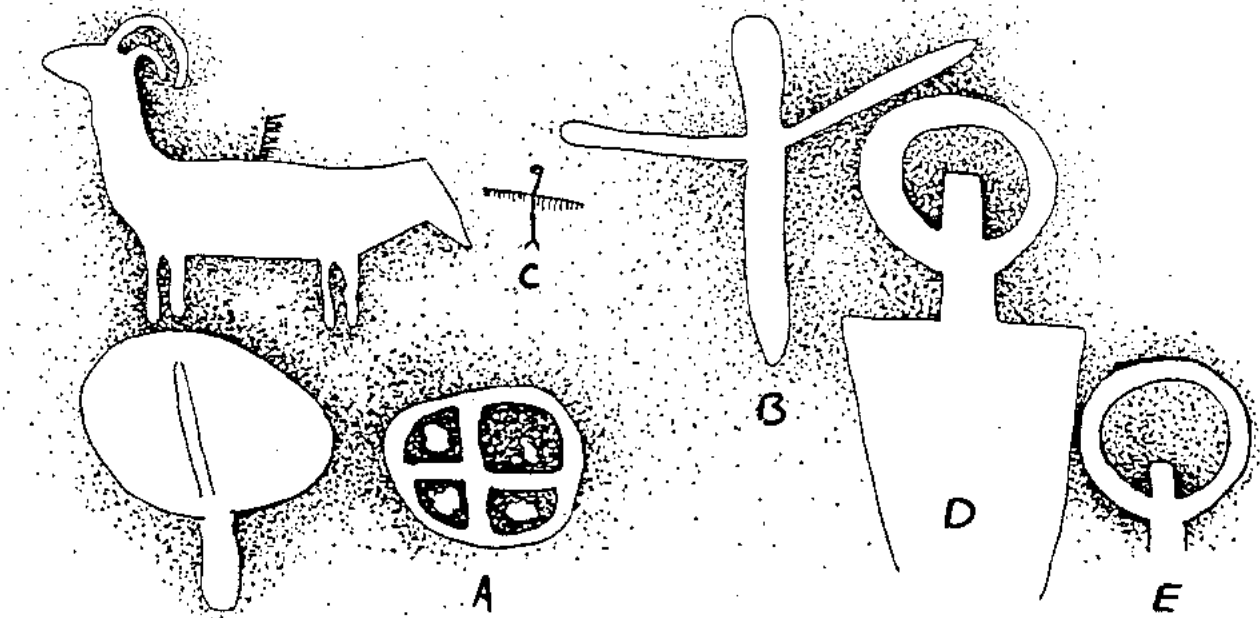


FIGURE 2.

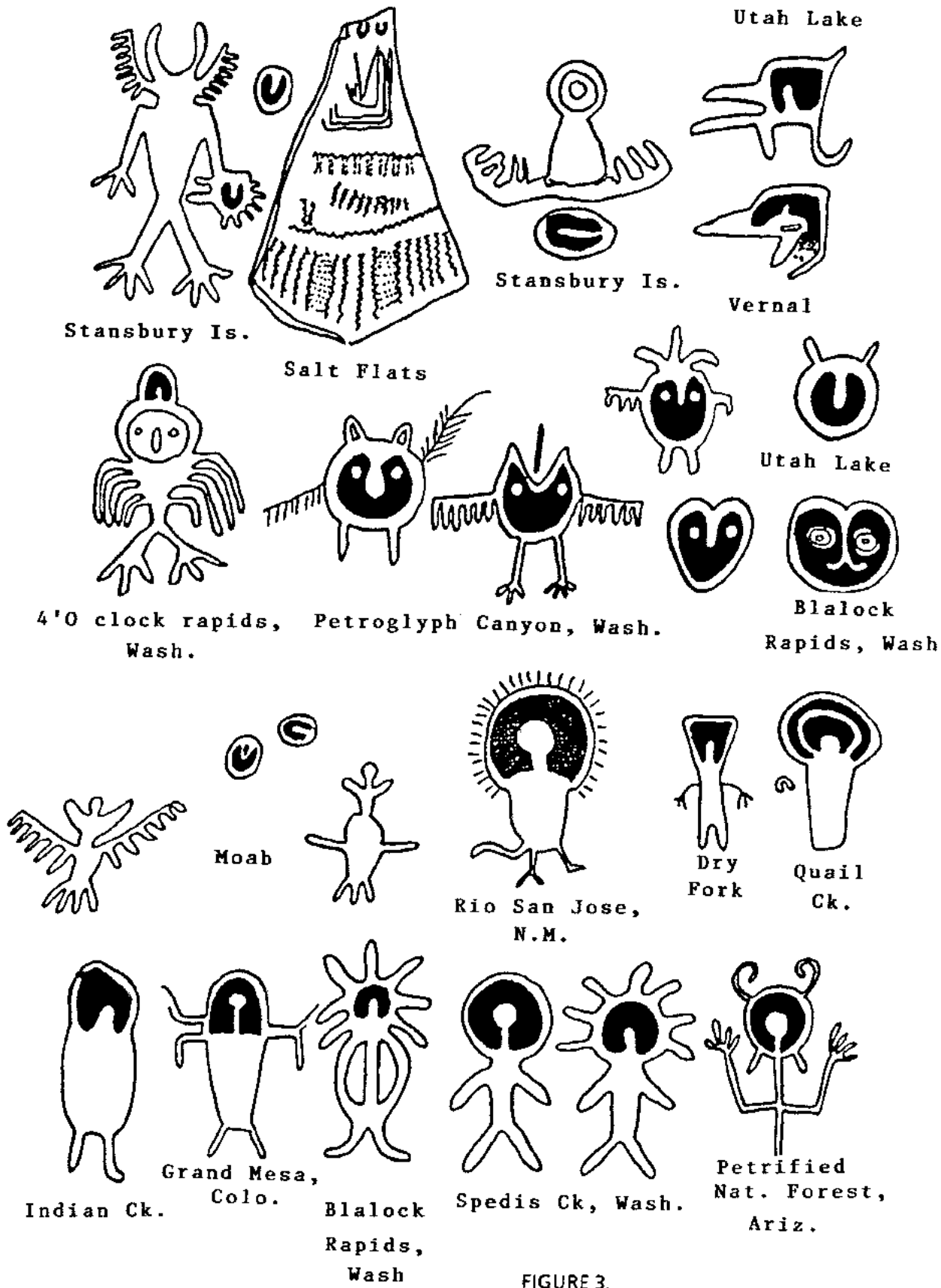


FIGURE 3.

circle indicates the place to stand to see the sunrise, it was placed so one could observe one of the most precise points on the skyline. Before the actual sunrise, an angle of shadow began to descend to the right as the sun rose. When the location of sunrise was identifiable, it appeared centered on a high, flat ridge of a little platform (Fig. 4). What actually made this spot so definitive and exciting were two very small eye-like windows that appeared below and slightly to the right of where the sun rose? As the sun rose, these became brighter. They looked as though we were seeing eyes of sunlight looking back at us. When the sun's disk appeared they were lost, engulfed in the sun's blaze. Were the two eye-like holes filled with light at the position of sunrise important or symbolic? We have a very strong feeling that they were. From that point on the horizon, this is the best view, with the best location with a suitable surface to mark it. The subsequent interactions on both the Barrier Canyon and Basketmaker style panels seem to support that belief. With the symbolism previously described, of shamanistic transformation at a solar observation site, with symbolism seeming to emphasize bird eyes and possible esoteric or ecstatic vision would also seem to indicate that the sun like form of eyes would be very symbolic.

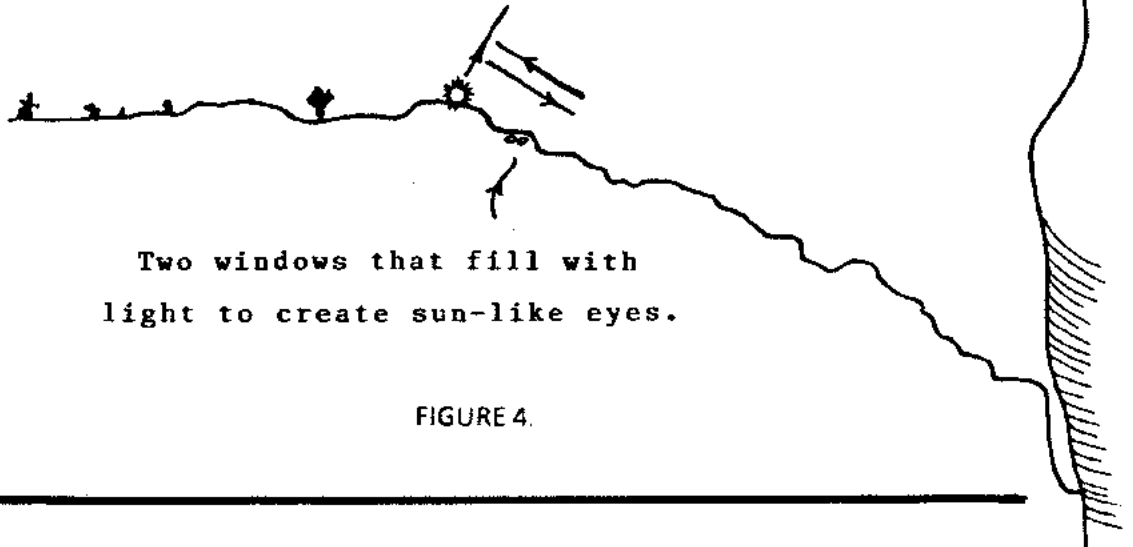
By 7:50 A.M., (Fig. 4 Line 1) a point of shadow had moved across the face of the first, far left Barrier Canyon figure as the light forms on the cliff. At 7:55 A.M., another point of light had moved across the quadruped. By 8:00 A.M. that angle of light had centered on the face of the second Barrier Canyon figure which seemed to again represent the context where an angle of light comes out of its mouth to portray a much more complex and deeper symbolism (Fig. 5, Line 3). Again notice the angular and linear placement of the sets of both rows of figures corresponding to the movement of the shadow. From the face of the second figure the angle of light moved to the center of the face of the third figure at 8:06 A.M. It then simply moved down through the rest of the painted figures without further interaction.

Because of the northern most position of the sun causing it to rise at its highest arc, the angle of light above the biggest figure (Point Y, Fig. 5 Line 4). Point Y, will never move any further to the left. Prior to Summer Solstice it moved up to this position and afterward it will return back down and away. Point X (Fig. 5 Line 2) was at that time estimated to possibly descend over the faces of the second row of figures. That was observed on Equinox (dotted lines).

As the shadows continued to lower, the angle of light at point Z (Fig. 5, Line 6), descends down to move across the face of the partial, spread armed figure (Fig. 5, Line 7). At that point we were ecstatic. To date we have seen this context on many panels with just one figure interacting and on several panels with multiple such interactions at different times of the year and day (Fig. 6) (Warner and Warner 1985). At present, multiple interactions on one panel like this are rare (Fig. 6B). This panel, however, has five interactions on Summer Solstice as the angle of light moves over to the mouth of figure 2D by 9:00 A.M. (Fig. 5 line 8), it then has two more interactions (totaling six) on Equinox.

The foregoing completes the symbolism described earlier. These last U-bracket faced figures, with a possible symbolic association of sight, may now

Edge of cliff to  
the left of panel.



Two windows that fill with  
light to create sun-like eyes.

FIGURE 4.

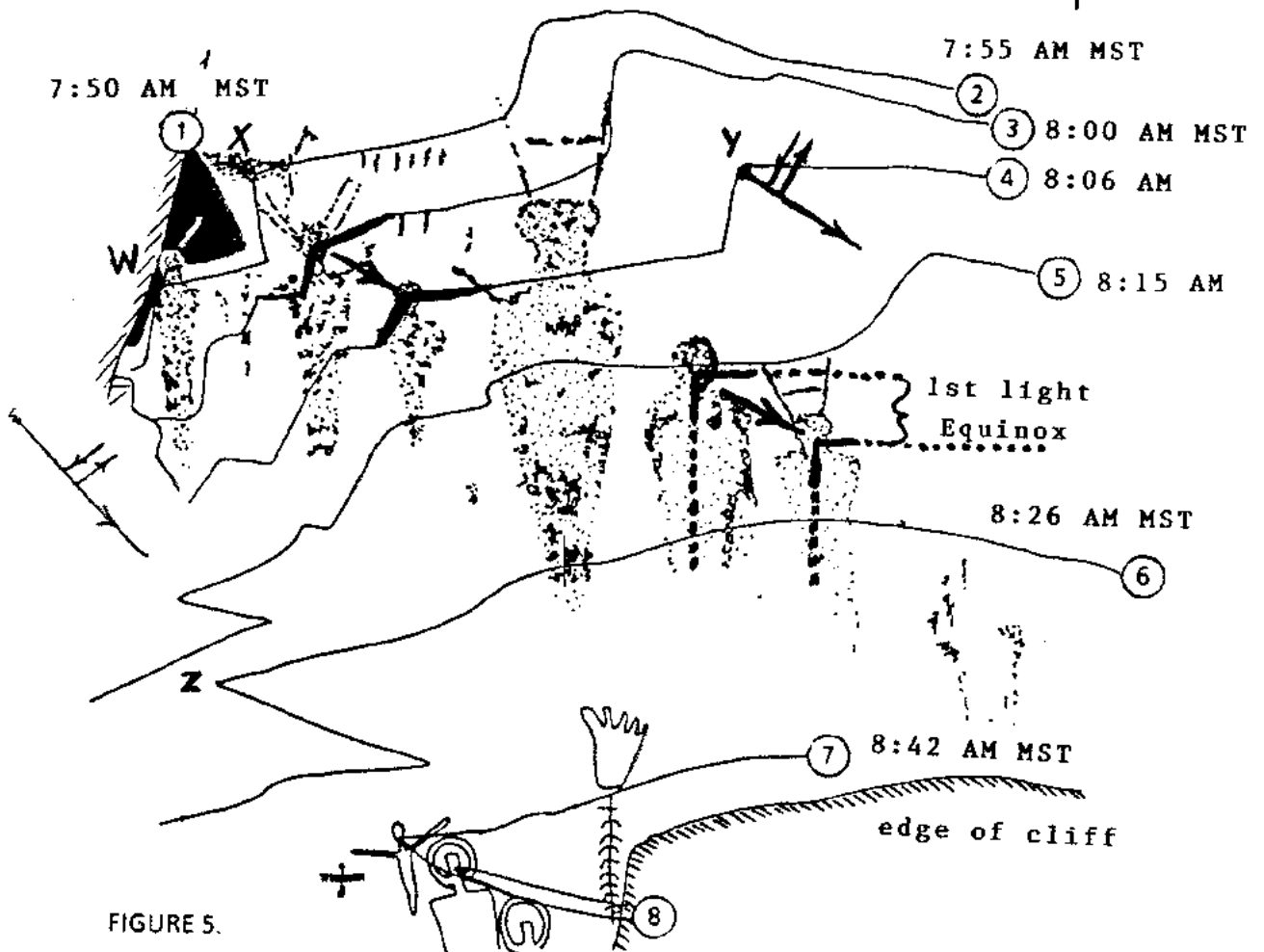
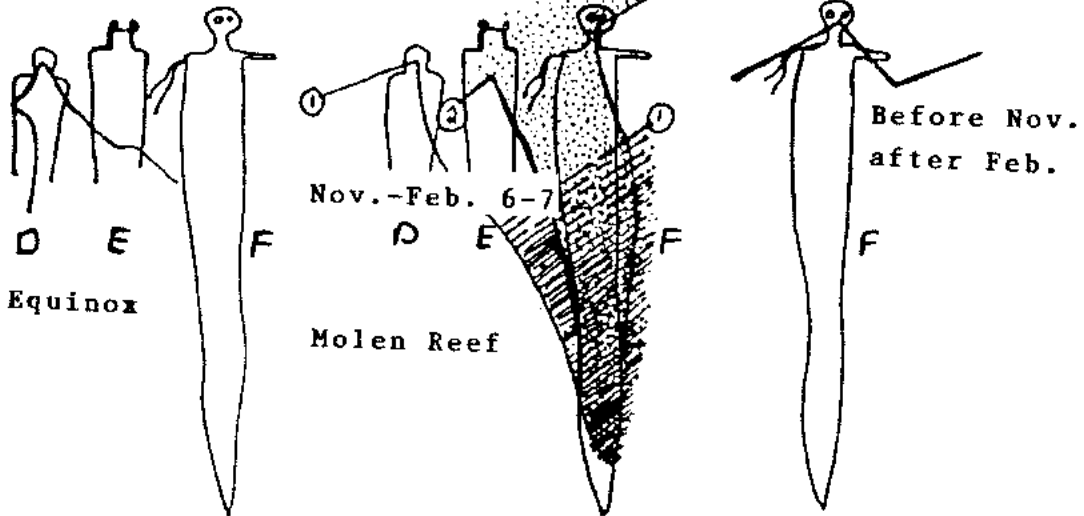
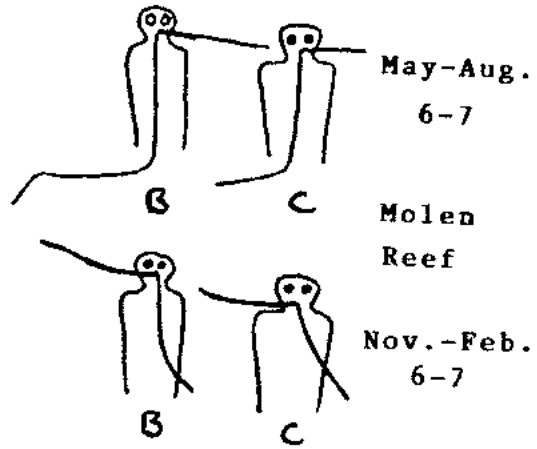
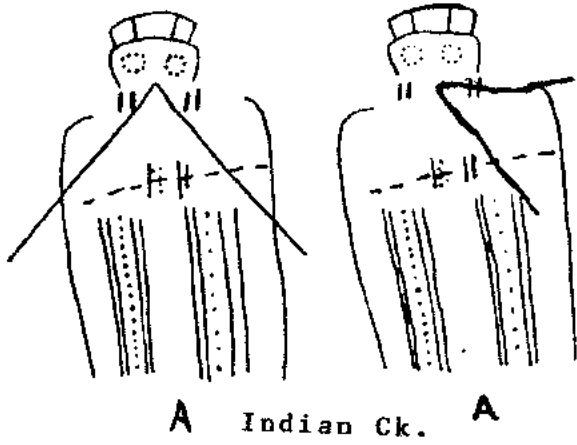


FIGURE 5.

Equinox Winter Solstice



Molen Reef

FIGURE 6.

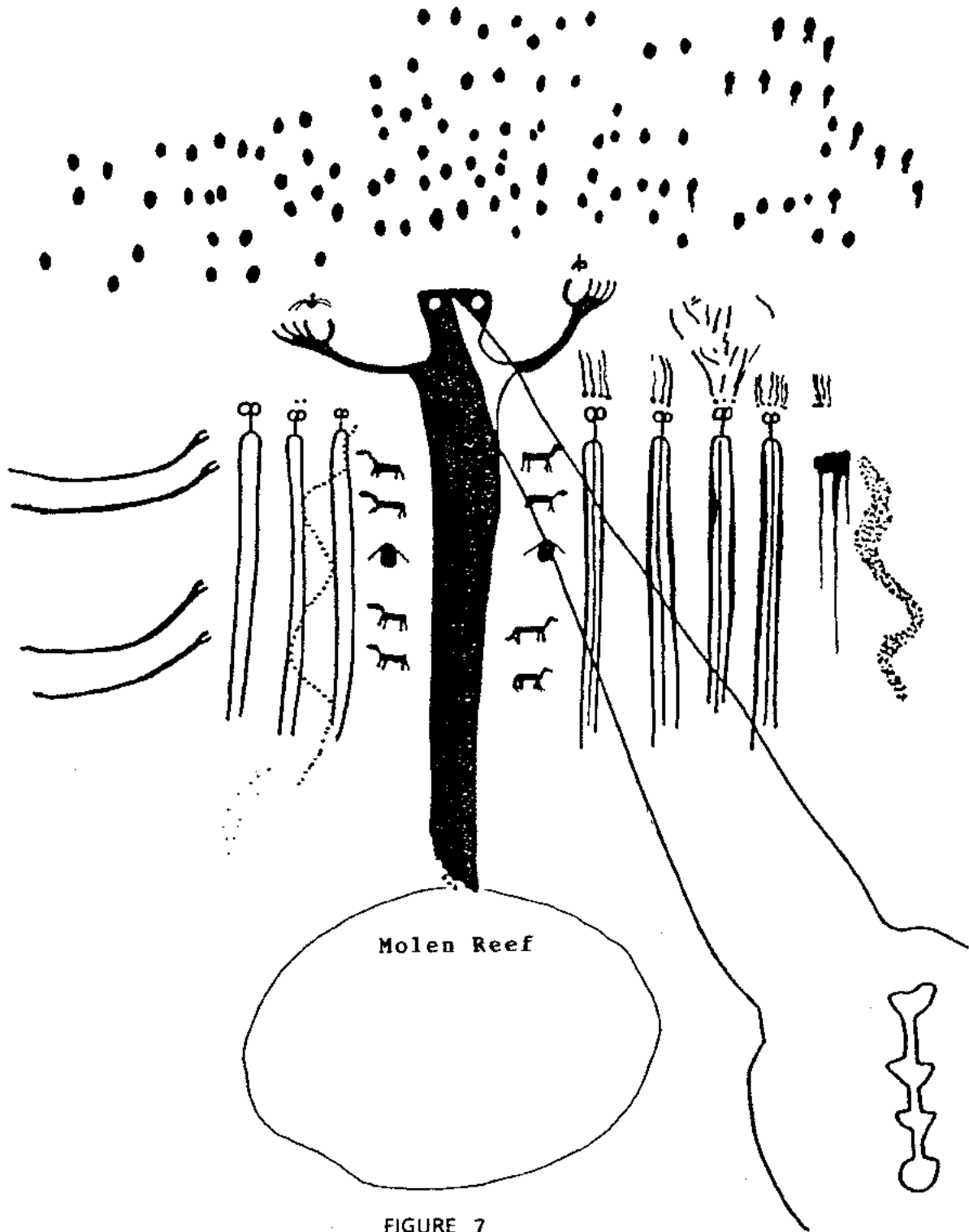


FIGURE 7

either "see the light" as transformed beings and or "speak with light" after their ecstatic experience. At the Molen Reef site there is a Barrier Canyon Style figure with similar outstretched arms with a small bird rising from each palm and a line of small stacked animals under each arm, one of which is a bird (Fig. 7). Within the shaft of light that comes from his mouth there is a pecked line with a series of odd separated ball-like forms. At Pleasant Creek, perfectly centered within the shaft when it comes from the mouth of the partial figure is a ticked line or "one pole ladder" which may be a corn stalk, reed or notational marker. Because of the context of these two examples, they are almost cartoon-like in that they seem to possibly represent an object that symbolizes what is seen or spoken.

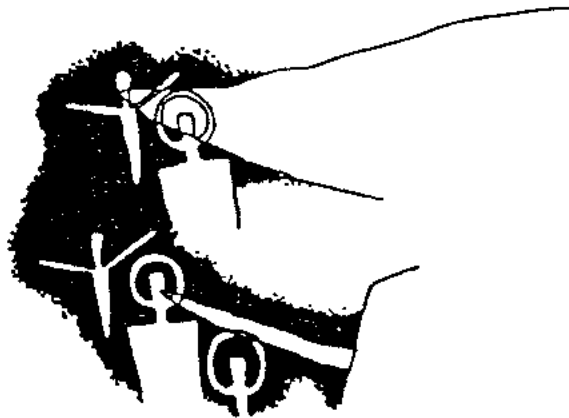
What is important about the ticked line in Fig. 8 is that it could mark a sequential period of time. On Summer Solstice, when the sun is at its highest point and farthest north, the shadow brackets the top and bottom of the pole. From the point it crosses the mouth of the partial figure, to where it pinches out on the bottom rung after coming out of the mouth of the U-bracket faced figure. It effectively marks the limit of the shadows progression. This is as far down and to the left as it will reach and then it will pinch out and thus it also marks the limit of the suns movement. Again, at various equal periods, both before and after, the shadow will continue to lower from the top of this element rung to rung as the shaft continually descends diagonally down and across the cliff. These interactions need to be observed.

This panel says essentially the same thing, but with a different form and context as the panel observed at Dry Wash (Fig. 9). That panel has a sun headed figure of a solar observer, which is also a multiple-Double Entity with implications of transformation and then speaks with light. Even though Figure 8C is not the most impressive figure that speaks with light, it is one of the most distinctive forms. By their forms all the other figures that speak with light are not distinguishable enough to identify them from any other Barrier Canyon or Basketmaker figures, like those on the upper portion of this panel. Figure 8C, however, has a diagnostic face that occurs on several other figures. As I felt when I saw the first figure speak with light, if a figure with a U-bracket face speaking with light was important, to be a good test of its validity and intention, we should be able to find it repeated again and again.

It just so happens that in Clear Creek Canyon another figure with the same reversed, patinated U-bracket face had a triangle of light move across its face on Summer Solstice as well (Fig. 10). This establishes a greater significance to the fact that the form is associated with the concept of solar observation and the symbolism of the U-bracket. This also strengthens the ideas presented earlier that it is associated with both bird and eye, and is possibly another method to depict shamanistic transformation, ecstatic vision and esoteric knowledge. Rather than duplicate statements that further illustrate the symbolism of bird eyes here refer to sunbirds: a possible symbol of transformation (Warner 1988).

Even though these are accurately observed intersections, whether the intent has been accurately defined is uncertain. There is no way to tell all the esoteric symbolism of such a complex situation. We have tried to limit





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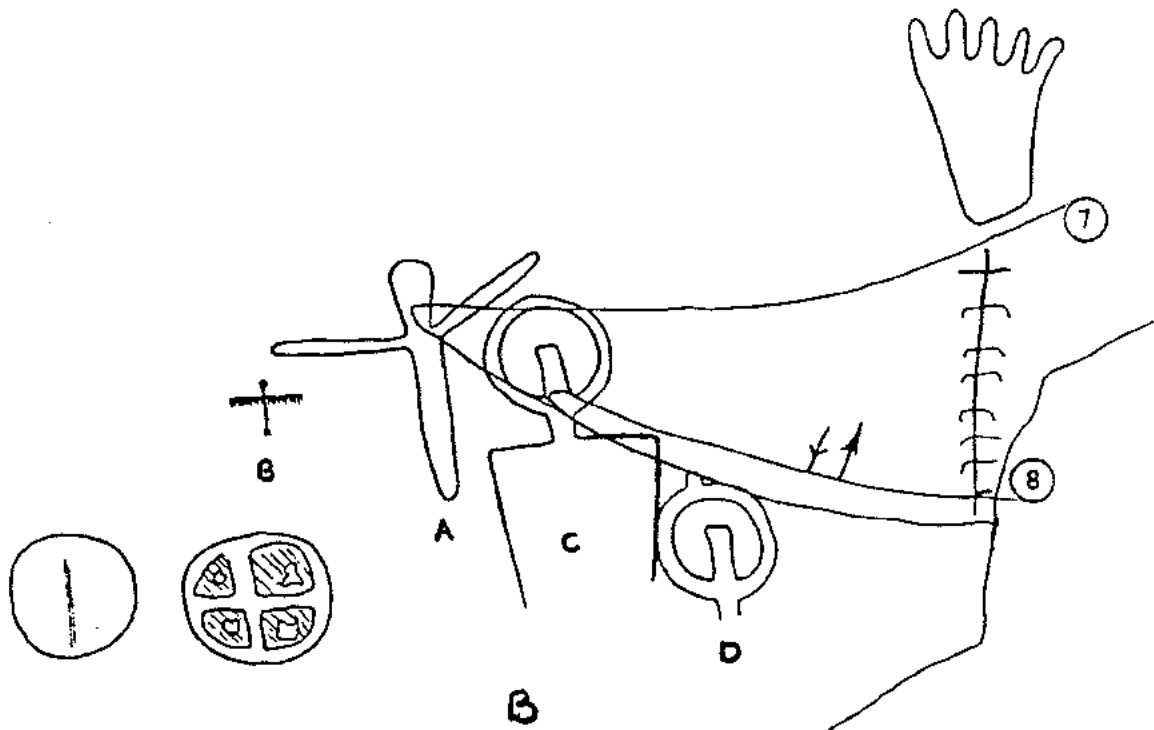
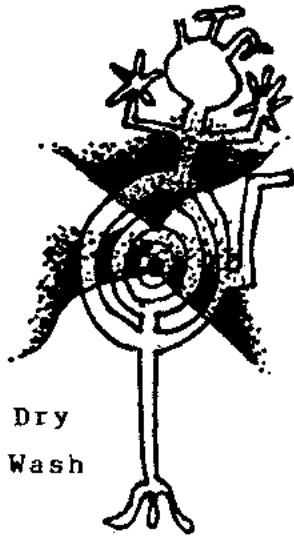


FIGURE 8



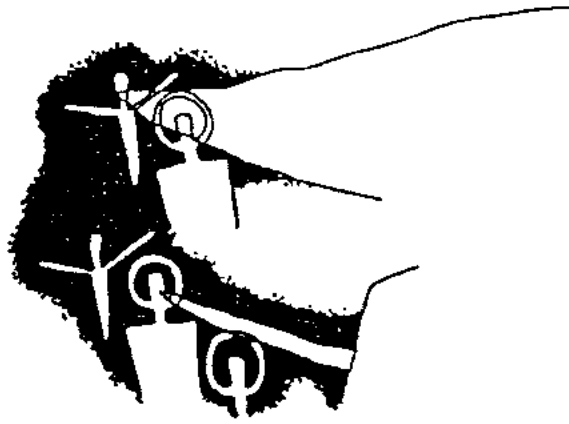
Dry  
Wash

FIGURE 9.



Clear Ck.

FIGURE 10.



A

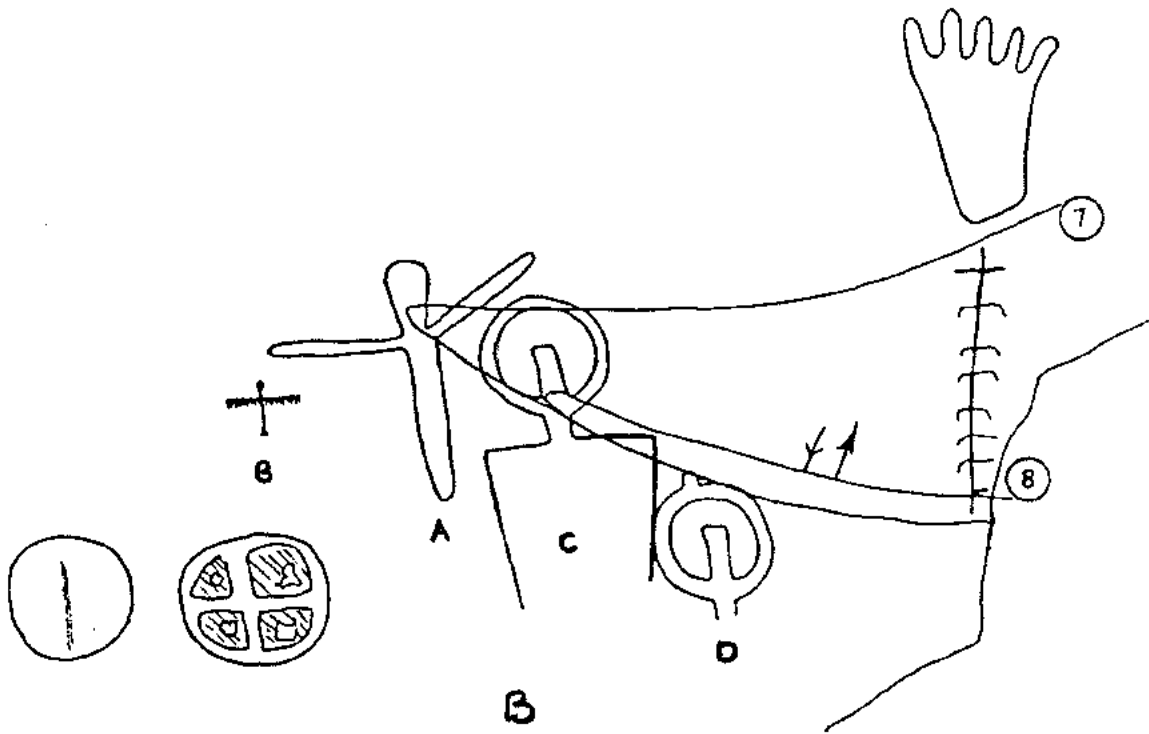
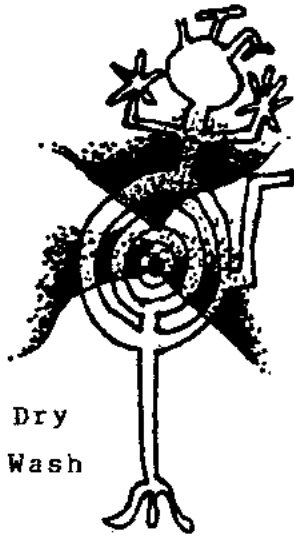


FIGURE 8



Dry  
Wash

FIGURE 9.



Clear Ck.

FIGURE 10.

the process of interpretation to a reasonable and acceptable limit by simply identifying the concept or source of the symbol. Rather than delve deeper into unsubstantiated interpretations ( with statements like: " the reed-like form within the shafts of light represent aspects of an origin myth" ) we limit ourselves to a source or concept with only figures whose form, association, context and interactions repeat. By doing such, we have identified that something, which is both important as well as an established part of their cosmology and which is being represented and is being repeated. We have no doubt that other forms will be found that will support and add further to the concepts of these beliefs and practices.

After careful comparisons and considerations we feel that it was probably the Basketmakers who produced the petroglyph portion of this panel and that they may have been the ones who vandalized the Barrier Canyon Style figures. If they observed (and no doubt they did because of their similar interactions) the interactions on the Barrier Canyon Style figures and had a different view of the situation, they may have attempted to erase the earlier "differences" and reorder, edit or recreate the facts to fit their view. Those may have involved the differences between simply seeing and speaking with light and seeing, speaking and transformation. Additional evidence that points toward other similar situations is being collected for further research.

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