

## FEMALE SEXUAL IDENTIFICATION IN ROCK ART:

### A PROBLEM OF GENDER AND VALUES

BY

JUDITH S. WARNER

It may seem odd to choose such a subject for study but there are several important reasons that these considerations are necessary. Since those figures with obvious gender indicated on the rock art panels really need no discussion, most of this presentation will consider the ambiguous or unobvious representations. These are the ones that cause many of the problems.

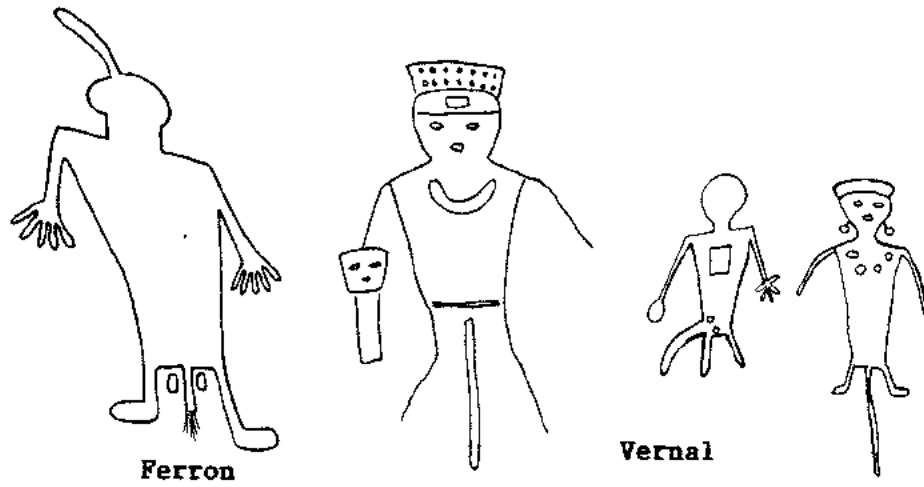
As far as the male is concerned, there is only one obvious means of physical discrimination. Sometimes, however, there is a little problem in knowing just where to draw the line between a figure with a vision of grandeur and one that starts being a lizard (Fig. 1). For the feminine gender, there are several alternatives of female identification.

Although there are those obvious sexual features that can help to identify or segregate gender in rock art (Fig. 2A, B), the problem is that the largest percentage of figures do not include those obvious features. Many of these figures are also represented with odd abstract incorporations that are ambiguous as to whether they represent sexual identification or some other concept (Fig. 3). Physically genderless forms, however, may in some cases carry additional features, other than sexual organs, to help identify which gender they belong to.

It is often assumed that the making of rock art was probably a male dominated activity, with the male probably most often represented, participating in male dominated functions. In other words since female representations are so low on the percentage scales of sexual occurrences, they would only occur in a finite number of contextual relationships. Most of these could be listed as participants in panels possibly representing hand holding couples (Fig. 4), brides, or captives (Fig. 5), consummation scenes (Fig. 6), receptive females (Fig. 7), satisfaction of carnal desires - procreations, or ceremonial intercourse (Fig. 8), pregnancies (Fig. 9), birthing scenes (Fig. 10) and epic or mythical female figures, such as Spider Woman, Mother of the Hero Twins Etc. (Fig. 11), and some nondescript contexts.

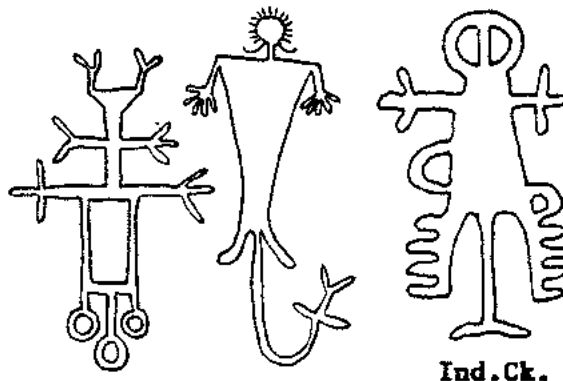
#### OBVIOUS TO UNOBVIOUS SEXUAL IDENTIFICATIONS

A few obvious variations in sexual identifications are illustrated in Figure 2. Sometimes sex organs can be stylized, abstracted and exaggerated enough that it is not obvious as to which sex they represent. Sometimes it is uncertain whether or not they may even represent additional concepts beyond sex identification such as extensions of fertility or rebirth in a Shamanic



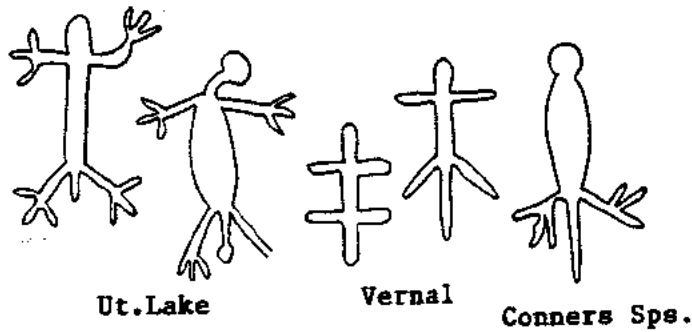
Ferron

Vernal



Moab

Ind. Ck.



Ut. Lake

Vernal

Conners Sps.

FIGURE 1

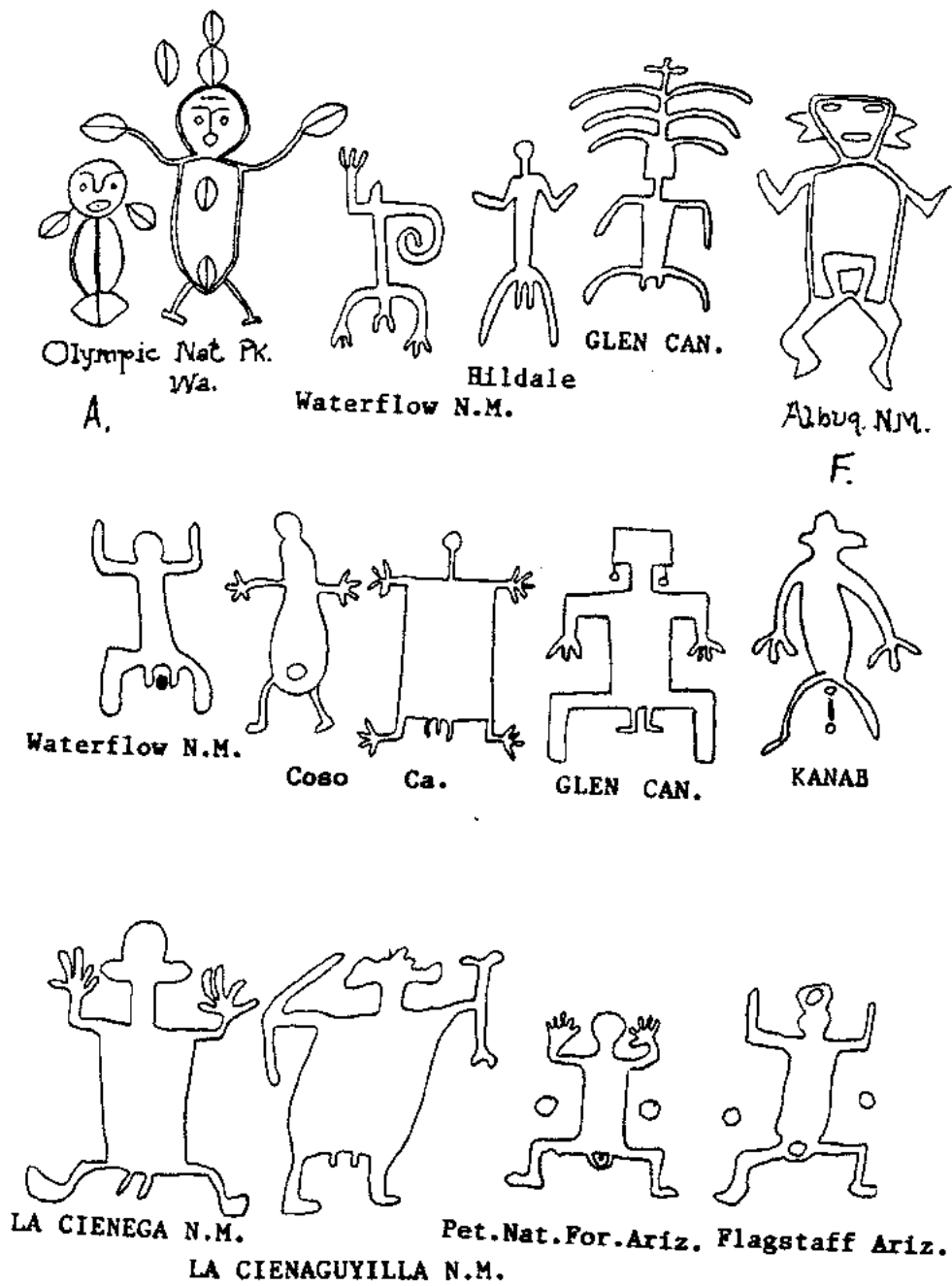


FIGURE 2 A.

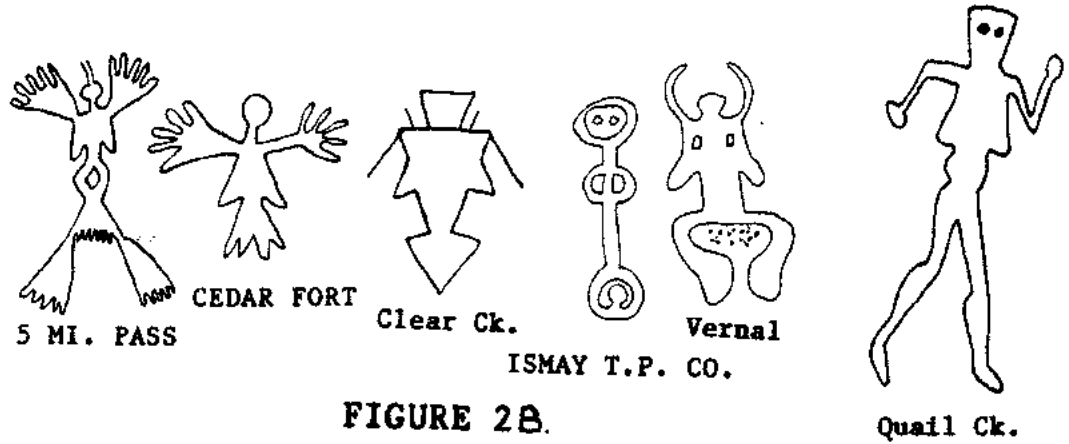
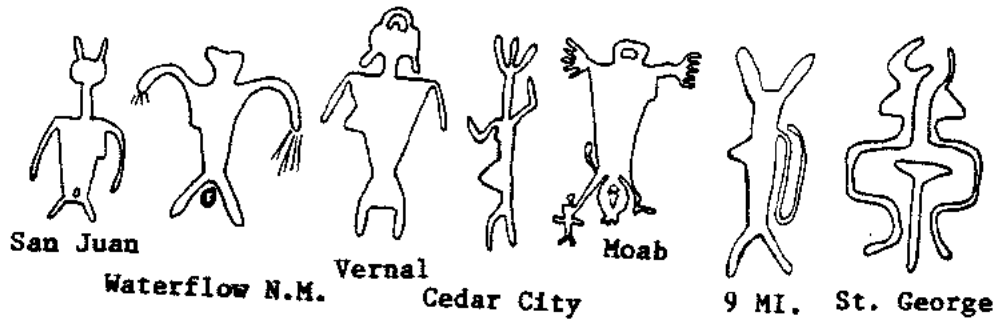
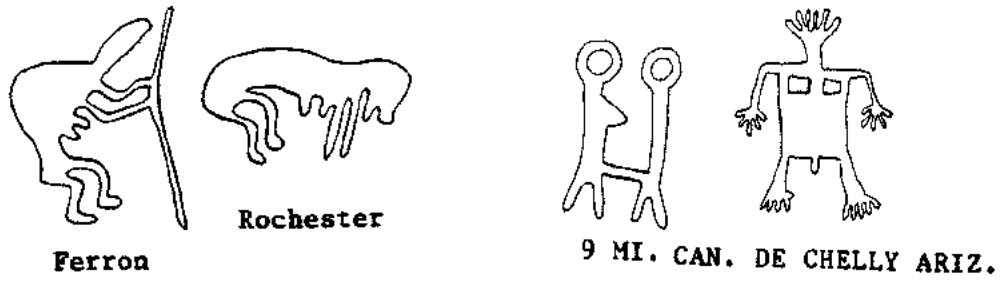
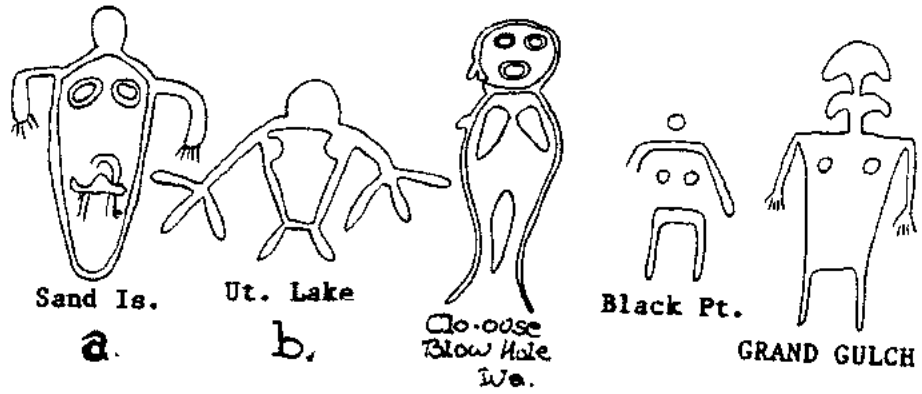


FIGURE 2B.

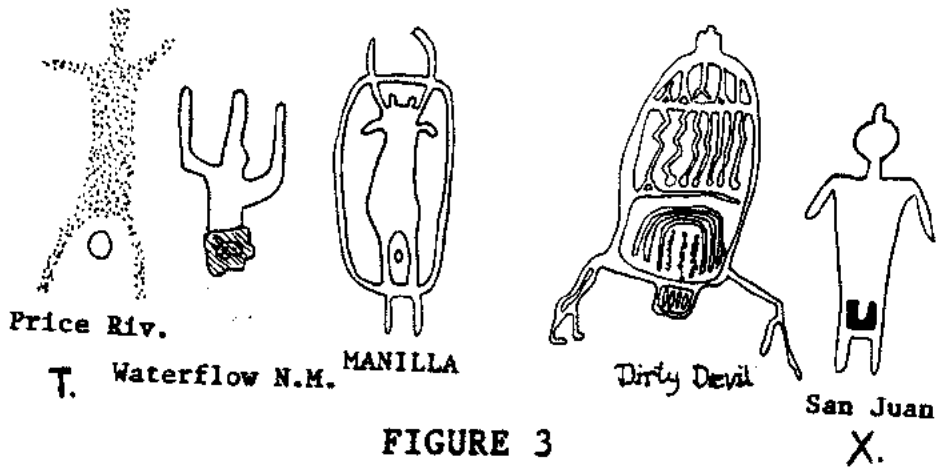
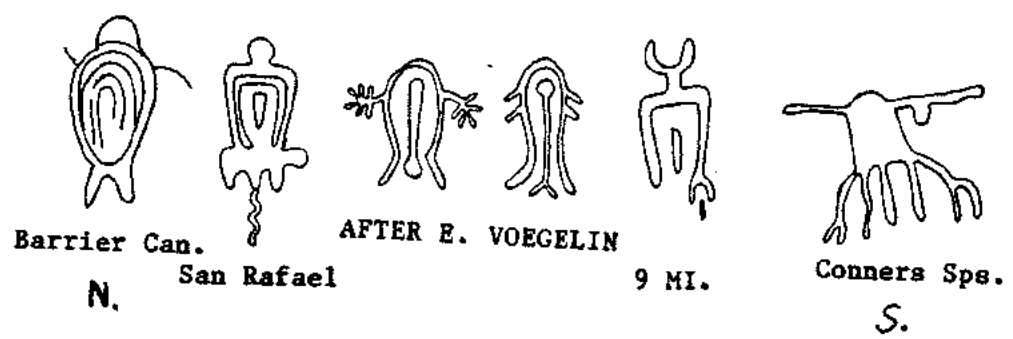
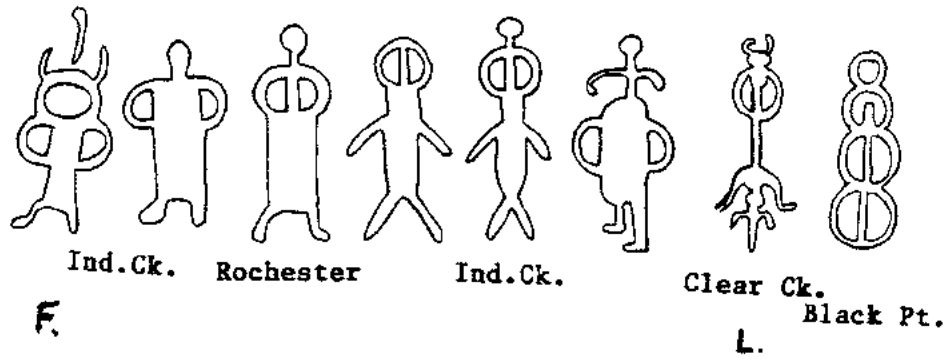
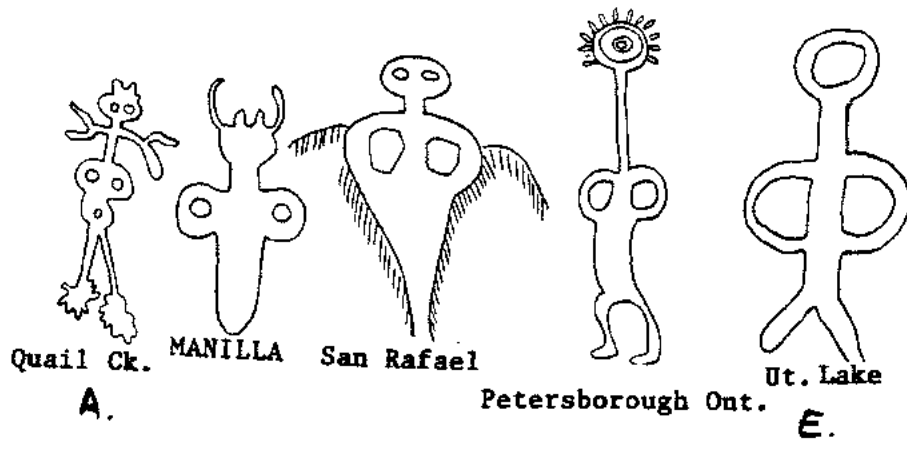


FIGURE 3

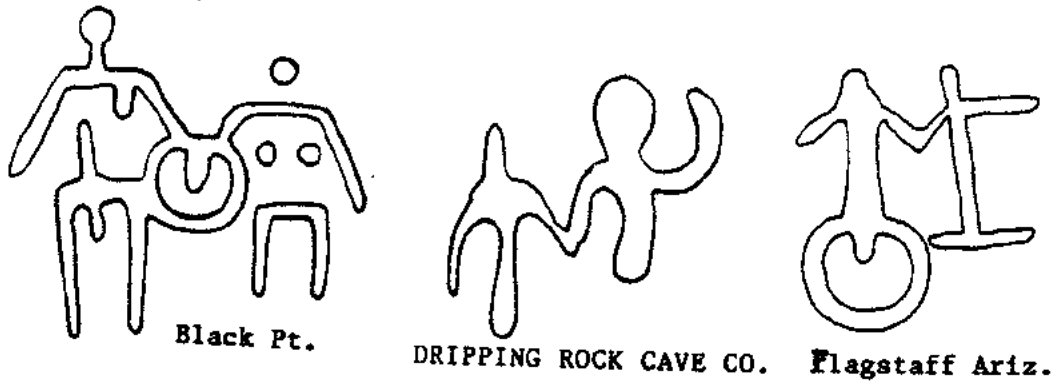
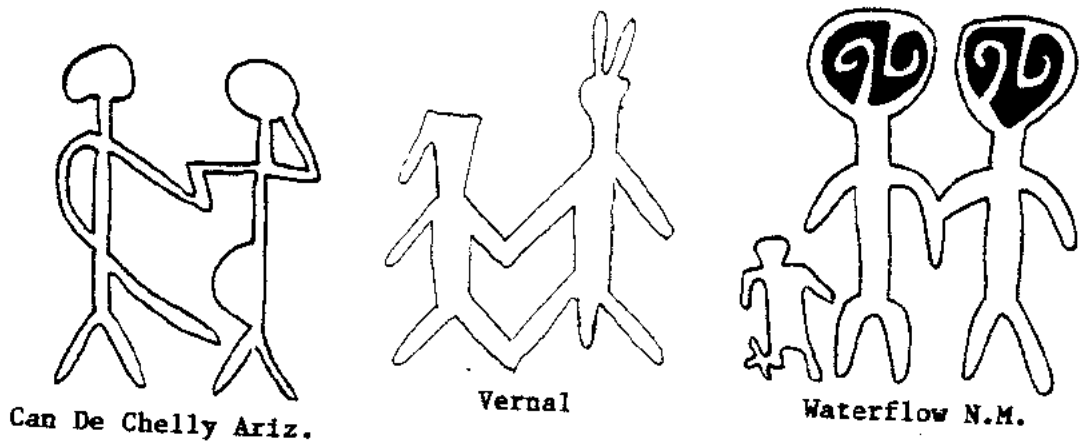
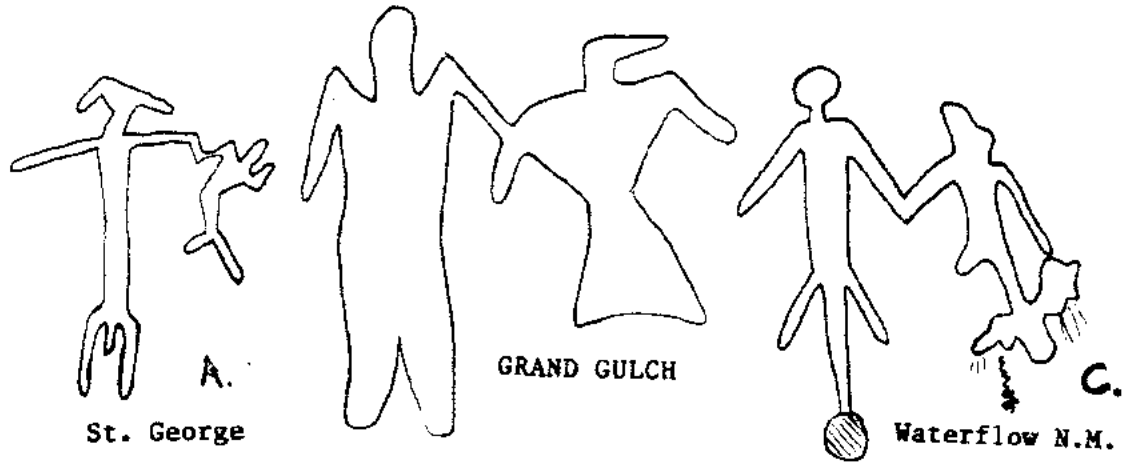
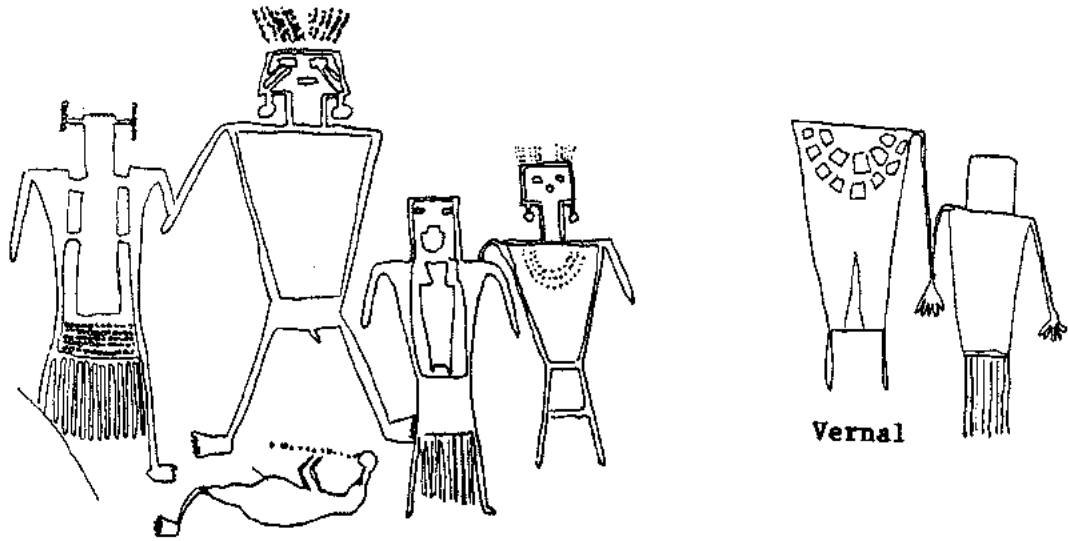
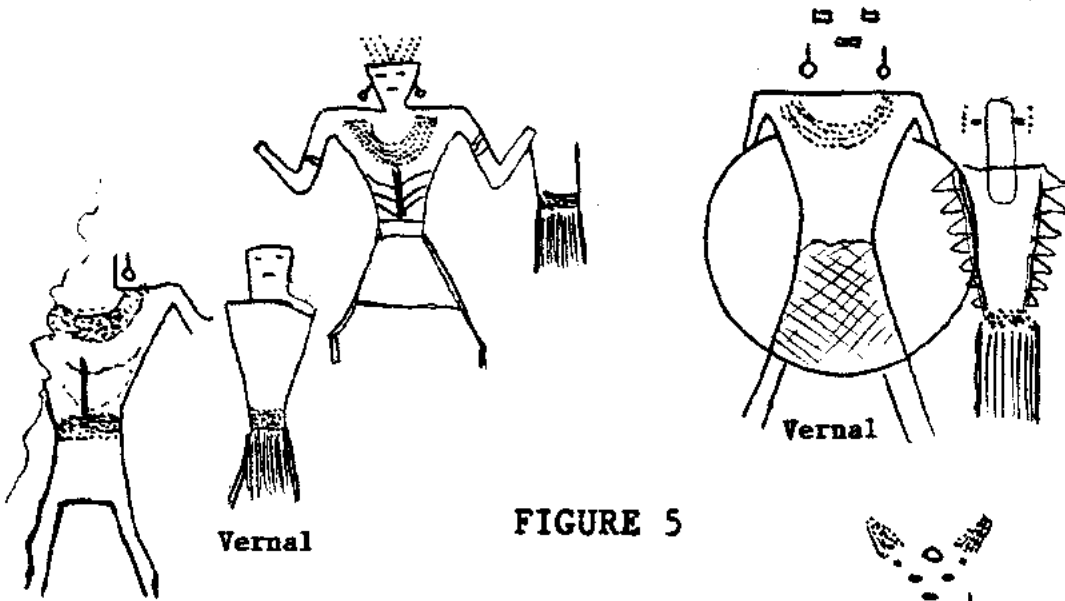


FIGURE 4



Vernal

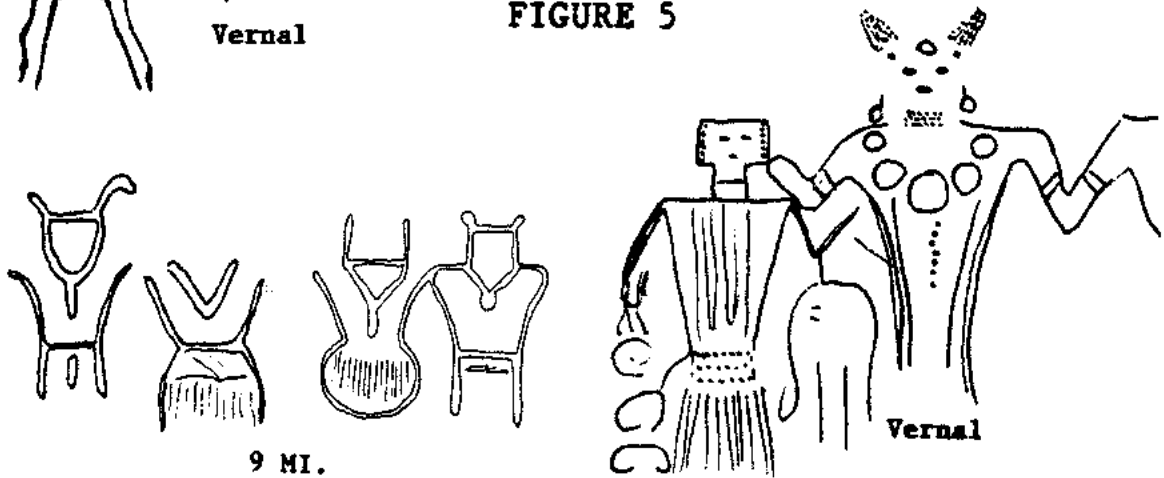
Vernal



Vernal

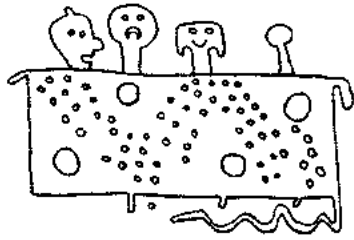
Vernal

FIGURE 5

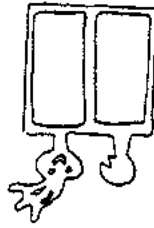


9 MI.

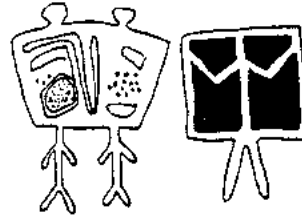
Vernal



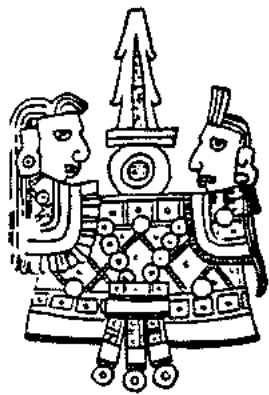
Cochiti N.M.



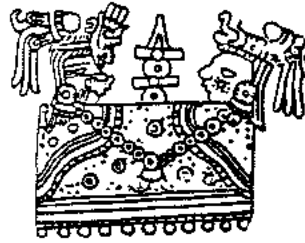
LA CIENAGUYILLA N.M.



Waterflow N.M.



Codex Borgia



Codex Borgia 9

FIGURE 6



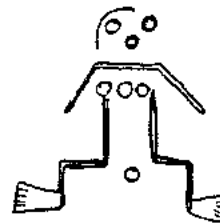
Vaticanus A



Rochester



Vernal



Coso Ca.

FIGURE 7



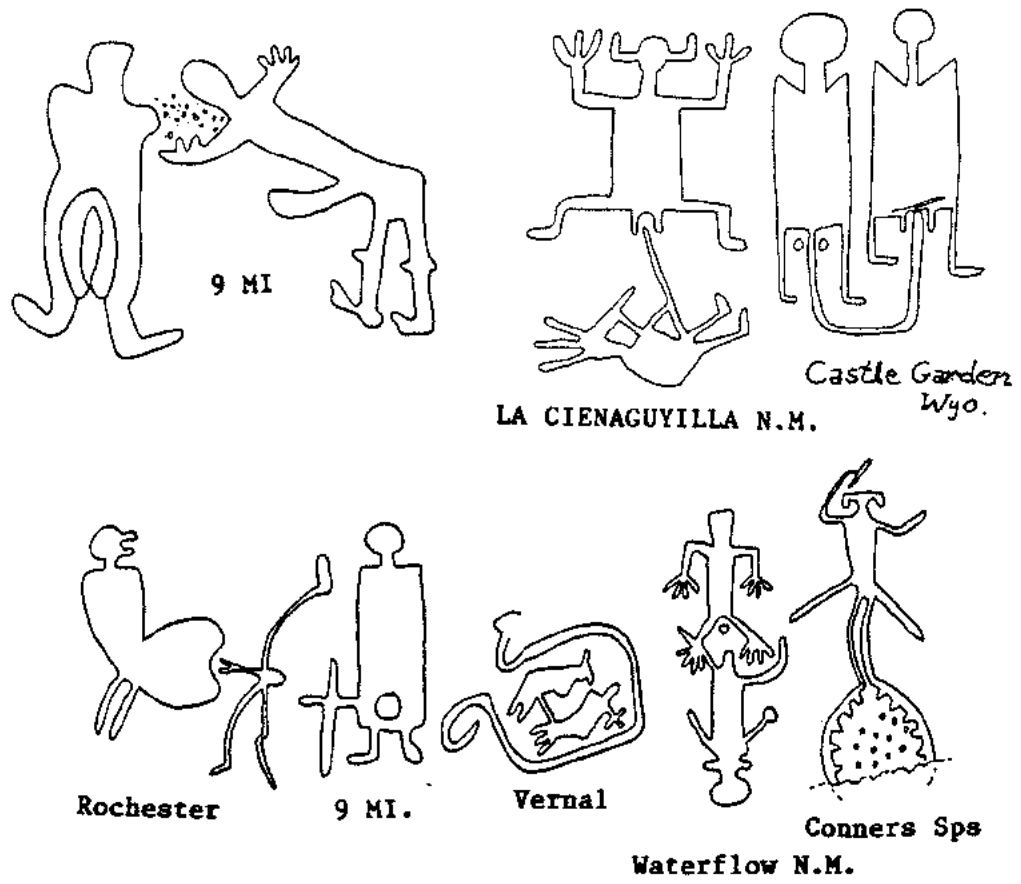
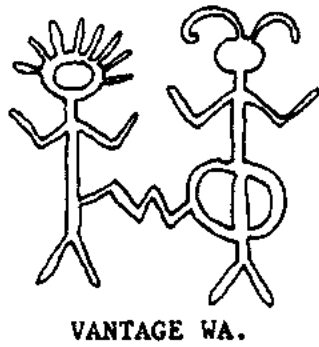
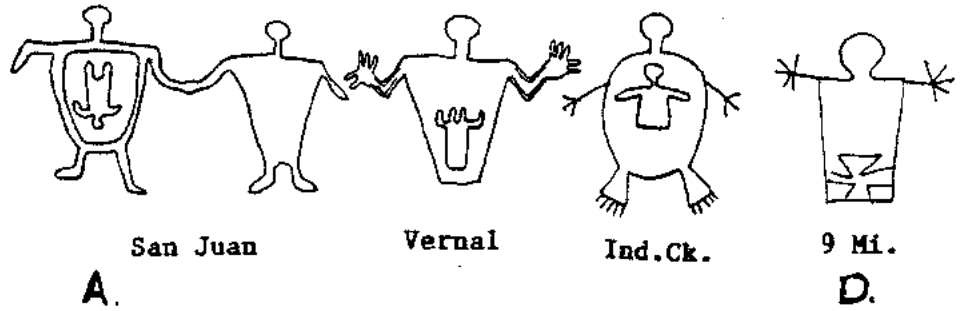


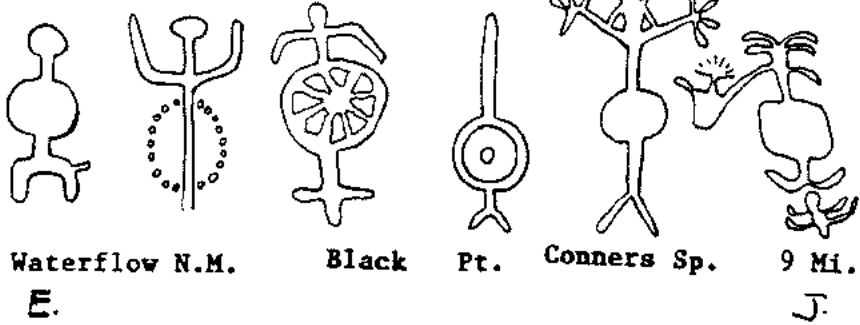
FIGURE 8





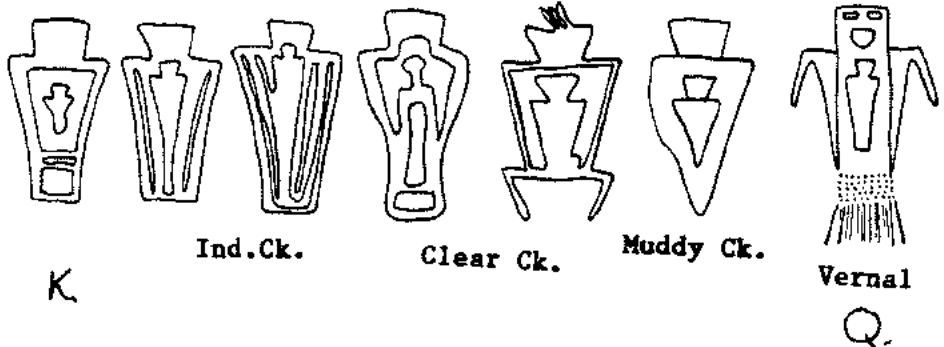
A.

D.



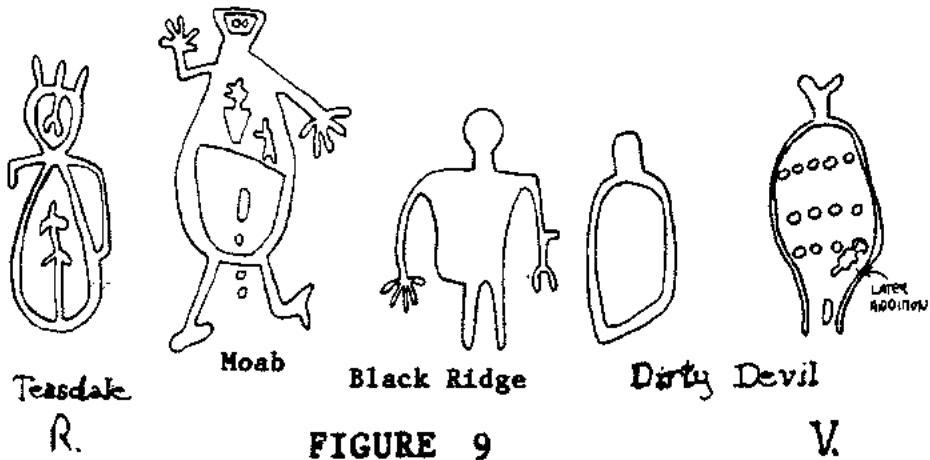
E.

J.



K.

Q.



Teasdale

Moab

Black Ridge

Dirty Devil

V.

FIGURE 9

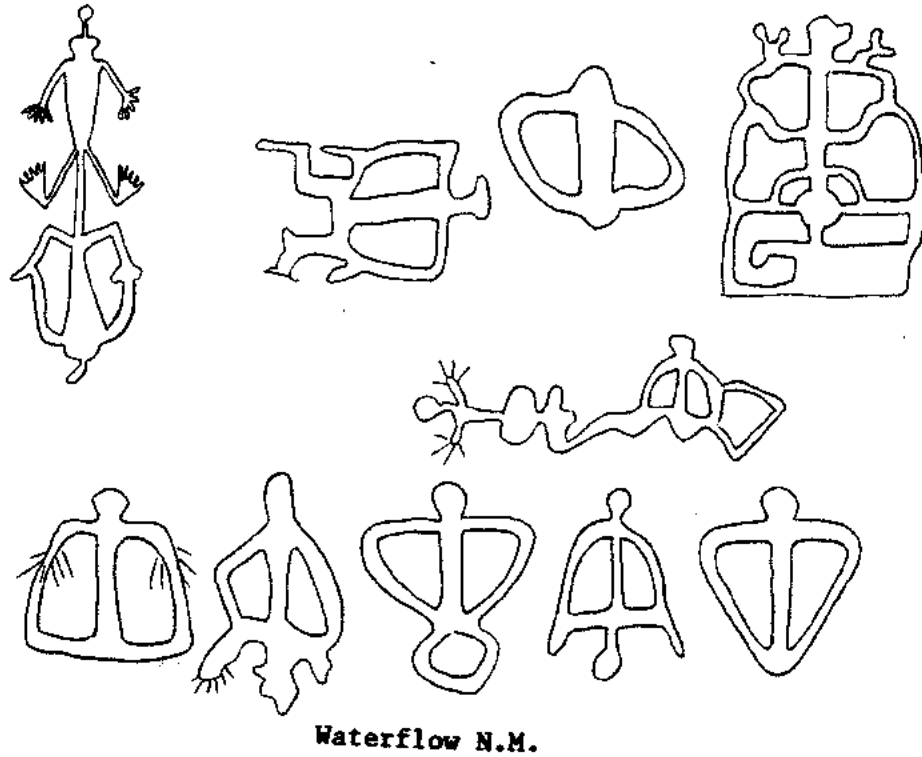
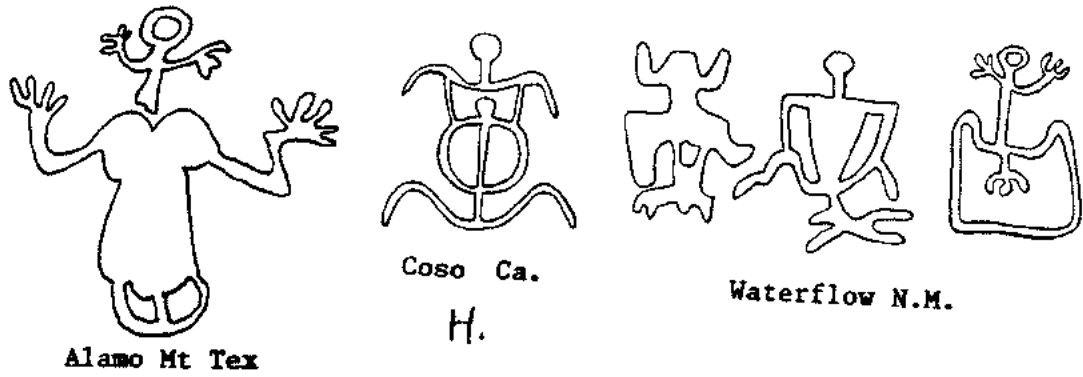
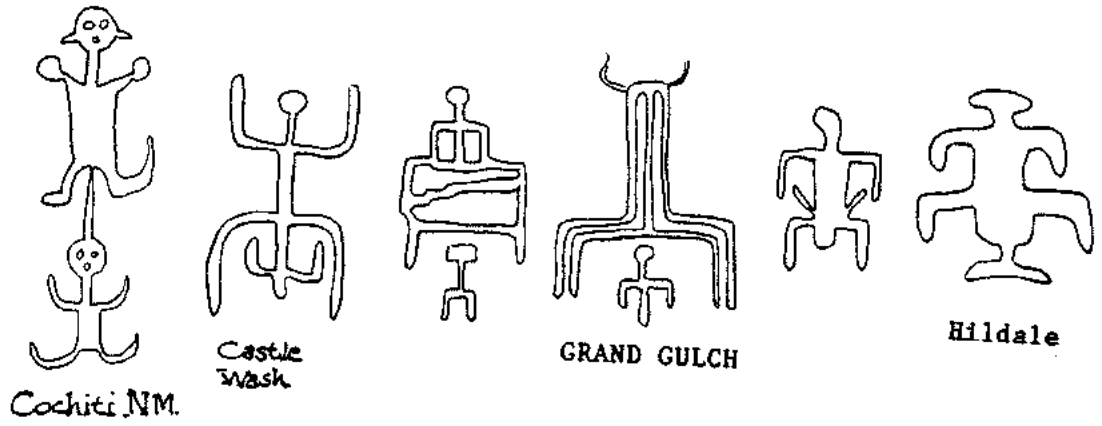
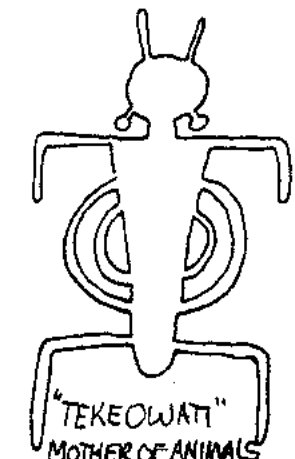
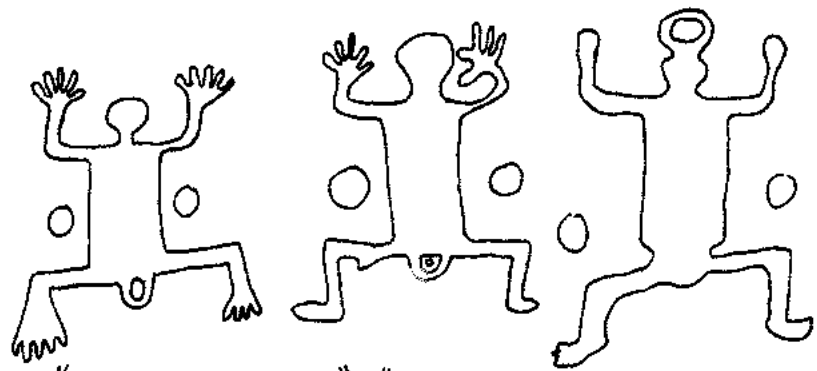


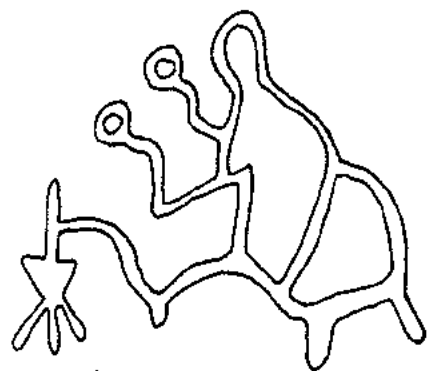
FIGURE 10



"TEKEOWATI"  
MOTHER OF ANIMALS  
C.F. C. TURNER 1963  
PETROGLYPHS OF THE  
GLEN CANYON REGION P. 54



"GODDESS OF GAME" - "DEER MOTHER" ETC  
C.F. PAT MCCREERY AND JACK MCCREERY 1986  
A PETROGLYPH SITE WITH POSSIBLE HOPI CEREMONIAL  
ASSOCIATIONS. AM. IND. ROCK ART. VOL. II. P. S. HARARA.



"SPIDER WOMAN"  
C.F. L. MARTINEAU  
CLEAR CREEK PROJECT  
1985 UNPRINTED. PIUTE TRIBE  
OF UTAH. P.



"TSAGIGLALAL"



"FEMALE GOD OF NIGHTCHANG"  
C.F. P. SCHAAPSMIA 1975  
ROCK ART IN NEW MEXICO P. 47

FIGURE 11

sense. Some of these are illustrated in Figure 3. It is the figures with questionable identities that are usually the more interesting.

At Upper Court House Wash a figure has a phallus-like extension that is disconnected. There are also two bulbous forms with similar disconnected lines with the inclusion of a dot below the possible phallus. Since the questionable phalli are disconnected and the two enclosure-like glyphs echo the form of the legs of Figure 12.B. It seems there is an attempt being made here at identifying a concept association. For instance, the fact that there is a widening of the lines on one to create a triangular pubic-like area, these are probably not phallic representations at all, but seem to represent unincorporated vulvas (Fig. 12.C-D).

The dot below supports this in that it could represent the anal opening. A figure from Dripping Rock Cave, Colorado, one from Mussentuchit and the female in the copulating couple from Buck Horn Wash also have this feature (Fig. 12. E-G). These forms are repeated in nearly all of McGowans (1977) illustrations of vulvas (Fig. 12.J). A similar form without the dot occurs on a figure in Nine Mile next to several others with exaggerated vulvas and implications of copulation (Fig. 8.A, 12.H).

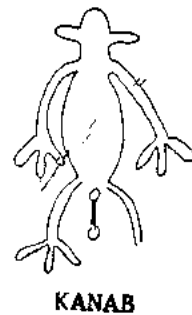
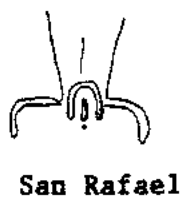
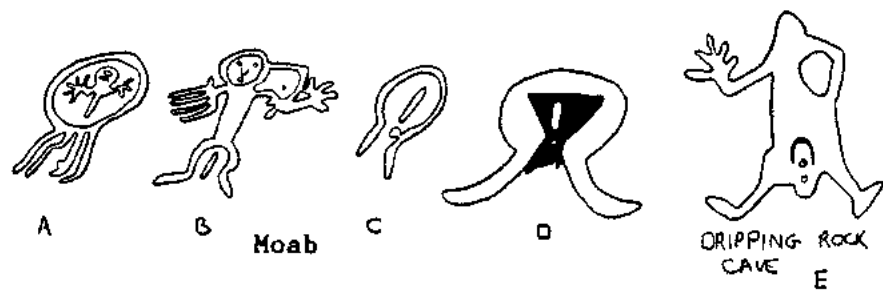
Other problematical figures occur in Figure 3A. At Quail Creek, a female-like figure occurs with widened hips, vulva and what looks like two bug-eyed loop-like lines between the pelvis and the arms. Do these and similar forms (Fig. 3.A-G) represent breasts or are the loops similar to forms that are now being considered to represent a variation of the Bisected Circle? That special form is sometimes another set of arms that creates a variant of a Double Entity. Compare that form with the examples in Figure 3.G-L.

Are Figures 3.N-S personified vulvas? Figure 3.O seems to be such a figure emerging from the back of a stylized animal, suggesting a transformation symbolism that includes connotations of Shamanic renewal and rebirth.

Since many vulvas are represented as reversed U brackets, does the upright U Bracket in Figure 3.X from the San Juan represent a male or a female? If it represents a male, notice the possibility that there was an interplay between the positive and negative techniques in producing the form. The phallus is a positive form, one created by doing something (pecking the patination away). The negative area, a recognizable patinated U Bracket was produced by not doing something and resulted in a U Bracket that fits around producing a symbol possibly representing the union of both the male and female identity. Thus they possibly depicted the idea of sexual union by having a positively produced phallus inserted into a negatively produced U Bracket vulva. This is reminiscent of the Buddha heart Chakra, a golden symbol of higher spiritual development (Campbell 1988:174).

At Lincoln Beach there is a figure that has an outlined body with a circular enlargement of the pecking in the areas of the breasts. That probably was all that was necessary to give that figure a female identity (Fig. 2.B,b).

Another problem is deciding when a figure within another figure represents



AFTER MCGOWAN 1977

J.

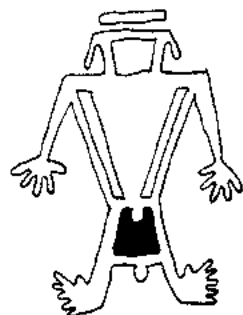
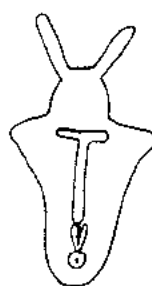


FIGURE 12

a pregnant image or a depiction of another variety of a Double Entity, conceivably representing the spirit within the body. Figure 9 illustrates many of these figures. Figure 9.Q from Dry Fork perhaps represents several different situations. It has a body within a body, a typical pregnancy scene but is that what it represents? It has the typical bride or captive context but does the figurine form inside imply pregnancy or that she has had an altered state or an out of body experience something altogether different. That she also could have had that experience is not unlikely. Besides male shamen, it is also possible for a woman to have out-of-body experiences (Andrews 1981). One of the things that also can trigger that ecstatic release is pain. This can and does happen in child birth. Figure 10.H from Coso, California, illustrates a definite Double Entity expressing an emergence but the personage has also been placed in what is commonly referred to as the receptive female (Fig. 7) or birthing position with spread and raised legs (Fig. 10).

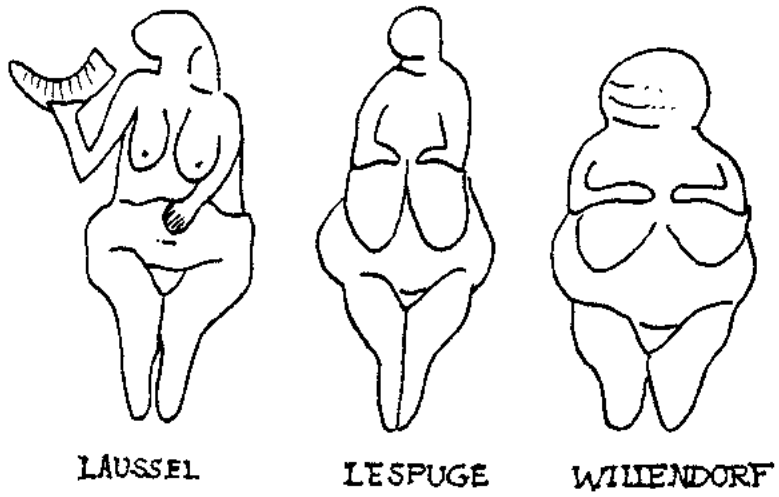
With the female figure there is little problem with sex identification when it is the vulva or breasts that was selected as the manner to provide demarcation. From a look at the body features in Figure 2.B, there are a few other additional indications that seem to be usable for female identification. These, however, may not be the only means of sex identification, while more distinct forms sometimes are.

#### **WIDENED HIPS**

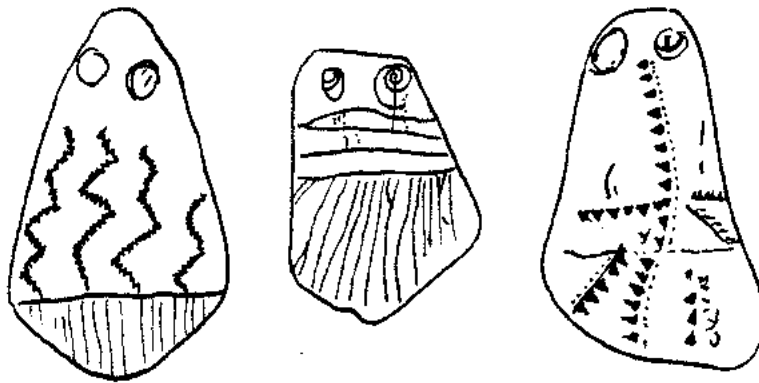
Another noticeable means of identification is the widened hip section. This seems to be a universal symbol of fertility like the Venus figures from Laussel, Lespuge and Wallendorf (Fig. 13.A), to the plump figures of Ruben and Picaso. Although that trait does occur on a number of examples percentage wise, it really isn't all that common in rock art, but it does occur as a common form on engraved figurines in Western Utah. This was accomplished by engraving the stylized figure with the skirt at the bulbous end. These figures use the stones shape to provide the outline of the body (Fig. 13.B, 15.0).

Figure 14.A illustrates a bulbous terminus on a stick figure in a probable copulation scene. Without the male represented, would we take all such ball-ended abstract figures as a variation of wide-hipped females? Would all of the other wide hipped examples in Figure 14 also represent that image? Maybe part of the time, but there are other things that it could imply. At Waterflow, New Mexico, there is a similar figure with a vulva (Fig. 14.A,u) and another that end in a natural pock (Fig. 3.A, y). Since other figures there have similar concretion vulvas and a male has his phallus inserted into one, we now understand that as a possible variation of the ball terminus.

Martineau believes that a feature with tremendous repetition in Clear Creek Canyon, that also occurs in other areas related to the Clear Creek Style, is a female indicator and more specifically represents the word "mother" (Martineau 1985:10). This consists of a reversed, triangle body terminus which may or may not represent the widened female hip section, intending female identification. Of all the occurrences of this form, only one figure occurs



A.

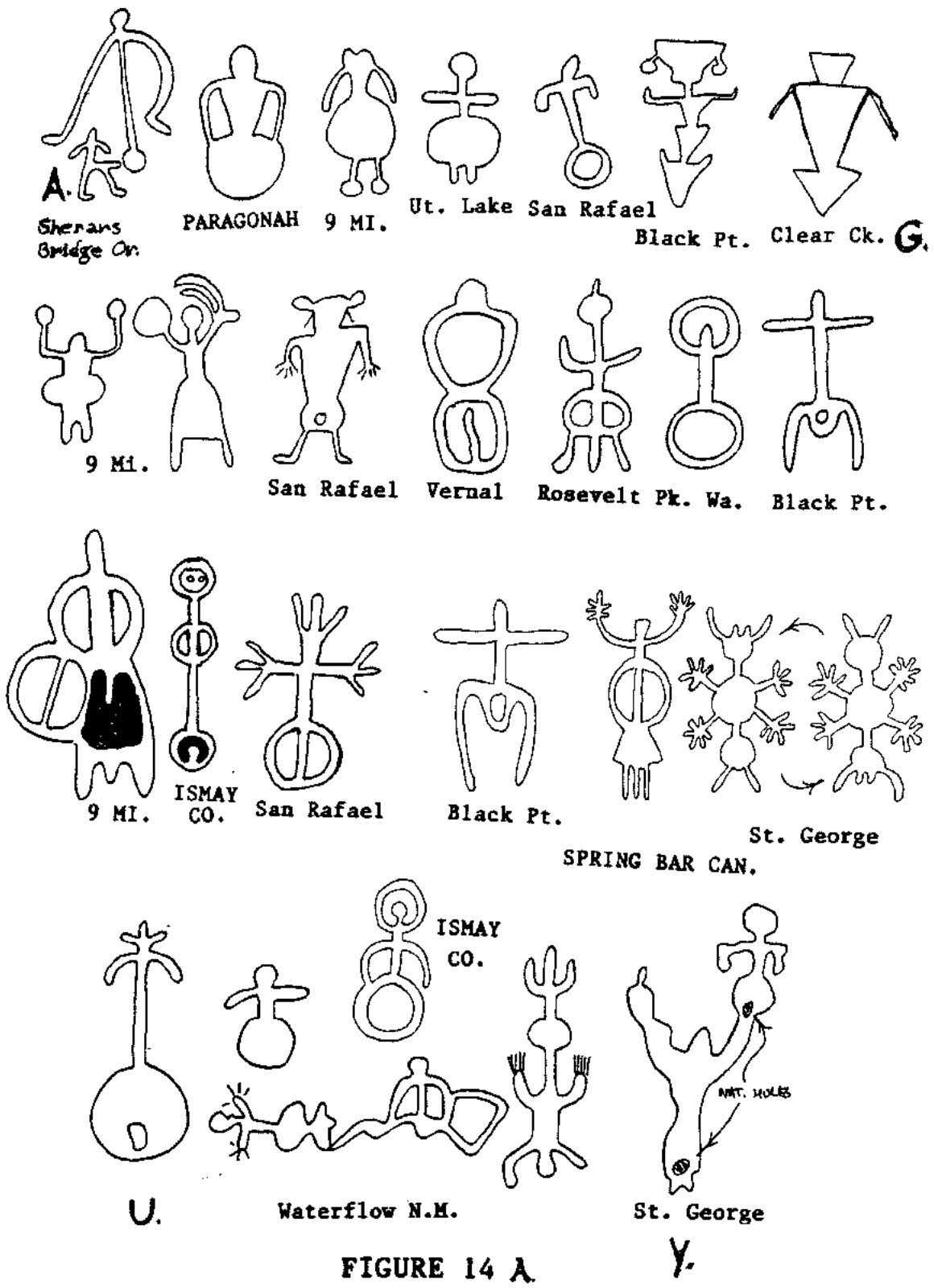


ENGRAVED FIGURES    WESTERN UTAH

B.

FIGURE 13





with breasts and none have vulvas (Fig. 14.A,g). As evidence for its identification as a female indicator Martineau states that it is the same symbolism incorporated in the symbols for the Navajo female cloud people, Mask for the Hopi Crow Mother Kachina and the same as the Delaware symbol for "mother of persons" (ibid: 10). We believe that some of these could be universals, since the concept is so widespread. Whether these were either coincidental or were independently created is also not difficult to believe. Martineau, who bases his premise for interpretation on a universal sign system, states that "similarity in shape and meaning also weakens the case for an artistic style (a local means of group identification? jw) since it is highly unlikely that the East Coast Delaware could have influenced the art of the Navajo and Hopi and vice versa" (Martineau ibid: 10).

Because there are many other figures with other variations of widened hips in Clear Creek Canyon some of which are represented with a phallus (Fig. 14.B), the wide hips in all cases are not felt to represent "female, as much as it does a specific type of figure or group identity, since that trait is so localized, (c.f. Warner N.D.). The triangular hip variety may be a specific and distinct form of other forms of widened hips. At this point because of other implications and contexts of the reversed triangle body termini (i.e. they don't fall into the typical contextual relationships referred to in the third paragraph), it is felt that they also could imply group identity. Further information is being gathered to provide more specific evidence that may either support or refute that possibility. The fact that other female figures occur without the triangle or widened hips indicate that it was not important to represent the female and not a universal symbol of sexual identification. Notice other phallic figures with widened or bulbous hips (Fig. 14.B).

### **SKIRTS**

The skirt on many figures may sometimes be a female indicator (Fig. 15 row one). This also is not a definitive marker since some presumed males occur with shorter variations of this feature like those in Figure 15, row two. Figures with skirts often have other features that also help to provide additional male or female identification.

### **FACIAL MARKING**

There is a specific type of repeated facial marking that may have a female relationship since two of them have skirts and nearly all occur in a "bride or captive" context. Most of these occur in Emery and Carbon counties. These occur as several parallel horizontal bands on each cheek (Fig. 16). So far, since these only seem to occur on female figures, they also may have another special connotation. Several clay figurines from the Evans Mound also exhibit this feature. Several of those also have breasts. These are currently on exhibit at the Museum at the Fremont Indian State Park in Clear Creek Canyon.

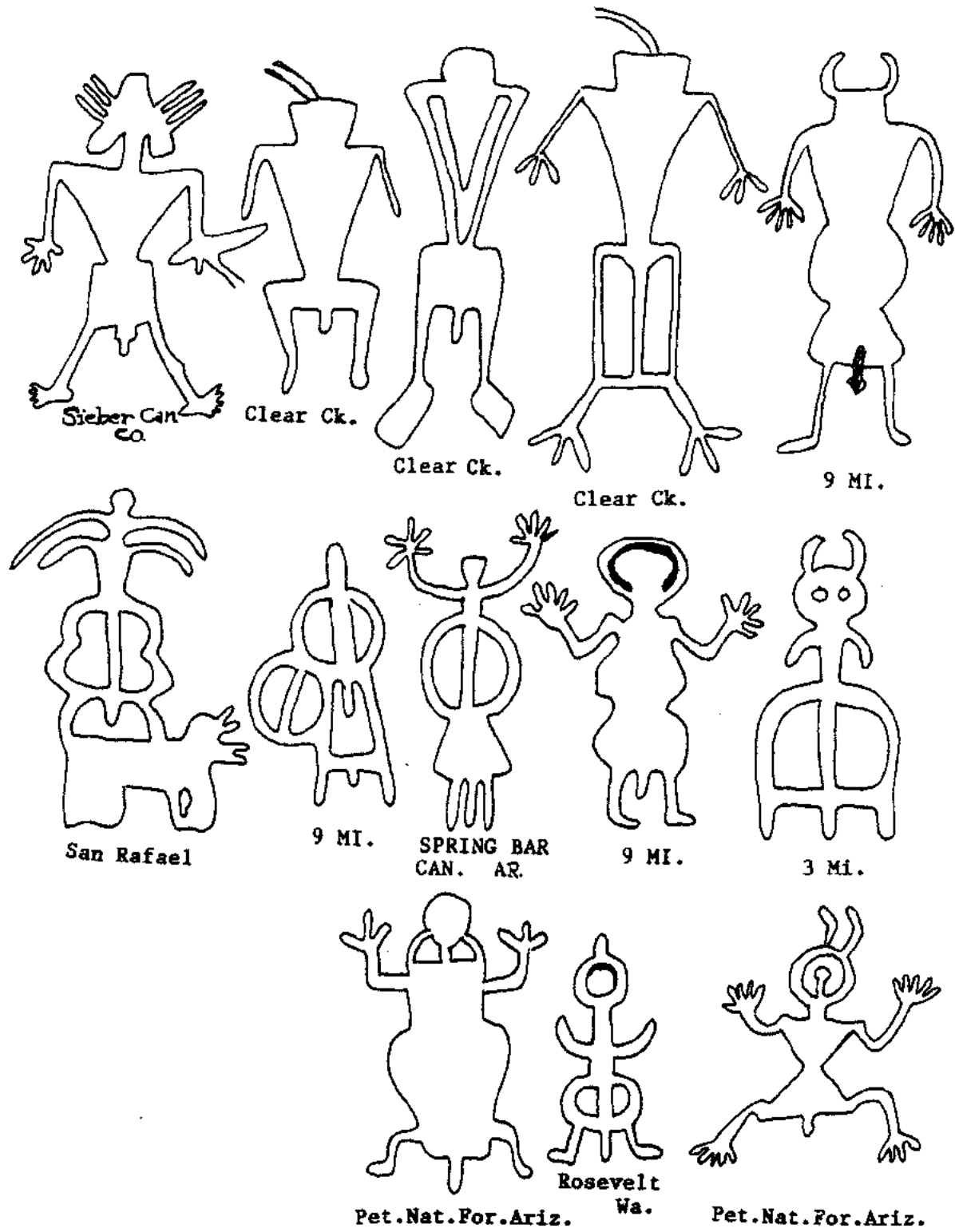
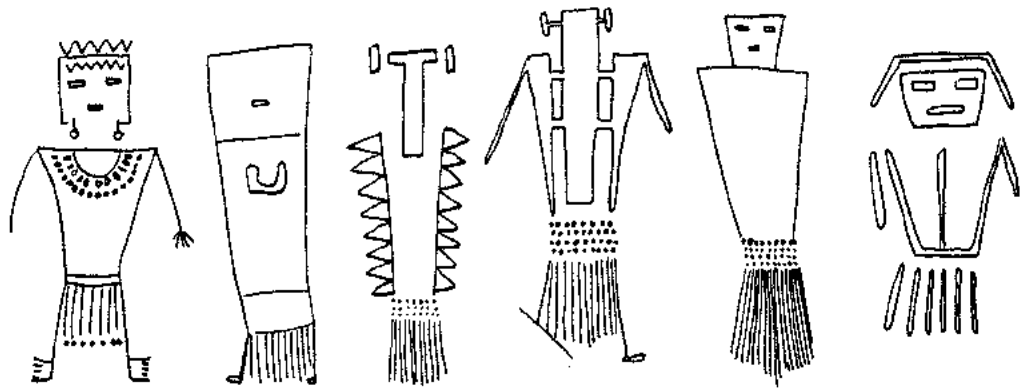


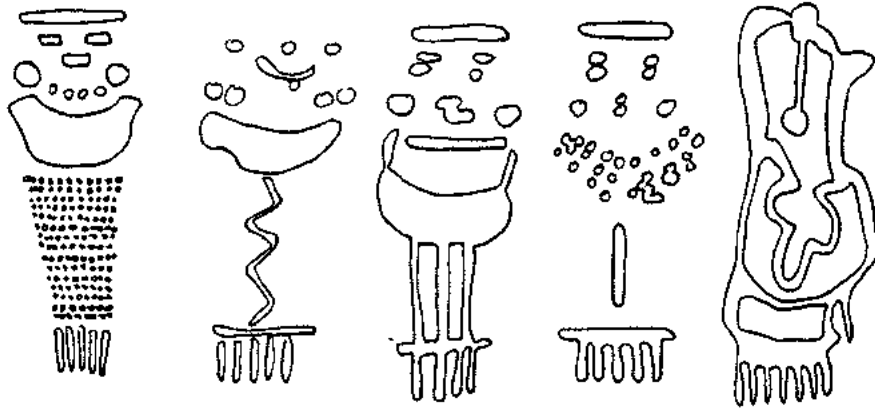
FIGURE 14 B.



A.

Vernal

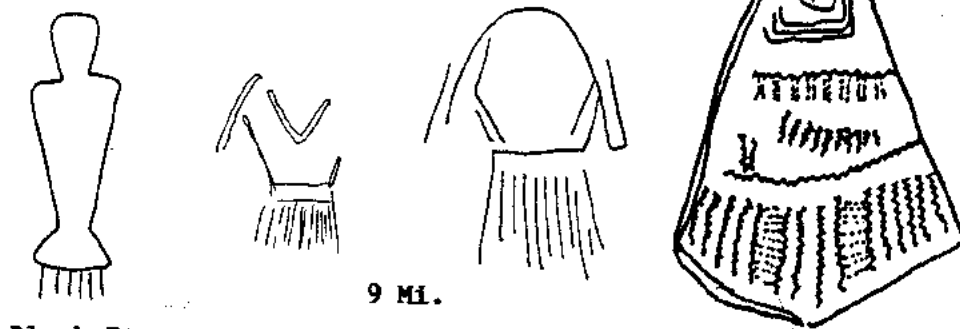
F.



G.

Vernal

K.



Black Pt.

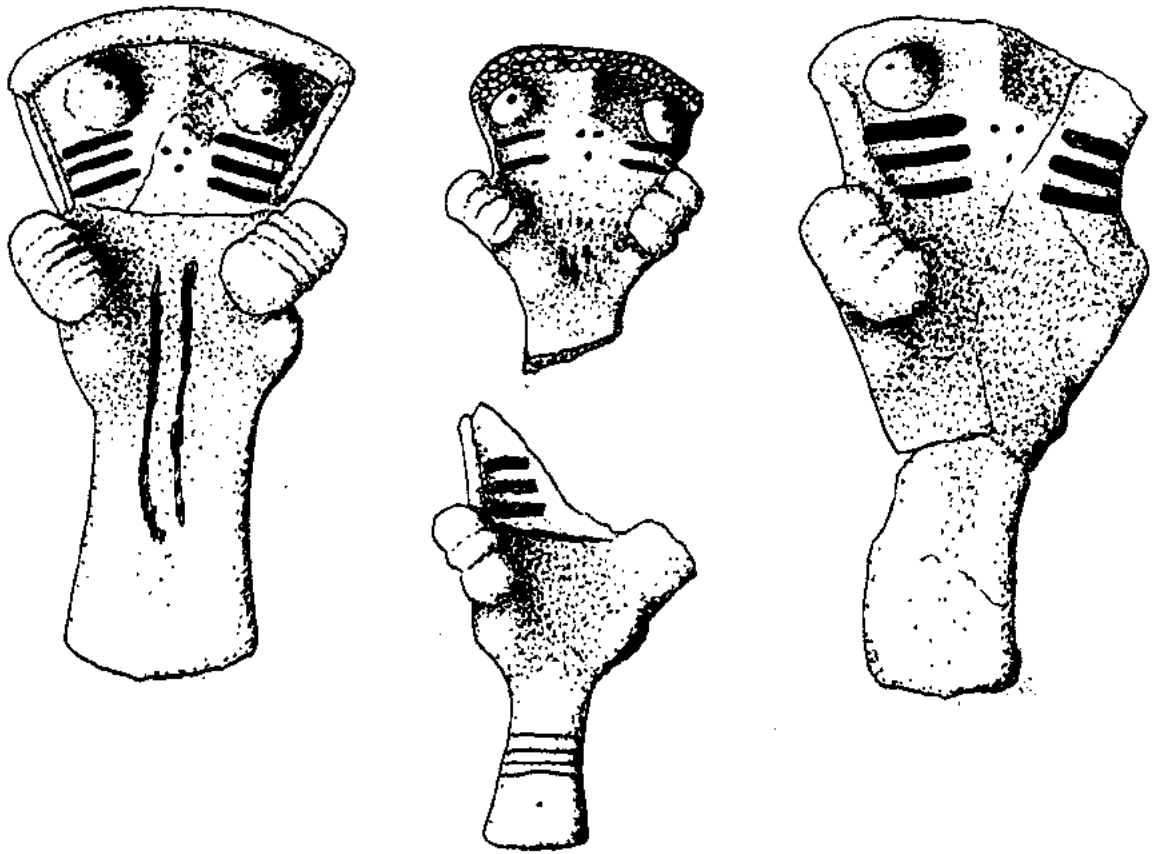
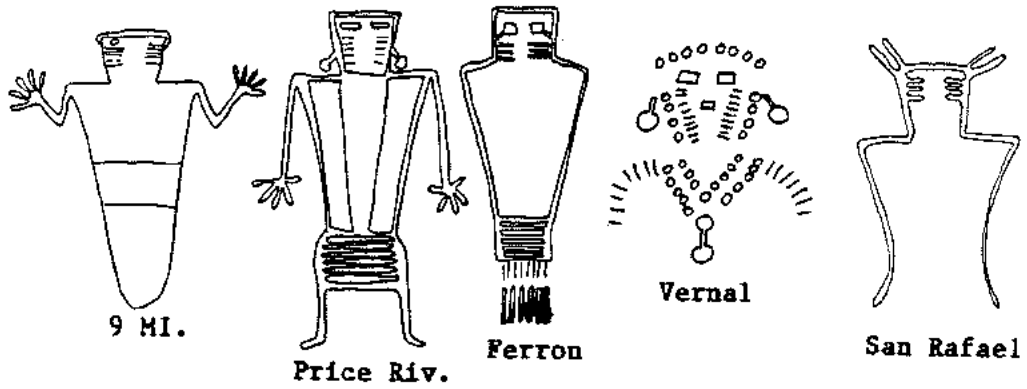
9 MI.

West Desert

L.

FIGURE 15

O.



EVANS MOUND FIGURINES

FIGURE 16

## HAIR TREATMENT

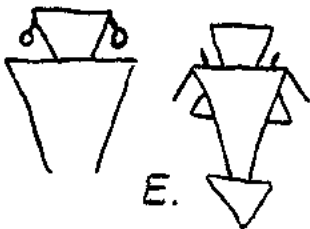
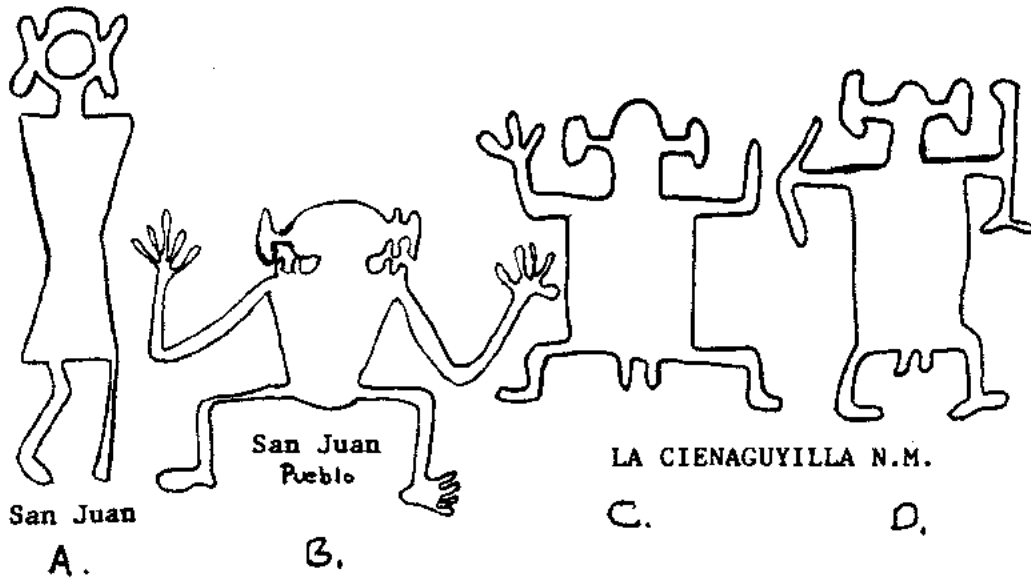
A type of hair treatment may possibly be an indicator for both male and female. Among the Hopi and other Pueblos, hair style is not only indicative of sex, it also denotes the marital status for females (Fig. 2.A,f). A look at the representations in this presentation, however, doesn't provide much help in using hair or head treatment as a means of demarcation. Two figures from Dry Fork do repeat a form similar to the Hopi virgin hair-do (Fig. 15C-D).

Martineau states (1985:10, 11), that "Most of the symbols of a female with a triangular base also show the symbol of the female hair style of the Fremont people." To illustrate this statement (he used in the singular), he uses two different graphic forms of handling or at least representing hair (Fig. 17). Martineau states that this is a Fremont female hair style. A look at other Fremont figures shows that many other figures with both of these hair styles have also been represented with a phallus (Fig. 17, bottom row). We have not yet been able to identify a definite, distinctive, absolute female hair style for the Fremont. At this point we don't know if it's because one doesn't exist or if it's because we don't have a sufficient data base. That hasn't been one of the things we've been looking for. The type of hair style with ties in Figure 17 also consistently occurs on many Salt Creek Faces and many of the Cave Valley Style figures. If this is a distinctive female style as Martineau states, then nearly all of the Salt Creek Faces and many Cave Valley Style Figures with that feature are female representations. Considering the typical percentage distributions, that isn't very likely.

Although Martineau depicts two distinct hair styles in the figure that he illustrates as the (singular) Fremont female hair style, they are probably two similar but distinctly different hair treatments (Fig. 17.E). He says that the clue to this hair style (sing.) can be found in figurines. He says that "All of the Pillings figurines with this hair style, also depicts breasts" (1985:11). The Pillings figurines and others that have breasts indicated, probably only have one of these styles of hair, but so do some without breasts. Are those males or adolescent females? Whatever they are, they have the same style of hair. This may mean that non-marital status was not differentiated like the Hopi (which came relatively late), or that men and women had similar hair treatments. Because of both, their obvious pairing and differences in size, Morss believed the breast-less figures to be male (Morss 1954). This evidence seems to imply that hair can but does not always indicate sex.

## HEAD SHAPE AND HEADRESS

Like hair treatment, head shape and adornment also do not have any distinctly obvious types consistently used in rock art for the female figures. In Navajo symbolism, there is a shape to gender. Males are round while females are square (Reichards 1963, Fig. 11.G). In the Classic Vernal Style there are many round, square, bucket and inverted-bucket shaped heads. There is enough repetition that they must have some significance but sex doesn't seem to be part of it.



AFTER L. MARTINEAU  
CLEAR CREEK PROJECT  
PP. 10,11 -1985

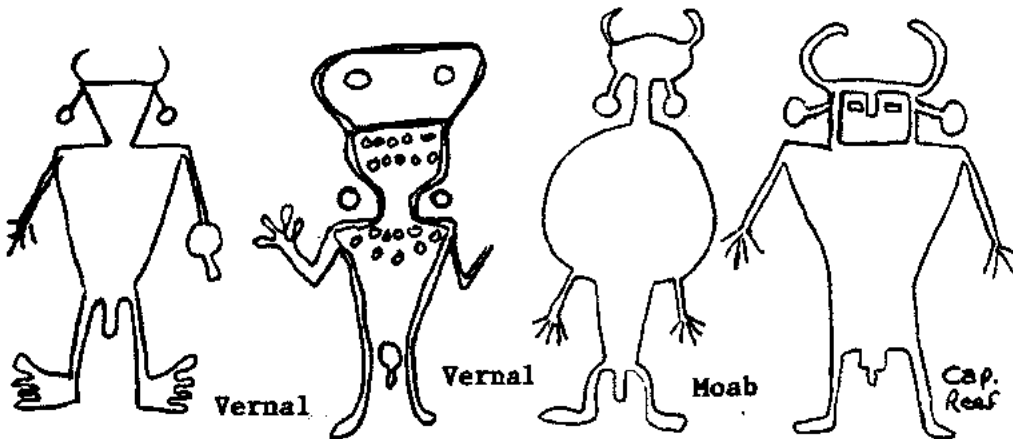


FIGURE 17

## **DIMINUTIVE SIZE**

In some panels where there are couples, one is sometimes smaller (Fig. 4.A-C). This type of symbolism recognizing a difference may be all that is necessary. Sometimes other traits previously discussed were also included, but it probably would depend on the importance of the female figure to the story. For those represented in larger groups, variations in size can also mean difference in importance or social status, which doesn't say anything new. Size also can represent a difference in perspective or distance, still nothing new, (women often look smaller in the distance trailing behind the men).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

It is very important to understand that the woman's place in rock art (like the home, tepee, wigwam, hogan, or pueblo) is a reflection of the social attitudes of the cultures which created the symbolism. The symbolism of a specific style that a society creates, not only differs from other styles in form but in the way those social values were expressed. Some of these differences are very distinct and sometimes they aren't even noticeable. Thus style is real, distinctive, vibrant and a reflection of what a society allows to be represented and how it was to be portrayed.

Since these values were a cultural inheritance, I believe that possibly the way sex was identified, copulation represented or fertility depicted would differ depending on the type of society that produced those values which the rock art reflected. These societies were either based on a system developed out of a patriarchal band of hunters and gathers, a matriarchal community of horticulturists, or a combination of both.

It is also important to realize that because of the ideographic possibilities and limitations, there will be many symbols based on and then extended from natural forms like the vulva. Some of these may or may not be like those of another group that did or didn't have any interrelationship. It is also important to understand that the values given similar or shared symbols will not always be the same. Any estimation of those values as moral or vulgar is judgmental on our part. To the Native American, few if any of these sexual representations are "vulgar" in the Anglo sense of the word. Sexual overtones permeate the symbolism inscribed on the rocks. Some copulation scenes were perhaps the physical remains of ritual consummations or requests for conception (Warner 1984). Others may depict epic events in the mystic past. Some of these may illustrate the conception of the Hero Twins (Tyler 1964), an event as special in nature to these ancient people as the conception of Christ is to a modern Christian.

The copulators at the Cave of Life, Petrified National Forest, Arizona, often thought of as "the pornographic panel" (Thomas 1982, Hunger 1983), now takes on a new but still "uninterpretable" importance as a shaft of light descends to make genital contact (Fig. 18.K). The "sun wombed" figures could perhaps represent the concept where it was the sun who entered the womb of the mother of the Twins (Fig. 18.A-E, F-J, 19). Thus the vulva in these contexts



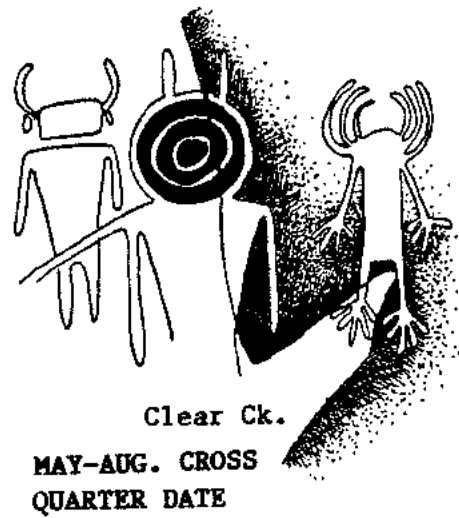
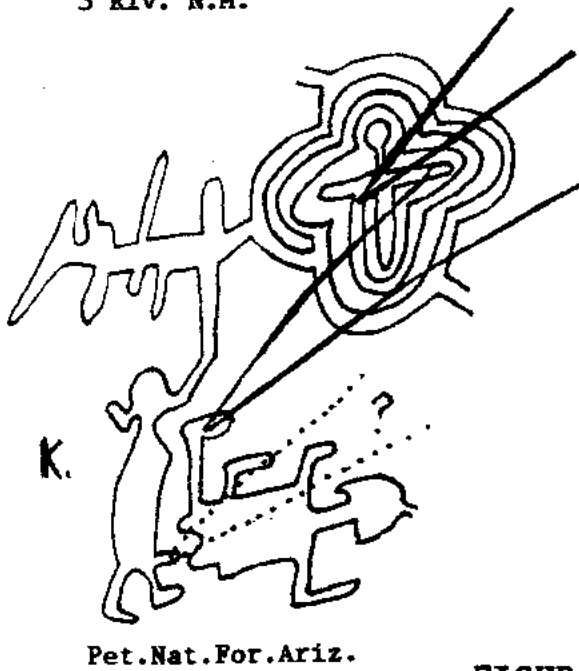
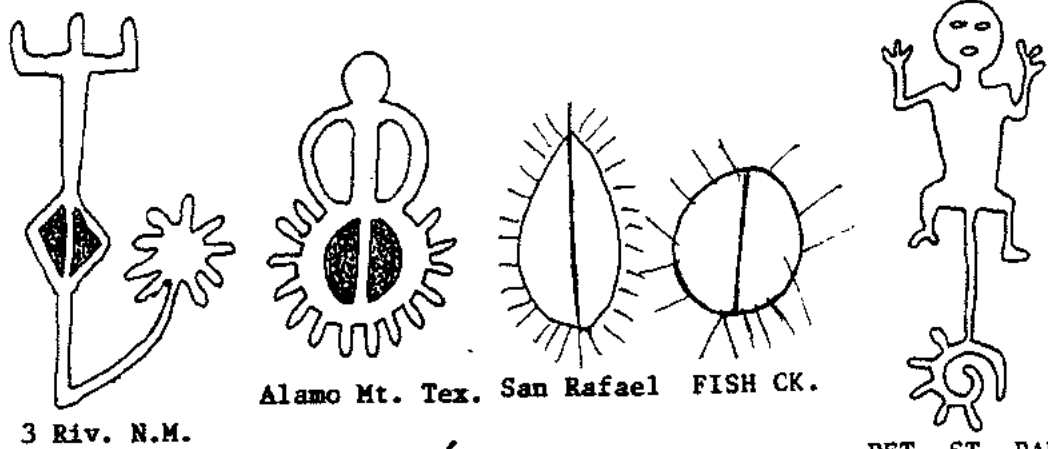
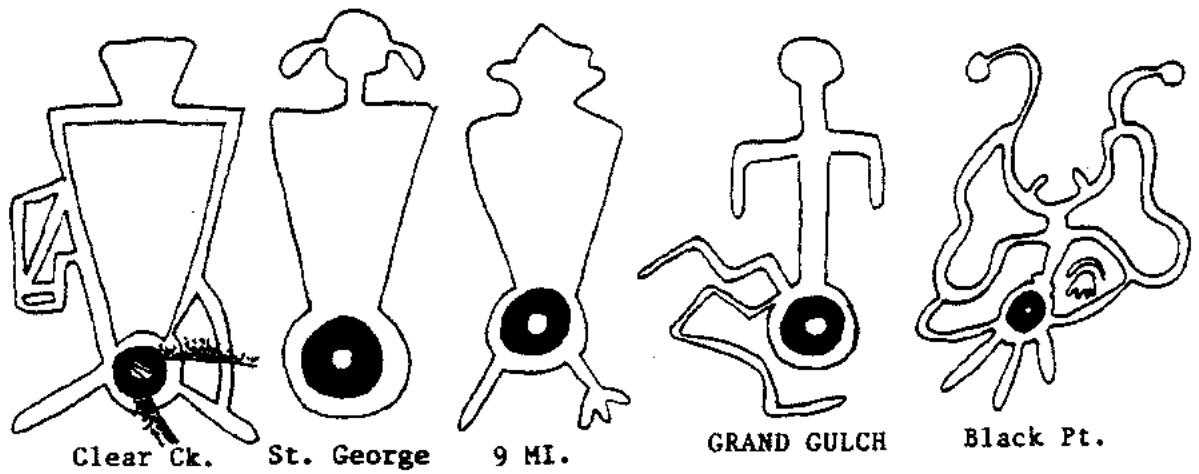


FIGURE 18

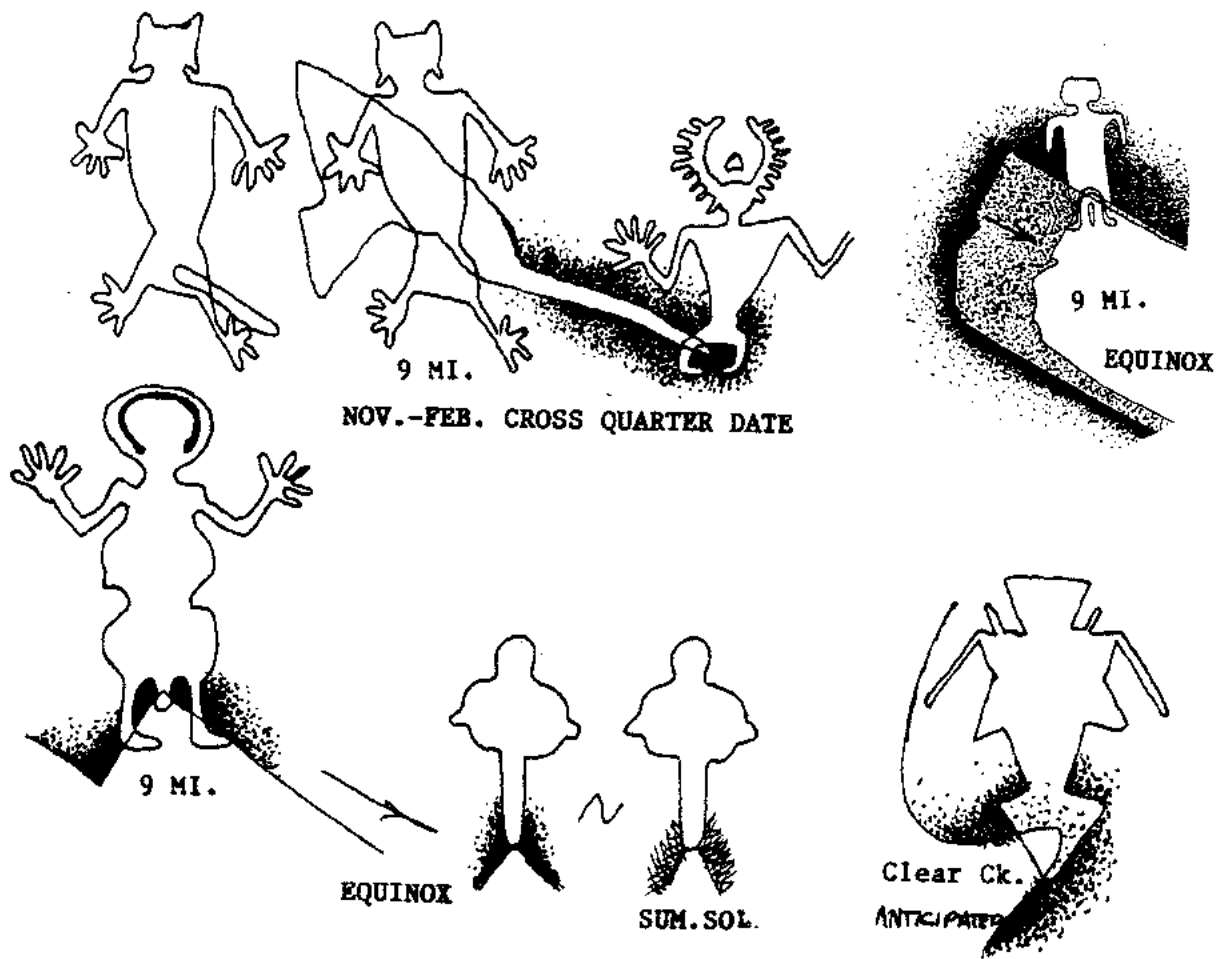
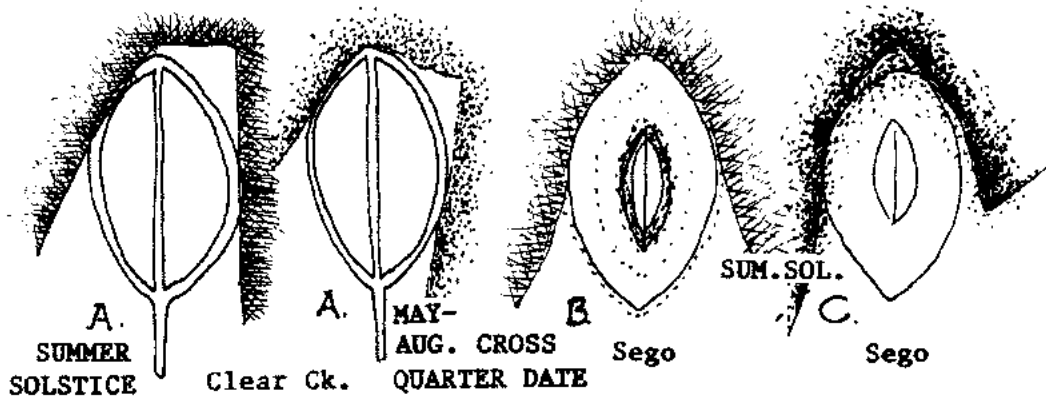


FIGURE 19

contains as much symbolism as the Renaissance Convention of Enunciation scenes did to Christians of the Middle Ages.

By taking the time to look at the role of the female in rock art and her related concepts of fertility, power, birth, and rebirth. We can probably avoid misinterpretations or misidentifications of the female form. We may be better able to understand the role she played in all the symbolism extended from her. We may even be able to better understand the inseparable nature of the many combinations of both male and female symbolism. We hope someday to understand better and appreciate the value of our early sister and the connection she may have to our modern sorority of womanhood.

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