

Keynote Address

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When Jesse Warner called about this meeting, he requested that I speak on the subjects of the role of rock art in archaeology and the future of rock art research. These are interesting subjects that are generally not addressed together. When he called, I had just completed a thesis in which rock art was used to answer archaeological questions with regard to the development of prehistoric Pueblo society. Also, in the spring, I presented a paper on Anasazi rock art and artifacts a subject that clearly relates to these. In short, the timing is right for me to discuss these subjects.

This talk is an attempt to explain the discipline of archaeology and its limitations and potentials for the study of rock art. Those of you with archaeological backgrounds, please bear with me as I give a brief explanation of the nature of archaeology.

As you know, several ways to approach rock art have meaning to modern societies such as ours. For example: studio art using forms and techniques of rock art as inspiration for modern art; art history tracing the development of styles, techniques, and subject matter over time and space to provide a context for modern students of art; history researching the use of rock art by historic peoples to record events or lifestyles; archaeoastronomy determining if rock art symbolism is associated with seasonal change and celestial events. This last study has frequently been tied to mythologies of historic peoples such as the Navajo. Anthropology, specifically the subdisciplines of ethnology and archaeology, have contributed significantly to the study of rock art. Ethnology examines traditions of living peoples and their relationships with

subjects such as rock art. Jesse W. Fewkes (1892) worked with rock art and other symbolism of the Hopi, and Matilda Coxe Stevenson (1904) did much the same with the Zuni during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Most recently, Mary Jane Young (1985, 1988) has produced an excellent study of the narrative role of rock art in modern Zuni society.

Archaeology uses the materials of past cultures to interpret rock art. In addition, archaeology uses information gained by most, if not all, of the above disciplines plus others such as biology; but archaeology has its own identity, goals or problems to solve, and methods of research that I will briefly discuss. Often people working with other methods and within other disciplines criticize archaeology for not accepting their conclusions. This is probably the result of not understanding the very specific nature of archaeology and its methods. Archaeology has no more reason to accept the conclusions of other disciplines without testing them by its own methods than the western medical establishment have to accept the conclusions of African medicine men without testing in a manner they find meaningful. In other words, all disciplines of study have their own cultural niches and educational biases that are thought to be meaningful.

Let me put the discipline of archaeology and the study of rock art in historic perspective. In the early research period, the late 1800s and early 1900s, the humanities were emphasized in American education. Archaeology was generally practiced as part of ethnographic studies such as those of Jesse W. Fewkes in his search for the

origin of Hopi clans. During the 1940s-1970s, science and technology were emphasized in education, and symbolic subjects like rock art were often avoided because they were not easily dated. Presently, the winds have begun to shift and the humanities are beginning to once again be seriously studied and used in combination with scientific methods.

The goal of archaeology, the study of past materials, is to answer questions of anthropology, the study of man on physical, social and cultural levels. Anthropology seeks answers or explanations for patterns and processes, continuity and change. Questions of Cultural and Social anthropology have been most important in archaeological studies. To archaeologists, culture equals materials and associated subjects within the contexts of time and space period. Once they are so identified, cultural materials are interpreted (including their symbolism) and used to explain broader questions with regard to cultural and social development using the scientific method of testing hypotheses.

If one seeks explanations for the past that ignore the presence or absence of materials, archaeology cannot provide answers. Thus, no serious consideration of the "Ogam" rock art issue has been given by archaeology. The presence of Ogam in North American rock art is one of many proposals that have been made since the 1700s in support of the presence of western Europeans and their cultural antecedents in North America. After 200 years of archaeology in North America, some poor and some very good, no clear material evidence of prehistoric (pre-A.D. 1300-1500) western European presence exists, much less evidence that European groups significantly influenced the prehistory of North America. On the other hand, an abundance of evidence exists for the prehistoric presence and indigenous cultural development of Native

Americans. However, the questions of prehistory, including the European presence, continue to be answered by ongoing archaeological research that seeks to document and interpret materials through excavation and survey.

Archaeological research, like that of other disciplines, is restricted by limitations of nature and the cultures and societies making the studies. Thus, the material record for North America is extremely incomplete due to weather; land change and development; vandalism; poor and limited investigational techniques; research designs and choices of sites to study (for example Chaco Canyon versus a lithic scatter at 10,000 feet elevation in the Rocky Mountains). No matter what the hypotheses are, evidence is limited by these conditions and resultant lack of information.

Why do we know so much about Anasazi rock art, not just how it looks over time, but how it may have functioned in past societies? Because we know so much about the Anasazi culture for a variety of reasons, including the good weather of the Southwest and good site preservation; relatively late discovery of sites and resultant vandalism; high quality archaeology in the early period by people like A. V. Kidder and Samuel Guernsey, Earl Morris, Emil Haury, and others; the protection of Anasazi and related sites in National Parks and on Indian reservations; and the continued existence of culturally conservative Pueblo people who are cultural descendents of the Anasazi.

Just a note, however; we still have relatively little information about some Anasazi populations such as the Virgin. Most of our information is about the Mesa Verde, Chaco, and Kayenta branches that have larger, better-preserved, and more spectacular ruins. Also, rock art of the Virgin River area is not well described in the literature,

and much interesting work remains to be done.

We all have a lot of field data about rock art in the Fremont culture area. Is it all Fremont and what are the dates? Can styles be associated with particular cultural development patterns, such as Basketmaker and Pueblo period rock art among the Anasazi? How did Fremont rock art function in the culture? What did it mean? There are a lot of questions and not many answers. Why? Because we know very little about the Fremont and their cultural and social development beyond the level of description.

What about Archaic rock art? How much can we really identify and interpret? One way is to compare Archaic materials with rock art imagery, comparisons such as the Cowboy Cave clay figurines and Barrier Canyon Style anthropomorphic rock art. Some good analyses of shamanistic content in Barrier Canyon Style rock art have recently been done using cross-cultural studies. Many more examples and styles of Archaic rock art have less obvious symbolism. Abstract rock art is a good example and one that provides a challenge not present in more representational art. It is very possible that abstract images were conventionalized symbols that functioned in much the same way as representational art. People of the past knew what all those lines and circles signified just as the Hopi and Zuni of today interpret spirals, zigzags, and terrace designs.

What do we know about Ute rock art or that of other Numic-speaking groups living in Utah at historic contact? How did the historic rock art function? Can we identify prehistoric Ute rock art? How does it differ from that of neighboring groups? Despite the fact that Utes continue to live in this area, their culture has been greatly changed as a result of Euro-American contact, and ethnographers have not vigorously pursued

the question of rock art. Accordingly, we may have lost the opportunity to answer questions about Ute rock art.

At this point, let me say that rock art students must be very careful with regard to using ethnographic and historic information to interpret symbols of the past, even interpretations by conservative Pueblos concerning Anasazi and Mogollon symbols for which archaeological continuities exist. Cultural change is subtle in some cases and drastic in others, and both types may have resulted in changes to traditional symbols. Symbolism in historic societies is passed down by word of mouth and by demonstration; it is exhibited in dramas and other ceremonies, and interpreted and changed by those who control its use in accordance with religious, social, political, and economic goals. It is reasonable to assume that this also occurred in the past and resulted in changes in the functions and meanings of symbols. Of course, with regard to North American Indians, the fact of cultural change wrought by Euro-Americans and the resultant loss of traditions and the people who maintained them as a result of murder, religious conversion, government regulations, disease, and modern acculturation are very significant.

To be meaningful, symbolic information from even the most conservative Indian groups should be used with care. The most traditional information probably comes from reputable early ethnographic and historic accounts. Also, specific interpretations are less reliable than those made on a systems or broadly defined level of meaning. Katsina cult symbolism can be identified in the prehistoric rock art record by comparison with the historic record, but the identification of specific katsinas and their functions and meanings is less likely. However, it is important for the goals of archaeology just to identify the presence of the katsina cult prehistorically with all the

ramifications for social and cultural development leading into the historic period.

If we do not worry about identifying specific meanings but look for things we can objectively deal with, such as rock art locations and similarities with material items, we may begin to understand how rock art functioned for ancient societies and gain insights into broad contextual meanings.

New theories in archaeology and rock art studies have moved away from interpretations based on how people made a living and the processes used for investigation and toward studies of total archaeological context. Symbolism and its role as a device for information exchange and the reinforcement of cultural concepts are viewed as very important in this "post-processual" archaeology. Accordingly, these are exciting times for rock art studies—rock art possibly being the quintessential subject for symbolism studies. Recently published studies on rock art of the Southwest, Midwest, South Africa and Australia generally reflect a contextual type of approach.

A leader in contextual archaeology is Ian Hodder, and I quote:

... theory, interpretation, and subjectivity are involved at every stage. Yet at the same time, the emphasis is placed on interpreting what the data can 'tell' us, and the more networked the data, the more there is to 'read'. As already noted, an object out of context is not readable, and a symbol painted on a cave wall when there are not deposits in the cave, when there are no deposits in the region that contain other depictions of the symbol on other objects, and when there are no graves containing the symbol, is scarcely more readable (Hodder 1986:141).

In summary, archaeology has supported rock art studies as they are related to material culture. Approaches have included comparisons with materials and related

symbolism (such as ceramic decoration), as well as methods of other disciplines that are viewed as meaningful. The role of rock art studies in archaeology has changed through time and is presently undergoing change as the significance of symbolism to cultural and social continuity and change is examined.

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