

THE MASKS OF THREE RIVERS

by

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We are going to take you to a place called Three Rivers in New Mexico. How many of you have been there? Quite a few. You know about the magic ridge. There is so much there, we would go and I would say, okay today I am going to shoot only birds or only masks or only zoomorphs or only anthropomorphs because you would find yourself going two hundred yards and you had gone through ten rolls of film already. Along the west ridge, the midlevel, at Three Rivers is one level consisting completely of masks. For some reason, that stratum was used just for masks. I am not about to attempt to interpret any of them. I have brought them to share, to show you some of what we have down there and go and wonder yourself. We are beginning to learn to read the glyphs. The one big thing ... two years ago I stopped calling it prehistoric rock art. These sites are in use today. There are power spots there. There are religious places. So it is not an obsolete art form or communications form done by a vanished people. They are alive and well and have the power today, if you respect them, that they had when they were first made. As far as interpretation is concerned, I have got to tell you a story that Teresa told us. There was a site called the Blessing Way out by Galisteo, very much in use today. Teresa took her friend, Foxy Grandpa, a very old man from the Pueblo, out there. There is a huge slab of sandstone about four or five meters high and almost as wide. The whole surface had been abraded, the pecked, then painted. So Teresa said "Oh boy! I am going to find out what this panel means". She took Foxy Grandpa out, showed him the panel and said "Foxy Grandpa, what does this mean?" The old man looked at the panel, picked up a stick, squatted in the sand, drew the same designs in the sand. And when he was finished said, "I don't know what he meant but this is what I mean when I draw this". So these arehey it is a church, the Earth Mother is a church upon whom we live. And these symbols are symbols of harmony, of harmony with life and once you learn these rhythms, your chances of getting ulcers are much diminished. There is the ridge at Three Rivers, it is in the lee of Sierra Blanco or Mount Baldy. The Shante Apache group still live in the lee of the mountain. They are still going out to Three Rivers for reasons we all know. You see a glyph. I take issue with the advice given a couple of years ago, do not touch the glyphs. To hell with that! You come, you give respect, you get power back, you give power. As I say, these are living, living things not dead scratches in the rock. It is great country up there, sedimentary, volcanic. Where the site is, you look to the west, you see the black lava flow of the Valley of Fire, the white of White Sands, the mountain beyond. Last time we were there I said the famous last words. "Nah, it is not going to rain". I think we have been wetter than any wet season in the tropics. You are going to get representations of Walking Head, birds, snow (a four letter word to me). The west ridge is covered with glyphs of an entirely different matter or style. You go up the trail and here is the biggest spiral that I have ever seen in my life at the head of the trail. There are also mushrooms up there pecked

in the stone. We have a storyteller, the Cat Eye it is called. The man sees in this world and in the spiritual world at the same time. It is the split eye.

I have noticed at Three Rivers, Abo and Tenabo in New Mexico, that you are going to see a lot of natural features of the rock used and enhanced. At Three Rivers we have got the cross of Quetzalcoatl. The pusteca, the travelling traders, came up in the dim old, old days, bringing their religion with them, the Plumed Serpent and Tlaloc. Tlaloc is the god of thunder, and the wind, and of rain. And being the god of rain, he is very, very important. It became transmuted into the legends that are passed on to this day.

I call these libraries in stone because they are libraries. These are frozen memories, crystallized memories. The wise ones know about them. A lot of things you do not talk about because you are not ready for it. But this is where a child would learn who he was or she was by learning where the people have been. So you have a place in the universe once you know this.

We find a mouth made out of a fault in the rock. But now there is a different technique used, a slashing technique instead of a pecking technique. I think this is much later Apache. I am probably wrong. And there are a lot of faces that whose markings look like the faces have been painted. A lot of times you see what looks like a hood but it represents paint. Everywhere you look everywhere you look. Some designs, we are calling Frontera Mogollon. You are going to see anew term introduced into the trade in this next year or so as opposed to the Mimbres Mogollon because the Frontera, which is the Rio Grande and are going all the way down, you are getting a distinct style because the environment is different. You get echos of the Mimbres without quite the sophistication. As here again we are speaking strictly of art styles.

Corners of the rock are incorporated into some of the glyphs. When you see a pair of big eyes, get down and look in the direction those eyes are looking and if you see, instead of merely looking, you will probably see something else there that was meant for you to see to go on to the next chapter or next lesson. There is a wild place at Comanche Gap where there is a meat eating petroglyph, looks like Masau with teeth and big eyes, and the Kiowa put it there. It was an ambush place. There is a gap in the rock and if you got down to look in the direction of the eyes were looking, zap, over the hill they would come and they would whap you. So it was a very nice view.

There is a spirit face that looks like mountain lion or bobcat spirit face with half above and half below the split in the rock. And are we dealing with two worlds here again, the mundane and the spiritual? I hate the term "spiritual" because it has been overused so much.

There is a technique that I had not seen before until we went to Tenabo, which is up in the Mon Sano Mountains, of using the edge of the rock as part of the design. And this is some of what awaits you at Three Rivers. You will find a meat eater with his teeth. He is going to get you. He is blind in one eye. He can not see in one eye. By the same token, if you see horns that are up and they are raked, it means strong spirit power. If the horns are out and down, this is sickness, this is loss.

We have the Crying Eye motif from Mexico. Now how much of it is crying, and how much of it is warrior stripes? I do not know. Maybe Clifford (Duncan) could tell us one day if he wants to. As I say, this time we concentrated on masks, just on faces.

I had a wild theory, which may be so far out that anyone who knows will laugh, that many of these so-called blanket designs were marks of the pusteca, the traveling traders who came up north. You get into Mimbres art and it becomes increasingly abstracted. You have this blanket design. You have a parrot. You have what looks like a shepherd's crook. Any one of these, singly means pusteca, at least in the border country and by extension, why not here? Someone passing through bringing religion with him.

There is a mask that is painted and the Crying Eye motif or are they the two stripes a warrior would paint? We have a bird on top of a Crying Eye. If a bird sat on your head you would cry too. But in this case I would go in the direction and see what else is in that direction. I say we are babes in the woods. Maybe in forty years or more I will learn a little more about this magnificent legacy that we must protect.

The glyphs at Three Rivers were probably done between 950 -1250 AD, most of them. The "slash mark" type would go into the "historic" times. But the thing to remember is, without a written literature, but this is a written literature actually, that is why I call them libraries in stone, oral tradition is the way the heritage is passed down. Now we have run into four sites, Samalayuca south of Juarez, Alamo Canyon, Alamo Mountain and Three Rivers, where what I think is the same artist's hand. Now either the same artist or students of the maestro. "Why do we do it this way?" "Shut up kid, we've always done it this way." It is a traditional thing.

There is the duality of everything. How many of you know Northwest or Alaska masks, Inuit masks? Everything is split, Comedy/Tragedy, because life is duality. We have Yang and Yin, cold/hot, warm, love/hate. Everything is a duality. Without harmony you can not have one without the other. Everything is, at least in my mind, aimed toward seeking harmony, finding harmony. There are faces covered with spots. This may be an indication of the smallpox. But I don't know. When the bloody Gringos sent smallpox laden blankets west half the Kiowa people died as a result. Well they did just that a few years ago in Brazil so nothing is new.

We have a Meat Eater with a Mountain Lion on his chin. Again above and below and he sees in both worlds. There is the same type with mountains. There is a pecked technique, some of it very rudimentary. We may have the a survival of the wonderful Utah custom you had of chopping off mother-in-law's head, filling it with sand and carrying it around on a string. I do not know. There is also a mausa with a vertical mouth. We have a warclub, we have a rattle. The snake and egg is a motif recurring all through Mexico. Having spent so much time in Mexico, naturally I am biased toward those interpretations. And I will leave with a bit of Earth's harmony to speed you on your morning. Thank you.