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**BOOK REVIEW OF PREHISTORIC ROCK ART OF NEVADA AND EASTERN CALIFORNIA** by Robert F. Heizer and Martin A. Baumhoff. University of California Press, 1984 (paperback \$14.95, hardbound version c1962)

Nothing in the book appears to indicate what the titles of Robert Heizer and Martin Baumhoff are. Archaeologists seem to be shy about publicizing their titles. I have reason to believe that they both had the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Archaeology and that both were professors of Archaeology at the University of California at Berkeley but nothing to that effect appears in this book. The book is stated to be a report of their findings which were the result of a three year program of research that was supported by two grants from the National Science Foundation and by the Committees on Research of the University of California. The version which I am reviewing is a paperback copy containing many illustrations that is published by the University of California Press. It is a 1984 edition of a book previously copyrighted by the Regents of the University of California in 1962.

This book is well made and contains 414 pages with 18 pages of introductory material. It includes 24 pages of plates that show excellent examples of the petroglyphs being studied. It has a large bibliography and seven appendices containing information obtained both before and after the main section of the book was compiled.

It provides a classic example of the problems that arise when someone enters a research project with preconceived ideas as to the expected results. I have touched on this problem earlier in my fictional story of the problems with the school children in the city of Korn which was published in *Vestiges*. The book has other shortcomings which will be pointed out later.

#### Rock Art

The authors of this book are kind to us for they give us an idea as to what their interests and biases are in the first sentence of the book. The very first words in the introduction are "In the field of the history of art. . ." (p. 1). They go on immediately to juxtapose the cave paintings in the great galleries of Lascaux with the 'petroglyphic art' of the Great Basin. They compare them saying that the petroglyphs are "not less interesting as art" (p.1). They continue to use the term "petroglyphic art" in the introduction until they finally abbreviate it to the term "rock art". To the best of my knowledge, this is the first time that the unfortunate term "rock art" has been applied to petroglyphs in the western hemisphere. They continue throughout the book to refer to petroglyphs as art and insist that petroglyphs were placed on the rocks merely to decorate the rocks. They say when discussing styles (p. 206 and again on p. 310) that: "Petrography is essentially a decorative art--an attempt to embellish an object without reshaping it." Even in their data sheets they speak of "Dimensions of Decorated Area" and Method of Decoration". These are very telling clues to the attitude of the authors.

#### Chalked Petroglyphs

The book was written at a time when the study of petroglyphs was in its infancy. Although Mallery, Steward, and others had done their pioneering work by the time the book was written, the study of petroglyphs had not yet become fashionable and standards were different then. This would account for the fact that most of the photographs appearing in the book were photographs of heavily chalked petroglyphs. Of course, today, the action of

chalking petroglyphs is considered to be bad practice and not to be done.

### Racism

The state of mind of the authors may be responsible for some of the errors in the book. Throughout the book it is very clear that the attitude of the authors toward the Indians was racist. Mr. A. L. Krieger, the person to whom the book was dedicated, is quoted extensively and he said, when discussing the relationship of the sign language to prehistoric petroglyphs: "Another point of difference is that a pictograph is able to communicate a wide range of information" presupposes an ability of realistic representation and discrimination that in general was "*far beyond native capacities*" (p. 292) (emphasis added). In the next paragraph and on the same subject the authors state: "In view of the known fact of *extreme cultural simplicity* (emphasis added) of the prehistoric people of the western Great Basin area, . . ." (p.293). Thus, it can be seen, that the authors felt the Indians were of an inferior culture. However, contradicting these statements they earlier said: "While the Great Basin Indians were fairly simply cultured, they did not lack interest or ability in decorative art." (p. 241)

Books could be written about the comparison of the cultural complexity of the prehistoric people of the western Great Basin area and their Caucasian conquerors. I do not think the Indians would suffer by comparison. When one culture is pitted against an entirely different one, it is difficult for the aggressors to see the virtues of the alien culture.

### Duty of Archaeologists

In chapter 1, we get a hint as to the reason this book was published which is beyond the publish or perish attitude prevalent in most universities. In discussion of some of the earlier studies of petroglyphs, the authors state: "One has the feeling that these later studies were undertaken not so much because of a burning interest on the part of the scholars, but rather because the petroglyphs themselves, by sheer quantity, forced their way into the consciousness of archaeologists, whose duty it is to study prehistoric cultural remains." (p.6) Are the authors here explaining why previous works have been published or why this one was published?

### Purpose of Petroglyphs

It is difficult, from the presented book, to determine just when the authors reached their conclusions as to the purpose of petroglyphs. In chapter 1 on the second page of the chapter, they state: "A careful study of our material has led us to conclude that Nevada petroglyphs are not a form of writing and are not communicative in intent." (p. 6) They further state: "We felt that the essential clue to interpretation must probably come from some connection with the subsistence habits of the prehistoric inhabitants of the area." (p.7) A little later they say: ". . . we reason that petroglyphs must be connected directly in some fashion with the securing of food." (p.8) Finally, in chapter 1, they say: "The burden of our argument is that most Nevada petroglyphs have 'meaning' in terms of one of the hunting patterns of the prehistoric inhabitants of the state." (p.11) After these introductory statements it was not surprising to find at the end of the book in an un-numbered chapter entitled "Concluding Remarks", the following statements: "We think that we have proved that petroglyphs in the area we have studied are to be understood as a part of the economic pursuit of hunting large game. . . Thus petroglyphs are part of the magical or ritual aspect of taking large game." (p.239)

### Illustrations

More than half of the book consists of illustrations or maps. This is very commendable for a book on petroglyphs since they appeal to the visual sense. By far the largest group of

illustrations are the line drawings of petroglyphs. While it is good to have drawings of the petroglyphs, when the illustration of as many as twenty panels are crowded onto one page (figs. 41,60) their utility is greatly diminished. The weight of the line drawings is not uniform. The heavy lines appear to have been made with a felt tip pen and the light lines appear to have been made with a ball-point pen. No mention is made as to the significance of the two different line weights. The drawings of the petroglyphs at some of the sites, and perhaps all, were made by tracing the elements from photographs which were available. The tracings are not uniform in quality and the completeness and accuracy of the drawings are unknown, although it is known that at least some were incomplete. They are reproduced in a manner which makes it very difficult for the petroglyphologist to learn much about them. It appears that several people were preparing the drawings, some using felt tip pens and some using ball-point pens. In at least some of the drawings, elements have been deleted from the drawing so that the illustration of the panel is not complete.

#### Misinterpretation

Unless one is very careful, a false impression may be gained from the book. The authors state that they have studied petroglyphs in Nevada for three years, having been supported by two grants from the National Science Foundation and by the University of California. They present in the main section of the book information on 99 sites which they have studied. One is tempted to assume that they studied these sites personally and from that study presented conclusions which are given in the book. Such is not the case. A more careful reading of the book reveals that they leaned very heavily upon the work of Mallery, Steward and others for information presented in their listing of the sites in Nevada. While the authors do not state which sites they have visited personally, I have assumed that they have not visited sites where they have given full credit for information presented to others and have made no personal comments about the site. Using this criteria, I find that they have not visited at least 61 of the 99 sites presented in the main body of the book. Of the sites that they did visit, most lie within 125 miles of Reno, none were in southern Nevada, and only one in eastern Nevada so their personal knowledge of the petroglyphs of Nevada was very limited.

#### Styles

Part of every research project is systematizing and categorization of the data to make it more meaningful. Heizer and Baumhoff, mindful of this imperative, decided to divide the petroglyph elements which they had identified into categories. The categories they chose were: Great Basin Representational, Great Basin Curvilinear Abstract, Great Basin Rectilinear Abstract, Great Basin Scratched, Great Basin Painted, Puebloan Painted, and Pit and Groove. Every researcher has the right to categorize his data in any way he wishes. It does seem particularly unwise to consider the categories Great Basin Representational, Great Basin Curvilinear Abstract, and Great Basin Rectilinear Abstract as separate and independent categories as the authors have done. In looking at their Table 4 (page 200), it is noted that in almost every instance where a representational element is found at a site, either a curvilinear element or a rectilinear element or both are found at the same site. Similarly, curvilinear and rectilinear elements are almost always found together. The inference follows that the three categories are not independent. The appearance is that the three categories are part of the palette of the petroglyph maker and he uses them as he sees fit.

The Pit and Groove style seems to have been hastily and inappropriately named. The authors admit that the style was named after inspecting only one panel. The 'pits' in this style resemble small cups so the name cupule appears more suitable. Most sites having cupules

present do not have any grooves. Only rarely does a site having cupules have associated grooves so it seems inappropriate to have a 'groove' as part of the name of the style.

Many other objections can be made to the categorization done by the authors but they will be reserved for another time.

#### Theory of Lamb

One of the worst decisions made by the authors when writing this book was to accept without reservation, the theory of Sidney Lamb as being correct in all details. (Lamb's theory states that the Numics, ancestors of the Paiute, Shoshoni, Ute, and others lived in or near Death Valley and migrated from there to fill the territory occupied by these groups at the time of first contact, within the past 800 to 1000 years replacing the original occupants.) This theory as interpreted by Heizer and Baumhoff places the date of the Numic migration at sometime between A.D. 1200 and A.D. 1800. This assumption plus their other assumptions about petroglyphs form a framework within which all of their data about petroglyphs must fit. Their assumptions form a very restrictive straight jacket.

Heizer and Baumhoff had much difficulty with the assumptions they made in the beginning. As we shall see, they thought that the putative pre-Numic people made the petroglyphs which they had been studying in northwestern Nevada. Since they did not recognize and recent petroglyphs in the area they were studying, they assumed that the pre-Numics quit making petroglyphs some time before the migration. This assumption also required that the Numic people also did not make petroglyphs or else recent petroglyphs would be found. They said: "We noted that the recent Indians of the Great Basin deny knowledge of the meaning or authorship of petroglyphs, and concluded from this that the prehistoric inhabitants made petroglyphs up to fairly recent times and then, for some reason, discontinued the practice." (p. 14) Further, they said: "Throughout the Great Basin, the Numic speakers are presumed to have replaced an indigenous population of unknown linguistic affiliation." (p. 14) Finally, they said: "...the fact that petroglyphs in the Great Basin did not continue to be made up to the historic period could be explained by the recent Numic migrations." (p. 15) Oh, really! If we are to assume that the Numics did not make petroglyphs in Nevada, an explanation is needed of how they knew precisely where the Idaho and Oregon borders were, for there are plenty of recent and not-so-recent Numic petroglyphs in each state near the border with Nevada.

Clearly, Heizer and Baumhoff painted themselves into a corner with their assumptions and found that getting out of the corner was not as easy as getting into it. However, with their limited knowledge of petroglyphs, they found it easy to make assumptions which, in their minds at least, straightened out the logic of their situation.

#### Hickison Summit

Hickison Summit provides us with a wonderful example of what can happen when people with limited experience enter into a research project with faulty preconceptions about their subject. The authors had assumed that all petroglyphs were concerned with the hunting of big game. They said: "The most reasonable assumption, we feel, is that the glyphs themselves, or the act of making them, were of magico-religious significance, most probably a ritual device to insure success of the hunt." (p11) Their conclusions as to the purpose of the glyphs may have been correct, but they badly erred in deciding what the glyphs represented.

The Hickison Summit site is the southwestern anchor of a group of sites in northeastern Nevada at which the overwhelming majority of the representational elements are depictions of female genitalia. Others have noted an occasional similarity between the depiction of deer

tracks and female genitalia. The depictions here are quite graphic so there should have been no confusion. Nearby sites have even more graphic representations of female genitalia so there can be no doubt as to what was intended. The sites are numerous enough and in a sufficiently compact area that they appear to form a separate cultural area. This area has been dubbed the Honeymooner's area after the example set by Zancanella and Amme, two archaeologists who have done research in the area.

Instead of having a big game hunting site located on a game trail, as explained by the authors at length, the site is apparently a site celebrating fertility or some aspect of the reproductive process. As to its being on a game trail, it may reflect the possibility that it may be hard to find a site anyplace in Nevada that is not located on or near a game trail.

### Conclusions

The book can be opened to almost any paragraph and questionable statements can be found in that paragraph. It is obvious that Heizer and Baumhoff knew almost nothing about petroglyphs nor about the Indians who made them. The conclusions of the authors have been colored by so much misinformation and by their own misconceptions that all their conclusions are to be seriously questioned. In the opinion of this reviewer, it would have been better if this book had never been written it is so full of misinformation and bad conclusions.



*Our old John was a man that we all got to know,  
His opinions, we all knew he had some.  
And the "rock art" of his state he'd willingly show  
On a field trip or at a symposium.*

We'll all really miss John, and the enthusiasm he had for the writings on rock that were in Idaho. He was a regular contributor to our symposiums, and we will miss the controversy he liked to stir up. He was a man who was truly dedicated to the study of rock writings. As a friend of his said, I may not have agreed with what he said, but I admired the way he said it!