

Creation and Calendars—Partners in Meaning

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In our efforts to decipher the meaning of southwestern rock art, Mary, my wife and partner of 43 years, and I have been trying to figure out the main subjects of this art and why they were chosen. We could then focus our studies.

Subjects we are frequently finding in rock art, seem to be gods, ceremonies, and mythic events. Often they seem, in our opinion, to be related to Creation Time, a period when all of these beings and happenings were ordained by the Creator. All of these are embodied in the stories and legends of the Native American cultures of the Southwest.

Another subject or aspect of rock art is the presence of mechanisms for telling the time of the year--an annual calendar. More and more researchers are identifying alignments of light and shadow to announce the solstice, equinox, and other key days in the year.

Creation panels are occasionally identified with these calendric mechanisms. We propose that that this association of Creation and calendars in rock art is no accident. They are linked and require each other. We will explain why.

We offer for your consideration research by Mircea Eliade, who is well known in rock art circles, for his studies on shamanism. We refer to Eliade's study on Creation as found in primitive societies around the world. His book *Cosmos and History: the Myth of the Eternal Return*, published in English in 1954 contains this research. We will summarize his work in this talk. Also, we are providing a copy of his book to the URARA Library for any of you who would like to pursue Eliade's research further.

Eliade offers the thesis that each year's annual cycle--with its birth, growth, maturity, and death of plants, animals, and people; with the ceremonies that mark each phase and season of the cycle--replays the myths of the original creation of this primitive society. The Myth of the Eternal Return is the return of the events of creation, replayed in song and ceremonies during each annual cycle. Creation returns each year and the tribe relives creation throughout the year.

Primitive societies usually begin each year with numerous ceremonies which separate the new year from the old year. This often took place on or near the winter solstice. A calendric device was required to announce this date.

Primitive societies continue through the new year with more ceremonies; each ceremony being a reenactment of some aspect of Creation Time. These ceremonies often are keyed to the seasons, again requiring a calendric device to signal the proper date for performance of the ceremony.

History as we know it in modern societies--which emphasizes secular happenings and historical people--is absorbed by primitive societies into this re-enactment of Creation Time, a time of the gods and heroes. History disappears into Creation Time. Primitive societies may be

said to live in permanent Creation Time.

Now these creation myths, with their annual cycles, seem to be set into a broader sequence of mythical cosmic ages, often three or four or more. In these ages the gods who created the world and its creatures come to realize that the age and its people they just created are flawed and must be destroyed. Fire, ice, floods, or other catastrophes inflicted by the gods end each age and in due time the gods try again with a new race of beings.

According to White Bear Fredericks and Frank Waters, the Hopi are today living in the Fourth World, Tu-wa-qachi--the World Complete, created by Taiowa, the Creator, after several failed worlds had to be destroyed. The Nahuas, the Meso-American people who encompass the Aztecs, are living in the era of the fifth Sun, named 4-Movement, following a similar sequence of failed worlds. Aspects of these failed ages can be found in the Creation myths, often as object lessons of what evil to avoid and what practices to be followed.

Recently we have been attempting to meet elders in Hopiland, using our two books, *The Field Guide to Rock Art Symbols in the Greater Southwest* and *Hopi Pottery Symbols*, as door openers. We have made a few visits, met a few friends, attended a few ceremonies, and visited a few rock-art sites. You might be interested in our thoughts about Creation and Calendars in the light of these visits.

As you know, it is at New Year time--this winter solstice time--in the Hopi ceremonial cycle when the Kachinas (ka meaning respected and china meaning spirit) return to Hopiland from the San Francisco Mountains to begin the ceremonies of the New Year. Some of these supernaturals are associated with events of Creation Time--a time when the gods and spirits helped the ancestors of the Hopi people survive and prosper. The Hopis look upon the Kachinas as beings who "bring all good things to the Hopis," to quote a Hopi friend who dances in these ceremonies.

As many of you know the arrival and departure of the Kachinas at a dance involves much gift giving by the Kachinas to members of the audience. Baked goods are passed out lavishly after the Kachinas come down the ladder into the kiva. On departure the Kachinas give oranges and apples to all. These gifts are symbols of the good things these supernaturals bring to the community.

Regarding history being non-existent and Creation Time being the here-and-now, we remember discussing with a Hopi elder the massacre at Awatovi where the Hopi traditionalists in the early seventeen hundreds killed off the offending people of Awatovi who were embracing Christianity. This elder had no recollection of such a massacre--it was not in his history memory if he had one. Yet he would sit and discuss with us how Massaw, his god and owner of the surface of the earth, was furious about the new water and sewer lines being constructed through the village. No one had properly asked Massaw for permission to disturb the earth--his

Massaw' earth. I could feel Massaw sitting grumpily at the oil-cloth covered table very much there and very much annoyed. It was the time of the Creation in my Hopi friend's house.

Parallels exist between the Hopi and other primitive societies. For example, the Tatars of Persia on the day of Nawroz, the Persian New Year, sow seven kinds of seeds in a jar and "from their growth . . . (draw) . . . conclusions regarding the corn of that year." (Eliade 1954:65). This seems highly similar to the planting of the beans in the kiva after the turn of the year in Hopiland--to prophesy the success of the crops to be planted in the spring in Hopi fields.

Now let me talk briefly about three rock-art sites in the Southwest that seem to exhibit my them, Creation and Calendars.

The first site is on private land near the Petrified Forest, northern Arizona. We used this panel (Exhibit 1) from the site as the cover of our book *A Field Guide to Rock Art Symbols in the Greater Southwest* published in 1992. We picked this panel for the cover because the overall display of symbols was representative of what you find on the rocks. We have come to develop a special respect for this panel. This site faces southeasterly and the panel is what we call "a pantheon panel," as it has many of the mythical gods and spirits of Creation Time on it. These symbols are some of the most common found in southwestern rock art.

At the top are three concentric circles which depict the sun. The outer circle is the ring of light around the sun, the next is the sun itself and the center circle is the hole or umbilicus of the creator, Taiowa, who stands behind the sun. It opens to spread the power and blessings of the creator upon the world (Patterson 1992:192). In my opinion, this panel is dominated by the Creator and his symbol, the sun symbol, and represents the Creator making the world and all its beings spirits and human beings.

The sky snake is directly below it; the one pole ladder or feather comes next; the lizard or earth mother figure, a spider or the grandmother figure, multiple snakes, the stepped pyramid, cloud symbols, and even a flute player appear up at the right.

The bluff across the valley has a prominent up-thrust rock which acts as a nomen or pointer on the winter solstice sunrise, casting its shadow down over this panel. This event on the winter-solstice sunrise signals the beginning of the New Year. Creation and the Calendar meet each winter-solstice on this rock-art panel, as the sun turns back north to begin the new annual creation cycle.

White Bear Fredericks in the *Book of the Hopi* (Waters 1963:61) tells us that the symbols of the sun and flute player--both are on this rock-signal the presence of the Sun and Flute Clans. White Bear goes on to say: "these two clans, the sun and the flute clans, work together in . . . rituals which help the sun to turn back at the times of the winter and summer

solstices.”

The next example (Exhibit 2) is the major panel at Sears Point on the Gila River in southern Arizona. Boma Johnson refers to it as “the Creation Panel.” A Puebloan elder called it by that name and explained the rock art to Boma almost 20 years ago. Boma has an article in press concerning this site, “A Lesson in Stone: The Sears Point archeological Site, Lower Gila River, Southwestern Arizona,” to be published under the editorship of David Whitley which we recommend to you when it is published.

The ubiquitous lobed staff is on the left--and is repeated again some 50 yards to the right, framing the glyphs of the Creation scene. The lobed staff, according to Boma’s Hopi informant, is a calendric device. Exactly how this device works and what it signifies was not explained to Boma.

We have some possibilities for your consideration. The staff may stand for the three, four or five ages or eras that are part of the Creation myths as described by White Bear. He portrays the ancient Hopi coming from the West on rafts over a great sea. They were interrupted by several cataclysms that wiped out other life forms, the Hopi surviving to arrive on the western shores of America. From there they migrated to the Hopi Mesas.

Other versions of the Creation myth describe the Puebloan people climbing upwards through several levels of the underworld to exit into the surface world thru the sipapu near the Grand Canyon. White Bear says this version is not correct; the true version is the overseas one related above.

Another possibility is one given me by a Hopi elder recently with whom I was discussing rock-art symbols (subsequent to the URARA meeting at Green River). He explained the lobed staff was a calendric device that specified the time interval between performances of a rite or ceremony. Each lob on the lobbed staff was a specific period of time--a month, year etc. This explanation implied that the figures and symbols in the panel associated with the lobbed staff were performing a ceremony. I intend to pursue this explanation with my Hopi friend.

This panel contains a concentric circle sun symbol with the hole or umbilicus in the center that opens as mentioned before. There is a grid below. I believe the grid represents this world we live in, either as the woven mats that were used for sitting or sleeping or were the layout of the fields assigned to the various farmers.

This panel also shows a vertical line--the axis mundi climbing to the sky and then the world tree in the form of a menorah. There are the mythical twin lions that helped the Creator in his work and the Creator himself in his big hands and feet aspect (Exhibit 3 & 4).

Oversize hands and feet, we think, were metaphors to designate the Creator's ability to create the world and his ability to travel the great distances required in this task. Unfortunately, Boma's Puebloan informant did not explain this aspect of the Creator.

In certain parts of Meso-America big hands and feet may have designated chiefs or gods according to one researcher, Gary Gossen, who has studied the languages and customs of various Mayan tribes. "An extremely common fixed couplet formula , , , which introduces many prayers . . . goes as follows:" I have come before your feet, I have come before your hands"" (Gossen in Bricker 1985:87)

We admit we may be stretching this evidence too far, but we are intrigued by the allusion in prayers to the hands and feet of the one to whom prayers were addressed. So often, especially in Archaic depictions, we see anthropomorphs who are mostly hands and feet. This occurs especially in Archaic panels.

At Sears Point there are solstice alignments, verified by Tom Hoskinson, the archaeoastronomer. A solstice sunrise occurs in a gap in the Oatman Mountains to the East. A solstice sunset occurs in a notch over Grannery Basket Peak to the West. These sunrises and sunsets were viewed, apparently, from a spirit or ceremonial path that crosses the top of the mesa.

The third site is at Parawan Gap, Utah. There is a great deal of rock-art in the Gap itself, but today I will refer to a panel within a cave in the Gap. Nal Morris calls this site "the large cave" which differentiates it from a smaller cave nearby. This "large cave" contains this interesting panel (Exhibit 5).

This "large cave" is directly below the profile of the Paiute creator god, Tibutz, which is outlined in the rock face of the over-hanging mountain. The whole area seems to be especially sacred to the Paiute tribe.

The main panel in this "large cave" has the lobed staff at the extreme left and right side of the panel. As to the meaning of this "framing" of the panel, I refer you to the discussion of the lobbed staffs at Sears Point. You might remember that caves were often shrines and/or special locations where offerings were made or ceremonies held.

We can only guess at the meaning of the other figures besides the lobbed staffs. The right-hand oval figure could signify the opening between the surface world and the sky world, plus a designation of the four directions. The left-hand grid figure could designate our surface world with a grid depiction of planting fields, sleeping mats, or whatever.

There are too many solar and lunar alignments at Parawan Gap to outline them here.

Nal Morris is "Mr. Calendar" and Parawan Gap is one of his masterpieces. Ways of determining the calendar using solar and lunar alignments are much in evidence.

Let me conclude by restating my opinion that Creation Time and devices for determining the time of year were major subjects on the rocks. They went together to tell the story of the unfolding annual cycle and to signal the proper time for the ceremonies that encouraged the success of this annual cycle.

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Exhibits

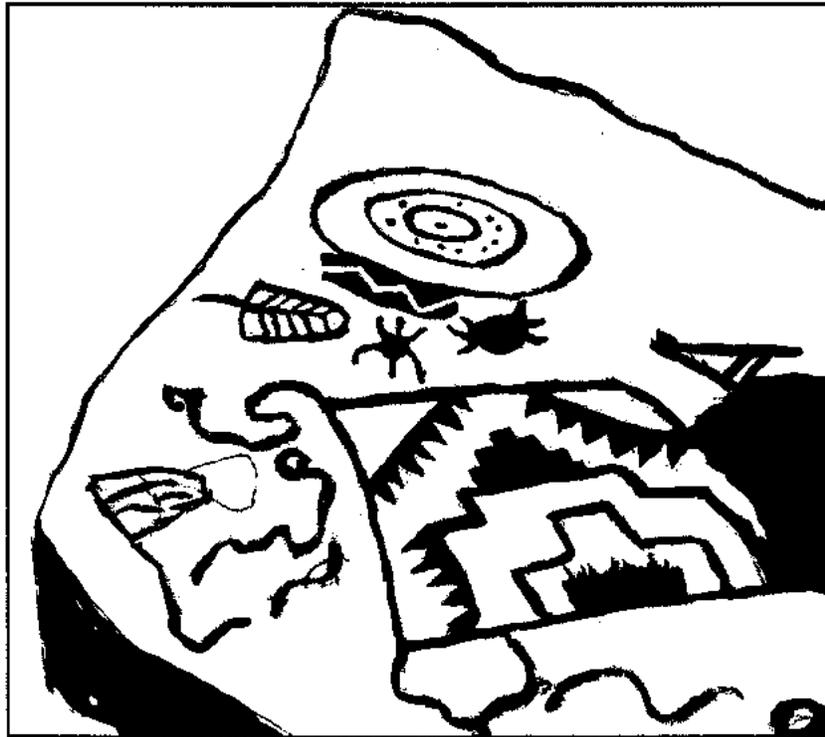


Exhibit 1 Panel at site on private land near Petrified Forest National Park, AZ

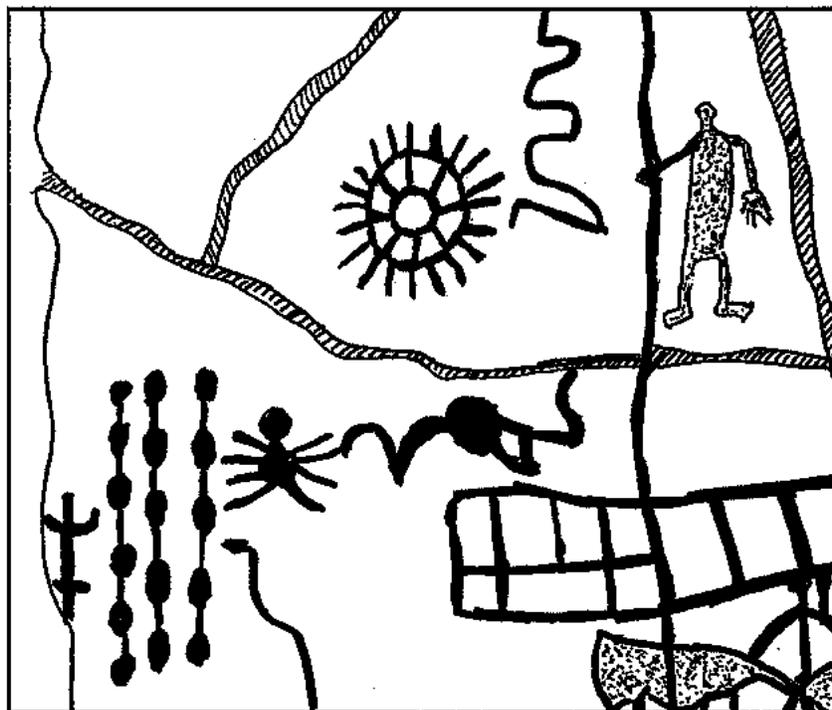
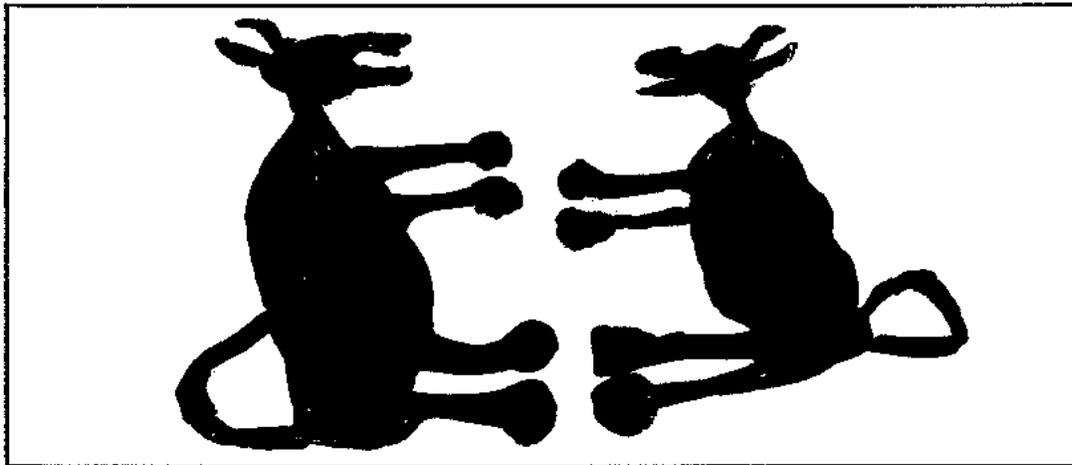


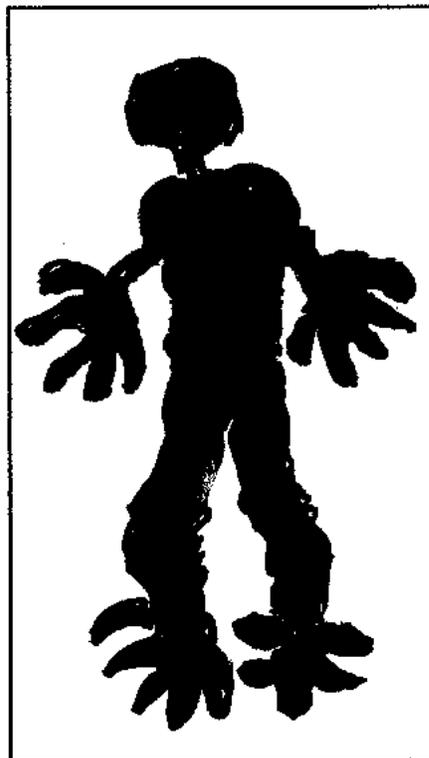
Exhibit 2 Beginning of so-called "Creation" panel at Sears Point, AZ



Individual elements from the "Creation" panel at
Sears Point, AZ

Exhibit 3 (Above). Legendary Twin Lions
who assisted the Creator during the orig-
inal Creation.

Exhibiti 4 (Right). Creator himself in his big
hands and feet aspect which allowed him to
complete the original Creation of the world.



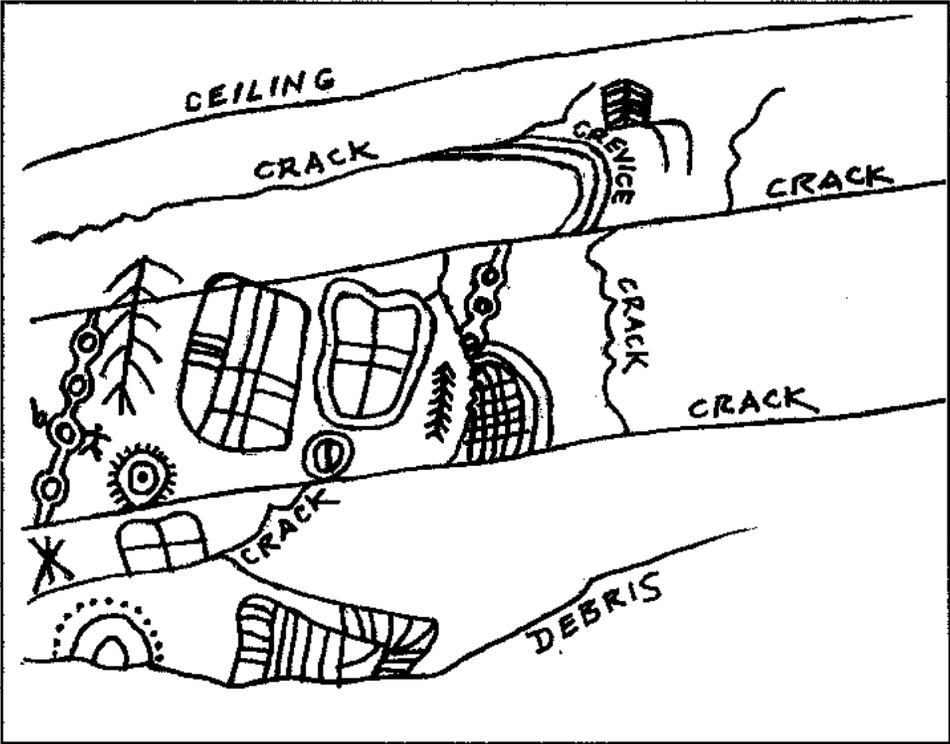


Exhibit 5 Panel in so-called "Large Cave" at Parawan Gap, UT (1995)