

Unique Repetitions

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INTRODUCTION

The name *unique repetitions* may at first sound like a serious contradiction or an oxymoron, since unique is often defined as single or sole, or being without a like or equal, and repetitions are a situation where it takes at least two or three somethings to repeat. I have defined unique repetitions, hereafter UR(s), as a set of figures that by their very nature, as a very limited group, are unique in their limited repetitions. These types of figures only repeat with an extreme minimum number of times. They are also a complex and unusual enough type of construction that they would be very unlikely to have originated independently by different individuals, so that any repetition(s) would seem to be related. Most often, they will repeat just once or twice (which makes two or three example, one original occurrence and one or two repetitions). Since that may be slightly restrictive, and because the evidence seems to predicate the placement of a reasonable limit on the definition, I have allowed its limit to expand; from three repetitions to as many as five in special cases, making a total of 5 or 6 examples. Any more than that and the element would come close to falling into the category of being a motif.

The first question is, why do such a thing as this? In my 1997 presentation of *A Few Curious Things* (to be published in the Patina series), I introduced the concept of URs and provided the framework and validity for considering URs as a valid category between the state of being an element and

becoming a motif, but did not illustrate those comments with any examples. Let me review and expand on those thoughts and explain the reason for such a consideration.

ELEMENTS

The word *element* has been defined as a single, identifiable unit of production. With that definition, we have to assume that the idea behind an element can range from an isolated dirt mark to a complex abstraction. Since the concept of an element is fundamental to this discussion let us examine it a little deeper than you have probably thought of it before. Before we can ever begin to understand these enigmatic symbols we need to begin to see what these ancient symbolists did in a way that is as close as possible to what they actually saw themselves doing. Without them that will be very difficult, if not impossible.

We talk about this and that as an element, but even on this fundamental level do we really see an element as the glyph makers saw and defined it? Moreover, are definitions really relevant? We consider an image as any definable, segregateable unit, when it is known from ethnography that the glyph makers did not see, define, or produce it that way. To them, each part of an element, and the individual element's part to the whole, was not segregateable as such. An element in our way of thinking is simply the most fundamental aspect of rock art terminology.

Even though the element is the lowest form of occurrence on the unique level of one, from a single dint mark to a single expression, but more complex form, combination, or context it is not just one simple idea or concept alone in-and-of itself. Elements are the common chaff that we throw into the intellectual hopper of the mill that grinds out meaningful facts and situations for us to then analyze and staticize. Even though elements can be isolated by us, they were not, as has been mentioned, isolated to the ones that made them. They're a part and a parcel of vast and rich symbolic packages, and we need to do what both Bill Dalton and Harold Tuchins (Native American consultants) said to do to find what I used to translate as meaning but knowing also fits. They said to look for every example of a specific aspect that can be found, then consider the similarities and study the differences. Why? Because similarities will help point out what is important (on the level of its motifness, on to becoming a convention), and the differences will teach us the most about the elements (how and to what they can be applied). That is what Dalton and Tuchins did, so that is what I try to do. For some reason, back then it sounded very scientific, and still does for the same reasons, but is it science, and does it need to be?

To be on the ancient symbolist's list (which did not really exist), of what an element is, consider that an element is not just what they produced alone, such as an anthropomorph. The person that anthropomorph represents had a character, a personality, a persona, a status and various relationships to other elements in a context with various masks hiding everything but the obvious. He also involves a positioning on the cliff to be involved with rock incorporations or

incorporating forms of light and shadows forming Symbolic Solar Interactions (SSI), or solar flairs, that are also part of the form, context, and concept of its elementness. It is not uncommon that the forms of light and shadow predicated the size, form, placement, and context of an element. The SSI, hole, crack, ridge, bulge, or solar flare is not just a part of the element; they are also elements within or by themselves. That is the way the makers of the figures looked at it, and some of us continue to ignore that fact. However, it is none-the-less a fact. And we only encapsulate what we see in the simple word, "element." That word without all this other vital information remains so crisp, and so clean, and so "scientific," but lacks so much of what we need to be seeing.

When we do what they did, we realize that isolation (i.e. a single human form on a rock face) is simply an abbreviation of a context and that no element, sign, symbol, icon, image, or SSI can ever be isolated. How many have ever thought of contexts as elements or motifs? Because of the evidence I have seen, I have been forced to accept that as well. Let me illustrate the importance of that, since it is so very important. Figure 1A provides a few examples of elements that are associated with rock features, but represented here without them. Figure 1A is the way we see them. Figure 1B illustrates why the natural feature is a major part of a glyph's elementness. The crack, or other forms of rock incorporation, the associations it has with other figures, the exact location, and then, last but not least, the time that it was meant to be viewed to complete the context, completes the concept that was being expressed, which is far beyond the essence of its form alone as an isolated element. Figure 1C illustrates light incorporated as a

vital part of what the meanings of these elements are.

With such considerations we have taken these figures out of the definition of a simple element and have put them into many different categories that each have become motifs or even conventions in-and-of themselves. Thus, the term element defined as an isolated figure is scientifically incompatible with the facts. If defined as any definable figure, as Schaafsma (1971:3) states, it, as a scientific term, is all right, I suppose. However, I am concerned about what is definable and how and from what areas of consideration it is defined, since many of our scientific definitions define things so differently and define so little. As long as we know that in our definition there will always be more than we currently realize and rock art elements are really, in the trueness of their original intent, undefinable, we are left to define what there is to define from our perspective, our vision, and in our words. We do this for all of our many unrealized reasons, not the reasons of the ancient symbolists, especially since the professional's vision of rock art is so low and when site reports ask for relatively nothing more than a presence of rock art, if that much. This will be expanded in detail in a future paper entitled, *Looking at Versus Seeing Rock Art*.

MOTIFS

The next category we have inherited by previous pioneers in this field of research is the next higher level in the progression of the percentage of occurrences of an element. That category is referred to as motif. Motifs are elements that have become major themes or concepts segregated from each other, as elements are by their forms, but that repeat enough times that they

eventually become distinctive subjects in a particular style. At that point they may eventually become hallmarks of their various styles or shared traits between styles; then they are recognized as conventions or conventionalized symbols.

Again, in our efforts to elucidate and nomenclate these categories we often fail to see what the glyph makers were really doing. Of course, we think we are intelligent enough to know that what they were doing was not really what we can process directly over into a "scientific" procedure. Therefore, in our efforts to be very scientific in our research, we feel the need to take what they did apart. We bend it and often have to break it to make it fit into our view of what would be an acceptable scientific cubbyhole or what I facetiously call "clatures of nomins." Into all of our various scientific categories, we seriously try to put all of the little bits and pieces of seldom-understood evidence so we can better, in the end, understand it. Now that really makes sense. It is ironic that if we really understood what they were doing that would be the best scientific procedure to define and analyze it by, but we do not, so we do not.

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Thus, feeling compelled to operate in the realms of scientificness, we quite often miss the point (their point), in our research.

After the term element, because of my research, my scientific bias calls for the insertion of another cubby-hole that tries to express a more complete approximation of what I think I see them doing. At least I believe this new cubby-hole brings this and other related areas of the symboling process a little closer to the ancient author's way of thinking and better enables us to get

a glimpse of what was going on in their minds. That is where unique repetitions come into play. This Category helps to provide me with another slot for things to fall out of the hopper into. In my research, I have been trying to be conscious of the frequency of symbol repetition with minor variations, and the limits of what those variations imply. I have noticed that there are a few figures that, on their way to becoming motifs, fall short of what I have defined as the adequate definition and numbers to actually become motifs.

The problem is, as far as I know, no one has ever considered this aspect of the process before. It is very difficult trying to blaze a new road through well-established scientific procedures when it is already a well-traveled highway, even though it takes us in the wrong direction. We have been taught that when an element repeats often enough it becomes a motif. However, what happens when it repeats, but not "often" enough to become a motif? Moreover, who has made the determination of how many times it takes to repeat before becoming a motif? Is our definition or limit equal to what I believe I see them doing? Maybe it is time to look at our definitions a little differently and think about their adequacy.

In my research in different categories of SSI, I felt I needed to find an area of symbolic expression repeat at least 12 times before I could seriously establish it as a valid category, a motif, or convention of light interaction. Why? Mostly just to be sure that I understood what they actually meant, and then to satisfy the possibility that they might not have meant something else.

A leading anthropologist, Dr. Marvin Harris, once said that to have more information

does not tell us any more about the subject (Harris 1989:vii). That is true if it is just a repetition of the same old information. This illustrates the importance of the "Limits of Variation," (next year's presentation), and was the basis for Tuchin's and Dalton's statement that it is the differences, the variations in those repetitions, that will teach one the most. Differences are not just more information; they are additional information. David Madsen and Asa Nielson, both prominent Utah archaeologists, made similar statements about the fact that another pit house or another arrowhead will teach us little more than we already know about who the Fremont Indians really were. It is very interesting that while many elements repeat so often and so similarly, the latter discoveries often tell us little more about their applications. That is what makes URs so very special, they are very seldom exactly the same. One or the other of the URs has the types of additional details to expand greatly our comprehension about them. In fact, they are very important in our use to determine the limits of variation, not only in form, but in application as well. Dr. Richard Cytowic (1993:138) in a similar discussion to this suggests that it is also very helpful to overwhelm the opposition with evidence.

Thus far I have identified 30 different categories of SSIs most of which have at least twelve repetitions. There are also a few categories that still have less than 12 examples present. Like URs, those SSIs with a lesser number of occurrences are probably motifs or even conventions, but the various degrees of repetition represent an aerial distribution of conventionality, or possibly fewer examples having been found. Those sparse numbers of URs and SSIs can also reflect areas where more exploration is needed, not just the lack of occurrence. Let

me restate that a little differently. It expresses a known number of occurrences, not the real number of occurrences. Low percentages of figures in the inventories are not always an indicator of nonexistence; they can equally represent a lack of recorded information. To be a true UR there will only be an extremely small number of occurrences, and thus it will be harder to find those repetitions, if in fact they do exist.

WHAT URs REPRESENT TO US

1- URs express the border between a simple presence at a site or in a style, and an element or its associated concepts becoming a motif or a convention.

2- URs express interesting concepts, ideas, and procedures, etc., that are not common to the site or common from the site level to that of the style.

3- URs illustrate the distribution or association of sites or styles not otherwise associated with only one occurrence of an element, versus two or three occurrences spread between different sites or styles.

4- URs illustrate innovations or different manners of representing an existing concept that did not succeed. These are ideas that may not have been an important association, form or context, to the style because it never grew or became accepted beyond the stage of the main level of the UR, the panel or site and sometimes beyond.

5- URs can express something in the intellectual (superorganic) domain, or the physical (organic) domain that were seldom or never expressed elsewhere.

6- URs illustrate the non-universal areas of symbolism. These areas were not generally shared between people or styles, or shared in the manner of the UR.

7- URs can also represent instances where the carrier of one symbol package moved

from one area to another, producing the only existing examples of his URs. Since these are unique enough they may even provide a specific example of thumb printing of individual glyphmakers in relation to other associated glyphmakers.

8- URs can also represent one or two more contexts to help expand the present limited knowledge of the one or two previously known examples.

9- URs often provide us with different contexts, associations and variations that help us identify the limits of their variations, and more information to help us to extract more variables about form, meaning, application or function.

10- URs thus help us to better see and understand the symboling process. They help define the existence and use of a known reservoir of symbols that became a shared knowledge of their makers.

11- Rather than an examination of elements alone, URs are at the foundation of an analysis of symbolism, because they illustrate how extensive the association and situation is that they occur in and what form the association takes, as well as how well it was accepted. This cannot be delineated by a study on the level of elements or motifs alone.

12- Lastly, they can express the limits of expression of one concept and the beginning of the expression of that or a similar form in an another concept.

URs can occur in:

- The same panels.
- Different panels at the same site.
- Different but associated sites (same style).
- Different non-associated sites at greater distances (same style).
- More distant sites of different (contiguous) styles.

- More distant sites of noncontiguous styles (e.g., several states apart).

In the last situation there needs to be some serious consideration in respect to independent invention or diffusion. Examples that occur beyond contiguous styles may be part of what is called universal symbolism, and then the symbols will not be URs. This is a slightly different area than independent invention that I will not go into in this presentation, except to say that independent invention would preclude the possibility of its being a UR, since we are defining it as unique in that it would be complex enough a construct to be very difficult or improbable for another glyph maker to come up with the exact same design, configuration of form, or context. Because we are dealing with the human mind, and the possibility and problems with the principal of universal consciousness, that possibility cannot be ruled out.

The following examples follow the general categories expressed above rather than the meanings of URs to us, and illustrate the importance of considering URs as a new and important category for future use in research. Since this will be the subject of concern for a chapter of Volume 4 of *Rock Art and The Symboling Process*, there will only be enough examples here to illustrate the intended importance. In that volume, I will delve into URs from the view of those 12 points. In Figures 2-6, the illustrations have been broken down into the following categories without any discussion. Figures 7A-10B will be considered for their special contributions. These are by no means all of the examples. They were picked because they seem to represent a broad spectrum of problems encountered with URs. Their provenance has not been included because it is not important to the concepts

being considered here beyond an association on the same panel to their occurrence in vastly distant areas. Provenances will be provided in the chapter that deals with them in Volume 4 of *Rock Art and The Symboling Process*.

These are some of the categories

- URs at the level of the same panel (Figures 2A and B).
- URs at the level of the same site (Figures 3A and B).
- URs at the level of associated sites of the same style, to more questionably related styles (Figures 4A and B).
- URs at more distant sites of the same or similar styles (Figures 5A and B).
- URs at more distant sites of what we call different styles (Figures 6A and B).

These categories may even become important in considering what we call style and stylistic associations. These examples represent the limit and the boundaries of URs. Many of these in Figures 6A and B are doubtfully URs.

Figure 7A for some time was felt by many members of our organization to have been modern vandalism. The human form looked too modern, and the arrow through him looked too phony. This figure occurs on a panel at the upper end of Buckhorn Wash. After finding just one other example of a very similar figure, produced in an identical technique at another site in the canyon without the arrow, it became more likely that it was not modern vandalism, but a more historic artifact.

There is one fact that provides good evidence that the second figure, and by extension the first, were not non-native productions. That evidence consists of the column-like figure with the partial rayed circle on top to the left of the figure (on our

right). This, as it turns out, no doubt represents a geographical feature (an inaccurate and misinterpretive term without any proof). However, the existence of a similarly shaped geological feature helped in the discovery of this panel. While I was looking for the place to stand to observe the sunrise on the top of a pinnacle on the skyline on an important solar date, I found I was photographing the sunrise on the pinnacle right in front of this figure that duplicated me (the observer), the pinnacle and the sun. No other examples of this type of figure have been found within Buckhorn Wash, the rest of the San Rafael Swell, or beyond that area that I know of.

Three historic examples also illustrate the same problems that we are faced with in the study of more ancient symbols. Figure 8A, occurs in an overhang in Barrier Canyon. Figures 8B and C occur next to each other in Clear Creek Canyon. The time sequence of the last two are not exactly the same. All three of them, being very unique in shape, share the same symbolism. Figure 8C, was made with a metal tool, while the technique of Figure 8B, looks not that different from aboriginal work. In fact, the difference in repatination and weathering between the two that are side by side would make one believe that the left one was much, much older. That may be an example of the inability to trust either factor in dating, since all three examples of these are probably of Anglo production. This implies that there cannot be that great of an age difference between the two Clear Creek examples.

Figures 9A and B occur in one of the canyons on the Ute Reservation. They do not occur at the same site, but at sites in the same general vicinity. They pose one of the problems that we have in this type of research that involves the limits of varia-

tion. When an UR has achieved a certain degree of repetition, one can begin to explore the limits or range of its acceptable variations. That means, when does this symbol stop representing what the more identifiable form does and start to represent something else? Many times the symbol begins at that point to develop into either an extended application of the original symbolism or a markedly different symbolism altogether. An example of that is Figure 10. Many believe two joined triangles simply represent conflict or war; which can be a misinterpretation because they are much more complex than that. First of all these are not complete triangles. In addition, joined triangles may also represent several different objects and concepts. With URs we do not have the luxury of enough repetitions to make those judgments based on similarity of forms rather than their differences.

Since Figures 9A and B are the only two and they are so close in their proximity, it is felt that the negative eye-like feature has a greater influence on the identification and or semantics of the symbol than does the outline of the form that houses the eyes. Also, remember that orientation is not associated with what the object of consideration is, but how it is being used (i.e. orientation represents part of the meaning of a figure and not always what it is).

The differences in the X-like or joined partial triangle-like symbols from the same area as Figure 9 also illustrate these problems in the limits of variation just discussed. The compound elements in Figure 10 are probably Ute cattle brands, but that is an assumption of some researchers. After a study of other brands from the area, I have found that there were not any others that had a plus-like sign or equilateral cross

above partially closed X-like triangular symbols. Both of these X-like forms are very vulva-like in their own different ways, which may be part of their symbolism. Without more examples and contexts, it is impossible to say.

Figures 11A and B, includes the only two examples of one type of abstract human form of which I am aware. These two figures have looped lines that join the arms and feet on each side of the body to create what is very similar to and probably a representation of the lobed circle symbolism. The Lobed Circle (a descriptive term) or Lobed Pendant (an interpretive term) complex existed within a complex but finite frame of reference in the Basketmaker styles of the lower San Juan River area and a limited area beyond. The first and more complete figure comes from the banks of the San Juan River near Bluff, Utah. The second example comes from a panel in the Petrified National Forest, Arizona. This example of a UR, along with several other figures that were more successful in becoming motifs and hallmarks of that group, help tie those panels together with others of that style. These two distant sites and their associated styles are considered as separate styles by geography, and are generally felt to be of a different time frame. Can we here assume that because of their similarity they may be somewhat contemporaneous? Was there a diffusion of the idea? Those are tricky questions to answer, and without more information is impossible. If the Utah example ties into the Lobed Circle complex as it seems likely, these two figures add a few additional and different pieces of information to what was known about those symbols that is not obvious in other isolated or incorporated examples of lobed circles. If these do in fact belong to that more complicated Lobed-Circle com-

plex, then they may represent other areas of extension of that symbolism not previously illustrated by them or considered by us.

In two independent research projects, neither author considered this application or several other incorporated examples of that form as a possible variation, exemplifying that the idea and importance of considering the limits of variations is an important point that others haven't caught on to yet (Manning 1990, and Patterson and Patterson 1993).

PROBLEMS IN PROPERLY DEFINING URs.

After looking at these illustrations, the thought arises; have I properly identified them? What exactly is, or is not, an UR? It is often easier to identify what something is by looking at what it is not. Those thoughts guided the decision of which examples to include and which not to include as URs. In conclusion and to exemplify that, take a moment and examine and contemplate the cases in Figures 12A-C that are not felt to qualify as URs. I will not explain the reason why not at this point, but leave them for you to ponder. Some reasons are obvious and others are not, depending on what one does or does not see, know, or understand.

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