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BOATS IN THE DESERT—PART II

Ancient representations of boats from around the world have long provided a baseline from which to understand variations in boat forms.

Figures 1 and 2 contain only a few examples of ancient old world watercraft. The problem is, they were ships hauling more than just a man across a river or a lake. Here, especially in our deserts, it is assumed that boat shapes would be much more simple, since a raft, canoe or hide boat is about all that we may expect.

Assistant Utah state archaeologist Ron Rood created a reed boat as a project for the 1997 Utah Arts Festival. Its form was created after those seen in early photographs from Nevada (Fig. 3). That boat was not a modern form of transit learned from immigrants. It's part of a long Native American tradition. Since ancient boats did exist in our American deserts, what would their images have looked like on the rocks? What would indicate their being a boat rather than representing something else? In other words, how does one define the concept of boat when there are so many different possibilities? Figure 4.1-2, illustrates two boat-like elements from America that have been identified through ethnography as Native American boats. Figure 4.1A is a supposed record of a sighting of John Wesley Powell, and Figure 4.1B is a very close representation of a boat that ran the Green River in the late 1800's. It was found in Nine Mile Canyon. The reason for including those two is to demonstrate that on both of our seashores records of sightings were made and that other glyphs may also be records of sightings of non-native craft. Hopefully we have eliminated those and European ships, because that is not our concern here.

Our concern is native water craft. At first we may ask, do the examples in Figure 5 and 6 fit within the limits of what may be called a boat?

The assumed answer is that they are all likely, to one degree or another, but without being able to prove any of them, scientific logic and objectivity prohibits that assumption. A better question then, may be which are more likely candidates and which ones are less, to least likely? Those not selected as boat-like enough, in the end analysis, will be a good cross reference for the limits of their variations. But before any can be totally discounted as extreme examples of possible boat forms or something other than a boat, there has to be another more logical explanation for them, with sufficient supportive examples. Just saying I do or don't think so doesn't work.

To suggest or identify a boat we will probably have a cross section or side view of a hull, with added detail suggesting passengers, paddles, push poles, cargo, or rigging. In more natural, identifiable representations there may not be very much detail, and less if stylized or abstracted. Remember that the Argo, the ship of dead Osiris was represented by just a stern (De Santillana and Von Dechend 1992:281, 302). So with the abstract cases we may be faced with some serious identification problems. Most examples in Figures 4.1-2, to 6, really don't raise anything supporting their being more probable than possible. In fact they seem to be at the extreme of what could possibly be imagined as boats.

Compare Figures 4.1-2, with 5 to 7, which contain those that are a little more question

able. Remember that even though the form of the simplest watercraft may be no more than a flat line with a slight curve on one end (Figs. 4.1C, 5O, 11E, like 3A), to a slight crescent shape (Figures. 5T, 9C), there would no doubt be more detail to keep it from being too ambiguous. Which ones could we suppose are not likely candidates for a version of some type of watercraft, if any?

There are several goals divided between both authors. We each believe that there are legitimate boat representations out there, and that within a certain range of forms many will probably be difficult to identify. Because of that, the main goal of Warner's is to examine and test the limits of variation of when an element is or isn't a boat and why. Because of expected ambiguity in the symbolism, we have also looked for what else can be a boat, or what else a boat can be.

Bowen made a contribution that as far as we know of, no one else has thought of. There is an obvious logic that says boats and water go together. That not only suggests that there may be a better chance of finding boat images next to navigable water sources, but that those examples of possible boats found where they could have actually been used may up the likelihood of their actually being a boat. Most of the watercraft around our country occur near navigable water, but what about out in our interior deserts?

Because of other extenuating evidence, it seems that there may be two basic categories for boat expressions. The first and most obvious is the basic transportation and economic functions of watercraft here in our deserts. This will be addressed in the second part of this paper by Bowen. The second is the mythological implications or associations that water craft may have. The following hopefully illuminates the second category.

The example in Figure 7A could be a man in a boat floating on water represented by a crack like 7B, with actual wave-like lines. That possibility seems easy enough to identify after it has been described, and your mind has received and accepted that mental image, but is that what it really represents? In the Navajo world of ceremonial symbolism, there are many aquatic metaphors such as floating or flowing for certain types of movement in certain ceremonial situations. If cracks are a symbol of the entrance to the unknown, otherworldly, the esoteric, and "shamanistic" realm, could it then not be a boat, but a trip just the same; in other words, a human represented in a boat form?

Could the lines from the torso just as easily be his legs in a squatting posture, exaggerated into a boat-like fashion conveying the idea of traveling in that fluid-like realm? If he is not in a boat then it may simply suggest traveling or just being in that fluid-like subliminal state. That could be analogous to putting wings on heavenly beings to indicate the concept of flight. If he is in a boat and traveling in that same supernatural realm, then boats may relate to that state. That seems just as likely and is supportable by ethnography. If so, and we just missed that point, we may want to know why the seeming ambiguity (mentioned earlier).

Was the use of the boatness to his legs an intentional double usage of symbolism: a pun or metaphor if you will? The form of his legs would then be like a determinative, suggesting the floating nature of his condition (c.f. Vastokas and Vastokas 1973:128-9). The answer to the question beginning this paragraph will correspond to how many other relatable examples we can find and verify. It will take more than just Figure 7C, D and E.

The basic assumption is that the boat has to be more than just a line or especially a cres-

cent to keep it from being confused with, say a vulva variant or a lunar form, unless of course there is a vulva, and or lunar and boat relationship. If the basic shape of this boat is a crescent, with a vertical aspect for a person, and part of its structural rigging such as a mast or support, do the objects in the rest of this illustration pointed out with little arrows suggest reversed, receptive vulvas or boats?

Figures like 7C-E, which seem more obvious than 7G which is more abstract, are really no different than 5A or a few of the other examples we've shown, most of which were felt in a test or poll to be good candidates for being boats. Figure 7G is in a context with what appears to be a detached, three fingered arm or bird leg, and a likely detached phallus (Warner 1999). Appendix A contains an assortment of what may be hands or feet filling the function or playing the role of a phallus. That suggests that the three-fingered object may also be a phallus just as much as the more natural one above it. Compare Appendix AS with Figure 5R, paying particular attention to the unincorporated phallus to the upper right of S in Appendix A. Most of the examples in Appendix A were selected from a variety of other forms because they were three fingered or toed on a long arm like the one in 7G and many others that occur with boat-like symbols.

The next thought that comes to mind then, is the little inverted, bisected crescent that the arrow points to. Is it a reversed vulva form, a boat, or now a bird track? Which is most likely? It is interesting to know that if it is a bird track, it could also be a good candidate for being a vulva form as well, since many birds, bird-like feet and bird tracks are represented as being vulva variants (Appendix B. Warner 1999, Ewing 1998). It is also interesting to note that according to Ayto there is some speculation as to the original meaning of bird, especially concerning the concept of

breed and brood. He suggests that as early as 1300 A.D., bird was used for girl... No doubt a confusion with burde, a Middle English word for young girl (Ayto 1990:64). Remember Aldonza, the little bird in the cinnamon tree in Man of La Mancha. In America, bird became chick. Ancient symbolism from all over the world suggests that bird and female associated symbolism is really very early.

Whether or not the three fork object is or either phallic or a vulva form, the positioning of the inverted, bisected crescent-like boat below the phallus does seem to support the possibility of it being a vulva variant, or possibly a determinative for the vulva association of the bird-like foot to the right of and below it. Look at the examples in Appendix B very closely. Notice that it contains examples like this and other three digit hands or feet as vulva forms, and bird body-like forms felt by the author to be associated with the vulva concept. It's contexts like these, and hopefully better ones that will add support for their likelihood as being either boats, vulvas, bird tracks, or what ever else they may be.

The presence of a hand or foot with a boat to some authors is a reference to the presence of a deity (Gimbutas 1991:247, Farley 1998:150). Is the three fingered hand-like form next to the smaller boat-like element at the right of 7K a more natural representation of the possible more abstract one, which is a part of the right end of the boat-like form to the left in 7K? That element, if a hand, has an exaggerated and complicated middle finger. If it is a boat, it is much more complicated than say, 5F, R and maybe P, 7M and O. That aspect is more identifiable in Appendix C.

To understand the possible associations of vulva forms with boats we need ethnography. For that aspect, the Maya are a good place to

begin. From ancient Mayan artifacts, there is some very interesting evidence that the boat, often a canoe, takes the soul of the deceased to the land of the dead. The Milky Way in some cultures represents the road or river that the deceased travel to their destination (De Santillana and Von Dechend 1992:246-7, Hudson and Underhay 1978:118,119,121). To the Maya, a certain portion of the Milky Way, when horizontal just above the horizon, represents the canoe of death. Its entrance into the portal is as it begins to dip and sink out of sight below the horizon (Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993:73, 79, 82, 89, 90, 105, Gillette 1991:34, 91, 137).

At least one eccentric flint has been interpreted as the moment the canoe begins to sink below the surface of the water (horizon) taking its passengers to Xibalba, the realm of the underworld, like Odysseus to Hades. Figure 8A, depicts three faces reared back in anticipation of that final plunge (Gillette 1997). There are other representations that more clearly depict this voyage (Figure 8B-E). Could we have that type of mythological representation here in our imagery, verses the simple traveling or economic use of a boat alone as in 8F? It's possible, but not proven with ethnography.

That is the type of stuff that lies behind their closed doors, as Father Berard Haile talks about and one author found while on the Navajo reservation (Haile 1977, Warner 1997:11, Freidel, Schele and Parker 1993:204, 210, Classen 1993:36-7).

Even though there is a vulva likeness to many of these possible boats or symbols associated with them, along with many unincorporated phalli, it's hard to really say that the final trip in death, rebirth or resurrection is being portrayed by the presence of these fertility symbols with boats. One interesting panel may relate to this symbolism in an unusual way.

Figure 9A from the Northwest Coast may provide another clue. If upon seeing a foreign seagoing vessel for the first time, and having a belief that boats took passengers to the land of the dead, could they have drawn the composition of a ship moving towards a vulva with those thoughts in mind?

How do we know for sure that the bisected oval is a vulva form? Its likeliness is based on the fact that it occurs near the next illustration of "the girls that take their wares to town" in 9B. There are 12 vulvas depicted between those two girls, and a total of 18 like the one in 7A at the site. I doubt the interpretation of prostitute as it has been defined is an accurate understanding of this rendition. In all likelihood they may just as easily be offering "life" instead of pleasure, like Siduri the divine barmaid of Gilgamesh, or Aegir's wife Ran, who welcomed the dead to her ante-chamber between dying and the land of the dead, who has been likened to Saint Gertrude, patron of sea voyagers and hostess of the souls first night after death (De Santillana and Von Dechend 1992:208,210, 294-5). But that's only a thought. Before you dismiss that thought of a vulva and a ship occurring together as having a reference to anything but death or otherworldliness, note the vulva pecked around a natural cleft in the rock along a crack to our right of the main female figure. That alone associates the vulva form with the supernatural and every unknown thing that cracks are associated with, especially cracks being conduits for spirit travel. In no other publication that includes that figure has anyone ever made reference to that aspect of the panel that I can find. It is there, and it is an important part of the story and its composition.

Notice the other boat-like forms in Figure 9 that are associated with vulva-like forms next to them. Bovine heads on cows may also have a vulva relationship (Warner nd). It is

interesting that Higgins suggests that at the Clo-oose site not that far from Figures 9A and B, some of the petroglyphs of ships there are believed to represent the 1896 shipwreck of the "John Bright," (Hill and Hill 1974:72). A coincidence of course, but a very interesting one.

Without leaving those thoughts or making up your mind, take a look at a few other situations to see what they suggest. In Figure 10 there are a few figures that seem to be fair possibilities as being boats or at least boat-like, especially those on the bottom row. In 10A, we are again dealing with the aspects of a crack, not exactly like 5R. Notice again that this composition has both phallic and vulva-like associations. Those concepts would not seem to be so foreign to what might be expected as an example of that voyage of rebirth. One author calls that Mayan belief resurrection (Gillette 1997).

Note the line from the head of the human-like form standing in the boat-like object. It has a square attached to it that seems associated with the similar, square-like notch in the crack. Anomalies, disconformities and bends in the course of things like rivers are power spots (Classen 1993:14, 15, 82, 84, Devereux 1994:81).

The boat-like object he seems to stand in was examined at 1997's URARA symposium in an examination of *The Limits of Variation*. In that article it was shown to belong to a file of figures representing unincorporated sheep horns, often functioning as a vulva form (Warner nd 1999, Appendix E). If that is the case then, could we call that expression of it a horn-vulva form boat? Note that this example also contains a sideways E, or three-fingered hand-like form as does 10G, which supports that it is a figure in a boat if 10G is in the same context.

The element below 10A was suggested to be a boat with it's reflection in the water. Note its similarity to the last two examples in Figure 5. That makes three possibly related forms using this reflective imagery. Figure 5V is the same as 4.1D.

Reflections and thus reversed and attached images are often felt to indicate the other-world, or its presence (Tylor 1964:59, 61, 128, 173, compare pages 11, 57, 185). However, 10A, and 5V, W, may no more represent a boat than something else. If they all represent the same concept, it's interesting there are only three of these found by the author so far, making them another example of a Unique Repetition; not enough to provide the evidence or detail necessary to help solve the questions they pose.

Pools of water and lakes all over the Americas, like the rest of the world, are often associated with entrances to the land of the dead (Bord 1997:122, Freidel, Schelè and Parker 1993:135, 139, 143, 157, 188, 283, 366-7, Gimbutas 1991:249, Devereux 1994:125, Thompson 1970:180, 256, Tylor 1964:58, 63).

The man-like figure, seeming to stand in an animal-like boat in 10B, is one of those that seems to be a reversible figure. In other words, he's just as logical upright as reversed. If it is a reversed man (or reversible), who is to say that he is not one who can come and go from that watery world of the unknown? After all, that watery realm is the part of the world where things are reversed to our vision.

A reversed man does not always mean death, like some want us to believe. To the Hopi as well as the Navajo, it also represents situations that can be like death. The out-of-body or near-death-experience is well within the

realm of a reversible figure (Warner 1990 sec.5:1, 1994:127, Gillette 1997:44, 45).

By coming at this symbolism from another point of view, we can see things a little differently. There is one thing, however, that jumps out that we can immediately see. It is that in some of the previous examples, the crescent we supposed to represent the boat may in fact represent footless legs in an odd, unnatural position. This form or context, interestingly, may represent the ecstatic experience. As Boma Johnson, the BLM archaeologist in Yuma, Arizona suggests, they likely represent the idea of their "floating". Their use of floating was not meant as floating in a boat in the water, but in the air during the moment of ecstasy. The top row of Figure 11 illustrates examples of human forms with flat to crescent-like legs in the boat-like position, but with feet. Take the feet off and we have the examples in Figure 5. Vastokas and Vastokas (1973:128-9) mention that shaman used boats to travel in their ecstatic experience. That implies that some may be puns on the shape and function of the idea behind the form.

In Figures 10N and O, there are two forms of crescent/V forms that may be more likely to be vulva forms rather than or as well as boats. Compare them with the vulva like Vs or right angles in 10P.

Comparing these examples with the previous ones will eventually bring one to the real moment of illumination. That vision is that of a man in a boat floating at the watery door, the metaphoric entrance of Xhibalba, or the man floating in the air during a moment of ecstasy, which is essentially the same thing. The only difference is that in the one case he returns, and in the other it's his final voyage. Out of the four conditions just described, all are essentially different in the long term, but may hold the same symbolism and be repre-

sented much the same in the short-term graphic scenario. That is not only an accident of the process of symbolization, but of the metaphorical exploration of symbolism. When they found different symbols of different things represented differently in some aspects yet the same in others that can mean much the same thing. It seems to have created even more power in that type of symbolism.

The conclusion seems to be that there were boats, but what were the boats? Boats were to help make it easier to fish, hunt waterfowl, gather reeds and other aquatic plants by, and transport people and goods. But how many of them identified in this paper represent that activity verses the other possibility, which is the voyage into the unknown; either to the land of the dead or just the ecstatic experience.

This is described very well by Gillette (1997:23) when he states that the Maya sought for the secret connections between things. The moral of this story is that things are not always what they seem, and we need to keep an open mind.

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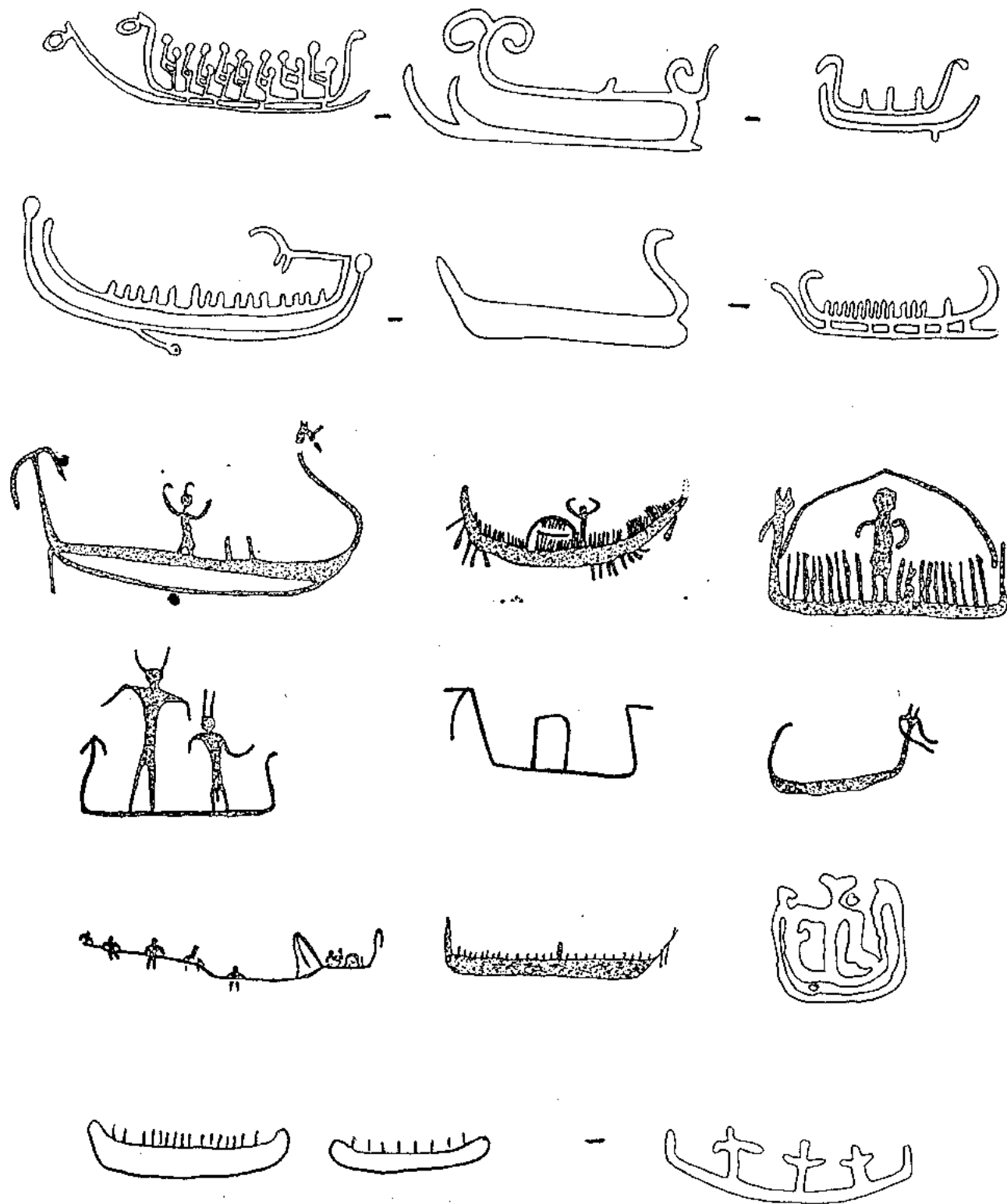


Figure 1

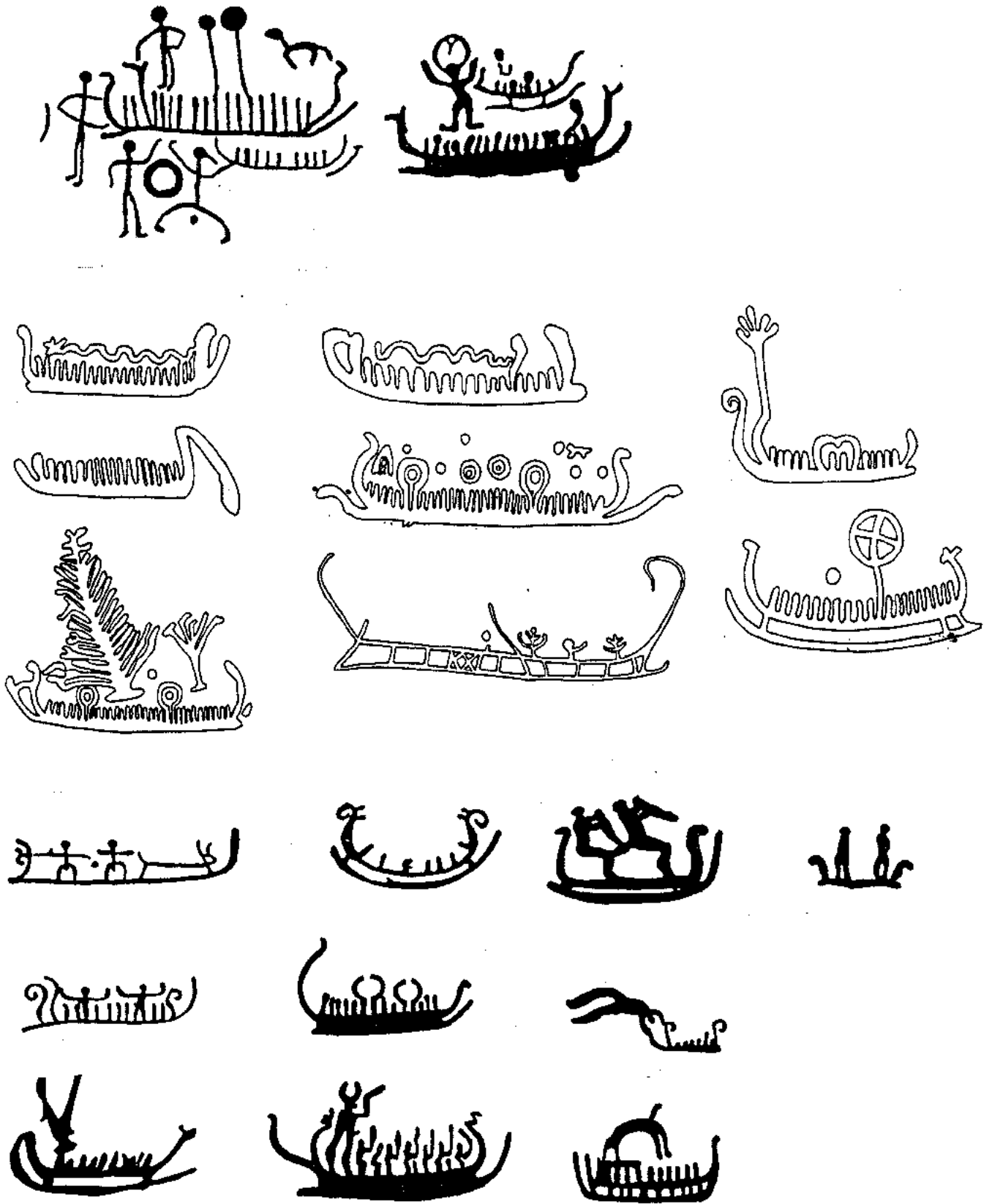


Figure 2

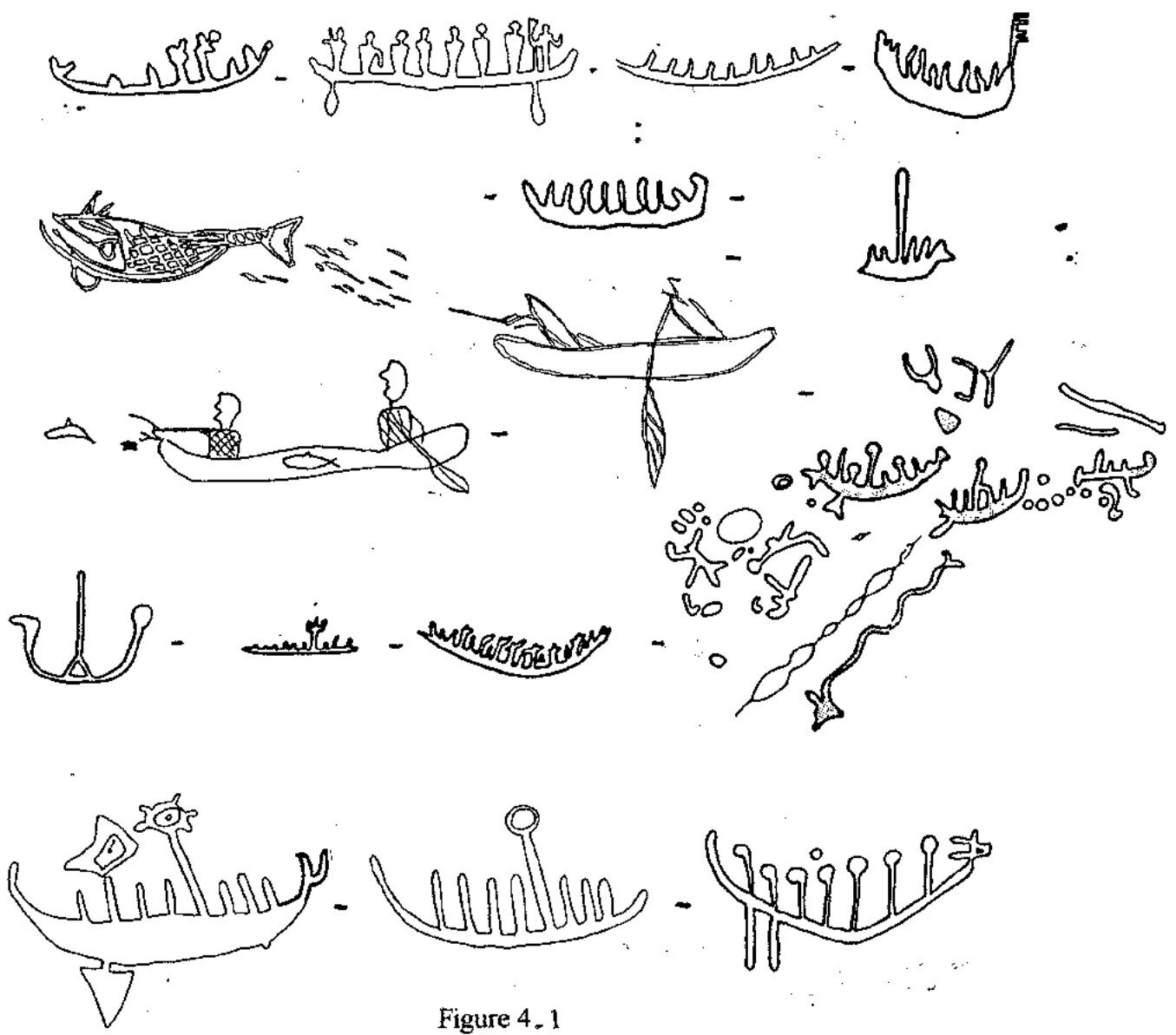
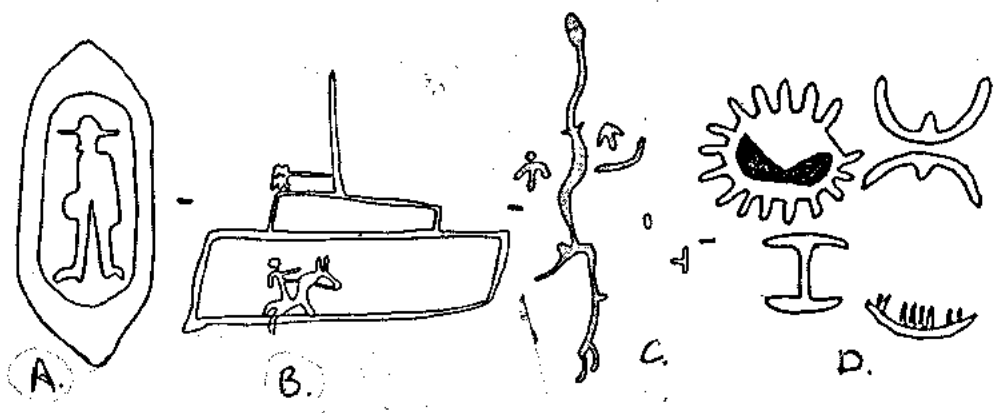


Figure 4. 1

H. 4

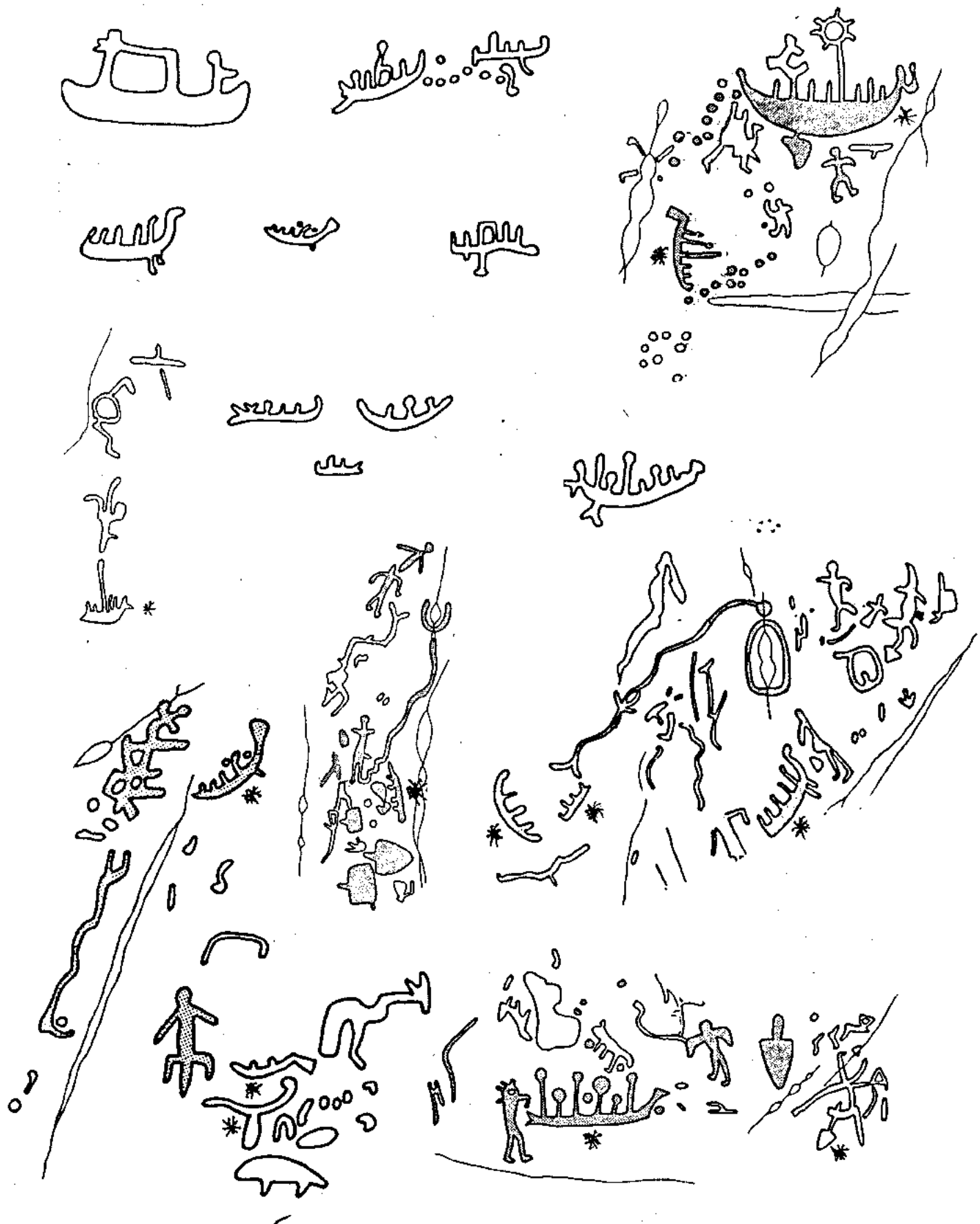


Figure 4.2

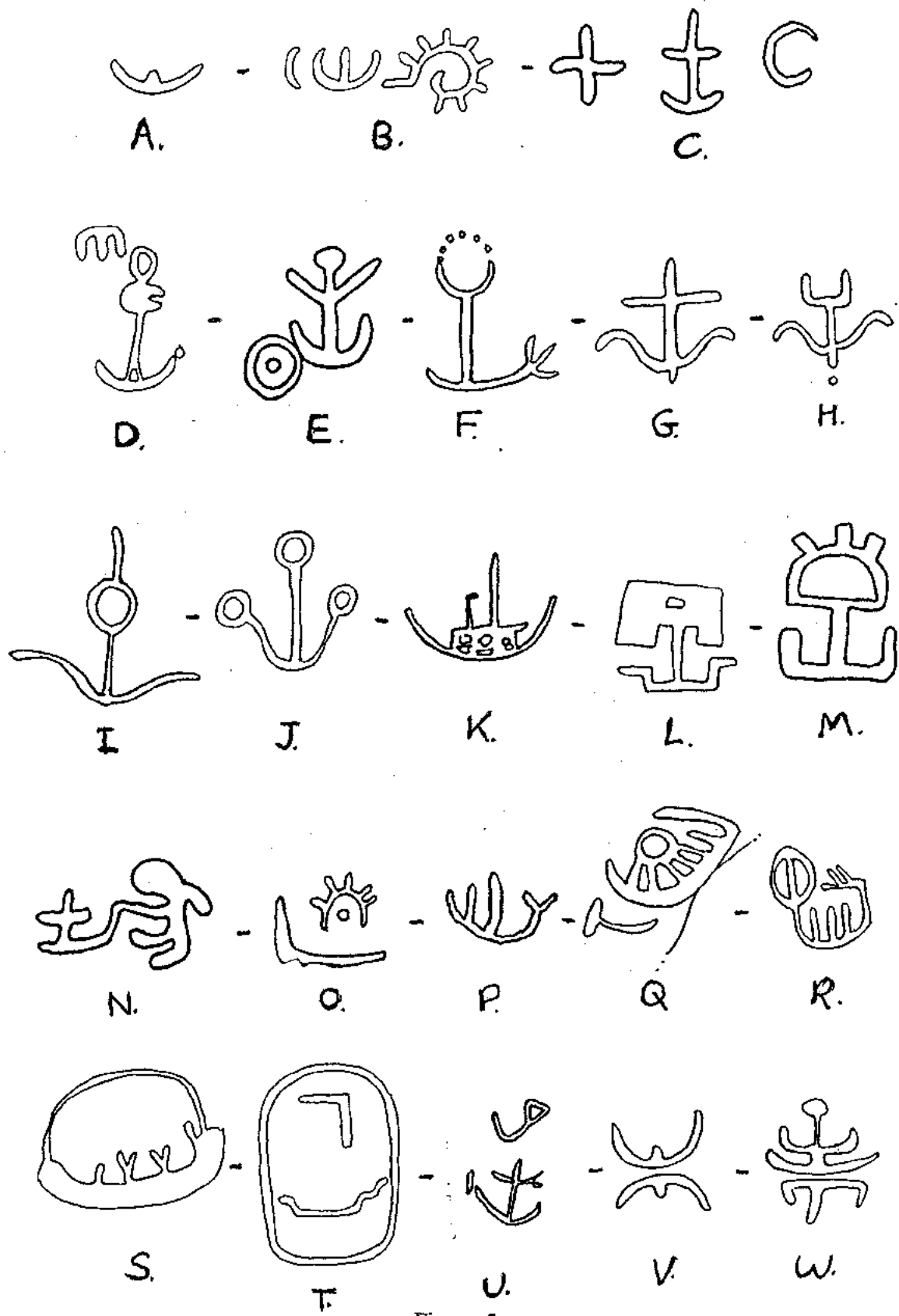


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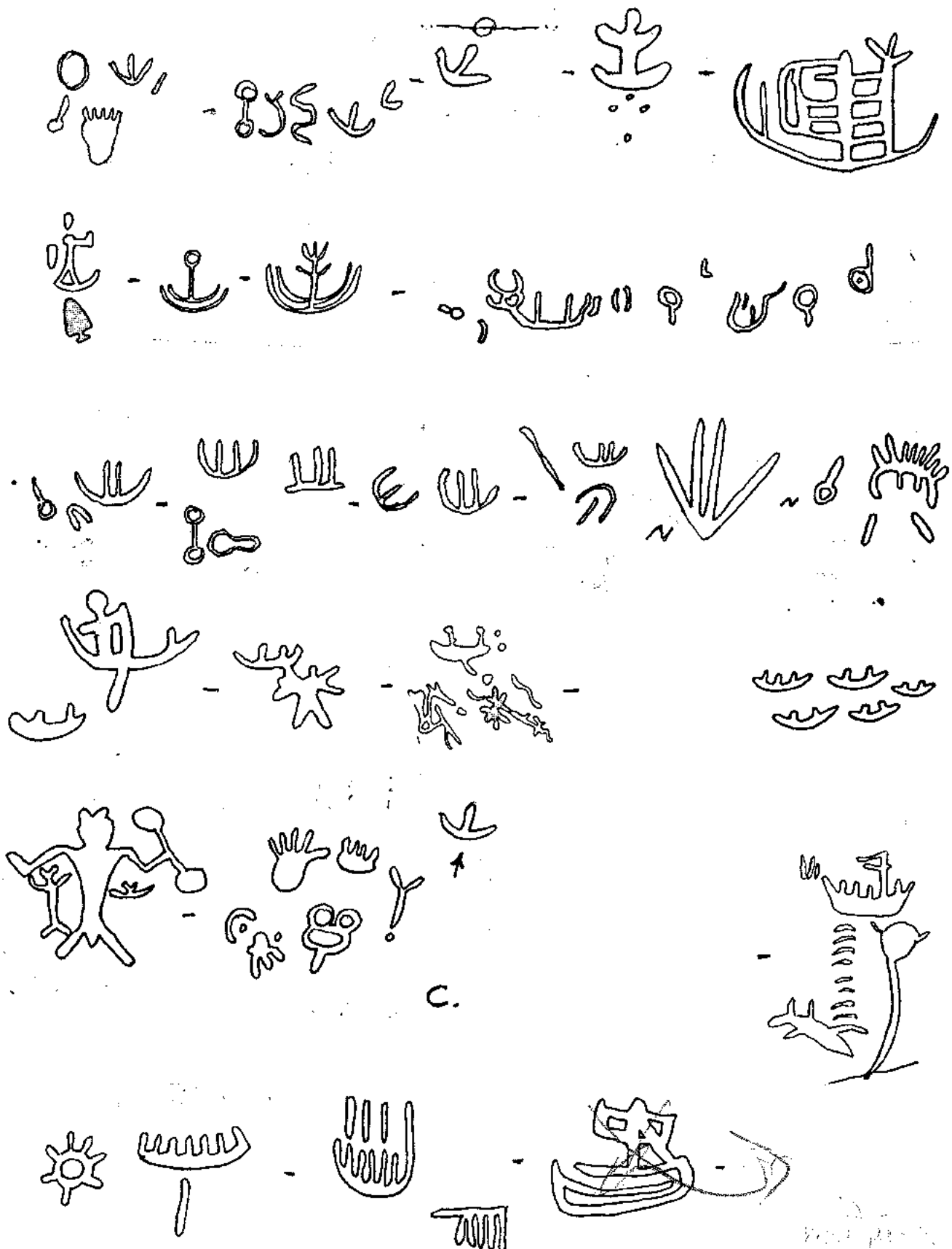


Figure 6

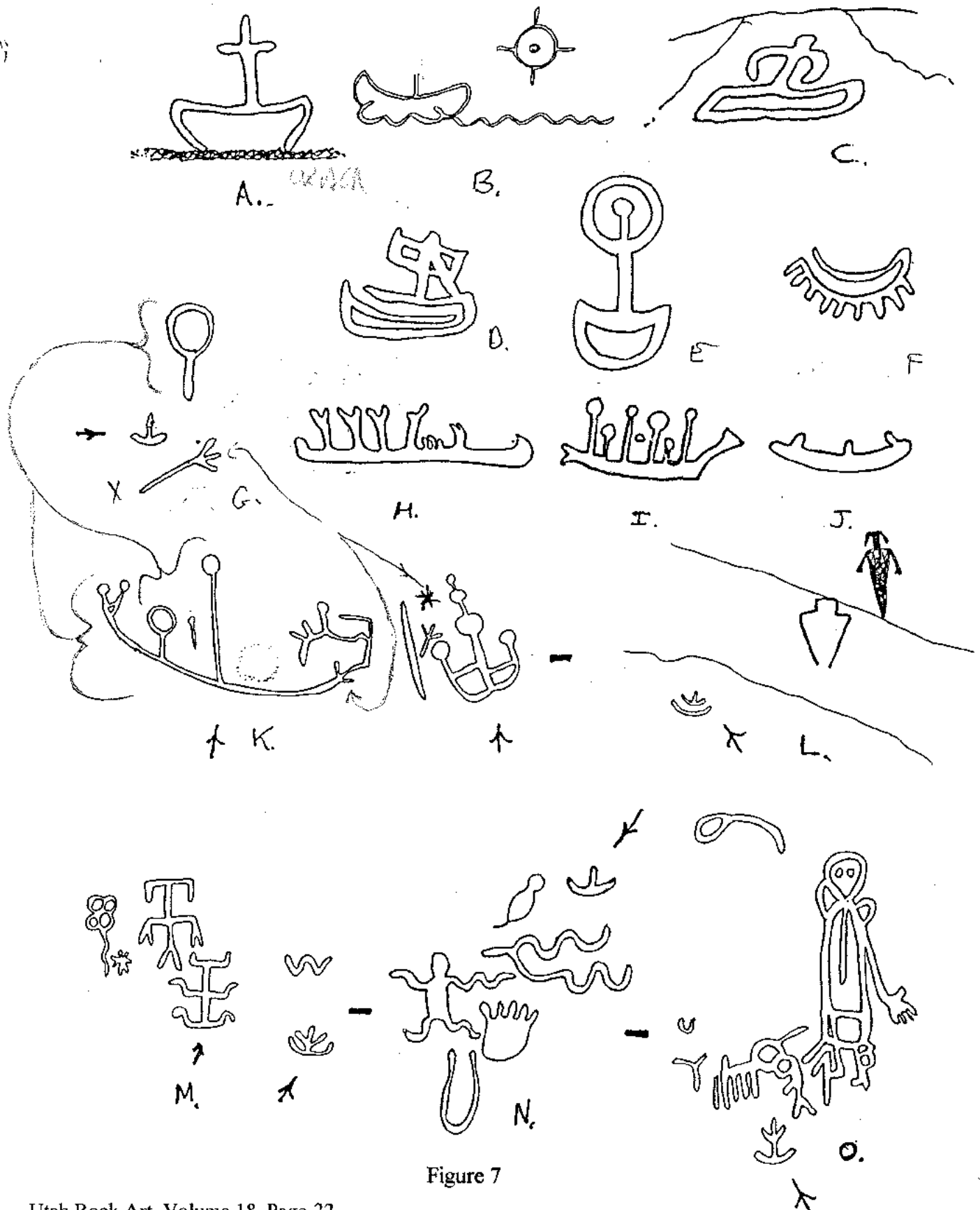


Figure 7

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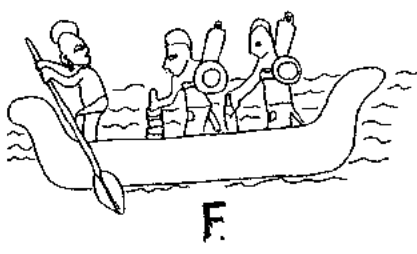
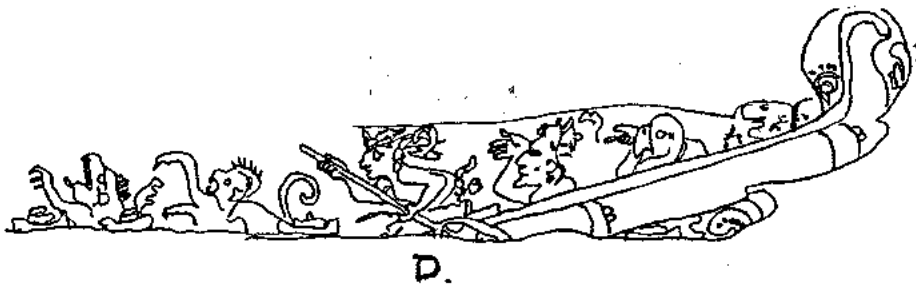
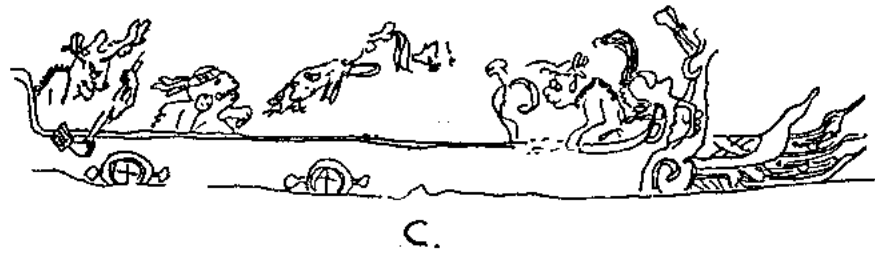
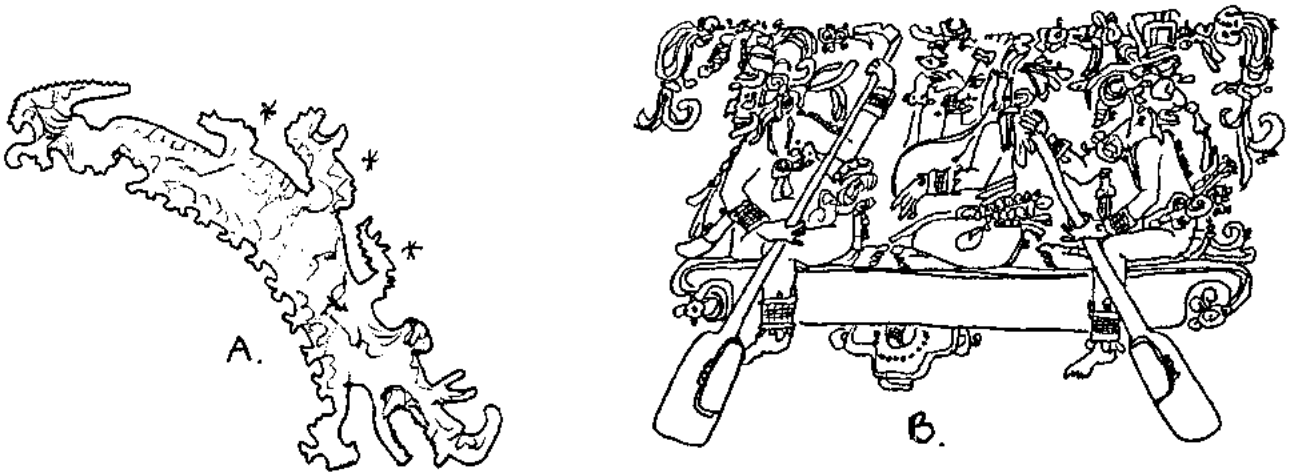


Figure 8

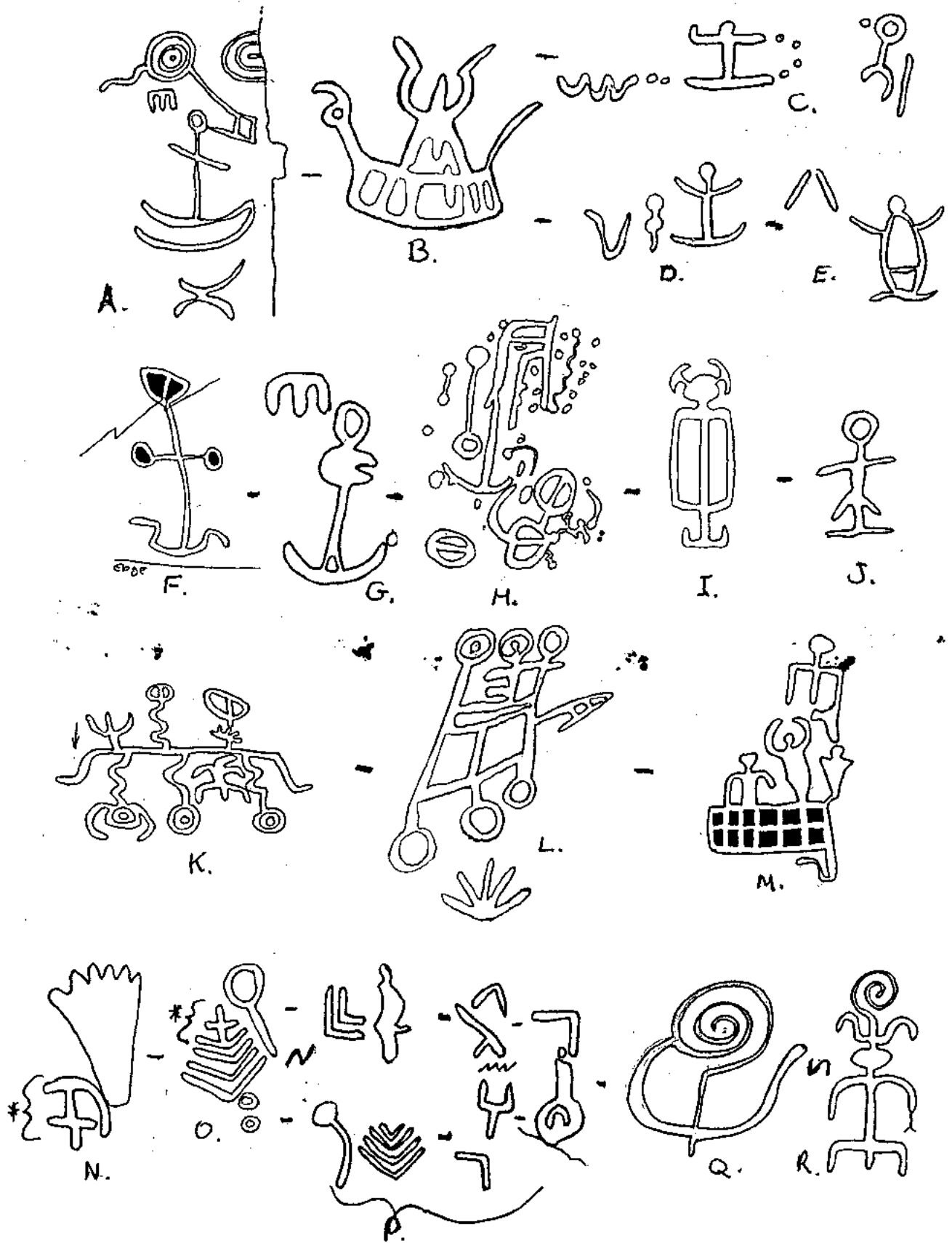
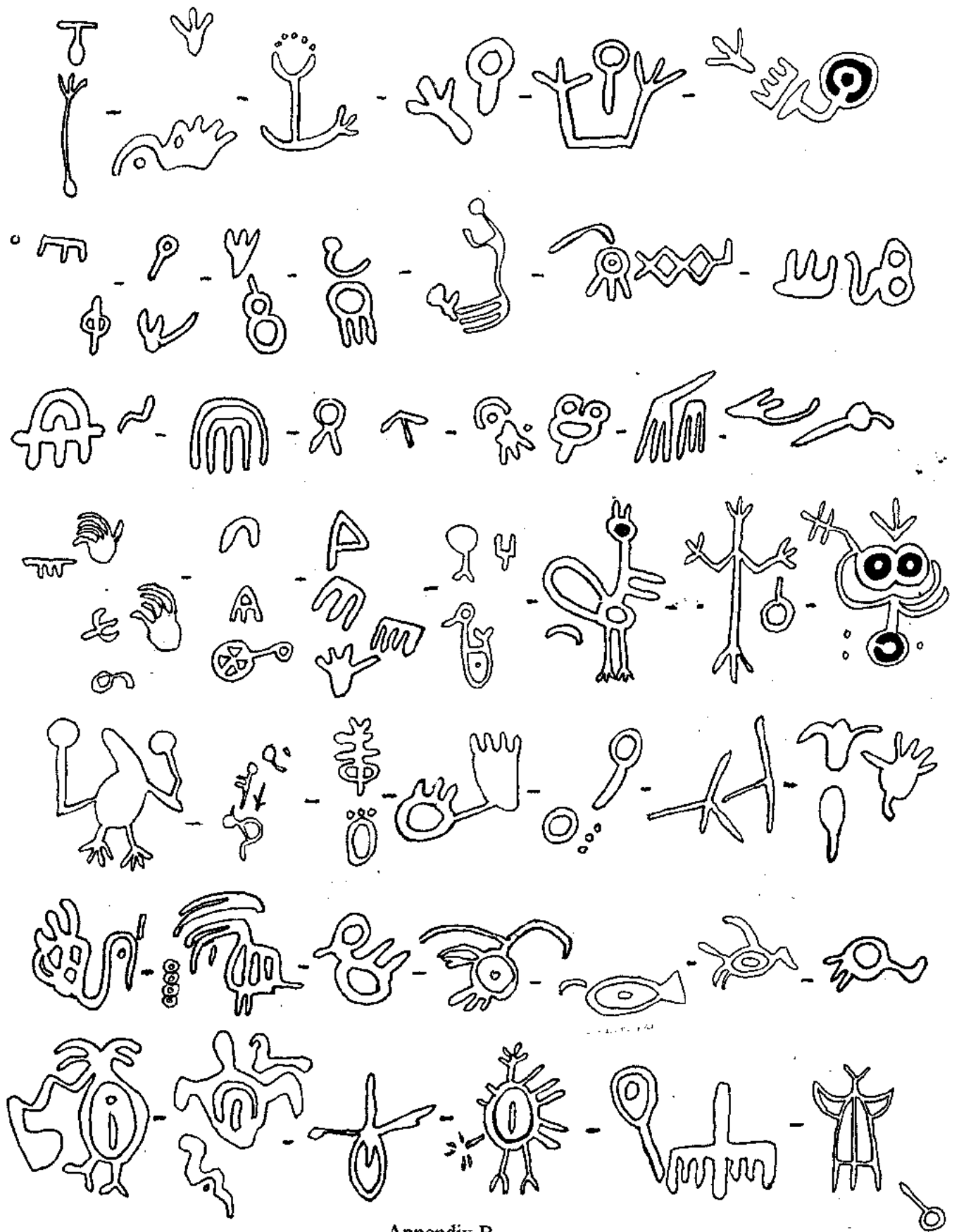
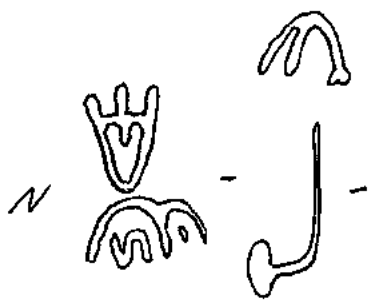
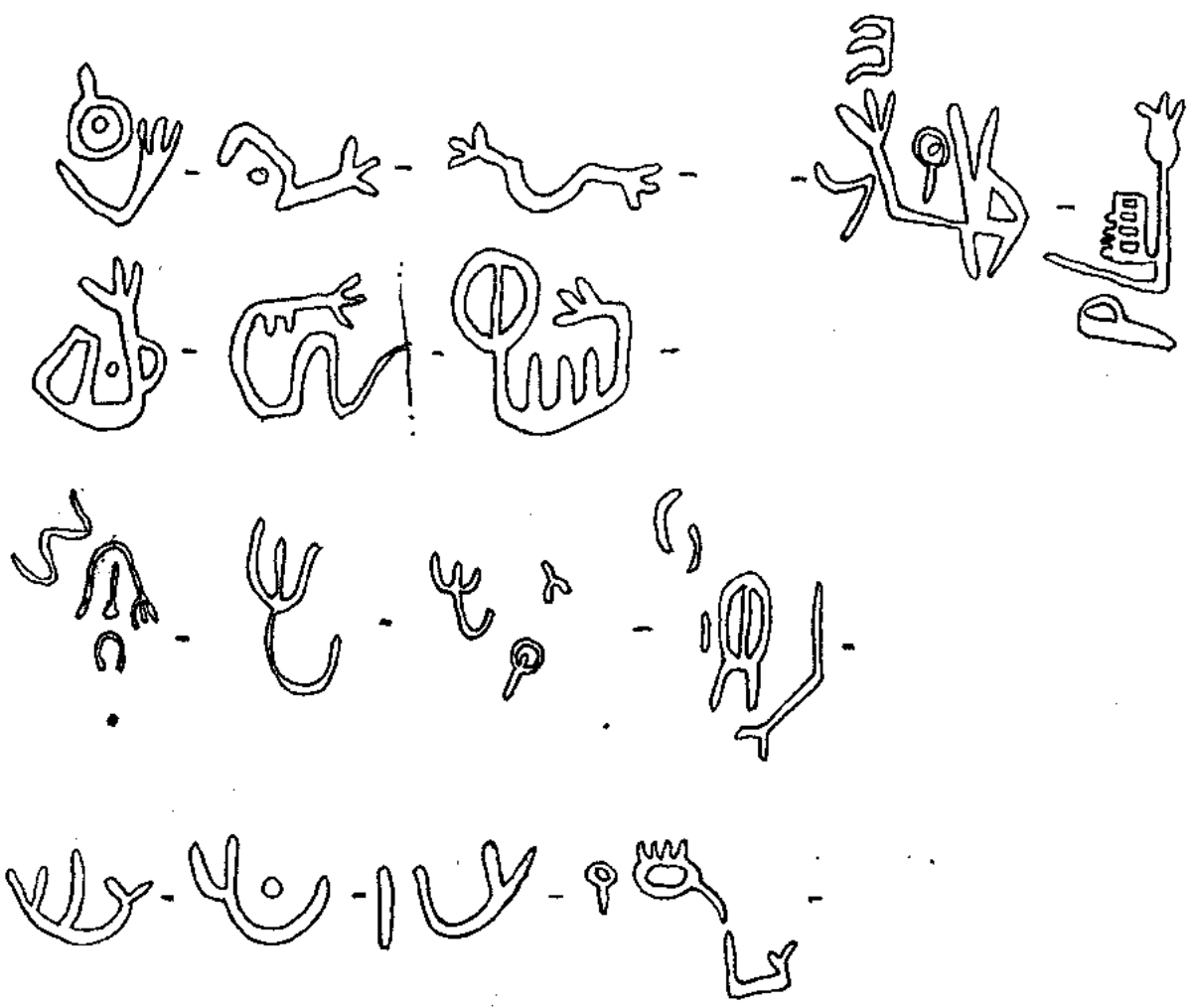


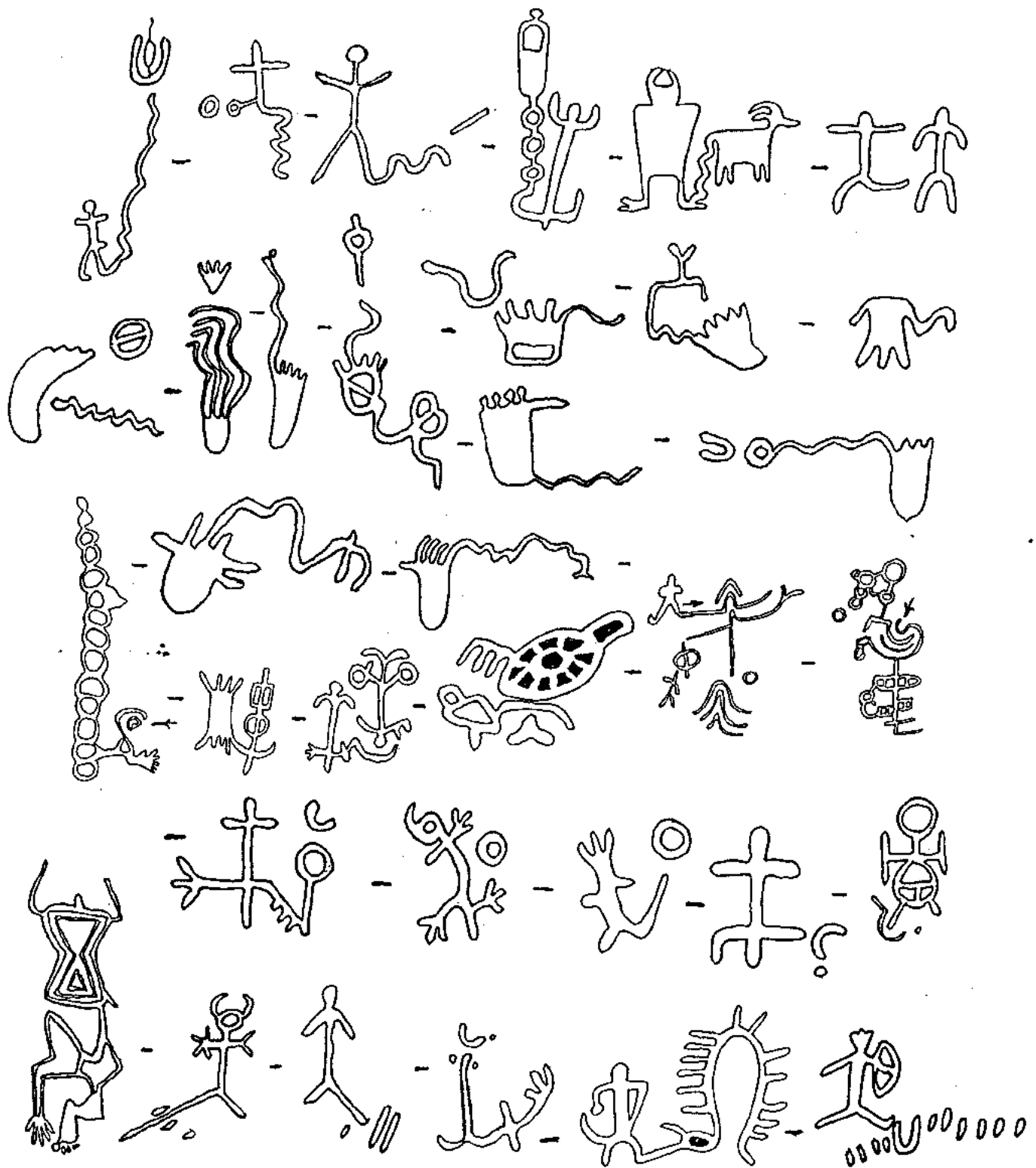
Figure 10



Appendix B



Appendix C



Appendix D