

## **Ungainly Ghosts**

### **Signs of a Northern Variant in the Barrier Canyon Style**

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*In the northern reaches of the Barrier Canyon style area, more than a dozen Barrier Canyon style rock art sites contain one or two distinctive types of the spirit figure motif—here given the designation of Northern variant.*

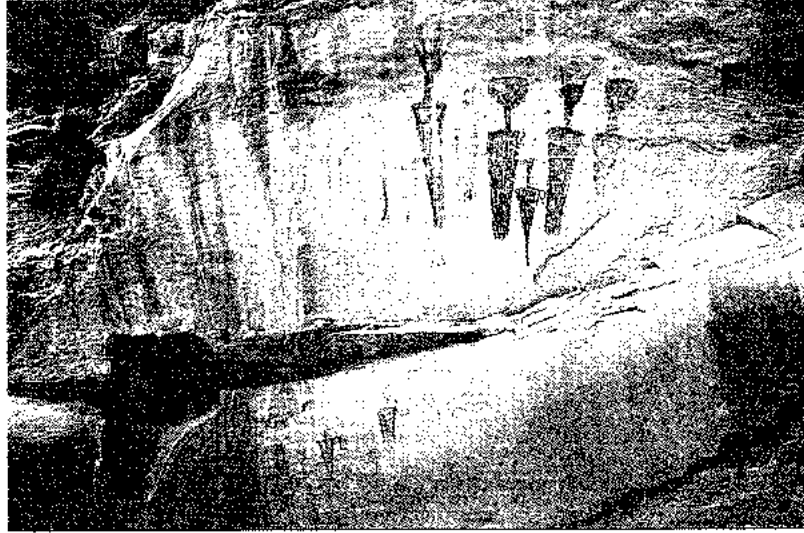
*Uncharacteristic of the Barrier Canyon style, most of the Northern variant images are roughly-painted, inexact, and show a surprising variety of head and body forms. The most common spirit figure type is the figure indifferent to proportion, an “ungainly ghost”, an image appearing to be “thrown” together from unscaled body parts. The other type, less common, is a banded figure with two or more alternating bands of red ochre and white paint, while the body-form is often closer to the classic Barrier Canyon style variants.*

*Some visual elements and motifs found in the Northern variant are seen occasionally in the imagery of the Fremont style in Utah and western Colorado. Mixed-style images are also found throughout the regions north and west of the Colorado River and may represent the cultural transition from the hunter-gatherer tradition to the agricultural lifeway (circa 100–600 CE in Utah)*

### **Introduction**

Neither perception nor representation in a given medium is based on intellectual abstraction. Nothing but our particular one-sided tradition suggests that concepts are formed only by the intellect. All the cognitive instruments of the mind operate by grasping over-all features of a phenomenon or a group of phenomena through form patterns of a medium. The medium may consist of the stock of “perceptual categories” or the shape patterns of a means of representation or the abstractions of the intellect. The word “concept” refers to an operation that may occur in any kind of cognition: it does not reduce all cognition to intellectual processes. [Arnheim 1960:134]

On a pleasant autumn afternoon, returning to my car after a visit to the Great Gallery, I found myself with time to study the images at the Living Quarters site (Figures 2, 3) in Horseshoe Canyon. Thinking about the elegant and monumental Barrier Canyon style painted figures I had just seen at the Great Gallery (Figure 7), I wondered if the comparatively awkward and roughly-painted figures at the Living Quarters weren't the work of inexperienced artists, maybe teenagers or perhaps the last remnants of the general Barrier Canyon style where “quality control” was lacking (I was reminded of the clumsy images made during the last of the Roman empire and the early days of



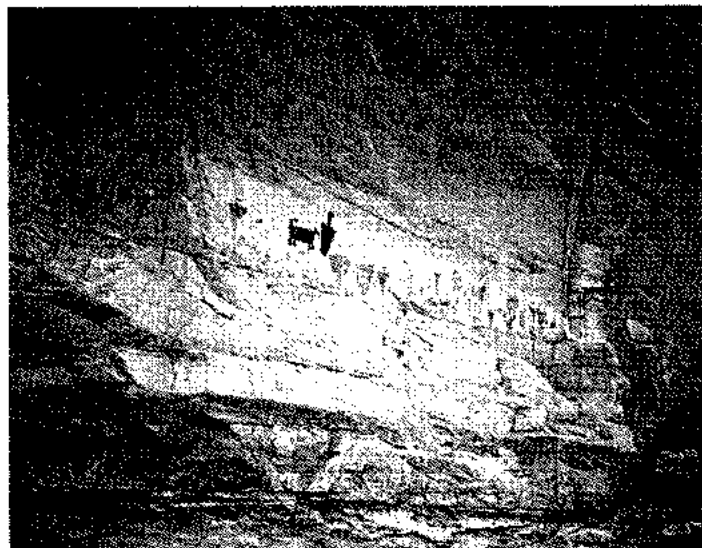
**Figure 1. Carrot Man panel, Rangely area, northwestern Colorado. Northern variant spirit figures, probably late Barrier Canyon style, tallest figure about five feet high.**

the Christian era).

Although I was unaware of it at the time, this was the first sign of the Northern variant of the Barrier Canyon style. And after several trips into the Book Cliffs, the Uintah Basin, and northwestern Colorado, I found that these image-types were more common in the northern region of the Barrier Canyon style.

About 50 miles south of the closest part of the Book Cliffs and 140 miles south and west of the northern clustering of Barrier Canyon style sites in Colorado (Fig. 17), the Living Quarters Panel represents one of the southernmost locations of the Northern variant type of images.

**Figure 2. Northern variant images, Living Quarters, Horseshoe Canyon, Canyonlands National Park, Wayne County, Utah. BCS Project photograph by Craig Law.**



## Northern Variant

More than anything else, what convinced me that these northern images could be a variant type was a visit to the Bitter Creek panels in the Uintah Basin—located just west of the Barrier Canyon style rock art sites in Colorado.



**Right: Figure 3. Companion composition, Northern variant, Living Quarters, Canyonlands National Park. Tallest figure about three feet in height.**

**Below: Figure 4. Bitter Creek Main Panel, Uintah Basin, Uintah County, Utah. The most elegantly painted Northern variant rock art site. Tallest figure about four feet in height.**



Of the 17 northern Barrier Canyon/Transitional style sites that I have viewed, the Bitter Creek Main Panel (Figure 4) is clearly the finest painted panel, and although much smaller in scale, it is the closest in quality to the important sites in the style's heartland (e.g., Great Gallery, Buckhorn Wash). At Bitter Creek I found both kinds of Northern variant images in the same panel, along with figures of the more classical (Great Gallery, Canyonlands) variants. And unpredictably, some of these "awkward" type figures were painted with an elegance and competency that I had not seen previously within the variant.

In an overview of the Main Panel images (Figure 4), some of the anthropomorphic figures at the bottom right half appear to be related to the banded figure type. The top line of figures has at least

one unscaled figure in the linear figures (top right and Figure 5), and the classical-form figures, of course, are found to the left of center. Most of the painted figures (both solid and linear images) across the top section of the Main Panel have, like the best of the classical-style variants, been painted with precision.

Apparently, the unscaled form-elements of the Northern type figures that I had seen elsewhere were not merely the results of the artists' indifference to form or proportion (while attempting to paint the classical variant forms) but rather represented, quite consistently, a distinctive set of iconographical forms—the Northern variant.

## Unscaled Figures

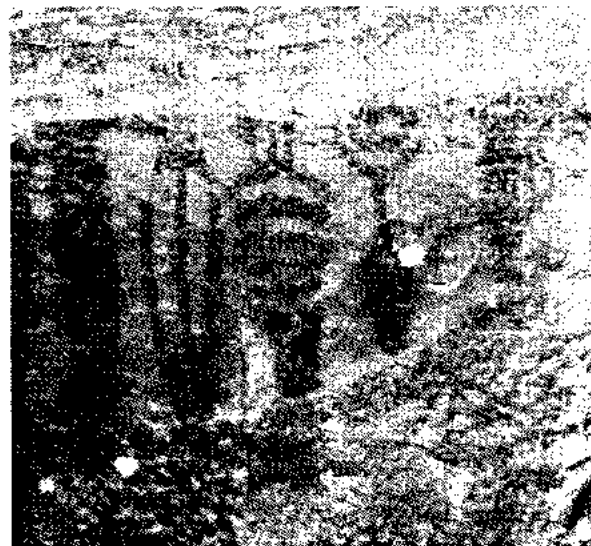
In the Bitter Creek Main Panel, the three linear figures in Figure 5, the center figure with horizontal bars of dark (red) and light, the vertical-lined figure to its left, and the unscaled figure to its right, appear to have been painted by the same hand, perhaps even during the same episode of painting. All three of these images are very well made, but the horizontally barred figure, except for its modest size, is equal in design to most Barrier Canyon style images that I have seen, 214 sites at this writing.

The base or bottom forms of the linear figures are painted with similar exactness, but their forms suggest different functions. The tops of the two left, solidly colored, base shapes are flat or the center dips slightly downward to help shape and to fit the unpainted light forms above them, while in the right figure, the uppermost center of the lower shape curves upward to complete its shape (body) in front of the light field.

Seen in the indicated manner, the long vertical thick line can appear as a thin neck shape connecting the distant head and body forms. Unfortunately, a rifle shot has destroyed some vital visual information in the upper right side in the shoulder area of the base (body) shape, making it impossible to fully read the image.

The top of the unscaled figure's head form has also been lost through exfoliation of the rock surface, but this too-perfect, probably circular, head shape is certainly out of (classical) proportion with the image's other body parts.

The variant's greatest variety of shapes are found in its head/headress and neck motif-forms; there seems to be only slightly less variation in body forms, which are generally without appendages. And there is an indication that some Northern variant body forms may reflect, in particular areas, the local Barrier Canyon variant style of body forms.



**Figure 5. Detail, Bitter Creek Panel, the long-necked figure is a Northern variant unscaled figure type. The top parts of some images are exfoliated; tallest linear figure is about two feet in height.**

## Carrot Man Panel

The major unscaled-figure panel, known locally as the Carrot Man Panel (Figures 1 and 6), is located in northwestern Colorado about 30 miles east of Bitter Creek. Unlike the Bitter Creek panel, at this site the Northern variant images appear more typically painted in imprecise arrangements of varied heads, headgear, neck shapes, and body forms. These elongated spirit figures are the tallest found at the Northern variant sites with a maximum of about five feet in height.

The forms of the bodies (Figure 6) are not new forms—they echo the shapes of figures identified with other variants. The tallest carrot-like figure, the second from the left with long lines extending from top of head, is similar to the type found at Courthouse Wash (Eastern variant). The two righthand figures appear to be two versions of the Great Gallery variant. Compare the left one with the large figures of Figure 7, and the right one with the two smaller spirit figures in the far left of Figure 7.

On the other hand, the smaller figure with the severely tapered torso at the bottom right center of Figure 6 is more similar to the San Rafael variant (e.g., Buckhorn Wash Panel).

Like the dark figure from the Living Quarters Panel (Figure 3), most of the Carrot Man figures have extended thin neck forms, and the connections of the necks to the bodies and heads are usually slightly off center. Although the forms are roughly bilaterally symmetrical, they lack the precision of shape and placement seen in the best of the classical variants, e.g., the large figure just left of the center in Figure 7, and those at Bitter Creek. And unlike what we see at the Great Gallery, the figures at the Carrot Man panel have some grossly oversized heads topped by a variety of head-dress motifs.

The four tallest figures have orbicular heads. Two of the heads have exaggerated widths and white nubs, short perpendicular brush strokes, extending from their tops,



**Above: Figure 6. Detail, Carrot Man Panel, northwestern Colorado. Unscaled figures, Northern variant. Tallest figure about five feet in height.**

**Below: Figure 7. Detail, Great Gallery, Canyonlands National Park. Classical Great Gallery variant figures. Monumental proportions, bilaterally symmetrical anthropomorphs of, apparently, different ages. Tallest figure more than five feet in height.**



and the other two, at half their widths, have long lines extending from their tops. The two lines on the right figure's head appear to be the familiar antenna motif, but the large figure on the left has multiple lines extending, unlike any of the classical Barrier Canyon style variants. The faint smaller figure to the left of upper center has what appears to be large, banded ear forms, and the lower, sharply-tapered figure's head is barely wider than its neck form and has multiple extended brushed lines.



**Figure 8. Detail, Bitter Creek Main Panel, Uintah Basin. Banded figure type, Northern variant. Tallest figure about 2.5 feet in height.**

## Banded Figure

The second, less common Northern variant form-type is the banded figure. The banded figure has alternating bands of red and white defining the body and head forms. At the Bitter Creek Main Panel (Figures 4 and 8), the white figure (far right) with an enclosing dark (red) contour line is one of the more elegantly executed banded figures. The two dark (red) figures on the left in Figure 8 have been partially contoured with a white line, but painted without the degree of skill exhibited in the far right figure. Commonly, the banded figure type is loosely painted and has a rough bilateral symmetry.

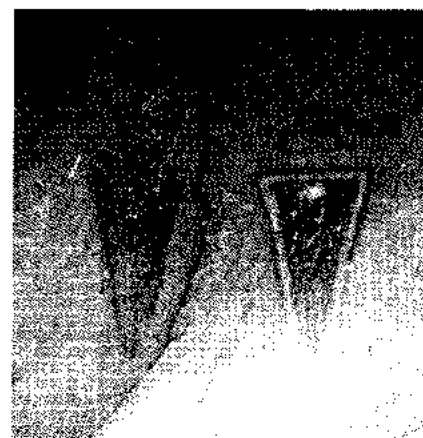
Although there is considerable variation of banding in the body and head forms, the head sizes tend to reflect the proportional (to body) ratios seen in the classical variants. The body forms are elongated and range to about four feet in height (Figures 8 and 9).

## Painted Panel

A western Book Cliffs site, the Painted Panel (Figure 9) is the largest of the exclusively banded figure sites I have yet visited. Here the images were painted quickly, applying the two colors while they were still wet, resulting in some bleeding and blending of color.

The lower-center figure with interior vertical design in dark (red) and white paint has classical proportions, albeit inexact. One Painted Panel figure, at the far left top, even has a classical head/neck motif, complete with an arc painted over its head. The top right figure with red and white, nested V forms, has an undulating snake form attached to its right shoulder. This figure form-type is similar to the Carrot Man Panel's sharply tapered figure but without the multiple linear forms extending from its head. This V type of figure is common to both figure forms of the Northern variant and seems to be found throughout the Barrier Canyon style area, including a large figure at the Courthouse Wash Panel about 45 miles southeast near Moab (also two light-colored figures in Figures 2 and 3).

A finely painted figure with banded figure characteristics (Figure 10) is found much further south in the eastern Canyonlands area. Well designed and monumentally proportioned (small head and



**Left: Figure 9. Banded figures, Book Cliffs, Western section. Northern variant, tallest figure about three feet in height.**

**Top center: Figure 10. Banded figure (?), Eastern Canyonlands, figure is about two feet in height.**

**Top right: Figure 11. Banded figure (?) on right, Segó Canyon East Panel, figure on right about 2.5 feet in height.**

large body), it reflects the body type of the local classical (Canyonlands) variant. Another interesting banded spirit figure is found at the Book Cliffs' Segó (Thompson) Canyon site. This image has been well designed, and painted with consideration and skill (compared to the Painted Panel, Figure 9, about 30 miles west). Although commonly identified as Fremont, the Segó banded figure has some obvious Barrier Canyon style characteristics.

## Segó Canyon Site

Utah's most important multi-styled rock art site, the Segó site and area, contains painted and pecked images from the Barrier Canyon, Fremont, Ute, and early European-American styles. Each style (with the exception of the Euro-American) seems to have several episodes of image making, and there are a few superimpositions of images. However, as in many Utah rock art sites, some of the prehistoric images do not seem to fall neatly into any of the recognized style-types; rather, they appear to have form-elements of two or more styles (Barrier Canyon and Fremont in particular) as, apparently, does the Segó banded figure (Figure 11).

The body form of the Segó banded figure can certainly be found in many Barrier Canyon style sites. It is consistent with the San Rafael variant figure (concave sides) and though not as close a fit, with the Canyonlands variant (similar height but fuller convex body). Although the bucket-shaped head form has been generally identified as a diagnostic Fremont element, there are many (earlier) examples of this head form in the Barrier Canyon style as well (Figures 7 far right, 8 second from left, 15, 16 f and i).

Comparing the Segó banded figure in the East Panel (Figure 11) with the pecked and abraded Fremont images in the South Panel (Figure 12), we find the similar bucket form head, with extended banded (feather?) form-motif and a similar, although more severely tapered and concave, upper

body form.

However, and typically for the Fremont style, the base forms of the pecked figures do not symmetrically taper to a point or truncated base, as seen in the Barrier Canyon style figures. The sides of the Fremont bases begin to parallel each other or flare out slightly (Figures 12, 13, 16-1). The pecked figures of the South Panel also have other distinctive Fremont style elements not seen in the banded figure or in the Barrier Canyon image inventory, including two figures with elaborate necklace and slit eye motifs, and two with diagonal lines that cross the body.

The Segó banded figure body form is clearly much closer to the Barrier Canyon body type. The tapered base form, banded design, bucket-shaped head form, horizontal head line, and the clavicle/shoulder line (Figures 10, 11 both figures, 14 first and third figures from left) are all found in the (earlier) Barrier Canyon style.

Evidently, the banded figure (Figure 11) at Segó is mostly Barrier Canyon—certainly well within the range of variation that is characteristic of the style. Yet because some Fremont visual elements (particularly the single, banded head-extension form) are also present, I began to think that the Segó banded figure (and some of the mixed style images) may well have been painted within the period of stylistic transition—between the making of the distinctive Segó Barrier Canyon style images and the subsequent pecking of the site's typical Fremont figures. Not unexpectedly, I suppose, I have come to use the designation of transitional style when referring to this type of mixed style image.

"Ethnographic research...suggests that ethnographic material remains may be the result of culturally determined behavior at the level of basic motor habits in artifact fabrication or the basic component properties of form such as symmetry... Patterns that arise from enculturation (cultural traditions) have been dismissed as nonexplanations, yet they provide the raw material for ethnic differentiation and clearly serve to track the history of enculturation" (Geib 1996:109).

## Working Conclusion

Obviously, until all the Barrier Canyon/Transitional sites are visited, any paper on variants is a work in progress. Yet, at least some if not all visual elements that distinguish this particular variant have been identified. As



**Above: Figure 12. Section of the South Panel, Segó Canyon, Book Cliffs. Pecked Fremont figures are superimposing faint Barrier Canyon style spirit figures at the top. Fremont figures are three feet in height.**

**Below: Figure 13. Hunt Shaman Panel, Nine Mile Canyon. Pecked San Rafael Fremont style.**





archeologist Phil Geib points out (above) “properties of form (can)...serve to track the history of enculturation.” The perceived “pattern(s)”, helpful as an aid for “ethnic differentiation” (style), can also be quite useful in drawing temporal and spatial distinctions (variants) within the style (especially in a style that was in use for thousands of years over such a vast territory).

Containing some stylistic elements that are also found in Fremont imagery, the Northern variant may represent the last phase of the hunter-gatherer tradition before the agricultural lifeway became prominent in the lives of the peoples of the north and west regions.

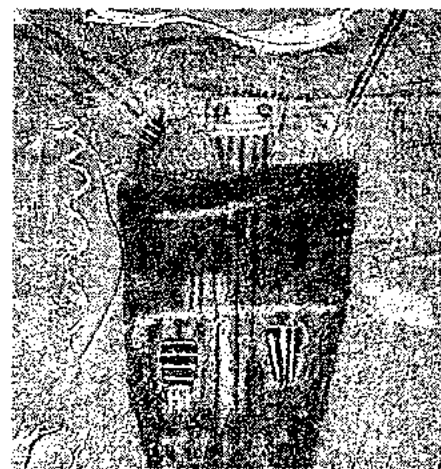
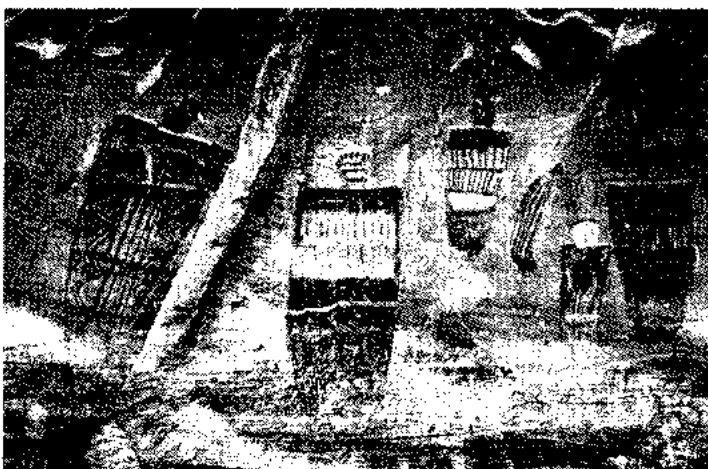
My sense at this time is that the Se-go banded figure probably represents an early Fremont spirit figure (but still very much related to the Barrier Canyon figure tradition). On the other hand, the Northern variant panels of Carrot Man and Painted Panels (lacking any distinctive Fremont visual elements) appear to be late Barrier Canyon.

## Discussion

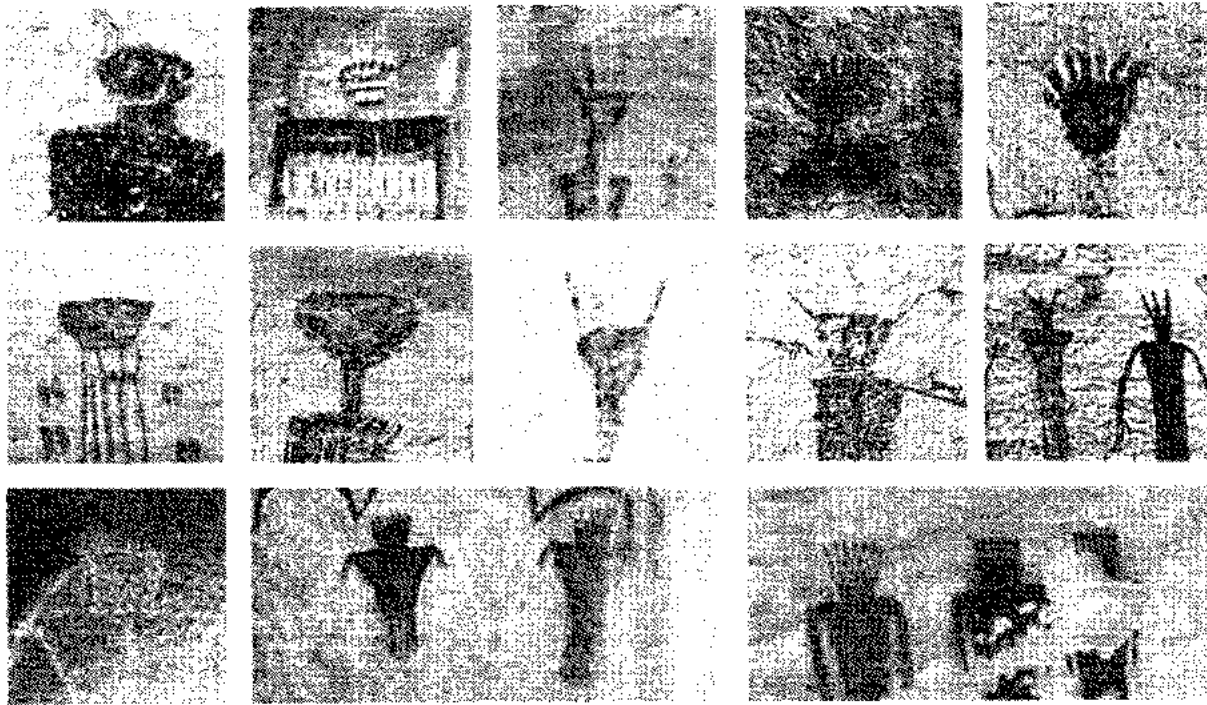
The intention for this paper was to go no further than to point out the signs of a Northern variant of the Barrier Canyon style rock art—a report of an unusual sighting. However, since the Northern variant, more than any other Barrier Canyon variant, seems to share some stylistic elements with the Fremont style, it seems important to extend the paper and include a brief discussion of this interesting Barrier Canyon-to-Fremont relationship, in light of archeologist Phil Geib’s work in the Glen Canyon area.

Except for the possibility of the southern part of the eastern side of the Colorado River in Utah, Fremont images are found in all the same areas, if not always at the same sites, as we find Barrier Canyon style images. And the similarities between the two styles are apparent to most who study Utah rock art.

(Polly) Schaafsma (1980)...conclude(d) that the artists of Fremont, Barrier Canyon, and San Juan Basketmaker styles had a shared anthropomorphic artistic tradition connected with



**Left, Figure 14. Section, Great Gallery. Painted Great Gallery variant, tallest figure about five feet in height. Central figure has a representation of a white-tipped feather headdress. Right, Figure 15. Detail, Great Gallery, Canyonlands National Park. Great Gallery variant with “crewcut” motif. Spirit figure is five feet in height.**



**Figure 16. Top Row (from left to right): a) BCS, Great Gallery; b)BCS, Great Gallery; c) BCS, Carrot Man Panel, NW Colorado; d) BCS, Bear Panel, Western Canyonlands; e) BCS (?), NW Colorado.**

**Middle row: f) BCS, Harvest Panel; g) BCS, Carrot Man Panel; h) BCS, Carrot Man Panel; i) BCS, Western Canyonlands; j) BCS, San Rafael Swell.**

**Bottom Row: k)Transitional (?), Western Canyonlands; l) Fremont, Western Canyonlands; m) Fremont, Uintah Basin.**

historically related shamanistic practices...My main point of disagreement with this (statement) is that the term historically “related” in the sense of implying ancestry should only apply to the Barrier Canyon and Fremont styles and that the term historically “connected” applies to Barrier Canyon (perhaps also Fremont [*Geib’s parentheses*]) and San Juan Basketmaker [Geib 1996:72].

In a bit of a surprise, Geib found no hiatus between the occupation of the Barrier Canyon Archaic and the early Fremont in his study area. Working in Glen Canyon both before and after Lake Powell, and adjacent uplands, he found enough evidence (footwear, stone points, basketry, maize, rock art, and carbon dates) to become convinced that the peoples (“artists”/ rock art “styles”) we know as the Fremont descended from the Western Archaic peoples whose artists painted in the Barrier Canyon style. Geib also found that the peoples responsible for these two styles of rock art lived almost exclusively in the lands west and north of the Colorado River in Glen Canyon, well into the agricultural or Formative period when, in the southwestern area, Pueblo II and III materials show up in the archaeological record.

In contrast, the southern and southeastern Glen Canyon areas were the exclusive territories of the Western Archaic people, then the White Dog Basketmaker (San Juan Anthropomorphic style) followed by the Pueblo phases. Geib believes that the Colorado River corridor was a

boundary or buffer between the two groups, probably ethnically distinct—each living on their side of the river until about 1000 CE, when some of the Puebloans crossed to live and farm in the southern part of the Fremont lands (e.g., Boulder Valley).

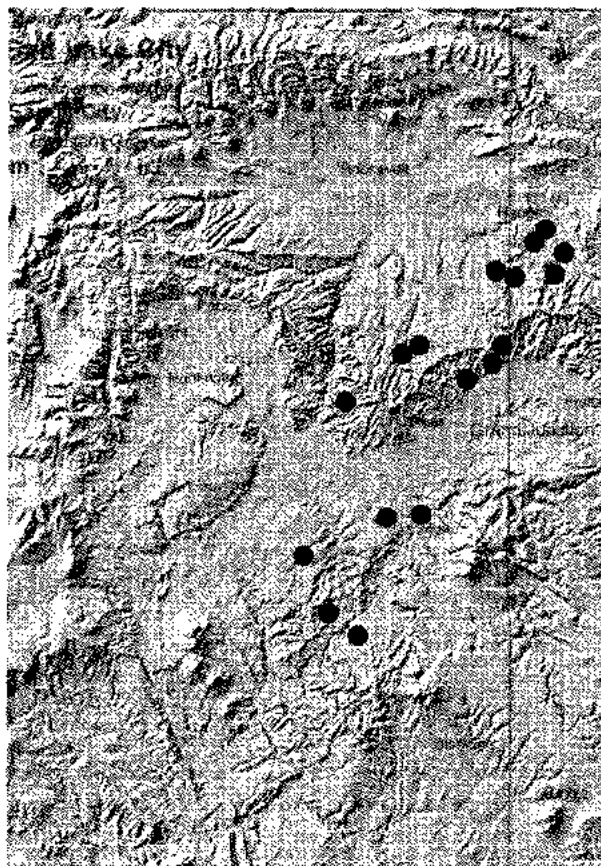
Evidently the Fremont were to the Barrier Canyon people as the Pueblo were to the (White Dog) Basketmaker people in the Glen Canyon area. Preceding these groups, the land was occupied by a generalized Western Archaic people whose common traits (sandals, split twig figurines, dart/large points) are found throughout the Glen Canyon study area.

Geib, among others, thinks that the White Dog Basketmaker people migrated into the area from the south and east and brought the domesticates with them. However, the indigenous Barrier Canyon people apparently retained their hunter-gatherer tradition for many generations after the arrival of the domesticates—even though the distance between their territories was evidently quite small (20–40 miles), albeit in very difficult terrain.

“...for several hundred years after White Dog Basketmakers took up residency [circa 300/500 BCE] in the southern portion of the Glen Canyon region, populations to the north continued a hunting-gathering lifeway. The specifics of their subsistence-settlement practices and social life perhaps changed, but these terminal Archaic groups had not yet adopted farming” (Geib 1996:197).

The Glen Canyon archaeological record indicates that the White Dog Basketmakers were contemporaneous with the earliest phase of the Fremont as well as the last of the Barrier Canyon style, which dates back to 5600 BCE or earlier, Cowboy Cave figurines. Rejecting a generally-held estimate of its origin as contrary to the evidence, Geib thinks that the earliest phase of the Fremont style could date to about 100 CE. He refers to archeologist Betsy Tipp’s AMS-based estimate for the last dates in the Canyonlands area for Barrier Canyon style paintings of about 300 CE. Geib’s findings do more than close the supposed gap between the Barrier Canyon and the Fremont. And evidence from Cowboy Cave’s Unit V may add support to the possibility of a period of about 100 to 550 years when signs of both cultures/styles may have coexisted—the dusk of one style and the dawn of the other.

“The evidence from Cowboy Cave... suggests the continual importance of plant gathering during the Early Agricultural.... What is not yet known is whether the Unit V [100–650 CE] occupancy of Cowboy Cave represents the foraging component of early agriculturists or the continuation of a true hunter-gatherer economy” (Geib 1996:61).



**Figure 17. Distribution of sites with possible Northern variant Barrier Canyon/Transitional style images.**

## Representational Imagery

Geib's uncertainty about the affiliation of the materials from Cowboy Cave's Unit V reflects a similar quandary about the mixed-style rock art images: very likely some Transitional style images are early Fremont (early agriculturists) and some are late Barrier Canyon (hunter-gatherers), but is it possible to be more certain of their affiliation?

Geib's research may be able to shed some light on the mixed style question. In particular, the representations of two types of objects, plant imagery (wild plants/domesticates) and hunting implement imagery (atlatls/spears/bows and arrows), appear to be relevant.

The Glen Canyon record indicates that the earliest manifestation of the Fremont was pre-ceramic and pre-agricultural. Evidently, the "nascent" Fremont extended the hunter-gatherer tradition until about 200 CE. According to Geib, this is about 300–500 years after the White Dog Basketmaker people introduced domesticates into the Glen Canyon area (Rainbow Plateau, Red Rock Plateau, Cedar Mesa).

While images appearing to be representations of domesticates (e.g., maize) appear frequently in the Pueblo styles and occasionally in both the San Juan Anthropomorphic (White Dog Basketmaker) and the Fremont styles, they are not seen in the Barrier Canyon style where representations of wild plants (e.g., Indian rice grass) and composite figures, combining plant parts with anthropomorphic figures, are typical.

Geib estimates that the Fremont received bow and arrow technology by 300 CE (Cowboy Cave, arrow points in the pre-ceramic stratum Vb, circa 100–250 CE). He refers to research which indicates that among the Fremont the replacement of the atlatl by the bow and arrow was probably completed by 600 CE (Geib 1996:64–65).

From more than two hundred panels and many hundreds of images, I know of only one Barrier Canyon style figure with a bow and arrow motif—although there are many representations of spears or atlatls. There are also many representations of atlatls in the San Juan Anthropomorphic style, but few, if any, bow and arrow motifs. In contrast, the bow and arrow is a common Fremont (Figure 13) and Pueblo II/III style motif, while the spear/atlatl form is non-existent.

Apparently, the presence of representational images of plants and hunting implements may help us to distinguish the work of the Fremont-affiliated artists (bow and arrow/domesticates) from the Barrier Canyon artists (atlatl/spear/wild plant/composite figure) during the mixed-style period (circa 100–600 CE).

The high degree of symbolism in rock art, coupled with its immobility, makes it of great significance for identifying the geographical expression of past social entities. Rock art, more than most artifact types, is likely to have played an active role in communicating social affiliations. If style is an expression or display of social identity at various levels, then styles of anthropomorph depiction in rock art seem particularly significant, in that they encode cultural views on dress and adornment, as well as culturally bound perceptions of the physical manifestations of supernatural beings [Geib 1996:71].

Uncommonly among working archeologists, Geib gives some consideration to the presence and meaning of rock art in his study area. His research provides an archaeological basis to support the perception of a close relationship between the imagery of the Barrier Canyon and Fremont styles at

many of the north/west rock art sites.

The Glen Canyon area archeological record reflects a period of time (circa 100–650 CE) of uninterrupted cultural transition from the ancient hunter-gather tradition to a more settled lifeway with the sequential incorporation of agriculture, the bow and arrow, and ceramics into the peoples' lives. The images that reflect these cultural changes promise to be useful clues, if only as part of an initial effort, in sorting out the cultural affiliation of the artists who created the representations of Transitional, late Barrier Canyon, and early Fremont style anthropomorphic figures.

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