

Agony and Ecstasy in Native American Rock Art

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Vernal Style anthropomorphs on the sandstone cliffs at the McConkie Ranch in Dry Fork Canyon, Utah, have tears streaming down their cheeks. Trophy Heads held by other anthropomorphs also have tear-streaks (Figures 1, 2, and 3). This Weeping Eye motif in rock art is a dramatic expression of emotion, captured in stone. On the other hand, a petroglyph figure at the Blue Mountain Site in Dinosaur National Park (Figure 14), east of Green River, seems to be expressing exaltation.

Because Weeping Eye petroglyphs and pictographs, as well as Hallelujah Man and ecstatic anthropomorphs in California and other Southwestern States might be of interest to members of URARA, along with more familiar Utah examples, a paper on contrasting emotions in rock art seems appropriate, hence the title "Agony and Ecstasy in Native American Rock Art."

The Weeping Eye figures at the McConkie Ranch, and especially the Trophy Head glyphs with tears streaming down their cheeks, are shocking and require comment. In fact, actual Trophy Heads have indeed been found in archaeological sites, as reported by Kidder and Guernsey (1919) and others, and some heads have rope handles so they can be carried, as the McConkie Ranch petroglyphs illustrate.

Stephen H. Lekson, in his review of Steven A. LeBanc's book *Prehistoric Warfare in the American Southwest* (1999) in the May-June, 1999, issue of *Archaeology*, refers also to several earlier papers on the same theme, and makes a case for warfare and rule by intimidation. Also in that issue are three related articles: "War and Peace in the Southwest," by Stephen H. Lekson; "Violence in the Prehistoric Southwest," by Steven A. LeBlanc; and "A Reign of Terror," by Christy G. Turner II. Class conflict, the use of violence, and the exhibition of Trophy Heads to enforce order and the supremacy of a ruling elite have been demonstrated in other regions of the Southwest. If that kind of ruthless rule were the case in the Dry Fork area, there would have been ample cause for weeping eyes and tear-streaked faces.

Moving on to California, the Crying Face petroglyph at the Freightwagon Site in the Mojave National Preserve (Figure 4) might represent a completely different story. The Freightwagon Site was recorded by the legendary Jim Benton on January 15, 1977, and facetiously so-named because it was loaded with artifacts: petroglyphs, pictographs, pottery, tools, metates, flakes and points.

Jim Benton, who passed away on December 9, 1999, was born in Indiana in 1916. He enlisted in the Air Force in 1940, and continued in the service for 22 years including assignments in the Far East and Europe. After retiring from the military he went back to school at Indiana University majoring in education, receiving his bachelor's degree in 1965 and his master's in 1968. He taught in Indiana for a time, then in Barstow, California, and finally in Baker and Mountain Pass, where he became recognized as knowing the archeology of the Eastern Mojave area more thoroughly than any other person. This paper is affectionately dedicated to his memory.

I first met Jim Benton in 1981 at the Desert Study Center south of Zzyzx Springs near

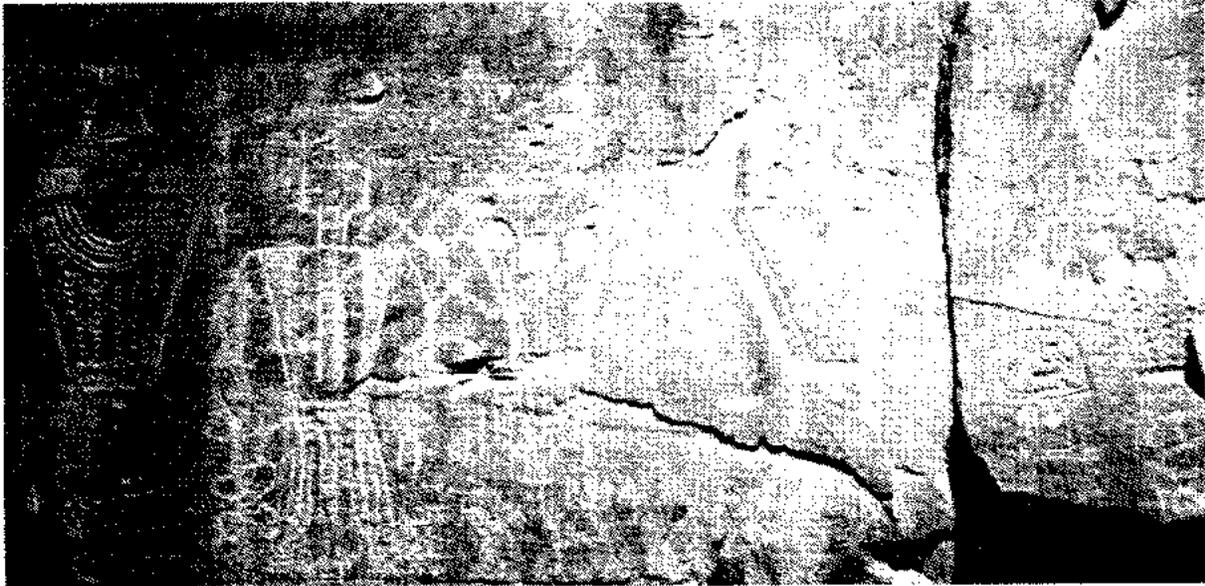


Figure 1. McConkie Ranch anthropomorphs with weeping trophy head



Figure 2. Weeping eye trophy head

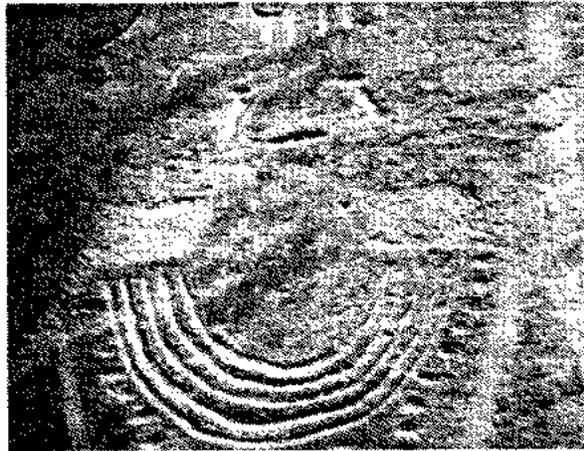


Figure 3. Tear-stained figure



Figure 4. Freightwagon weeping eyes



Figure 5. Tortoise Mountain mask

Baker on the western edge of Soda Dry Lake. He spoke of the whole area between Halloran Springs and the 32 cinder cones along Aiken Wash to the south as one vast archeological site. As we were leaving the Desert Study Center, Jim stopped at a point where we could see two Indian trails going up hills to the north. He had followed those trails for miles and plotted out prehistoric trails all over the Eastern Mojave, noting village sites, rock art and other archaeological features. In the next several years we visited several times at the annual San Diego Museum of Man rock art symposium, where he gave papers. I last saw him at an Albuquerque Symposium in 1995, though we exchanged letters more recently. He sent me a copy of his paper on "Cultural Affinities of the Freightwagon Site, Near Baker, California."

At Albuquerque Jim drew a map for me of directions to the Freightwagon Site that were no doubt intentionally vague, which was an experience other researchers said was characteristic of Jim (though he had also suffered a major stroke). He marked a trail all the way from Black Tank to Indian Springs, and circled a vast area.

Consequently, I started out from Black Tank, then Aiken Arch, and finally Indian Springs on separate outings. I photographed five rock art sites I had never seen before, located springs and seeps, and followed several trails before finally reaching Freightwagon.

If Jim intended for me to become acquainted with prehistoric trade and travel routes and their surrounding network of sites, perhaps his motive is implied in a 1986 letter accepting the honor of being a Research Associate with the San Bernardino County Museums, in which he wrote he had "continued to be concerned with the many smaller, often ignored, sites of the Mojave Desert. These minor sites often present a picture which supplements that which is offered through the larger, better known sites. It is through the assembling of small pieces that a jigsaw puzzle is clarified and understood" (Benton 1986).

At Freightwagon the first petroglyphs encountered were on massive boulders with a deep reddish patina, located on the north side of the wash. Farther west were smaller, deep-brown to black basaltic boulders that had the finest petroglyphs. Farther west up the ridge, pinkish rhyolite provided material for a lithic workshop. Moving eastward up the hill or butte from the lithic area, on the summit were twelve mounds or cairns, several of them disturbed. Across the wash to the south was a cliff with a large midden at the base, and the remains of a wall apparently built for storage. Then up the incline to the right are face or mask petroglyphs, with long tear lines extending down from each eye. From one face, the tear streaks extend beyond the surface to the overhang below (Figure 4).

Nothing within the area of the site would appear to call for such elongated, exaggerated tears. Of course, the fact that we noticed only one tool at a site originally named Freightwagon because of the load of pottery, flakes, points, and other artifacts, might cause an archeologist to weep; Jim Benton predicted on his site survey form that with the growing popularity of off-highway vehicles, the site might fall prey to vandalism and theft of artifacts.

More to the point, did the original dwellers who left their pottery, tools, and other possessions in place expect to return? Were they among the peoples who went to Clark Mountain to peacefully harvest *Agave* and were observed by army scouts, who assumed they were congregating to attack wagon trains to the south? If so, they never returned, for they were ambushed and massacred by army troops. Did a lone survivor chronicle the tragedy with weeping eyes, looking down at the Freightwagon encampment? We shall never know.

In the central Mojave Desert northwest of Barstow is a tragi-comic mask (Figure 5) at

Surprise Outcrop on the northeast point of Tortoise Mountain, which is part of the Black Canyon petroglyph complex. Wilson G. Turner started recording the petroglyphs in Black Canyon in 1977 with a team of twenty people during a six-week period beginning on July 10. Little did he expect that the recording would take some five seasons, with over 10,000 glyphs in the final count.

On August 10, 1978, I went to Black Canyon with Turner's "A 1997 Preliminary Report on the Black Canyon Project of the Mojave Desert" from the Spring, 1998, *Quarterly of the San Bernardino County Museum Association*. My little Honda Civic immediately got stuck in the deep sand of the main canyon. Backing out, I fortuitously decided to skirt west around Sandal Hill. That route took me directly to Surprise Outcrop and the amazing tragi-comic mask. The face was divided in half, with one eye open and the other closed, and tears streaming down the cheek. It was an awesome example of competing emotions, and appeared to be old, deeply incised and repatinated. Turner's report dealt with petroglyphs in the main canyon, so the Surprise Outcrop tragi-comic mask was indeed a surprise.

The final examples of the Weeping Eye motif that I want to point out in California are in a large rock shelter on the Tule River Indian Reservation in Tulare County. The shelter is composed of huge boulders, which hold up a large slab forming the ceiling. It is located right next to a narrow, boulder-lined channel of the Tule River. Pictographs cover the ceiling and side walls. On the wall to the right of the entrance is a large shaggy figure with outstretched arms and tears streaming down from the eyes (Figure 6). On the same wall, deeper into the shelter, another figure seems to have less clearly-depicted tears (Figure 7).

At the Three Rivers Site in New Mexico are at least two petroglyph masks with weeping eyes, one of which has pronounced tear streaks (Figure 8).

At Hueco Tanks State Historical Park in Texas are a number of pictograph masks having tears. On the east side of West Mountain there, a fading mask has on the left side a large weeping eye with four tear streaks coming down, and enough of the faded mask outline to suggest that the other eye had tears as well (Figure 9). Near this mask was what would in rainy weather be a waterfall, which suggests an association of the mask with rain. North Mountain also has a mask, under an overhang. The mask is outlined with yellow pigment, with red features suggesting tear streaks under one eye (Figure 10).

In contrast to rock art with Weeping Eye symbolism are examples of more ecstatic themes. In the Pahranaagat Valley of Lincoln County, Nevada, there are almost identical Hallelujah Man designs near Alamo and Ash Springs. At the Alamo Paint Site the Hallelujah Man, with arms stretched high above the head, is a bright red pictograph (Figure 11). But near Ash Springs the Hallelujah Man is a petroglyph (Figure 12) on a boulder located on the slope east of the Highway. In 1978 when I first became intensely interested in Native American rock art, as my wife and I were driving up to Caliente, Nevada, at the approach to Upper Pahranaagat Lake I saw the lava escarpments on both sides of the highway. I said to my wife, "I think there will be petroglyphs there," and there were, on both sides.

Then approaching Ash Springs, I saw the boulders up the slope to the east. Stopping at a service station that no longer exists, I asked if there was "Indian writing" on the boulders up above the station.

"No, nothing like that," was the answer, but I persevered.

"Any reason I couldn't go up that dirt road to see?"

"Go ahead," I was told, "but I'm telling you now, there's nothing up there but the dump."



Figure 6. Tule River Indian Reservation weeping eye, shaggy figure



Figure 7. Tule River weeping figure

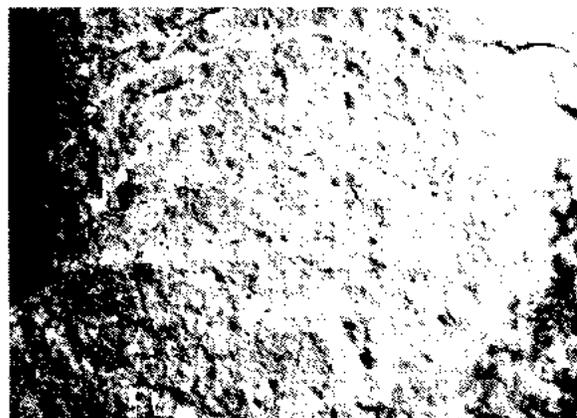


Figure 8. Three Rivers tear mask

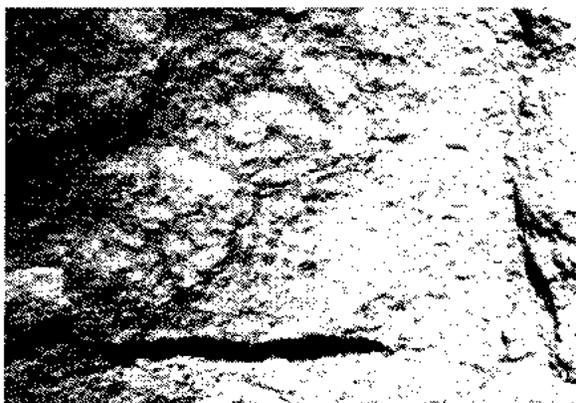


Figure 9. Hueco Tanks weeping eye



Figure 10. Hueco Tanks tear mask



Figure 11. Alamo painted Hallelujah Man



Figure 12. Ash Springs Hallelujah

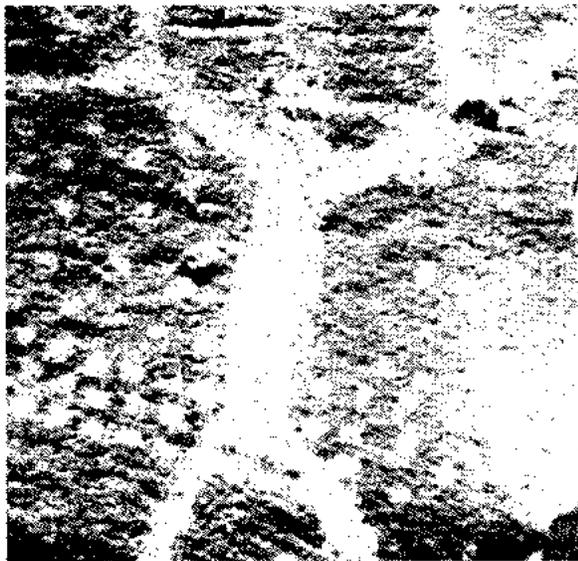


Figure 13. Lagomarsina arms raised

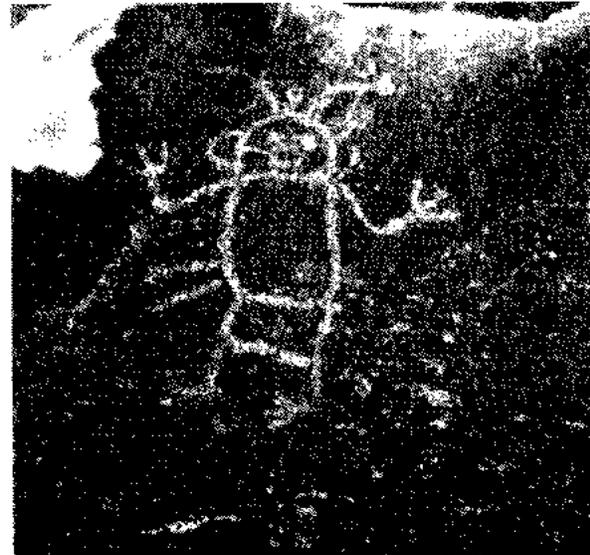


Figure 14. Blue Mountain figure



Figure 15. Buckhorn Wash with several figures having upraised hands



Figure 16. Panel north of Antelope Springs with exultant figure

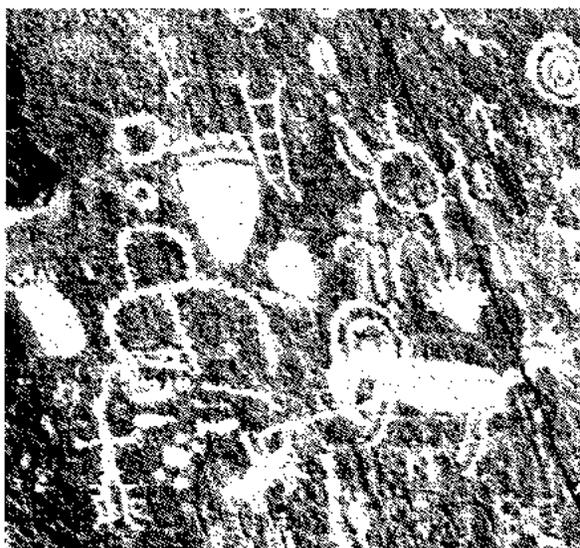


Figure 17. Newspaper Rock ladder figure

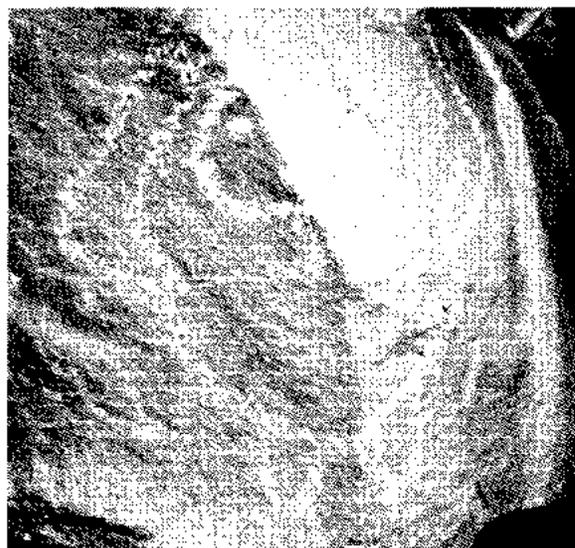


Figure 18. Santa Fe River arms up



Figure 19. South Mountain arms up



Figure 20. Tempe Butte ecstasy

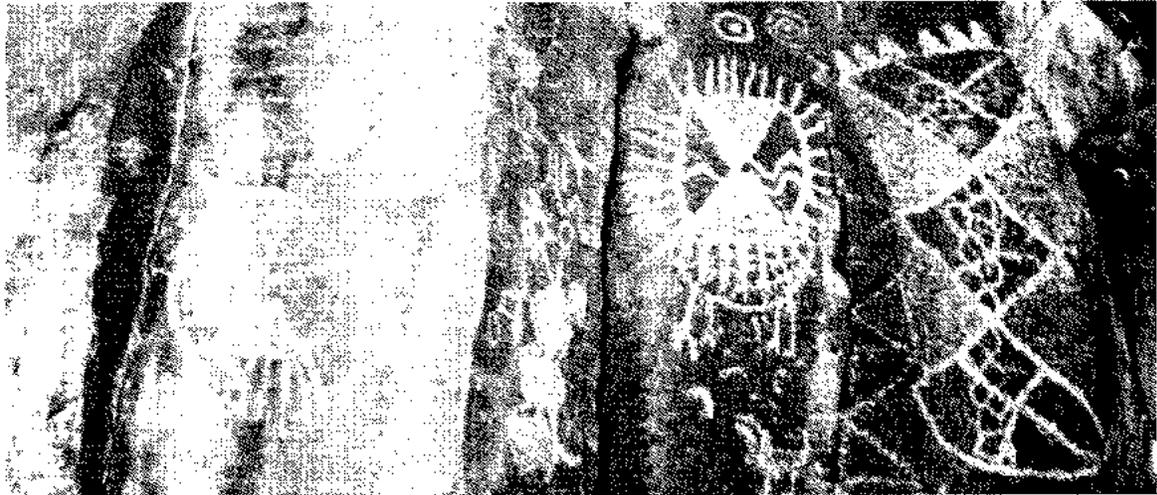


Figure 21. Gillespie Dam with figures having upraised arms



Figure 22. Sears Point shield arms

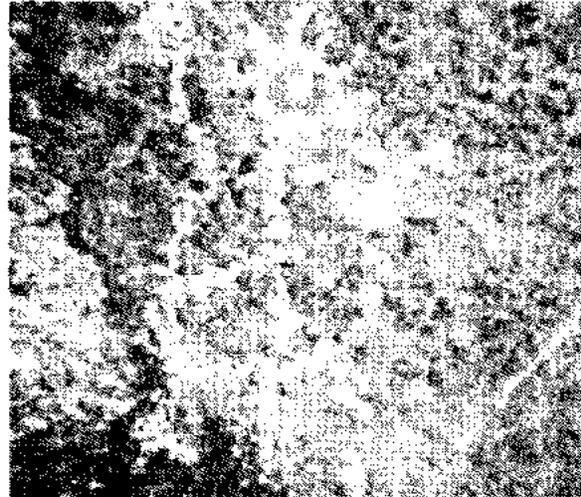


Figure 23. Three Rivers figure



Figure 24. Canyon de Chelly upraised arms

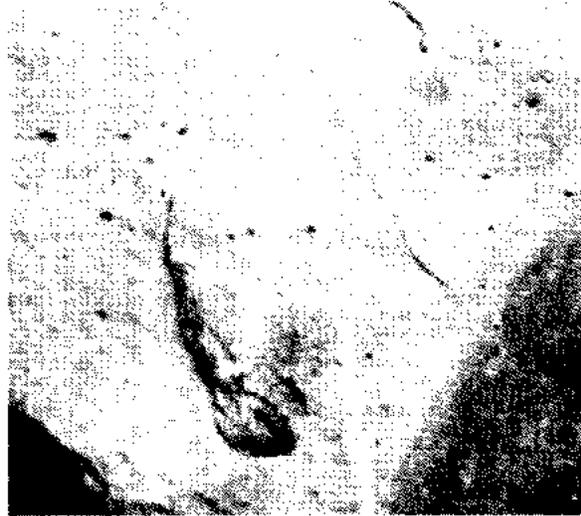


Figure 25. Gillespie Dam upraised arms

The second boulder we came to, though with some exfoliation, still had bighorn sheep glyphs. We found rock art on many boulders, including Hallelujah Man. Fortunately, the smoldering dump no longer exists.

A petroglyph with upraised arms in Nevada at the Lagomarsina Site in the Virginia Mountains between Reno and Carson City (Figure 13) intrigued me because of the rows of dots across the waist. But it was the exuberant little figure with upraised arms at the Blue Mountain Site in Dinosaur National Park in Utah (Figure 14) that suggested the contrast in emotions with those tear-stained figures at McConkie Ranch.

Because of my interest in the Buckhorn Wash Pictograph Panel Restoration Project initiated by citizens of Emery County, Utah, I must note the upraised arms in a prominent panel there (Figure 15). An idyllic petroglyph scene north of Antelope Springs in Western Utah features a cluster of life forms around a central figure with halo rays arching above the head, and has a figure to the right with arms upraised in exultation (Figure 16). Also in Utah, at the well-known Newspaper Rock site, is an intriguing ladder with upraised arms, along with a small figure with arms up as well.

In New Mexico along the Santa Fe River at the Cienaguilla site, a figure with upraised arms overlaps two surfaces that meet at the center (Figure 18).

In Arizona at South Mountain, along with the dancing shaman holding a crook, there are several dancing figures with upraised arms (Figure 19). At Tempe Butte several figures have arms raised in exultation, including those pictured (Figure 20). Among several figures with upraised arms at Gillespie Dam, a small, perhaps-pregnant figure with raised arms is located next to what some commentators regard to be "vision images" (Figure 21). At Sears Point, which has several figures with upraised arms, there is a shield figure with arms raised (Figure 22).

However, not all rock art figures with upraised arms fit into the general Hallelujah Man or ecstasy category.

At the Three Rivers site in New Mexico, there is a circle-enclosed cross with head, upraised arms, legs, and phallus (Figure 23). The encircled cross, according to ethnographic data, was an emblem of fructification in girl's puberty ceremonies (Patterson 1994:197). For both boys and girls, puberty was observed with special celebrations; the ability to have children and ensure a new generation was looked upon as very important, and became the occasion of training, purification, and ceremony.

In Arizona near the entrance to Canyon de Chelly is a design (Figure 24) showing a reclining, hump-backed flute player, having fertility significance, and an example of the "receptive female" symbol with upraised arms (Patterson 1992:115). On the escarpment south of Gillespie Dam, a male figure with upraised arms is positioned over a hole in the rock surface, which has female implications (Figure 25).

In California along the Kern River just below Lake Isabella in the southern Sierras, a red pictograph figure with upraised arms is positioned in the midst of several fertility symbols (Figure 26). At the Canebrake Wash Fertility Site several miles east of Lake Isabella, there is a long panel of pictographs under an overhanging boulder. Twenty-eight red markers symbolize the menstrual cycle. In front of the overhang is a large boulder with a yoni on top, a natural feature resembling female genitalia (McGowan 1982:1). Several grinding surfaces are at the base of the boulder. Back under the overhang and to the left of the 28 red markers, is a red pictograph figure with upraised arms. Couples not able to have children went to such fertility sites, so the upraised arms may signal success.

Jane Bush presented another meaning for the upraised arms in her paper "Prehistoric Women and Rock Art." She gave examples of hunt scenes when all the people would shout and raise their arms to chase deer over the cliffs, or to chase rabbits into nets



Figure 26. Kern River panel has upturned arms and fertility themes



Figure 27. Canebrake fertility site



Figure 28. Buffalo Eddy hunt scene



Figure 29. Nine Mile Canyon figure with lifegiving raised arms

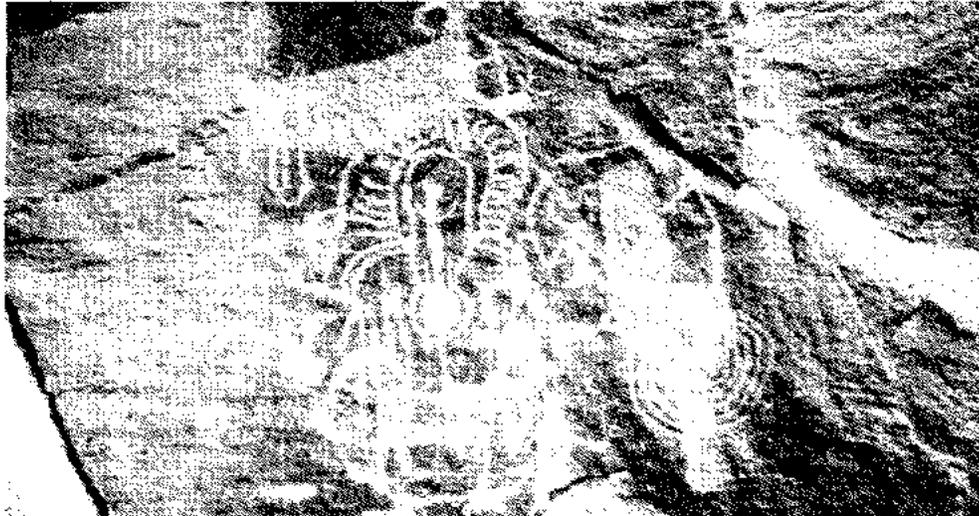


Figure 30. Nine Mile Canyon where upraised arms suggest worship



Figure 31. White Shaman Rock Shelter with three figures in awe



Figure 32. Panther Cave figure with upraised arms and regalia

stretched across a valley (Bush 1999:2). At Buffalo Eddy on the Idaho side of the Snake River in Hells Canyon is a panel with many figures with upraised arms, some holding weapons, with bighorn sheep at the bottom of the panel (Figure 28). Since we saw bighorn sheep drinking from the river not far from Buffalo Eddy, this is a very plausible interpretation of the meaning for the upraised arms in the panel.

Finally, upraised arms can also symbolize prayer, worship, or the experience of awe (Patterson 1992:161). In Nine Mile Canyon, Utah, are two very provocative petroglyph panels. In one, to the right of the central powerful figure with upraised arms, there are animal and human forms in the horizontal or upside-down position, which may symbolize illness or death. But on the other side, the many big horn sheep and also human figures are right-side-up (Figure 29). Is this an awesome depiction of healing or life-giving power?

Another Nine Mile Canyon panel features a central figure with upraised arms and an enclosing arch and lower orb, suggesting a creation motif. There are surrounding animal and bird designs, with a lower human figure on each side. These figures seem to be in awe (Figure 30). While we cannot know the intention of the shaman artist, the impression is one of worship or adoration.

In the lower Pecos River Canyon, Texas, there are also several pictograph panels suggesting awe or ecstasy. In the famous White Shaman rock shelter overlooking the Pecos River, three small figures with upraised arms at the lower left seem to be in awe of the White Shaman ascending, leaving his black, shadow-like body behind (Figure 31). At Panther Cave a red pictograph figure under a slight overhang has upraised arms, as if in awe over the arching, 12-foot-high panther shaman, up to the left on the rock surface above (Figure 32).

Certainly emotion is depicted in Native American rock art, and this paper seeks to present a few of the contrasting emotions of agony and ecstasy, suffering and exultation, found in selected sites throughout seven Southwestern states.

Acknowledgments. It was Jim Benton, to whom this paper is dedicated, who sent me on the quest to find the Freightwagon Site in the Mojave National Preserve, and gave me his unpublished paper: "Cultural Affinities of the Freightwagon Site, Near Baker, California." I met Wilson G. Turner on several occasions at the San Diego Museum of Man rock art symposium, and his progress report on the Black Canyon Petroglyph Recording Project sent me on an adventure. Jesse Warner, past president of the Utah Rock Art Research Association and prominent rock art researcher, took us to the Blue Mountain site in Dinosaur National Park. Jane Bush, also affiliated with URARA, directed me to the upraised arms in hunting scenes in her paper on "Prehistoric Women's Roles and Rock Art." I am indebted to Nancy R. Weir, president of the Southern Nevada Rock Art Enthusiasts, for taking us to the Alamo Paint Site. I owe thanks, also, to Wanda Olszewski, Ranger Exhibit Technician at Hueco Tanks State Historical Park, Texas, for guiding me to the Weeping Eye Mask on the east side of West Mountain.

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