Ceremonial Depictions of Bighorn Sheep Anthropomorphs in the Jornada Mogollon Region

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Cornudas, NM (EPAS 290)
Photo by LeRoy Unglaub
The Jornada Mogollon region is known for its rich body of rock art. Researchers have suggested that elements such as cloud terraces, masks, goggle-eyed figures and horned serpents are associated with ceremony. Although hundreds of bighorn sheep images exist in the regional rock art these figures aren’t usually mentioned except in a general inventory of frequently found motifs.
Tate Site, NM
LA 51341

(Lincoln National Forest)
Other imagery

- Faces/Masks
- Geometrics
- Knife wing
- Lizard
- Step fret design
- Handprints
- Feathered tail
- Simple zoomorph
- Paw prints

Tate Site
Whole Animal Headdresses
Deer, Canine and Pronghorn

Talus Slope Site
(LA 187627)

San Diego Mtn.
(LA 30643)

Apache Flats
(LA 43952)

NAN Ranch
Another example with the “headdress” also depicted separately

Sawyer Site, NM (LA 51339)
Ceremonial Accoutrement or Utilitarian Hunting disguise?

Hunting associations
• Numerous examples at the “figurative” Archaic sites
• Jornada Mogollon - infrequent
Archaic – Numerous figures with atlatls

Tiny hunter with atlatl
(10 cm)
Absence or sparseness of hunting associations in the Jornada-Mogollon imagery

Three Rivers, NM (LA 4923)

Alamo Mountain, NM (LA 108976)
Evidence for possible “Ceremonial” Use

- Anthros with Bighorn Headdresses
  - Just Horns
  - Whole head of bighorn
  - Bighorns with human features
- Bighorn Sheep Figures in unusual configurations
- Association with other ceremonial imagery and other artifacts
  - Headdresses
  - Fetish
  - Mimbres Pottery

Three Rivers, NM (LA 4923)
Some are found in shelters

Serpent Cave, West Texas

Waterhole Canyon or Tully Cave, NM (LA 145509)

Photo by Lay Powell

Photo courtesy of EPAS
Several are found at Hueco Tanks, Texas

Photo by Robert Mark, Drawing by Evelyn Billo – Rupestrian Cyberservices
• Campbell Grant suggests these are Apache Mountain Spirit Dancers
• Rowe, et al dating 450-750 AD
• No known Apache figures have Bighorn Headdresses
More Hueco Tanks

Kirkland Illustration 10-B
Bighorn Associated with other ceremonial imagery

Kirkland (1957) Illustrations: Site 23-C
Site 23-C, Photo by Robert Mark
Juniper Cave, Texas

Hair – not spots
While some are found in shelters others are found on flat surfaces.

Pony Hills, NM (LA 5230)

Red House Canyon, NM (LA 36972)
Drawing from Loendorf, Miller et al
Most are on boulders or cliff faces

Monte Carlo Gap, NM
(LA 63490)

Photo by LeRoy Unglaub
Three Rivers
New Mexico
Bighorns associated with staffs
Sites such as Three Rivers (LA 4923) show various combinations of bighorn/human combinations.
Bighorn Head with pattern
Three Rivers, NM (LA 4923)
Three Rivers - Cartouches
Bighorn sheep in unusual configurations

Three Rivers, NM (LA 4923)

Phillips Site, NM (LA 48270)

San Diego Mtn. NM (LA 30643)
Some bighorns with human features

Alamo Mountain, NM (LA 108976)

Three Rivers, NM (LA 4923)
Association with other ceremonial artifacts

- Mimbres Pottery
- Effigies
Effigies

Stone effigy of bighorn ram, probably used for ceremonial purposes, found in the San Andres Mountains.
Plate XXXV.—The Alamogordo Sites—Animal effigies. Length of a, 7 cm.
Green River bighorn sheep headdress discovered in the San Rafael Swell (1020-1060 AD)

Photo courtesy of
Certainly there are plenty of “just” bighorn images
Or bighorns used as design elements

Three Rivers, NM (LA 4923)
“... an important distinction can be made between unsystematic data collection, resulting in anecdotal evidence and systematic data collection that can reveal idiosyncratic behavior or unusual cases. There is nothing about systematic research that precludes the discovery and explication of extraordinary cases or the importance of unusual evidence. But unusual evidence obtained from systematic student differs from anecdotal data collected unsystematically because, at the outset, we know that it is extraordinary rather than representative, and that would generally be recognized as part of the range of empirical variation that occurs in the archaeological record, thereby potentially providing a more nuanced and detailed understand of an existing interpretation or theory." (Whitley 2011:155)
Found in the eastern Jornada Mogollon as delineated by Lehmer (1948).

Map courtesy of https://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/hueco/images/jornada-readmore.html
Future analysis
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Alamo Mountain – LA 108976
Questions?? Feedback!