Using Ethnography to Shed Light on Celestial Motifs in Prehistoric Utah Rock Art

by John McHugh
Interpreting prehistoric rock art involves delving into Ancient cognition

• Functional-processual archaeologists assert that archaeology’s purpose is to: “study what people did, not how they thought.”

• Study of religious ideology is akin to practicing “palaeopsychology.”
**Mappa**: Internalized cognitive map of world and how it functions.

- The mappa of pre-scientific cultures came from religious cosmology.
- Mythology was history.
- Example: Sipapu
Ethnography

• The scientific description of the customs of individual peoples and cultures.

• Includes the study of a culture’s religious beliefs and rituals.
Late-19th Early-20th Century ethnographers:
F. Cushing
E. C. Parsons
M. Titiev
A. Stephen
Continuity in Puebloan Ethnography

“The historic Pueblos of the U. S. Southwest preserve a remarkable cultural tradition descended, in part, from prehistoric times... The religious ceremonies reported at the beginning of this century [AD 1900] ... probably have the greatest longevity and the strongest connections to prehistory.”

(Zeilik, 1985: S1)
Archaic hunter-foragers evolve into the agricultural cultures of Southwestern Archaeology.
Ethnography reveals that Puebloan people forged a Solar calendar based on rising/setting sun.
Puebloan Ethnography
Puebloan cognitive map (*mappa*) holds that the Sun-god needs to be coaxed back from his four-day standstill at winter solstice.
Lũ-há-vwü
tochomo

227°

Dec 10

Dec 6

226.3°

Dec 7

Dec 21

229.3°

Eldon Mesa

Winter Solstice Observations Began Dec 2

Nov 24
Hopi call the Winter Solstice moon *Kyamuya* = “Sacred-But-Dangerous-Moon”

- Witchcraft abounds for 5 days
- Children may be kidnapped by the Moon-god as sacrifices
Dual-Suns-with-Crescent-Moon Petroglyph

Fremont Indian State Park
Prehistoric corncob (probably Fremont)
Sunset from Dual-Suns glyph (Jan. 2)
Winter Solstice
21-24 Dec (~231.3°)

12 Dec
2 Jan
(232°)

17 Oct
27 Feb
(252°)
“Lower Shrine”
“Lower Shrine” with obsidian
“Upper Shrine”
Winter Solstice Sun stopped at southern “house”

Winter Solstice Sun leaving southern “house” to begin the journey northward

“Dangerous Moon”
Ritual Head-Taking in Puebloan Ethnography
Scalp Pole in Plaza at Zuni Pueblo
Plumed-Serpent figure decapitating victim
Cha’veyo Kachina with head petroglyph near Hopi village of Sikya’tki (faces Summer Solstice sunrise)
Antelope heads in Goat kiva during winter solstice ceremony
“Throughout Pueblo tales or myths heads, not scalps, are referred to in killing or fighting episodes. Inferably scalp-taking is a later trait, an overlay on head-taking.”

Parsons 1939: 352
The Sun-god was considered a head-taker in Puebloan mythology.
“Red Devil” Pictograph

Vernal, UT
6:07 AM (Summer Solstice 2019)
6:15 AM (Summer Solstice 2019)
6:20 AM (Summer Solstice 2019)
6:21 AM (Summer Solstice 2019)
6:22 AM (Summer Solstice 2019)
6:24 AM (Summer Solstice 2019)
6:29 AM (Summer Solstice 2019)
6:30 AM (Summer Solstice 2019)
6:33 AM (Summer Solstice 2019)
6:39 AM (Summer Solstice 2019)
6:41 AM (Summer Solstice 2019)
¼ mile away at the Collett’s site...
Head-takers face: Summer-Solstice Sunrise
Head-takers’ horizon line
Plausible that the Collett Head-taker panel embodies solar association like the “Red-devil” Solstice pictograph
Warrior-god/Warrior-twins as aspects of Venus
Warrior-twins on kiva altars
Warrior-twins figurines in kiva
The Big/Little Dipper and Pleiades in Puebloan Religious Iconography
Dipper and Pleiades on wall of Zuni

Thle’wekwe Fraternity
Mastop Kachina
Grey Knoll Site

(Big Dipper?)
(Little Dipper?)
(Pleiades)
Please contact me if you are interested in assisting in future URARA archaeoastronomical research