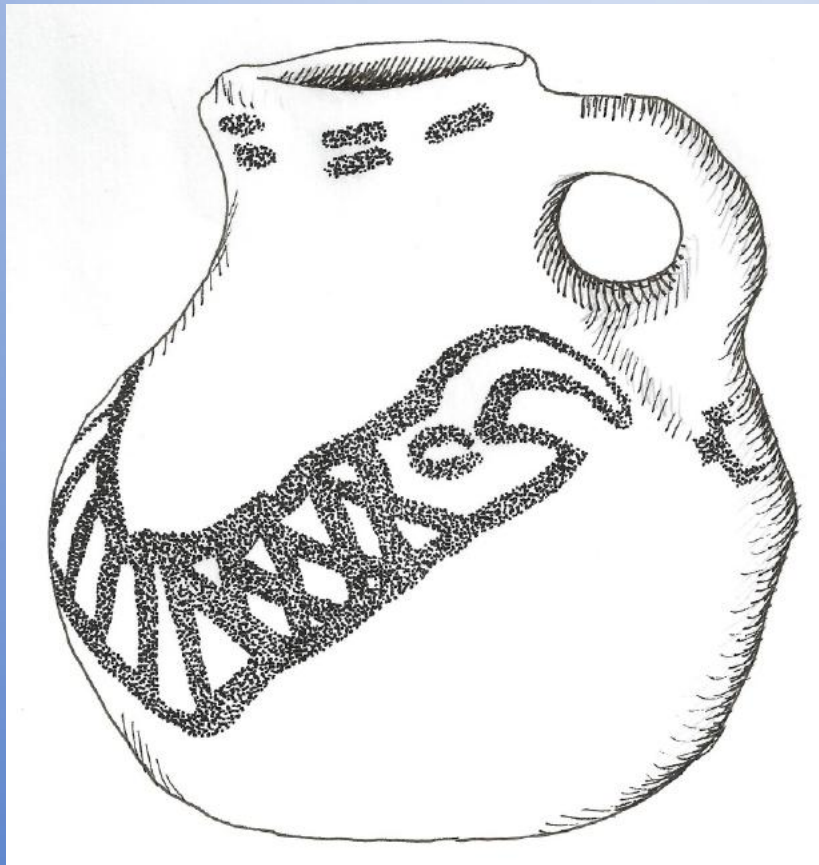


# Snakes, Serpents, and Slithering:

Horned and Crested Snakes in the Iconography of the Jornada Mogollon  
Rock Imagery and Mimbres Ceramics



Chupadero Miniature Pitcher, Bent, NM

Marglyph Berrier  
Jornada Research Institute  
October 2023  
Utah Rock Art Research  
Association Symposium,  
Price Utah

(all photos and drawings by author  
unless otherwise noted)

I would like to acknowledge the First Nations people who created these images and on who's ancestral lands we reside.





Northern New Mexico TOO!  
Often called Awanyu. But we are  
headed still farther south.

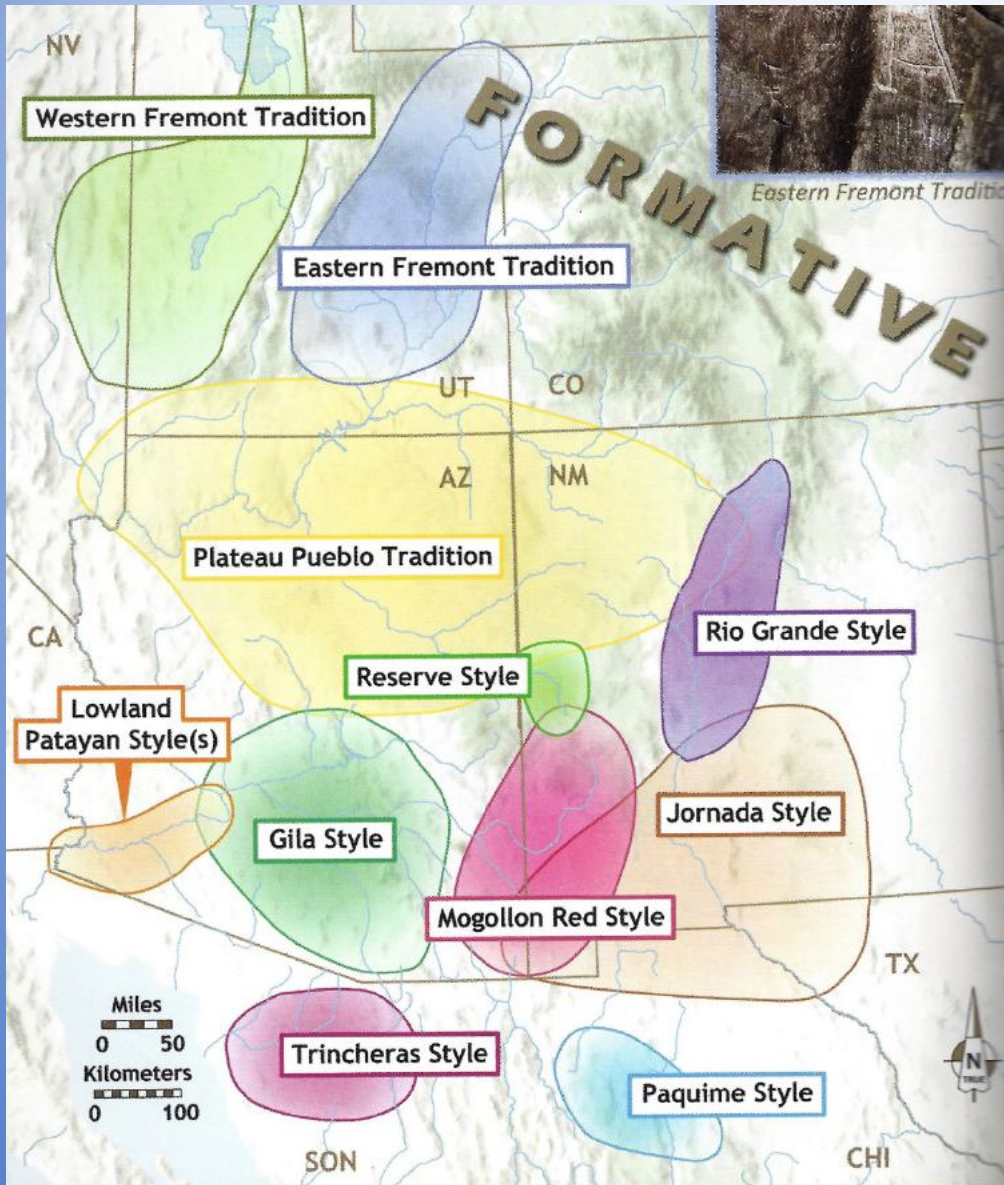


Utah has some great horned  
“serpents” but we’re headed  
south to look at another area





# Who, Where, and Why



Map courtesy of Al Dart, Old Pueblo Archaeology

- The information/data I am talking about will predominately be related to the Jornada Mogollon which is my research focus.
- Descriptive not interpretive
- Providing data for those who are conducting research.
- Comparison with Paquime Style



# Dating - Jornada

- All tablitas were made of yucca or sotol
- From Upper Gila and Hueco Caves
- Calibrated radiocarbon age estimates consistently range between A.D. 600 and A.D. 900 (Miller 2018:252)
- The updated range for the Jornada Mogollon Culture is from A.D. 500 to 1450 (Miller et al. 2019:39)
- Corroborates dates by Hyman, et al. 1999 from Hueco Tanks

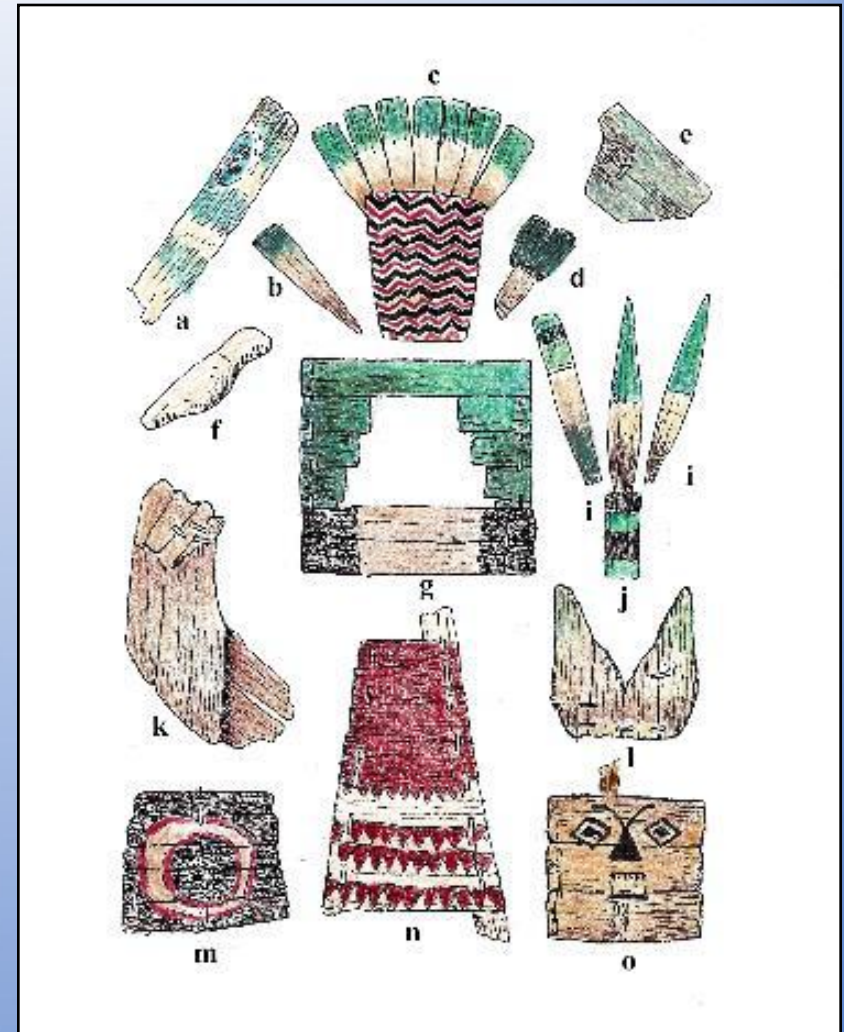
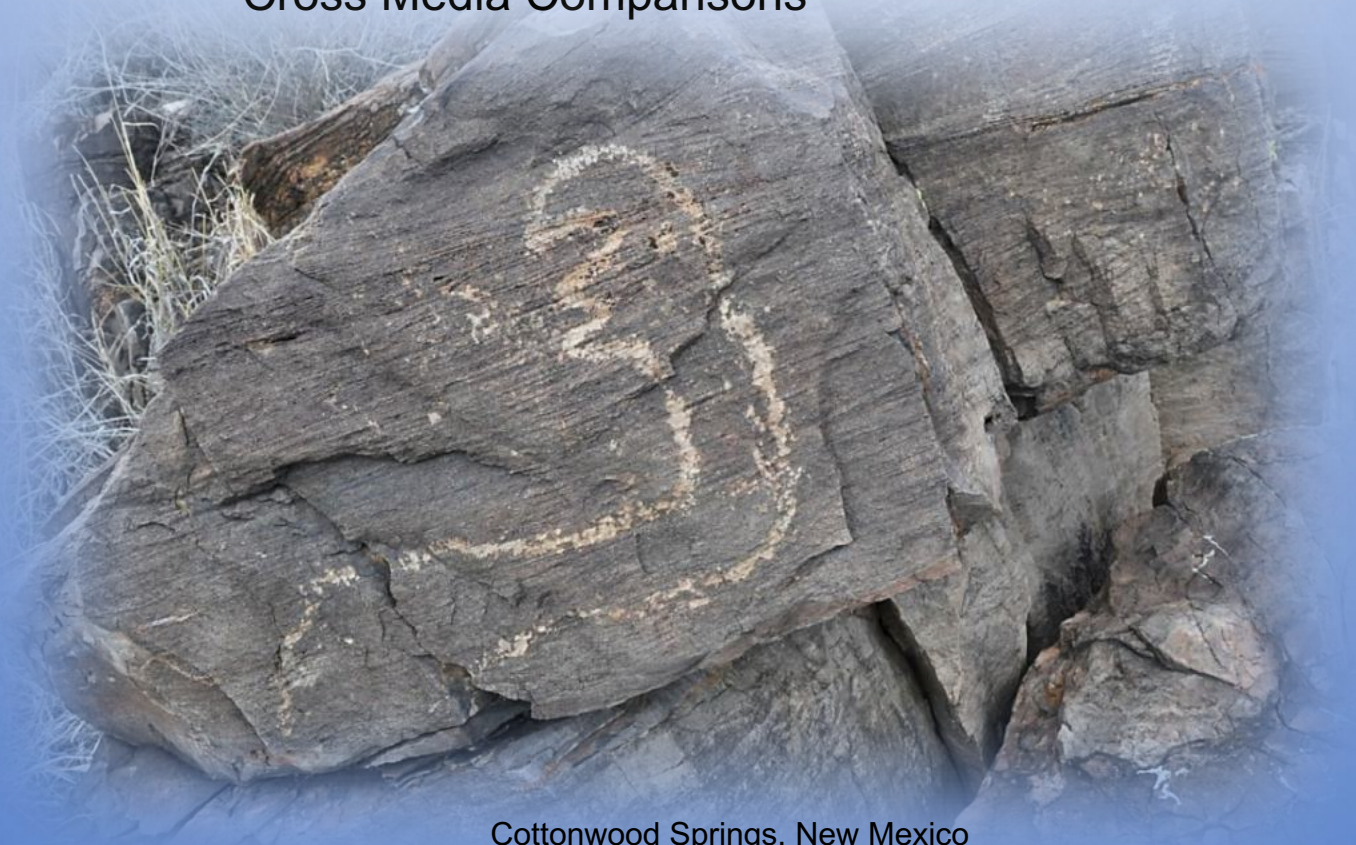


Figure 3: Adapted from Cosgrove's Figure 126 from Upper Gila and Hueco Caves. Wooden tablita and bird: a, d-f, Doolittle Cave; b,c, g-j, l,o, Mule Creek; k, Lone Mountain Cave; m, Cave 7, Hueco Mountains; n, Cave 5, Hueco Mountains.

# Documentation and Identification Methods

- Identify attributes: Snake/serpent like, horn or crest, feathers, rattle, square-nose
- Search photos – my and other researchers
- Literature search
- Social Media
- Cross Media Comparisons

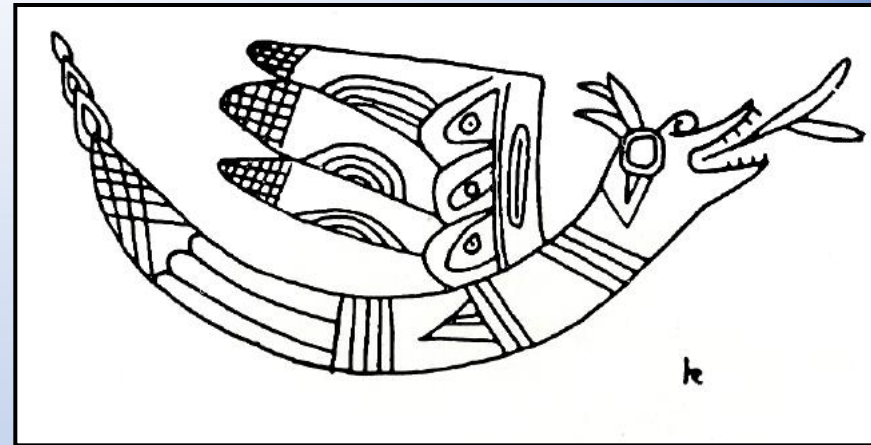


Cottonwood Springs, New Mexico  
Over 1200 images with this single horned serpent



# Literature Search

- Horned, crested, and feathered serpents have been documented throughout North America.
- Schaafsma states that “horned, and sometimes feathered” serpents are less frequent in the Jornada Mogollon rock imagery and that their distribution is mostly in the vicinity of El Paso (1992:64).
- No detailed documentation of the form or distribution in the Jornada.
- Several authors have suggested this figure has an affinity with the Mexican deity, Quetzalcoatl, and state that these are “signature images” of the Jornada Mogollon style.



From Sun Circles and Human Hands: The Southeastern Indians – Art and History



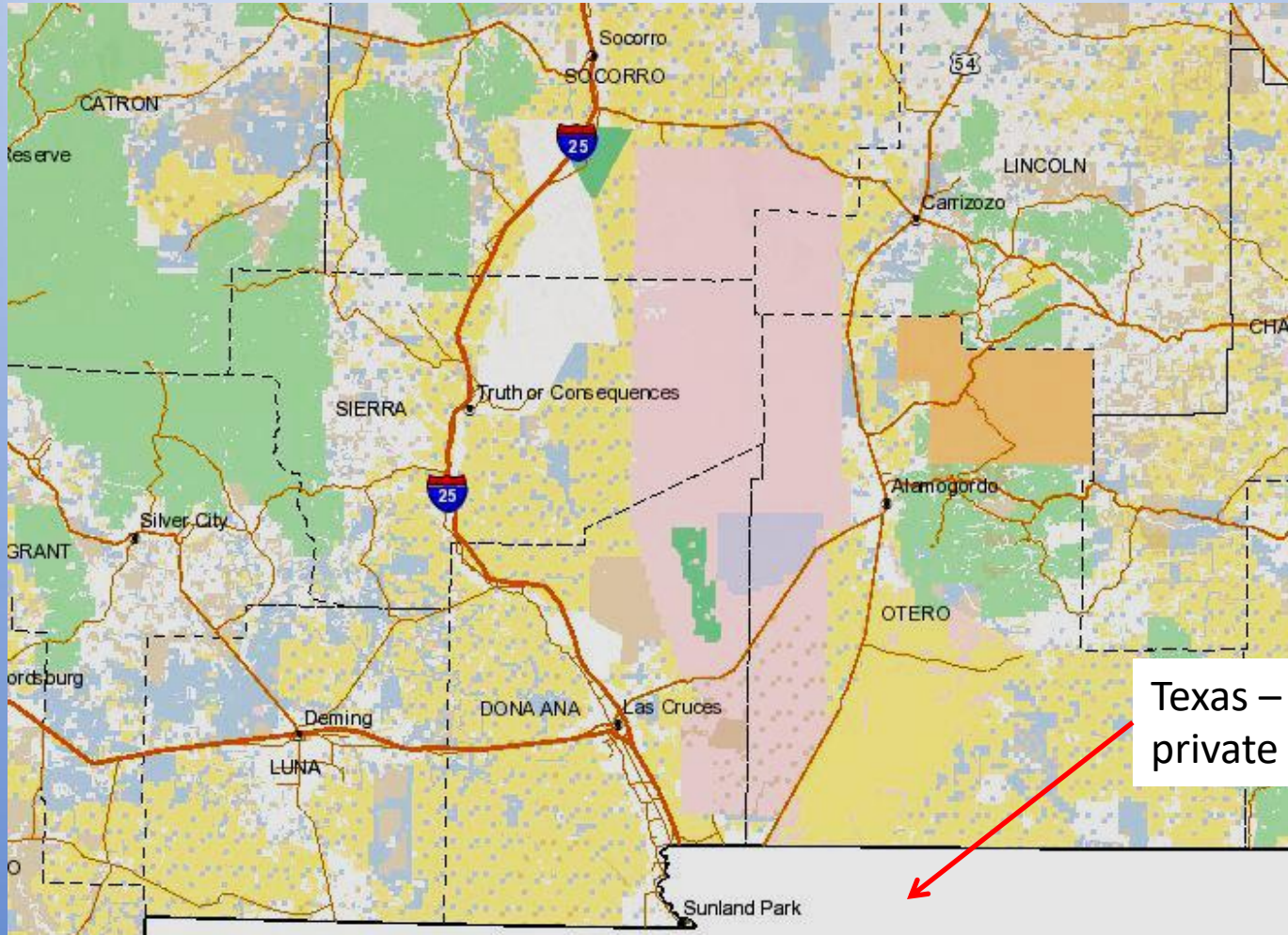
Chicken Itza: Photo by Marglyph  
Temple of K'uk'ulkan

# Some areas are a challenge to document

Military Reservation

Bureau of Indian Affairs/Tribal

MEXICO



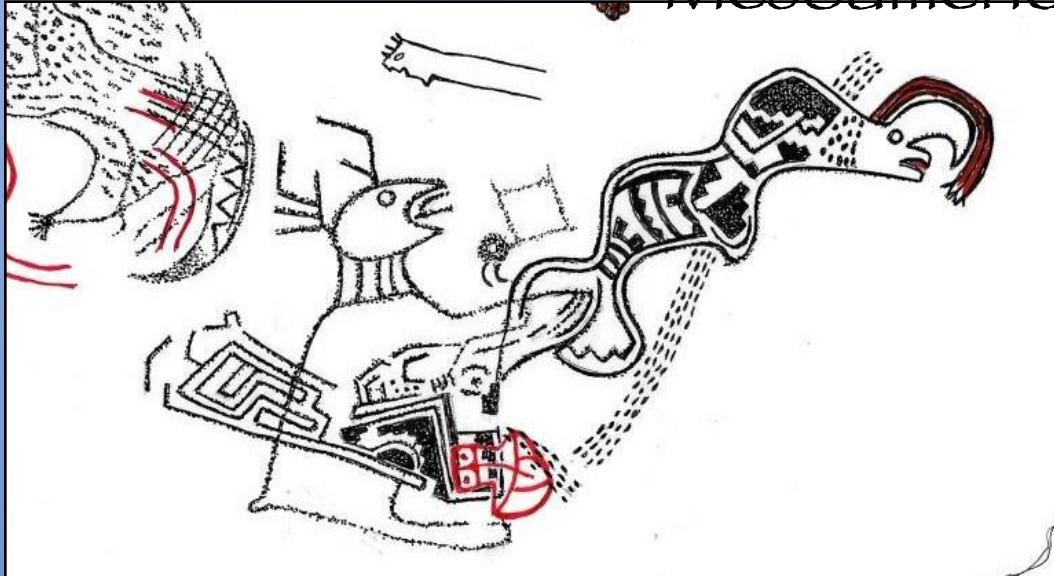
Texas – Mostly private property

<http://landstatus.nmstatelands.org/default.aspx>

Although some research has been recently done on military land and social media provided some in Mexico.



The theory that feathered serpents were signature images developed from a few images and was posed by researchers that had studied Mesoamerica.

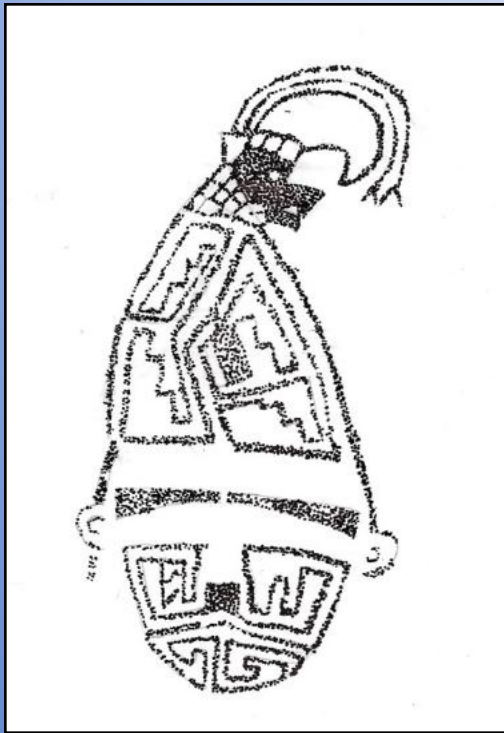


Near Fort Hancock, Texas

- Horned and Plumed
- Stepped designs on torso – not feathers
- Forward horn/plume
- El Paso Vicinity – 80 km



One of the most  
published is from Hueco  
Tanks, Texas.



Horned and plumed  
with similar torso  
design to the one at  
Ft. Hancock

Site 10-F  
DStretch yre\_cb)



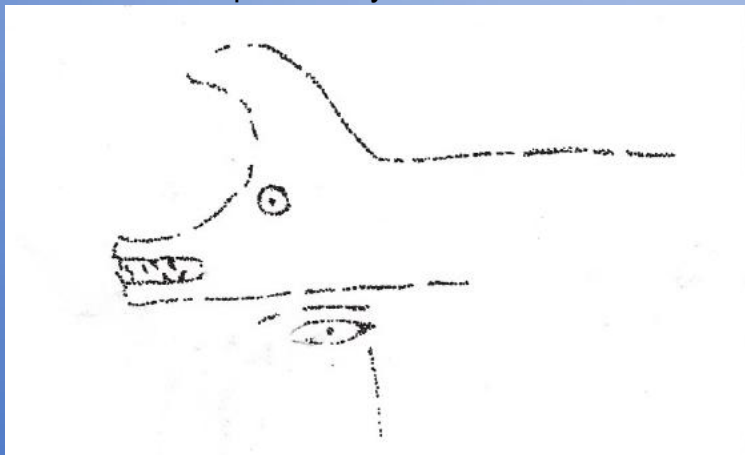


But the majority lacked plumes or feathers  
Some not noted until the rise of DStretch



Site 9-D-1 DStretch CMYKmtC, Photo by  
RupestrianCyber Services

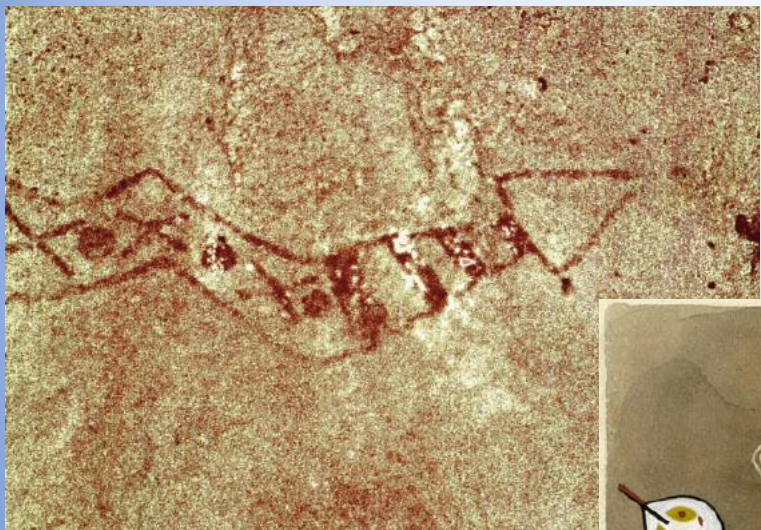
Hueco  
Tanks,  
Texas



DStretch yre

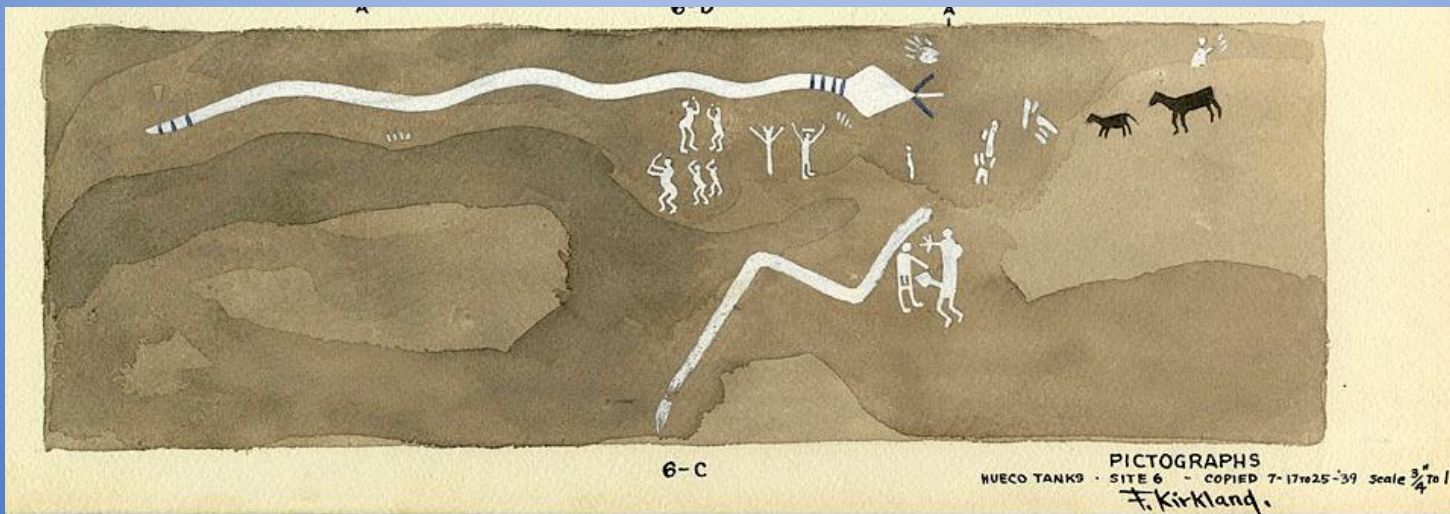


But there are many other snakes without any of these features



Dstretch ac\_yre\_cf

# Hueco Tanks, Texas



Watercolors  
by Forest  
Kirkland



# Hueco Tanks, Texas



Photo by Otis Aultman – 1920's

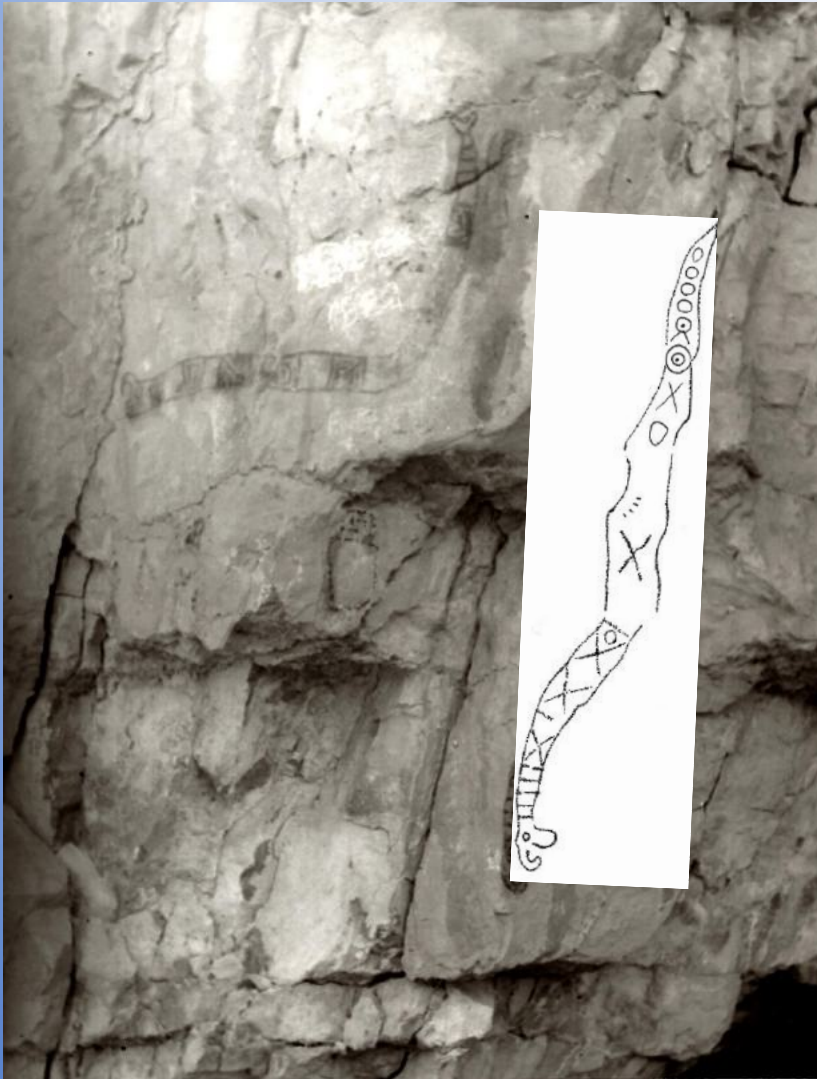




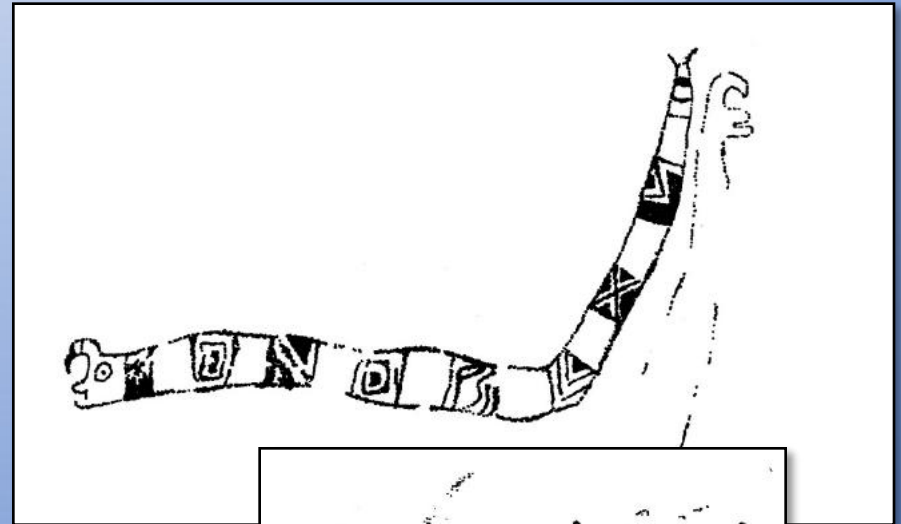


Many had squared off  
snouts and teeth.

East of El Paso, Texas



Otis Aultman 1920s Photo



John Green called these “feathered serpents” but appear to be “just horned”

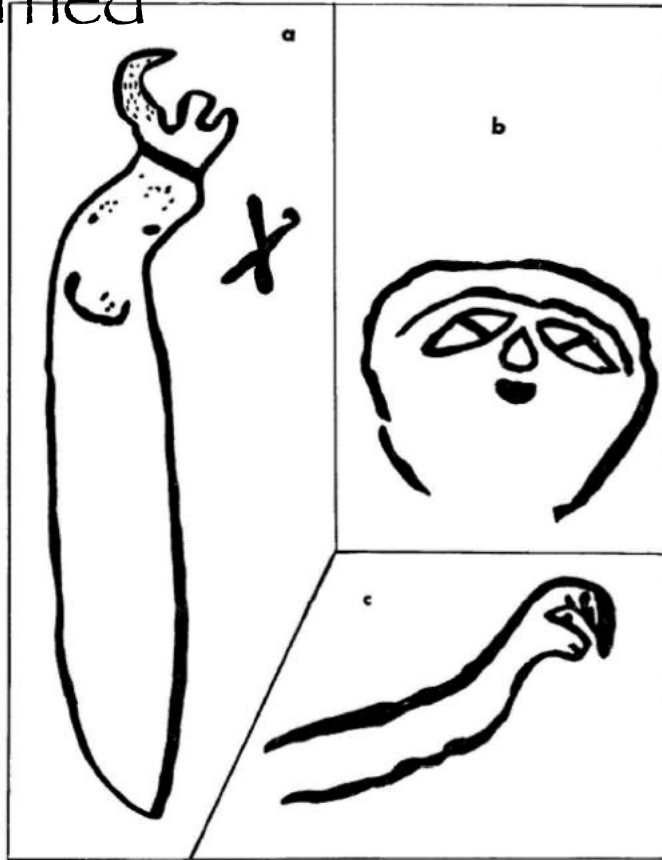


Fig. 11. Negative drawings of the two feathered serpent depictions, the face or mask, and an X-type design, all found on the south side of Fusselman Canyon. (Drawing a. is 1/5 actual size, b. is 2/5 actual size, and c. is 3/10 actual size).

Illustration by John Green 1967

## El Paso, Texas

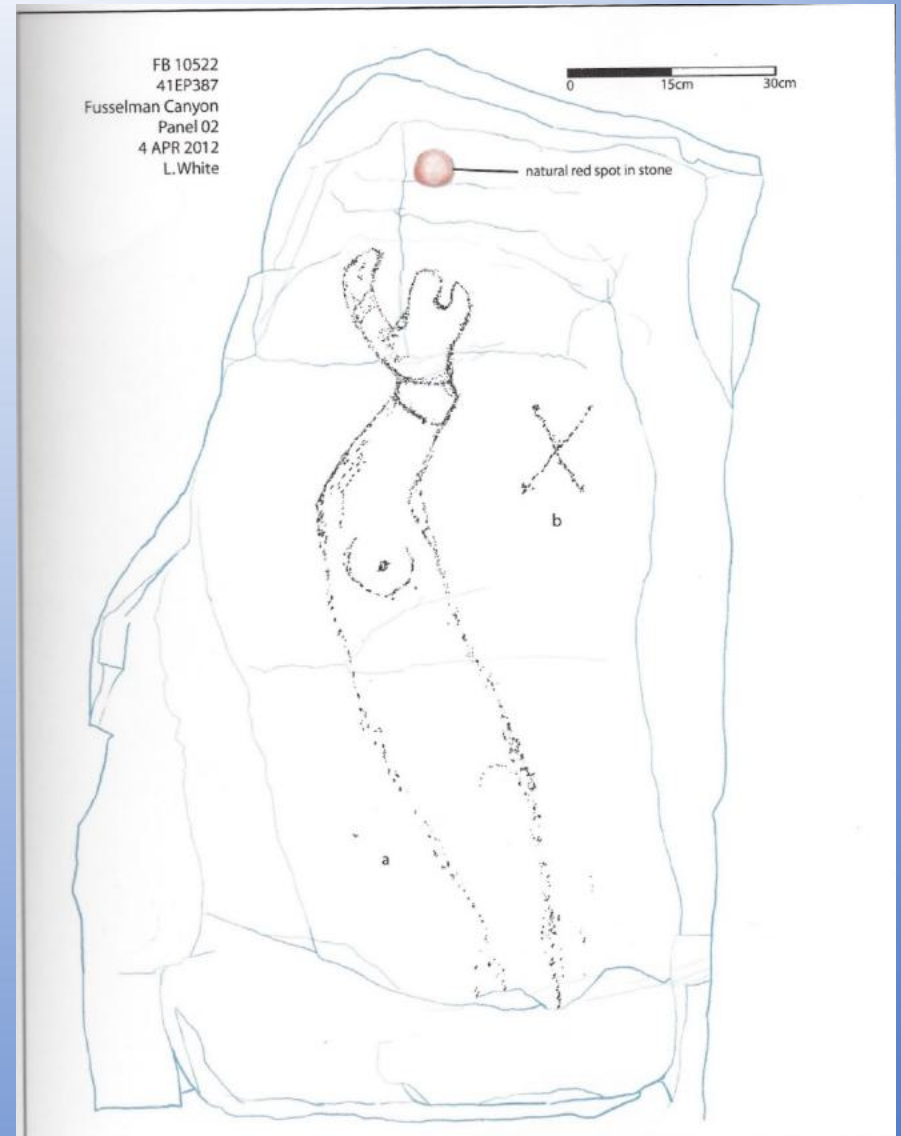
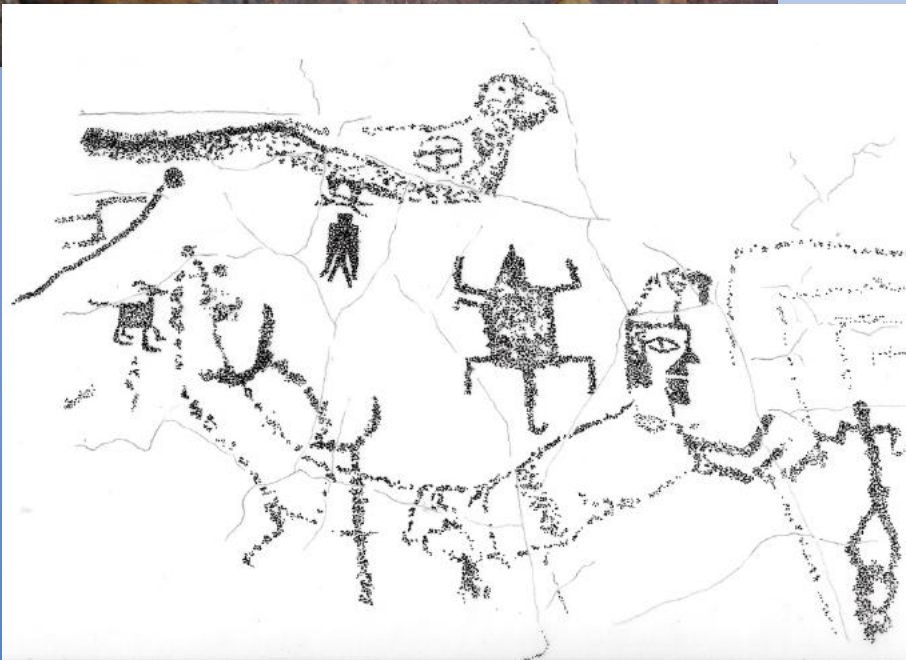


Illustration by Laurie White  
Loendorf et al 2013

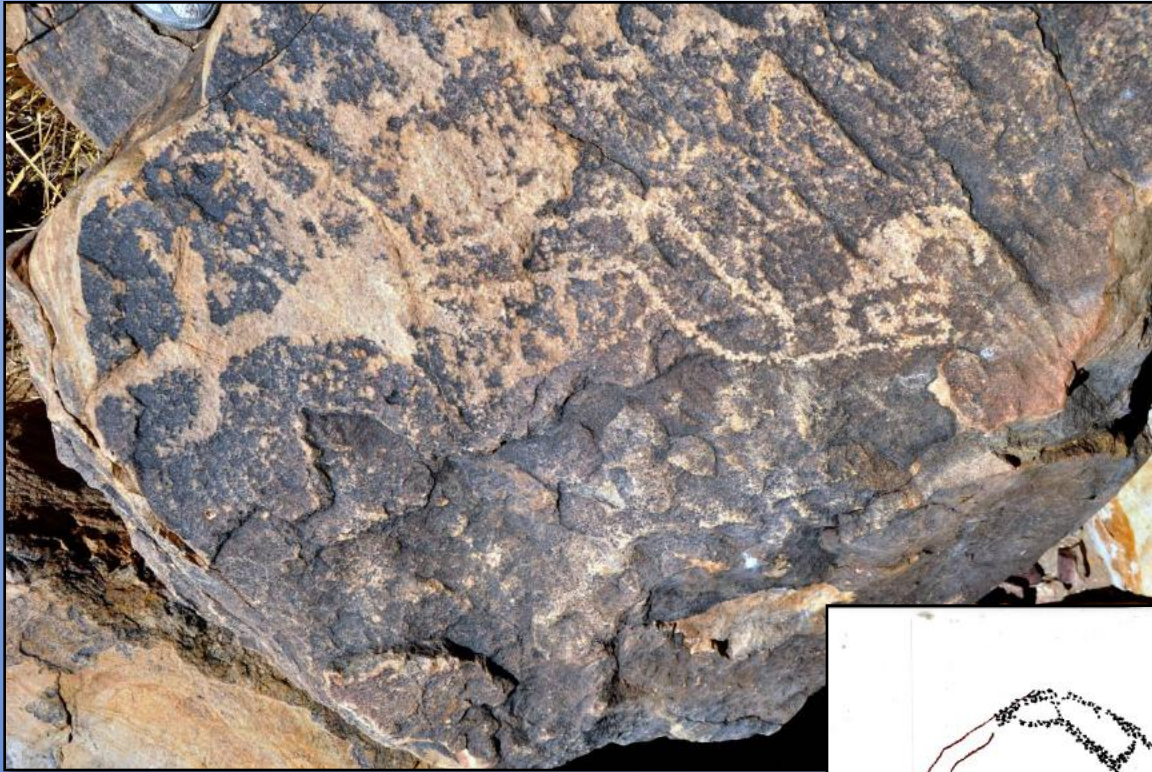


# Some looked like caps rather than horns



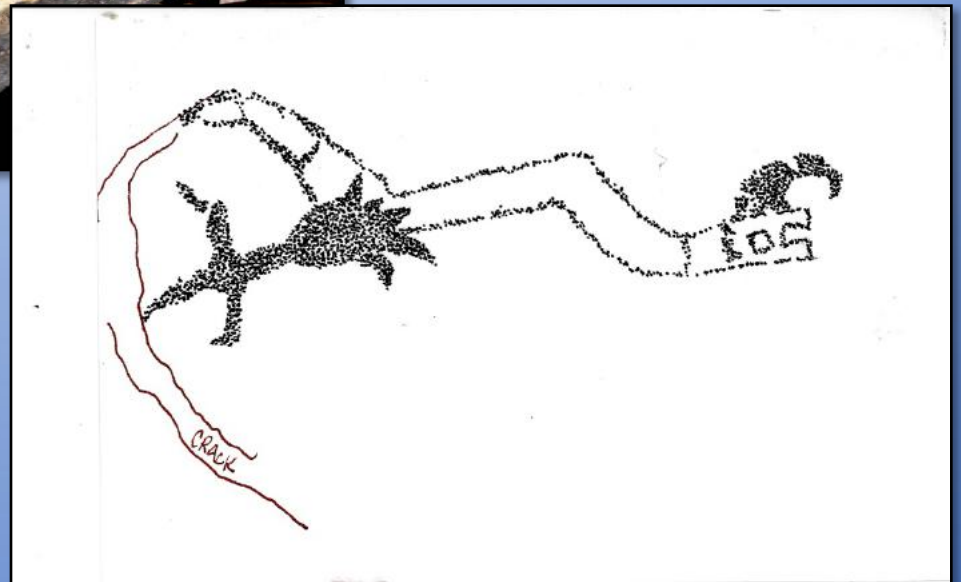
Northeast of Deming, New Mexico

# Northeast of Deming, New Mexico



- Classic form
- Horn forward
- Only two panels out of hundreds

- 130 km northwest of El Paso





# Finlay Mountains, Texas

- This snake resembles other examples, but the head is missing.
- 78 km Northwest of El Paso



Dstretch Ire



Many are abbreviated forms with just heads



Storyteller Site and Jarilla  
Mountain



# Jarilla Mountains, New Mexico

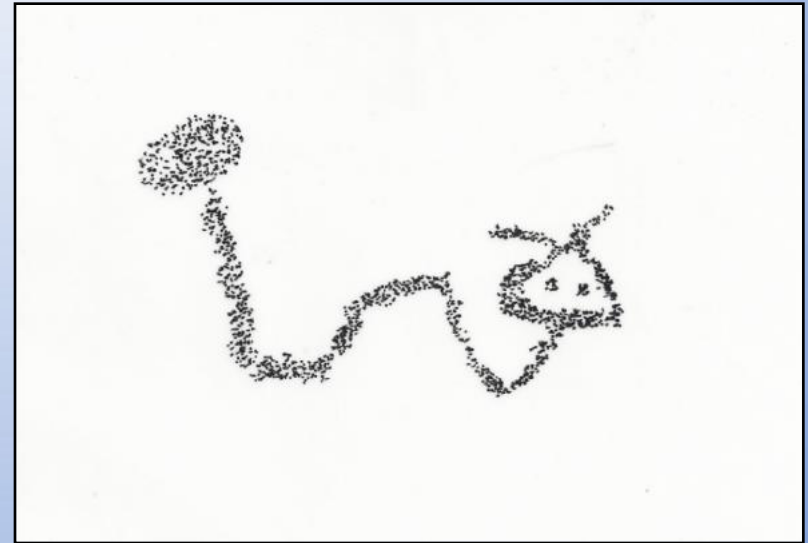




Some had forked  
tongues and rattles  
that some interpret as  
horns.



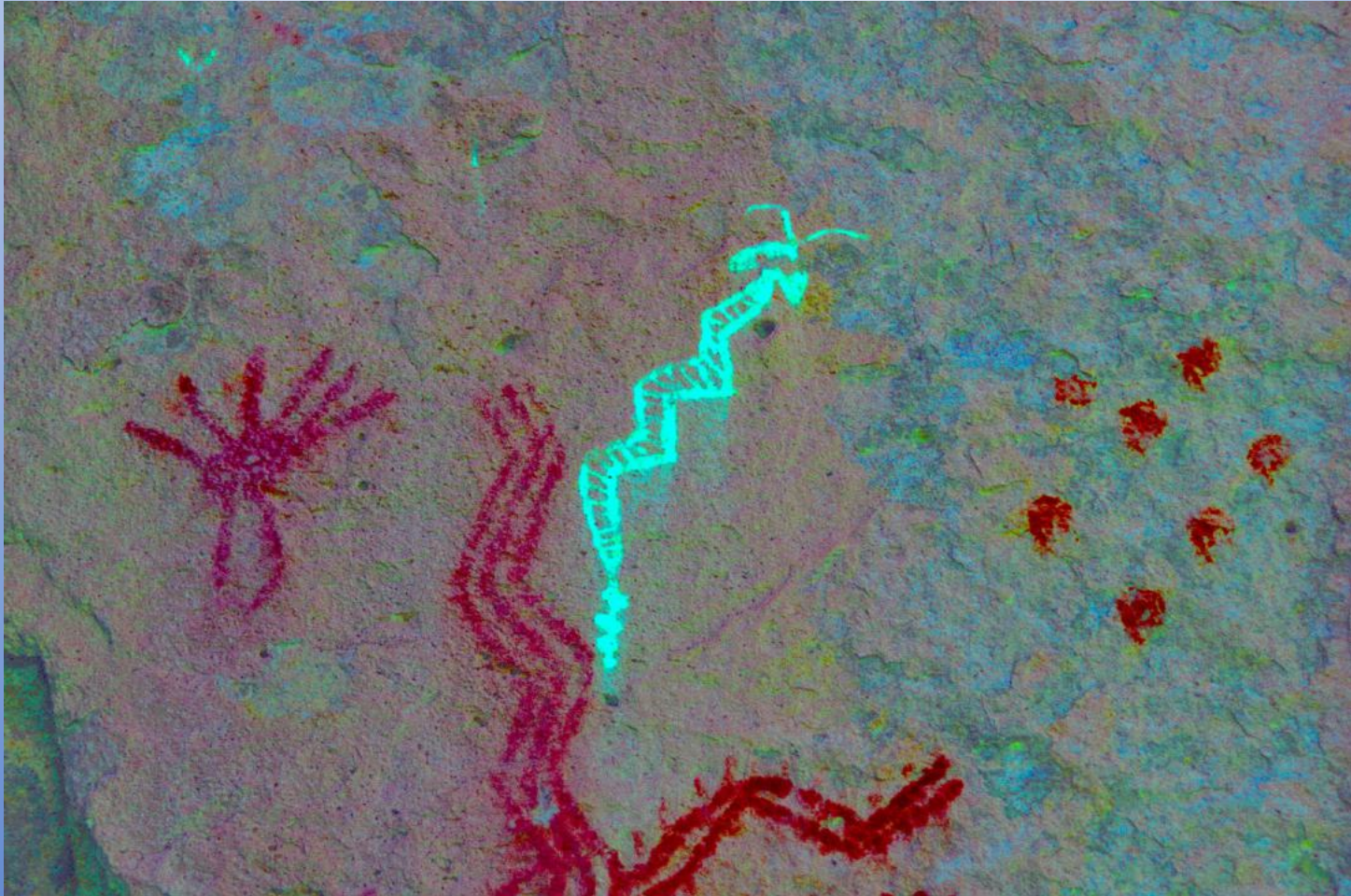
North of Deming, New Mexico

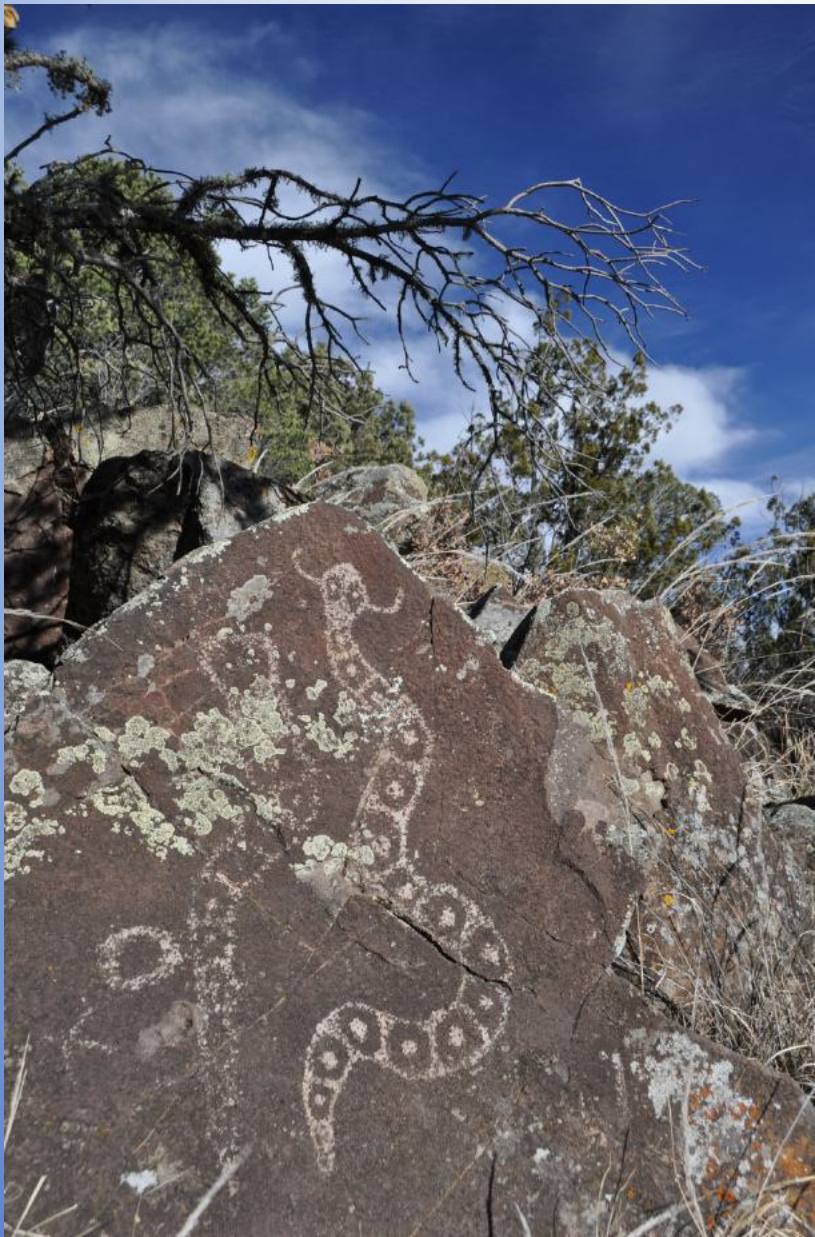


North of Las Cruces  
Tom Todsens photo archives



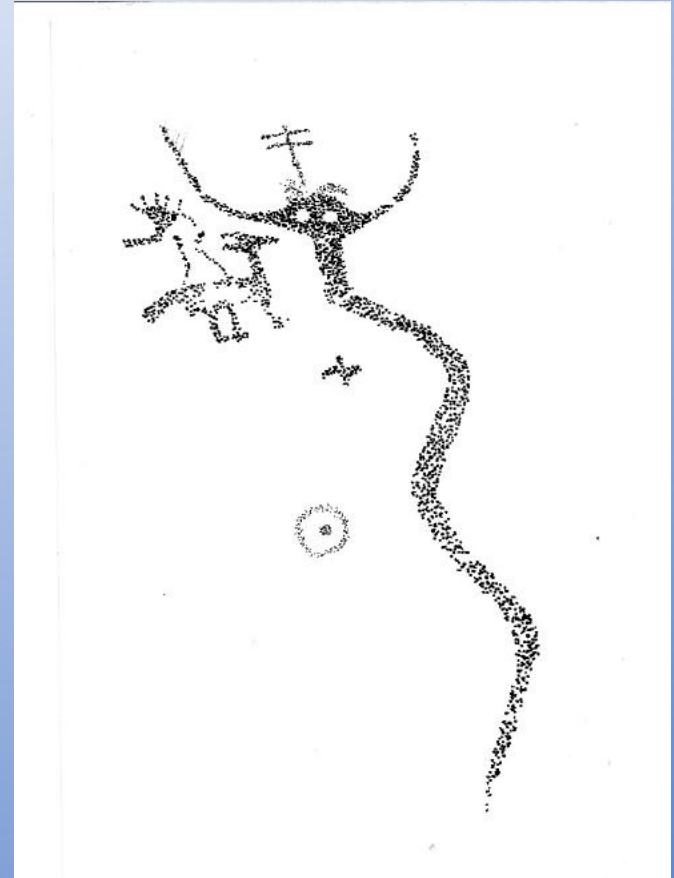
# West of Chloride, New Mexico





Snake Springs, New Mexico

Some had two horns  
similar to those further  
north

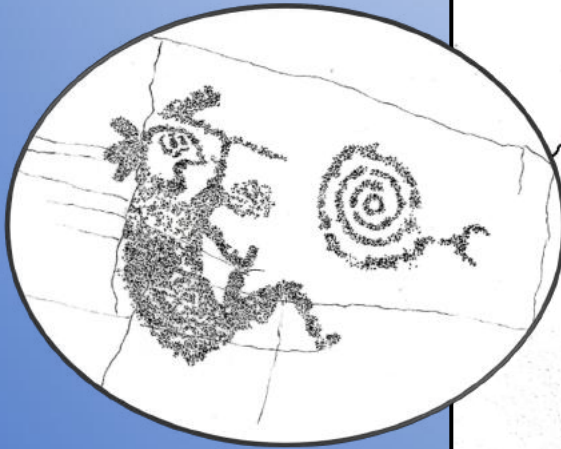
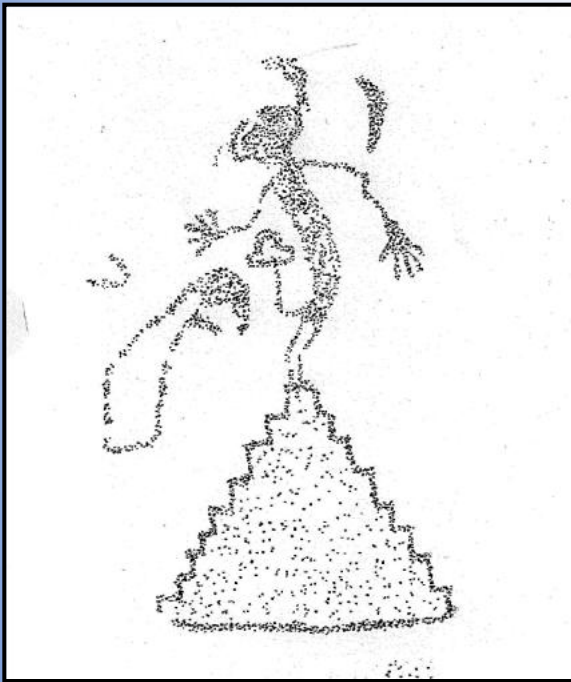


Val Verde, Northern, New  
Mexico



Some sites has  
different varieties of  
Horned Serpents

~215 km from El Paso



Sierra Blanca  
Region, New Mexico



Reptiles documented but  
reported that there were no  
horned serpents



What  
about  
Three  
Rivers??

Archaeological Society of  
New Mexico's Rock Art  
Recording School 1986-  
1992

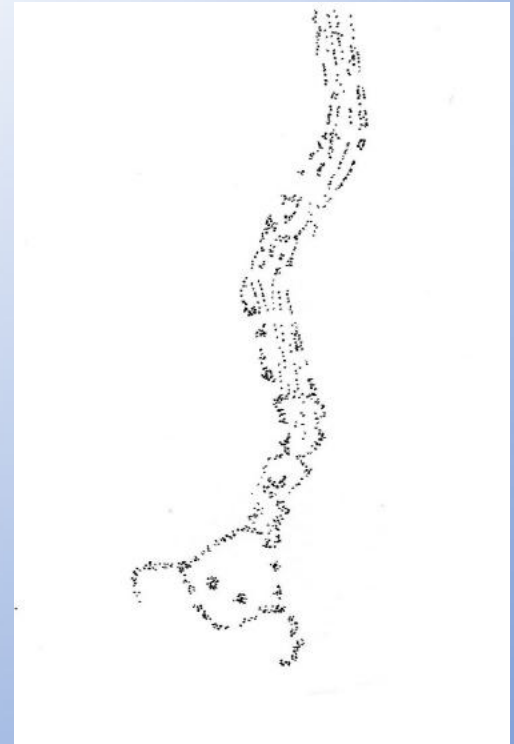


There are  
snakes but  
not as  
common as  
other  
elements.

Three Rivers, New Mexico

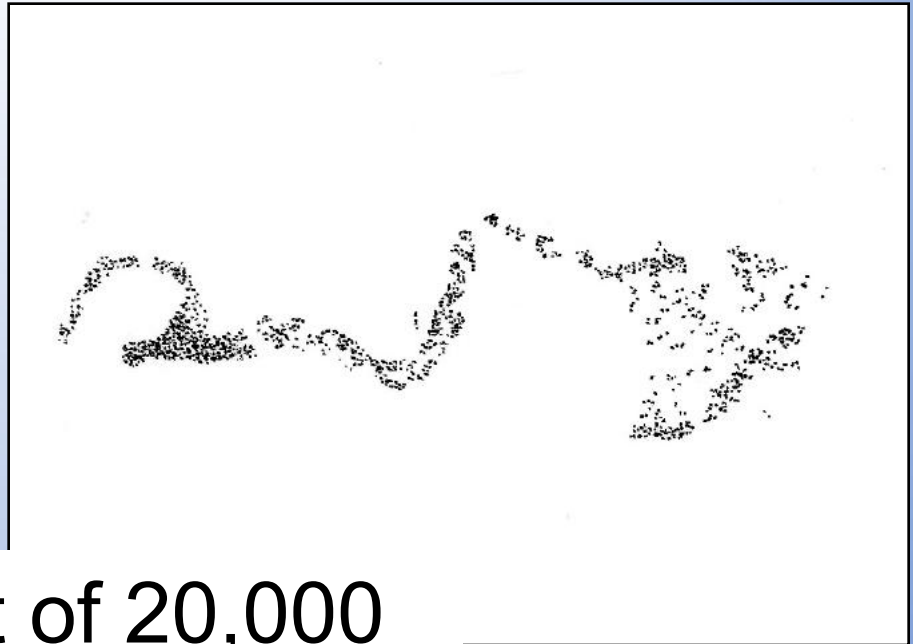


There is at least one two horn  
snake at Three Rivers, New  
Mexico





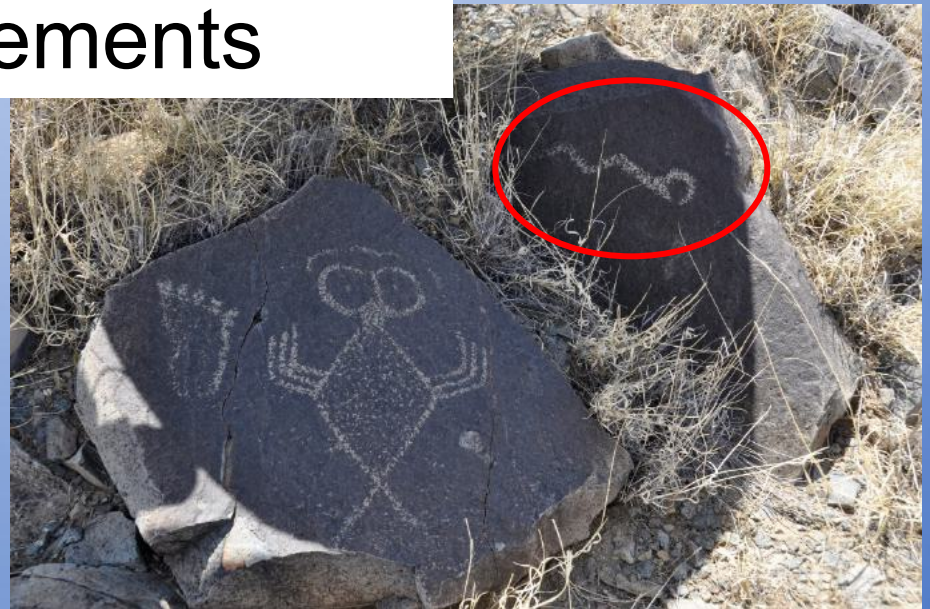
A more detail look at  
the imagery suggests  
three possibilities



3 out of 20,000  
elements



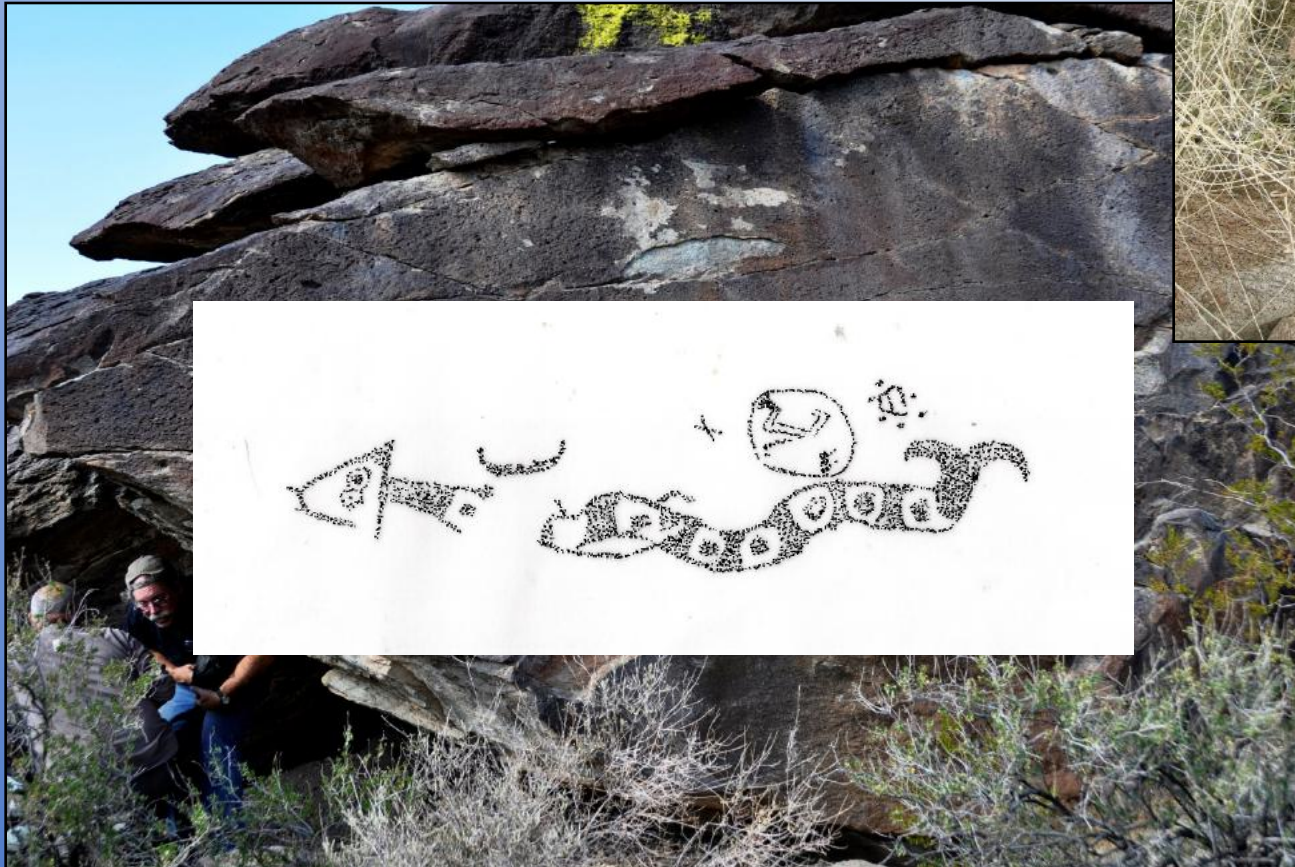
Three Rivers,  
New Mexico





# Otero Mesa, NM

A large site with probably as many images as Three Rivers has a variety of snake imagery



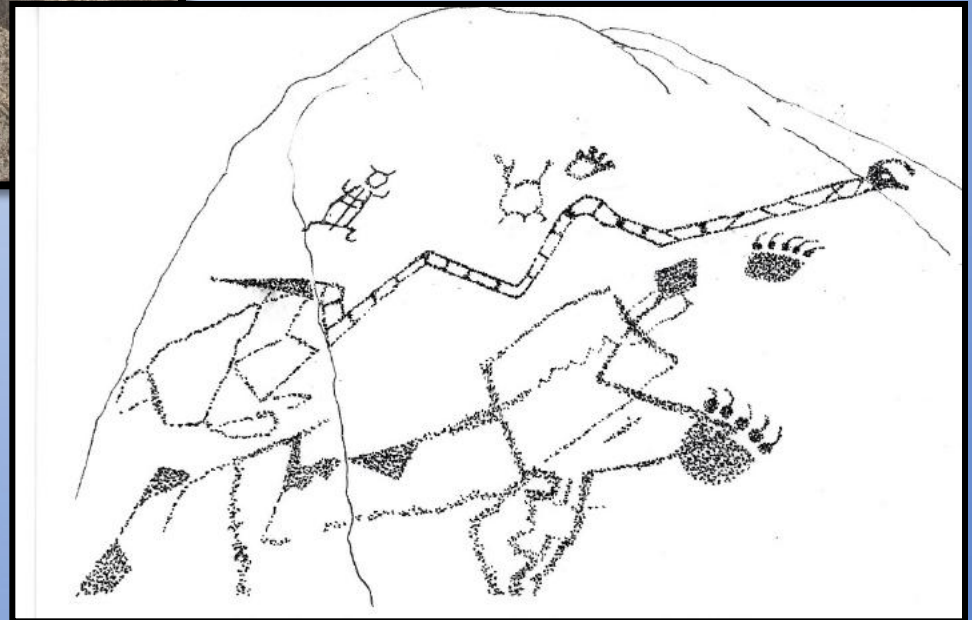


# Otero Mesa, NM





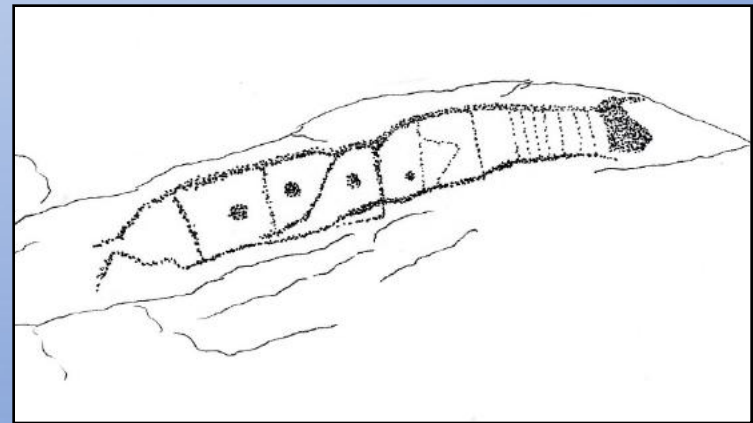
# Horned Serpents, Alamo Mountain, New Mexico



No complete documentation has been done and only a few horned serpents.



# Horned Serpents, Alamo Mountain, New Mexico



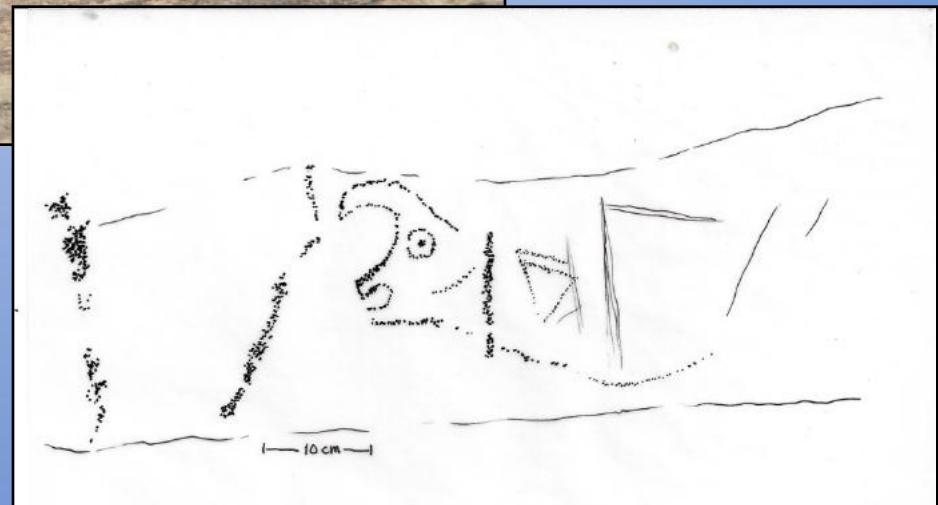
But not many





All in this  
region  
have  
forward  
pointing  
horns

Apache Flats, New Mexico





# Near Ruidoso, New Mexico



Photo by Mike Bilbo

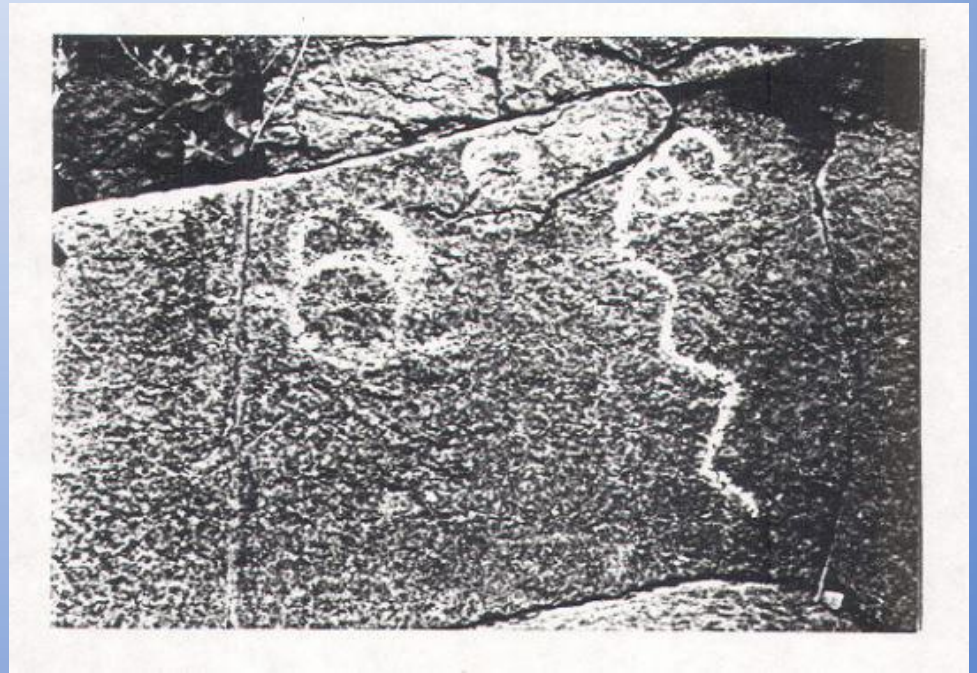


Photo by Delton Estes

# Some examples may be marginal



Figure 7.32. Left: feathered serpent from Sacramento Shelter; right: feathered serpent from Mouth of Grapevine.

This “element” may or may not be a serpent, but it doesn’t have feathers ... but rather a plume or headdress.  
Versa Report



Lobo Valley, Texas (photo by LeRoy Unglaub)



Cacti Canyon, New Mexico – Versa Report



# Cross Media examples

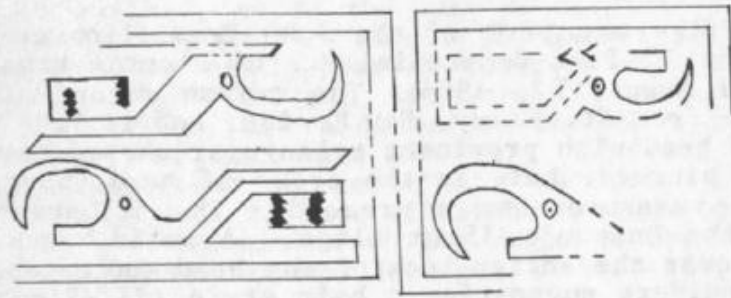


Figure 7, Drawing of design motif on an El Paso Polychrome olla.

Ceramic from  
Hot Wells

All examples  
from Vernon  
Brooks

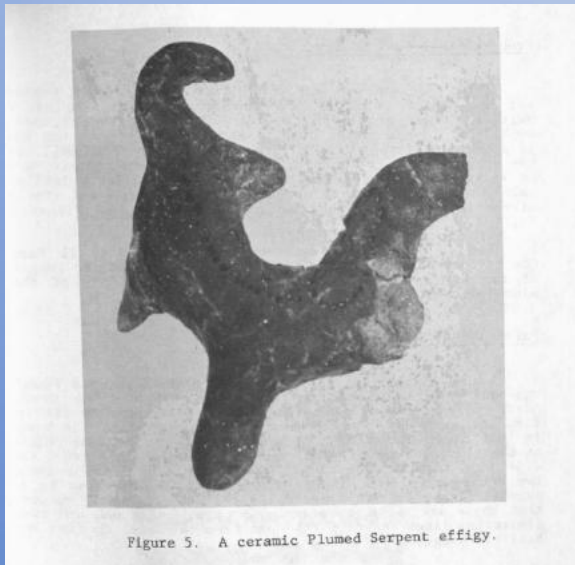


Figure 5. A ceramic Plumed Serpent effigy.

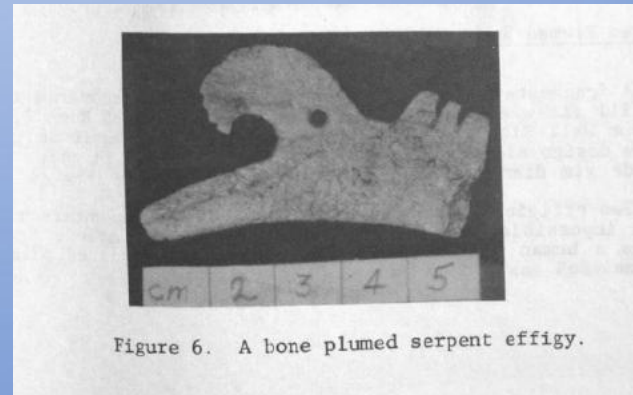


Figure 6. A bone plumed serpent effigy.

Bone effigy from  
Hot Wells

# Cross Media Studies: Mimbres

Jornada and Mimbres – close ties

Traveling east to west

29 examples of snakes in Mimbres database but 14 of these has no provenience (could be fakes)

3-4 are horned or crested – none have feathers

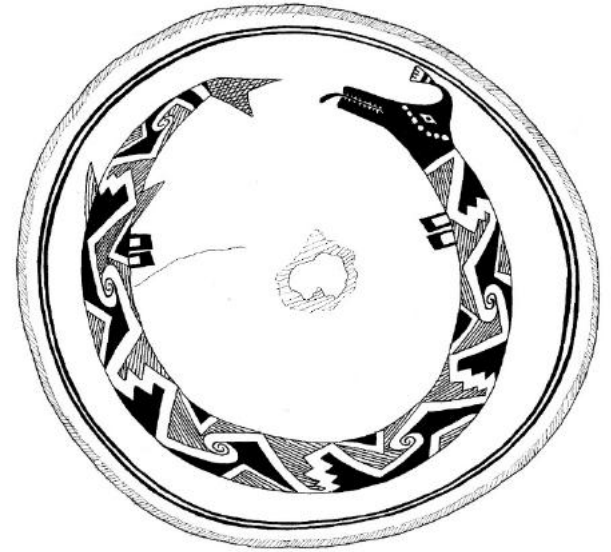
Some are composite animals – like snake/fish, etc.



#MimPIDD ID: 8610  
Owner: EMAP - Center for  
Archaeology and Society  
Repository, ASU  
Site Name: Ronnie Pueblo  
(LA45103)

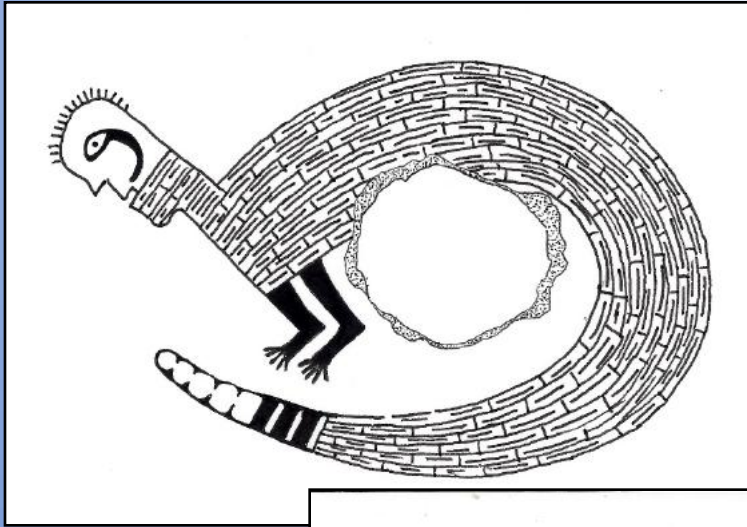


# Mimbres examples



#MimPIDD ID: 1650  
National Museum of the  
American Indian

# Other snakes in the Mimbres

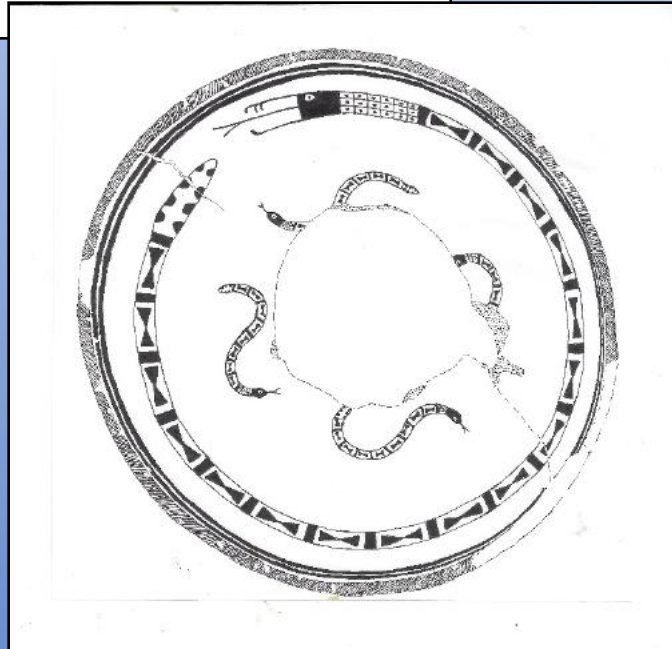


#MimPIDD  
ID: 2628  
Site  
Name: Swarts



West Baker

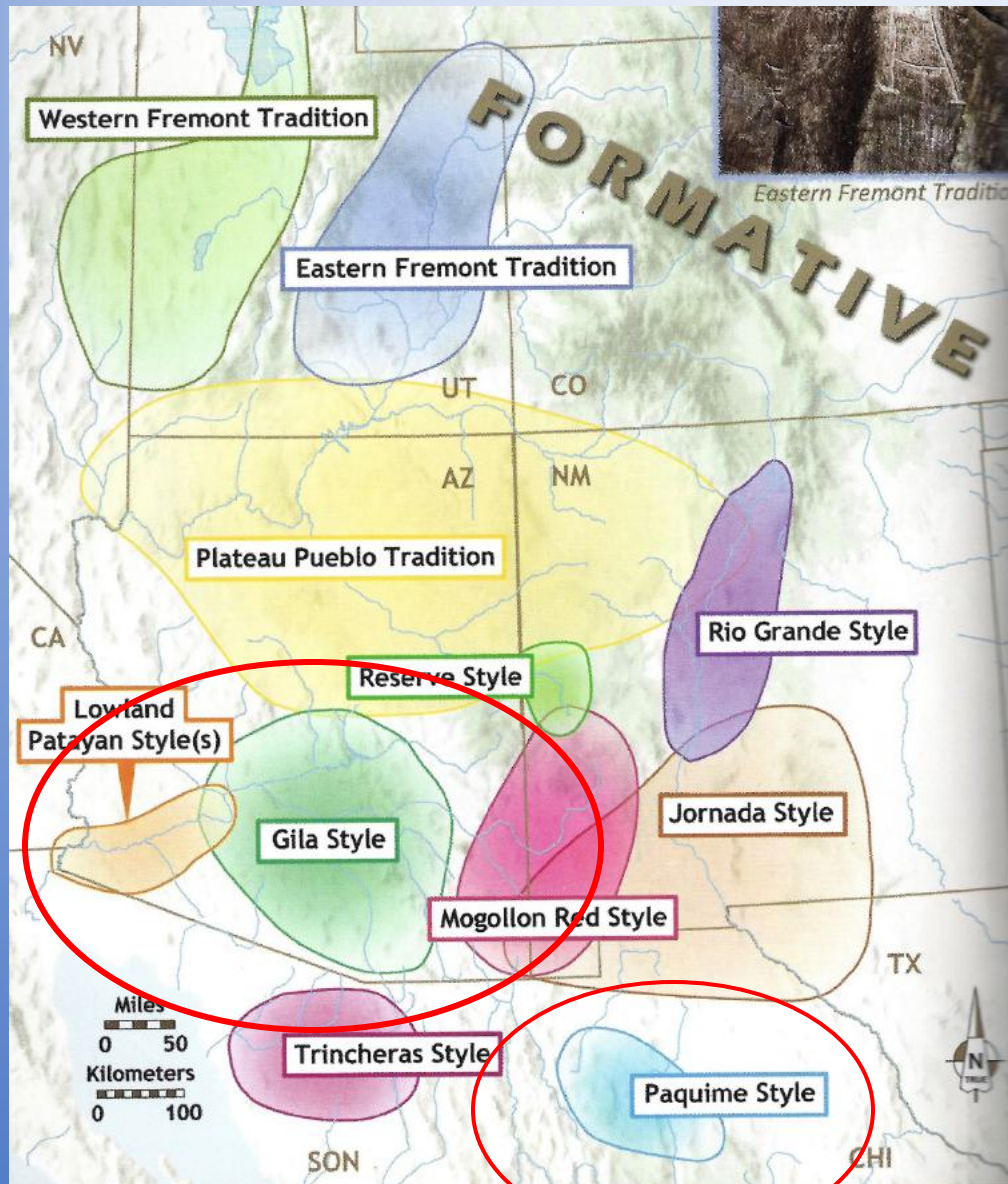
#MimPIDD ID: 5042  
Housed at the  
Millicent Rogers  
Museum



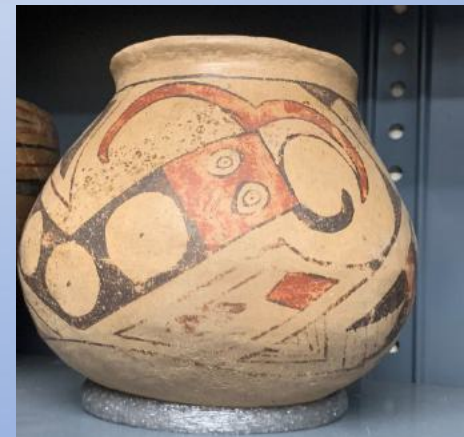
MimPIDD ID: 3609  
Housed at the  
National Museum  
of the American  
Indian



# Other Neighboring Cultures



Why are there no horned serpents in the Hohokam Region?



El Paso Museum of Archaeology

Paquime Style and Casas Grande. Are they related?



There are some  
horned serpent  
petroglyphs,  
but more study  
is needed

Río Piedras  
Verdes,  
Chihuahua





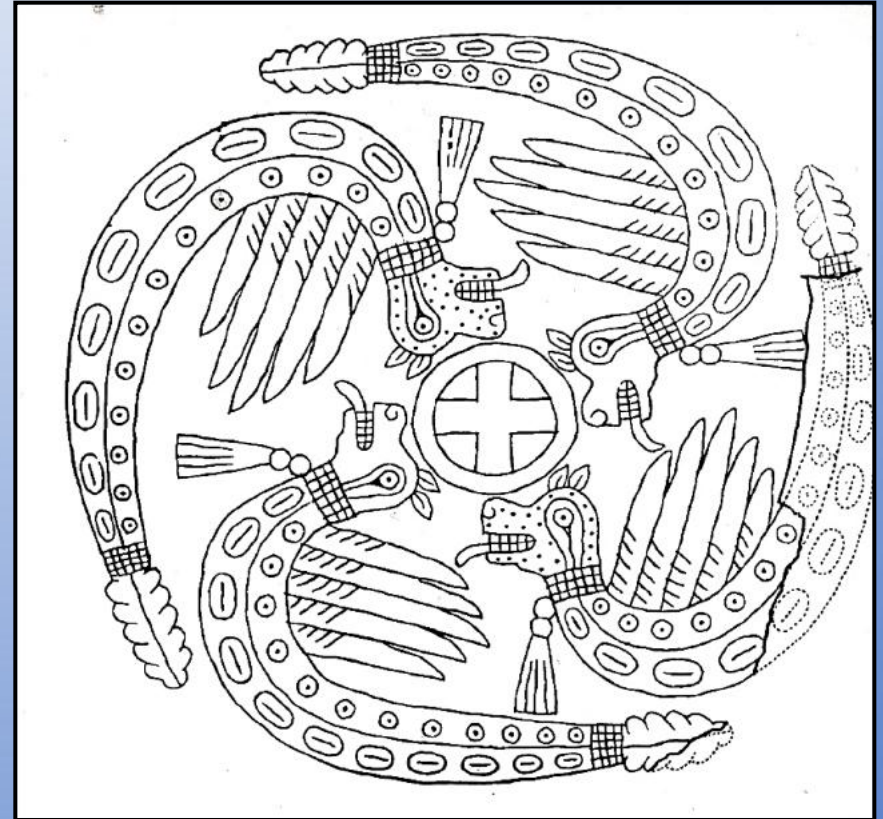
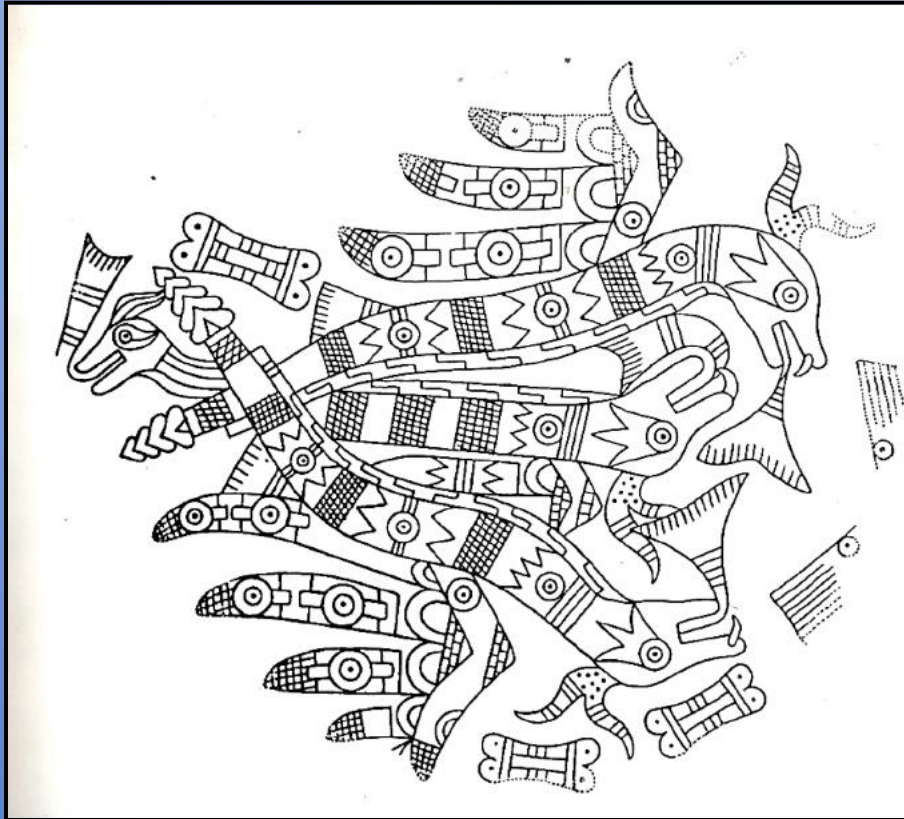
Schaafsma states that in the Paquime style the head alone is more commonly represented – but only a few sites were documented at time she wrote that.



Photos by Ben Brown  
and Jeff Romney

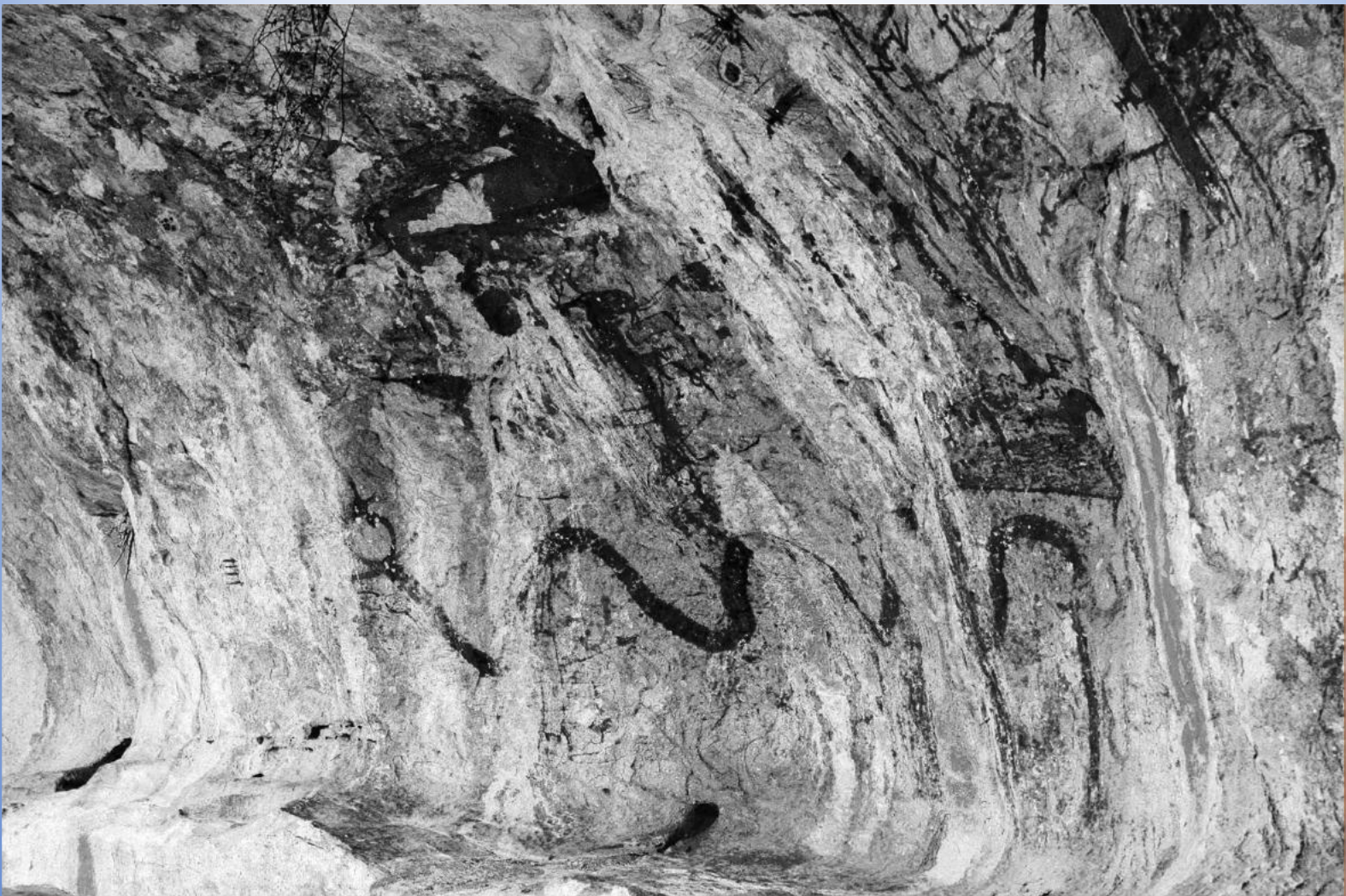


Horned and Feathered Serpents were major components of the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex as well as other cultures



From Sun Circles and Human Hands: The Southeastern Indians – Art and History





Mystic Shelter the LPS (Lower Pecos River Style) art has been radiocarbon dated to **3920±120** years BP (Rowe 2001), before the appearance of horned serpents in the Jornada region based on current dating – Myles. Jack Rabbit Shelter has serpent dating even earlier.



# Texas Panhandle

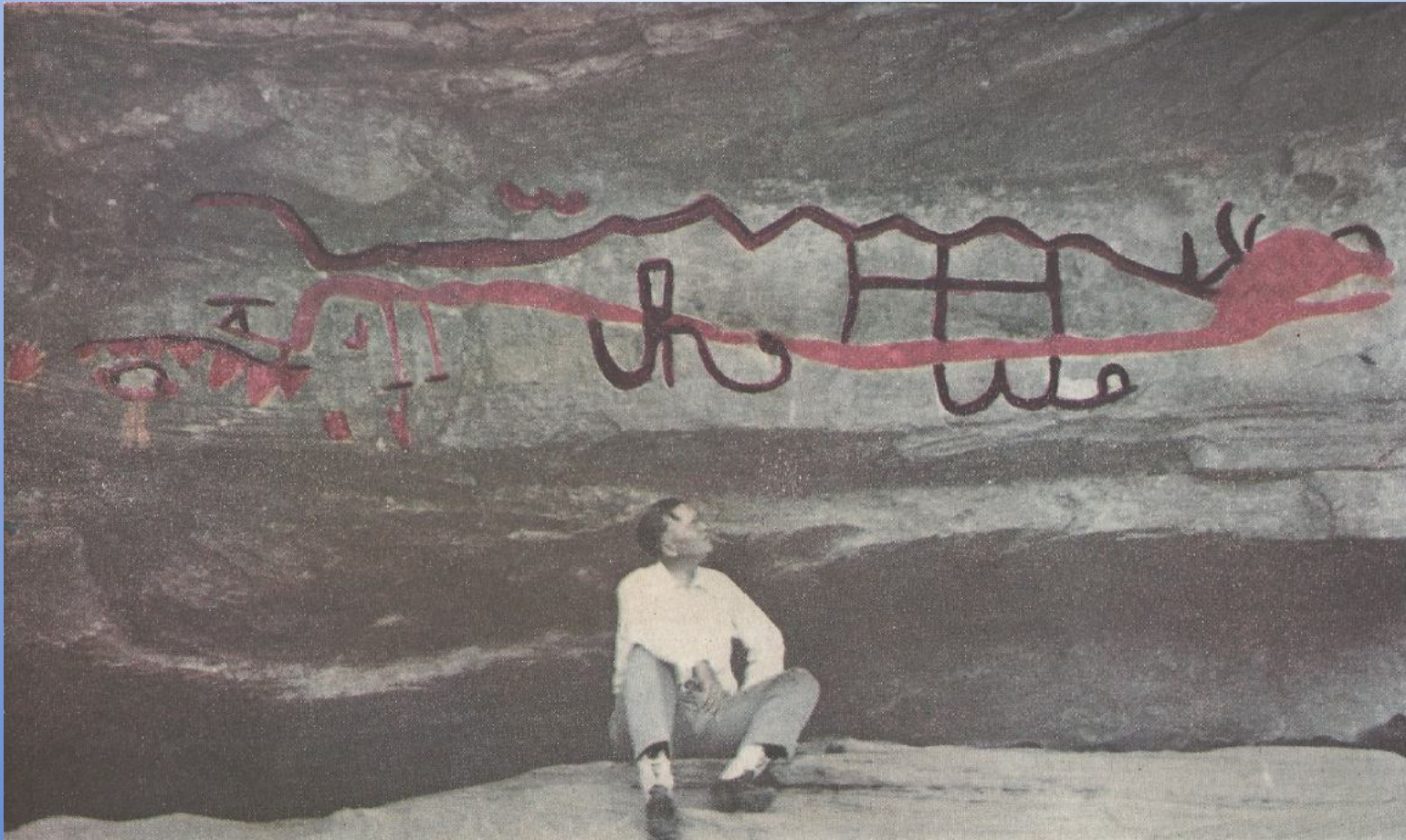


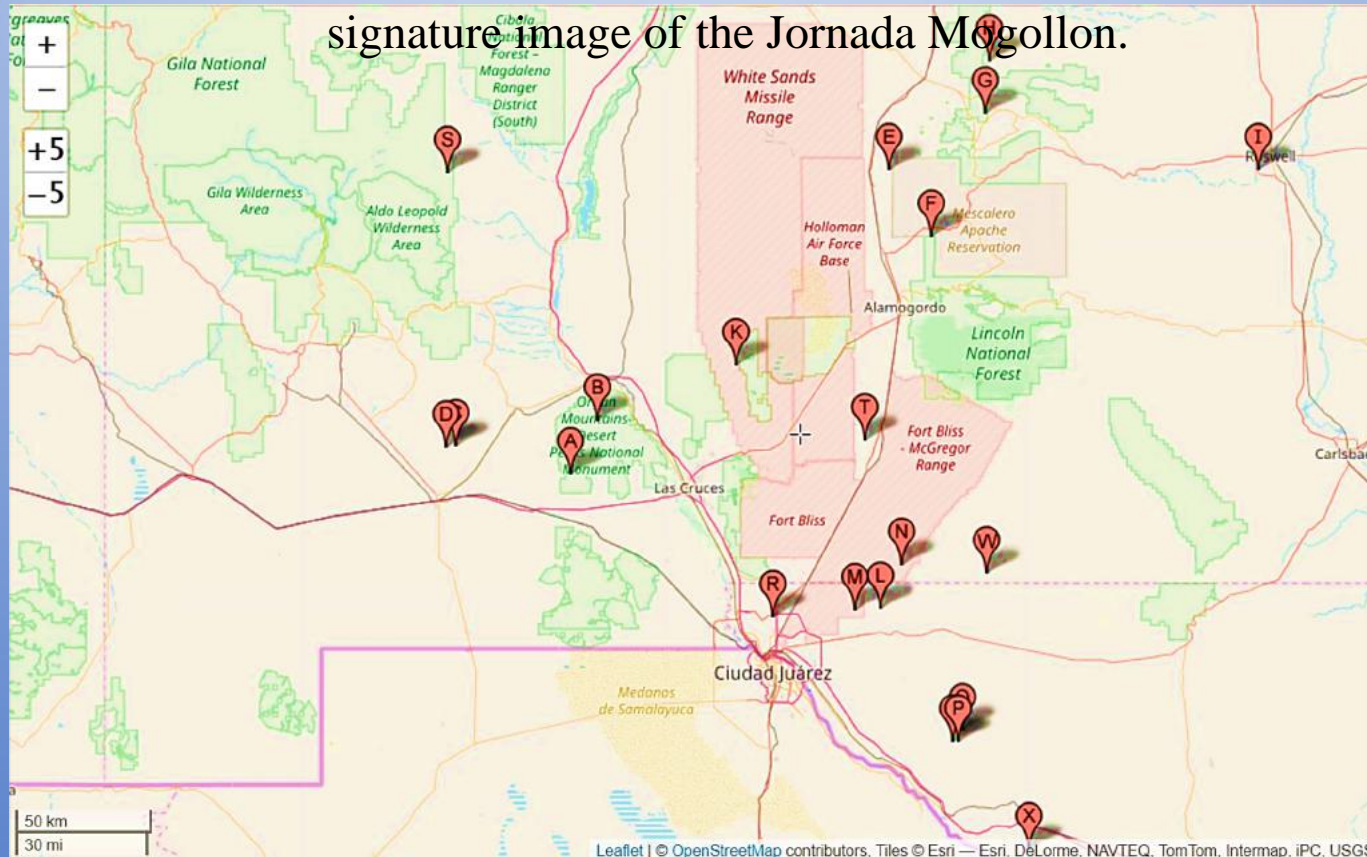
Plate CCXXIII – Newcomb and Kirkland 1967

So-Called Plumed Serpent, Handprints, etc The serpent-like creature, 13 ½ feet along, is painted in red and black with gradations of yellow and brown.



# Horned and Plumed Serpents (29 sites, 52 examples)

- The identification of horned and crested snakes by this study documents this iconography and shows the distribution of these figures beyond the vicinity of El Paso while still in the Jornada Mogollon Region.
- Although there are a few striking examples the results suggest that the number of horned and crested serpents are incidental rather than significant and might not be a signature image of the Jornada Mogollon.



# Results

- Horned snakes are infrequent in the Jornada
- Horned/plumed snakes are more widely spread in the Jornada than previously reported
- More research and comparisons are needed



Photo by Tom Todsen  
Archives



# Conclusions

Using the term Quetzalcoatl(feathered serpent) seems misguided since NONE in the Southwest are feathered

But not all depictions of Quetzalcoatl in Mesoamerica had feathers either.



<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=147279>

Chicken Itza – photo by  
Marglyph  
Temple of Kukulcán

# Conclusions

This icon is likely part of old patterns that endured over thousands and thousands of years, suggesting deep origins in time.

El Paso Polychrome  
found at Paquime –  
made in the Tularosa  
Basin



Redrawn from Di Peso, et al al, Volume 8, 1974 p 157



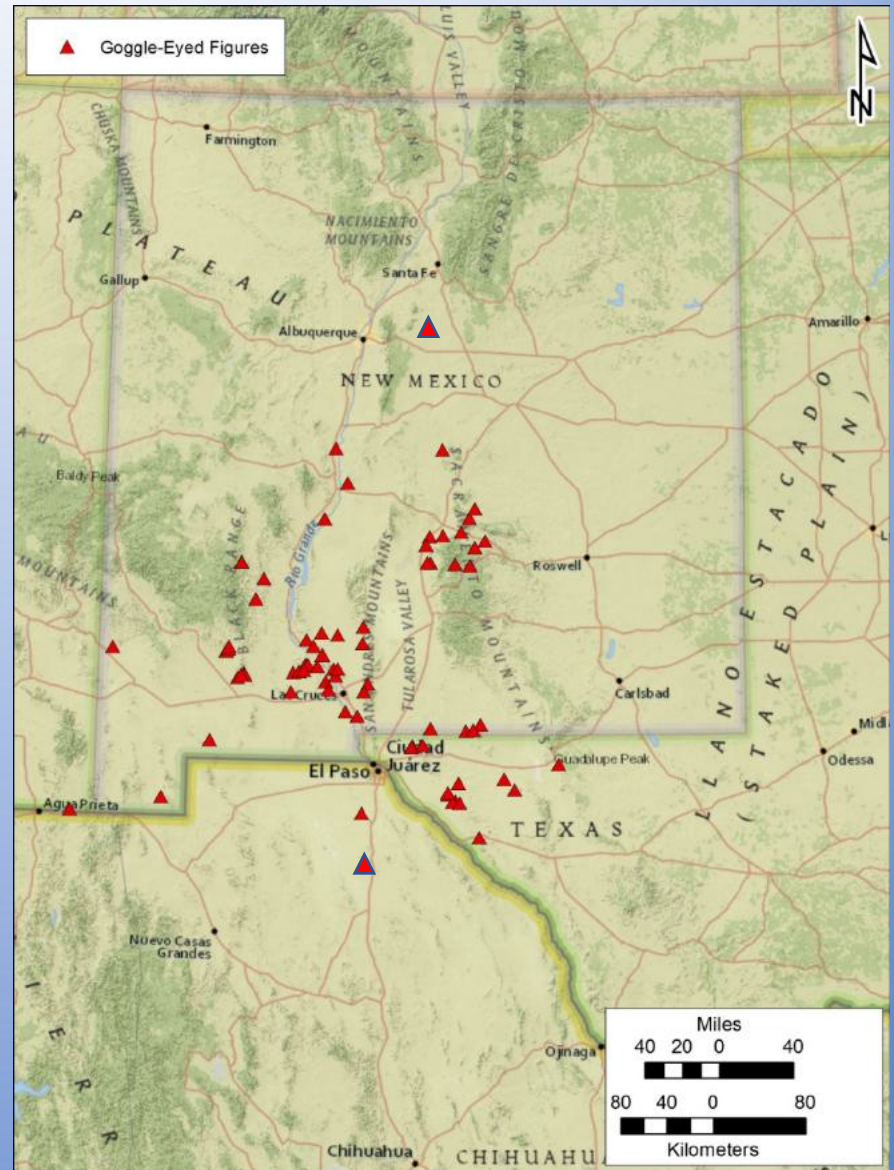
# Next steps

Further documentation

Comparison with other “signature images

Ethnography

Consultation with Native peoples



Map by Mark Willis



## Acknowledgements

John Davis, Myles Miller, Larry Loendorf, Mark Willis, Evelyn Billo, Robert Mark, David Parker, Kay Sutherland, LeRoy Unglaub, and Trinity Miller