

Comparing Water Symbolism of SW Rock Art with Iconography from Mesoamerica

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A widespread Indigenous "basement" culture that originated in the distant past influenced later societies (Covarrubias, 1957)

A "Proto-Uto-Aztecan" culture disseminated from the Great Basin and Northern Mexico to influence iconography across Mesoamerica and the Southwest (Shaul, 2014; Mukhopadhyay and Garfinkel, 2023)

Horned Snake and
Anthropomorph
West of Milton, Utah



Common Motifs Shared Between Mesoamerica and the Southwest

- Migrations
- Emergence
- Wind Symbols
- Hero Twins
- Spider Woman
- Tlaloc and Water gods
- Feathered and other Supernatural Serpents
- Prior Worlds
- There are more...

"We can, with reason, look beyond Hopi, Zuni, and Acoma to Mexico for additional insights into the ancient Southwest. They were connected." – Lekson (2001)



Florentine Codex



Moab

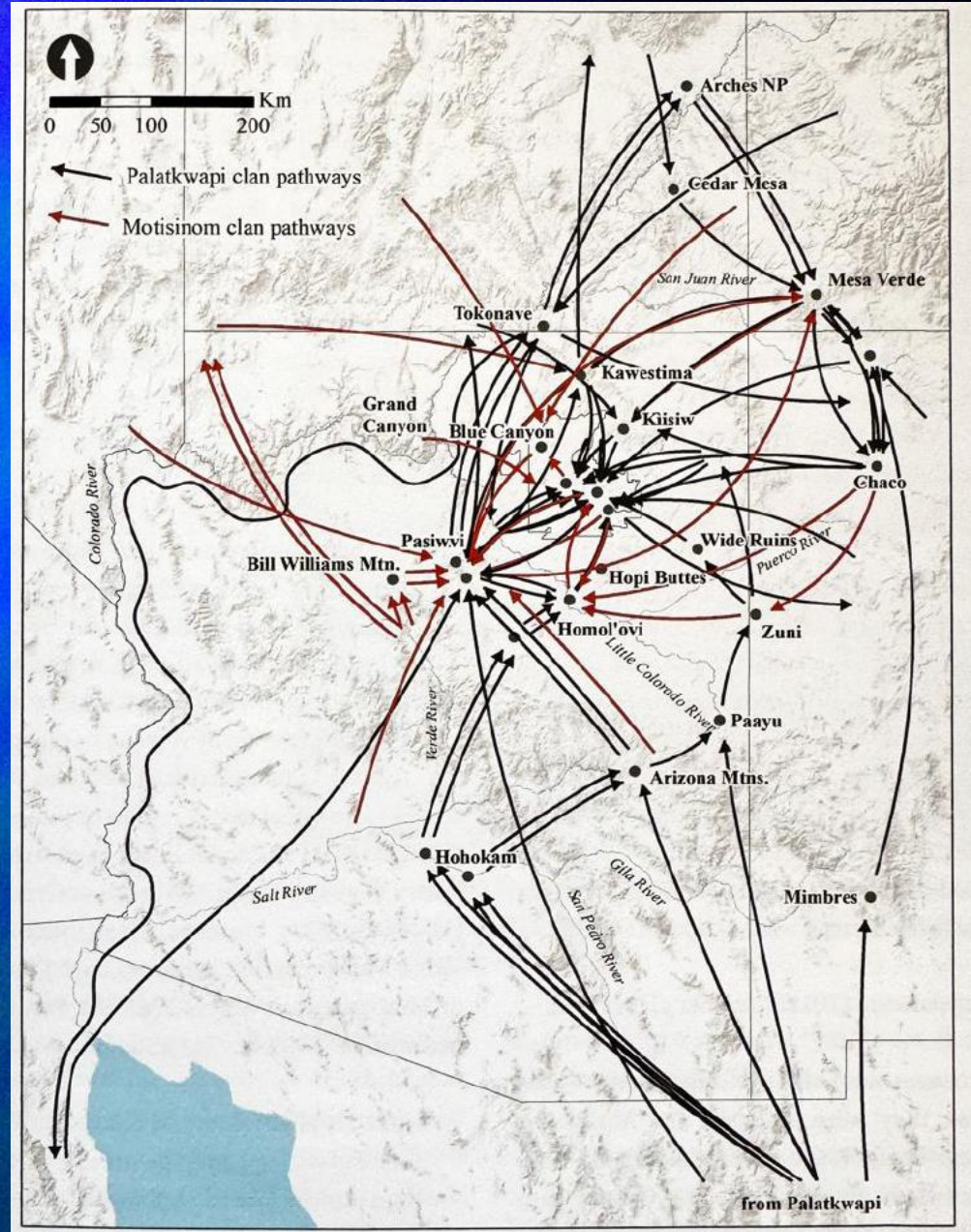


Map of Uto-Aztecan Migrations (after Shaul, 2014)

Hopi Migration Pathways

There are at least 20 other Pueblo tribes that have their own migration stories, plus all the other non-Pueblo tribes in the SW!

Everyone was on the move...



Source: Hopkins, et al, 2021: 19



Starting in the Archaic, water related imagery began appearing.

Note the "rain fringe"

Alternately, possible dragonfly nymphs (Ben Everett personal comm)



Many BCS
sites appear
to display
water
symbology

Buckhorn
Wash

(See Sucec, 1996)

Notice
the
possible
rain cloud
above the
figures

(See Farmer
2022)





Kuaua Kiva Mural
(Reproduction)
Coronado Historic Site, NM



Anthropomorph with Cloud
and Lightning
Garfield County, Utah



Mimbres: Hero Twins (?) with a fish.

Source: Princeton Art Museum



Maya Hero Twins (Hunahpú and Xbalanqué)
Tonina Chiapas, Mexico
Source: flickr



The Navajo represent the Hero Twin Monster Slayer with a recumbent bow and brother Born-for-Water with a scalp knot.



Hero Twins? Vernal



Teotihuacan Spider Woman

See: Taube, 1983

Spider Woman Iconography In Rock Art



Cub Creek



Santa Fe County

See: Patterson, 1997



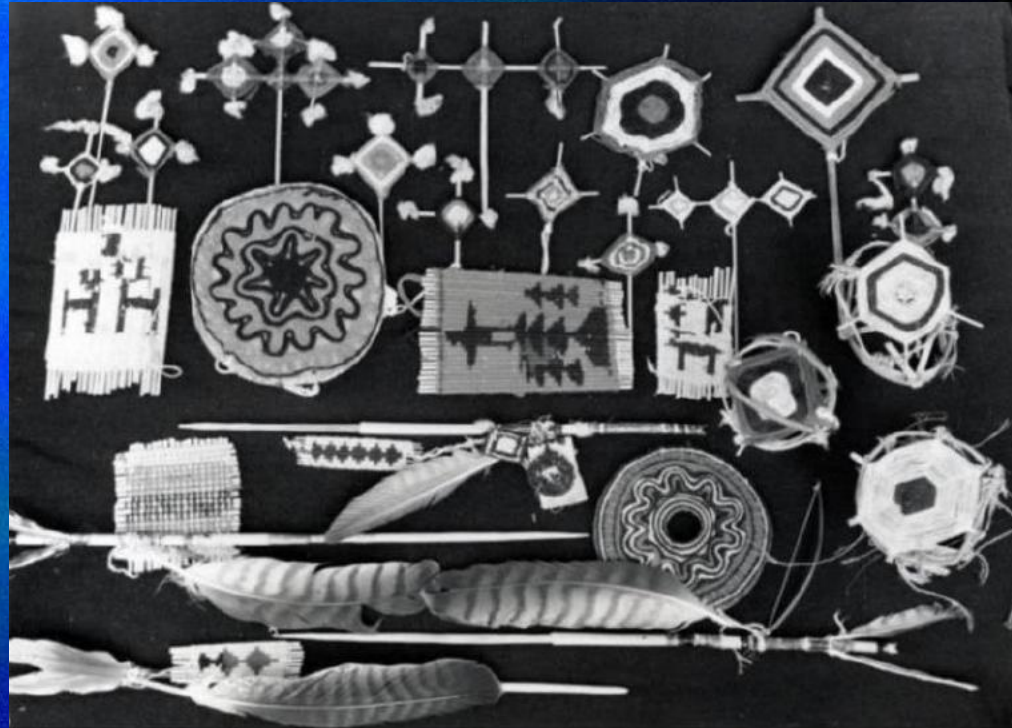
Divining Mirror. In Mesoamerica, Spider Woman often has associations with mirrors and divination.

Maya. Guatemala

Source: Penn Museum

Huichol Woven Divination Tools

Affiliated with Huichol version of Spider Woman



"God's Eye" Prayer Arrows, Prayer Shields, etc.

Source: Myers, 1938, Peabody Museum

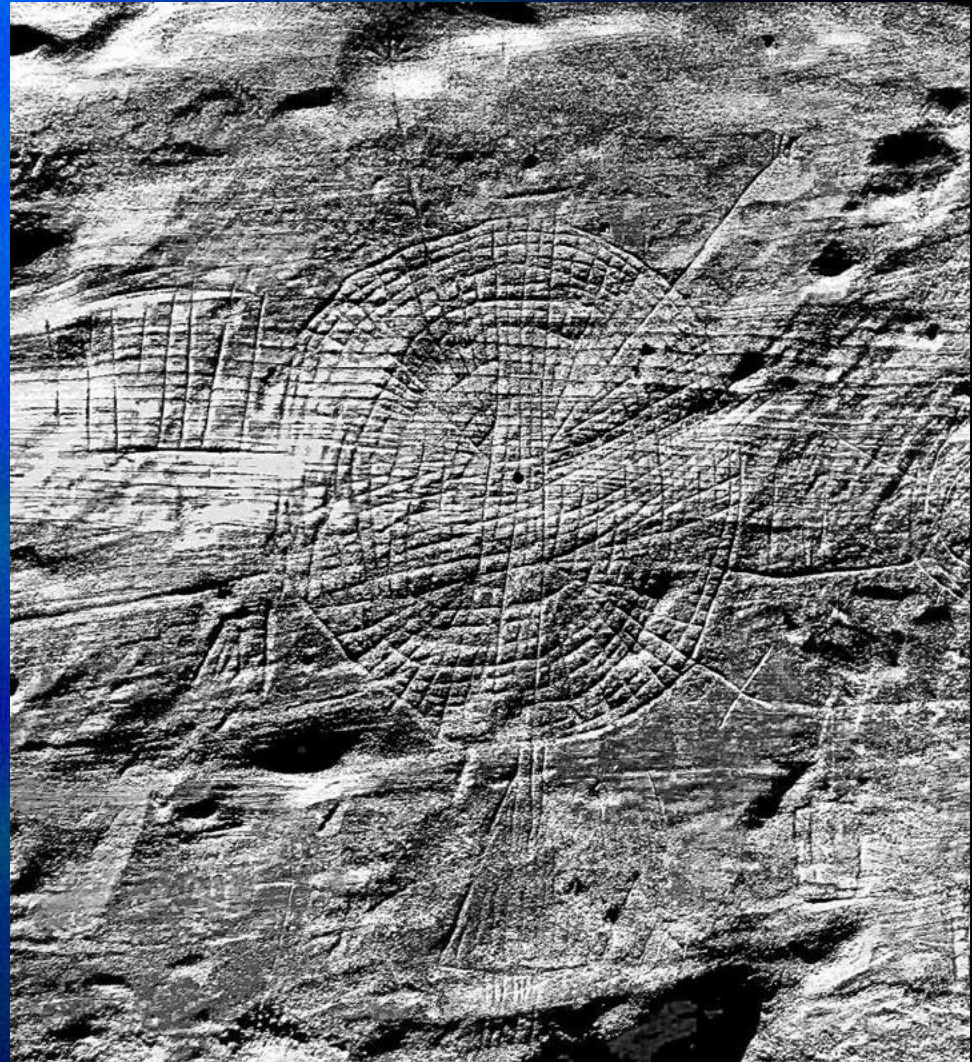
Ceremonial Prayer Shield/ Divination Net

Source: Ethnological Museum of Berlin

Divination Nets???



Santa Fe County



Vernal



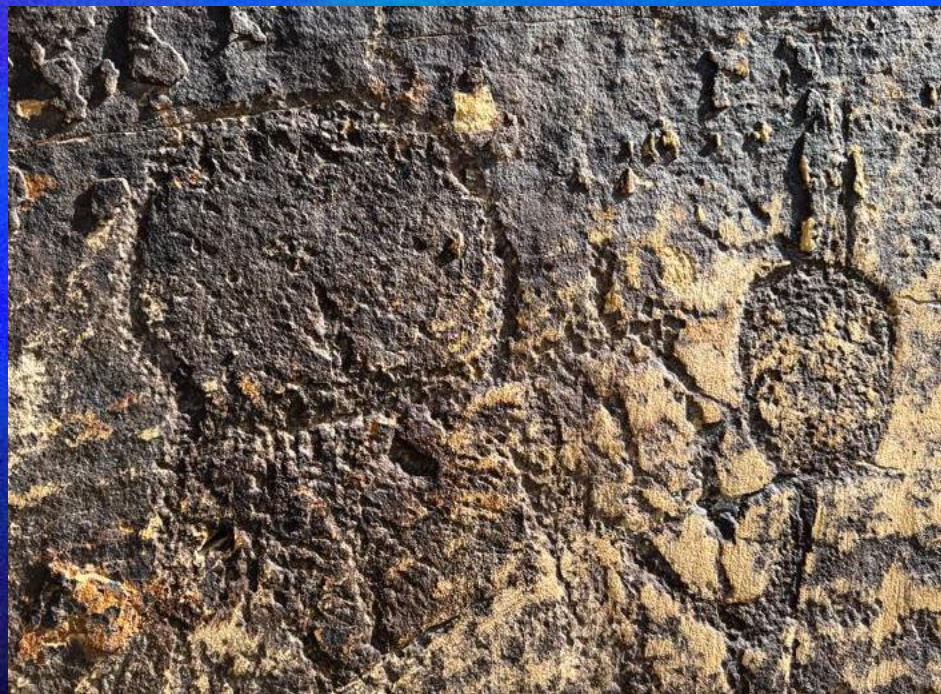
Knife Wing
El Malpías, NM



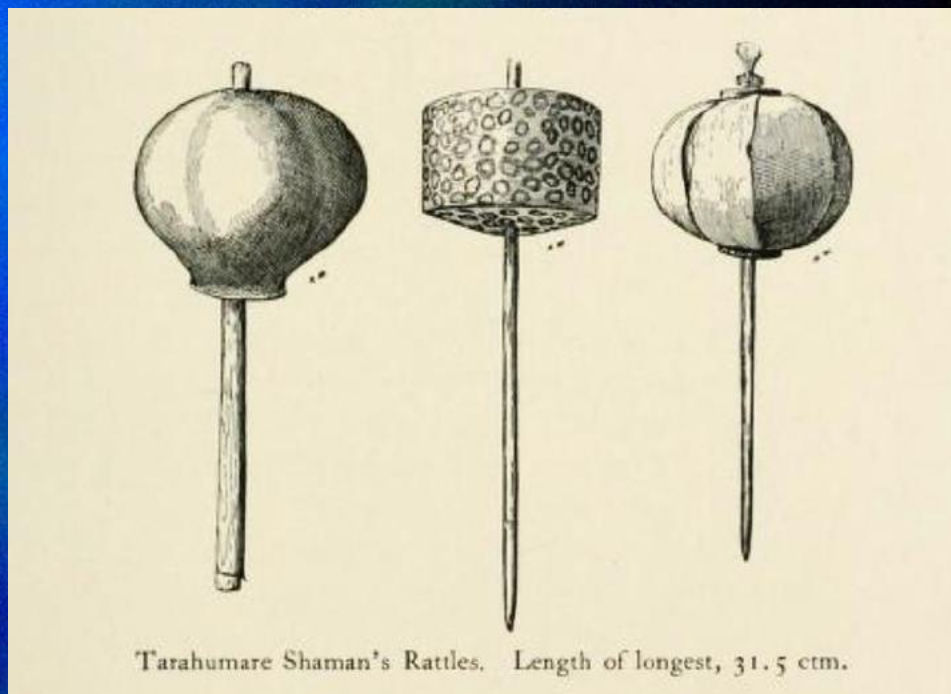
Eagle Warrior
Tenochtitlan
(Aztec)
1400–1521 C.E.,
National Museum,
Mexico



Knife Wing
Southern NM



Shaman with Rattle
NE Utah



Tarahumara Shaman's Rattles
Lumholtz, 1901

Tadpoles?
Southern
NM



Tadpole Bowl
Arizona: Source
Penn Museum



"The croaking of frogs was thought to herald the coming of the rainy season, and so they are connected to Tlaloc."

Lauren Kilroy-Ewbank

Frog, Southern NM



In Central-Mexican accounts, "people preceding the present era are described as fish-men." Taube, 1986

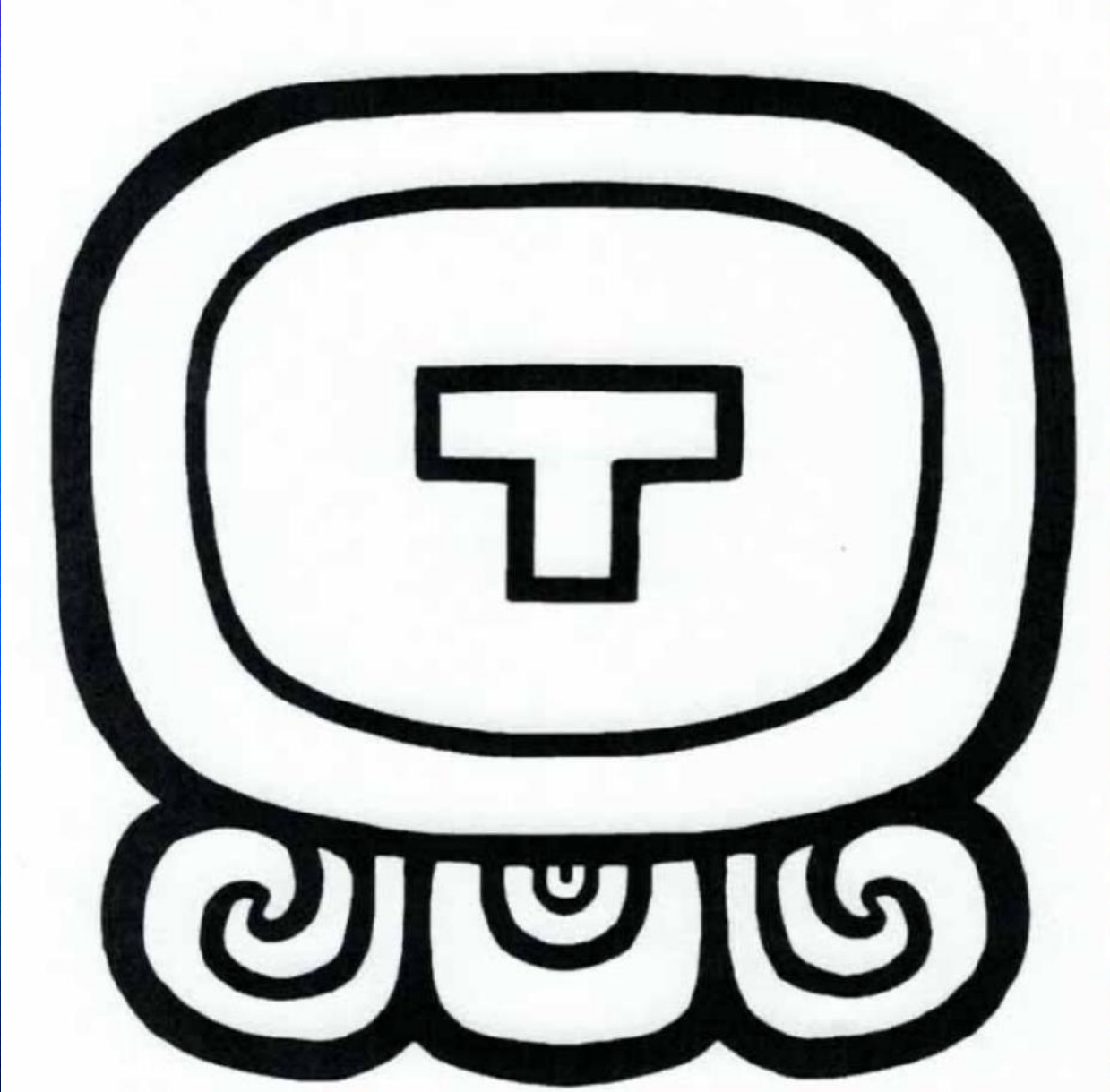
Southern NM



In both Aztec lore and modern Chorti Maya mythology, during the floods that ended the Fourth World, some humans transformed into fish. Others escaped to the present world.

See: Taube, 1986

Three Rivers



*Wind
Brings
Clouds
Brings
Rain*

See: Marc Callis,
2021

"IK": The Maya Glyph for Wind or Breath

Image source: Diane Davies



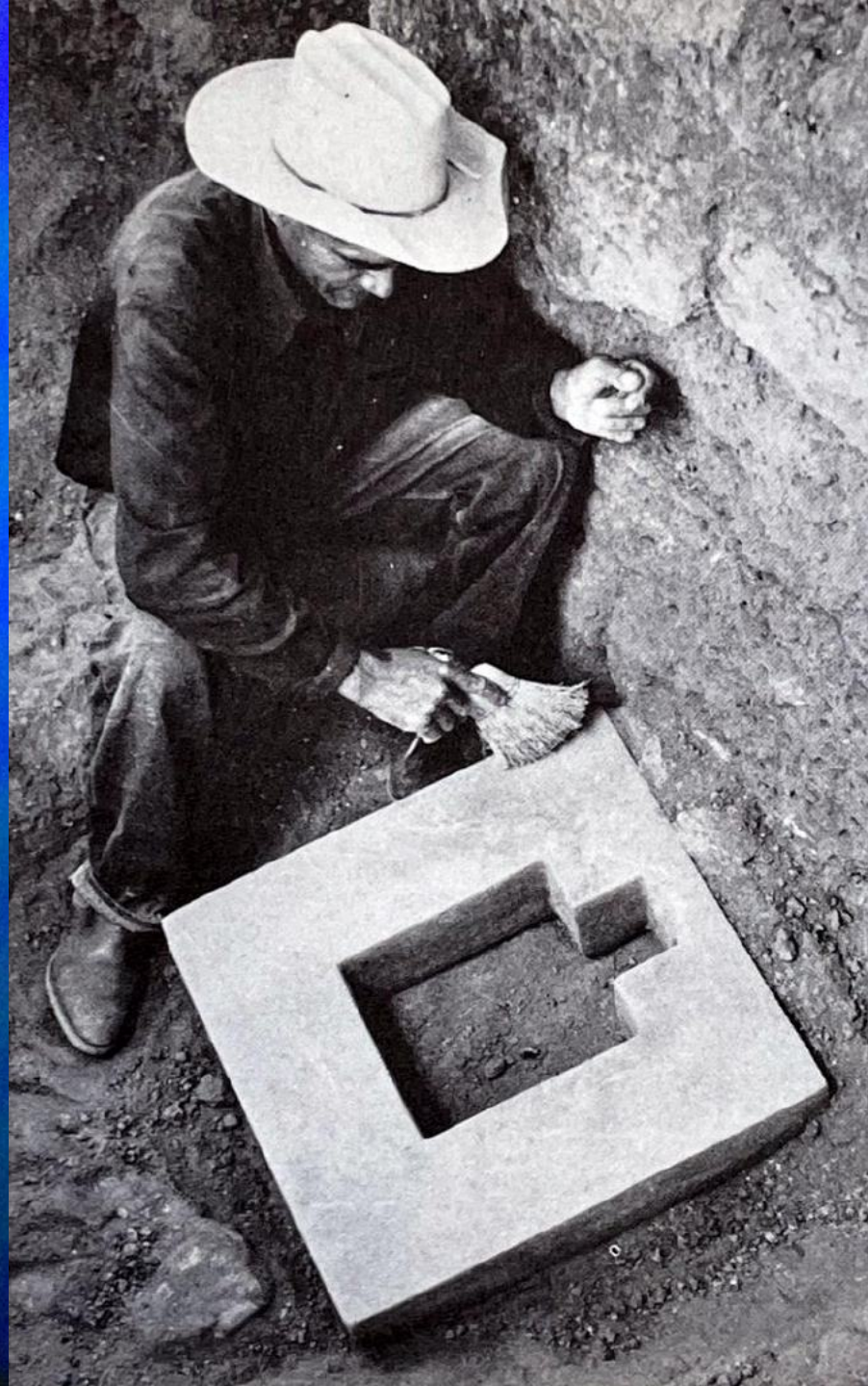
Palenque, Mexico



"T" shaped sculpture with the Maya Rain God, Chac
Quirigua, Guatemala; Source: Coe, 1966, also see Taube, 1986

"T" shaped alter,
Paquimé, Mexico

Source: Di Peso and
Fenner, 1974





"T" Shaped doorways at Garabato,
Chihuahua. Lumholtz, 1891



Hovenweep



Chaco Canyon



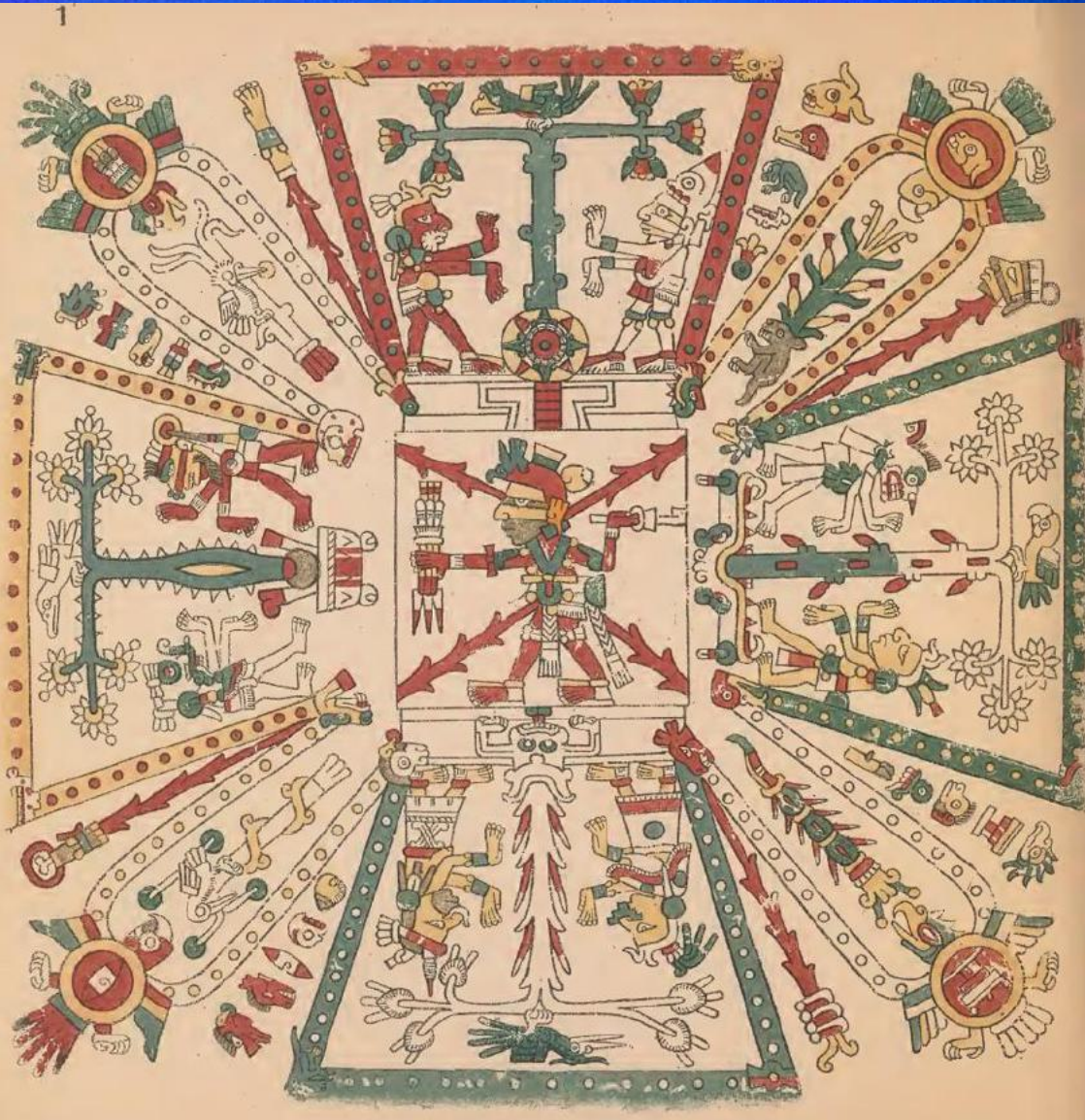
Casa Rinconada, Chaco Canyon



Mesa Verde



IK symbol?? Detail from Wolfman Panel, Bluff



Mesoamerican
Cosmogram:

Four sacred
directions plus
sky and earth

Codex Féjérvary-Mayer
Source: Smithsonian
Institute



Mesoamerican Cosmograms

Salmon Ruin (Dstretch)



Pueblo Bonito (ceramic)

(Source: Smithsonian Institute)



Mound of the Cross, Paquimé

Source: Di Peso and Gloria J. Fenner, 1974



Drone View of a Bedrock Kiva Incorporating the Four Sacred Directions

Rio Arriba County, NM



Mesoamerican Cosmogram,
Village of the Great Kivas, Zuni



4-Sided Star/ Venus Symbol

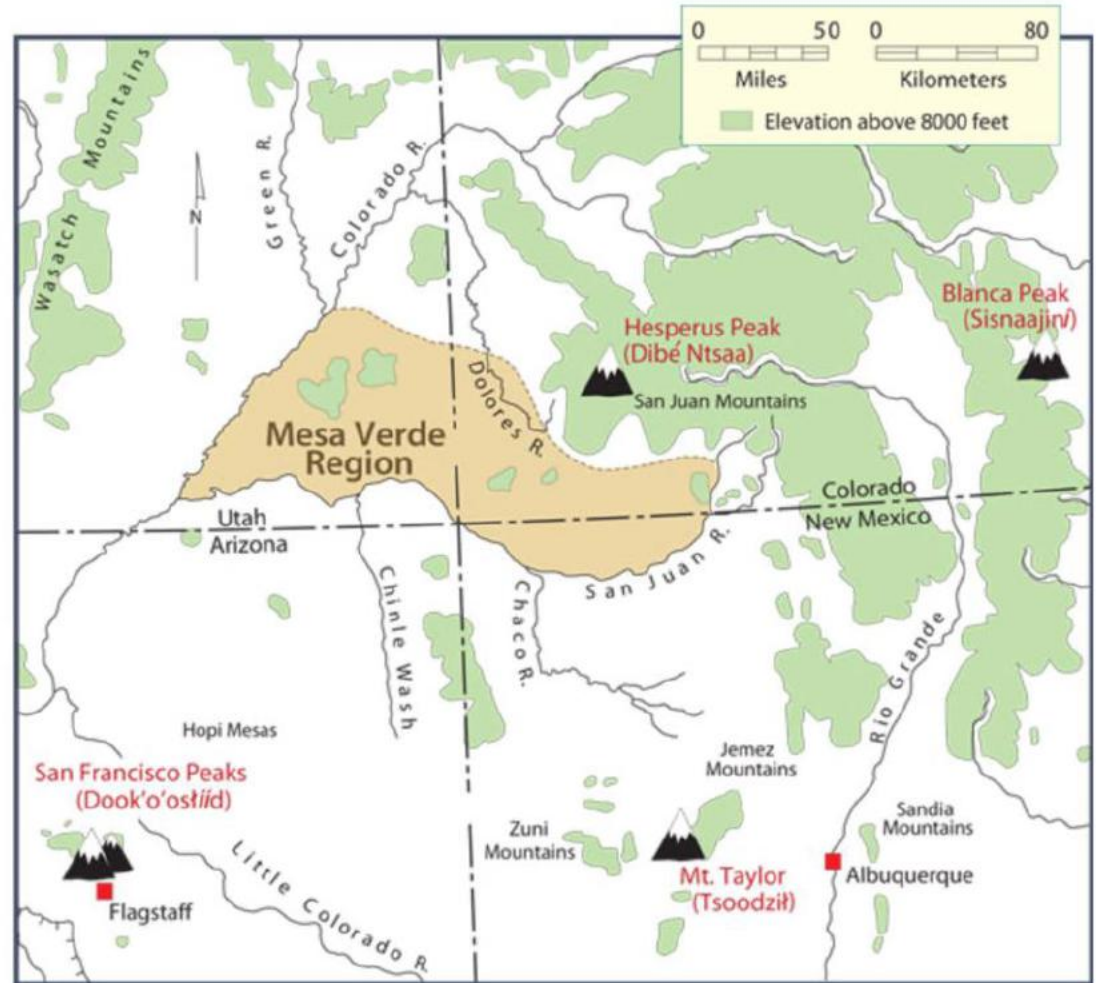
Galisteo Basin, NM



Flat Canyon

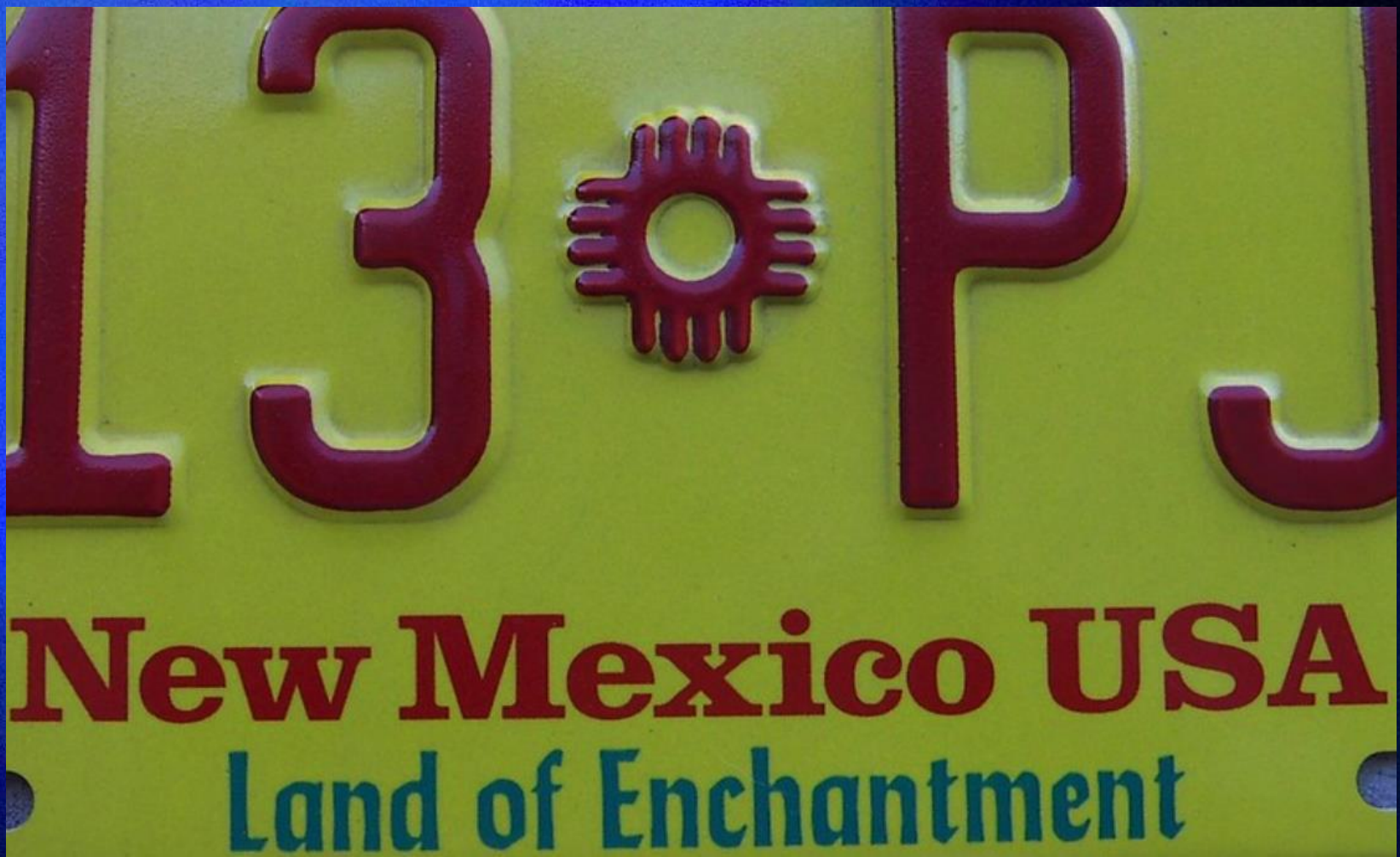
Four sided Cosmogram is embedded in the Indigenous landscape

Mt. Blanca
Mt Taylor
San Francisco Peaks
Mt. Hesperus



The four sacred mountains of the Diné.

Source: Crow Canyon Archaeological Center



The Mesoamerican cosmogram appears on the New Mexico license plate as the Zia sun symbol



Olmec Earth Deity
Chalcatzingo

Source: Mexican National Institute of Anthropology and History



Chalcatzingo Relief 1

Source: by Joralemon, 1971

For the Maya,
the conch shell
“represented
the wind—the
sacred breath of
life— of the
cosmic Serpent.”

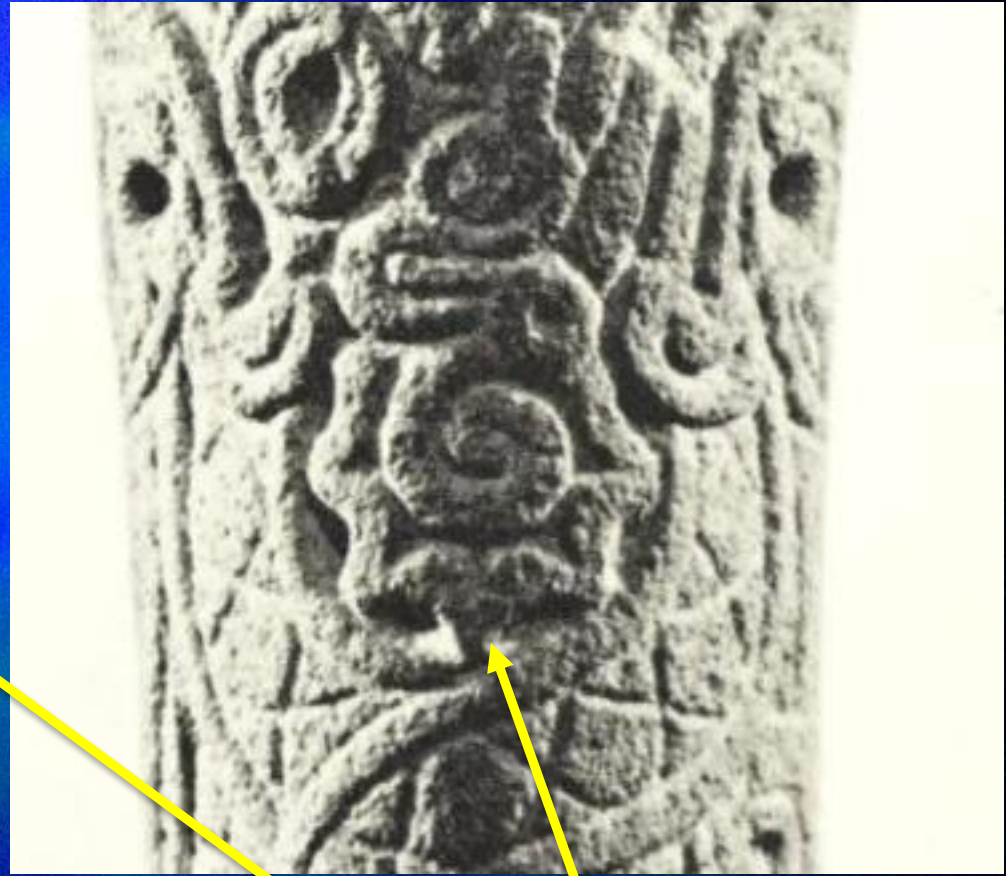
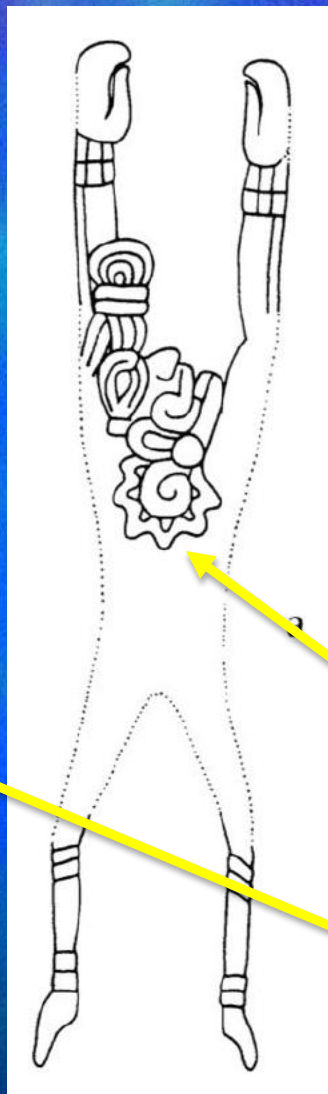
Kathryn
Deveraux, 2020



Hohokam Conch Shell Trumpet

Jackrabbit Ruin, ca. 1300–1450 C.E.

Source Arizona State Museum



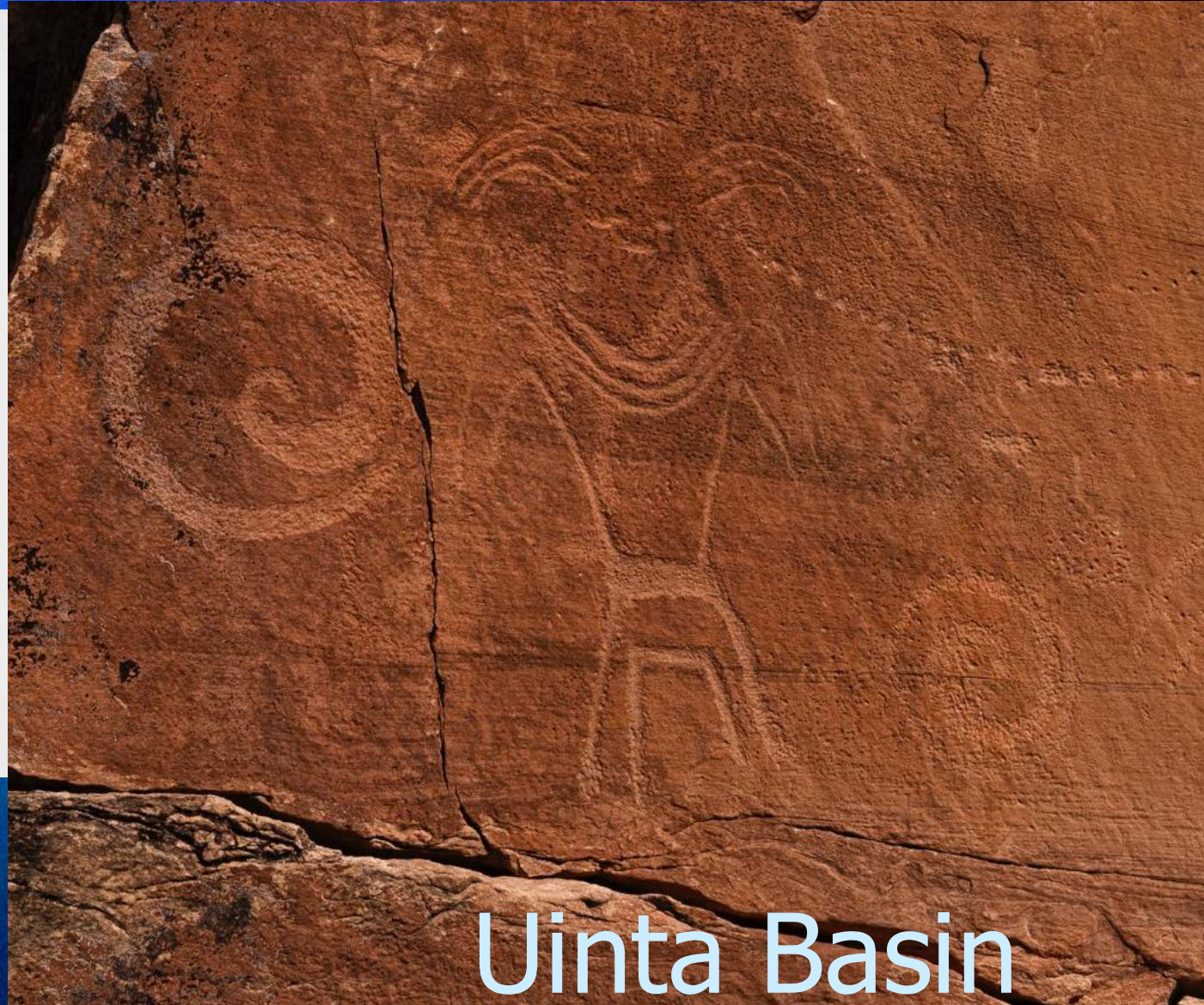
Quetzalcoatl depiction with Wind Whorl Pendant
Source: Taube 1986; von Winning, 1968

Wind Whorls??



Wind Priest
breast plate

Chalco, Mexico
Milwaukee Public Museum



Uinta Basin

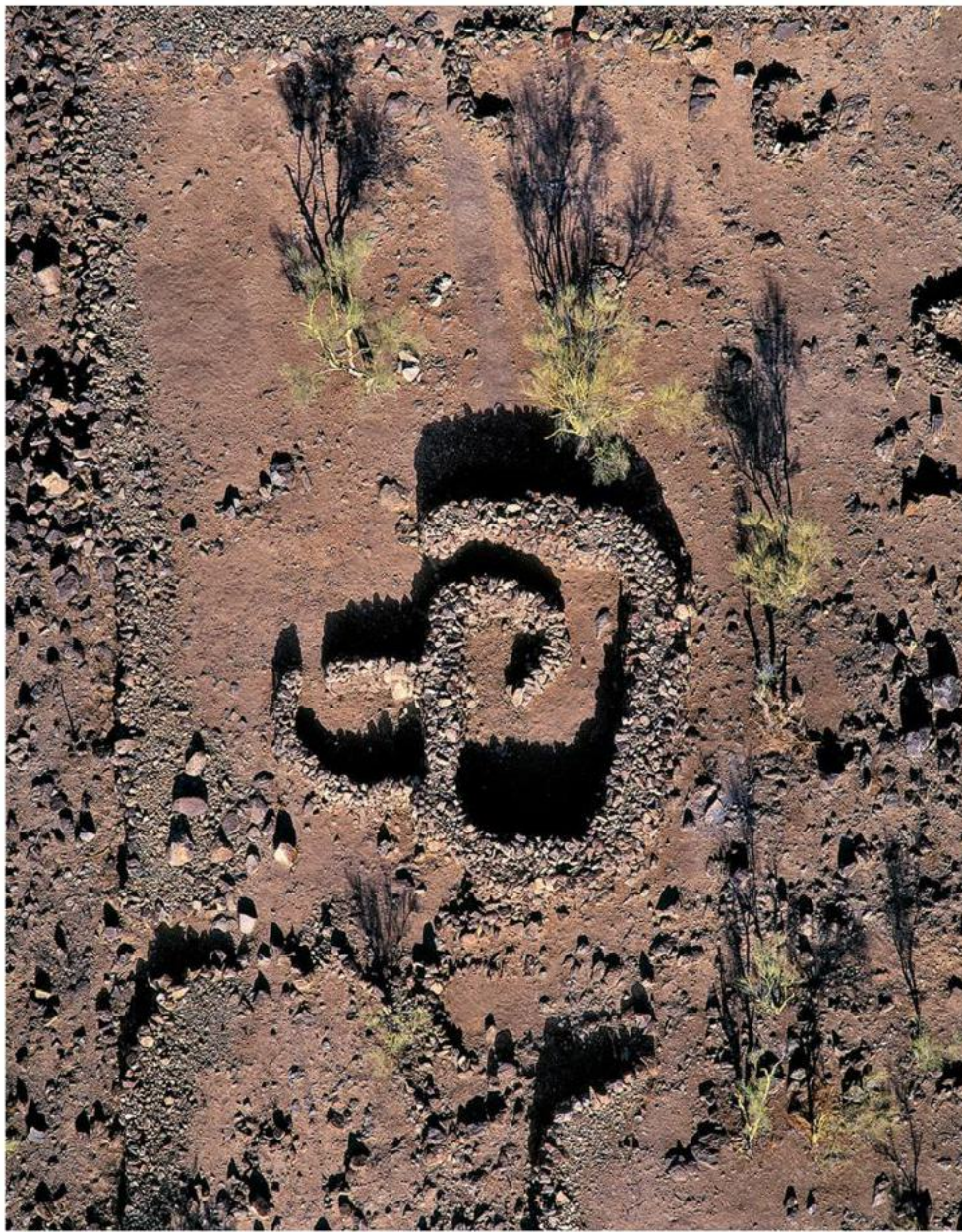
Mesoamerican Conch Wind Whorls



Aztec Feathered Serpent Pendant
Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art



Ehecacozcatl Necklace 350 - 800 CE
Source: Pinterest



Excavated Spiral-walled Compound, © Adriel Heisey

El Caracol Cierro de Trincheras, Mexico

Source: Archaeology Southwest

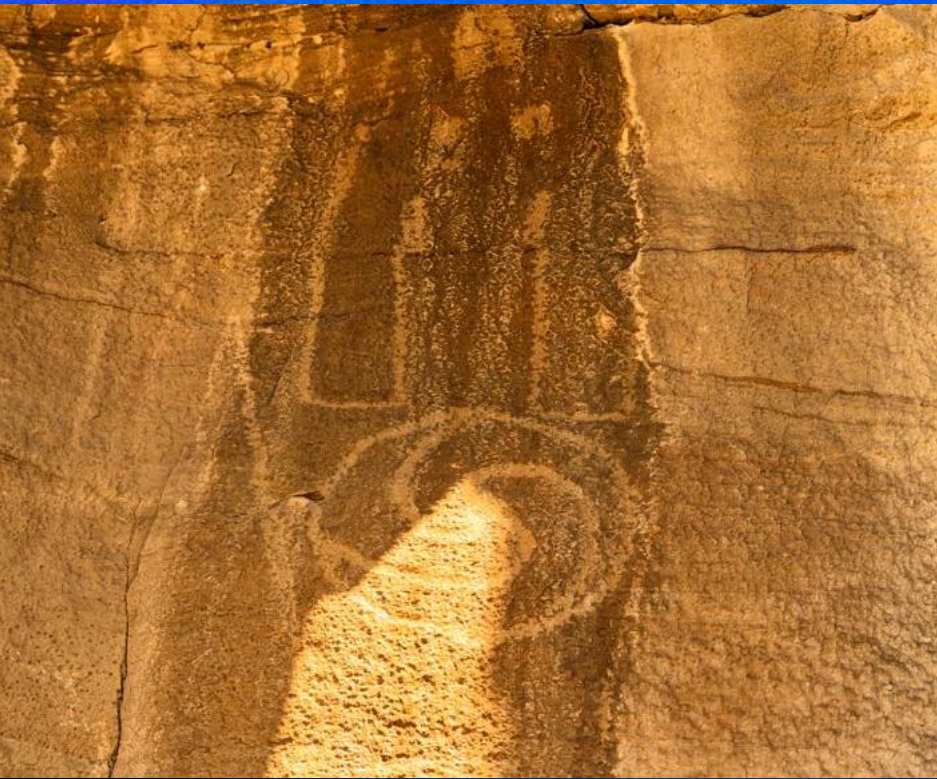


Wind Symbolism? Jornada, NM

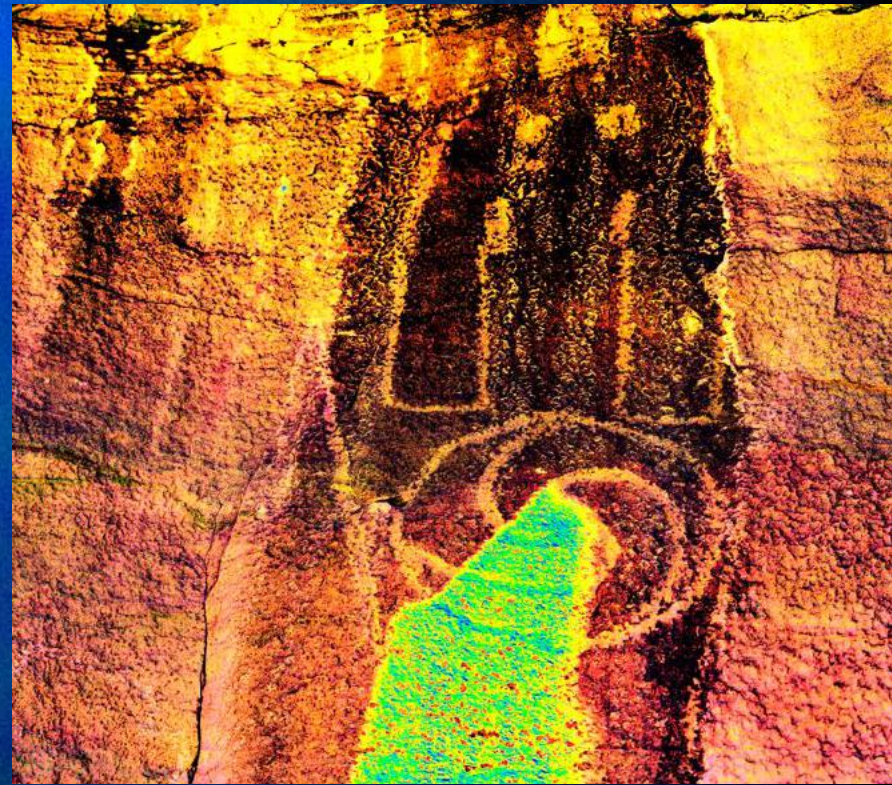


Wind Whorl? Vernal

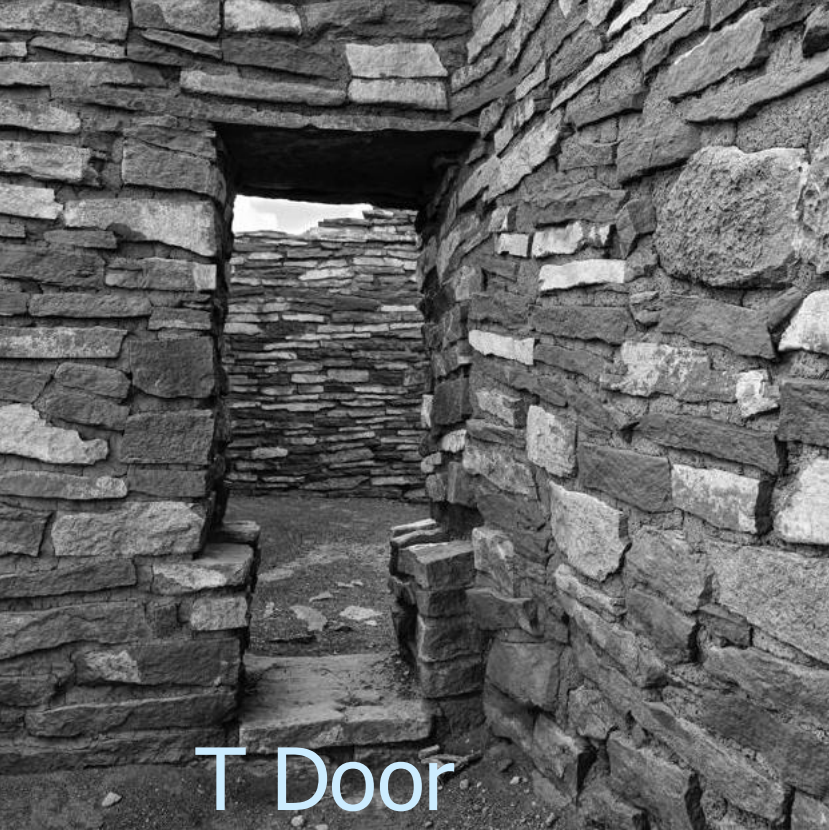
Wind Medallion? McKee Springs



Normal



D-Stretch



T Door



Hopi - Huukyangwuy Kii'at
"wind's home or breath" -
Blowhole



Ball Court

Wuptaki
Mesoamerican Connections



The stepped triangle motif is a metaphor for clouds, mountains, and the source of rain. (Schaffsma, 2023)

El Malpías, NM

Artist reconstruction of Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capitol.

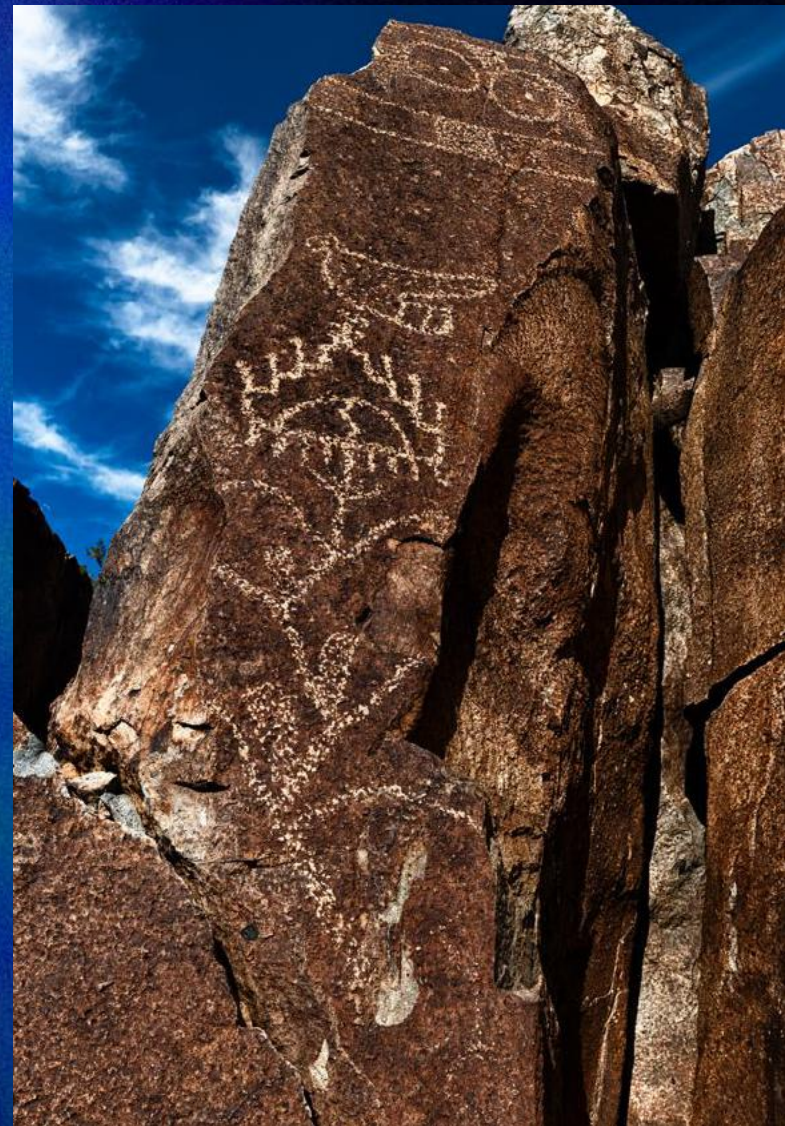
Source: World History Encyclopedia



Main pyramid topped by two temples, Tlaloc, the god of rain (north) and Huitzilopochtli, god of war (south). At base is the temple of Ehecatl (Quetzalcoatl's humanoid double), god of wind and air.



Tlaloc, rain deity,
Mexico



Tlaloc with "cloud stairs"
and corn stalks, New
Mexico



Tlaloc at excavation site

Source: www.mexicolore



Tlaloc

Three Rivers

Mixtec

Codex Vindobonensis Mexicanus
14th Century (British Museum)



Tlaloc,
Dwyer, NM



Tlaloc, cloud stairs, and wind whorls

Southern NM

Tlaloc???

(Or other rain
deity? See
Farmer 2001)

Bartlett Panel

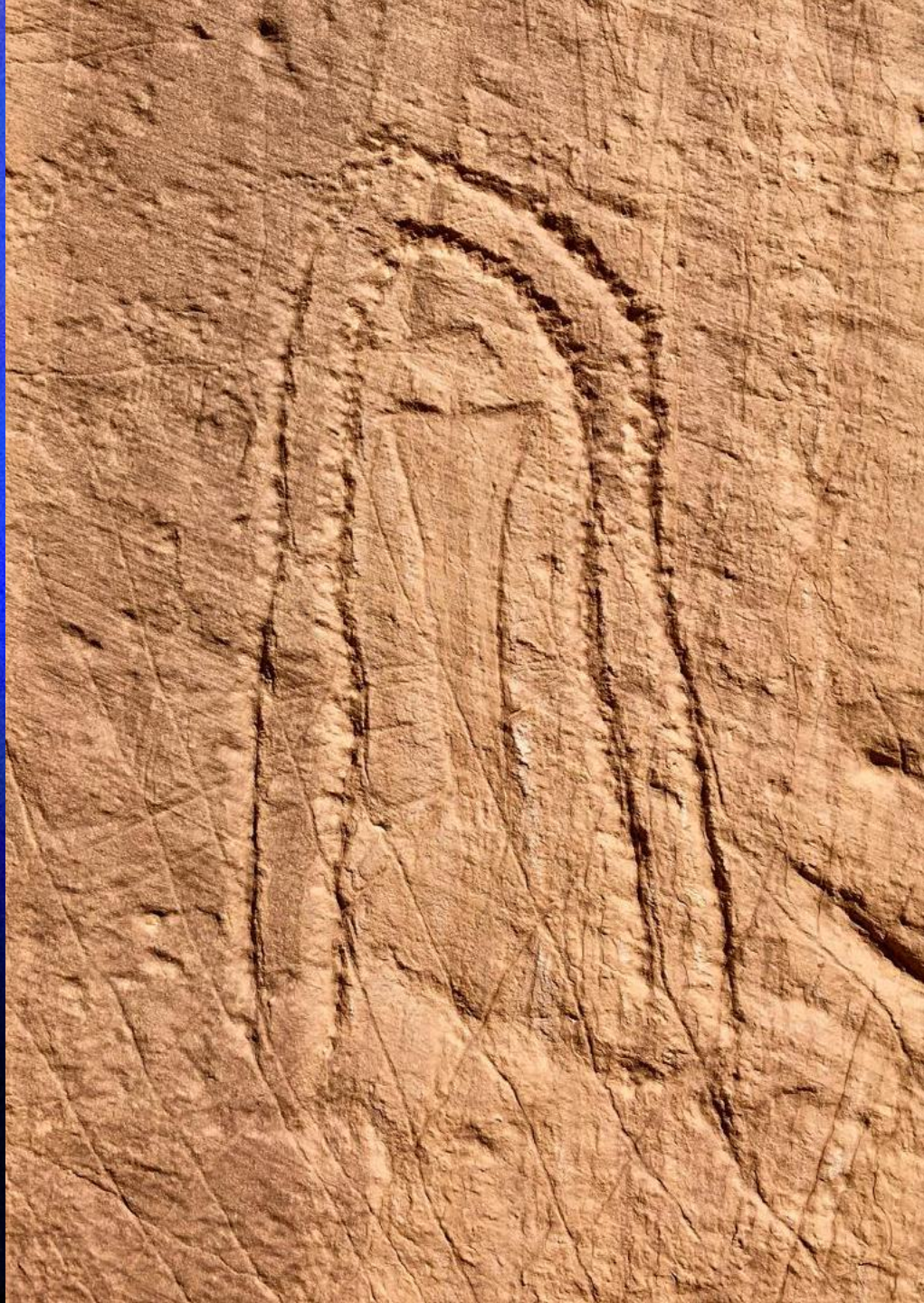




Dolores River



Rain god seeding rainbows? Ferron



Rainbow?

Southern Utah



Rainbow? Rochester Panel

"Horned Water Serpent(s) ... inhabit springs and underground waters" – Gunnerson, 1968



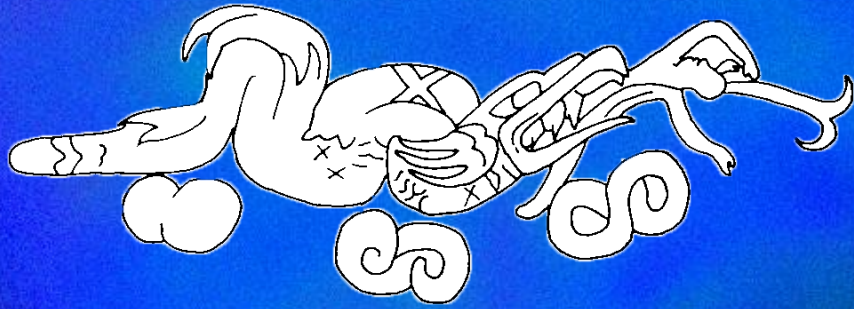
Santa Fe County



Little Singer (Hatatsi Yazhi), Navajo. Snakes, part of Wind Altar, 1903. Brooklyn Museum

"Avian Serpents"

Olmec Approx 700 - 500 BCE



Relief V Chalcatzingo,
Mexico

See: Joralemon, 1971,
Taube, 1986



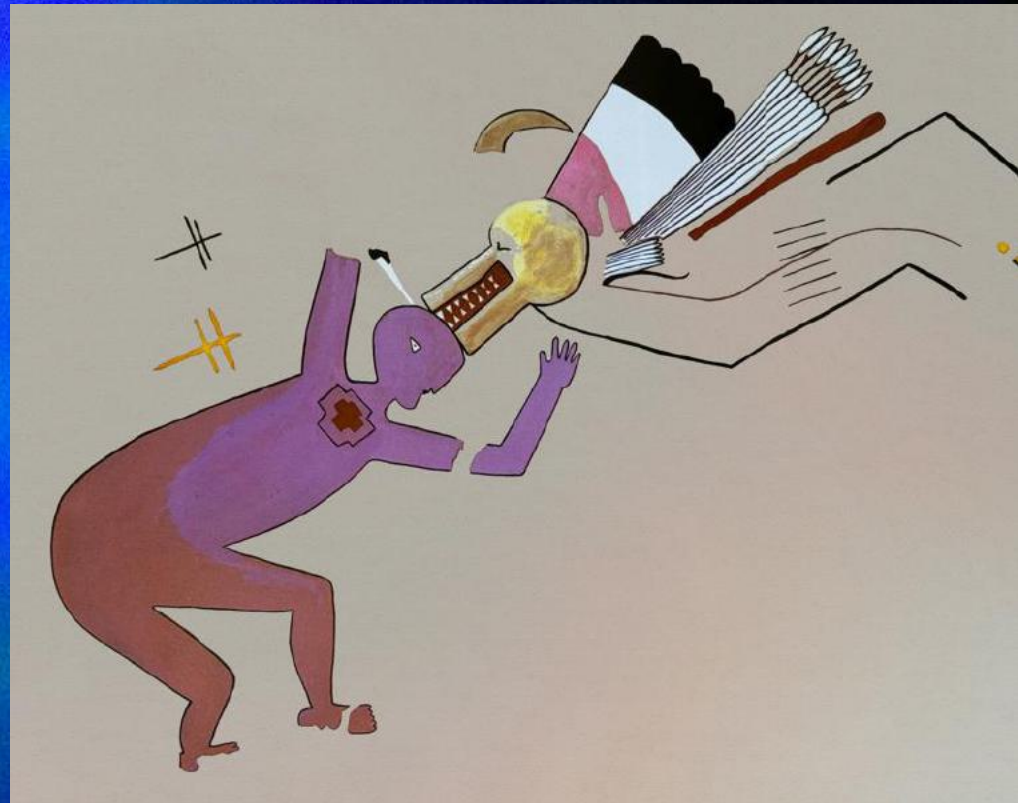
Monument 19 La Venta
Source: Wikimedia Commons



Quetzalcoatl consumes a man.

Source: Aztec Codex
Telleriano

AD 1561-1600



"plumed serpent consumes a
purple man" Pottery Mound
Kiva 9 (New Mexico)

A.D. 1300 to 1475

Source: Hibben, 1975

Antlered serpents



La Cueva de la Serpiente, Baja, Mexico

Source: Bradshaw Foundation



Quetzalcoatl (bottom), Tlaloc? (upper right) and conch shells. Temple of Quetzalcoatl, Teotihuacan



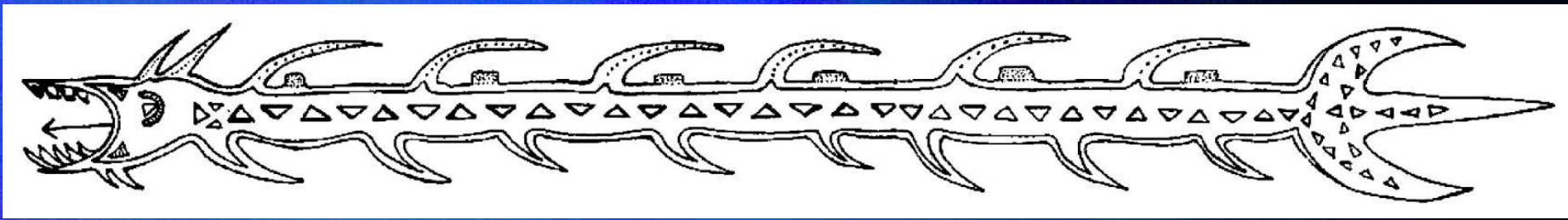
Temple of Quetzalcoatl at Xochimilco, Mexico



Wind Temple: Temple of Ehecatl – Quetzalcoatl

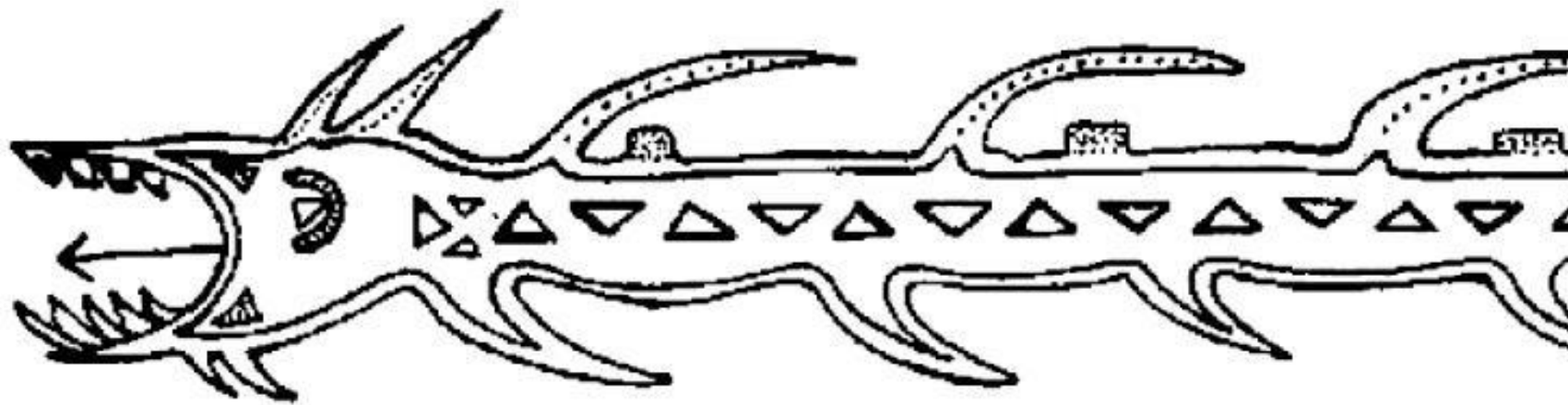
Note the Circular/Spiral Shape

Calixtlahuaca, Mexico (Aztec) Image: Flickr



Top: Eighteen-foot long Avanyu from the Galisteo Basin. Renaud, 1938

Bottom: Plumed serpent from Teotihuacán, AD 500 to 550. De Young Museum, San Francisco





Horned Snake Geoglyph, Paquimé, Mexico

Source: Google Earth

“Horned
serpents are in
the position to
control the flow
of water,
whether from
springs or
rainfall” Phillips,
VanPool, and
Vanpool. 2007



Nine Mile Canyon



Santa Fe County



Nine Mile Canyon

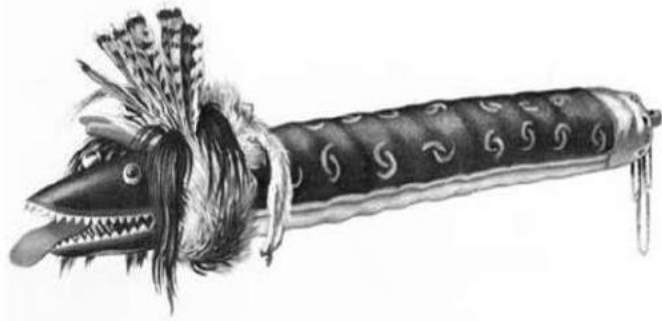


Fig. 1 Zuni Kolowisi. From Stevenson 1904: Plate xiii.

Zuni Kolowisi
Stevenson, 1904

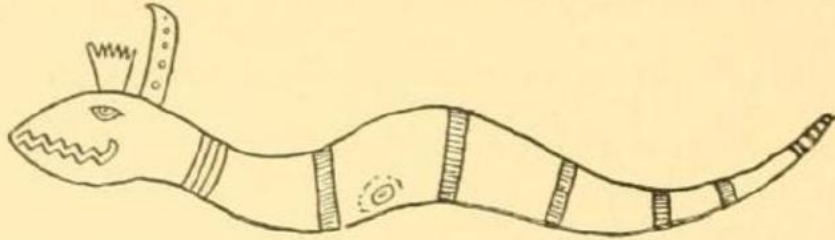


FIG. 661.—Baho-li-kong-ya. Arizona.

Canyon Segy, AZ
Mallery, 1894



Tusayan Pictographs
Fewkes, 1892

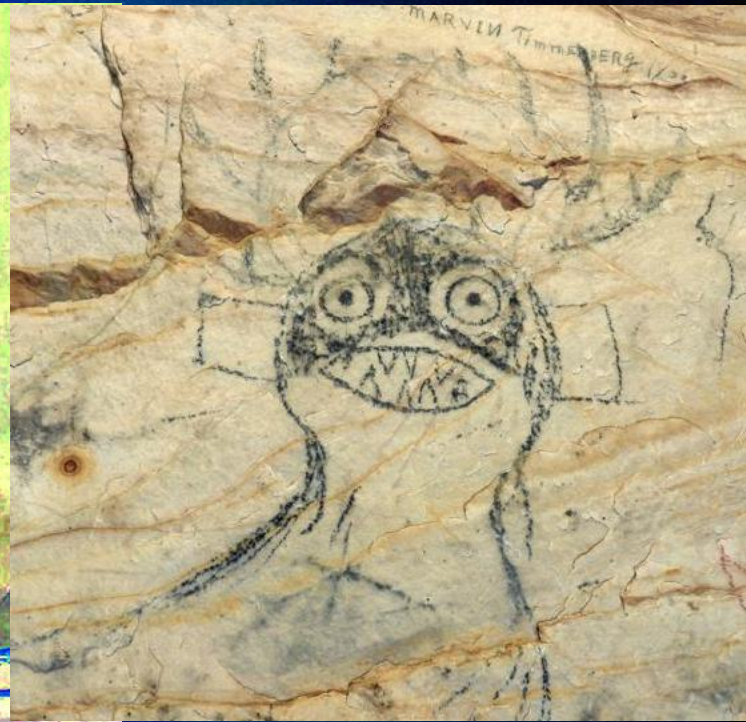
Faces of the Supernatural Serpent



Santa Fe
County,
New
Mexico

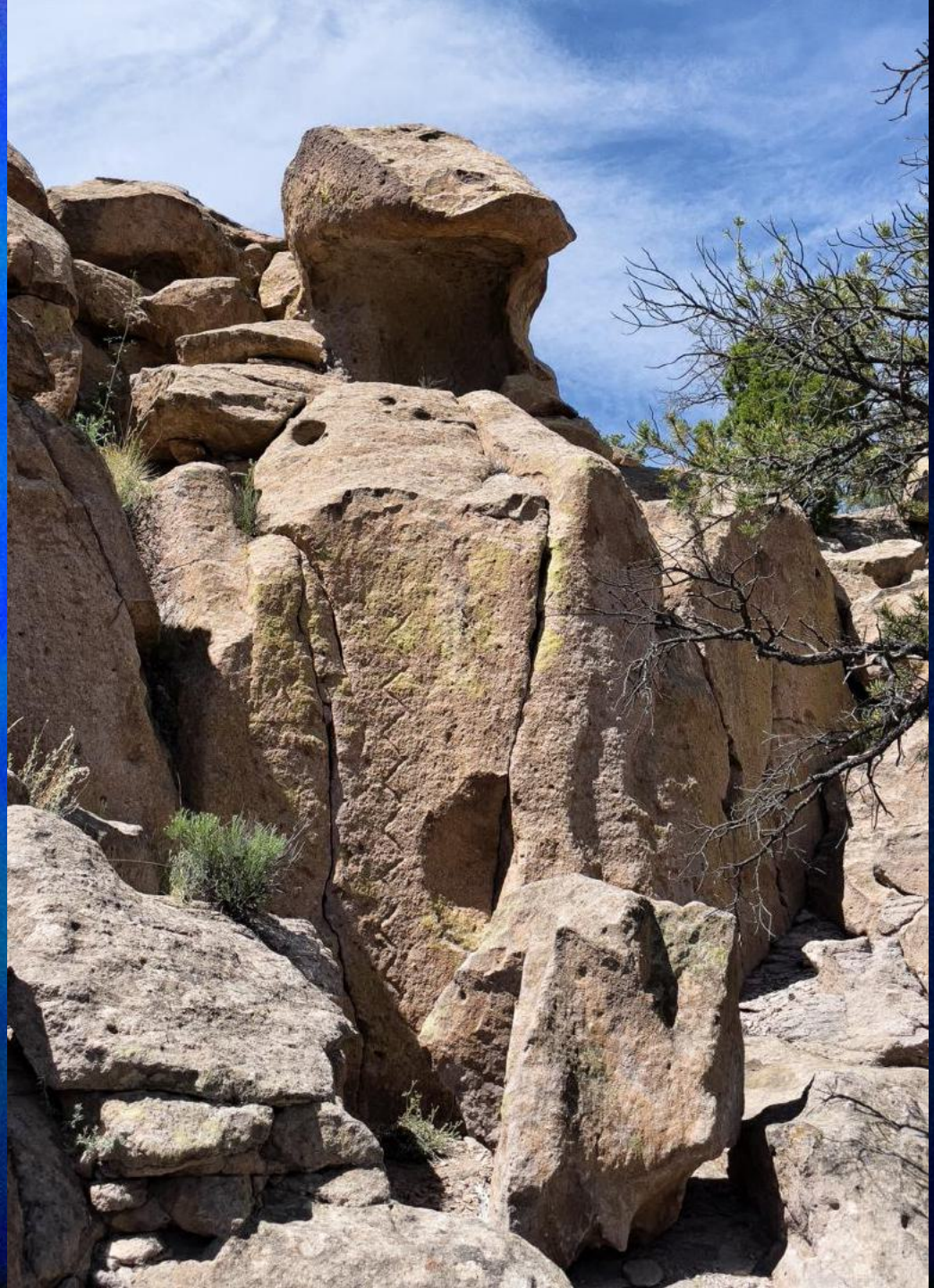


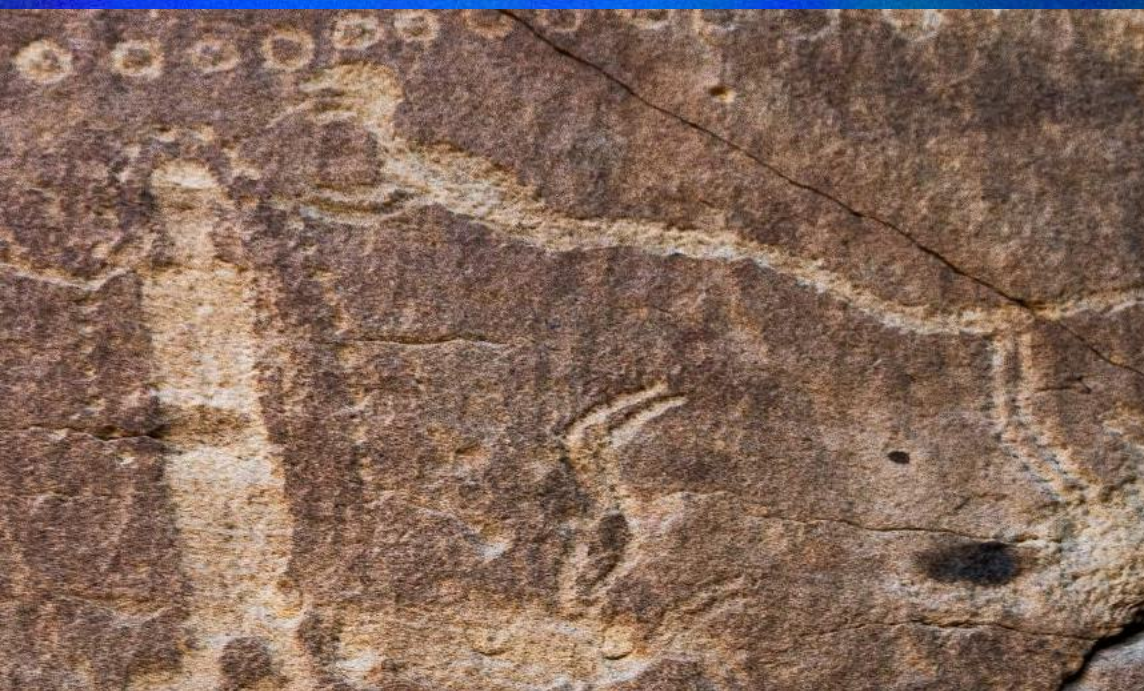
Molen Seep,
Utah
(D-stretch)



Picture Cave,
Missouri
Photo:
Alan Cressler
(via Flickr)

Snake Rock
and Avanyu,
New Mexico





San Rafael Swell



Bandelier, NM



H. Lewis pinx.

Lith. Jast. Arnz & Co. Düsseldorf

THE PIASAU ROCK
near Alton, Illinois.

DER PIASA Felsen
bei Alton in Illinois.

The Piasau Rock, Alton, Illinois

Supernatural (Horned, Feathered, Antlered) Serpents

Quetzalcoatl

Horned Serpents

Antlered Serpents

Feathered Serpents

Zuni Kolowisi

Avanyu

Serpents with beaks and arms

There are others...



Buckhorn Wash

Are they the same? ... Not Necessarily... But they share roots and have shared characteristics that are probably not coincidental



Supernatural Portals/ Emergence Imagery
New Mexico



Cieneguilla, NM

The Maya refer to Venus as the “Quetzal Star”

(See Villalobos, 2021)



"Snakes bring forth rain, clouds, and snow for prosperity and fertility in all things." Brinkerhoff, 2023.

In this talk, we've touched on various common ideas and symbols shared between Mesoamerica and the Southwest

- ❑ Migrations
- ❑ Water Symbols
- ❑ Hero Twins
- ❑ Spider Woman
- ❑ Wind Symbols and "T" Doorways
- ❑ Cosmograms
- ❑ Tlaloc and Water gods
- ❑ Feathered Serpents
- ❑ Emergence, Prior Worlds / Portals
- ❑ There are more...

A Key Takeaway...

When we consider Mesoamerica and Southwest deities as regards to rock art it's helpful to think in terms of

Parallels

Analogies

Similarities

Aspects

Guises

Common Ancestry

They're not necessarily the identical but possess similarities and common roots originating in the deep past.

Details are murky for sure.

Comparisons are very enlightening!

Appreciations

Nina Bowen

Darlene Koerner

Tim Sweeny

Roger Cook

John Lundwall

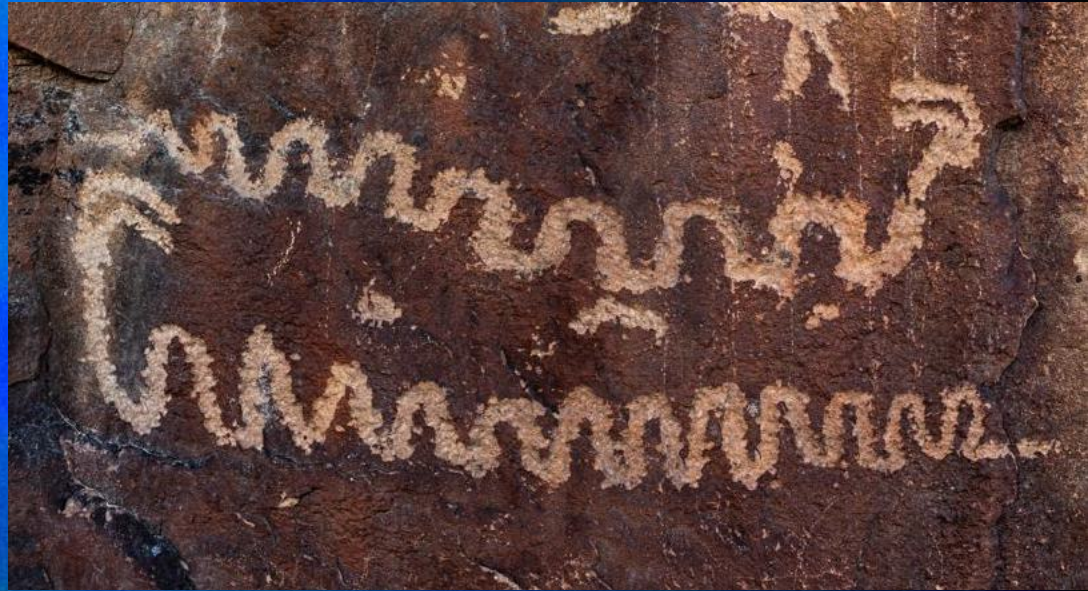
John McCue

Dennis Devore

Steve and Diana Acerson

Joe Brame

Tina Tan



Nine Mile Canyon

THANK YOU!

