

## ROCK ART STYLES OF THE GREAT SALT LAKE/UTAH LAKE AREA

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Not too long ago, a few researchers were asked by a company based in Salt Lake City to write as much as we could find out about the rock art in the Salt Lake/Provo area. This was done as a part of a recording project. What we found was that information, aside from some generalizations, was lacking. There were some papers that were published in the 1930s as a part of a sweeping archaeological recording project taken on and reported by Steward (1936), and Reagan (1935). Fortunately their monographs have some photographs of rock art that was found. It is the only reference we can find that would allow us to compare what they photographed versus what we can find today. Not much research has been done since then. There is quite a bit that has been written dealing with the archaeological work in and near the Great Salt Lake area. It mostly concerns excavations from caves such as Danger Cave (Jennings 1957), Black Rock Cave (Madsen 1983) and Hogup Cave (Aikens 1970) in the Great Salt Lake and Wendover areas. These sites do not contain rock art.

There was a very good paper published recently in American Indian Rock Art Volume 25 titled *Regional Variation in Rock Art Styles in the Southern Great Basin: A view from the East Mohave* (Christensen et al. 1999). One of the points that the authors make is that “To more fully understand these styles, more complete documentation of rock art sites has to be done to create a more substantial database for comparative studies” (Christensen et al. 1999:77). This statement made me realize that in order to compare rock art traditions from all over the region, researchers need to know more about the lesser publicized sites that can be found here.

Most rock art researchers will have a difficult time accessing State or BLM documents (IMACS forms). Many of the site forms before about 1975 do not have pictures attached, which makes doing research using these site forms nearly impossible. Practically the only way to conduct this type of research is going book by book, or finding and viewing sites independently. I would commend URARA for their efforts in making this type of information available to the public.

The main goal in writing this paper is to draw the interested researcher’s attention to the rock art styles found in the Great Salt Lake/Utah Lake area, and specifically to what the author calls the Great Salt Lake variant of the Great Basin Representational Style of rock art found only in this area.

I will begin with the oldest styles of rock art and work forward to the most recent styles.

C. Melvin Aikens stated that all of the styles of rock art that can be found in the Great Basin represent a rock art tradition that spans perhaps 3,000 years (Aikens 1978:5). The Great Salt Lake/Utah Lake rock art tradition includes these styles: abstract (a combination of curvilinear and rectilinear), representational, and painted. Pit and groove style does not appear to be used here, nor is the scratched style. Based on association with artifacts from other areas, the abstract style was in use for the longest span of time, from roughly 1000 B.C. to A.D. 1500. The representational style was in use from roughly A.D. 1 to 1500, and the painted style was in use from A.D. 1000 to 1500 (author’s best guess).



Figure 1. Great Basin Abstract Style, Scott Spring.

### GREAT BASIN ABSTRACT

The Great Basin Abstract style of rock art (Figure 1) was made by Archaic peoples, and is the oldest style found in the study area. The style extends from the Owens Valley east to the Wasatch Range and Colorado River. This is the core area of the Western Archaic tradition. What strikes me is that this style is so universal and abundant. Predominantly abstract images are made by a variety of techniques, which include pecking, scratching, abrading, and painting.

In the Great Salt Lake/Utah Lake area the pecked line is often wide. It is commonly found on large boulders, which are mostly covered with pecking, and there is great similarity in the motifs used. These boulders are usually situated where there is a commanding view, but this view is not of a specific landmark or direction.

Individual stones are also used for Great Basin Abstract Style rock art. These can be as small as a few inches in diameter. Great Basin Abstract rock art can be found in the same areas as those containing later styles of rock art, which indicates repeated use of the same sites over time.

I would suggest that this type of rock art was used in the northern Utah area as a way to mark “ownership” of areas, or rights to use areas, or as sympathetic magic. There are very few animals depicted in the Great Basin Abstract rock art of

this area, and the places that contain these boulders are not likely places that one would use in hunting, so I don’t believe that this type of rock art was used as an aid in the hunt. Archaeological records show that there was an abundance and variety of animals available in the early Archaic period. Maybe there was no need to worry about their availability or picture them on the rocks to make them appear.

### GREAT SALT LAKE VARIANT OF GREAT BASIN REPRESENTATIONAL (Figures 2 and 3)

This style of rock art is also very old and falls stylistically into two categories. The first category is composed of very detailed and realistic images of people, animals, tracks, and birds. The second category is abstract images that are also finely detailed and different in content from the Great Basin Abstract Style.

This is the dominant style of rock art found in the Utah Lake/Great Salt Lake area. In more than twenty years of research, I have found no other areas that contain this type of rock art except in the northern part of Utah. Further research needs to be done to substantiate this. The rock artists used this style on boulders and rock outcrops. Since it is the style that shows the most artistic form and is also the most portable, it is the most sought-after rock art for vandals. Much of what was described by early researchers is no longer found. It is often found in the same area as the Great Basin Curvilinear Style, but is not made on the same rock surfaces. In fact, superimposition is rare in the entire study area.

Albert Reagan’s account of boulders recorded in the Utah Lake area in the 1930s describes many boulders with representations of “dancing” men, “juggling” men, and flying birds. He describes some of the men as wearing pendant fox tails. He also describes:

...typical Basket Maker, both pictographic and petrographic, triangular-shaped drawings of

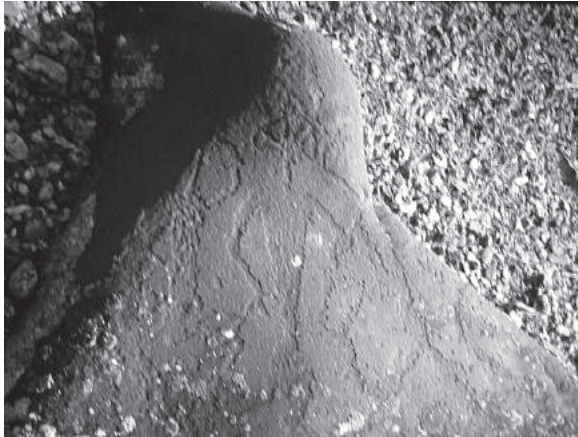


Figure 2. Great Salt Lake Variant, Great Basin Representational Style, Stansbury Island.



Figure 4. Boulder on BYU Campus.

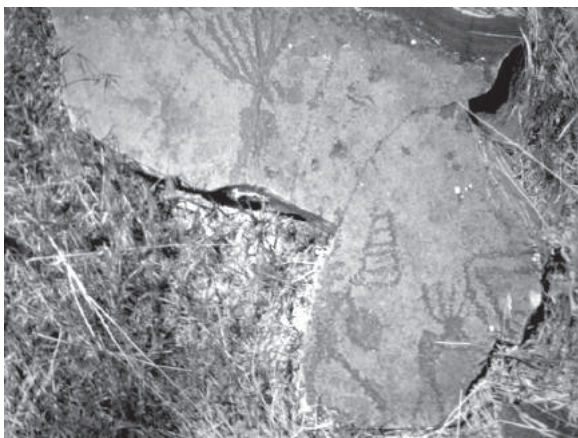


Figure 3. Great Basin Representational, Utah Lake, Great Salt Lake Variant.

humans often even showing the characteristic side-locked hair, as the hair was worn by that people. While along with these drawings, are drawings of humans in dancing attire which seem to be just as old, drawings which are not drawn by the triangular-bodied pattern, but, instead, depict even strenuous action [Reagan NDAa].

In Reagan's day, the Fremont style of rock art had yet to be identified as such.

He also states in describing the rock art at Lincoln Beach:

There were many drawings on this point and on the slopes about it originally, but as noted above, people have denuded the whole

“promontory” front of most of the surface that contained drawings and have taken the “rock writings” to decorate their rock gardens, while some have also been taken to decorate the path to the Maeser building on the upper campus of Brigham Young University, so that only the poorest and most worn “rock writings” are left [Reagan NDAb]. (Figure 4)

Since my inventory reflects only what is left after over 100 years of intensive collecting (which is still occurring at an alarming rate), it seems only natural that some of the images described by Reagan would no longer be found. I cannot find humans with their hair done in a side-locked fashion, nor can I find many images of birds, which he indicates are abundant in his time.

I have begun to wonder if fire has an effect on the progress of patination, since those boulders that are more exposed to the frequent fires at Utah Lake and Stansbury Island seem to also have the heaviest repatination. This would be a good research project for someone with the ability to prove scientifically whether or not fires accelerate the repatination process.

Because of the repatination of the boulders and a more carefully executed and therefore earlier style of glyphs, I believe that many of the images from this area were made at an early time in the prehistory of the area.



Figure 5. Fremont Style, Stansbury Island.



Figure 6. Site near Tremonton with view of marsh.

## FREMONT

This type of rock art is not as old, as evidenced by the noticeably lesser amount of repatination on the figures. Fremont occupation of this area in the archaeology dates from about A.D. 300 (Jennings 1978).

Fremont Style rock art in this area is not as common. This is a northern adaptation of the classic style, with triangular body shapes, quadrupeds, and abstract images being predominant. The images are not as carefully made as with the earlier styles, and their placement on the rock appears to be more random. Fremont Style rock art is the most common style found on Stansbury Island in the Great Salt Lake (Figure 5). In many instances, when groups of images are found together, they seem to depict a story, which is not a common trait to other styles of rock art in this area.

Most rock art sites that are attributable to the Fremont Style have a hunting theme, and can be found in areas that are favorable for hunting of game. At Stansbury Island, these sites are situated near springs. Jameson places a date of approximately A.D. 1400 for the rock art of Stansbury Island, based on associated archaeology at one site there (Jameson 1958:38).

Near Tremonton, sites are situated on benches overlooking marshy areas (Figure 6).

One site in the Oquirrh Mountains contains several Fremont Style panels. It is not near water and might preclude solar interactions, but has been used through time. Glyphs are situated near hunting blinds and even a present-day shrine.

The Fremont Style is differentiated from the Great Basin Representational Style by the degree of repatination, the pecking style, and the subject matter of the panels. Earlier rock art shows considerably more repatination and a much finer style of pecking. The finer detail and artistic effort in the older glyphs suggest that more time and effort was used in their execution.

## WESTERN UTAH PAINTED STYLE

Campbell Grant (1983) describes the Western Utah Painted Style of rock art as: "Painting usually in red. In the Salt Lake area there are typical Great Basin Curvilinear motifs that are painted. Style includes Fremont anthropomorphs, often horned" (Grant 1983:24).

Painted glyphs can often be found inside caves. In the foothills of the Wasatch Front, painted sites are found on relatively large outcrops, but the glyphs



Figure 7. Western Utah Painted Style, Jordanelle Dam.

themselves tend to be quite small. The painted images are often badly weathered and faint. These painted sites do not contain petroglyphs.

The painted tradition is depicted in literature to be quite old, but in this area it does not appear to be.

One site near the Jordanelle Dam shows images in a variety of colors, which is unusual for the area. It is in a large overhang, and was probably used for seasonal hunting (Figure 7).

### RECENT ROCK ART

Recent attempts at production of rock art seem to range from making images that replicate the rock art to brands and names. Some of the figures that seem to look like rock art images could easily be cattle brands from the ranchers who have grazed animals in the area. Names of cowboys who herd sheep can be found in the Utah Lake area. When the railroad was built from Fairfield to the west, the people who worked on the railroad left behind their signatures and dates in the same area as the rock art. Stansbury Island used to be a popular place to have a picnic, especially at Easter time, according to a woman whose father grazed cows on the east side of the island. During the Easter outings, it was common for people to carve their



Figure 8. Recent "rock art" created by visitors to Stansbury Island. Placed over petroglyphs.



Figure 9. Vandalized panel at Utah Lake.

names on the boulders, with no regard given to the rock art that was already there (Figure 8).

Vandalism continues to be the major threat to the rock art of the Great Salt Lake/Utah Lake area. Unlike many other rock art sites in Utah, these sites are in close proximity to the most densely populated part of the state. Utah Lake sites are near at least eight target-shooting areas. Some of the rock art sites sit within feet of these target-shooting areas. Many people end up shooting at these sites without even knowing they are there, damaging the glyphs that they contain. Efforts are underway to encourage these shooters to practice elsewhere, but there is a great demand for these practice ranges that are so close to home. Landowners are not cooperative either, preferring to take matters into their own hands by using a variety of signs, as shown in Figure 9.

## CONCLUSION

The rock art of the Great Salt Lake/Utah Lake area is in many ways like that found throughout the Great Basin. Great Basin Abstract, Representational, Fremont, and Western Utah Painted Style rock art is common here. One unique style is found, and having found no other reference for it, I have named it the Great Salt Lake Variation of Great Basin Representational Style. Its unique properties include minute detail in the execution and subject matter, placement on boulders rather than cliff faces, and total repatination of panels. It appears that early researchers called it "Basket-Maker" style, but it does not fit into that category. By exposing the public to the rock art of this area, which is underexposed in the literature, I hope to make their research into rock art styles easier.

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