

# **UTAH ROCK ART**

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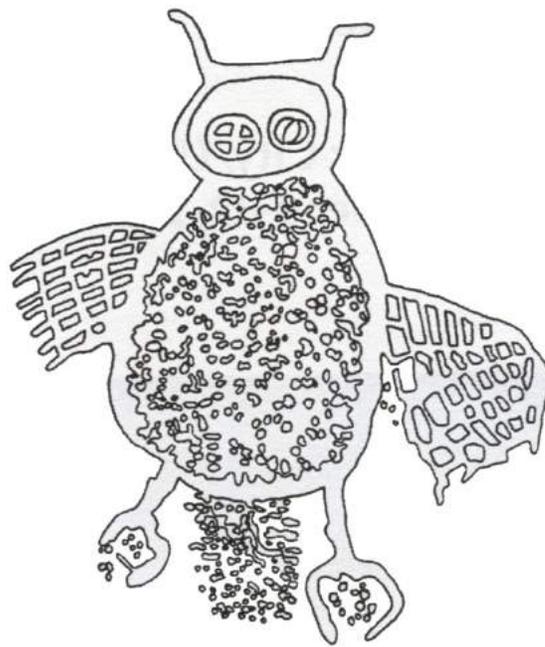
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Bernard M. Jones, Jr

## THE SHAMAN'S CROOK: A VISUAL METAPHOR OF NUMINOUS POWER IN ROCK ART

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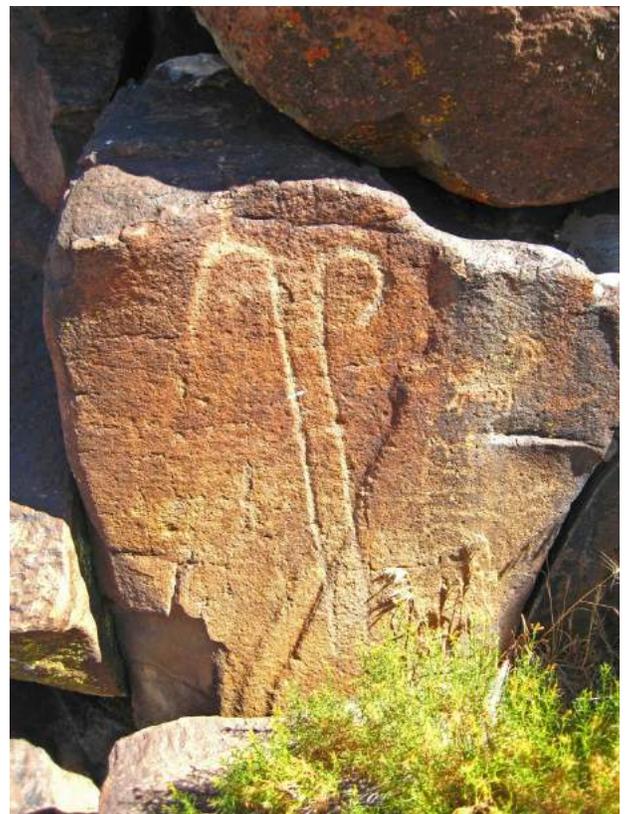
Power is omnipotent and part of all material and non-material substance in the universe. Supernatural power apportioned by spirits and other hosts was fundamental to the survival of most Native North American peoples, their lifeways and religions (Irwin 1994:101-102; Olofson 1979:13). A greater portion of that power was acquired by shamans using dream, trance or vision. Shamanic figures, associated paraphernalia and symbols discovered in the rock art record, can provide clues as to how the metaphysical concept of power was expressed, obtained, understood and used by these cultures. A symbol of that power is a crooked staff (Figure 1), or cane carried by a culture's creators, animal ancestors, spirits, priests, leaders or shamans (Figures 2,3 and 5).



**Figure 1.** Dual crooks of the Big Fire Fraternity at the Zuni Pueblo. Photo, Kat Johnson.

Crook images are visual tropes. Eliade termed this type of icon multivalent, an object or image containing deeply layered symbolism (Eliade 1991:15). This paper uses the crook as

a metaphor for power and demonstrates how associated imagery of line, shape and form were used in rock art, over time, by many cultures, as abstract visual symbols to exemplify and record the visionary/dream experience of power (Figures 4 and 7).



**Figure 2.** Dual crooks in Little Petroglyph Canyon, California.

Conceptually, in many North American cultures, humanity is born with low or insufficient levels of power. Theoretically, all human, spiritual and material objects are related (Parsons 1996:198) with some relations having more power than others. To more

readily survive in the world of man, become a leader, warrior, healer or shaman, one must overcome this shortage and obtain more power to combine with his or her own innate gifts.



**Figure 3.** A shaman strolls through a “Landscape of the spirit” at Three Rivers, New Mexico.

Acquiring an enhanced capacity for power is achieved by visiting the kindred, un-manifest or transcendent aspects of power. These facets of power are generally understood as being a series of dangerous, unpredictable, interrelated, supernatural realms or worlds, usually accessed through known areas of concentrated power, which Bahr (1994:233), identifies as “landscapes of the spirit” (Figures 3 and 7). Depending on societal norms, the visitor may meet or interact with spirits, entities, cultural heroes or gods within spiritual landscapes in the attempt to acquire more power.

Culture also determines the means of approaching the supernatural, awe-inspiring, mysterious or numinous experience. It may be an individual pursuit, part of a group rite of passage, or initiation into a particular society or clan. Journeys to obtain power may be accomplished using dream, vision questing or the ingestion of hallucinogens, among others.

Each of these processes can cause an altered state of consciousness. This psychic modification helps release an immaterial aspect of the human vital force to contact, engage and arrange associations with inhabitants of the numinous (Spier 1970:237). Dreamers and visionaries use the intangible mobility of trance to pass through holes, openings or cracks in a rock’s surface to enter supernatural spaces (Park 1938:28; Parsons 1996:198; Underhill 1969:274, stanza 19). The nature of dream/vision events is accurately described by Irwin (1994:64):

“The existential world of dream experiences is a tactile, sensory world of immediacy in which actions and events occur with vivid and intense tangibility. It is not a shadowy world of vague appearance and misty forms but a vivid, highly charged world of sensory participation, drama, movement, flight and encounter within often highly detailed scenes that are regarded as actual and real.”

Participants in dream or visionary experiences become keenly aware of the supernatural aspects of power. Overwhelming physical, visual and auditory sensations assault the visitor. Encounters with unimaginable, extraordinary beings, each embodying a particular facet of power, astound the imagination (Figures 4 and 10). If the visionary is prepared and deemed worthy, entities, gods or spirits teach the visitor unique songs, chants or dance they will need to call power when desired. Individuals are shown the spiritual equivalent of the material

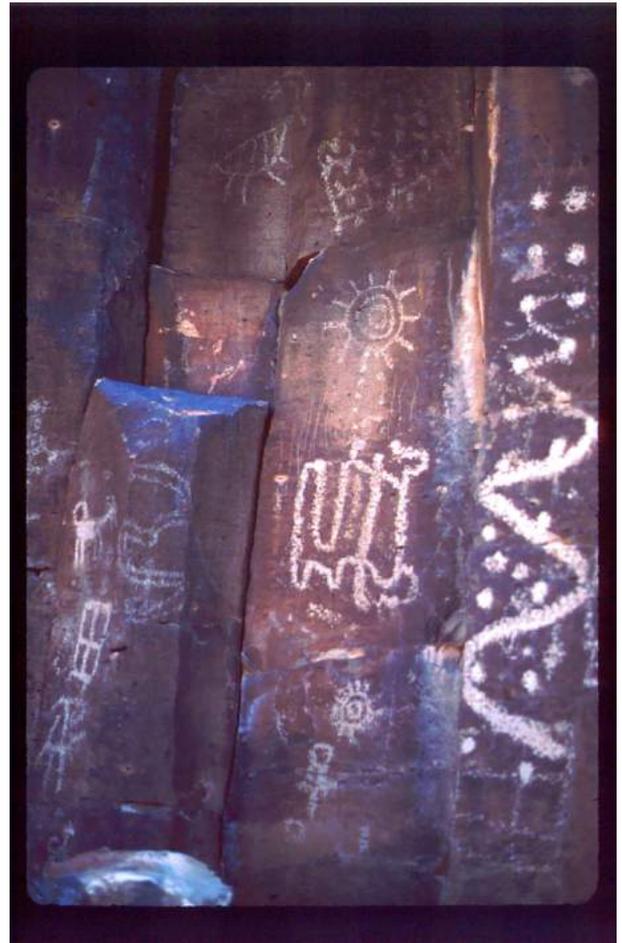
paraphernalia they will be required to make or find to channel power in the human world. The overwhelming physic experience of visiting the supernatural and interacting with its inhabitants provides the visionary with a series of unique mental constructs. Insights gained and objects necessary for work as a shaman discerned in vision are translated into visual, reciprocal material representations of this experience. The ritual paraphernalia carried and dream images which are recorded in body paint, clothing and lodges are also reciprocated on rock surfaces (Hultkrantz 1980:73-75, 1997:160; Irwin 1994:214-215; Kelly 1936:129-130; Olofson 1979:15; Whitley 1997:148).



**Figure 4.** A shaman engaged in a dream or visionary experience. Objects necessary for the shamans work are discerned in dreams. Near Seligman, Arizona.

As mentioned above, omnipresent moving aspects of power are seen by visionaries and dreamers as swirling inseparable, interconnected energy patterns which could be called powerscapes. It is in these various numinous worlds of power that spirits of all types exist. Observation of ever changing energy patterns generated by the movement of power compelled visionaries throughout Native America to illustrate these extraordinary

phenomena using a very similar series of linier devices and patterned motifs (Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** Sinuous lines snaking from crook configurations and patterned shape are used to illustrate numinous energy. Gila River, Arizona

Arrays of sinuous lines and patterned shapes are observed in many North American rock art styles and other cultural materials. Sinuous lines, snaking from crook configurations, radiating from spirit and other forms are displays of symbolic numinous energy. This power symbolism has been variously described in the literature as life energy, magic lines, force lines, wavy lines of power or tiguas (Berlo 2000:45; Kirkland and Newcomb 1967:67 Plate28, No.1; Labbe' 1998:43; Vastokas and Vastokas 1973:67).

## VISUAL ALLEGORIES OF THE NUMINOUS

Endeavoring to “read” metaphors or reciprocal allegories of the numinous in rock art panels is difficult. Symbol systems defining shamanic rock art are more easily identified when

culturally recognized shamanic emblems such as crooked staffs are associated or integrated within geometric or linear compositions. In Lobo Valley, Texas, (Figure 6) a huge boulder covered with petroglyphs provides a striking example of shamanic symbols integrated within an abstracted, linear-geometric composition.



**Figure 6.** A shaman in magic flight amid the swirling power of the numinous.

Overlapping zigzag and serpentine lines blend with geometric patterns that appear to emerge from cracks in the rock and play at the boundaries of the boulder. This arrangement implies a sense of depth and significant, intermingled movement within and below the XXX-12

rock’s surface. A simplified human form with a phallus and circle for a head has been placed near the center of this energetic composition. The anthropomorph has been placed above a fault or break in the boulder’s surface. The figure has no baseline and appears to hover or

fly within a numinous matrix. Flight is an avian characteristic associated with shamanic or soul flight. Detailed examination of the head reveals a set of projecting horns, a shamanic metaphor for power. The circular head shape may have tripartite symbolism. Circles or concentric circles are a prevalent mental image in dream, trance or meditative states and as symbols of transformational passageways. They are often found in visionary art and represent portals into other worlds (Berlo 2000:45; Eliade 1991:52; Halifax 1979:1; Mallery 1972:236; Spier 1970:401). Arlene Benson, researching ethnography and rock art among the Achumawi of California learned that when concentric circles and zigzags appear together in one design, this marks “the place where powerful spirit beings or very powerful shamans can pass through the rock from one world to the next.” (Benson and Sehgal 1987b:6-7 and Figure 4). Circles are also grounding devices typifying a cultural center, a starting and ending point for movement between worlds (Berlo 2000:45; Vastokas and Vastokas 1973:39).

Potent symbols of shamanic power and transubstantiation are embedded within the overall composition. A crooked staff has been placed at the bottom left of the panel in association with star imagery (Figure 6). Note that these elements, though a part of the composition, have been placed slightly apart, outside of the geometric patterning of most of the panel. The crooked staff is “hooked” into the swirling supernatural field. The bottom of the staff has been placed into a Pueblo-like stand and may represent the shaman’s material staff. The staff becomes a physical grounding device, a return path in his flight between “worlds”. Within the Pueblo cultures these

stands are used to hold crooks, prayer sticks and feathers in ritual (Voth 1901: Plate XLVI). The physical crooked staff’s immaterial, reciprocal reflection, its spiritual counterpart, the staff revealed to the shaman in his dream, is imbedded within the patterned numinous. Like the shaman, it is connected to and intertwined within the geometric matrix of the numinous. It is difficult to see, perhaps intentionally, as another metaphor describing the formidable task of visiting or interacting with the supernatural. The immaterial staff is located within the geometric patterns, below and slightly to the left of the “flying” shaman (Figure 6). Altogether, the visual images contained within this panel help convey authoritative, multivalent, cultural concepts of shamanic power using symbol systems that enjoyed widespread use. Rock art panels with similar physical symbol systems dot the sacred, often feared, environments throughout the southwest and beyond.

### **POWERSCAPES**

Neophytes wanting to obtain a vision traveled to frightening, culturally known “landscapes of the spirit.” These landscapes are places of concentrated power, areas according to oral tradition that are occupied by a body of spirits (Hultkrantz 1980:60, 1987:52-53; Park 1938:14-15). Once engaged with the numinous powers encompassing these domains, visionaries were engulfed in a type of psychic terrain, imbedded in the environment of compelling dream or vision experiences this paper terms “powerscapes”.

A panel of rock art in the Picacho Mountains of Arizona provides the viewer a microcosm of the dream experience (Figure 7). In this visual account the visionary has moved into the

dream realm or powerscape through an archetypal circular dream tunnel or path. This transformational dream portal is symbolized by the shapes attached to his right arm. In spirit, he has engaged the energy fields of a powerscape and is experiencing the ecstatic sensation of dancing with the pulsating energy of the numinous. In this nascent condition, a spirit has elected to help the dreamer. The helper is introduced as an up-side-down, abstracted, hominid form placed above the dreamer. The spirit demonstrates its indwelling affiliation with this mystic space and his intent to help by coupling itself to the dreamer using the energy currents of the supernatural. The songs, dance and ritual paraphernalia the dreamer must understand and acquire before becoming a shaman are made known to the visionary/dreamer during this experience. The dreamer is reaching for the spirit's gift, an incorporeal crook, also connected to the flow of the powerscape. He is reaching with his left hand, the hand often used in ritual, the shaman's hand (Spier 1970:283; Parsons 1996:460,870; Underhill 1969:270).

When a physical, reciprocal or manifest crook is eventually made by the dreamer following the spirit helper's instructions, it will be his supreme power object as a shaman. This tool will channel the omnipresent energy of the supernatural to his will (Laird 1976:31; Underhill 1969:270). The energized nonmaterial crook touches another static crook form at the top of the composition. The horizontal and slightly diagonal static crook touches the sinuosity of the supernatural power but is not encapsulated in its flow. This may represent the novice's crook in its manifest form. It will be his emblem of supernatural authority, a visual metaphor of omnipotent power which, when energized, connects the

supernatural with the human world. The manifest crook becomes a physical symbol of the force behind the shaman's license to practice.



**Figure 7.** A novice, dancing within the ecstatic dream experience, is reaching for the ultimate power object, a crook.

Flickering power lines oscillate in a narrow concavity at another site in the Picacho Mountains (Figure 8).



**Figure 8.** The concentric circles of the head symbolize a dream or trance state. This man of power is holding his emblem of power, a crook.

Hundreds of tiny pecked dots pepper the same space and increase the ambience of power.

These patterned power motifs ring a single male shaman immersed in his encounter with power. The concentric motif of his head is a symbol of the dream aperture through which he transcends his physical nature. The shape of his crooked staff is uncommon. He is holding a staff with a thick body and narrow crooked head. This object is an immediate declarative statement of the dream and its associated power to control aspects of the supernatural.

A large boulder, its rugged surface covered with petroglyphs, leans against larger rocks in a heavily used spirit landscape named Cadalgo (Figure 9). Visionaries animated this boulder, adding dream imagery to its surface for centuries. Each participant expressed a portion of his experience embodying aspects of the undulating, phantasmal dream world in portal-like petroglyphs. These small window-like patterns describe limited personal glimpses into supernatural powerscapes. In time, individual artwork coalesced into a numinous powerscape composition. One dreamer added himself engulfed in power. This shamanic symbol occupies the center of the panel. His elongated, abstracted arms and enlarged hands indicate a holotropic state. One large hand supports a thick crooked staff, a guidepost used to negotiate this spiritual matrix. Additional crook forms are found within this powerscape.

A wonderful panel, located in Sloan Canyon, near Las Vegas, Nevada, offers another view of the journey taken to obtain power (Figure 10). This panel displays an inverted individual, symbolic of a dream or trance state, entering a crack in the rock's surface (Underhill 1969:274 stanzas 17 and 19), a metaphoric entrance into the lower spirit world "where extraordinary beings with reptilian or distorted humanoid appearance live" (Arnold and Stoffle 2006:5).



**Figure 9.** A powerscape near Bishop, California.



**Figure 10.** A novice in magic flight or dream trance enters a powerscape through a crack in the rock.

This individual has entered a powerscape where a crooked staff is being offered the dreamer by distorted spirit beings of the supernatural.

Rock art symbols were used as visual metaphors to convey the visionary's holotropic state of consciousness moving into and being immersed within a swirling powerscape (Irwin 1994:214-215; Whitley 1998:142). As symbols derived from the interactions with spirits in dream or vision, rock art itself is a form of power. As such, shamanic rock art is often found within many cultural "landscapes of the spirit." Power symbols offer glimpses of spirit forms residing in the supernatural and are a record of powerful ritual objects a shaman will need to harness the forces of the numinous and bind them to his will. Crooked staff symbolism is one of the most powerful and versatile manifestations of the shaman's power.

### **EXPRESSIONS OF NUMINOUS POWER**

Crooked staffs are holonomic, symbols used to express the whole of the numinous in a highly condensed manner. They are an expressive visual synthesis representing the indwelling, constantly unfolding, power of the supernatural. Rock art masters throughout North America used a combination of dot, line, and abstracted shape to typify the vivid movement of numinous energy, light or power emitting, surrounding or interpenetrating the holonomic symbol of the crook.

When manifest crooked staffs are imbued with power, they become numens or supernatural aids and in the hands of shaman are capable of accomplishing fantastic feats. An anthropomorph located high on the walls of Warner Valley, Utah, is part of a small horizontal panel anchored on both sides by

cracks in the cliff's face. He is wearing large ear ornaments and is holding a crooked staff which is being infused with an almost electric current of power from a crack to the viewer's left (Figure 11). The crook is unusual in that its distal end is carved in the shape of a spear point, reminiscent of the crooks carried by plains warrior societies. These symbols identify him as a shaman. The supernatural world is conceptually located just beneath the cliff's face and can be entered through cracks in the rock. The shaman has used the circular dream pathway, symbolically attached to his left arm, to pass through the cracks and access the power of the supernatural.



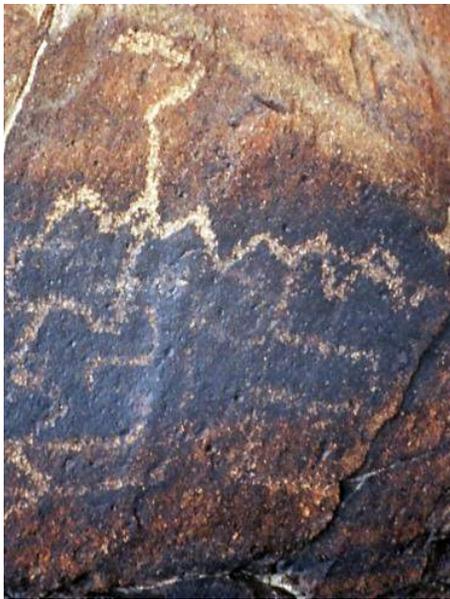
**Figure 11.** The electric power of the numinous enters a shaman's crooked staff.

Rock art panels displaying crook shapes emitting power imagery are found throughout the American West. The Yellow Jacket site near Bishop, California, (Figure 12) has a panel displaying this phenomenon. An upright crook has an undulating power line radiating from its base.



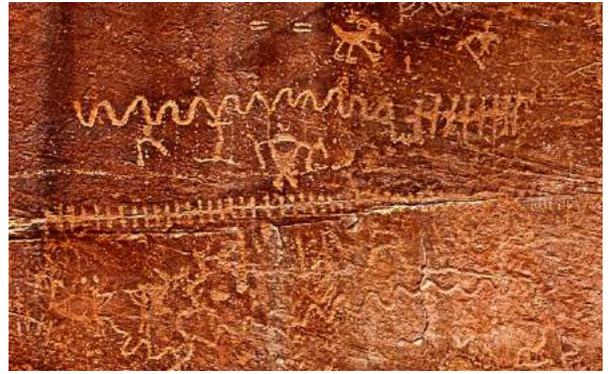
**Figure 12.** Power radiating from a crook is symbolized using undulating lines.

A similar example is found in Arizona at Inscription Point (Figure 13). An undulating power line emits from a crook image on one face of a boulder.



**Figure 13.** Serpentine energy lines, moving from crooks, snake along a boulder's surface.

The Thumb site is a heavily worked panel in the Grand Gulch area of Utah (Figure 14). This panel also displays crooks with oscillating lines, individual crooks and anthropomorphs holding crooked staffs. Other innovations in the symbolic emanation of power are variations in linear dot patterns.



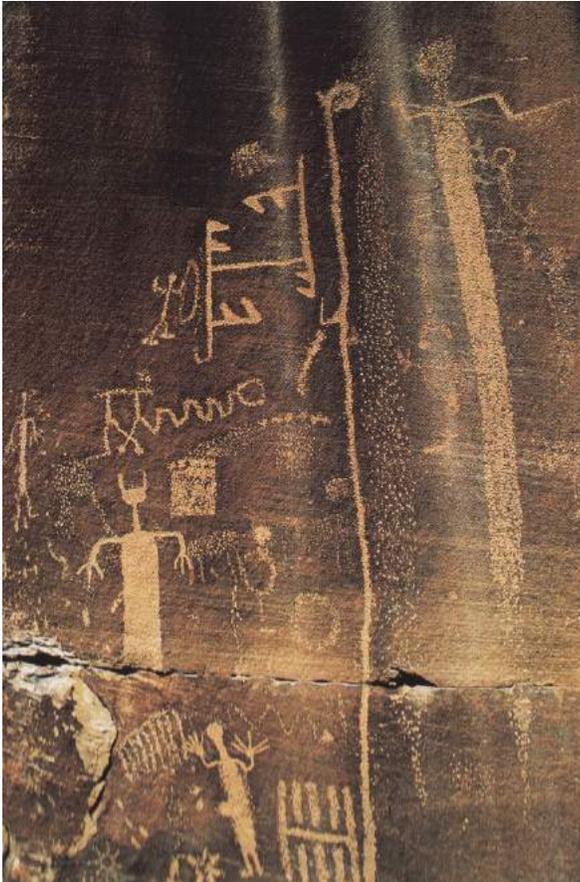
**Figure 14.** Supernatural power is broadcast from crook forms (photo, Chris Rhodes).

A small alcove at the Long Lake site in Oregon has a good example of this variation (Figure 15). Large dots in linear patterns appear to drip from the crook end of the staffs. Similar design configurations are found in New Mexico and Arizona.



**Figure 15.** Dual crook forms appear to weep power symbolism.

A long staff in Coconino County, Arizona, has a cascade of power spilling from its crook, symbolized by hundreds of dots in a tightly grouped pattern (Figure 16). A similar, though smaller image of this type of power imagery spilling from a crook, is found in The Valley of the Great Kivas in New Mexico (see Roberts 1932:Plate 62).



**Figure 16.** Power pours from a crook, located within a powerscape. (after Malotki, Page 83, plate 85).

Repeated crook symbolism can be used to illustrate the kinetic omnipresent aspects of power. In Meadow Valley, Nevada, a powerful crooked staff is shown anchored in a powerscape. The crooked end of the staff projects upward, out of the powerscape. Its supernatural potency is illustrated using a

smaller crooked form radiating from its larger power source (Figure 17).



**Figure 17.** These crook shapes represent both omnipotent power and its omnipresent aspect of kinetic energy.

Dual crook symbolism, found in the Picacho Mountains of Arizona, emit ethereal crook-like power line imagery (Figure 18).



**Figure 18.** Incorporeal crook forms flow from their host's bodies symbolizing the moving aspects of power.

Another impressive crooked staff icon is found at Corral Lake, Oregon (Figure 19). This commanding symbol is almost six feet long and is located within a compelling spiritscape. It has an assortment of symbolic power imagery emitting from its body including additional smaller crook forms.



**Figure 19.** An imposing crook symbol displaying a variety of power imagery.

“The contents of any sacred image embody a vital expressiveness; they have a communicative efficacy that functions nonverbally to convey the image’s significance” (Irwin 1994:212). Crooked staffs and their associated symbolism visually communicate the immediacy of the numinous.

### SHAMANIC MANIPULATION OF POWER

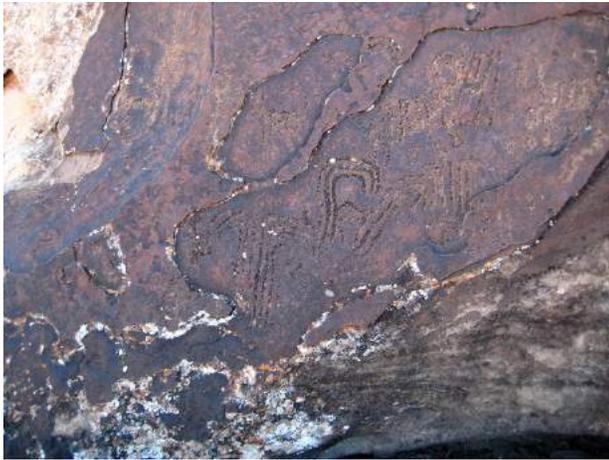
“*Puha* [power] emerges as a mana-like force imbued in the doctor [shaman] and his objects given him by a *timidainI* [spirit]” (Olofson 1979:13). Visual examples of concentrated power being manipulated or controlled by shaman holding crooked staffs or canes can be found in the rock art and other material objects of the American West.

Little Petroglyph Canyon, California, contains a wonderful example of a shaman using the intangible power of his crook to control a big horn sheep (Figure 20).



**Figure 20.** A shaman uses the supernatural power contained within the crook to control the movements of a big game animal.

An unparalleled allegorical expression of kinetic power being used to control animals is found at Quail Creek, near St. George, Utah (Figure 21). This panel is located within a shallow irregular concavity near the base of a large boulder. The arrangement may be intended to represent numinous activity within this rock. An anthropomorph, almost certainly a shaman, is holding a crooked staff which is projecting repeated crook shapes symbolizing the powerful flow of numinous kinetic energy. This vigorous current is being used to control the movement of game animals.



**Figure 21.** In knowing hands, the powerful kinetic current of the numinous can be used to manipulate or control. It is symbolized here using repeated crook forms.

Several fine representations of power manipulation can be seen in the Picacho Mountains of Arizona. One such site displays skillfully manipulated energy patterns which illuminate the somber patina of its panel (Figure 22). Swirling, undulating linear patterns envelop a shaman, creating an illusion of supernatural power radiating from a natural depression in the rock. This mysterious man has adopted a firm ritual stance. His eyes scrutinize the energy field while his elevated staff engages and molds this potency to his service.



**Figure 22.** A shaman has summoned and is projecting power from his crooked staff.

Power contests among shamans are reported throughout the ethnographic record (Olofson 1979:14). In Chemehuevi myth, Wolf and Lion win a duel of power with their adversaries, the Bluebird Chiefs. While it is not stated in this story that their poros or crooked staffs were used in this duel, the one object of power that the Chemehuevi shaman used was the poro (Laird 1976:31; 1984:239). The Pima-Papago oral tradition tells of a Hohokam shaman destroying the mind of another man of power. “I am holding my hand, And with my cane, I have destroyed the understanding, Of this medicine man” (Bahr 1994:248-249). An intriguing Mimbres bowl found at the Old Town ruin in the lower Mimbres Valley of New Mexico may depict just such a power event (Figure 23).

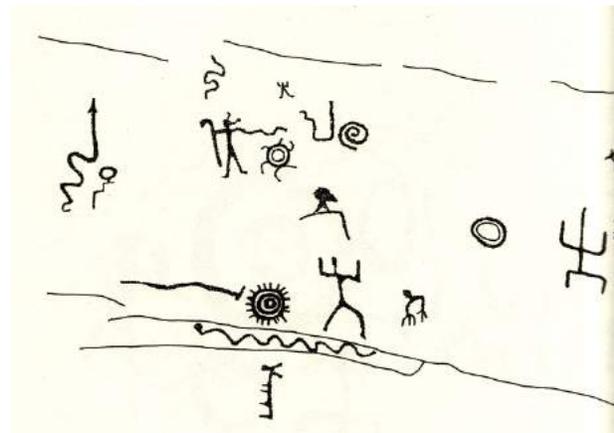


**Figure 23.** A shamanic duel. One individual is “firing” power from his crook.

The shaman or mythic warriors portrayed on this bowl have laid aside their bows, arrows and quivers. One of these individuals is attempting to subdue the other using power “shot” by his crook. His opponent may be using a magical shield to deflect the power aimed his way. Hopi priests told Fewkes (1939:28) that “these crooks or gnelas have been called warrior prayer sticks, and are symbols of ancient weapons. In many folk

tales, it is stated that warriors overcame their foes by the use of gnelas which would indicate that they had something to do with ancient war implements.” This Hopi story has the flavor of the Pima-Papago and Chemehuevi myths and may be an echo of shamanic abilities among the early pueblo peoples or their ancestors.

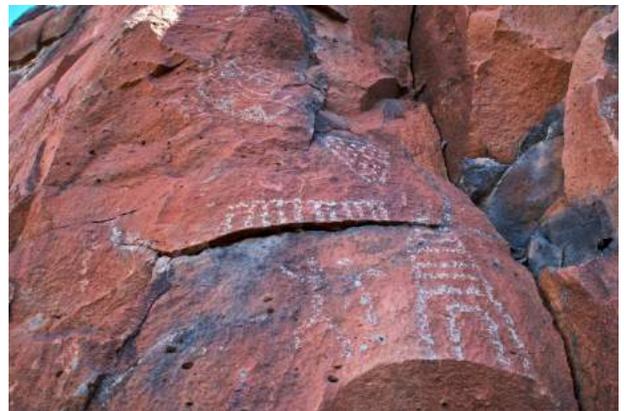
Chemehuevi ethnography speaks of the ancestral coyote shaman using his poro or crooked staff to hook the wind down to earth (Laird 1976:31). In the Hopi flute ceremony, “a crooked stick is said to be used to draw down the clouds when rain they contain is much desired” (Fewkes 1914:29). Further, at Jemez Pueblo, Doctor Parsons found that the crook or dyefu’ is used to pull down the rain, “or to catch the water from the sky” (Parsons 1925:102). Rock art panels at South Mountain and Gillespie Dam, Arizona, illustrate anthropomorphs interacting with sun symbols, perhaps depicting shaman controlling the sun’s movement (Figures 24 and 5).



**Figure 24.** A shaman appears to be interacting with or controlling the sun. (After Bostwick 2002: 188, Figure 247).

The concept of using a crook to pull or manipulate objects and animals or to control natural events is dramatically illustrated on a cliff face at San Carlos Mesa in Baja

California. In 1988, Eve Ewing and Mark Robin discovered an extraordinary solar interaction with a series of petroglyphs, which marked summer solstice at this site. Their paper describing the find includes an excellent detailed description of the panel and its interaction with the sun’s rays (Robin and Ewing 1989:29-35). The authors took me to this site in the summer of 2008. The interaction was exactly as they reported. In their description of the site they describe a “vague female form” (Figure 25).



**Figure 25.** Detail, solstice panel at San Carlos Mesa.

“To the left of the house is a disintegrated figure made up of approximately 7 segments (depending on which marks on the rock are included in the figure), one of which in the lower part of the figure is pecked around a natural hole in the rock. We interpret this as a possible female symbolism; identification of the figure as an anthropomorph is problematical” (Robin and Ewing 1989:30). Closer examination of this “figure” reveals that it is a classic crook form. The crook is ethereal in appearance as it is emerging from the numinous through a natural hole in the rock, a passageway to and from the supernormal realms; the home of power. As seen in other sites throughout the southwest, the crook

segment of the staff is facing away from the shaman holding it. Feathers tied to the shaft just before the curved segment are a common occurrence in ritual and in symbolic renderings of these crooks. However, the most important aspect of this panel is the kinetic interaction of the sun's rays with the imagery of the panel (Figures 26 and 27). The shaman is symbolically "pulling" the sun into its summer home, using the power imbued in his crooked staff.



**Figure 26.** The sunlight "dagger" at summer solstice after it has passed through the body of the shaman and his crook and is touching the sun's "home".



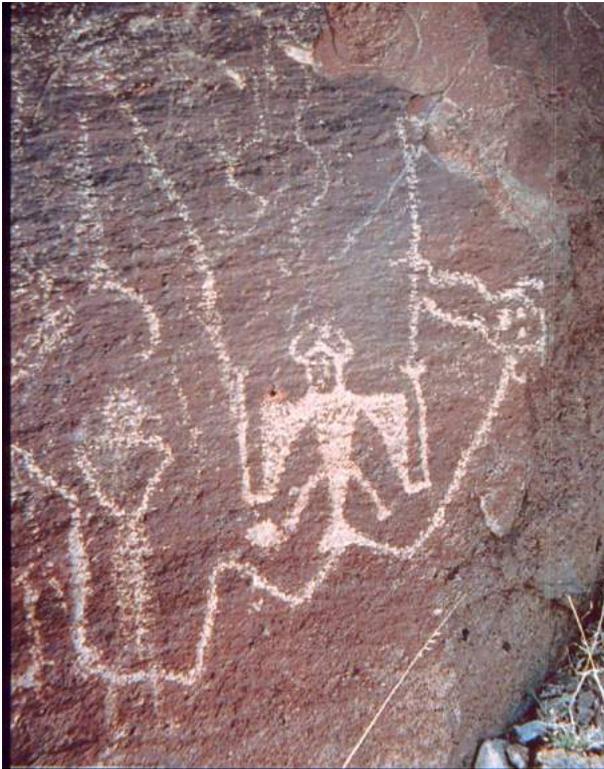
**Figure 27.** The sun, as a light dagger, enters its home and becomes a "pool" of light in the doorway.

The Luiseno, a people living approximately 500 miles north of San Carlos Mesa, had their lives guided by power decisions made by the mythic Kahmelum or first born people of that culture. One of the most important decisions the Kahmelum made was that the sun would return to its home at winter solstice to insure balance in the universe. The Luiseno pulum or shamans were expected to honor this decision through yearly reciprocal actions (Jones 1989:79). The shaman who created the rock art panel at San Carlos Mesa carved a permanent reciprocal action "in stone" to benefit his people. This visual reciprocal action used the symbol system of the supernatural to pull the sun into his home. This power statement has been repeated many times after his death, insuring the ongoing balance of the universe.

#### **SOMETHING FOR SPIRITS TO COME DOWN ON**

Elsie Parson's ethnographic work among the Pueblos sheds light on crook use by these peoples. At Zuni Pueblo, the crook is explained as "something for the spirits to come down on" (Parsons 1996:693). Visual echoes of this statement are found in rock art hundreds of miles from Zuni and suggest that similar concepts were known and used by people of power in many southwestern cultural settings.

A powerful petroglyph panel found on Alamo Mountain, New Mexico, depicts a shaman in magic flight and wearing horns denoting power. The hand of his winged left arm holds a crooked staff. A spirit form is using the shaman's crook as a ladder, bridge or path to move from one world into another. Both the shaman and spirit are connected to a powerscape by the undulating energy patterns of the supernatural (Figure 28).



**Figure 28.** A shaman's crook being used by a spirit to travel between worlds.

An analogous reflection of the crook/spirit connection is found at Indian Hill, New Mexico (Figure 29).



**Figure 29.** A kachina-like spirit using a crook to move through various realities.

In this composition, the energy of power undulates between the cane and the edge of the rock. The body of the spirit is ephemeral

formed using indistinct line and shape. Its head or mask is conceived using a soft triangle and is very kachina-like. The mask is decorated with horizontal lines, a head feather, two eyes and possibly a mouth. This entity provides a vivid image of a spirit being using the crook as a passageway to move through simultaneous levels of existence.

A large, very powerful petroglyph panel found in the Black Mountains of Arizona (Figure 30) displays what appears to be a bird-like spirit emerging from the numinous through an enormous concentric circle pattern.



**Figure 30.** A compelling, detailed display of power symbolism.

The inner most circle of this concentric pattern and the distal ends of two crooked staffs terminate in a crack on the rock's surface. This triple metaphor is a compelling, masterful, visual look at unique transcendent symbolism. An anthropomorph has been placed on the back of this relatively large bird-like spirit, perhaps to illustrate control. Both the anthropomorph and spirit are connected to the emergent "road" connected to the concentric circle. In the cultures of the southern deserts, bird spirits are

prevalent and are considered potent shamanic familiars. An array of rattle symbols is also found on this boulder. Rattles are among the ritual paraphernalia given by spirits or creators and used by shamans to call their helper spirits. The designs on the rattles may also contain numinous symbolism, “marks” given the shaman by a spirit. The large triangle-like shape connected to the upper crook may be a reference to the sacred mountain of the Mojave and Yuman peoples, the “great pointed peak of Avikwa’ame” (Kroeber 1970:771). Avikwa’ame, also known as Spirit Mountain, is the home of the creators Mastamho (Mojave) or Kumastamho (Yuman). Shamans from both groups get their powers directly from mythic characters while visiting Avikwa’ame.

Crook staffs images, in conjunction with other rock art and natural elements of the spiritual landscape, can symbolize the nexus or pathways between “worlds”. They can represent aspects of the power structure or ethereal bridge human spirits or “shadows” use to access the supernatural and simultaneously describe the road over which familiars or spirits enter human environments.

### CONCLUSION

Crooked staff iconography is certainly multivalent. Crook forms and other symbols derived from interactions with spirits in dreams and displayed on rock are a form of shamanic power. Shamanic symbol systems are deeply layered, highly versatile, cultural methods of making explicit the implicit power of the dream. Crooks used by shaman and represented in their rock art are holonomic, reciprocal reflections of that power. Constructions of pecked dots, circles, concentric circles, rayed images, abstracted geometrics, zigzag or

serpentine lines in association with crooks, are often derived from communication with spirits in dream. These images symbolize the animated, omnipresent radiant energy force or power of the spirit world. When these shamanic symbol systems are placed on or near openings or cracks on a rock’s surface within a “landscape of the spirit,” they become additional natural metaphors synthesizing their association or connection with numinous “powerscapes” contained within the mass of a rock, mountain, bluff or boulder.

Throughout the American West, recurrent power symbolism follows an amazingly similar series of recurrent abstract patterns in the rock art record across culture and time. Many of these rock canvasses have been created to provide insight into the workings of the numinous, recounting extraordinary sensate visionary experiences within powerscapes. Rock art panels describe the shaman’s use of the crook to manipulate or control the movement of animals or to “pull” wind or water from the sky. Drawings on rock recall the ability of powerful shaman to use crooks to constrain the sun’s movement, controlling and directing its course through the seasons of the year. In certain locations, petroglyph panels delineate crooked staffs as metaphoric symbols depicting a road for “spirits to come down on” or a metaphysical means for the human spiritual essence or shadow to gain access to supernatural realms. Crooks are spoken of in oral tradition as powerful tools used by shaman, ancestors and cultural heroes to heal, destroy and to do battle. They are highly significant visual metaphors of the numinous in rock art.

Understanding of this powerful symbol and its use by many peoples over time and space is

constantly evolving and unfolding as more information concerning this unique form is uncovered.

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