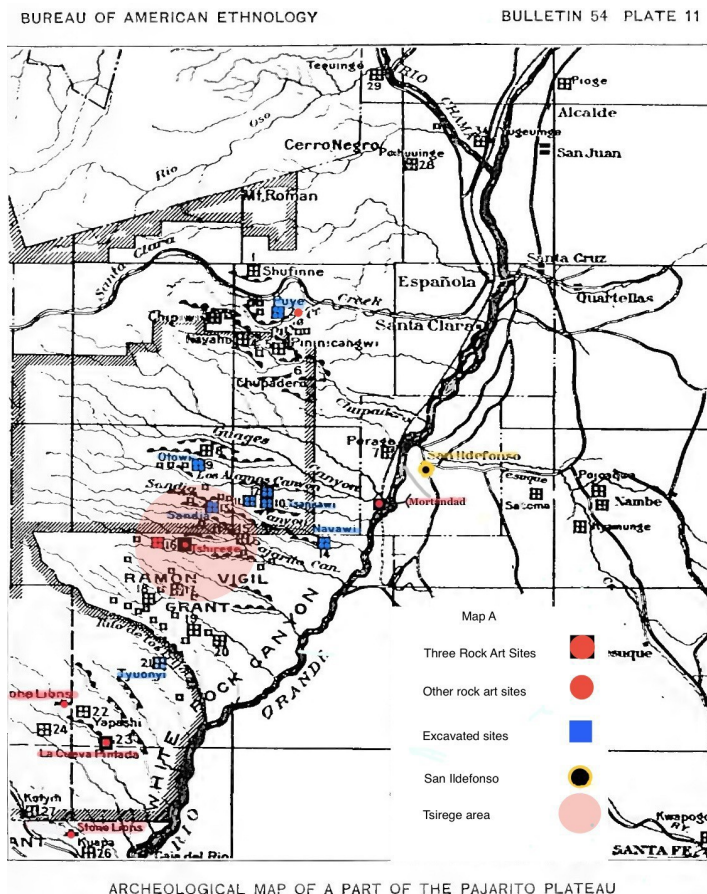


The Avanyu Petroglyph Motif on San Ildefonso Pottery: Perfection, Authenticity and the Sacred in Rock Art

Christine Oravec

From 1907 to 1910 two archaeologists, Edgar Lee Hewett and Kenneth M. Chapman, working on behalf of the School of American Archaeology (now the School for Advanced Research) and the Museum of New Mexico, excavated several late ancestral Pueblo villages. The villages bordered the San Ildefonso reservation on land now within Bandelier National Monument and the Los Alamos Nuclear Laboratory known as the Pajarito Plateau (Mathien 77-84; Hewett et al. 76 Map A).



Map A

The two archeologists wished to demonstrate that despite the disruptive impact of Western contact the inhabitants of San Ildefonso Pueblo derived significant aspects of their culture from these ancestral Puebloan peoples, based on the shared decorative motifs of their pottery. They also wanted modern San Ildefonso pottery using those ancient designs to be recognized as an art form and to be valued as such. To further their aims Hewitt and Chapman collaborated with Maria and Julian Martinez, potters and artists, to produce some of the most famous indigenous pottery in North America. In the course of her long career Maria Martinez “became one of the most widely celebrated artists of her time. . . , whose work continues to influence new generations of artistry” (Pardue 1).

In this paper I trace a crucial link between ancient pre-Puebloan rock art and modern Pueblo pottery as a form of high art and evidence of cultural authenticity. In particular I show that Maria and Julian Martinez, with the encouragement of archaeologists Edgar L. Hewett and Kenneth M. Chapman, decorated their early 20th century San Ildefonso pottery with an Avanyu motif derived from a petroglyph near Tsirege Pueblo, a Classic period site on the Pajarito Plateau (1350-1600 ACE). Their use of an ancient petroglyph to create a modern pottery design may have subjected sacred Avanyu iconography to public exposure and widespread reproduction in the realms of science, commerce and popular culture. It may also have helped establish public perception of modern Pueblo pottery as culturally authentic, thereby enhancing its monetary value and establishing a collectors’ market for Puebloan sacred images.

Petroglyphs and Potsherds

If pottery was a preferred form of material evidence grounding early twentieth-century archaeology in the US, it seems that rock art would have been even better. Unlike pots, petroglyphs were tied physically to a geographical space defining a local culture, had a permanence matched only by stone implements, and were often confidently attributed to ancient peoples. Nonetheless in 1908 or 1909, according to the accepted narrative, archaeologists Edgar Lee Hewitt and/or Kenneth M. Chapman offered Maria Martinez some ancient potsherds from the Pajarito Plateau digs for her to replicate. She was not impressed:

Men from the Museum one time come to us with some bowls from the ruins, and they say, “Make some bowls like these.” So I made some, and I say to them, “What to do with so much bowls,” and they say, “You sell it.” And I say, “Nobody here to buy these bowls.” They say, “We take them and sell them for you.” So they did and they brought back the money and say, “Make more bowls.” We make more and more. Now people come to us to buy pottery. We do not take it to them. And now everybody in San Ildefonso make pottery (Spivey 13 quoting Zahler¹⁴).

Even Chapman, a museum and art curator, did not respect the aesthetic quality of the shards his archaeologist friend Hewett held up as models:

[He] recalled that there was nothing excellent about the Biscuit wares they were excavating; rather, the clay was soft and porous, the slip imperfect, and the designs messily painted. (Chapman paraphrased in Bernstein 74)

Some of the the sherds did have an attractive dark patina, such as the Kapo blackware from San Juan Pueblo (Ohkay Owingeh). Still, they left something to be desired for the appreciator of fine art (Bernstein 77; Petersen 89).

Pottery seen as a kind of archaeological evidence and also as a work of art presented a real dilemma. On one hand archaeologists maligned the authenticity of modern tourist wares, often in such forms as animals, teepees and singing children, although these forms were popular and sold well (Chapman "Memoirs" 68; Babcock "Madwomen" 431-32.) Maria Martinez once even made a little canoe of clay from an archaeological dig (Bernstein 74). On the other hand the ancient pots endorsed by archaeologists, mostly in the form of gray broken shards, were artistically uninspiring to everyone but antiquarians. Faced with this dilemma the Martinezes might have thought: What would be the value to the archaeologists and the Museum if they made pottery featuring an evocative and fantastic figure from Pueblo mythology? And what if the figure was modeled upon such an authentic and permanent cultural artifact as an ancient petroglyph?

Certainly by 1909 Edgar Lee Hewitt and/or Kenneth Chapman may have suggested to Maria Martinez that she along with her husband Julian copy the Avanyu petroglyph near Tsirege Pueblo to decorate their pottery, but the thought could have occurred to them beforehand. Julian Martinez worked on digs at Puye and Rito de Los Frijoles during two seasons from 1907-1908 and was asked to record some rock art using watercolor paints (Hendron 53 Fig. 23; Spivey 15; Marriott xiii, 155; Mathien et al.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

92-93). Unfortunately we don't know exactly when the Martinezes started making pots with an Avanyu motif presumably inspired by the Tsirege rock art panel. We do know that as early as 1914 they made San Ildefonso-style polychrome pots with traditional Avanyu imagery, as well as modern pots decorated with Julian's own Avanyu motif ("Bowl 1914"; Bernstein 71; Ettema). The one from 1914 shown in Figures 1 and 2 is consistent with the tradition of San Ildefonso black-on-red but appears somewhat avant garde or experimental. The serpent is drawn with a lively, cartoon-like line and the black-on-red really "pops."

Later, when Julian Martinez invented modern black-on-black ware in 1918 or 1919, he used his own Avanyu motif, fully featured and finely detailed, for the decorative design (Spivey 2003:39; Marriott 1948: xiii). The pot shown below was made after 1955 when Maria's son Popovi Da took Julian's place as artist and collaborator, but it illustrated a formula established by the Martinezes as early as the 1920s. By this point the tonal palate of a black on black surface might have seemed more subdued and sophisticated than the old traditional black-on-red, making the motif both harder to see and revelatory. Emerging from a gray cloudy sky, the shiny black image of a feathered or horned serpent with a lightning tongue evoked the Avanyu's mythological origins as a flood and storm god. The Martinez motif in particular featured a perfectly round eye, a serrated arrow-tongue and a three-pointed horn referencing the trident of a water deity. This is the image that dominated the twentieth-century Indian pottery market. It's a bit different than the petroglyph it was derived from, but not by much (see Fig. 3):



Fig. 3

The Tsirege Avanyu Petroglyph

While researching this article I discovered that the development of the Martinez Avanyu pottery was fairly well documented. However I had to search deeply to find images of the specific petroglyph that inspired their design. Working backwards in the public record, I first came across a 2006 WikiCommons entry presenting a blurry photograph of a gray-on-gray pecked image with little surrounding context except for its placement on a flat basalt wall (Fig. 4 “Tsirege Petroglyph”):

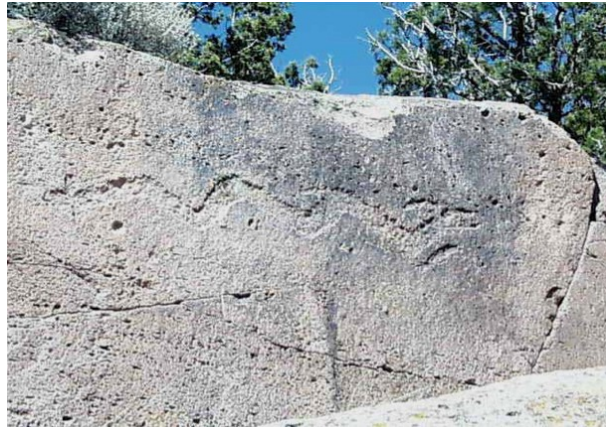


Fig. 4

The caption read:

Julian Martinez of San Ildefonso painted the Awanyu on a rectangular dish made by his wife, Maria Martinez..This was the first commercial use of the Avanyu. The pot is in the collections of the Museum of Indian Arts and Cultre [sic], Santa Fe, NM.

It was an exceptional claim, but the author of the entry provided a source by citing A Plan for the Management of the Cultural Heritage at Los Alamos National Laboratory, New Mexico Prepared by Ecology Group for the Department of Energy, July 2005. The plan pertained to the area surrounding the LANL where Tsirege Pueblo is now located. It presented a photo of the Avanyu petroglyph, the same as in the WikiCommons article, attached to a description of the area's cultural resources:

Tsirege is the only Classic period complex plaza pueblo at LANL and an ancestral village in the traditions of the Pueblo of San Ildefonso. Tsirege and Tsankawi were the last to be occupied on the Pajarito Plateau. It is one of the largest pueblo ruins on the Plateau, and contains several hundred ground floor rooms and evidence of three-story I architecture. Tree-ring dates indicate use at least during the period of AD 1422 to 1580, with the later date coinciding with the final abandonment of the Pajarito Plateau by permanent Ancestral Pueblo populations due to prolonged drought. A

Tsirege rock art petroglyph (Figure 15.13) of an Awanyu, a horned water serpent deity, was copied by a famous Pueblo of San Ildefonso potterer, in the earlier 20th century. This image was part of the 20th century revival of Tewa pottery making and now commonly appears on contemporary Pueblo pottery. It also has become a commercial icon for northern New Mexico. (69)¹

Like the WikiCommons caption, the LANL report made the extraordinary claim that this petroglyph inspired the Martinezes' pottery motif, but again it provided no evidence. Oddly enough, the next revision of the plan in 2014 completely excised the photo and the claim. Further I haven't been able to find a reference to the Tsirege Awanyu petroglyph anywhere after 2005 in the maze of government documents concerning LANL cultural resources. Since the 1940s access to the area where the petroglyph resides has been restricted and archaeological trips there are offered only every five years, with no photography allowed ("Tsirege").

Gauging only from the photo in the report, the petroglyph is outstanding for its aesthetic qualities. It has been measured at about seven feet long. It is evenly proportioned and complete, firmly outlined, and consistently pecked throughout the interior of the figure. The profile has a discernible mouth and jawline. There are two identical peaks, one on the head and the other on the first curve of the body that could be either feathers or horns. The body has four symmetrical curves including the head, and there is a cross- or star-shaped tail possibly referring to ancestral warriors and the planet Venus (see Fig. 5, Los Alamos 70; Frej 78-81; Snead 11; Schaffsma 111; Rohn 87; Peterson 1977:91):



Fig. 5 Tsirege



Fig. 6 Painted Cave



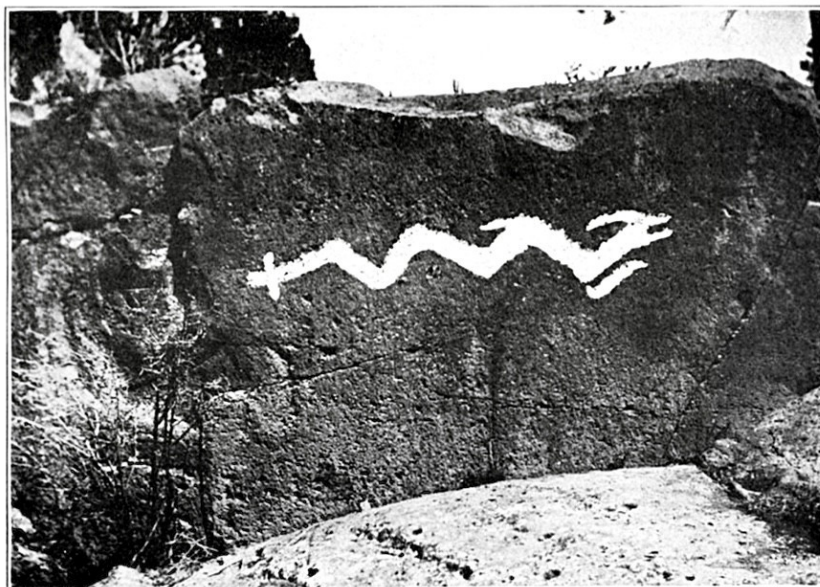
Fig. 7 Mortandad

In addition, the figure of the Tsirege Avanyu is quite different than other major rock art panels containing Avanyus in the Pajarito Plateau. We can compare it to the pictographs of Painted Cave in Bandelier National Monument and the petroglyphs of Mortandad Canyon in Los Alamos (see Figs. 6 and 7; National Park Service; Los Alamos 70). The Tsirege Avanyu panel is high up on a rock face, made of white-on-white stone, and centrally positioned with wide margins on its rock canvas. The Avanyu itself is substantial, detailed, and solitary, so the focus is on it alone. The two other major Pajarito rock art panels considered here are inside a cave or scratched on a soot-blackened wall, somewhat erratically placed in their settings and full of images. The Avanyus are fairly slender, lacking detail and crowded by other rock art. To draw an analogy, the petroglyphs and pictographs of Painted Cave and Mortandad are ensemble performances, while the Tsirege Avanyu petroglyph is the star of its own show.¹

Again moving backwards in the public record, the next source of evidence for the influence of the Tsirege Avanyu petroglyph on the Martinez's pottery came from ethnologist and art historian Bruce Bernstein. In 1994 he wrote a short history of early Martinez pottery for The American Indian Art Magazine. He also made some astonishing claims, particularly that Julian used the Tsirege petroglyph as a template for his own Avanyu motif. In this case, however, Bernstein provided compelling visual evidence. He juxtaposed a different, earlier photo of the petroglyph with a photo of a corn meal box Maria made of red clay. The rectangular shape of the box was significant; it was not a pot for holding water or food, but a container for holding the sacred corn pollen used by members of a San Ildefonso household to bless themselves in the morning (see Figs. 8 and 9; see Spivey 16 for a similar Martinez Avanyu cornmeal box from 1922).

Let's see how Bernstein juxtaposed a photo of the Tsirege Avanyu petroglyph with a photo of the Martinez cornmeal box. First, he used a much earlier photo of the Avanyu than the one we have considered so far, and I will discuss it shortly. Second, he used a photo of the cornmeal box which is currently unavailable to reproduce, so I'm substituting an identical photo (Bernstein et al.). Seeing Figures 8 and 9 on the same page visually confirms that the Tsirege Avanyu petroglyph closely matches the

Avanyu motif Julian applied to Maria's ceremonial cornmeal box. This juxtaposition is convincing to me. It indicates that the Martinez's Avanyu motif was derived from the Tsirege Avanyu petroglyph:



PETROGLYPH OF PLUMED SERPENT ON TCHREGA CLIFF

This content downloaded from
209.33.201.58 on Mon, 02 Jun 2025 21:03:46 UTC
All use subject to <https://about.jstor.org/terms>

Fig. 8



Fig. 9

Corn Meal Box, 1914, Pottery, Maria and Julian Martinez, San Ildefonso Pueblo, Photography by Blair Clark, Courtesy Museum of Indian Arts & Culture, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM, MIAC 1769/12. <https://elpalacio.org/2019/09/vessels-of-a-truth-obscured/> and https://www.academia.edu/44543622/Potters_and_Patrons_The_Creation_of_Pueblo_Art_Pottery

In both images the head of the Avanyu has an open mouth, a squared-off snout, round eyes and a backward-leaning horn or feather. In the petroglyph the body has four undulating curves including the head, the second curve with a horn or feather matching the one on the head; while the corn meal box has only three curves, but the horns or feathers are in the same respective locations. Both Avanyus are horizontal, long and extended, with a cross or star shape on the end of the tail. Both have S-curves, possibly cloud forms, under their necks. The entire petroglyph is sharply outlined and pecked in, while the painted motif is equally sharp and infilled with pigment. Both designs are centered on their respective panels, highly contrasted, and solitary except that the cornmeal box has a cloud-terrace motif on another side. If one were to create a stencil of the Avanyu petroglyph photograph and size it to scale it would tightly match Julian's cornmeal box design, except that the petroglyph has an additional curve and a little less angularity (Chapman "Pottery" 114-15).²

Bernstein did not detail the blessing ceremony or delve into the decorations on the box. Rather, he noted the importance of Avanyu imagery from Hewett's viewpoint:

The water serpent or avanyu was probably suggested to Maria and Julian Martinez by Chapman or Hewett. . . who knew the design from A.D. 1400-1600 rock art and pottery on the Pajarito Plateau.... Part of Hewett's motivation in asking contemporary potters to use this symbol was to help him demonstrate that the Pajaritans did not disappear, but rather moved down the hill to San Ildefonso. (74,77)

Here I found that the use of the Avanyu motif on the Martinez's pottery was part of a larger archaeological project. If decorations on San Ildefonso pottery resembled those on pots dug up on the Pajarito plateau, modern Puebloans may have received a significant amount of their culture from Classic period peoples who were never influenced by Western, that is Spanish, contact. The Martinez's pots decorated with an Avanyu motif demonstrated Hewett's theories of cultural continuity among the ancient Pajaritans and extended that continuity into modern Puebloan times.

It's not surprising, then, to discover that Edgar Lee Hewett published the photo of the Tsirege Avanyu petroglyph long before he presumably asked the Martinezes to apply the design to their own pottery. In 1904 Hewett authored a paper for the American Anthropologist, "The Archeology of Pajarito Park, New Mexico," that featured the photo of then Tsirege petroglyph included in Bernstein's 1994 article. The photo in Hewett's paper, labeled as "Plate 26: Petroglyph of Plumed Serpent on

Tchrega Cliff,” appeared a full four years before Hewett and/or Chapman alerted the Martinezes to the potential of the petroglyph’s ideography. Moreover, the photograph itself may have been taken by Chapman as early as 1900 (Hewett “Catalog” 1). These details suggest that the Martinez pottery phenomenon was far less spontaneous or unmotivated than it has been portrayed. In fact, the request was made in the context of professional, scientific and technological drama for Hewett specifically, and the field of archaeology as a whole.

By Maria Martinez’s own account, Hewett and/or Chapman asked her to replicate ancient pottery shards with her own pottery, thereby providing support for Hewett’s archaeological theory. But in the case of the Tsirege Avanyu design Hewett could not transport the petroglyph to her, so he very likely showed her and/or Julian a copy to reproduce (Bernstein 78; Bernstein et al.). Such a transfer of iconographic information by means of a copy rather than the original made logistical sense; petroglyphs, after all, are not potsherds. But we know by looking at the historical and visual record that the copy must have been a very good one to have replicated the Tsirege petroglyph as accurately as it did. These circumstances argue for the copy being, not an artistic rendering like a sketch or a painting, but a photograph; especially a photograph that had already seen scrutiny by the scientific community.

Furthermore, Hewett may have been under considerable pressure to garner even more evidence for his scientific theory, beyond the replication of potsherds. As early as 1907 he had clashed with anthropologist Franz Boas over the quality of his field work, which Boas thought was insufficiently informed by scientific standards. Just prior to this time Boas helped found the American Anthropological Association, served as an editor of the journal where the Tsirege photo was published and became an advocate for the professionalizing of archaeology (Johnson 52-60; Thomas 49-50, 111-113). By 1908, in the course of securing further employment and funding in an increasingly demanding field, Hewett acquired a doctorate in sociology from the University of Geneva in Switzerland (Les Communautés). Any plan to further bolster his reputation, say by reproducing the Tsirege petroglyph in Pueblo pottery, would work only if the copy he used was considered legitimate evidence by the kind of professional and scientific community represented by Boas. Based on the historical and visual evidence it follows that the copy Hewett gave the Martinezes was probably the photograph of the Tsirege Avanyu petroglyph from his earlier scientific publication in 1904. It also helped that the photograph was highly reproducible; in fact, he reproduced it not only in that publication but in his dissertation as well (Hewett Les Communautés 104; Burgess esp. part 1).³

Avanyu Imagery in Commercial and Popular Culture

We may never know exactly how the Martinezes copied the Tsirege Avanyu petroglyph. But the fact that it could be copied may be more important than how they did it. Because the Tsirege Avanyu image lent itself to precise photographic reproduction, copies of it met scientific criteria for authenticating certain artifacts of indigenous Pueblo culture like pottery and pottery designs. Moreover, because those

copies proved to be as iconic and reproducible as any corporate logo, they fulfilled the marketing requirements of the greater commercial realm. Everyone who copied this sacred Avanyu imagery was involved in the creation, not only of a scientific theory, but a recognizable brand.

The ability accurately to reproduce Tsirege Avanyu imagery at scale while retaining a degree of its authenticity held immense commercial potential. In 1911 the Museum displayed an abstract representation of Avanyu feathered prayer sticks arranged in a three-legged pattern called a triskelion, the design of which came from an ancient pot dug up by Hewett. After the owner of the Parker Pen Company George S. Parker of Janesville, Wisconsin visited Santa Fe on vacation, this “unique, beautiful and mystical” design was incised into a new line of Awanyu “Aztec Indian” Lucky Curve pens, with the permission of Chapman himself (*Les Communautés* 92, pl. XV; Parker “Awanyu”). By the 1920s the distinctive Martinez motif became the most commonly known version of Avanyu-related imagery, and its placement on pottery was an important source of revenue for the SAR and the Museum of New Mexico through the Santa Fe Indian Market (Chapman “Pottery” 28-32; “The World’s First”). Since 1980, a truncated red Avanyu modeled upon the Martinez motif has appeared in various forms as a logo for The Archaeological Conservancy, a nonprofit that purchases petroglyph fields for preservation (The Archaeological Conservancy). And Avanyu imagery has been used as heraldry by the 200th Infantry Regiment of the U.S. Army since World War II, although over time the triskelion has been modernized and the Avanyu reinterpreted as a common Southwestern rattlesnake (U.S. Army). It’s hard to overestimate how widespread Avanyu and Avanyu-associated imagery has become, even as it has blurred and faded with continual use.

All I have left is to look again at the photograph of the petroglyph in its public setting to appreciate the subjective effect it might have had upon its viewers. In 1918, approximately the same year Julian invented the black-on-black technique, the photo appeared in a short story written by Elizabeth Hayes and published in *El Palacio*, the magazine of the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture in Santa Fe. “Old as the Hills” is a romantic romp by two archaeologists at a field school, a man named Chittenden and an unnamed woman, through the ruins and burials of ancient Tsirege. The beginning of the story depicts the woman, filled with archaeological enthusiasm, playfully twirling the bones of an ancient one in her hands until Chittenden mildly tells her to stop out of respect for the dead. But the culmination of the story is their hike up a rocky slope to see the Avanyu petroglyph, which is illustrated by the photograph in Hewett’s paper and Bernstein’s article. Here the photo is clear, contrasted and manifestly reproducible. I condense the plot of the story to better transmit the tone of the narrative and highlight the efforts of the two archaeologists at site preservation:

At the head and feet they put [the old Native’s] finest Avanyu bowls, broken just enough to free the spirit of the bowl, lest it harass the man’s soul on his Journey.... [The archaeologist] walked slowly back to the mound, heaped the bones together a little more carefully, let [sic] a shower scatter them,

and, with an effort, asked: "Shall we go back to the camp?". . . Without waiting for her answer, he set off down the trail, down the Stairway of the Plumed Serpent, she following. (235; see Fig. 10)



Fig. 10

The existence of this story suggests that by 1918 readers could view clear, detailed and creditable photographic reproductions of both ancient pottery and the Tsirege Avanyu petroglyph in a publication delivered to their home. Further, the story implies that certain psychological affects accompanied this accessibility. The reader might observe a fictional character experiencing a degree of beauty and sublimity in the presence of both pottery and rock art, to the point of thoughtlessly desecrating ancient remains. The reader might also witness another character overcome professional and moral qualms over the desecration, so much so as to tolerate and even participate in it. Both characters' emotional arcs validate and facilitate their desire for an authentic experience of ancient indigenous culture uninhibited by any restraint. By framing the encounter in such romantic and psychologically cathartic terms, the story sidesteps the scruples that might arise from

the reader's own appreciation and consumption of indigenous sacred objects, whether originals or reproductions. It's not just an innocent lapse of judgment. The story indicates its awareness of these scruples and passes by them anyway.⁴

By the early twentieth century, viewing a photograph in a magazine or obtaining a "Marie" signature pot was more feasible for the general public than traveling to New Mexico to see the real thing, and they provided comparable aesthetic experiences. Similarly, knowing that a photo or a decorative motif came from a source as "old as the hills" gave viewers an experience of authenticity, an important consideration for someone investing money either in a periodical or a pot. The reproduction of the Tsirege Avanyu motif on the Martinez's pottery, then, justified and facilitated public exposure of the sacred ceremonial iconography upon which the pottery was based, with the potential effect of reducing its once powerful psychic aura to a pleasantly distant glow (Benjamin 22).⁵

Conclusion

Of all the principals in this story, Maria and Julian Martinez really knew where they came from and where they were going. On the very morning they left to visit the St. Louis World's Fair of 1904—long before they encountered the Avanyu petroglyph, long before Julian invented black-on-black, long before the signature "Marie" could sell any pot on the rack—they got married in an elaborate ceremony (Spivey 22; Marriott 113-118). When they returned to San Ildefonso they applied everything they had experienced and their own considerable talent to lift their Pueblo out of poverty, using the vast levers of Western commercialization.

To be sure, the Martinezes grounded what they produced in sacred Puebloan traditions, but they themselves commented on their process in completely modern terms. (Chapman, Pottery 254; Spivey 13). In 1924 Julian Martinez decorated his brand new car with designs replicating his black-on-black pottery, and Maria Martinez, answering a question as to why she made so much blackware, responded "People think that black goes with everything" (Peterson 85, 97; Martinez, "Plate: About 1925"). She might have been paraphrasing Coco Chanel, but she also might have been referring to a 1970s ad campaign for Guinness Stout directed toward modern liberated women ("Maria Martinez in 1912"; Lonsdale, Pinterest; Malm, "Here Come"). In the long run the archaeologists Hewett and Chapman brought the authenticity, while the artists Maia and Julian Martinez were plugged into the popular culture (see Figs. 11 and 12; Babcock "Marketing" introduction by Bright 13):

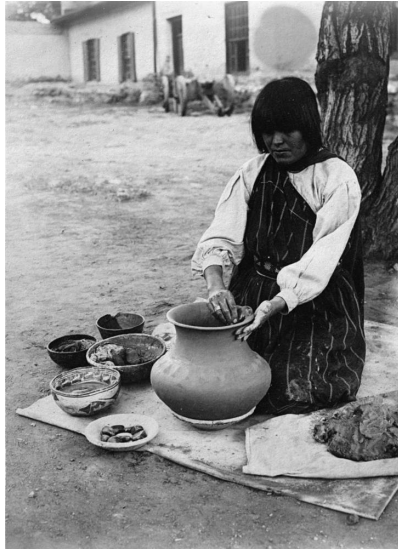


Fig. 11 Maria Martinez in 1912

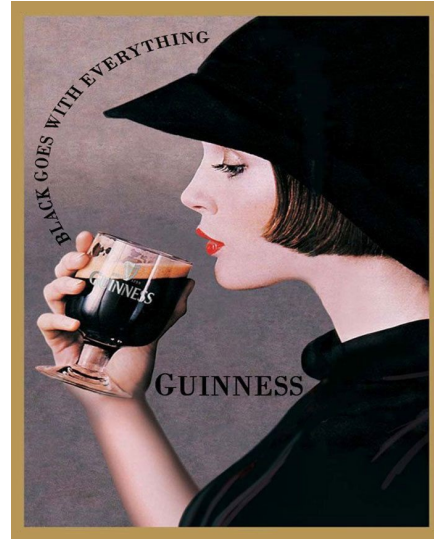


Fig. 12 Guinness Black in the 1970s

Thus the Martinez Avanyu motif drew its appeal in the public imagination directly from a piece of rock art. The Martinezes knew as well as anyone that the Tsirege Avanyu petroglyph was perfect, authentic and sacred. The Avanyu motif they produced, however, was almost immediately separated from its original source through the process of reproduction and sale. It still has a lingering aura centered on the Avanyu imagery, but few have seen or know about the rock art it was originally based upon. Maybe that separation is enough to preserve the Tsirege Avanyu petroglyph. Maybe it is to the benefit of the rock art, the Parajito plateau, and the people of San Ildefonso.

Notes

1. Avanyus are both immediately identifiable and extremely strange. The Avanyu figure of central and southern New Mexico in particular strikes me as autochthonous, that is, related to the myth of a people emerging from the ground or place they inhabit. In addition to their associations with water, winds, storms and the sky world, some southern New Mexico or Texas Avanyu petroglyphs have human heads instead of serpent heads (Berrier 17, 25, 40) and others in central New Mexico have human figures climbing up their long snaky bodies (Frey 79, cover plate). This juxtaposition suggests an identification of Avanyu with indigenous people. In the Southwest US autochthony manifests as myths of creatures like ants climbing up a cornstalk to become more progressively human in the upper world (Navajo), or lizards emerging through a hole underwater and losing their tails in the process (Zuni). According to Levi-Strauss, as they emerged from the underworld chthonian humans, like chthonian dragons, could not yet walk upright on two feet:

The dragon is a chthonian being which has to be killed in order that

mankind be born from the earth; the Sphinx is a monster unwilling to permit men to live....In mythology it is a universal character of men born from the earth that at the moment they emerge from the depth, they either cannot walk or do it clumsily. This is the case of the chthonian beings in the mythology of the Pueblo: Masauwu, who leads the emergence, and the chthonian Shumaikoli are lame ("bleeding-foot," "sore- foot"). The same happens to the Koskimo of the Kwakiutl after they have been swallowed by the chthonian monster, Tsiakish: when they returned to the surface of the earth "they limped forward or tripped sideways." Then the common feature... is: the persistence of the autochthonous origin of man (190)

Future studies of the Avanyu imagery might delve more thoroughly into this founding anthropological myth identifying an exotic but damaged creature with an exotic but damaged indigenous people, possibly to the detriment of the people.

2. Several researchers have made claims or published information about the Tsirege Avanyu petroglyph with various levels of completeness and accuracy. Most importantly for the argument of this paper, Bernstein in 1994 and Bernstein, Fender and Sanchez in 2019 made the following claims about the petroglyph, here quoted in the latter version: "[It] was during the next summer, in 1909, that Hewett handed Maria Martinez a ball of clay he had found at the Santa Clara ancestral village of Puye and asked her to paint an Avanyu on it that was copied from a seven-foot-long rock art panel at Tsirege, a San Ildefonso ancestral village" (2019; Bernstein 78). This later statement elaborated upon the often-repeated story of Hewett asking Maria Martinez to copy the potsherds he gave her by suggesting there was a second request involving the petroglyph. In particular the authors claimed that Hewett asked Maria Martinez to reproduce the petroglyph, indicated that a copy was made of it, and mentioned that he handed her the clay to use. Bernstein's forthcoming work will explicate these claims. Interestingly the early photo of the Avanyu petroglyph reproduced in the 1994 article did not appear in the later 2019 article, although the picture of the cornmeal box was retained.

In 2006, James E. Snead published a paper, "Trails of Tradition: Archaeology, Landscape and Movement." In it he published a photograph and a personal account of a trip to the Tsirege Avanyu petroglyph, providing a context and a setting (5-11). Along with Hewett 1904 and Rohn 1989 I believe it is one of three photographs to be found on the internet. By including its remarkable location, on a wall next to a stepped pathway leading up to a major ruin site, Snead adds even more evidence of the petroglyph's significance as an icon centered in ritualized activity.

In 1989, Arthur H. Rohn published a photo and commentary in the book The Rock Art of Bandelier. He supported the idea that the petroglyph was most likely dated from 1400-1600 ACE and established that the figure was seven feet long. However he went on to state that the Avanyu figure had three horns (which he termed feathers), not two. In this he may have confused the additional horn with what looks like rock coloration or abrasion on the top part of the third curve counting the head (87, 96). If he had compared his photo with the original photo from Hewett's 1904 paper, the EI

Palacio photo from 1918 or the actual petroglyph, he might have said there were only two horns, the same number as on Julian's motif. I consider this a small error, but it is useful for my purposes. In correcting Rohn I reiterate that at least one of the defining features of the rock art Avanyu, its two horns, existed as early as 1904. This feature can be substantiated not only by modern photography, which can be misleading by itself, but also by a people's own material culture in the form of pottery.

The 1995 book Sentinels on Stone: The Petroglyphs of Los Alamos, a survey of the LANL area by Dorothy Hoard and Betty Lilienthal, did not acknowledge the existence of the Tsirege Avanyu petroglyph at all. One illustrative sketch placed in the background of a text page roughly resembled the petroglyph but was neither labeled nor discussed (61). The book influenced the placement of the White River Canyon on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Tsirege Avanyu petroglyph is undoubtedly well defined but it was most likely enhanced by chalking, a practice used in the first half of the 20th century to create contrast and produce a better photograph. That is to say the actual petroglyph on the rock face may have been chalked, though the only evidence we currently have is the photo from 1904. In addition, a photo of a petroglyph in publicity materials for the School of American Research (as it was titled then) and the photo of Mortandad Cave from the Los Alamos report show signs of prior chalking of the actual petroglyphs—high contrast, defined outlines and white-on-black tones (Walter 70; Los Alamos).

Bruce Bernstein (Correspondence) points out that the different angles of lighting in the two photographs of the Tsirege Avanyu petroglyph, the one from 2005 lit from the side and the one from 1904 lit from above or below, would show different degrees of contrast. I still think that the stark black and white contrast of the 1904 photo probably was enhanced by chalk, but as Bernstein points out the different angles of the lighting show that photographers used the medium to alter or enhance the appearance of material objects (Burgess esp. part 2). These photographic signs of alteration call for a fresh examination of the Tsirege petroglyph itself by experts in the field of rock art research to determine whether it has been chalked, traced, superimposed, repecked or overpecked for the camera.

3. The Edgar Lee Hewett papers were digitized by the New Mexico History Museum in 2023 and are the most-researched collection in the Frey Angelico Chavez Library. The papers include drafts of his publications, correspondence, documents and photographs. My examination of the online collection and a query sent to one of its curators uncovered no direct evidence of a photograph of the Tsirege Avanyu petroglyph or its use. The possible exception is a line item in a catalog of photographs, maps and paintings of Pajarito Park Hewett made in 1907 or thereafter. "No. 16." indicates that in "1900" at "Tchrege," "Chapman" took a photograph of a "Pictograph," with the subject matter of a "Flying Serpent." I have not been able to confirm that this item refers to the photo in question but if so it was undoubtedly taken by Kenneth M. Chapman as early as 1900 or thereabouts. Hewett's correspondence shows that the two communicated

frequently and Chapman supplied Hewett with photos and drawings for lectures, publicity and reports for decades after they met in New Mexico around 1903. Outside of the two instances mentioned in Notes 2 and 3, I did not use the archive except to confirm extant public records (Hewett “Catalog” 1; McClure, “Edgar Lee Hewett”; “Edgar Hewett”).

4. Ironically, the thinly-veiled fictional “National Museum” sponsoring the field school where the archaeology lovers meet and disturb the burials may be read as a proxy for the Museum of New Mexico, a sponsor for Hewett’s digs after 1910 (Mathien 83-4). Chittenden the fictional male archaeologist could have been modeled after Chapman and/or Hewett, both of whom headed in various capacities the Museum and the School of American Archaeology, now the School for Advanced Research (SAR).

5. In this translation Benjamin juxtaposes the notion of a work of art as an iconic image, primarily visual, with its historic location in space and time. These two components make up an aura that is diminished by mass reproduction. “In even the most perfect reproduction, *one* thing is lacking: the here and now of the work of art—its unique existence in a particular place. It is this unique existence—and nothing else—that bears the mark of the history to which the work has been subject....The here and now of the original underlies the concept of its authenticity, and on the latter in turn is founded the idea of a tradition which has passed the object down as the same, identical thing to the present day. The whole sphere of authenticity eludes technological...reproduction (Benjamin, 21; 22-23). I read Benjamin to say that the aura of the work of art lies in its being unique; in other words, it is perfect in its iconicity and sacred in its association with ritual activity. It is authentic inasmuch as it lends its aura to its reproduction. That reproduction, though it may be popular and widely disseminated, has little authority in itself except as a record or trace of the original. Its value is that of an exhibition, as in a museum. Noticing how and when the aura of a work has been diminished in the process of reproduction can help identify its frames of reference, such as the mythologies constituting its history and geography, even if those references have become unknown, forgotten, distanced or alienated. Writ large, the attenuation of the aura of a unique and significant work can lead to the desacralization of the culture as a whole. This makes it vulnerable to appropriation and devaluation.

As we have noted, Benjamin’s concept of the aura is highly visual. He implicitly refers to the tradition of placing a golden halo around the heads of figures in Orthodox religious icons, although he does mention music and architecture along with painting, photography and film. Here I wish to advocate for the use of heritage peoples’ terms for rock art that emphasizes place as distinct from vision. Thus I would have liked to use a local Tewa term in lieu of the general English term “rock art”, but I have not yet discovered one. The Tewa language however is full of names such as “Pojoaque” or “Tesuque,” with the ending “que” or “ge” designating a place. Perhaps Tewa speakers talking about rock art would use terms referring not so much to a visual image or graphic motif as a Tsikw’aye or “place up above” where rock art is to be found on the mesas overlooking the pueblos (“Tewa Language”; “Written in Stone”; Ortiz 19-22; Wright). Such a move might counter the epistemological dominance of visual terms in rock art research and restore it to a more localized or grounded orientation.

Works Cited

- Babcock, Barbara A. "Madwomen and Whitemen: A Meditation on Pueblo Potteries and the Politics of Representation." Situated Lives: Gender and Culture in Everyday Life, edited by Louise Lamphere et al., Routledge, 1997.
- Babcock, Barbara A. "Marketing Maria: The Tribal Artist in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Looking High and Low: Art and Cultural Identity, edited by Brenda Jo Bright and Lisa Bakewell, University of Arizona Press, 2022.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version." The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media, edited by Michael W. Jennings et al., Harvard University Press, 2008, pp. 19–55, JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1nzfgns.6>.
- Bernstein, Bruce. "Potters and Patrons: The Creation of Pueblo Art Pottery." American Indian Art Magazine, Winter 1994, pp. 70-79. https://www.academia.edu/44543622/Potters_and_Patrons_The_Creation_of_Pueblo_Art_Pottery
- Bernstein, Bruce et al. "Vessels of a Truth Obscured." El Palacio, Fall 2019, <https://elpalacio.org/2019/09/vessels-of-a-truth-obscured/>
- Bernstein, Bruce. Correspondence with the author. July 21, 2025.
- Berrier, Marglyph. "Snakes, Serpents, and Slithering: Horned and Crested Snakes in the Iconography of the Jornada Mogollon Rock Imagery and Mimbres Ceramics." Utah Rock Art Research Association Symposium, Price, Utah October 2023, pp. 1-52. http://www.utahrockart2.org/pubs/proceedings/papers/2023-05-Berrier-Snakes_Serpents_and_Slitherings.pdf
- Burgess, Anika. Flashes of Brilliance: The Genius of Early Photography and How It Transformed Art, Science, and History. W.W. Norton, 2025.
- Chapman, Kenneth M. The Pottery of San Idelfonso Pueblo. University of New Mexico Press, 1970.
- Chapman, Kenneth M. Kenneth Chapman's Santa Fe: Artists and Archaeologists, 1907-1931: The Memoirs of Kenneth Chapman, edited by Marit K. Munson, University of New Mexico Press, 2008.
- Ettema, Michael. "Maria and Julian's Pottery Revolution." YouTube, uploaded by Los Alamos Historical Society, September 14, 2021, <https://youtu.be/b0eEECYdiuE?si=MCz0o8SWtueVNFV8>
- Frej, William et al. Blurred Boundaries: Perspectives on Rock Art of the Greater Southwest. University of New Mexico Press, 2024.

- Hayes, Elizabeth. "Old as the Hills." El Palacio, vol. 5, no. 14, Oct. 26, 1918, pp. 231-35. Reprinted with permission. Also: New Mexico State Library archives, https://nmsl-montage.auto-graphics.com/#/land-page/entities_6184
- Hendron, J. W. Prehistory of El Rito de Los Frijoles: Bandelier National Monument. Southwestern Monuments Technical Series, no. 1, 1940.
- Hewett, Edgar L. "Archaeology of Parajito Park, New Mexico." American Anthropologist vol.6 no.5, Oct.-Dec.1904, pp. 629-659.
- Hewett, Edgar L. Les Communautés Anciennes dans le Désert Américain : Reserches Archéologiques sur la Distribution et l'organisation Sociale des Anciennes Populations au Sud-oest des États-Unis et au Nord du Mexico. Genève, Librairie Kündig, 1908.
- Hewett, Edgar Lee et al. The Physiography of the Rio Grande Valley, New Mexico, in Relation to Pueblo Culture. Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 54, Government Printing Office, 1913.
- Hewett, Edgar L. "Catalog of Photographs, Maps and Paintings from Parajito Park." Hewett archaeological papers and notes on Puye, 1907-1927, 1988, undated. Edgar L. Hewett Document Collection, Fray Angélico Chavez History Library. New Mexico History Museum, 2022, archives.newmexicoculture.org
- Hoard, Dorothy and Betty Lilienthal. Sentinels on Stone: The Petroglyphs of Los Alamos. Los Alamos Historical Society, 1995.
- Johnson, Adam Fulton. American Archaeology and the Conceptualization of Preservation: Edgar Lee Hewett and the Crafting of the 1906 Antiquities Act. Dissertation Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2011.
- Levi-Strauss, Claude. "The Structural Study of Myth." Reader in Comparative Religion, edited by William Lessa and Evon Vogt, Harper & Row, 1979, pp. 171-83.
- Lonsdale, Esme. Guinness poster 1970s. Pinterest, n.d.
- Los Alamos National Laboratory. A Plan for the Management of the Cultural Heritage at Los Alamos National Laboratory, New Mexico. Ecology Group for the Department of Energy, LA-UR-04-8964 DRAFT July 2005.
- Malm, Sara. "Here Come the Guinness Girls: The Retro 1970s Advertisements Meant to Get Ladies to go for an LBD (that's Little Black Drink)." The Daily Mail, May 12, 2013, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2322669/Here-come-Guinness-girls-The-retro-1970s-advertisements-meant-ladies-LBD-thats-Little-Black-Drink.html>

Marriott, Alice. Maria: The Potter of San Ildefonso. University of Oklahoma Press, 1948.

"Maria Martinez, 1912," by H.S. Poley, Wikimedia Commons, 2024, File:Maria Martinez, 1912.jpg

Martinez, Maria and Julian. "Bowl 1914." Metropolitan Museum of Art, Wikimedia Commons, CC0 License 1.0 2011, 2017, reprinted with permission, File:Bowl MET TR. 165.137.2011a.jpg

Martinez, Maria and Julian. Corn Meal Box, 1914, Pottery, Maria and Julian Martinez, San Ildefonso Pueblo, Photography by Blair Clark, Courtesy Museum of Indian Arts & Culture, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, NM, MIAC 1769/12, reprinted with permission.

Martinez, Maria and Julian. "Plate: About 1925." Denver Art Museum, <https://www.denverartmuseum.org/en/edu/object/plate>

Martinez, Maria and Popovi Da. "San Ildefonso bowl." Field Museum of Natural History. Wikimedia Commons, CC Attribution-Share Alike 2.5 Generic License, 2020, reprinted with permission, File:SanIldefonsoBowl1.jpg

Mathien, Frances Joan et al. The First 100 Years : Papers in Honor of the State and Local Archaeological Societies of New Mexico, Archaeological Society of New Mexico, 2000.

McClure, Heather. "Edgar Hewett in the 21st Century." YouTube, uploaded by Friends of New Mexico History, 2025.

McClure, Heather. "Edgar Lee Hewett in the 21st Century," YouTube, uploaded by Friends of Archaeology New Mexico, July 10, 2024.

National Park Service. "BandPainted Cave." Wikimedia Commons, 2005, File:Band paintedcave.jpg

Ortiz, Alfonso. Tewa World: Space, Time, Being and Becoming in a Pueblo Society. University of Chicago Press, 1969

Pardue, Diana F. and Tobi Taylor. Maria and Modernism. Catalog. Heard Museum, 2024.

"Parker Awanyu 'Aztec Indian' 1911." Parker. Collector's website, Tony Fischier, <https://parkersheafer.com/parker-awanyu-aztec-english/>

Peterson, Susan. The Living Tradition of Maria Martinez. Kodansha International, 1977.

Rohn, Arthur H. Rock Art of Bandelier National Monument. University of New Mexico Press, 1989.

Schaffsma, Polly. Rock Art in New Mexico. University of New Mexico Press, 1992.

Snead, James E. "Trails of Tradition: Archaeology, Landscape, and Movement." Landscapes of Movement. Symposium organized by James E. Snead, et al., University of Pennsylvania Museum, May 29-31, 2006, pp. 1-20.

Spivey, Richard L. Maria: The Legacy of Maria Pokeva Martinez. Museum of New Mexico, 1979.

"Tewa Language." Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tewa_language

The Archaeological Conservancy. "Preserving the Past...for the Future." The Archaeological Conservancy, <https://www.thearchcons.org/>

"The World's First Art Market." Southwestern Association for Indian Arts, <https://www.swaia.org/history>

Thomas, Jeffery Allen. Promoting the Southwest: Edgar L. Hewett, Anthropology, Archaeology, and the Santa Fe Style. Dissertation Texas Tech University, 1999.

"Tsirege." Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc, 2022, reprinted with permission, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tsirege>

"Tsirege Petroglyph depicting Awanyu." Wikimedia Commons, 2006. Copyright Los Alamos National Laboratory, reprinted with permission, File:Tsirege Petroglyph depicting Awanyu.jpg

US Army 200th Infantry Regiment. Wikimedia Commons, 2017, File:200th Infantry Regiment DUI.png

Walter, Paul A.F. "In Parajito Park: Amidst the Prehistoric Aboriginal Ruins of Northern New Mexico, Bandelier National Monument; A Summer in the Parajito." School of American Research Publicity File, 1902-1933. 1916. Edgar L. Hewett Document Collection, Fray Angélico Chavez History Library. New Mexico History Museum, 2022, archives.newmexicoculture.org

Wright, Aaron. "Why I No Longer Call It 'Art': Preservation Archaeology Blog," Archaeology Southwest, March 9, 2023, <https://www.archaeologysouthwest.org/2023/03/08/why-i-no-longer-call-it-art/>

"Written in the Stone: Petroglyphs." Transcript of an Interview with Matthew Martinez, historian and leader of Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo and Director of the Mesa Prieta Petroglyph Project, by Jerad Koepp. Open Educational Resources Big History Project, 2025, <https://www.oerproject.com/OER-Materials/OER-Media/Videos/Origins/Era2/Written-in-Stone-Petroglyphs> Big History Project

Zahler, Margaret Root. "Artisans of the Pueblo Potteries." The Christian Science Monitor. September 19, 1934.

Acknowledgments

My endless gratitude goes to the members of the THPO Committee of San Ildefonso-Pojoaque Pueblo for approving the reproduction of their sacred rock art in its many places.

The paper would not have been possible without the direction and advice of Dr. Bruce Bernstein, University of New Mexico, Santa Fe, former Director of the Museum of New Mexico and the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, Santa Fe, former Director of Research and Collections at the Smithsonian Museum of the Native American, Washington D.C. and current THPO officer for San Ildefonso-Pojoaque Pueblo; Dr. Kieffer Nail, Registrar of Collections, Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, Santa Fe; Dr. Emily Withnall, editor of El Palacio magazine, Santa Fe; Dr. Heather McClure, Librarian and Archivist at the Fray Angelico Chavez History Library, Museum of New Mexico and primary manager of the Hewett papers digitization project; and Dr. Sarah Rounsville, Archivist of the Edgar Lee Hewett Papers, Museum of New Mexico.

The analysis of the paper owes its moral compass to Richard A. Roger's Petroglyphs, Pictographs and Projections: Native American Rock Art in the Contemporary Cultural Landscape, University of Utah Press, 2018, especially Chapters 3, 6, and 8. In this regard the student has become the teacher.

The art-historical orientation of the paper references the work of James Farmer, author of many papers in the Proceedings. Editorially, Nina Bowen always steers me in the right direction. Fellow Avanyu enthusiast Rob Crifasi alerted me to Hewett's 1904 paper and what might be the first published photograph of the Tsirege Avanyu petroglyph.