

Northern Rio Grande archaic petroglyphs, beyond entoptic

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Abstract: *The archaic indigenous culture (3200 BCE – 500 CE) in the upper Rio Grande Valley, USA, has been identified by archaeologists, but petroglyph photos remain buried in unpublished government reports. Dating is based on rock surface patina due to age, which results in minimal contrast between pecked lines and the natural rock surface. Reports, images and photographs from the Bureau of Land Management, Santa Fe County, New Mexico, the U.S. Department of the Interior, private land surveys, and the New Mexico State Department of Cultural Affairs are reproduced here. Previous research following the river from Monte Vista, Colorado, southward into the Galisteo Basin in New Mexico attribute designs to one of two theories explained here. Anthropologists' interpretations limited to abstract, geometric and entoptic morphology are contrasted with discovery of plants and animals on canyon escarpments and boulders. Theories attributing these images to hallucinogenic vision and/or the universal human hunter-gatherer phase are contrasted with recent conclusions on naturalism.*

Keywords: *petroglyph, archaic, entoptic, hunter-gatherer, Rio Grande.*

I. Introduction

Obscure as riverine canyon shadows, at mountainous elevations archaic petroglyphs in the northern Rio Grande broadcast from ridgetops. Petroglyphs from present day Monte Vista, Colorado south along the river's edge into the Galisteo Basin illustrate this era. Iconography together with refinements in patina analysis allow identification of these artifacts with the archaic. Not limited to abstract, geometric and entoptic images, archaic petroglyphs exhibit animal and plant forms, as well. Hence naturalism fuses with geometry. Unpublished archaeology surveys and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) photos provide settings and site reports. Further images corroborate this junction of naturalistic and geometric motifs. Recent studies trace zoomorphs and plant imagery throughout this era, linking ancient people to their environment. A comparison is made between this iconography and interpretations of the creators' relationship with their surrounding landscapes. While abstract style predominated, some organic plant and animal forms also appear. Thus, a hybrid archaic style emerges beyond entoptic and archetypal images. Original reports, data and photographs are public information and available upon request to New Mexico state government, via the inspection of public records act, NMSA 1978 Sec. 14-2-1 et seq., as amended.

II. Literature Review

In the 1930s, Pearsall [1] surveyed and excavated from Monte Vista, Colorado to just south of the New Mexico border. All the while receiving and cataloging these dug artifacts from Pearsall, Renaud first designated an upper Rio Grande culture pre-dating Pueblo. Admitting that the petroglyphs were impossible to date, except for being pre-1540 CE, Renaud [2-5] did distinguish an older time frame based on patina. In addition, among his iconography sort emerged a geometric style, as described as separate from anthropomorphs and zoomorphs. These included circles in various forms such as concentric, in a chain, with center dots and crosses, a rayed sun, with a tail, and spirals [3:27-28; 4:9-10,52; 5]. Without mentioning petroglyphs, Boyer and Moore [6] identified Pearsall and Renaud's upper Rio Grande culture as archaic, dating it mid to end archaic, 2000 BCE – CE 500, and 3600 BCE – 1100 BCE.

To illustrate this early style, Renaud [2:pl. 1, Fig. 2,3,5] included drawings of photographs he took on private land. These consisted of dotted grids and lines, wavy lines, and one quadruped [7].



Figure 1 Petroglyph, Galisteo Basin, Santa Fe County, New Mexico. Geometric or corn stalk image [8:Fig. 87].



Figure 2 Petroglyph, Galisteo Basin, Santa Fe County, New Mexico. Sprouted corn image [8:Fig. 2].

Focusing on the Galisteo Basin, Lang [8] defined northern Rio Grande petroglyphs as including the Galisteo Basin and continuing northward along the river. For archaic petroglyphs, he relied primarily on LA 28553 and LA 28509. See Figs. 1 and 2. Establishing two classifications within the archaic based on iconography, he considered primarily the relative degree of patina. Having dated it, he then proceeded to an iconography analysis. “Local rock art of Archaic date represents at least two distinct styles that, in correlation with regions outside of the northern Rio Grande, suggest strong cultural ties with Desert Mogollon people of south-central and south-eastern New Mexico” [8:21]. To the culture of the region, he assigned the archaic to 3200-1800 BCE – 100 CE. In addition, he defined a subset for the northern most as 1500 BCE-100 CE, to which he correlated with archaic Cochise.



Figure 3 Petroglyph, Galisteo Basin, Santa Fe County, New Mexico. Dot grid and double wavy lines [8:Fig. 109].

San Cristobal 2 and 3 became titles for these two archaic petroglyph classifications. While admitting he could not prove sequential temporal relationships between the two, he nevertheless assumed so. San Cristobal 2 contains: “completely geometric”, wavy or zig zag lines, single or closely paired, “paired wandering lines, one ending in a fork”, “three vertical wavy lines pendant from a straight horizontal line; single vertical lines cross hatched to eight to eleven horizontal lines, and double vertical cross hatched by six horizontals; simple concentric circles, rows of dots arranged vertically or horizontally, with three to ten rows composed of at least 8 to 11 dots per row; large pecked dots; and possibly (but not surely) the spiral” [8:376-377, Fig. 87, 109]. See Fig. 1, 3.

With San Cristobal 3, Lang identified a naturalistic element added to the geometric style. Encompassing cliffs, as well as a rock shelter, imagery included vertically divided subtriangular with one or more upward radiating lines, partially surrounded at the base by semi circles open at the top, or exhibiting a curved line extending downward from one corner of the base, with attached pendant spines of irregular lengths, bird like forms, one with bulbous bodies, short center-axis-line head, three toed feet, and wings curved like pincer-like; a second represented by only one example, depicted so as to represent the classic crowing rooster plus sprouting corn seeds and quadrupeds. [8:378, 380, Fig. 105]. See Fig. 2.

Forty-five years later, in the environs of Taos, New Mexico, at LA61185, McCrary identified archaic/basketmaker petroglyphs based on their patina. He dated these 4000 BCE – CE 500. As site function, he lists “recording of event/site marker”, without any comments on iconography [9a:3, 9b].



Photo 9. TAS-2, closeup of Panel 3, facing NW

Figure 4 Petroglyphs near Taos, New Mexico, LA 75747. [10:Photo 9].

Similarly situated, LA 75747 also contained petroglyphs. Without distinguishing between the two, Muste [10] identified both Pueblo IV-V (post 1600 CE) and archaic (4800-3200 BCE) in the rock art survey. Juxtaposition of diverse eras at a single site were not uncommon among these cliffs and riverine valleys. Here, the archaic even overlapped into the cultivation of corn. Iconography certainly encompassed both: double wavy lines, cornstalk, anthropomorphs, human faces with headdress, and concentric circles intersected with straight and wavy line rays emanating from the center. The lichen interrupted line of dots in Fig. 4 suggests the archaic.



Figure 3: Complete repatination of elements, the most readily visible is an asterisk shape in the upper right corner of the boulder. Locale 31, Panel A.

Figure 5a Petroglyph, Galisteo Basin, Santa Fe County, New Mexico. [11:Fig. 3)



Figure 3: Complete repatination of elements, the most readily visible is an asterisk shape in the upper right corner of the boulder. Locale 31, Panel A.

Figure 5b Petroglyph, Galisteo Basin, Santa Fe County, New Mexico, with petroglyphs outlined in black lines on photo. [11:Fig. 3]



Figure 11: A panel of Archaic geometrics, with a recent face added in the upper right corner. Locale 27, Panel A.

Figure 6a Petroglyph, Galisteo Basin, Santa Fe County, New Mexico. [11:Fig. 11]



Figure 11: A panel of Archaic geometrics, with a recent face added in the upper right corner. Locale 27, Panel A.

Figure 6b Petroglyph, Galisteo Basin, Santa Fe County, New Mexico, with petroglyphs outlined in black lines on photo. [11:Fig. 11]

Into the 21st century, two archaeologists' reports spanned from the northern environs to the Galisteo Basin. Futch [12] surveyed the petroglyphs between the Rio Grande and the Rio Ojo Caliente, north of Okay Owingeh. A major outcrop then known as Black Mesa, it became the present non-profit Mesa Prieta petroglyph project. He concluded the possibility of archaic petroglyphs among the more numerous later Pueblo styles. Further south into the Galisteo Basin, Munson [11:Fig. 3,11] located two archaic petroglyphs. Obscured by an almost complete re-patination, on closer inspection, wavy lines, rayed circles, u-shapes and arcs with tails evidenced classification as archaic geometrics. See Figs. 5a,b and 6a,b.

In another interpretation, surveying two Rio Grande gorge sites south along the river from Taos Pueblo (LA 102345, LA 75747), Alberti and Fowles [13:Fig. 8.5-10] recognized archaic petroglyphs on boulders, based on patina. These they dated 5000 BCE-900 CE. Described as aniconic, they consisted of parallel wavy lines, some attached to straight lines, rayed circles (some concentric), some with tails, parallel straight lines, and curved lines pendant from straight lines. However, the natural world also appeared among the archaic, as human footprints and hoof prints interspersed with a rayed circle, and dots emulating paths.

Most recently, focusing again on Mesa Prieta, Liwosz [14:Fig. 2a, 2b] identified two eras of the archaic, based on heavy patina. The early phase, 7500-1500 BCE, displayed complex, geometrical, abstract, and sometimes “improvisational motifs”. Following this phase, the late period (1500 BCD – 600 CE) added iconic designs, he posits. These included human feet, birds, animal tracks and hooves.

III. Historiography

Renaud’s [2-5] University of Denver publications can be analyzed based on their publisher and time frame. Renaud was anthropology faculty, and conducted his surveys in this role. In the 1930s and 1940s, southwestern archaeology was nascent and the archaic in this region had yet to be defined, or even identified. Scant existing petroglyph and pictograph data created a dearth for comparison. Nevertheless, he delved into iconography by referring to global images. He hastily drove around this mostly uncharted geography in search of artifacts and ruins. He focused on proximity to water sources, since he had identified this scenario as most likely to yield results. Imprecise methods and lack of gender neutrality impact Renaud’s relevance. However, his raw observations remain invaluable.

Pearsall [1] conducted his excavations at 2-3 feet, collected artifacts, and published under the auspices of the Colorado Archaeological Society, a non-profit organization. As he was president at the time, his reports were essentially self-published, and lacked any specified academic credentials. However, his work was corroborated by Mera, at the time director of the Museum of New Mexico laboratory of anthropology. As well, Renaud encouraged and accepted his collections and directed his research.

Other cited non-profit archaeological associations, as publishers, possess ISSN numbers, and produce issues periodically. Implicit selection processes function in their content choice. These series contribute towards the organizations’ 501(c)3 education mandate. Therefore, although their trenches may navigate towards their membership, they retain clout.

Publicly commissioned surveys, research, and excavations derive value from their contractual demands. As recipients of public funding, their authors necessarily fulfil the roles and qualifications of expert witnesses. Some are known via peer reviewed journals, while others are not. Sponsoring agencies include BLM, US department of the interior, New Mexico office of archaeology studies, New Mexico laboratory of anthropology (including all site survey reports), and New Mexico historic preservation division. For both private and public lands, authors must meet federal and state requirements concerning preservation. Controlling legislation consist of: National Historic Preservation Act, 54 U.S.C. et seq., Sec. 106 (1966 as amended); Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) (P.L. 96-95, as amended, 16 USC 470aa et seq.); and New Mexico Cultural Properties Act, NMSA 1978 Sec. 18-6-1 et seq., Sec. 18-6-10 (2018).

New Mexico state archaeology records management system (ARMS), a function of New Mexico cultural resources inventory system (NMCRIS), imparts veracity to these unpublished government reports. See NMAC 4.10.19 et seq. (computerized database). This statutory scheme outlines procedures and criteria for inclusion. In addition to requiring all archaeology sites be registered with this database, the code establishes standards for screening input. All cited survey reports function to satisfy this code, and as well reside within this database.

To book chapters in edited volumes’ [13,15,16] value is conveyed via inclusion therein. Individual authors’ relevance emanates from their university faculty status, and/or as implied via previous anthropology and archaeology publications. Whitley, however, while holding a Ph.D., lacks university affiliation and is part-owner of an archaeology and cultural resources corporation.

IV. Discussion

While Muste [10] does not distinguish archaic from later Pueblo in Fig. 4, the double wavy lines and lichen interrupted line of dots suggest the archaic near Taos. A drawing further elaborates this pecking obscured by intervening nature. Only a site visit can discover the relative patinas. At left of center, this dotted vacillating line can be applied to the path interpretation. The double wavy lines have the same profile as those in Fig. 6a,b.



Figure 7a Petroglyph, Bureau of Land Management, Taos field office, New Mexico.



Figure 7b Petroglyph, Bureau of Land Management, Taos field office, New Mexico, with petroglyphs outlined in black lines on photo.



Figure 8a Petroglyph, Bureau of Land Management, Taos field office, New Mexico.



Figure 8b Petroglyph, Bureau of Land Management, Taos field office, New Mexico, with petroglyphs outlined in black lines on photo.

At other Taos sites, the archaeologist at the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Taos district office, Paul R. Williams, identified Fig. 7a,b and 8a,b as archaic. These he sent to the author in 2009. They both exhibit re-patination and aniconic geometrics typical of ancient times. Amorphous and wavy lines, lines of dots, rayed concentric circles, and ladder motifs convert the ridge top to foci of communication. The big horn sheep profile (Fig. 7a,b) reflects Renaud's [2:Pl 1] quadrupeds, although the latter resemble coyotes, pecked in solid and dotted forms. Within imprecise rendering in rock, Lang [8] also identifies the ubiquitous quadruped among the archaic. Alberti and Fowles [13] attribute hooves and paths to quadrupeds, with humans following. Likewise, the amorphous wandering lines and rows of dots corroborate their interpretation as paths navigated by both humans and four-footed species. This connotes the dynamic of interaction with the landscape, and self-definition by geography. This image interjects naturalism and hence iconography, into the geometrics, consistent with Lang's San Cristobal 3 style.

Fig. 8a,b could belong to either San Cristobal 2 or 3, as it comprises geometric, abstract designs. The rayed circle especially repeats among archaic iconography. For example, in the Galisteo Basin, Figs. 5 and 6 evidence as well a near complete re-patination, which earmarks the archaic. Here, no plant, human, or other animal forms intersperse. This leaves lone geometrics on the rocks, consistent with descriptions in the literature of wavy, undulating lines, undefined lines, and rayed circles. These therefore fit into either of Lang's San Cristobal 2 or 3 definitions.

While Figs. 1 and 2 are classified as geometrics, the first could be construed as a corn stalk. Figure 2 departs from the geometric, non-iconic motifs with its sprouting seeds. By unequivocally placing these in the archaic, Lang re-affirms his San Cristobal 3 naturalistic style as reaching beyond the entoptic. Figure 8, while remaining geometric, approaches the realm of human foot and animal paths with its rows of dots and double

wavy lines. Likewise, this motif replicates in Renaud's [2:Pl 1, Fig. 2,3] Monte Vista, Colorado images. Here, wandering lines of dots accompany the dot grids.

Abstract petroglyphs link to entoptic phenomena and/or characteristics based on similar universal designs. According to Turpin [15:380-381], these phosphenes, or "form constants", are common in world wide pictographs and petroglyphs, and "in all North American abstract styles". Without citing to northern Rio Grande petroglyphs, Turpin relies on images from the Colorado Plateau, e.g., concentric circles, rows of dots, frets, chains of circles, spirals, concentric circles, and wheels. Inherent in this classification is attribution to trance states or other physiological stress, shared globally. Although these match northern Rio Grande geometric archaic motifs, clearly beginning and since San Cristobal 2, the natural world also emerges among the river's edge.

Renaud [3:6,48] also recognized universal petroglyph and pictograph motifs, in comparing the southwest and great plains to Spain and France. His figures included human, plant, geometric, and abstract forms. These, he noted, "seem to belong to the same artistic school, and reflect the same psychology and skill." As the European designs were dated Paleolithic, Mesolithic, and Neolithic, Renaud concluded similarities derived from "the same phase of culture." These traits included hunting and gathering, beginnings of agriculture, and flaked stone tools. Thus, Renaud's archetypes did not depend on a trance or psychotropic vision, although they alluded to psychology. Likewise, iconography was not limited to abstract or geometric.

Recognizing organic plant, animal, and human iconography among northern Rio Grande abstract archaic style, Alberti and Fowles [13] diverged from both these interpretations. They concluded such images represented a nature-centric world view. Rather than generating an historic time line, similar to primarily western European (and its colonies) zeitgeist, archaic people placed themselves within and participated in the landscape, they proposed. Indigenous people self-identified through place. Perceived as it were a blank slate, the pristine environment became a canvas. Ancient people expropriated wildlife trails, towards navigating the canyons, and reflected these views on basalt, according to this analysis. Priorly, McCrary [9a, 9b] attributed petroglyphs to this purpose, as noted above.

In Alberti and Fowles [13] interpretation of northern Rio Grande petroglyphs, the dots and other abstracts refer to animal paths, hunting paths, directions, and navigation inherent in hunter-gatherer culture. Indeed, these are interspersed with realistic images of animal and human footprints. These reinforce their interpretation of archaic people's self-definition based on geography.

Discoveries of animal imagery in Pleistocene and archaic era petroglyphs and pictographs in the Coso range likewise counter theories of an era limited to abstract style in the western hemisphere. Whitley and Dorn [16:146] present a petroglyph of an extinct Pleistocene zoomorph, and a lizard image dated 6100 ± 1200 years BP. Further, they conclude "There is no identifiable chronological distinction between geometric and representational images, including no evidence for any stylistic evolution of any kind". Therefore, while visions, stressors, and cultural phase remain possible inspirations for abstract styles, the natural environment remains ever present.

V. Conclusion

In the process of connecting similar, archetypal motifs through their simplicity, the entoptic and human civilization phase theories omit human relationships with nature. No doubt the scarcity of available archaic petroglyphs in the southwest contributes to these justifications. This stance negates the archaic quadrupeds and plants as well as human interaction with the environment, eco-awareness, and cognizance of the landscape. Further, it isolates the southwest from global evidence. Obviously, the earliest Anthropocene's cave and cliff images embrace flora, fauna and anthropomorphs.

In the southwest archaic, northern Rio Grande, Lang first recognizes zoomorph and flora icons. Both he and Liwocz imply these images emerged along a time line, as progression, evolving from the naked abstract, geometric, aniconic phase. In addition, these theories rely on a shift or evolution of human expression towards a recognizable image, or icon. This is debunked and obviated by the absence of timeline development/progression. Undoubtedly, these linear innuendos can be linked to the persistence and dominance of the abstract throughout the archaic. Lang himself calls Figure 2 at the same time geometric and sprouting corn. The brief review herein identifies not only the archaic abstract carved in ancient public places, but also the natural world co-existing within the same patina. As the valleys, ridges, rock ledges, escarpments and boulders and access to them comprise the archaic public sphere, these images invoke human interaction with landscape.

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