

AN INTRODUCTION TO ROCK ART OF THE CENTRAL COLUMBIA PLATEAU An Analysis of Temporal and Spatial Art Styles

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Introduction

There is always a moment of hesitation, even uncertainty, when confronted with a region like the Columbia Plateau. The first known European travelers, Lewis and Clark, remarked on the diversity of cultures that they found there. The U.S. Army, during its pacification campaign of the late nineteenth century, found it impossible to develop a general policy toward the vastly different groups that were only united in their struggle against white encroachment.

The Central Plateau has been a crossroads of pre-Columbian culture for 12000 years. There is evidence for a long distance trade network that stretches back 8000 years, to the time of the first "pit and groove" rock art traditions (Keyser 1992). This trade network has diffused styles and customs from all the Central Plateau's surrounding neighbors and makes it hard to decipher a true "Plateau Style". The diffusion of many cultures has created an usual rock art tradition in the Central Plateau. Many of the analysis criteria suggested by Emmanuel Anati do not quite fit in the Plateau. The evolution of style in Plateau rock art follows its own beat and must be viewed as an exception to his universal paradigms that work so well in other cultures.

What follows is a rough chronology based on an association between the archaeological record and rock art styles as well as a discussion of stylistic locals based in part on earlier descriptive works with some new interpretations of my own.

Previous Works

Almost all discussion about evolution of style in Plateau rock art follows a conventional classification of human, animal and geometric shapes. These are divided into naturalistic, stylized and abstract depictions (Borson 1976, 1979; Keyser 1992; McClure 1978; Nesbitt 1967; Wellmann 1979). There are some exceptions. McClure discussed the "paired anthropomorph" of the Central Columbia River and used Verne Ray's ethnographic notes on the Native American peoples still living there.

Borson, Keyser and Wellmann have all written comprehensive accounts of Plateau rock art. Wellmann bases a large part of his opinion on Borson's unpublished Master's thesis and does not make any claims about doing his own research here in the Plateau (Wellmann 1979). Borson suggests that the "Plateau Style" originated with adult initiation rites and that the images, for the most part, represent visions that were seen by the initiates while under extreme physical stress and experiencing hallucinations (Wellmann from Borson 1979a). Wellmann and well as Borson both attest to the recent vintage of Plateau incised and painted images.

Previous works have done excellent work in describing and cataloging many sites that are now inundated by revisions. The latest book, by Keyser in 1992, addresses some chronological issues but ignores spatial variation among Plateau traditions. In addition, the treatment he has given to the socio-economic context of Plateau rock art is vague and non-conclusive.

Methodological Considerations

The chronological analysis is based, in part, on previous work by Nesbitt and Keyser. Both gave a relative chronology and Keyser attempts an absolute one. His lists of images are too restrictive to be of much use to the student of Plateau rock art. I use Keyser's framework and use associations of my own to add to its scope. The justification of those temporal associations is based upon Anati's work with Archetypes and Paradigms with some qualifiers that are discussed below. It should be noted that time and financial barriers prevented an in-person analysis of the rock art sites. The evidence I have listed is based on the descriptive and recording efforts by many others. Often, different depictions are given of the same rock art site with traits often exaggerated or even missing. But a rough chronology is workable using style and archaeological considerations. Further, certain animal extinctions and arrivals give good clues as to when certain styles arose.

Analysis Criteria

The subject matter of rock art changes, in some respects, over time. Different game animals are represented in the rock art record and these can be associated with datable archaeological deposits. Associational scenes or a lack thereof in a known context, that is, in conjunction with other criteria, may indicate a relative temporal position. Stylistic trends may correspond with

artifact style trends from archaeological deposits. This seems especially true for later styles, notably after 1750 AD along the Lower Columbia River. Technical patterns cannot tell us much at this stage since they have not been adequately documented. My own work with petroglyph replication has shed some light on tool usage and the creation of images. Locales of rock art in the Central Plateau are homogenous and cannot be used as a criterion for analysis.

Socio-Economic Considerations

Along with stylistic considerations, socio-economic criteria have been used as well. The traditional occupational phases assigned to the Central Plateau correspond to ecological adaptations and shifts in material culture and economy. Climatic fluctuations have altered spatial distribution of peoples since the onset of the Holocene. These fluctuations have been dated reliably and are reflected in rock art compositional patterns. The lack or inclusion of certain style elements may well reflect universal patterns proposed in Anati's postulates. Certain variations occur and these will also be addressed. The analysis criteria of Anati's Paradigms and Archetypes do not always fit well with Plateau traditions. During certain occupational phases, peoples with an apparent archaic hunter strategy often are associated with rock art that is descriptive and anecdotal. For the most part, thematic criteria showed the expected results postulated by Professor Anati. However, in the Plateau-certain associational problems still need to be worked out before we can establish a reliable chronology. The chronology and associated style conventions given here should be considered preliminary.

Background

The Central Columbia Plateau is a flood basalt formation located in the Pacific Northwest of the United States. Its borders are confined within the State of Washington and are surrounded by peripheral parts of the Plateau in Idaho, Oregon and southern non-coastal portions of British Columbia, Canada. The Central Plateau is a cultural rather than geographic unit. Terms modified by the word *plateau* mean the cultural unit of the Central Columbian Plateau unless otherwise noted.

Topography

The Plateau is surrounded by three mountain systems: The Cascade Range in the West; the Blue Mountains in the Southeast and the foothills of the Rockies in the North and East. The Columbia River and its two southern tributaries trisection this region. The Yakima and Snake Rivers feed into this large drainage basin that eventually empties into the Pacific Ocean.

Striking geologic features dominate the topography of the Plateau. The rolling hills of the Palouse are in stark contrast to the surrounding channeled scablands. The bare basalt faces of the scablands are the result of a series of catastrophic floods that scoured the region around 14000 BP. The "Missoula Flood", as this event is often called, created many of the natural features that figure prominently in local aboriginal mythologies such as the Coulees and Palouse Falls.

Though underlying geological formations are of different origins, the Plateau and Great Basin regions share a common climate and proximity. Thus the Plateau is a semi-arid place. Outside the scablands, one can see shifting dunes and lone juniper trees. Most regions are characterized by stabilized dune formations and grasslands broken by occasional riparian zones. Everywhere loom the giant basalt formations laid down some thirty million years ago.

Flora and Fauna

The Plateau supports a variety and abundance of plant and animal life. Native plant species include the prickly pear (*Opuntia fragilis*), two varieties of sage brush (*Artemisia tridentata* and *Artemisia rigida*) and bunch grass (*Oryzopsis hymenoides*). European farmers and pastoralists brought the ubiquitous cheat grass (*Bromus tectorum*), a real nuisance to archaeologists, during the nineteenth century.

Larger mammals have been threatened by agricultural and industrial development over the past century. Species that have disappeared include the bison, timberwolf, pronghorned antelope, black bear and river otters. Elk (*Cervus elaphus*), coyote (*Canis latrans*), badger (*Taxidea taxia*), and bobcat (*Lynx rufus*) are some of the larger mammals (Chatters 1980). Other animals include the prairie falcon (*Falco mexicanus*), Great Basin pocket mouse (*Perognathus parvus*), Northern Pacific rattlesnake (*Crotalus viridis*) and black-tailed hare (*Lepus californicus*).

Most of these animals comprised the main subsistence base of the pre-Columbian aboriginal populations. Perhaps more important than these terrestrial species were the abundant riverine sources of anadromous salmonids. Several of these animals are represented in the local pantheon of mythic figures. Strangely, the salmon is not prescribed with any supernatural significance. Rather, like fire, the salmon was often bestowed as a gift, usually by Coyote, to the Plateau peoples. The

harvesting and processing of salmon had to be performed with some ceremony, however. So, unlike the other primary animals, salmon had no religious significance in of itself. It was used as a tool of control by supernatural beings on the local populations that depended on salmon.

Resource utilization patterns are well represented in the archaeological record. From this we can be fairly certain of some rock art site chronologies. For instance, both bison (*Bison bison*) and pronghorned antelope (*Antilocapra americana*) went extinct at a known time before white contact (Bense 1972). We can trace the utilization of these mammals by local populations and can date the appearance and decline of corresponding rock art motifs. This has already been done in the Great Basin and only recently has the archaeological record been adequate to attempt this in the Plateau.

Chronological Considerations

The primary cultural division in the Central Plateau is language. On the extreme north periphery is the Salishan language family. Spatially, the southern Sahaptian group dominates. The Sahaptians show more of the Great Plains and Great Basin influences while the Salishans seemed to show an affinity with influence from groups to the North. Several authors have discussed the prime position of the guardian spirit in Plateau religious systems (Keyser 1992, Ray 1939, Wallman 1979). In spite of the ethnic diversity of the Plateau, the different cultural groups shared the same basic cultural premises of religion, social and political structure. The development of trade early in the history of the Plateau probably led to the diversity of material culture and art styles found in the Plateau today.

Social and ideological structure of Plateau society carries traits of the surrounding Great Basin, Northwest Coast and Great Plains traditions. The larger tribes of the Plateau include the Spokane, Walla Walla, Nez Perce, Wanapum, Palus (correct spelling, *Falouse* refers to a topographic feature discussed earlier), Wanapum, Umatilla, Wenatchee and Cayuse. Neighboring influential tribes include the Yakima, Wishram, Wasco and Tenino. These tribes, though influential on Central Plateau art traditions, have peculiarities of their own that I must exclude for the sake of brevity. The Yakima Polychrome style and the North Oregon rectilinear are part of the Columbia Plateau as a whole but are different from the styles that are expressed between the rivers that border this cultural region of the Plateau.

Techniques and Locales of Rock Art

The documented rock art of the Plateau is, with rare exception, limited to riverine locales. Most images are situated on vertical basalt faces in the South and on vertical basalt or opportunistic granitic faces in the North. Pictographs tend to be located north of the mid-point of Washington State while petroglyphs tend to be south. Both pictographs and petroglyphs occur in all parts of the state and a "blending" of these techniques occurs in the mid-point zone. The vertical faces of the rock art sites are usually located in hard to access areas. The images at times are nearly impossible to access without some risk of injury. The location of these sites suggests they were not meant for general viewing. Many of Varna Roy's subjects during his 1930 ethnographic study expressed trepidation or superstition of the sites. Suggesting they had a mythical quality about them.

Pictographs usually are red and yellow is the next most frequent color (Cain 1950). Black and white pigments are relatively rare. Nesbitt and Keyser's study suggested that pictographs tend to be of recent vintage when compared to petroglyphs. This is in contrast to Anati's analysis criteria. This supports my contention that the unusual nature of the Plateau needs to have special consideration.


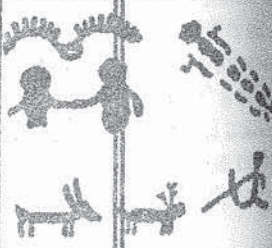
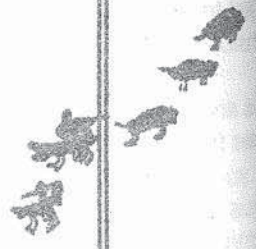
Petroglyphs are either pecked or abraded with a majority of the sites showing an abrasive technique. The ferric content of the basalt makes the working surface quite hard. Even though few engravings in the Plateau are deep, in fact most just break the surface, the surface is hard enough to destroy even other basalt pecking tools in a few strokes. Basalt abraders work fast and the technique is not very taxing physically. My own replicative experiments (Hare 1982) have demonstrated that the abrasive technique must have been the logical choice for incising.

Most of the images are rough in detail and only portray the minimum of identification information. This supports the popular hypothesis that images on the Plateau are part of a ritual or ceremony. Identification of the object was the purpose. The conclusion is that the term rock art is actually a misnomer since the intention of the artist was not aesthetic in the least. Terms such as rock art are valid. It is a constructural term. Archaeologists often develop labels for things that probably have little to do with the actual function of the item (Hassan 1993). Since functional values of rock art can only be guessed vaguely, form descriptors such as rock art will have to suffice for now. In both pictographs and petroglyphs, images are conventionalized with no considerations are given to realistic composition or perspective. Both Geometric and Silhouette images are well

represented and occur often together in associative scenes. There is no geometric zone and silhouette zone as is found in other rock art traditions like the Australian Aboriginal tradition (Layton, *Man* [N.S.] 20., 434-453).

General Characteristics of Rock Art of the Central Plateau

Illustration Credits: Upper drawing from a sketch by Keyser 1992; middle drawing from a sketch by Cain 1990; lower tracing from a sketch by Nesbit 1968

Date and Cultural Phases	Climatic Factors	Socio-economic Factors	Stylistic and Associative Factors	Representative Rock Art
Phase I: 12000-8000 B.P.	The end of Pleistocene glaciation and beginning of mild warming trend. Climate is moist with temperatures somewhat cooler than now.	Archaic Hunters and foragers. Small and highly mobile bands. Populations are wide spread and density is sparse. Groups are utilizing a broad range of species and tool kits devoted to food processing.	Simple abstract images. Only two known so far. One is a pictograph and other is incised. No anecdotal or descriptive scenes occur and no associations are depicted.	Images rare in the Plateau. Two isolated examples occur, one of which is in the Plateau, image has not been made available.
Phase II: 8000-7000 B.P.	Climate warms dramatically. The end of the early mild Holocene. Climate warmer and drier than today. Conditions resemble fully expressed arid environment.	Archaic Hunters and foragers. Populations restricted to marine habitats. Species utilization less than in Phase I. Shell fish from lacustrine and riverine sources dominate the economy. Collector technology develops but is not widely used.	No associational scenes. Rock art in the Plateau not well expressed. Along the Lower Columbia, the pit and groove style areas. No Interior Plateau art has been recorded.	The only images known are found along the Lower Columbia. No Interior images are known.
Phase III: 7000-2500 B.P.	Climate cools and becomes moister. Climatic conditions resemble semi-arid environment of today.	Archaic Hunters and collectors. The first two phases of sedentism occur. There is a greater reliance on collector strategy. People move out of strictly marine habitats to exploit big games.	Descriptive big game hunting scenes. Naturalistic depiction of anthropomorphs and zoomorphs. Ovine and hunter associative scenes are common. Petroglyphs predominate.	
Phase IV: 2500-250 B.P.	Mild fluctuations in climate. General warming trend with intermittent cold spells. Overall, climate resembles current conditions.	Early Phase IV are still archaic hunters and collectors. Middle and Late Phase IV populations shift to evolved hunters and as the end of Phase IV, acquire the horse.	Singular and associational ideograms occur. Fantastic creatures and known mythological images develop. Associative signs and anecdotal scenes common. Pictographs widespread in northern zones.	
Phase V: 250-50 B.P.	Modern semi-arid climatic conditions.	Evolved Hunters. During Early Phase V economy still based on hunting and collections. The introduction of the horse effectively ends the traditional Plateau culture as groups move into the Great Plains to engage in warfare and hunting. Heavy cultural diffusion from Great Plains groups. In Late Phase V, groups are moved onto reservations. Rock Art ends and people forced into non-traditional complex economy.	Rock art enters a decadent phase. Images diffuse from other areas. Modern implements such as the rifle appear. Graphic depictions resemble Great Plains style. Horse hunter scenes are common. Bison scenes common along the Snake River.	

Occupational Phases and Temporal Distribution of Motifs

The documented occupation of the Plateau extends back 11500 BP to the Ritchie site in Wenatchee (Chatters 1989). Emory Strong, in 1959 book, lists some of the sites at the Dalles to be 8700-8000 BP (Strong 1959). The following occupational

phase, conventionally named Old Cordellian, shows the first "pit and groove" rock art style. For the purposes of this paper, this will be the first occupational phase. Keyser does discuss in his 1992 book that in south central Oregon and at one site in Washington, one incised and pictographic image was located. The pigment of the Washington site has been dated somewhere around 7000 BP (Keyser 1992). However, where they are located now he does not specify nor does he publish an image. Future correspondences will hopefully provide us with a look at the earliest documented traditions.

Different schemata and constructs have been used to classify cultural evolution in the Plateau. Most chronologies are primarily concerned with lithic assemblages and are too restrictive. The standard often used is Schalk's Southern Plateau Phases and Galm's chronologies are used as well. Schalk's assemblage analysis does recognize that dependence on riverine resources increased over time (Schalk 1961). However, his inclusion of only three phases brings together too many temporally diverse styles. I have included five. These five phases correspond roughly to occupational phases assigned to the Plateau (Keyser 1992), but also include Chatters's climatic phases. Chatters's wrote a detailed climate history of the Plateau but his eight climatic periods became too unwieldy as marked style evolution is not that frequent.

Phase I 12000-8000 BP

The Post glacial populations that invaded the Plateau utilized a forager strategy, i.e. they hunted and gathered but left no trace of storage facilities that characterize later collector adaptive strategies. Early Phase I left no evidence of rock art. Early tool kits were devoted to big game hunting. The Phase I economy is Archaic Hunter/Gatherer. Later Phase I archaeological record expresses small highly mobile bands with a tool kit devoted to food processing—game and shellfish preparation (Chatters 1989, Keyser 1992). The climate is mild. The population is sparse and widely dispersed. Only poorly expressed examples of rock art are evidenced. Simple abstract images during the extreme late Phase I have been located so far. No anecdotal or descriptive scenes occur and no associations are depicted (Keyser 1992).

Phase II 8000-7000 BP

The end of Phase I also marked the end of the mild early Holocene. Populations became restricted to riverine habitats as the environment dried out. Utilized species also decreased in variety. Populations put increasing pressure on remaining utilized resources. Shell fish dominate the economy (Chatters 1989). Socio-economic context does not change from Phase I. There is a modest and infrequent shift from the forager strategy to collector strategy. Collector technology was known but not widely used. Keyser indicates the "pit and groove style" was being expressed during this phase. Keyser has dated this style using comparisons to similar art found in other Western States (Keyser 1992). Relatively, we know that usually this is the case. However, the 3000 year period between the pit and groove and later Phase III hunting scenes is not well explained. In addition, pit and groove styles are primarily restricted to the Lower Columbia and cannot really be associated to the Plateau styles with any certainty.



fig. 1: Ovina descriptive scene. Does this show anecdotal archaic hunters? Note style similarities to known archaic hunter image found nearby (see fig. 2). From Nesbitt 1988.

The inclusion of dubious examples like the pit and groove motifs must be allowed, however, since there are no other samples to analyze. They in themselves are an enigma. There does not seem to be a real convention as in later styles. The motifs are usually deeply incised images that completely cover the exposed surface of the rock. These are a common feature of the west coast and several attempts have been made to explain them.

Phase III 7000-2500 BP

Game hunting and sedentism dominate the next climatic shift. Big game resources seem to be restricted to ovines and cervines. Faunal analyses of sites from this period reveal a predominance of salmonid remains. Humans are again expanding out of riverine habitats and exploiting a greater variety of smaller animal species. The lack of incised or painted artifacts makes it hard to precisely associate rock art motifs with this phase. Keyser notes that his associations are tentative (Keyser 1992).

The lack of bows in ovine hunting scenes and the proximity of dated occupational remains suggest strongly an association between ovine descriptive scenes and Phase III. Hunters are still archaic though a greater reliance on collector food strategy has developed. Along the Lower Snake River ovines appear in associational scenes with horned and some limbless anthropomorphs in what Nesbitt has described as an "Animal Drive Composition" (Nesbitt 1988).

This descriptive scene presents a problem. Though, obviously, variations occur within a single material culture, anecdotal compositions should not occur in the art of archaic hunters. If this were the only example it could be dismissed as a statistical anomaly, but it is not. The solution to this dilemma poses an even greater problem. If this descriptive scene is truly representational of a variation of the ovine theme, then scenes depicting ovines cannot be reliably dated to Phase III. However, the general theme in ovine descriptive scenes is restricted to spear or atlatl using hunters. The lack of bowmen indicates this art was at least before 950 AD, the date that the bow was introduced in the Plateau. Perhaps this is a regional anomaly. Whatever the outcome, these Phase III scenes need closer scrutiny.

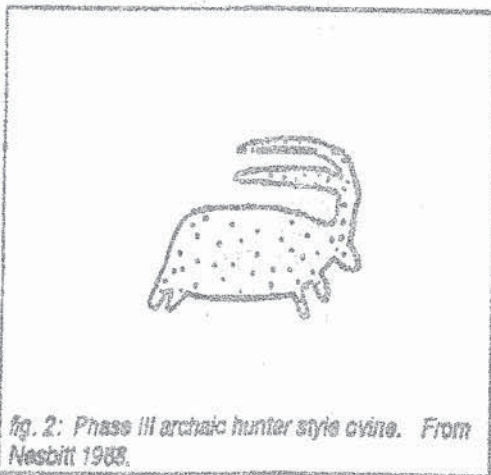


fig. 2: Phase III archaic hunter style ovine. From Nesbitt 1988.

Phase IV 2500-250 BP

Phase IV marks the transition of the foraging archaic hunter/gatherer populations to collector evolved hunter/gatherer. Trade greatly expanded during this period and material culture begins to reflect marginal influences from the coastal traders and interior peoples along the Lower Columbia River. Strangely, the interior Central Plateau does not reflect stylistic influences from the northwest coast traditions. There is an anomaly in the Pacific Northwest—Only very infrequently is there an exchange of images between the Northwest coast style and the interior traditions. It is well known that Salish peoples traded heavily with interior peoples at places like the Dalles and the Long Narrows. It would seem then that these trading activities were primarily economic in motivation and little emphasis was placed on ceremony and ritual.

At about Middle Phase IV, around 950 AD, local populations acquired the bow and arrow. The supremacy of the Atlatl and spear were eclipsed. Projectile points in the archaeological record diminished in size and mobility art is represented, though poorly expressed. Several important style and motif additions occurred in this period as well. Mountain sheep and mountain goats appear in simple associational scenes and are also depicted with bowmen in descriptive hunting motifs (Cain 1950).

The bison becomes an increasingly important part of the economy relative to other large mammal species. At about 500 BP, it goes extinct in the Plateau and fades in importance until its rapid return to even greater prominence at the dawn of Phase V. This allows us to confidently place bison motif scenes in one of two categories based on certain associative criteria. Bison in association with archaic hunters can be placed as Early or Late Middle Phase IV. Bison shown in associational scenes with evolved hunters without horses can be placed as Late Phase IV.

Another important style innovation is the wavy motif found in many other rock art traditions in North America and other parts of the world (Anati 1993). Anthropomorphic twins, the rayed arc and fantastic creatures also appear. Socio-economically, the Plateau was at its apex. Large villages and a mild climate gave collector groups relative prosperity.

Many of the mythological animals make their appearance during this period. Simple associations include dots and anthropomorphs, often surrounding or separating the subject from the rest of the panel. Other, easily identified mythic associations include the twin anthropomorph and fir branch and the coyote is often associated with the rayed arc and anthropomorphs (see fig. 3).

The fantastic creatures that represent the majority of surviving images in the Central Plateau are believed to have their beginning during Late Phase IV and into Early Phase V. Fantastic creatures are usually not associated with other figures. This suggests that Boreson and Wellmann's opinion was correct. Wellmann recounts from Boreson in his 1979 book *Indian Rock Art of North America*, that later Plateau images resulted from vision quest/ puberty rites. Modern adherents of this religion still practice variations on the vision quest ritual. This ritual usually involves physical and mental hardships-including sleep deprivation, fasting and long distance running to induce hallucinations (Gard 1992). Prior to white contact, it is believed that these initiates would paint their vision on rock faces. Verne Ray in his 1939 ethnographic work on the Plateau, writes of meeting modern individuals whom either painted the images themselves or knew of a recent ancestor who had.



Fig. 3: Geneflected Anthropomorph associated with coyotes and surmounted by a rayed arc, from Late Phase IV. From Cain 1950.

Phase IV represents the most active of the cultural phases. Early Phase IV ended with the sudden extinction of the bison. Late Phase IV is characterized by the acquisition of the bow. Phase IV effectively ends with the arrival of the first horse, around the year 1750.

Phase V 250-50 BP

Warfare and bison associations dominate Nez Perce territory and the southeast corner of the Plateau. The rise of tribal nations before and during Phase V led to stable territories and sedentism. Organized warfare increases between nations and western Plateau tribes venture outside traditional habitats with horses in search of large game animals, mostly bison. Great Plains influence are intensified along with an influx of white traders and goods. Rock art styles in the extreme southwest corner of the Plateau begin to show the browed eye image common along the Long Narrows and Lower Columbia. The archaeological record also shows the "She Who Watches" motif along Lower Columbia River sites (Keyser 1992).

Late Phase V, around 1850 AD, brings Plateau rock art to an end. White encroachment and colonization force aboriginal groups onto reservations. Later farming and industrial developments threatens many rock art sites with highway construction and inundation from dam reservoirs.

Climate fluctuations and simple forager strategies characterize early cultural phases. Climate stabilization and trade increase the profusion and variety of rock art sites during Late Phase III and Phase IV. European colonization effectively ends Plateau culture during Phase V.

Stylistic Distribution of Motifs and Problems of Assigning Areal Categories

Motifs within the Central Plateau cultural unit are come in four categories: Anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, fantastic creatures and abstract. Almost all sites display a combination of all four style elements. Beyond the pictograph and petroglyph regional classification already mentioned, there does not seem to be clear cut intra-regional variations over space. Some particular motifs occur in some areas more than others. Without intensive in-person site analysis, I cannot comfortably group rock art images together. Stylistic criteria can give clues and some areas can be grouped into certain style phases. What I have done here is to classify Plateau images into the above mentioned four categories and comment on variations of each category within the Plateau. Unique motifs and motifs with mythical connections will be mentioned.



Fig. 4: Distended anthropomorph in associational scene. Figure is similar to the figure 3 distended anthropomorph and is in proximity as well. Note the two inverted suck figure ideograms on either side. From Cain 1950.

Anthropomorphs

Anthropomorphs that do not display fantastic appendages come in two basic naturalistic styles: stick figure style and what I call distended style. Stick figures anthropomorphs are usually

depicted in frontal or oblique normal standing posture. Those that are posed tend to be in descriptive scenes of hunting. Later stick figures are found in mythical associational scenes such as the "twin brothers" or paired anthropomorph motifs. The distended anthropomorphs are more likely to be phallic than stick figured anthropomorphs. They are also less likely to be in naturalistic poses and are genuflected or spread eagled. As with stick figured anthropomorphs, distended anthropomorphs are found in profusion in both pictographic and petroglyphic zones. The distended versions also show hand detail such as fingers and head adornment attached to the body like horns. These horns are either singular or double in number. Non-associational stick and distended anthropomorphs appear in north more frequently than in the South. The middle and southern rock art zones have an abundance of twin anthropomorph and animal/human associations. There are exceptions. Fig. 3., in the northern pictographic zone, is from the Oroville area in northern Washington. This illustrates the difficulty in defining spatial stylistic phases.

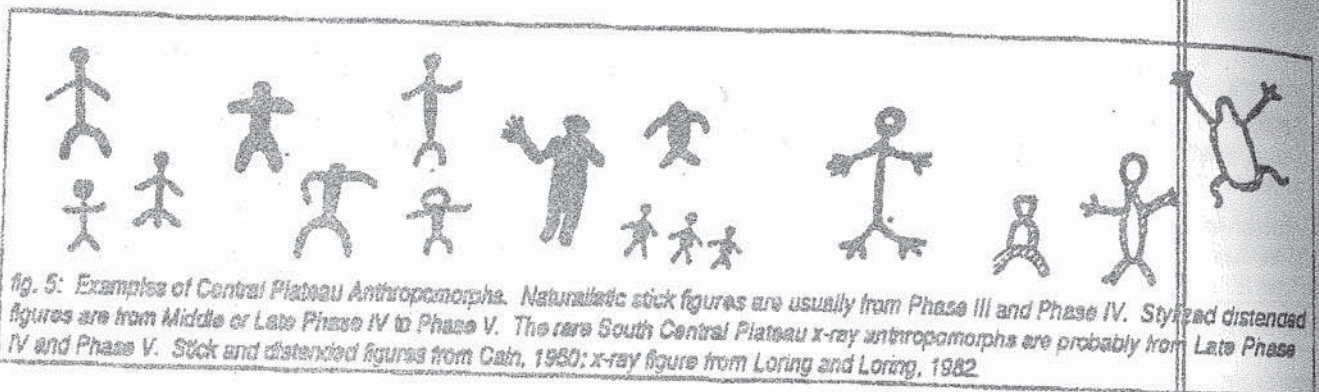


fig. 5: Examples of Central Plateau Anthropomorphs. Naturalistic stick figures are usually from Phase III and Phase IV. Stylized distended figures are from Middle or Late Phase IV to Phase V. The rare South Central Plateau x-ray anthropomorphs are probably from Late Phase IV and Phase V. Stick and distended figures from Cain, 1950; x-ray figure from Loring and Loring, 1982.

The last type of anthropomorph is the x-ray style which appears in the South Central Plateau and is less common than the other styles. I only found one site, in Franklin County, that depicted the x-ray anthropomorphs in the Plateau. They are genuflected and usually have three-fingered hands. One especially corpulent example has a left hand with four fingers and a right hand with three.

Zoomorphs

Zoomorphic images are found at every site in the Plateau. Identifiable animals include the ubiquitous mountain sheep and goat, the coyote, bison, lizard, deer and elk (though it is hard to tell which is which at times), snake, bird, centipede, fish, horse and one elephant (though this is questionable). Zoomorphs are found frequently in associational scenes with ideograms. At the Bonaparte Creek site, a bird with anthropomorphic legs but with a definite bird-like body, is seen to be joined by the tail with a small quadruped facing the opposite direction. The quadruped was added later (Cain 1950) and may represent one of the many confrontational creation tales that are told in the Plateau.

Many tales involve the Coyote which is found in most West Coast pantheons. In the Plateau, the Coyote is seen as a trickster who can change his shape at will. In tales of creation, he often combats monsters in the shapes of other animals and uses the defeated carcass as the material to create. The destruction wrought by these battles often creates the unique topographic features of the Plateau. The Palouse Falls were created by the battle between Coyote and the Beaver monster. From the Beaver's dead carcass, Coyote created the modern tribes. The thrashing of Beaver's tale is what created the long cylindrical hole that is Palouse Falls.

It has been speculated in the past that animal images represent the food resources being used at the time. Animals, with the exception of fish, have never been the mainstay of the Plateau diet (Cain 1950). In most occupational phases salmon and plant resources, such as camas and other roots, make up the majority of the caloric intake. If the rock art reflects foodstuffs, where are the plants? It is generally accepted that Plateau rock art is conventional and ritualized in execution and therefore represents a desire to acquire something. Most rituals are enacted not for the sake of the ritual itself but to gain something, either peace of mind, physical endowments, or food. It is unlikely, therefore, that Plateau peoples would waste their time making rituals for something they already have and which was never for want. Salmonid bones make up the vast majority of animal remains in most occupational levels. The hearty root plants of the Plateau are still easy to gather and can survive the harshest of droughts. The animals depicted in the rock art are probably status animals in earlier phases and probably a combination of status and vision quest animals in later Phase IV and Phase V.

The bison images associated with the Nez Perce reflect a transition in economy from a traditional Plateau subsistence to a Great Plains one. The Nez Perce began to emulate the Great Plains groups after the introduction of the horse. The switch in economies was due to a quest for status by young Nez Perce males, not because of hardship on the Plateau.



Fig. 6. Open mouthed and circle terminated quadrupeds. The highly stylized nature of these images represents later phases in Plateau rock art. From Cain 1950.

The rise of ovine images in Phase III and into Phase IV was more to do with the qualities of the animal rather than a dependence on the meat of the animal. We can note in the record a rise in the minimum number of ovine images found during Phase III and Phase IV but these remains were a small fraction of the total number of individuals recovered.

There are very few variations in the style conventions of animal images. Earlier Phase III images are executed in a simple naturalistic style and animals are usually depicted in profile and shown in attitudes facing either horizontal direction but almost never facing in a vertical one. Later stylized quadrupeds are depicted with open mouths (see fig. 6). The larger mammals show, in at least one case, anthropomorphic appendages resembling hands at the ends of the legs. Other style conventions along the Snake River, in the southeast corner of the Plateau, show a unique circular design that terminates the legs of bison. These bison are in

association with Phase V evolved hunters. The circular appendage also terminates the limbs of some anthropomorphic images in this area. This may be justification in the future to designate a stylistic locale for this region.

The centipede and other arthropomorphs are usually found in the southern regions of the Central Plateau and suggest a connection to centipede shapes along the Long Narrows and Lower Columbia. There is a creation myth associated with the centipede further south in the South west. This centipede is associated with the twin anthropomorphs in the southern hydrologies. At Whiskey Dick Canyon near the Vantage area, the centipede is anthropomorphized and shown in association with the twin anthropomorphs.

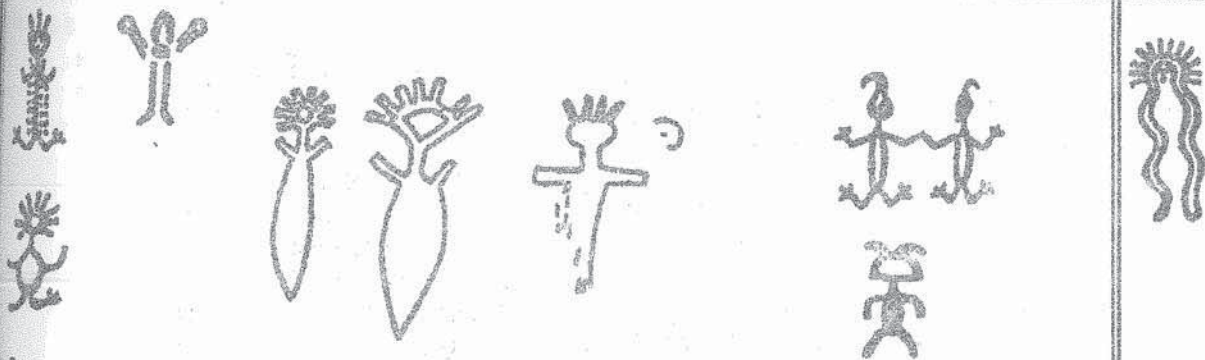


Fig. 7. Fantastic creatures of the Plateau. Were they made during the hallucinations associated with the vision quest? The associated ideograms, or ideograms, may give us our only clues. Drawing from Cain 1950.

The singular "elephant" reported by Cain in 1950 is hard to decipher. Examination of his sketch suggests a vague elephantine shape but his assertion that this represents a Paleolithic figure is unwarranted. Mastodons went extinct here 8,000 years ago and it's almost impossible to think that this pictograph would have survived exposure. The surrounding panel is relatively of the same chronology and these figures are from Early to Mid Phase IV, probably even later. During the 1870's, or Middle Phase V, a traveling circus was traveling through the area that had an elephant. If this image is an elephant, perhaps the artist was inspired by the circus (Keyser 1992).

Fantastic Creatures and Geometric Shapes

Fantastic creatures make up a large part of the surviving Plateau art. The recent vintage for these images is probably a contributing reason. Both Wellmann and Boreson associate these creatures with vision quest ceremonies and puberty rites that began during Phase IV and continued into Phase V (Boreson 1976a; Wellmann 1979). Though geometric signs are often

depicted alone or in association with anthropomorphic and zoomorphic images, their association with the fantastic creatures motif may lend the only clues to the nature of the vision quest images. The geometric images are found in all phases represented by rock art and Keyser notes that they represent some of the earliest examples via the "pit and groove" style (Keyser 1992).

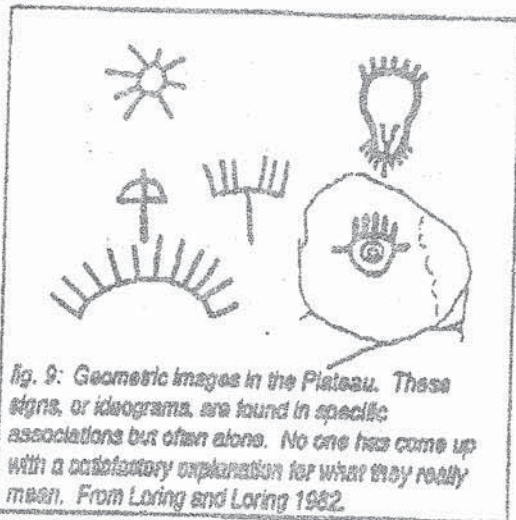


Fig. 9: Geometric images in the Plateau. These signs, or ideograms, are found in specific associations but often alone. No one has come up with a satisfactory explanation for what they really mean. From Loring and Loring 1982.

Each image is unique and very few stylistic conventions can be ascribed to them. Many are associated with the rayed arc motif which has been suggested to be basketry ideograms. There are some problems with this interpretation. The rayed arc is associated with too many other images to have such a restricted meaning. The distended anthropomorph with the coyotes in figure 3 suggests a more supernatural intention than basketry. It is true that for some Plateau cultures, such as the Wishram, basketry was a revered and highly conventional art form as well as a function of utility. In certain restricted contexts perhaps the rayed arc is a basketry ideogram. But the prevalence of the rayed arc throughout the region suggests it had a more general, powerful meaning. Many of the highly powerful twin anthropomorphs are associated with the rayed arc. In the Yakima Polychrome style, this rayed arc is repeated in large panels with no other associated signs. While its true meaning is unknown, the arc is probably not associated with strictly basketry themes. It is more likely that it had a different context in many different areas and represents something like "power" or, as Emmanuel Anati has speculated, "energy" (Anati 1993). For the most part, the fantastic creatures are anthropomorphized and are sometimes endowed with phalluses and very rarely endowed with vulvas. Some of the creatures show the Lower Columbia brow ridge style which dates them as late Phase IV through Phase V.

Meanings are harder to ascribe than with the zoomorphs since the visions they represent are highly personal and usually known only to the artist. Associated signs and geometric shapes may help determine the nature of the vision but these can only be guesses at best. The images are ubiquitous but each type of sign has areas that it dominates. The Vantage, Lower Columbia and Snake River regions have the greatest variety of geometric shapes.

Perhaps the most intriguing geometric shape is the connected circle, or "barbell" (my apologies for the ethnocentric term). This sign is found only at specific sites. These are the Snake River "Buffalo Eddy" site, the McLaughlin's Canyon site in the northern pictograph zone, and scattered among several sites in the Vantage-Beverly region on the Middle Columbia. Only at Buffalo Eddy are the associated fantastic creatures, bi-horned anthropomorphs, actually holding the "barbell". Nesbitt has classified the anthropomorph holding the "barbell" as belonging to the earlier naturalistic style. In the Vantage area, the sign is associated but usually part of a larger motif. In the northern pictographs zone, the sign is once again associated with a fantastic creature, again a bi-horned anthropomorph, but the creature is not holding the "barbell". The connected circles are summounted above the creature's head beneath the rayed arc motif. Next to the horned anthropomorph is another fantastic creature, a bird-man, also under a rayed arc. These figures are not connected but are in attitudes of association. The early vintage of the "barbell" sign relative to later datable signs, such as the twin anthropomorph, suggest the "barbell" may have been more of a symbol than a sign. Physically connected creatures are a common motif and the "barbell" may represent an abstraction of the concept of association or connectedness. The premise of the twin anthropomorph legend is also based in "oneness" or "connectedness". This holistic theme can give one explanation for the "barbell" though hard evidence is lacking.

Other common signs include the rayed circle, rayed wheel, partially rayed or asymmetrically rayed circle, the rake or "comb", dot and diamond. These are descriptive terms, of course, and do not reflect the true intention of the artists. One common denominator of these ideograms is the ray. Almost all of the described images have a radiating quality about them. Even some of the vulvar signs, like those found in Franklin County, have rays projecting from the core image. Perhaps this is associated with the hallucinations that come with the vision quests. Phosphores, the images created during physical or drug induced stress, have often been discussed as one originator of these ideograms.

Conclusions

Rock art represents the thoughts of the people who created the images. These images offer a unique opportunity to study the world outlook that the artists held. In many regions of the world, rock art meanings can be deciphered using constructs that

represent the basic syntax of the human mind. The rock art of the Plateau follows an abstract schema that cannot be easily deciphered using current theories of universal archetypes and paradigms. Many, often questionable, interpretations have been offered to explain the meaning behind the rock art traditions of the Plateau. What is known is that Plateau rock art is conventional in its execution and ritual in its motivation. The creators wanted to possess something that could not be explained. They created the art to empathize with animals and supernatural forces to either capture the animal or possess its inherent qualities.

Pictographs, in the northern pictographic zone, are later in vintage than the petroglyphs found in the southern petroglyphic zone. Description scenes also appear in the art of archaic hunters and lead to confusion in the dating of certain sites. The temporal distribution can be divided into five phases which represent climatic adaptations on the part of the aboriginal inhabitants. Temporal motifs can be matched to the archaeological record to give clues about the arrival of certain images and associations. The arrival of the bow and arrow in late Phase IV and the horse in Early Phase V give definite chronological frames to many of the later images of the Plateau. Spatial distribution can only be vaguely guessed at since style conventions are relatively homogenized in the Plateau. Ethnographic considerations help to decipher some zoomorphic images and local variations of myth can be associated to specific images.

The destruction of many of the Plateau's sites during the first half of this century and the continuing vandalism during the second half is the justification for continuing research in this understudied but fascinating region. A complete and accessible catalog has yet to be completed. The work of cataloging should follow the procedures outlined in the Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici's report to UNESCO in 1993. At this time, work in the Plateau proceeds sporadically and interested parties are not coordinated. Once regional studies have become more developed, it is hoped that universal patterns within Plateau rock art may be detected. Until then we are left with many questions and few answers.

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