

## 6

A Gendered Search Through  
Some West Texas Rock Art

PATRICIA M. BASS

**M**OST PEOPLE WHO STUDY ROCK ART, that category of material culture which includes such palaeolithic and archaic art as paintings, drawings, engravings, and figurines, as well as more recent visual endeavors by varied indigenous groups, would agree that interpretation, in all its dimensions, is in the eye of the beholder. Thus, a modern-day pictorial interpretation of a large image on a cave wall along the Rio Grande River might be a panther/cougar, a visual representation frequently found in west Texas rock art. However, a second examination of such an image, along with its nearest associated image, might suggest a human figure and horned cattle. How do we—not the original users—know which is the “right” pictorial image? And how do we know what the image signifies—its symbolic interpretation? At the very least, such varied and inconclusive interpretations offer yet another reminder to never underestimate context and viewer bias when offering interpretations of ideological artifacts.

The importance of context and bias as they affect rock art research and thus the models and interpretations, particularly symbolic interpretations, is briefly investigated here. A deliberate focus is the study of gender content in the art by examining motif associations and panel compositions, and using symbolic and semiotic models, to identify visual patterns and repetitions in the rock art of the Pecos region of west Texas.

**West Texas Rock Art**

Most of the twenty-four sites from which data were recovered and which are examined here contain only a few scattered paintings. But in some of the large shelters, pictographs, often superimposed, almost completely cover the walls for more than 100 feet. Nearly all the Pecos River style pictographs (those generally considered to be the oldest in the west Texas region and the primary stylistic corpora of data examined here) are found in shelters associated with refuse heap deposits and artifacts, or are immediately adjacent to such archaeologically significant materials. The pictographs are painted in several colors, including a dark red (the most common color), yellow, black, white, and blue. One color is often used to outline another, and alternating lines of color are common.

The images most often depicted include anthropomorphs,

*In rejecting art-for-art's sake . . . [we need to] stress how works of culture belong to the larger struggles of their societies.*

— Gregory S. Jay,

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animal forms, plants, geometric figures, and abstractions or images that are not immediately recognizable. The anthropomorphic images are the most elaborate, conspicuous, and numerous. The basic shape of the earliest depictions is an elongated oval with roughly parallel to slightly converging sides. Some images have squared-off shoulders, and a smaller number are a definite rectangular shape. Arms are usually extended and slightly raised. Legs are sometimes present and often show toes. Most anthropomorphs face front and show little or no movement. The bodies of the anthropomorphs, which are extremely varied and often headless, are generally outlined and may be filled with vertical lines, stripes, circles, rectangular forms, and solid colors. Their average size is under 6 feet, although some are 10 to 15 feet tall.

Therianthropomorphic figures,<sup>1</sup> those combining human and animal attributes, are not as numerous. Projections or “antlers” often protrude from the head area. Several figures display wide, squared-off “wings” that extend horizontally outward at shoulder height. Anthropomorphs are visually dominant in size and location and are usually surrounded by animal, plant, geometric, and abstract images. Birds in flight and small-size deer are occasionally depicted. Cougars and panthers are numerous and often large, up to 15 feet across, and placed in commanding spatial positions.

Images of plant-like forms that seem to resemble native vegetation are also drawn. Designs that are similar to the flowering stalks and other features of sotol and agave, which probably provided the bulk of the wild plant food for the prehistoric artists, are depicted. Many examples of ribboned or wavy lines, rectangular or oval forms, small circular shapes, and hand prints are also shown (Bass 1989:86–88).

**Previous interpretations**

Early analyses of rock art, including that of the Pecos River region of west Texas, interpreted these images as representing an Archaic Indian sympathetic-hunting-magic cult (Bass 1989:45–46). This inference was based on the visual presence of game animals in the rock art and ethnographic analogies drawn from contemporary foraging groups. Archaeological evidence of stone tools and other artifacts was attributed to a division of

labor between the hunter and the hunter's paraphernalia and the gatherer and the gatherer's equipment. The art itself was explained as depicting figures of "a god-of-the-chase surrounded by animals pierced with arrows" (Kirkland and Newcomb 1967:65). This notion of a hunting cult was eventually dismissed because deer were not the only animals hunted. The art also included animals that were not hunted (such as the visually impressive cougars) and seemed to have a more complex meaning than a prey or even a predator (Bass 1991:5).

The pictographs were next considered to have originated in shamanic practices. Early researchers such as Kirkland and Newcomb suggested that the "anthropomorphic beings. . . [were] shamans or perhaps members of medicine or dance societies." They cited T.N. Campbell who had noted "that the chances are good' that a mescal bean cult was involved in the scenes depicted in the Pecos River style paintings" (Kirkland and Newcomb 1967:65). The distinctive red mescal bean (*Sophora secundiflora* seeds) has been found at numerous archaeological sites in the region, along with more limited evidence of peyote use (Kirkland and Newcomb 1967:70-71; Shafer 1986:223). This "shamanistic-society" hypothesis, it was argued, explained the presence of the cougars in the pictographs: "some shamans, or perhaps members of a 'cougar society' received power from this animal." The shamanistic-society hypothesis also explained the extensive overpainting found in Pecos River style pictographs—shamans would return to their "old traditional places where their forerunners had been in successful communication with the supernaturals." The conclusion was that the custom of painting shelter walls in the region of the lower Pecos "may have originated when a shaman emerging from a trance. . . attempted to visualize his hallucinations or dreams by a rude painting" (Kirkland and Newcomb 1967:79-80).

### Gender bias

Most current explanations, as with many corpora of rock art, offer shamanic-related interpretations. Yet, even with shamanic interpretations, we might be ignoring a cultural construction of our own: gender. Earlier interpretations seem to have progressed from hunting-cult to shamanic-society hypotheses without seriously considering the tacit presumption of an explicitly male-based art. We no longer routinely assume these images are male gendered; after all, there are no physical attributes in the Pecos River style rock art to indicate one sex or the other. The analytical assumptions used are no longer obviously gender related. Nevertheless we may have replaced our more blatantly gendered explanations of a hunting cult with a nonetheless androcentric bias because of a focus on the undoubtedly important shaman images. It may now be "necessary to reconsider simplistic interpretive assumptions to the effect that 'hunting' artifacts are indicative of the presence or activities of men" (Wylie 1992:27).

Researchers in this area have found it difficult, however,

to develop methods that encourage examination of shamanic and other images that might reflect a less exclusive explanation of this rock art. This, in turn, may lead us to ignore the nonshamanic images that may help break our androcentric interpretive mind-set and influence our course of inquiry in a de-gendered way.

### Problems with androcentric bias

One way to make our methodology more inclusive is to acknowledge our androcentric bias and our reliance on ethnographic analogy. Archaeologists are supposed to be cautious about simplistic ethnographic analogies, but we have not been with regard to gender (Conkey and Spector 1984). If we continue emphasizing "shaman" images with "set repertoires of accessories" (Turpin 1991A:271), traditionally interpreted as atlatls and beating sticks or hunting equipment (Shafer 1986:159), are we still not maintaining an implicit and perhaps unnoticed man-the-hunter gender bias? Shafer (1986:159) is correct in urging us not to "assume that. . . [the images] relate to men's activities alone," but a broader ritual interpretation of the art should not be limited to "boys' initiation rites" (Shafer 1986:25, 142) as it must also include the possibility of female rites. Thus we continue to generate gender-exclusive, rather than gender-inclusive, reconstructions. Furthermore, with the Pecos rock art and its unclear ethnographic antecedents, are we not assuming ethnographic analogs and the universality of the sexual division of labor as we now see it?

Because we are using ethnographic models, why not examine those that might offer a more inclusive treatment of all the images? In other words, ethnographic examples can be used to aid direct interpretations or, in a case such as the Pecos River rock art, to help us see in a heuristic fashion. There are ethnolinguistic records where women were recorded as shamans. Kroeber, in his *Handbook of the Indians of California*, talks about certain ethnolinguistic groups and the fact that the "shaman was almost invariably a woman" (Kroeber 1925:853, 423).

Recent work by David Lewis-Williams (1982) offering a shamanic explanation for rock art in southern Africa suggests the presence of female shamans. In applying his shamanistic interpretation to Paleolithic art, he notes, however, that "in some societies the shaman is an exceptional and solitary figure, whereas in San society about half the men and a third of the women are shamans. . . We shall therefore have to achieve a broad and comprehensive view of shamanism before we try to ascertain some of the features of Upper Paleolithic shamanism" (Lewis-Williams 1989:51).

Thus we may propose that rock art may be shamanistic but not male. Furthermore, certain ethnographic cases demonstrate that females made rock art in the context of "shamanic" art: James Teit recorded female puberty rites and rock art among the Thompson River Indians of the Columbia Plateau in 1896 (Teit 1896: 227-230). The Huichol,<sup>2</sup> a group living in north-west Mexico with possible cultural antecedents in the South-

west and pre-Columbian cultures, produce art of peyote visions or representations envisioned in an hallucinatory state and shamanic initiation (Eger 1978:39).

Although women shamans are rare, "the duties and obligations of the shamanic quest are so intense that the effort must be a joint undertaking of husband and wife" (Eger 1978:47). Furthermore the woman's religious knowledge is encoded in her art (Eger 1978:51). "Through ingestions of peyote, the completed woman also develops the ability to 'dream' her designs and remember them. . . Her handiwork is drawn from the same reservoir of shamanic knowledge and power" (Eger 1978:52). These shamans, in an effort to communicate their understanding of the world, have given birth to these art forms (Bean and Vane 1978:124).

David Whitley has provided yet another example of female-based rock art. He describes southern California puberty rites in which some motifs are explicitly "female." They show helpers as seen in altered states during female initiation ceremonies (Whitley 1992b:95). According to Whitley, using an ethnographically informed analytic approach, there are at least two separate traditions of rock painting in the locale he describes, but "when the metaphoric and symbolic foundations of various traditions are examined," they fundamentally concern vision-questing (Whitley 1992b:92, 94). "The first rock painting tradition involved formalized puberty rites, conducted separately for male and female initiates of the so-called chinigchinich or jimsonweed cult" (Whitley 1992b:94). Paintings were made by initiates concluding a period of deprivation and stress, the administration of hallucinogens, ceremonial dancing and so on.

This puberty-painting tradition constituted a fundamentally shamanistic initiation in which initiates "apparently painted the spirit helpers they received during this initiation" (Whitley 1992b:94). Female initiates "principally painted zigzag and diamond chain motifs whereas. . . evidence for the male initiates suggests circles and curvilinear motifs. This fits the general gender-based distinction in 'decorative motifs' for far western North America: diamond, zigzags and diamond chains were female' designs, while other geometric patterns were 'male'" (Whitley 1992b:95). Furthermore "the Southern California female initiates' zigzags and diamond chains have specifically been identified as 'rattlesnake' drawings. . . correlating with a gender-based pattern that characterized far western North America as well" (Whitley 1992b:95). Thus, the rattlesnake was a shaman spirit helper for the female initiate, and we may propose that rock art is produced not only by shaman ritual specialists, but by the shamanically aided nonspecialist in a ritual context.

### Applications of Interpretive Models

Trying to ascertain the features of the shamanic rock art of west Texas has led to a variety of endeavors to illuminate and explain this art, some indicated above. Proving that these pictographs are a product of shamanic events is not, however, the

focus of this paper. Rather, the art may be shamanic and female based. Therefore, the focus must now shift to a restructuring of the data to produce a de-gendered or more inclusive interpretation of this corpora of rock art.

### Models of association

The primary method used to examine symbolic interpretation, or what the images might signify, evolved from studying the evidence gathered from twenty-four west Texas rock art sites<sup>3</sup> and models of association adopted to illuminate semiotic communication patterns (Bass 1989:54-79; 1992:409). After adapting and trying to work with several different models designed to elucidate associations among images, criteria were developed to define the relationship between two or more pictographs. This effort necessitated a visual classification of approximately sixty motif types that was refined and modified over a three-year period. The images were counted and categorized according to this pictograph typology and analyzed using criteria consisting of eleven types of association. The data relating to two of the association criteria, images designated D1 or D2—those whose logical relationship is perceived by the viewer either by connection by lines or objects or by sequential action—have been analyzed for this de-gendering task (Bass 1989:99-100, 1992; table 6.1).

As a visual example of what is meant by "association," we begin with a very simple combination of images found at Coyote Shelter (fig. 6.1). On a wall above the Rio Grande River, we find a zigzag painted in association with reverse hand prints and two small animal figures sometimes identified as coyotes. The scene's shamanic origin may be suggested by using Lewis-Williams and Dowson's (1988) neuropsychological research, which indicates that the zigzag is an entoptic image seen by the artist, who was a shaman, upon entering a trance phase. One very small panel of Red Monochrome style rock art paintings along a river in Texas, however, does not offer persuasive evidence for use of Lewis-Williams and Dowson's (1988) neuropsychological model, and I would rightly be castigated

**Table 6.1 Results of direct association search for "zigzag" motif**

|      | Frame | Pictograph typology | Direct association |
|------|-------|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1987 | FB18  | 57                  | D1:60(9)           |
|      | FA3   | 55                  | E:57               |
|      | PA8   | 24(5)               | C:57(2)            |
|      | PA9   | 57                  | D1:30:54           |
| 1988 | CC1*  | 57                  | D2:2               |

\* Art is not Pecos River style.

Notes: This example of a search for a zigzag motif type, number 57 (in boldface type), shows how "direct association designation," that is D1 or D2, appeared in conjunction with motif type 57 two times in the 1987 data and one time in the 1988 data. FB18 means Fate Bell Shelter, frame 18, where we found one "zigzag" motif directly associated (D1) with nine depictions of motif "60", which are human figures. The second direct association is found in Parida Annex, frame 9, one zigzag association with a "spear" (30), and another unidentifiable image (54). The zigzag motif association found in the 1988 data is located at Coyote Shelter. Red Monochrome style art. Motif 57 is associated with motif type 2, a quadruped with tail (see figure 6.1).

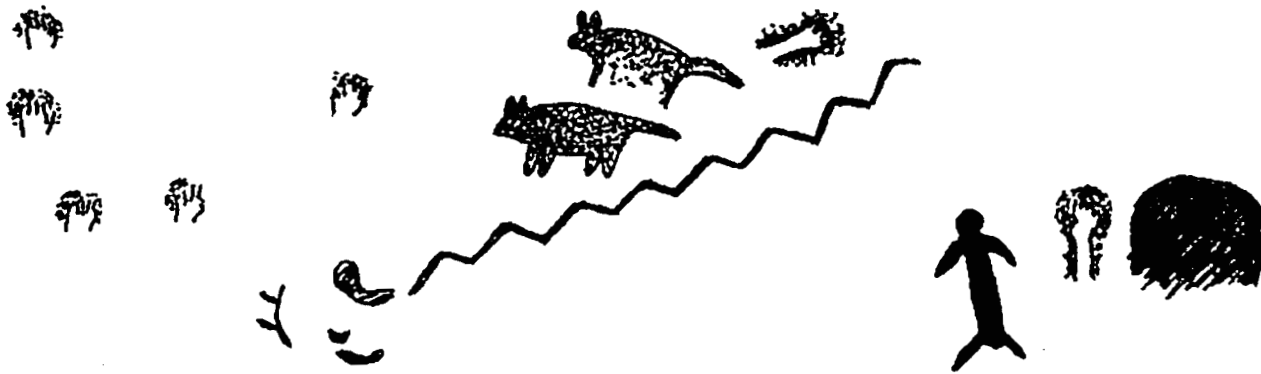


FIGURE 6.1. COYOTE SHELTER. Located under an overhanging bluff on the west side of the Pecos River. Red Monochrome. Scale  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch to 1 foot. Drawn from Kirkland and Newcomb 1967:20, pl. 4, No. 1.

for my lack of "concern for the empirical content of the interpretation" (Watson and Fotiadis 1990:620). More importantly, it does not begin to address the issue of gender. I have, therefore, returned to my original data to search for images using "gender as an analytical concept" and, at the very least, expose gender bias in my inquiries (Gero and Conkey 1991:4-5).

#### De-gendering the interpretations

It is hard to focus on metaphors and the gendering of cultural products when dealing with prehistoric pictographs. Ann Solomon, in her study "Gender, Representation, and Power in San Ethnography and Rock Art," examines San texts and stereotypes to interpret the iconic content of San rock art and illuminates culturally constructed gender conventions in compass directions, form (round versus elongated), and orientation (left versus right) (Solomon 1992:291-329).

Whitley also considers gender in terms of social relations among the so-called egalitarian Numic hunter-gatherers of the prehistoric Great Basin of the western United States. He argues that a literal reading of Coso rock engravings would seem "to emphasize hunting, an activity of reduced importance to [the seed-gathering Numic]." By examining the social context, Whitley interprets the engravings as "response to the threat to established gender relations precipitated by . . . [a] change in subsistence" (Whitley 1994: 368).

I find it much harder, however, to point out the complexity of gender relationships, as represented iconographically, using only the visual depictions of rock art. In examining the Pecos data, with the aim of "finding" women in this archaeological context (Gero and Conkey 1991:5), several assumptions become apparent. There is no visual justification for the androcentric bias in interpreting the Pecos River art. Even the anthropomorphic images, which we may acknowledge to be shamanistic, have no sexual referents: they fail to show any primary (sexual organs, mammalia) or secondary (facial hair) sexual characteristics. Nor do the zoomorphs show any sexual characteristics (such as penis sheaths or testicles on profile-view quadrupeds and panthers).

Additionally, by emphasizing "shamanic" figures, have we ignored other motifs with potential sexual associations? There seem to be traditionally interpreted men's artifacts in depictions of "hunting paraphernalia," but have we overlooked artifacts traditionally ascribed to women?

Lastly, acknowledging this latter simplistic interpretive assumption, do the motif association patterns show possible links between gender-associated pictograph types and other motifs, particularly the shamanic figures? That is, do the shamanic images in fact co-occur with "male" weaponry or possible "female" motifs, or are there other associational clusters that might inform an interpretation of the art? (For more information about the direct association models used here, refer to Bass 1989:99-100.) If we accept a shamanic origin for the art, then we should be aware that "trance draws on gendered symbols" (Solomon 1992:316). De-gendering does not equate with no gender representations—if gender is important, then not all representations should be male.

#### Analyzing and interpreting the Pecos River art

The data gathered from the west Texas rock art sites do not display distinguishable physical sexual characteristics. The usual image categorized as an anthropomorph/shaman figure consists of an idealized body shape, sometimes with a head form, and often holding a variety of "typical" implements (fig. 6.2). Thus, none of the 673 images classified as shaman figures (Bass 1989; 1992:410) can be directly interpreted as "male," except by interpreting their equipment as being male based.

**Male-associated art.** Nevertheless, the male-based equipment was entered into the data base as representational motifs depicting:

Type 30 – spear with fletching

Type 31 – atlatl (must be curved with notch suggested)

Type 36 – hunting stick

Using circular reasoning, we classified type 36 as a "hunting stick" because it was typically held by the shaman figure; in other words, a straight-line depiction was counted as a "hunting stick" if, and only if, it was held by an anthropomorph. A

composition of images was then calculated. It showed that the vast majority of these representational motifs, held fairly equally in either the right or left arm of the anthropomorphs, were directly associated with shaman figures (Bass 1992:411). While these representational associations might plausibly suggest at least some male art, it is important to note that less than one in six anthropomorphs/shamans actually carried this traditional hunting equipment (116 were counted).

**Female-associated art.** A further examination of the images associated with the shaman figures indicated that another 134 images were not what we had assumed were male-associated images. These depictions had been interpreted as shamanic equipment, but not necessarily as hunting tools, and classified as:

- Type 20 – rounded pads connected to stalks
- Type 21 – rounded pads (without stalks)
- Type 22 – oblong corn-like or wheat-like images

In addition to taking note of non-hunting shamanic equipment, I began to track associations of such motifs as plants, that might plausibly be interpreted as female associated:

- Type 23 – sunbursts (14 depictions found)
- Type 24 – thistles (100 images found) (fig. 6.3)
- Type 25 – other plant-like (24 counted)
- Type 26 – plant-like (52 counted)

**Geometric images.** To determine whether there were other image association clusters, I searched for the following abstract images:

- Type 44 – vertical squiggles
- Type 45 – horizontal squiggles
- Type 46 – diagonal squiggles
- Type 51 – circles or concentric circles
- Type 57 – zigzags (fig. 6.4)
- Type 58 – helix-like images

There are, of course, other abstract images in the Pecos River and Red Monochrome style pictographs, but I chose to track those nonshamanic images that depicted shamanic or entoptic features in other rock art corpora. In addition to locating these images, I investigated their associations with other images—that is, their semiotic/communication patterns. Data gathered from the sites revealed 123 vertical curvilinear designs of the Pecos River style, 1 image associated with the Red Monochrome style painting, and 84 horizontal and 46 diagonal curvilinear designs. The circles/concentric circles numbered 243, with an additional 8 painted in the Red Monochrome style. The zig-

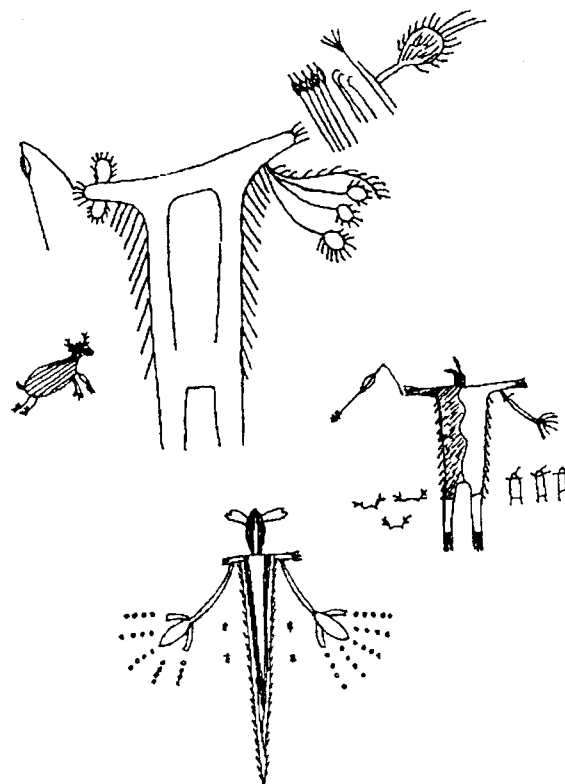


FIGURE 6.2 ANTHROPOMORPH/SHAMAN FIGURES. Schematic drawing of Pecos River style rock art. Drawn from Kirkland and Newcomb 1967:45, fig. 1.

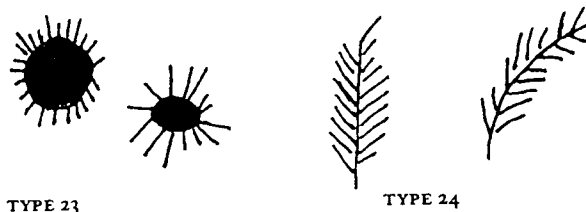


FIGURE 6.3 SUNBURST AND THISTLE MOTIFS. Schematic drawings of idealized types of motif forms classified as type 23, sunburst and type 24, thistle. Bass 1989:111.

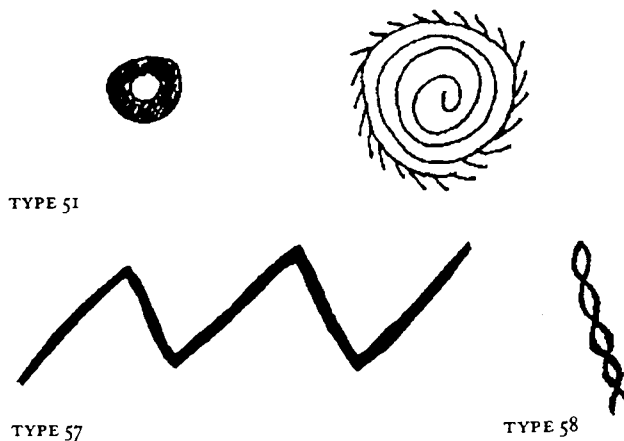


FIGURE 6.4 CIRCLE, ZIGZAG, AND HELIX MOTIFS. Schematic drawings of idealized types of motif forms classified as type 51, circle; type 57, zigzag; and type 58, helix. Bass 1989:114,117.

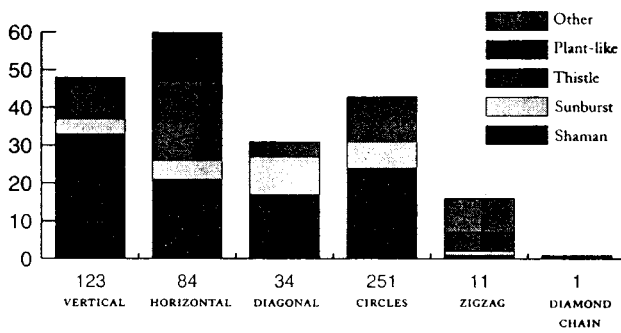


FIGURE 6.5 DIRECT ASSOCIATION GRAPH. Direct association between abstract motif types and iconic image forms found at twenty-four Pecos River rock art sites. The numbers below the abstract motif types are the total number of representations of that type found in the four-year data base. The numbers at the left of the graph represent the absolute numbers of direct associations with the indicated iconic form. "Other" includes representational forms such as quadrupeds and human figures.

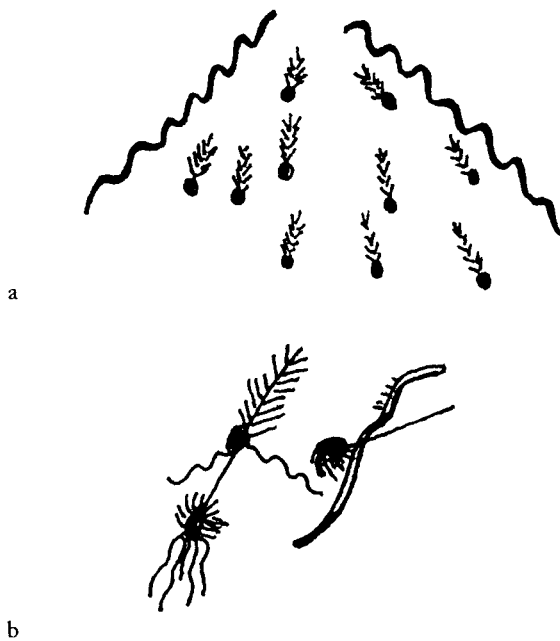


FIGURE 6.6 PANTHER CAVE. Examples of association of the horizontal curvilinear design and plant-like images. *a*, scale  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch to 1 foot; drawn from Kirkland and Newcomb 1967:66, pl. 26, No. 2. *b*, scale  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch to 1 foot; drawn from Kirkland and Newcomb 1967:62, pl. 23. The primary color for both drawings is reddish-brown.

zag figures numbered only 11, and 1 image described as helix-like might also be described as a chain of diamonds.

### Further Interpretations

What explanations might we pursue using these numbers? Obviously, there are many more shaman images than abstract images, and thus our bias towards the emphasis of these figures, whether androcentric or not, may be understandable. The numbers of geometric images, interpreted as possibly entoptic, are small and may not seem to provide very strong evidence for neuropsychological experiences. Yet, we know from the archaeological evidence that trancing did occur and we should still feel

confident in a shamanic origin for the art. The Pecos River style and Red Monochrome style rock art do contain a number of circles and curvilinear designs of various kinds but not many zigzags or diamonds. Is this adequate evidence for inferring some sort of initiation rite depictions as seen in California and other areas of far western North America? Does examination of these images as single figures allow us to design more inclusive de-gendered models for studying rock art images?

The short answer is that looking for these selective single images, even combined with an assumption of entoptic renderings and thus shamanic origins and initiation rite depictions, may not be too useful for such rock art as the Pecos River style which appears to be without direct ethnographic references. Indeed, such an effort would move beyond heuristic use to result in nothing more than an ethnographic analogy lacking any sort of continuity.

It becomes necessary, therefore, to look at the composition of these images in their context. Using the direct association rules developed to frame and contextualize this art, we find that the 123 vertical curvilinear designs are associated with 33 shaman figures, 4 sunburst figures, and 11 thistle images (fig. 6.3). The 84 horizontal designs are associated with 21 shamans, 5 sunburst figures, 21 thistle images, and 13 plant-like images (what the Rice recording team called "vegemorps"). The 34 diagonal curvilinear designs are associated with 17 shamans, 10 sunburst figures, and 4 thistle images. The circles, numbering approximately 251, are associated with 24 shamans, 7 sunburst figures, and 12 thistle images, plus various quadrupeds, humans, and crenelated lines. These pictographs are also found in association with one another. The 11 zigzags are most often associated with human figures—9 times with 1 shaman, 1 sunburst figure, and 5 thistle images. The diamond chain image is associated with a shaman (fig. 6.5).

A close examination of the curvilinear designs associated with the shaman images suggests that they are, in fact, part of the shaman itself—the "undulating streamers. . .flowing down from their upstretched arms" (Turpin 1991a: 271). Thus, these particular images do not seem to be geometric forms.

However, all of these images, except the diamond chain, were associated with thistle motifs, plant-like figures, and sunbursts that might also be interpreted as possible plant elements. Thus, the context of these abstract figures often appears to be plant-like images of a limited variety. For example, the horizontal curvilinear design is associated with 49 plant-like types (21 thistle forms, 5 sunburst figures, and 13 plant-like depictions; fig. 6.6) but only 21 shaman figures.

What we may be seeing are repeated patterns of a constellation of restricted visual images representing some shamanic features. There is a lack of variety in the kind and number of images represented, as well as the way in which they are depicted. Furthermore, these pictorial and associational limitations seem to imply that these are not individually inspired images but rather culturally imposed and curated as a mean-

ingful set over long periods of time. Are stylistic differences hiding a unity of visual themes? These patterns, or constellations of forms, even extend over time in the depiction of circles, some curvilinear designs, and zigzags that are rendered in the Red Monochrome style, traditionally considered more recent than the Pecos River style.

This is not, of course, a new idea, though I am not suggesting a mere form and distribution study. Maybe it is time to look again at traditional motif distribution studies, but combine such evidence with other cognitive archaeology models. Can we determine rules for the use of visual symbols that suggest initiation knowledge or the presence of some other integrating social institutions?

It has been suggested, for example, that the hundreds of masking traditions that produce headdresses, helmet masks, and face masks throughout 3000 miles of West and Central Africa derive from the transmission of a mosaic of forms resulting from a shared history (McNaughton 1991). An example closer to west Texas may be found in the typical inhabitants of northwest Mexico in archaic times. They were subsistence farmers who owed their basic culture to Mesoamerica even though they "had no interaction with that civilization in their daily life" (Phillips 1989:395). The significance of these interpretations is that a limited set or restricted variation of visual symbols may alert us to some of a society's strongest held beliefs. Solveig Turpin has recorded feline shaman images in northern Mexico which are similar in style to the Pecos River shaman. She believes that the feline images indicate a "unified belief system" (1991A:267). Perhaps we need to remind ourselves that prehistory is a process that includes multiple motivations, agents, and activities. This process enables people to obtain and adapt objects, institutions, and points of view from other people. Furthermore, these "other people" could be hundreds or thousands of miles away and never directly encountered (McNaughton 1991:49).

We must, of course, exercise caution against the use of selective single images. It would seem unnecessarily exclusive to focus on single images when our association models suggest we should be looking for a combination of images deliberately curated for their symbolism. Thus, using one constellation of images examined above—curvilinear abstract designs, zigzags, diamond chains, and plant-like figures—we can search for that symbolic reservoir in rock art corpora between west Texas and southern California. For example, in the Alamo Hueco Mountains of southwest New Mexico, the Chihuahuan polychrome abstract paintings depict diamond chains associated with long rakes (often interpreted as representing winged transformations) (Schaafsma 1980:51). At Painted Grotto in New Mexico, we find "fringed concentric ovals, rakes and possible flower elements" (Schaafsma 1980:53). In Grand Gulch, southeastern Utah, depictions of polychrome rakes, zigzags, circles, and thistle-like plant designs are found (Schaafsma 1980:53).

These visual similarities may not be mere happenstance but instead the result of a history we might begin to understand (McNaughton 1991:41). A choice of motif arrangements within a culture is far from random. The use of the direct association tests described above was two-fold: to provide a more inclusive way of viewing the images to get beyond an ethnocentric perspective of seeing this art as androcentric; and, trying to determine whether these "forms" signal some cognitive aspect shared beyond itself, something functional, conceptual, or symbolic (McNaughton 1991:45).

### Conclusions

Although I recognize that it imposes western and feminist perspectives, this interpretation is offered as a way of addressing and assessing the presumed male dominance in this prehistoric culture. If we use a cross-cultural framework anyway, should we not develop models that allow archaeological researchers to compare groups in different ecological, economic, or social contexts to better understand the expression and sources of variations in gender (Wylie 1992:27) and other social constructs?

Keeping in mind that "reliance on multiple lines of evidence is an important and general feature of archaeological reasoning; archaeologists rarely ascribe evidential significance to items taken in isolation" (Wylie 1992:28), future research seems to suggest:

- Corpora of data should be compared to fill in the geographical map of the Southwest, beginning with what David Phillips (1989:374) calls Northern Mexico and moving westward to those bodies of rock art and their associated ethnographic information in southern California and far western North America.
- Models that allow us to track constellations of images and how they change through time and across distance should be developed. We see examples of such constellations of images in the feline figures and the bighorn sheep, as well as in the geographically and chronologically continuous depictions of the zigzag, circle, curvilinear designs, chains of diamonds, and plant-like images.
- The constellation of images should include analyses of the different winged figures and their associations. These images, including the winged shamans, birds, rakes, and fringes, have already been interpreted as possible "spirit helpers" (Schaafsma 1980:71) and should therefore favor an associational model approach as I have suggested.
- Other corpora of art, such as painted pebbles, should perhaps be reexamined. We may be limiting ourselves by analyzing the abstract images on different media and comparing them solely with one another rather than across the different techniques.
- Lastly, models that reflect the gender inclusiveness of ethnographic data, that is, a de-gendering of our unstated as-

assumptions which bias the emphasis on certain specific rock art images for our interpretive studies, should be developed. While meaning in rock art "cannot be seen in isolation from dominant social relations" (Solomon 1992:293), we may have gender-linked some rock art, such as the Pecos River pictographs, where such linking may not have been intended.

I have not been able to show definitively that this art is female associated or made by women. But neither can I conclude that it is male associated or made by men. Therefore, the androcentric bias against which I have been disclaiming from the outset must be recognized and overcome. We must, finally, pay gender-inclusive attention to the centrality of symbolic behavior.

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#### **Notes**

1. Therianthropomorphs were included in the "anthropomorph" motif types, such as "anthropomorph with horned or spiked head" or "anthropomorph with feathered head" and "winged," because they might also depict costumes on people. However, rather than concluding that these were only costume depictions, we grouped together all these images, realizing anthropomorphs might not be the most appropriate description for them but that such a classification provided an easy and useful motif-type device. Thus the term anthropomorph, as used in the data analysis and in this chapter, includes the grouped-motif categories, including therianthropomorphs. We also decided to group together interpretations and explain the images as either "a shaman" or "a shamanic-aided experience" depiction.
2. Because it has been suggested recently that Huichol-like people may have produced the Pecos River style rock art (Boyd 1993), I have included this example despite the fact that the art being produced by the Huichol is not rock art. It is not my purpose to address the visual comparabilities or the necessary assumption of a shared "ideology/cognitive set" across time and space but rather to de-gender that interpretation.
3. The twenty-four sites include non-Pecos River style rock art sites. Usually classified as "Red Monochrome style" rock art, these forms are traditionally deemed to have been produced at a later date than the Pecos River style rock art. For compositional analysis, it was important to count associations of like with like, that is Pecos River style rock art with Pecos River style rock art.