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MYTH, RITUAL AND ROCK ART: COSO DECORATED ANIMAL-HUMANS AND THE ANIMAL MASTER

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Abstract. Recent interpretations of rock art have often focused on these images as a somewhat exclusive record of shamanic experiences. Consideration of decorated animal-human figures (Patterned Body Anthropomorphs - PBAs) within the Coso Rock Art Complex in eastern California, in conjunction with the mythology of Kawaiisu, other Numic and Tubatulabal groups, suggests an alternative (or perhaps complementary) view. Coso PBAs may be representations of an important supernatural — possibly the netherworld master of the animals. This interpretation, if valid, provides further support for Coso rock art as a manifestation of a hunting religion complex. Such a complex prominently featured animal ceremonialism and functioned in part as a means to envision a supernatural agent that had special powers controlling the movements of animals and restoring game to the human world.

Alternative views of the meaning and function of rock art, especially those images depicting large game animals and animal-human confections, have sparked a long-standing debate. A central figure in this debate since the 1980s has been David Lewis-Williams, who has argued that aboriginal rock art is principally associated with a range of beliefs, rituals and experiences directly related to a distinctively shamanistic context (e.g. Lewis-Williams 1981, 1985, 1987, 1997; Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1988, 1999, 2001).¹

The uniquely rich rock art record in the Coso Range of eastern California, considered together with ethnographic testimony, offers an opportunity to contribute to this dialogue. We provide new updated information particularly on the 'Coso Patterned Body Anthropomorphs' that are an important element of

this complex. We propose that Coso images were not exclusively a product of shamanism but were also developed from elements of mythology and ritual.

The Coso Rock Art Complex

Coso Range rock art has been a central part of the shamanism debate since the 1980s. It has played a prominent role in attempts to understand pre-Historic forager iconography (Garfinkel 2006; Gilreath and Hildebrandt 2008; Hildebrandt and McGuire 2002; Keyser and Whitley 2006; McGuire and Hildebrandt 2005; Pearson 2002; Whitley 2005). Many researchers have taken Coso to be a classic test-case and proven reference point supporting the shamanistic perspective on rock art (e.g. Hedges 2001; Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1988, 1989; Whitley 1988a, 1988b, 1992, 1994a, 1994b, 1996). Interpretations of Coso rock art, like other interpretations of archaeological elements, ultimately depend on analogy to relevant ethnographically-recorded human behaviour — rather than purely 'endogenous' explicatory evidence. Thus the ethnographic contexts of shamanism, the recognition of supernatural beings, and the nature of hunting supernaturalism are all keys to this debate.

The Coso Rock Art Complex is located primarily in the Coso Range of eastern California, within the limits of the China Lake Naval Weapons Station (Fig. 1). Most of the rock art lies within a 90-square-mile area, where at least 55 000 petroglyph elements have been identified. Region-wide surveys provide

¹ In the last decade, between 1999 and 2008, Lewis-Williams's position on the role of shamanism and rock art has been somewhat tempered. He indicated recently to us (Lewis-Williams, pers. comm. 2008) that he was not as clearly an opponent of the mythological pole as was generally represented in the literature. To provide a fair appraisal, even in his 1997 paper he argued that a recursive relationship exists where myth must ultimately be assigned causal or determining primacy over trance and altered states (Lewis-Williams 1997: 11). In his more recent references there does seem to be a tendency toward acknowledgement of alternative interpretive platforms. However, in many earlier discussions he clearly treats the vision quest, trance and shamanism model as a dominant basis and chief explanatory platform for rock art.

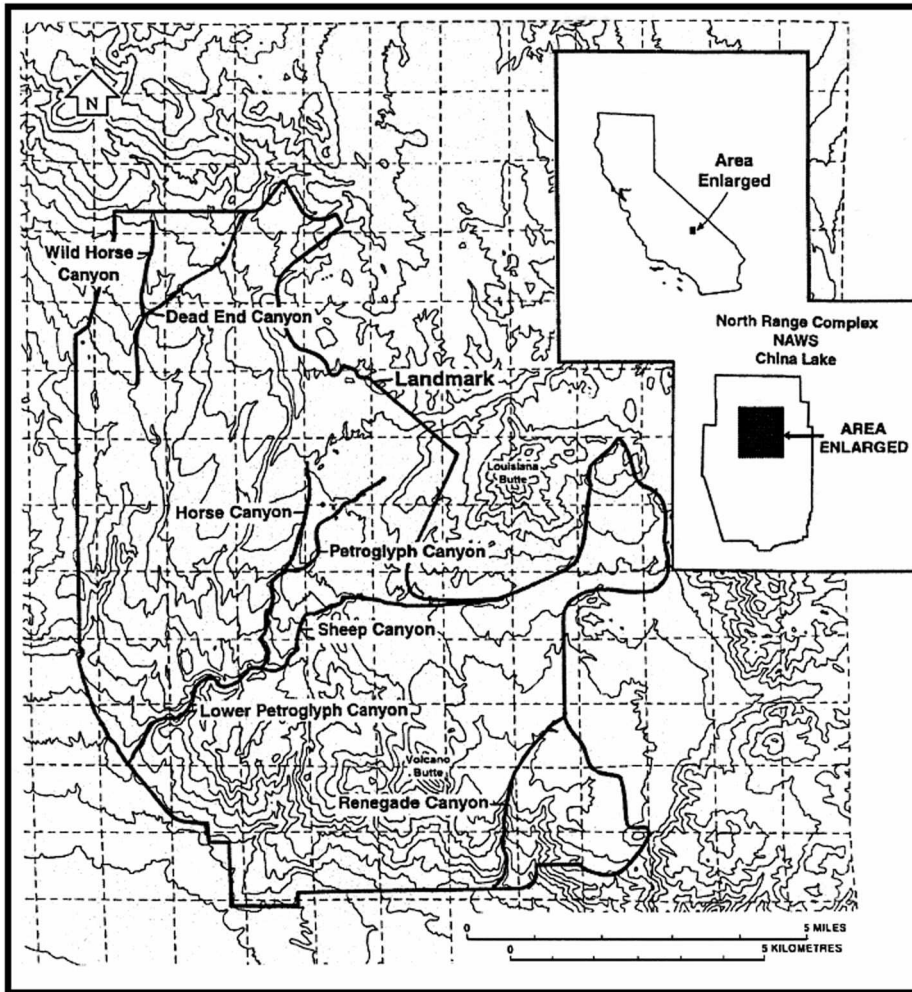


Figure 1. Map showing the locations of the major concentrations of petroglyphs within the Naval Ordnance Test Station at China Lake and indicating the placement of China Lake within California.



Figure 2. Overview of typical Coso Range terrain. Black-brown basalt lava flows are interrupted by steep-walled canyons. Annual rainfall is less than 5 cm per year and much of the area where most of the petroglyphs are located averages around 1600 to 2000 m in elevation

a conservative estimate of more than 100 000 individual elements (Gilreath 1999a, 1999b, 2003; Hildebrandt and McGuire 2002; Keyser and Whitley 2006; Wilke 1980; Russell Kaldenberg pers. comm. 2006). Therefore the Coso complex is one of the largest concentrations of aboriginal rock art in North America (Grant et al. 1968).

Impressive numbers of petroglyphs are found on basalt lava flows, canyon walls and isolated boulders (Figs 2, 3, 4 and 5). The rock surfaces upon which the petroglyphs are found are themselves associated with various sites, including rockshelters, hunting blinds, stone dummy hunters, rock ring houses, milling stations, open-air middens and flake scatters.

One of the remarkable facets of Coso rock art is its naturalism. Based on a vastly underestimated rock art count, Campbell Grant and his colleagues (1968) tallied 14084 glyphs of all kinds in the Coso complex, including 3796 abstract elements and 10 288 naturalistic ones. Portrayals of bighorn sheep are particularly abundant. Bighorn images are known throughout western North America, yet even based on this gross underestimate the 7161 sheep tallied in the major areas of glyph concentrations exceed the total number for all other regions combined (Grant et al. 1968: 34). Of these, 2056 are horns-front, head-only depictions or full-body depictions, often with boat-shaped torso and bifurcated horns. The latter figurative sheep element forms are characteristic hallmarks of the Coso representational style (cf. Schaafsma 1986: 218).

One of the more striking and consistent Coso images is an element known as the Patterned Body Anthropomorph (PBA). These figures are sometimes



Figure 3. PBA petroglyph appearing to have an atlatl or spear, dart foreshaft, concentric circle face, fringed garment, avian legs and feet, associated lizards (horned toad or chuckwalla) and large snake. The central figure has been re-pecked as is evident from the difference in the fresher and brighter patina of the larger PBA element versus the more ancient associated zoomorphic elements.

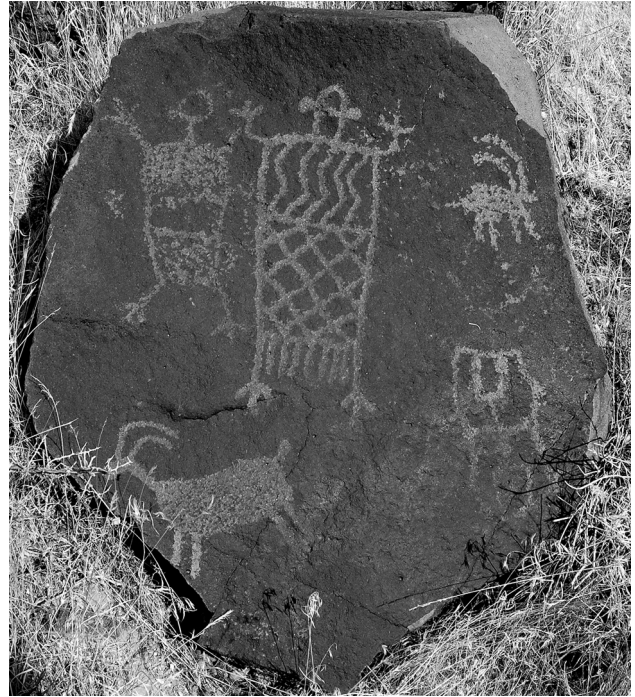


Figure 4. PBA petroglyphs are found in panels rendered on canyon walls and depicted on isolated boulders. PBAs are often manufactured in association with bighorn sheep images, possibly more so than other types of figures. Two PBAs are depicted on this boulder; the smaller one is faint and less distinct. Two bighorn sheep with side-view swept back horns also adorn the boulder.



Figure 5. Coso late period (c. 300–1300 C.E.) bighorn sheep in Big Petroglyph Canyon. The largest sheep is just over 2 m in length (nose to end of tail) and is superimposed over an older PBA. In this photo, part of the PBA's vertical body can be seen between the two sheep just to the right of the upper sheep's rear legs.

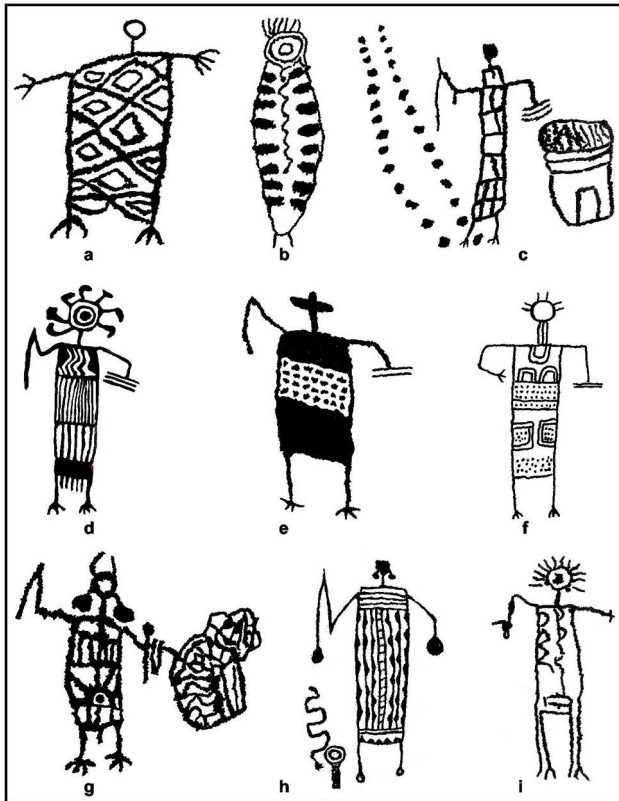


Figure 6.

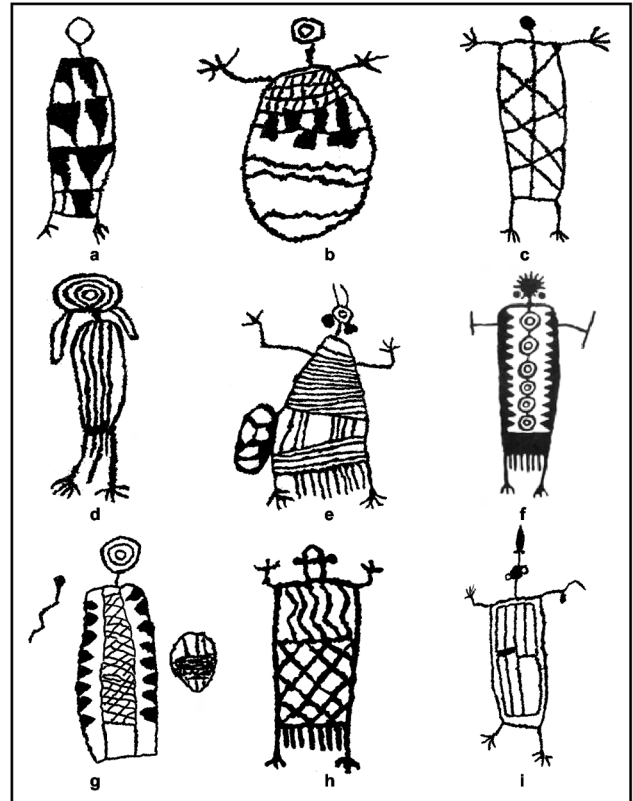


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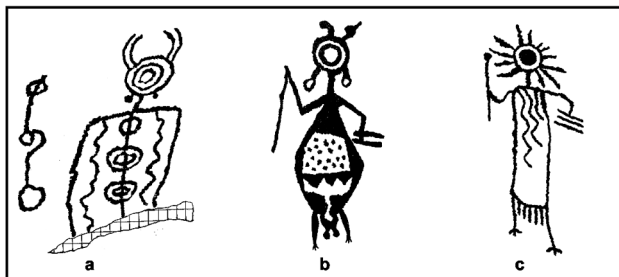


Figure 8.

prominently placed on high outcrops at the heads of the Coso canyons just below the rims of the narrows (Figs 6, 7 and 8). Grant and his colleagues (1968) tallied 745 PBAs in their initial study of the Coso rock drawings. Recent analysis by Caroline Maddock (2009), more narrowly focused, intensively documented and classified nearly 450 such images in Lower Renegade (Little Petroglyph), Upper Renegade, Big Petroglyph and Sheep Canyons. The present discussion is based largely on Maddock's sample, but is amplified by PBAs identified during fieldwork in more remote and less well-known areas (Garfinkel and Pringle 2004).

PBAs are elaborate renderings — mixing human and animal characteristics (Figs 6 and 8). They are always decorated, never plain, and never solid-bodied. PBAs are diverse, no two images being identical, although designs found in one PBA often occur in another. They usually have elongated rectangular or (infrequently) ovoid torsos embellished with stripes, checks, circles, chevrons, dots, meandering lines, triangles, bars or

Figures 6, 7 and 8. Sketches of characteristic and representative examples of Coso Range Patterned Body Anthropomorph petroglyphs. Images come from elements located within the rock art galleries in Little Petroglyph, Big Petroglyph and Sheep Canyons. Images range in size from the largest at 1 m in length and the smallest being just under 30 cm.

cross-hatching. In many instances, at the base of the torso, is a series of short vertical lines, sometimes likened to a fringe on a garment or what is commonly identified as a 'rake' design. Many figures have two thin, straight, perpendicular legs that end in claw-like, taloned 'bird' feet (Figs 6a, 6c, 6d, 6e, 6f, 6g, 7c, 7e, 7f, 7h, 7i, 8c, and 9).

The PBA figure, when it exhibits upper appendages, often has outstretched limbs extending directly from the shoulders (Figs 6a, 7c, 7h and 7i). The right arm is frequently bent upward, and the left arm is often extended (Figs 6c, 6d, 6g, 6h, 8b, 7c and 8c). In some instances, at the end of the bent right arm is a long, slender, vertical 'rod' (Figures 6d, 6g, and 8b). Sometimes the rod contains a knob in its midsection, an apparent rendering of a weighted atlatl (spear-throwing device). Sometimes the long rod is attached to a bulbous object that may be meant to depict a club, bullroarer, rattle or hunting bolo (Fig. 6h). Often the long, slender pole appears more akin to a staff, cane, crook or spear (Figs 8b and 8c). The shorter arm on the figures is most often the left and that appendage frequently holds a single rod or set of multiple rods

(Figs 3, 6c and 8c). These rods are shorter than the implement held in the other appendage. The short rods may extend either vertically or horizontally, and they appear to represent dart foreshafts (Fig. 6d). In the American Southwest, similar imagery has been more realistically depicted as definite projectiles, their tips still attached to the foreshafts (Grant et al. 1968: 37, middle figure, letter b). Sometimes a 'lizard', 'snake', 'blanket', small 'human effigy', 'bighorn sheep' or 'turtle' is hung upon one of the two arms of the PBA or placed in close association (Fig. 3).

A circular head is shown atop the PBA's short neck. The head never has facial features such as eyes, nose, mouth or ears. It is frequently an unfilled, or, rarely, a solid circular ring (Figs 7a and 7c). Often the head is a nested series of two or more concentric circles (Figs 6d, 7b, 7g, 8a, 8b and 8c), but very rarely is shown as a spiral. Slender projections frequently crown the top and sides of the head. These may be simple narrow spikes (Figs 6f and 6i), but they may also be right-angled plumes akin to the topknots of quail (Fig. 6d and 8a). These crown feathers are depicted on many of the most elaborately rendered figures. In a few instances the head adornments appear to morph into dart points attached to foreshafts (Fig. 7i). In still other examples, there are apparent hair whorls on the sides of the head similar to the Hopi style of hair adornment for unwed girls.

Prehistorians agree that the Coso occupation began during the terminal Pleistocene/early Holocene era, based on obsidian hydration dates and diagnostic projectile point forms (Garfinkel et al. 2008; Gilreath and Hildebrandt 1997). However, large numbers of highly stylised, naturalistic Coso images may have been made during a relatively brief period (cf. Garfinkel et al. 2007; Gilreath and Hildebrandt 2008). Many archaeologists argue that most or all of PBA rock art production dates from prior to c. 1000–1300 C.E. (Garfinkel 2007; Gilreath 1999a, 1999b, 2003; Gilreath and Hildebrandt 2008; Gold 2005; Hildebrandt and McGuire 2002; Whitley 1994a, 1994b; but see Keyser and Whitley 2006 for a contrary perspective). In fact, most Coso PBA figures appear to antedate the introduction of the bow and arrow, c. 200–300 C.E., because a substantial number of the PBA images (n = 103) can be interpreted as holding atlatls or atlatl-like implements, or have arms positioned in a conventionalised manner typified for atlatl use.

The ethnolinguistic identity of the makers of Coso rock art is uncertain, but it is likely that they were speakers of proto-Northern Uto-Aztecan (cf. Gilreath and Hildebrandt 2008; Golla 2007: 74; Sutton 2000: 300, Map 14.3). Northern Uto-Aztecan is a division of the

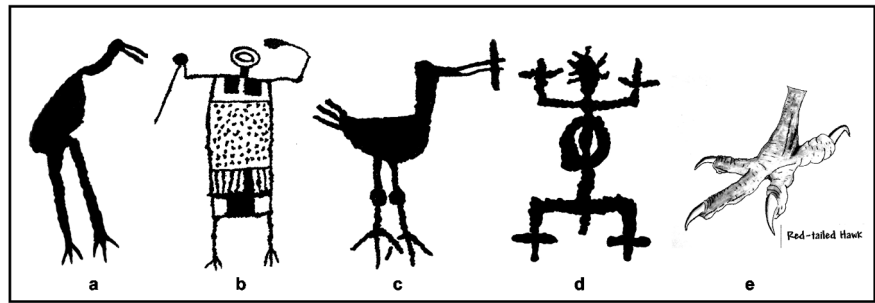


Figure 9. Comparison of an actual bird foot (e) with implied bird feet (a, b, c) and three-digit non-bird feet (d) in various rock drawings throughout the American Southwest.

a- Wading bird petroglyph, Hohokam Culture, Sears Point, Arizona.

b- Coso petroglyph PBA with bird-like feet, Upper Renegade Canyon, Coso Range.

c- Wading bird petroglyph, Puerco Ruin, Arizona.

d- Anthropomorph petroglyph, Picacho Mountains, Arizona.

e- Drawing of red-tailed hawk foot based on photograph.

greater Uto-Aztecan language family situated partly in Mexico. Linguists and prehistorians generally agree that 5000 or more years ago the Uto-Aztecan languages branched into southern and northern divisions. Northern Uto-Aztecan most likely migrated from Mexico into an area located near the interface of the southern Sierra Nevada and western Mojave Desert. About two millennia afterwards (c. 1000 BP) Northern Uto-Aztecan split into four branches — Tubatulabal, Hopic, Takic and Numic. Tubatulabal and Numic remained in the vicinity of their ancestors while Hopic moved east into the American Southwest and Takic migrated further south within southern California.

In the Historic period, the Coso Range was occupied by Kawaiisu and Western Shoshone speakers, belonging to the southern and central Numic groups, respectively. Coso rock art is found in the same general region where linguists and archaeologists posit the location of the proto-Numic homeland (Fowler 1972; Lamb 1958; Madsen and Rhode 1994). According to many scholars, using glottochronological estimates and other criteria, Numic groups began to spread out from eastern California around 1000 C.E., expanding their territories to the north, west and east, and ultimately dispersing throughout the entire Great Basin (Bettinger and Baumhoff 1982; Lamb 1958; Madsen and Rhode 1994). If there was some level of ethnolinguistic continuity in the Coso region during the last 2000–3000 years, and if some elements of native religion and cultural traditions were highly conservative, this would strengthen the argument for the relevance of Historic Numic and broader northern Uto-Aztecan ethnographic data for interpreting Coso rock art.²

2 Archaeological evidence from the Coso region seems to support the thesis that some elements of native religion and cultural traditions were, in fact, highly conservative. Experimental XRF dating (Lytle 2008; Lytle et al. 2006)

Interpreting the Coso PBAs

In a pioneering attempt to infer meaning for the Coso PBAs, Grant and his colleagues (1968: 39) suggest that 'these figures almost certainly represent the costumed principals of the sheep cult and may have been shamans'. David S. Whitley has taken this interpretation one step further, arguing that these images are undoubtedly shamans in costume (Whitley 1998a, 1998b, 2000a, 2000b, 2005). This interpretation emphasised what Whitley felt is the whirlwind arrangement of quail feathers on a few figures ($n = 10$). He further argued that the PBA's unique interior designs were phosphenic patterns seen by a shaman when in trance and that the bird-claw feet, concentric circle faces and whirlwind quail plumes were allusions to shamanic flight (Whitley 1998a: 157). Ken Hedges (2007) reiterated that the body decorations of the Coso PBAs represent images seen during trances, but that the figures represent culturally construed images that potentially possess multivalent meanings. Hedges suggested that Coso PBAs could be embodiments of deities, spirit beings, or the shamans who produced the images (Hedges 2007: 8–11).

A key issue is whether such rock art images were produced exclusively by ritual specialists (shamans) or by community members in general. Ethnographic data for indigenous peoples of California and the Great Basin indicate that rock art creation was sometimes associated with activities other than shamanism, such as puberty ceremonies (Earle 2003; Hedges 2001; Kehoe 2002: 74).³ In southern California, jimsonweed or toloache (*Datura* sp.) use was also correlated with dreaming as a *personal* means for ordinary people to acquire life-long spirit helpers. According to Ake Hultkrantz (1987a) a central element of traditional Numic ideology was the acquisition of supernatural power (*puha*) and guardian spirits; *every young man* was expected to seek visions and supernatural power. Furthermore, in traditional Numic society, the boundary line between common visionaries, medicine men and shamanic specialists was often slight (Hultkrantz 1987a: 32). One could only differentiate a commoner from a ritual specialist by the number

of his spiritual assistants. This situation reflected the great emphasis in accounts of Chemehuevi, Southern Paiute and other southern Numic religion on the shaman as a specialised curer as opposed to a generalised ritual leader. Of possible further note is that the terms for a person with supernatural powers in Numic languages – *huviya-ga-di* / *poha-ga-di* / *'uu-poha-ga-di* – have as their root the word *'aga*, which means to paint or to rub (Zigmond et al. 1990). This provides a strong suggestion that authors of paintings and petroglyphs were individuals who had acquired or were actively acquiring supernatural power. The abundance of Coso petroglyphs and the great amount of labour they represent also argue against their exclusive production by an elite class of ritual specialists commonly identified as shamans (Bard and Busby 1974; Garfinkel 2006: 230).

Ritual symbols, whether expressed verbally or visually, are recognised as frequently multivalent or multi-referential, yet with all of their meanings often bound together. Studies in symbolic anthropology indicate that culturally knowledgeable natives tend to manipulate the interpretation of these polysemous symbols in pursuit of their own social ends (Turner 1967, 1968). With this perspective it can be argued that through concurrent possession of multiple meanings, rock art symbolism served an integrative function by providing a common ground between individuals of different social backgrounds, including commoners or non-specialists as well as ritualists.

Mythology, rock art and Uto-Aztecan religious practices

Whitley (1998a, 2000a, 2000b) has consistently argued that much of California rock art does *not* portray mythic characters or events. He suggested that Numic groups of the Great Basin, as well as the Chumash and Yokuts of California, strongly differentiated between ritual, ceremony and shamanism. Personal interaction with the spirit world was said to occur only in a sacred time – a place distinct from mythic time, which had existed before humans were created. Hence, Whitley argued, when the Numa, Chumash or Yokuts entered the supernatural realm encountering spirit beings, they did not meet with mythic immortals, because to do so they would have had to return and re-experience the creation of the world (Whitley 1996: 16–17, 1998a: 163, 2000b: 25). However, in our view, this categorical distinction between the supernatural realm and the mythic realm in respect to community hortatory ritual and personal religious participation can be questioned. This distinction hinges in part on a Western concept of the unfolding of time – creation past and present, not fully in accord with various traditional native time concepts (Laird 1976: 44).

Two further assertions have been made that are relevant to our discussion. First, it has been argued that the production of rock art was the particular sphere of the shaman operating exclusively as a

leads us to believe that sheep images were a central part of the Coso rock art tradition from its inception (c. 8000 B.C.E. or earlier) to its demise (c. 1000–1300 C.E.). Additionally, archaeological dating, including single component obsidian hydration, temporal placement of subject matter (seriation, superimposition, and atlatl versus bow and arrow depictions), associated time diagnostic artefacts and experimental XRF analysis support the conclusion that Coso PBA figures followed a somewhat similar iconographic pattern that endured from 7000 to 2000 years ago over the course of five millennia. This remarkably stable and conservative cultural tradition featured this prominent religious symbol that endured for 5000 years.

3 See Kehoe's (2002) extensive critique of Eliade's (1964) rather oversimplified definition of shamanism and trancing.

private individual rather than the art being a product of community ritual. It has been proposed that the anthropomorphic figures in rock art represent the shaman's self-representation during personal 'travels' to a world of non-ordinary reality. That perspective is at variance with an interpretation that emphasises these images as supernatural beings associated with creation and continuing manifestations of the supernatural realm. We present here an alternative scenario where anthropomorphic figures can be associated with this class of supernatural beings.

The region encompassing southern California rock art traditions includes the aboriginal territories of the Chumash, Southern Valley Yokuts, Takic and Numic groups (the latter two groups of Uto-Aztecan linguistic affiliation). The ethnographic data available supporting the interpretation of rock art content in southern California has been relatively limited. However, original field-notes of data collected by John Peabody Harrington, Alfred Kroeber and other ethnographers permit some interpretation of specific rock art motifs. In a number of cases, rock art content has been associated with supernatural beings linked to earth-creation events and human-supernatural interaction in more recent times (Gilreath 2007).

Interpretations of the Dinwoody tradition rock art in the Wind River area of Wyoming, near the north-eastern limit of Numic territory, provide a case for Numic depictions in rock art of supernatural beings and a suggestive analogue for Coso PBAs (Francis and Loendorf 2002; Keyser and Klassen 2001; Loendorf 1999). The supernatural figures believed to be represented by Dinwoody petroglyph motifs include Cannibal Owl, Water Ghosts, Water Ghost Woman, Split Boy, Buttocks Bouncers, Cannibal Giant and Water Buffalo. The Historic Wind River Shoshone knew the locations of Dinwoody rock art sites and identified them as places of power (*poha-kahni*). They attributed the production of the figures to water babies or mountain spirits, and such statements have been seen as a traditional way of identifying the images as a product of shamans. Similarities between Dinwoody and Coso motifs include patterned bodies, interior lines, static ventral views and outstretched arms. Many Dinwoody figures also have elongated bodies (longer than they are wide, and in that respect are similar to the Coso PBAs), apparent avian lower appendages (talons), a lower fringe embellishment or rake design, associated hunting weaponry (projectile points, bows, arrows) and 'power lines'. Most researchers agree that the Dinwoody figures are iconic representations of mythical beings, supernatural deities rather than humans (*contra* Hedges 2007, who defined the images as shamans).

The Kawaiisu themselves provide a rare example of a documented rock art site ethnographically linked to myth (cf. Sutton 1981, 1982). Creation Cave (also known as Rock House, *ti-gahni*, CA-KER-508 or Inspiration Cave; see Knight 1994) is located in Sand

Canyon in the Tehachapi Mountains within *Tomo Kahni* State Historic Park. The polychrome paintings there are rendered in mostly red, black and white, and depict a number of anthropomorphic as well as zoomorphic creatures (bears, turtles, bighorn sheep and snakes). The cave is mentioned in two separate Kawaiisu myths. This rock art site is described as the location where the animal people conducted celebrations, and it was here that the world was created; a mortar hole marks the spot. Grizzly Bear called the animals together and the various animals then decided what they wanted to be and each painted his own picture (Zigmond 1977: 76, 1980: 41).

In sum, we do not support the categorical exclusion of mythic supernaturals as a source for California rock art imagery. Examples from several other regions in western North America also suggest the contrary (e.g. Gilreath 2007; Hudson and Lee 1984; Hyder 1989; Lee 1977; McCreery and Malotki 1994; Potter 2004). Additionally, elements of oral tradition and mythology sometimes reveal relict or residual features representing important themes from an archaic hunting religion cosmology.

In the case of Takic, Numic, Tubatulabal and other groups of Uto-Aztecan linguistic affiliation, these groups developed varied traditions of religious belief and practice. It has been observed that while considerable diversity exists in religious beliefs and practices of Great Basin Numic groups, some of them traditionally emphasised chthonic (underworld) supernatural beings, the importance of caves, caverns and other 'underground' places. Corridors of supernatural power and an array of valued resources were found in sacred underworld settings. Laird mentions the importance of caves as places of supernatural power for the Chemehuevi (1976: 38–9, 46). They were associated with inherited sacred songs, power in curing, a class of cave spirits, and the supernatural powers of the cave itself. Kelly and Fowler (1986) also mentions supernatural underground travel among the Southern Paiute. Liljeblad (1986: 652–3) discusses the chthonic supernatural underworld among Numic groups and describes its association with a master-of-animals type supernatural being:

The fabulous idea of an otherworld or a secluded place from which game animals emerge ... or are finally released by the culture hero ... was commonly held in most parts of native North America, and can be assigned to the same category of mythological tales as other cosmogonic mythology (Thompson 1929: 348). Independently of mythology, the belief in accidental visits to the mysterious world below was found throughout the Great Basin ..., reflected in a particular class of testimonial legends describing subterranean existence.

The prototype of these legends, with local variants, relating visits to the lower world ..., occurs throughout a common cultural area comprising the western Great Basin ... Caves and other named localities, which remain sacred sites for the shamanistic power quest ..., are believed to have

served formerly as entrances to the legendary underground pathway. The recurrent theme in these stories is the adventures of a hunter following a wounded animal to the lower world and his return after a time spent with the dwellers below (Liljeblad 1986: 652).

As we shall see, this chthonic tradition is not only relevant to Numic ideas about the supernatural world experienced by human beings, and possibly expressed in rock art, but also to the association of rock art to caves and portals to the underworld. This connection was noted in a comment by John Peabody Harrington about the association of Kawaiisu rock art with a portal through a rock face leading to an underground domain inhabited by supernatural animals (Harrington 1986: Vol. III: Reel 98: 151).

The Animal Master

Many traditional hunting cultures represent an immortal Master of Animals as a prominent religious figure (Campbell 1988: 77–78; Harrod 2000: 47–60; Hultkrantz 1961, 1987a; Lee and Daly 1999; McNeil 2002, 2005, 2008; Miller 1983: 69; Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971; Sloten 1965; Whitley 2000b: 79). The central idea is that culturally important animals have their own supernatural ruler. That deity is a protector of animals and offers them to or withholds them from human hunters. It is believed that game animals cannot be killed without the permission of this deity and that animals are in fact immortals themselves, able to regenerate and return in renewed bodies after their death. It is the Animal Master that was the *agent* responsible for the regeneration of the animals and facilitated their reintroduction into the human world from their underworld homes.

Carling Malouf (1966: 4) observed that Numic religious practices had much in common with more complex societies and exhibited animal ceremonialism, group religious ceremonies and associated big game hunting rites (but see Steward 1940, 1941). Ritual adepts often functioned in these group ceremonies, and shamanistic activities had a meaningful relationship with certain hunting rites (Hultkrantz 1986: 631; Malouf 1966). Numic oral traditions make specific reference to instances where game animals were reborn after their bones were properly treated and their supernatural powers harnessed for the increase of game (Hultkrantz 1987a: 63, 1987b).

The Ute, Southern Paiute, Shoshone and Kawaiisu believed that a supernatural being was able to transform into a bird (crow, raven or small hawk) and controlled all animals, including bear, bighorn sheep, elk and deer. This mythic supernatural was sometimes associated with lower divinities that provided game (Harris 1940: 56; Hultkrantz 1986, 1987a, 1987b; Steward 1941: 230).

The Ute and Southern Paiute thought that all animals were controlled by a snow-white Master of the Animals, who lived high in the mountains, walked around in cloudy weather, and was able to transform

into a raven (Hultkrantz 1986). A central ceremonial pole, originally a deciduous tree, was represented as a metaphor for death and rebirth. The tree goes through a process of 'dying' (shedding its leaves and going into a relatively dormant state in winter) and then is reborn anew in the spring. The pole is a means of travel, a road for the Master of the Animals, helping to provide a safe return, means of reincarnation, and an aid for leading game animals back from the underworld to the tribal hunting grounds in the spring (Hultkrantz 1987a, 1987b; McNeil 2005, 2008).⁴

The Western Shoshone identified a coyote-like supernatural or dwarf spirit that opened the pen or cave where Wolf had kept the wild animals and let them run away (Hultkrantz 1961; Steward 1941: 230, 1943: 271). In some stories, the animals had been secluded by the Crow deity, with both bird and human qualities, and it was Weasel who let them go. The release of the animals, in some variants, was done specifically to benefit Numic groups (Lowie 1924: 62–4; Thompson 1929: 292–3; Steward 1936: 372–3).

According to ethnographic information obtained across half a century by Maurice Zigmond, Stephen Cappannari and Judy Barras (Barras 1984: 30; Bibby 1999; Zigmond 1977, 1980) an Animal Master, called Yahwera, is a recurrent figure in Kawaiisu cosmology. Yahwera figures prominently in nine Kawaiisu myths, and discussions with contemporary Kawaiisu (Harold Williams and Luther Girado, pers. comm. with Kawaiisu elders 2008) confirm the prominence of this supernatural creature in oral tradition and cosmology. Yahwera tales also closely parallel the text of a story told by Kawaiisu northern neighbours – the Tubatulabal (Voegelin 1935: 207). The following composite storyline can be extracted from Kawaiisu oral narratives:

This is a true story. Long ago there was a man. The grandmother of Emma Williams had in fact seen this man and told Emma this story. The man was sick or perhaps he just wanted luck. So to cure himself or to get that luck he took jimsonweed (alternatively

4 Symbolic oppositions between animals and humans figure critically in Southern Numic ritual and oral traditions and are at the very heart of their religious thoughts and their perspective on human mortality and the proper relations between humans and the natural world (Franklin and Bunte 1996). Mythic stories provide important clues to the symbolism and functions of ritual performances. Unless proper rituals were carried out, game animals will not let themselves be caught. Certain ritual dances were a way of showing gratitude and propitiation for the blessings of the annual rains and for human and animal fertility. Key aspects of symbolism and cosmology underlie and unify Numic ritual practice. The human domain is brought together in unison with the natural world and its annual cycle through dramatic personification of animals. It is a Numic tenet that only through animal sacrifice can the turning of the seasons, the cycle of the day and night, and the revitalisation of human and animal life be accomplished (cf. Franklin and Bunte 1996).

fasted, swallowed tobacco, walked naked through stinging nettles, or ingested ants wrapped in eagle down). He then went to a place in Back Canyon (or another cave) and found the opening to the animal underworld, Yahwera's home. At that hole, that goes down into the mountain, was a rock that opened and closed.

The man waited and slipped through quickly. He saw many different animals — deer, bear etc. These were animal-people who spoke just like the Kawaiisu. Near the mouth of the tunnel the man saw bows and arrows. These were the weapons by which deer were killed. The deer leave them when they go inside Yahwera's house. The man also saw the horns of all the deer that have been killed. Yahwera said that the deer were not really dead.

There were many different kinds of luck on the cave walls. The man saw a bow and arrow of a good hunter in a prominent place and the bows and arrows of inferior hunters in subordinate positions. The man took something for his luck. The man began to walk through the tunnel. He stumbled and climbed over a large gopher snake (*kogo*). Farther along he came to a rattlesnake, as big as a log (*tugu-baziiti-bi*) and he climbed over it. Then there was a brown bear (*mo'orii-zhi*) that he passed by and then he came to a grizzly bear (*pogwiti*) and went past it. Then he didn't see any other animals.

He kept walking and he saw Yahwera. Yahwera wore a mountain quail feather blanket. He looked like a hawk.

Yahwera asked the man, 'What do you want?' The man said he was sick and wanted to get well. Yahwera knew all about his illness without being told. Yahwera gave him some acorn

mush (alternatively pinyon or deer meat). Every time he ate some the same amount reappeared. He couldn't eat it all. He gave it back to Yahwera.

Context	Element	Number of occurrences ^a	Narratives ^b
Human-related	Kawaiisu humans	9	1, 2, 3a, 3b, 4a, 4c, 4d, 5a, 5b
	Sickness	6	3a, 4a, 4c
	Luck in life/hunt	3	3b, 4d
	Tobacco	2	4b, 4d
	Jimsonweed	2	4a, 4c
	Red ants	2	4a, 4c
	Nettles	2	4a, 4c
	Medicine	2	3a, 4a
	Fasting	1	4b
	Dreams	1	1
Yahwera-related	Yahwera	17	1, 2, 3a, 4a, 4c, 4d, 5a, 5b
	Songs	13	1, 3a, 4a, 4b
	Mountain quail	10	2, 4a, 5a, 5b
	Underworld home	5	2, 3a, 3b, 4a, 4b
	Bird	4	2, 4a, 5a, 5b
	Evil	3	2, 5a, 5b
	Mountain quail blanket	2	4a, 5b
	Shape-shifter	1	2
	Indestructible	1	2
	Little hawk	1	2
	Androgyny	1	2
	Mountain quail dress	1	5a
Other	Bears	12	1, 3a, 3b, 4a, 4b, 4c, 4d
	Big snake	10	1, 3a, 4a, 4b, 4c
	Deer	8	1, 3a, 3b, 4a, 4c, 4d, 5a
	Hunting equipment	8	1, 4a, 4b, 4d
	Deceased animals	6	1, 3, 3a, 3b, 4a, 4b
	Inexhaustible food	5	3a, 3b, 4a, 4b, 4c
	Acorn cup/mush	5	1, 3a, 3b, 4a, 4c, 5a
	Tunnel/hole	5	3a, 4a, 4b, 4c
	Pinyon food	4	3b, 4a, 4b, 4d
	Water portal	3	3b, 4b, 4c
	Deer meat	2	4a, 4c
	Cave	2	1, 2
	Coyote/bobcat/fox	1	1
	Desert exit portal	1	1
	Big rock	1	5a

^a Number of instances where the key word or concept is used in the narratives. Items are often mentioned multiple times in different contexts within a single story, and each mention is tallied individually.

^b 1 = Barras 1984: 30; 2 = Zigmond 1977: 69–71; 3 = Zigmond 1977: 93–94 (two versions), 4 = Zigmond 1980: 175–179 (three versions); 5 = Zigmond 1980: 181–183 (two versions). Zigmond (1980: 175–183) identified the individuals associated with these narratives: Emma Williams, Setimo Girado, Marie Girado and John Marcus. Andy Greene also shared a similar account via audio-taped interview (Bibby 1999). Contemporary individuals who have knowledge of Yahwera and shared information with the authors were Kawaiisu elders Harold Williams and Luther Girado. See Garfinkel and Williams (2009) for discussion of contemporary Kawaiisu culture and cosmology.

Table 1. Themes of the Kawaiisu Yahwera narratives.

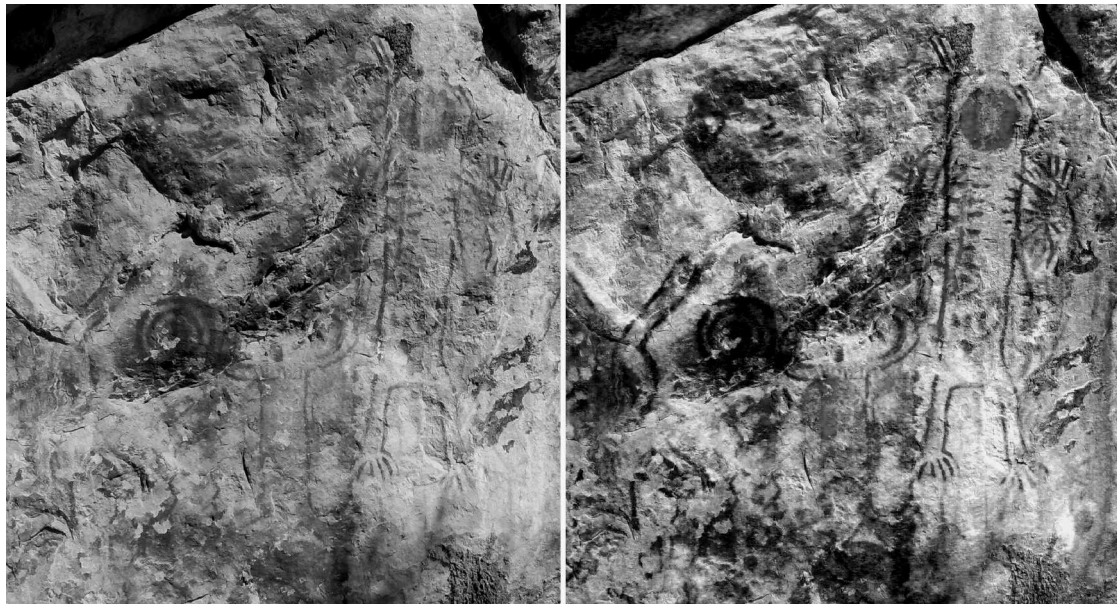


Figure 10. *Yahwera Kahniina, home of the Kawaiisu Animal Master and location of the entrance portal to the Animal Underworld. Back Canyon pictogram panel is located on a columnar island of limestone in Walker Basin, California. Right plate is an unretouched panel as it looks currently, left plate is panel with 'd-stretch' software program applied so that images are enhanced (Harmon 2009). Central figure is 1.1 m in height. For colour version, see back cover of this issue.*

Yahwera took him into a room where he kept the medicine. Yahwera asked him which of the songs he wanted and Yahwera named all the songs. The man took a song. The man was ready to return home, so he kept going to the other end of the tunnel. He saw water that was like a window but it wasn't water, he passed through and didn't get wet. He came out and found he was far away from the entrance and wasn't sick anymore. He had been gone for a long time and his relatives didn't know where he had been.

An analysis of the nine Yahwera narratives reveals certain recurrent themes (Table 1). The elements most frequently mentioned are the Yahwera deity, songs, quail, bears, a big snake, Kawaiisu humans, deer and hunting equipment. Repetition of narrative elements supports the importance of these key themes.

Several themes in these narratives may have relevance to interpretation of Coso PBA rock art. The Animal Master immortal takes the form of a bird and was described as a hawk. Yahwera also has a special relationship with mountain quail, and in three narratives (two Kawaiisu and one Tubatulabal) he fathers a profusion of quail progeny by his human spouse. Yahwera lives in a cave, hole or tunnel deep within the earth, where the spirits of deceased game animals dwell. He is guarded by a large snake. He is able to help humans who visit when they are sick or need assistance in life and can transmit healing powers through gifts of song and/or dance. Yahwera is associated with hunting arrows that remain after the game animals (bighorn, deer, fox etc.) leave to be reborn. His human visitors can obtain good luck in hunting by taking the hunting weapons littered about the walls of the cave. Yahwera is a provider of an inexhaustible

food supply, either pinyon nuts, acorns or deer meat, magically replenished from a never-empty food vessel. Yahwera stories represent journeys of troubled individuals using various substances or techniques to enter into the rocks where Yahwera lives and ultimately to exit at another portal that may be distant from the entrance.

The Yahwera figure and Kawaiisu rock art

The Yahwera figure described above is associated with portals to the underworld that in several versions of the story are linked to rock art sites. One of the sites is found in Back Canyon in Walker Basin, in the vicinity of the Tehachapi Mountains, and is associated with a portal to the Animal Master's domain (Fig. 10). This is a place called *Yahwe'era Kahniina* (Yahwera's House). A spring in the vicinity of Paiute Rancheria is at or near an entrance to this supernatural being's home (Zigmond 1977: 75). A number of sacred stories identify this location as the place associated with tales of the Animal Master — Yahwera (Barras 1984; Whitley 2000b: 78–79; Zigmond 1977, 1980). A monochromatic red pictogram panel (CA-KER-2412) is located there. This prominent pictogram site includes a central figure, a face-forward, frontal view of a 1.1-m-tall animal-human with concentric circle head, feathered or horned headdress, patterned body (?), and claw-like animal feet and hands (Fig. 10; Whitley 2000b: 78). Associated with this large main figure is a meandering snake design that is 90 cm in length. The Kawaiisu rock art site at Creation Cave, mentioned above, is also associated with a door or portal to the underworld, and with a chthonic domain of supernatural animals

that were painted at the cave at the site of the portal.

Links between Coso PBAs and Yahwera narratives

The context, typical characteristics and predominant features of Coso PBAs are reviewed in this following section. Our analysis considers the possible concordance of Kawaiisu oral tradition with certain key characteristics of Coso PBAs. These possible correlations between the rock art figures and myth elements suggest the plausible interpretation of the PBAs as supernaturals. Striking similarities in Kawaiisu oral traditions and the thematic and characteristic features of certain Coso PBA rock drawings are identified and described. Functional analogues between these two data sets lead us to propose a model for the possible meaning and function of these Coso petroglyphs.

Superimposition (Figs 5 and 11)

Klaus Wellman (1979) analysed superimposition of certain motif categories on 106 Coso rock drawing panels. PBAs were found to be the motif most frequently superimposed by the classic, Coso-style, boat-shaped body bighorn (cf. Grant et al. 1968: 56, figure on p. 57 and topmost figure p. 68; Maddock 2009: Fig. 49). Nearly 80% of the PBAs in Wellman's sample were overlain by Coso-style sheep or very large, nearly life-sized sheep images (this paper: Figs 5 and 11; Wellman 1979: Fig. 6). His statistical evaluations and broader ethnographic analogues led him to conclude that PBA figures held one of the most exalted statuses among the Coso artisans and that it was considered to be most beneficial for PBAs to be overlain by large bighorn or classic Coso-style sheep.

Therefore the Coso PBAs appear to have been most dominant during an earlier stage of rock art that preceded the proliferation of Coso-style bighorn sheep renderings that we believe were most commonly produced during the era from c. 200 to 1000/1300 C.E. Although not directly relevant to our Yahwera analogue, the superimposition of PBAs by the dominant motif of Coso bighorn seems to support the ritual importance that PBAs must have played in Coso cosmology and their continued significance through time.

Association with portal-like settings (Fig. 8a)

Human visitors come to Yahwera's home through the rock. Petroglyphs may be an attempt to commemorate that journey into the rock or an effort to entice the Animal Master to release the souls of the regenerated game animals back into the human world. Coso

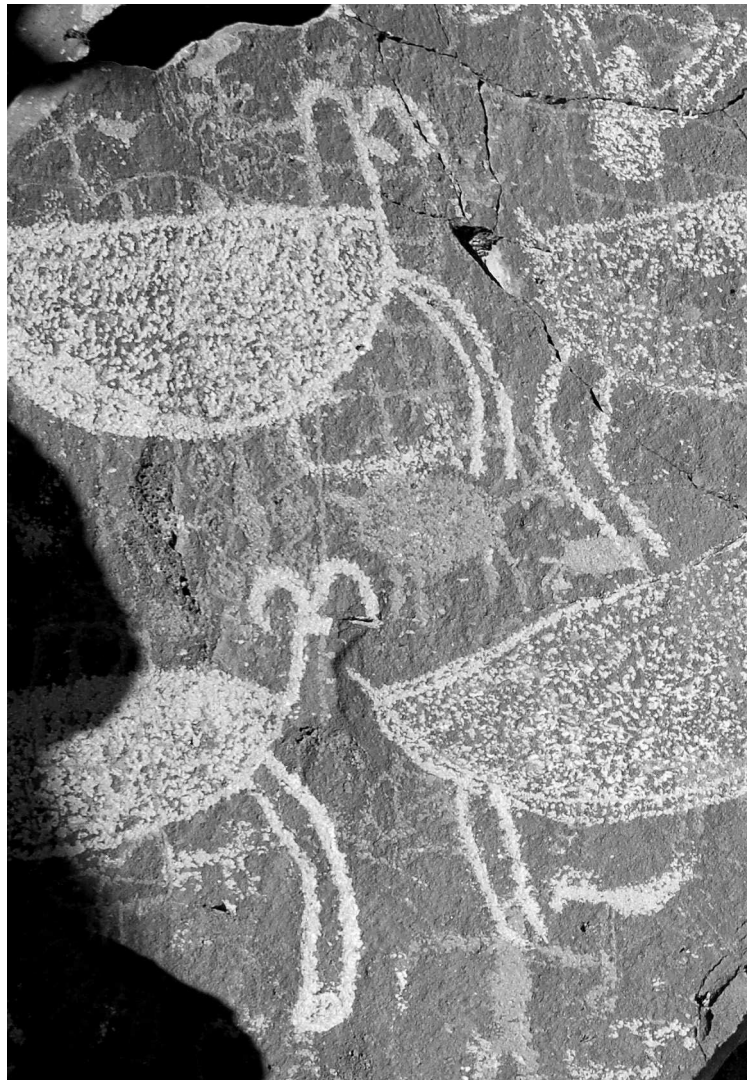


Figure 11. Portion of panel with four 'grand' Coso style bighorn sheep in Big Petroglyph Canyon. Sheep are about 1.7 m in length from nose to tail. Sheep are superimposed over an older PBA. Uppermost sheep has a PBA with head and shoulders just above flat back and legs under boat-shaped belly. Grand sheep date to the final late period of the Coso representational petroglyph style (c. 300–1300 C.E.).

PBA imagery has a three-dimensional quality made visible by the way it sometimes wraps, folds or even disappears into and around the cracks and crevices of boulders and rockshelters.

Concentric circles (Figs 3, 6b, 6d, 7g, 8a, 8b and 9b)

The faces of the Coso PBA figures are often represented as sets of concentric circles. Such an image is sometimes identified as a typical 'phosphene' — a visual image seen when the eyes are closed (Hedges 1985: 1). The concentric circle symbol has also been understood as a metaphor for a tunnel, path or passageway (Waters 1963). A concentric circle face is also characteristic of the Kawaiisu Yahwera image that adorns the Back Canyon portal known as Yahwera's home (Figure 10).

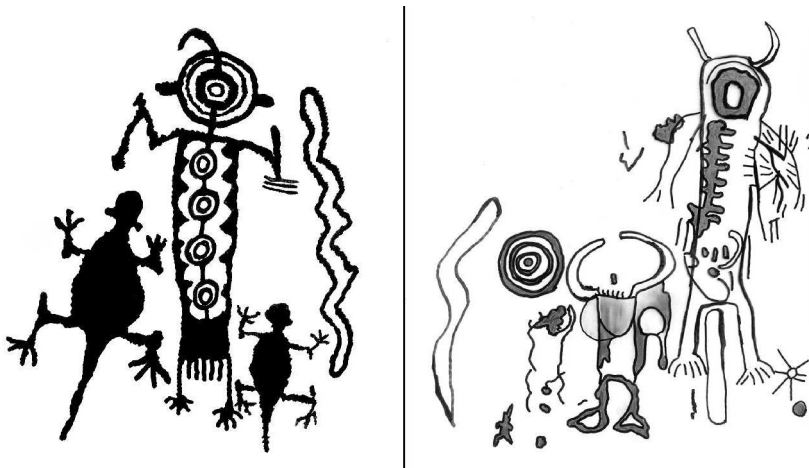


Figure 12. Pen and ink drawing of Yahwera panel with a side-by-side comparison with Coso PBA panel from Little Petroglyph Canyon (aka Renegade Canyon). Scale of Coso PBA enlarged to allow a direct comparison with Back Canyon image.

Feathers and quail (Figs 3, 6b, 6d, 6f, 6i, 7f, 8a, 8b, 8c and 12)

Many Native American cosmologies hold that human existence was designed by creators who had human qualities but who were subsequently transformed into animals. Hence there is a close affinity between people and animals. Native Americans tended to imitate animals in dress, action and projective thought.

Feathers are particularly characteristic of divine beings and supernatural powers. We have identified 103 PBA images in Coso rock art that have variously shaped projections, appearing to be feathers, emanating from their heads. In a number of instances ($n=23$), it is rather apparent that the distinctive forms of these elements represent the topknot feathers of quail (cf. Hedges 2001: 129). These are sometimes very realistically depicted as angled rays, while others are drawn more crudely as a single curved line or sharply angled emanation. Some PBAs have many such embellishments: more than fifty images have between six and twenty such feathers. Others have one to five feathers. Many of these feathers are readily identifiable as distinctive quail top knots. Some figures have their feathers replaced by realistically rendered dart points, and others have no such head adornment at all. The most finely executed and detailed rendering of a quail-plumed PBA is the icon of Little Petroglyph Canyon that serves as the emblem for both the Maturango Museum and the American Rock Art Research Association (Fig. 3). That Coso PBA figure bears a number of similarities to the Kawaiisu Yahwera image in Back Canyon (Fig. 12).

The Chemehuevi had a class of ritual specialists known as bighorn sheep dreamers (Kelly 1936: 138–142; Laird 1980). These sheep dreamers were especially adept at *charming game animals*. Hence, these were *shamans of the hunt* (cf. Hedges 2001: 131). Kelly (1936: 142) describes these sheep dreamer / game charmer /

hunt shamans as having visions of rain, bullroarers, and *quail-tufted caps of mountain sheep hide*. These caps were the most prestigious headpiece of the Chemehuevi. This mountain hat (*kaitcoxo*) was a critical component of the costume for a hunter or chief (Kelly and Fowler 1986: 373, Fig. 2, bottom left; Laird 1976: 6–7). The hat was traditionally sewn with a prominent tuft of many feathers — *exclusively the crests of quail*.

Quail-feathers were only used for the adornment of special baskets (*taarabigadi*) exclusively used by the Kawaiisu for the preparation of a jimsonweed brew used by vision-seekers to enter the world of the supernatural (Zigmond 1978). Hence ethnographic references for both the Chemehuevi and Kawaiisu point to

significant association of quail plumes for their vision seekers. These feathers also appear to be prominent metaphors, symbols relating to prestige, the control of game animals and hunting success.

Thirteen Coso PBAs appear to be holding or wearing blankets that may represent mountain quail blankets (Figs 3, 4, 6b, 6d, 7c, 7h and 8c; cf. Maddock 2009). In one instance, these blankets are what have been conventionally identified as medicine bags. These fringed squares or trapezoids have also been variously interpreted as bags holding talismans, as in a shaman's bundle, or as full-body hunting disguises (Heizer and Hester 1974; Nissen 1982).

Birds, raptors and talons (Fig. 9)

Images of birds are abundantly represented in the rock art of North America. Nevertheless, bird-human confections, zoomorphic birdmen or human figures impersonating birds are rare (*sensu* Grant 1993). Birds have claw-like feet, or talons (Fig. 9). The number of toes on birds can vary, with the majority of birds having four toes. Most birds have three toes facing frontward and one smaller toe in the rear facing backwards. Birds also have thin, stick-like lower limbs and ankles.

Bird-like lower appendages are typical of most all Coso PBAs: 266 of the PBAs illustrated in Maddock's (2009) study have discernible feet, and 192 of those (72.1%) have avian, claw-like talons. *All* of the Coso PBAs, that include depictions of their legs, have stick-like legs and ankles. Significantly, in other rock art that is interpreted as depicting the trance visions and images of shamans in the American Southwest, such avian appendages are rare to nonexistent (Malotki 2007: 76–87, Figs 139, 142, 153, 154, 155 and 158; McCreery and Malotki 1994: 13–33).

We would argue that the predominance of bird-like lower appendages on Coso PBAs distinguishes these

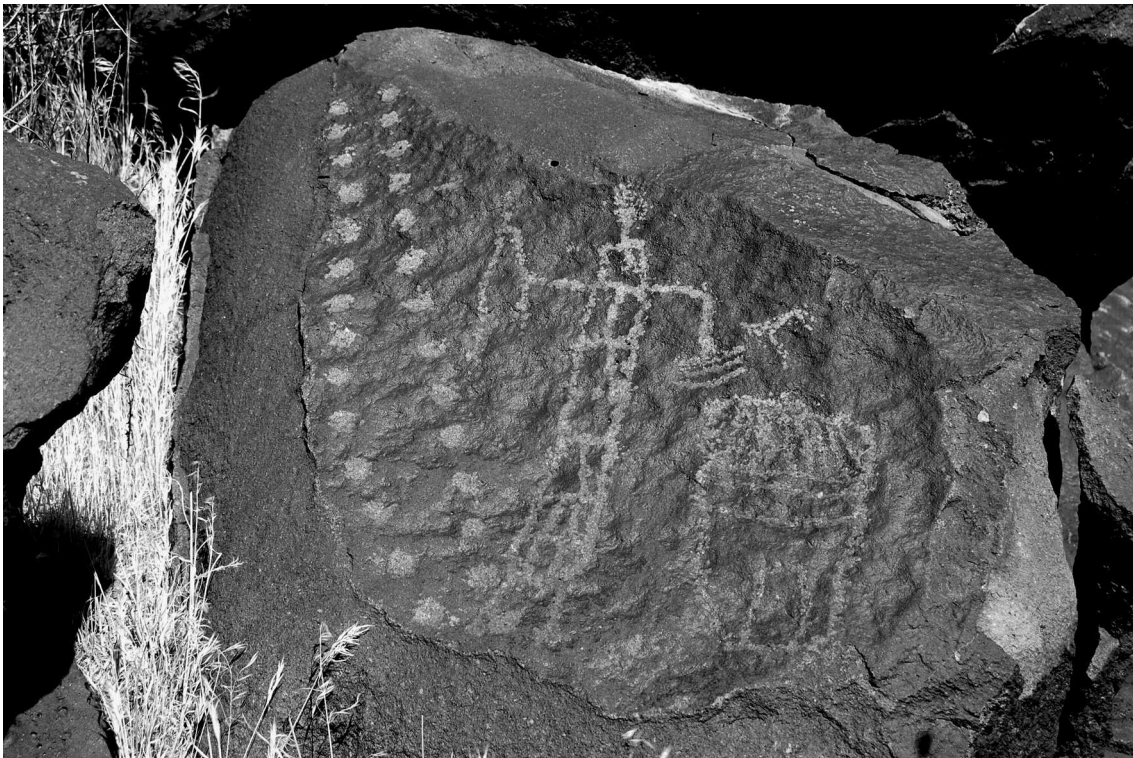


Figure 13. Photograph of Coso PBA from Big Petroglyph Canyon. Image has a basket-like element to the right of the central figure. Central PBA about 60 cm in length and situated on an individual boulder. Figure has typical posture for atlatl use and holds a long 'rod' in right hand and three 'dart foreshafts' in left. Anthropomorph has typical avian legs and feet.

images from those of typical humans. Images of human beings in the Coso area, even those serving a ritualistic or religious function, are often rendered with solid rather than patterned bodies and exhibit rounded, bulbous feet (with or without toes) but without the avian lower appendages, stick-like lower limbs or talons (cf. Maddock 2009). The pattern of solid-body anthropomorphs with club-like feet is also common to the Dinwoody rock art assemblage. Additionally, in both the Dinwoody and Coso cases, the human figures lack extensive head adornments such as elaborate headdresses, feathers or weaponry. In the Coso case, we are often able to readily discriminate the distinctly human renditions on the basis of easily recognisable hands, fingers, feet and toes.

In the Animal Master accounts and the descriptions of Yahwera we are often told that this being is a raptor or scavenger (small hawk, raven, crow etc.). The former animal is often symbolic of skill in hunting and the latter are associated with death as scavengers are carrion eaters. Both characteristics are likely metaphors associated with the Animal Master.

Hunting weaponry (Figs 6c, 6g, 6h, 7i, 8b, 8c and 13)

The Coso PBAs often carry hunting equipment — an atlatl, long spear or dart, staff or wand in one hand (*poro*?), and dart foreshafts in the other (cf. Grant et al. 1968: 37, middle figures). A few Coso figures have realistically rendered dart points projecting from

their heads or shoulders (Garfinkel and Pringle 2004; Fig. 4). The flexed-arm posture, seen in 103 of the 428 PBAs in Maddock's database, appears to be exclusively associated with atlatl-bearing figures. Alternatively, some of the long rods may be staffs, wands or batons (*sensu poro* as discussed below).

The Chemehuevi staff of power or sacred crook (*poro*) was a long wooden rod that had magical properties (Laird 1976: 31, 1984: 273–5; Musser-Lopez 1983). In mythic times this was the essential equipment for a shaman or an animal-human supernatural and it *was the means used to bring the dead back to life* (Laird 1976: 31, 1984: 273–5). Since Yahwera was responsible for revivifying game animals he would, most logically, be depicted with his heraldic staff — a wand with supernatural powers. Ruth Musser-Lopez (1983), when discussing the meaning, function, and symbolism of the *poro* with Carobeth Laird, comments that the *poro* was an archetypal object of great power with no associated regalia of any kind (e.g. no feathers or talismans) and was the badge of office for the shaman and also for the immortal animal-people, Wolf, Coyote and Woodrat.

The *poro* was the most sacred artefact of the mythic era (Carobeth Laird, pers. comm. 1981, cited in Musser-Lopez 1983: 262). All the immortals used their supernatural staffs (*poro*) in a variety of ways to at times *tunnel through mountains*, revive the dead, heal the sick, and even to kill game. The former attribute

seems to imply a relationship to our discussion of an association with portal-like settings and tunnels as discussed above and the latter functions clearly identify the use of the *poro* as a way to kill, heal, and also revivify the deceased.

Source of food (Fig. 13)

Associated with four PBA figures in Coso rock drawings are the depictions of what appear to be many small seeds, food bowls and baskets (Maddock 2009: Figs 17i, 32 f, 38b and 45b). Such depictions might engender a meaning relating to fecundity, increase or renewal and would naturally be associated with the revivification role of the Animal Master.

Androgyny and the rake or fringe design (Figs 6d, 7d, 7e, 7f and 7h)

Some Kawaiisu accounts portray the Animal Master as an androgynous being, recognised in human dreams in either male or female form. Six PBA images of the Coso Range exhibit human phalli (Figs 6g and 7d). Some Coso PBA figures exhibit characteristic feminine elements (Figs 7b and 8b). Elements of both sexes are found on certain figures. However, in most instances PBAs do not allow us to confidently distinguish gender.

A rake design is most often exhibited at the lower portions of PBA figures (Figs 3, 4, 6d, 7c, 7d, 7h and 8c). Some researchers have suggested that this element is a 'pubic fringe' and is characteristic of the feminine gender. Alternative meanings have been attached to this 'rake' as a symbol of rain or a rain curtain (Patterson 1992: 165), or the fringe on a costume (Grant et al. 1968: 39). In Maddock's (2009) sample, nine out of nearly 450 PBA figures have pendant labia (Fig. 8b), 17 have hair whorls (akin to the Hopi unmarried woman's hairstyle), and 58 have the distinctive fringe or rake element.

Hence, this fringe embellishment appears to be an important decorative element on Coso PBAs. It has been noted that fringe on such images might mark the bird-like nature of these iconic creatures. The costume fringe might represent and replace the feathers of a bird's wings. This fringe element would create an effect akin to real feathers since the individual fringes hang loose and move with the motion of the garment. This bottommost fringe has also been suggested as symbolising the connection of the figure with the underworld.

Conclusions

Kawaiisu ethnographic data and Coso PBA characteristics suggest to us that these petroglyph elements were not exclusively self-representations of shamans. Instead, they may additionally represent mythic supernaturals, particularly the Master of the Animals. This interpretation does not exclude the images having other meanings or that the representations were simultaneously intended as depictions of shamans

commemorating their experiences in altered states of consciousness. Various levels of meaning may have merged within the symbolism of Great Basin rock art, simultaneously signifying both the *source* and *agent* of supernatural power and the dream and trance world that gave humans access to the Game Animal Master. Therefore, it appears likely that Coso PBA artisans were engaged in rituals that served to activate the mythological past, evoking and retrieving a supernatural agent capable of restoring and revivifying game animals and replenishing the world. It seems reasonable that local mythologies would have profoundly influenced the character and interpretation of the personal visions or dreams experienced by the Coso people. Significantly, some researchers acknowledge that local mythology could be of great importance in contributing to our understanding of the meanings of specific rock art production (Bahn and Helvenston 2005: 106).

Recently Gilreath and Hildebrandt (2008) have argued that Coso rock art is best understood in its archaeological context and as a ritualistic by-product of the pre-Historic hunting practices of the local indigenous population. We heartily agree with that perspective (in most points) and Garfinkel (2006, 2007) has emphasised the centrality of a hunting religion and increase rites as an explanatory platform for understanding the imagery produced by Coso bighorn sheep cult artisans.⁵ The present discussion points out how a key element of the Coso imagery, the PBA, may have depicted the Animal Master — a central supernatural agent that figures prominently in hunting cultures worldwide. However, we differ slightly in recommending the judicious use of native ethnographic testimony from Numic and Northern Uto-Aztecan populations and advocate a cautious cross-cultural study of forager hunting religions in order to provide useful analogues and an explanatory platform for proper interpretation of Coso iconography.

5 Growing evidence supports the notion that bighorn hunting, a hunting religion and sheep cult complex characterised the Coso region and perhaps certain other areas of the larger Great Basin during the period from c. 2000 B.C.E. to 300 C.E. (*sensu* Coulam and Schroedl 2004; Garfinkel 2006). In the Coso Range, a variety of data strongly indicate that sheep were over-harvested and depleted during this time (Garfinkel et al. 2009). It has been proposed that bighorn depictions in Coso rock art are attempts to increase the depleted sheep population by supernatural means and that a decreasing sheep population led to, and was closely correlated with, increasing rock art production (Garfinkel et al. 2007, 2009; Gilreath and Hildebrandt 2008). Gilreath and Hildebrandt (2008) and Garfinkel (2006, 2007) point to the fact that hunting efficiency increased during the Haiwee Period (c. 300–1300 C.E.) due to the introduction of the bow and arrow and the use of dogs in pursuit of large game. However, Garfinkel et al. (2009) emphasise that the depletion of bighorn is recognised during this period not by an increase, but by a *diminution* in the relative emphasis on artiodactyl exploitation as seen in the archaeofaunal record of eastern California.

Just as Gilreath and Hildebrandt (2008) would not divorce Coso rock art from its archaeological context, we would not like to disenfranchise the imagery from its appropriate religious and ideological context (cf. Garfinkel 2006).

Importantly Coso PBA figures appear to have been eclipsed over time by a new central focus on bighorn imagery beginning about the time of the introduction of the bow and arrow (c. 200–300 C.E.). Therefore, rock art renderings that originally functioned principally in a culture where hunting was a dominant religious element, were eventually redefined. Afterwards bighorn representations must have had significantly more to do with associations of fecundity for plants and smaller game animals, also likely rain, and the general well-being of the Coso world, since these changes in the native use of symbols were correlated with subsistence shifts away from upland large game hunting to a greater (though not exclusive) emphasis on small game and hard seeds (Garfinkel et al. 2009; Gilreath and Hildebrandt 2008).⁶

6 The precise relationship of rock art production, hunting rites and the Animal Master is rarely represented in ethnographic literature. However, two examples of such associations are known to us. The Southern Siberian Evenki held hunting rites each year at a sacred rock or tree and crafted paintings on these rocks (Lahema 2005). The Evenki images were commonly zoomorphic, resembling the head of an elk, and the rocks were then believed to be 'numinous' (alive), inhabited by an elk deity who could bestow good luck to the hunter. McNeil (2005) comments that such 'shamanising' activities were not restricted to Evenki ritualists but were activities conducted by many community members during hunting and revival rituals. These Siberian hunting rites, identified ethnographically as singing songs and narrating stories, employed an animal intermediary (bear ancestor) to solicit *Kheglan*, the Mistress of the Animals, to release the souls of the unborn animals into the human world (McNeil 2005, 2008). Reichel-Dolmatoff identifies rock paintings of the Tukano and rock drawings made by their ancestors in Colombia, South America. The Tukano identify these images as promoting game animal fertility and they are located at the Animal Master's homes (1971: plates between pp. 168–169, and p. 247). Petroglyphs at Tukano hunting sites commemorate mythological themes. Ritualists communicate with the Animal Master at these rock houses. Tukano ask for herds of game animals and good hunting, and negotiate with the Animal Master to replenish game. The ritualist goes to the Animal Master's home and draws game, fertility symbols and the mythic snake that brought man to earth. Tukano recognise these actions as *invoking the aid of the Animal Master on behalf of the hunter*, with or sometimes without the artist having participated in ecstatic vision questing (cf. Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971). Tukano drawings depict many types of animals, including the divine king of beasts — the jaguar. The rock paintings are made precisely to reaffirm requests to the Animal Master, to foster fecundity of game, and to promote the fertilising power of the jaguar, an earthly representative of their supreme deity — the Sun. These actions occur at the source where the animals are reborn and repopulate the earth (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971: 82–3).

It was during this stage (c. 200–1300 C.E.) of Coso rock art production when we see the fluorescence of bighorn renderings both in the number of sheep images and their elaboration.⁷ Correlated with this period are a series of epic droughts that occurred from c. 970 to 1350 C.E. (Stine 1990, 1994, 1995; Jones et al. 2004). It appears that PBA imagery may have still played a minor, yet significant, role in ritual and symbolism during this era since some PBA renderings, especially those that were most well-executed and often located in prominent positions, were refreshed through re-pecking. This was done perhaps as a means to re-ignite their supernatural properties.

Nevertheless, growing evidence supports the notion that Coso artisans were unsuccessful in their efforts attempting to adapt to changing environmental and sociocultural conditions. It is probable that the immigration of Numic speakers from the Owens Valley may have been the final blow to their cultural system (cf. Garfinkel 2007). This population influx may have ultimately resulted in the competitive exclusion and extinction of the cultural pattern of the northern Uto-Aztecan, pre-Numic, Coso artisans. Alternatively this competition for scarce resources may have led to their amalgamation into a new cultural expression that

7 Grand, over-sized sheep images have been argued to be of the highest order in the symbolism of the Coso artisans (Wellman 1979: 554; Whitley 1988a, 1988b). In a review of the Numic lexicon, Goss (1977) opined that bighorn were 'boss' of the ungulates and might indicate a referent for *all* large game animals (cf. Nissen 1995: 72). After analysing twenty-five variants of Numic origin myths, Myers (1997: 44) concluded that bighorn served as a topmost metaphor due to their natural habitat associated with mountain tops. It would seem reasonable that the ubiquity of bighorn sheep imagery was meant to be a symbol representing *not only sheep*, but other animals as well, thus accounting for why there are so many Coso bighorn compared to images of other game (Nissen 1982). Wellman averred that the largest of the bighorn images assumed the most exalted status (Wellman 1979: 554). Due to its extreme agility and association with health and strength, the bighorn image may have also represented the chief protector of the Coso domain and perhaps the fertilising energy of nature. The former might be a natural expression as the largest game in the Desert West. Further, we wonder aloud if the exceptional abundance of Coso bighorn imagery might result from this creature being considered a principal animal intermediary analogous to the position of the bear in Northern Hemisphere cosmology (cf. Hallowell 1926; Lynda McNeil pers. comm. 2008). Significantly, Chemehuevi bighorn dreamers were identified as shamans of the hunt and the only ritualists who *had power over animals* (Kelly 1939). For the Chemehuevi, a mountain sheep was a good spirit familiar and exclusively associated with curing shamans (Laird 1976: 32–38, 1984). Laird (1974: 22) notes that bighorn and deer were *the only two game animals of the immortals and the only such animals who had been shamans in the dawn era and as such could function as shaman's familiars in present time*. Among the Nevada Shoshone, it was the shaman dreaming of mountain sheep who had power to cure disease (Steward 1941: 259).

did not feature the central position of *rock drawings* (apparently being replaced by pictograms and scratched renderings) within their ideology (Garfinkel et al. 2007, 2009; Gilreath and Hildebrandt 2008). However, we are fortunate to have a remarkable record of their artistic achievements preserved in the haunting and mysterious images adorning the canyons of the Coso Range of eastern California.

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