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MEANING OF ABSTRACT SIGNS?

People are sitting around waterholes, with spears and shields.

Australian Aboriginal painting, acrylic on canvas, cm. 30x 52 (by Judda, ca. 1990).

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PATTERNED BODY ANTHRO- POMORPHS OF THE COSOS: HOW MIGHT CONCENTRIC CIRCLE PSYCHOGRAMS FUN- CTION IN ETHNOGRAPHIC SCHEMES?

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Abstract

In this paper we examine deep time and space parallels in rock art patterns pertaining to the patterned body anthropomorph iconic motif (PBA) found in Coso Range rock art sites in eastern California. The authors propose that recurring geometrical patterns found on some of the more representational or identifiable shapes in the region reveal the presence of an ancient set of visual motifs that continue to be found in oral tradition and the symbolic culture of descendant Numic and broader Uto-Aztecan native peoples, including the Hopi and Huichol. Coso PBAs have become a prominent archetypical image of California and American rock art, evinced by their use as trademarks for both the Maturango Museum in Ridgecrest, California and as employed by the United States national rock art organization, the American Rock Art Research Association (ARARA). The present research investigates the possible evolution of ideas and interpretations associated with these abstract figures. We explore the PBA as a formalized perception of a deity and/or supra-mundane being, as an adorant shaman, animal master/mistress, and bearer

of the 'eye of god' or nierika motif of southern Mesoamerican, Uto-Aztecan ethnic groups.

Keywords adorant, animal master, aboriginal cosmology, Coso, Huichol, Kawaiisu, *nierika*, Numic, *ojo de dios*, PBA, psychogram, rock art, Uto-Aztecan, *Yahwera*

Introduction: Reasons Behind a Study of Coso Petroglyphs

The rock art of the Coso Range, Inyo county, eastern California, consists of arresting visual images and patterns that were carved principally by pre-Numic aboriginal populations mostly during a time period from about 4000 BC or earlier through AD 1000/1300 (Hildebrandt and McGuire 2002; Hildebrandt and Ruby 2006; Rogers 2010; Gilreath 2003; Garfinkel 2006, 2007; Garfinkel et al. 2009, 2010). Apart from abstract geometrical patterns, the Coso rock art assemblage includes certain elements that are called patterned-body anthropomorphs or PBAs. The Coso Range rock art locality is well known by anthropological, archaeological and rock art scholars, since it contains the greatest concentration of prehistoric rock drawings in the western hemisphere.

Art throughout the native world always relies on metaphor and is a tether for artefacts, ritual regalia and symbols. Any artistic motif can be connected with many cultural contexts (Wagner 1981: 38). Following Rappaport (1979, 1999), a trifold framework of meanings may apply. The simplest and most straightforward is object and semantic distinctions. These are commonly part of simple descriptive catalogues of rock art elements (such as animal, bird, projectile point, snake, etc). Higher-order meanings are discovered through pattern recognition employing quantification and formal analysis. The latter might relate to the disco-

very of the conventionalized or iconic images of the classic, boat-bodied, Coso-style bighorn sheep. Finally, at the highest levels of interpretive analysis are the most sophisticated contextual meanings, embedded in native cosmology, ceremony and ritual, that hinge on a deep and abiding understanding of a particular culture's internal relational framework. The latter is of course the most difficult and most conjectural and often is based on ethnographic and ethnohistoric analogies and cross-cultural studies of comparative religious thought.

The authors of this study are attempting to tease out these deeper constructs by employing a bevy of hermeneutical techniques that rely on cognitive neuroscience, and on an in-depth study of sacred narrative and religious ontology. We argue that the Coso PBAs are indeed prehistoric images containing deep-seated, cognitive, templates or patterns that seem to communicate shamanistic (or even pre-shamanistic) messages or codes. The function of these icons might, in certain cases, be rather transparent: to focus the viewer's attention and encourage participation in ritual or performance (Renfrew 1994).

With respect to Coso PBAs, sufficient documentation and analysis have been completed so that we might attempt to visually deconstruct them. Such an analysis may show that the figures might best be considered semiotic assemblies (Leroi-Gourhan 1982; Anati 1994). Our research seems to suggest that such iconic representations exhibit homologous attributes across a wide variety of distinctive ethnic groups, not only in the immediate environs of the Coso region but also across a much wider region, including the American southwest, Lower Pecos in Texas and within the cultures of Mexico, including the Huichol of northern Mexico and into the Baja Peninsula within the great mural rock art tradition.

Coso Geographical Location

Geographically, Coso rock art is in the Coso Range that is bounded by Rose Valley in eastern California and the Indian Wells Valley of the western Mojave Desert, and is further located in the southwestern corner of the Great Basin of the western United States (Whitley 1998a: 109; Whitley and Dorn 1984: 310, 1987; Garfinkel and Austin 2011: 454). The peak period of Coso rock art production was also a period of intensive hunter-gatherer activity in this region, where native peoples lived for thousands of years. The prehistoric Coso were the predecessors of contemporary Native Californians of Timbeshah-Shoshone (aka Panamint, Koso or Coso), Owens Valley Paiute and Kawaiisu heritage (Zigmond 1977: 59; Hultkrantz 1987: 34; Garfinkel 2006: 203; Gilreath and Hildebrandt 2008: 4; Garfinkel and Austin 2011: 453).

What are Coso Patterned-Body Anthropomorphs (PBAs)?

The Coso petroglyphs form an abundant and distinctive complex consisting of an estimated 100,000 examples of discreet visual diagrams (Garfinkel et al. 2009: 2; Whitley 1998a, 1998b; Maddock 2015: 1-2). There are two distinctive classes of elements within Coso. First, there are abstract geometricals: these may be either curvilinear or rectilinear Euclidean patterns, which do not seem to have any easily specified or transparent semantic reference.

However, perhaps the more interesting features of Coso petroglyphs pertain to their appearance as representationals (Heizer and Baumhoff 1962: 202; Wilcox 1973: 31; Whitley 1998a, 1998b). Representationals include PBAs, which comprise arrays that resemble animal-human figures. These figures conflate animal and human attributes (like bird talons in place of feet) and exhibit bodily embellishments executed

with abstract designs and patterns (like rings or shafts or outlines of hunting tools like the atlatl, a dart throwing board). For more contemporary scholars like Whitley and Garfinkel, the PBA form might potentially be deciphered or discerned in sufficient detail to possibly make out what the artist was most likely intending (Whitley 1998a: 120; Garfinkel et al. 2009: 181). The PBAs are conventionalized, iconic motifs. Grant et al. estimate that there are 700 such figures in the entire Coso Range. Maddock (2015) has sketched, photographed and mapped 400 of them. Simply, PBAs are animal-human confluations with decorated torsos.

PBAs invite a very interesting question in the context of rock art conventions within a larger sphere of Uto-Aztecan and Mesoamerican cultures as a whole. In all probability the Coso PBA is not just a representational icon but a paradigm of far deeper and implied, imbricated, metaphor, a symbol with embedded compound, multivalent meanings. The process of meaning formation here seems to depend on methods of array formations, though in the case of our PBAs, they seem to have an accumulative function. Simpler abstract components add with superior expressions of energy to form a structure resembling a psychogram, a time-tested technique proven to be prevalent in European rock art of the Pyrenees and the lower Mediterranean (Anati 1994, 2004; Scarantino 2004; Ambrose 2006). The Coso PBAs, like their inter-continental counterparts, reflect an early consciousness of using or conjoining simpler visual figures to create a more complex and integrated visual system. This peculiar cumulative agency of conjoined abstracts has been designated as the art of psychograms by Anati, and cognitively explained by Hodgson, Layton, Clottes and others as a process deriving from a hyper-agglutinative capacity of the neurovisual system (Anati 1981, 1994, 1999;

Helvenston and Hodgson 2010). The applications of the same theory to Coso rock art contexts is probably very helpful in deciphering the visual image on a cogently perceptive level for these human-shaped figures from eastern California. More interesting is the evocative process that shows how abstract visual units are employed in this system of art to suggest correspondences and meanings which have distinct ethnographic parallels in the ancient stories of an entire ethnologically defined region (Whitley 1998a, 1998b; Garfinkel and Austin 2011; Garfinkel and Waller 2012).



Figure 1. PBA employed as an emblematic pattern for the Maturango Museum, Ridgecrest, California.

An animal-human conflation with a number of homologous attributes appears in Coso iconography, and also later in time associated with the native Kawaiisu who inhabited this very same area. The design and context of the Kawaiisu animal-human, supernatural appears to function in a similar vein, perhaps implying similar meanings and metaphors.

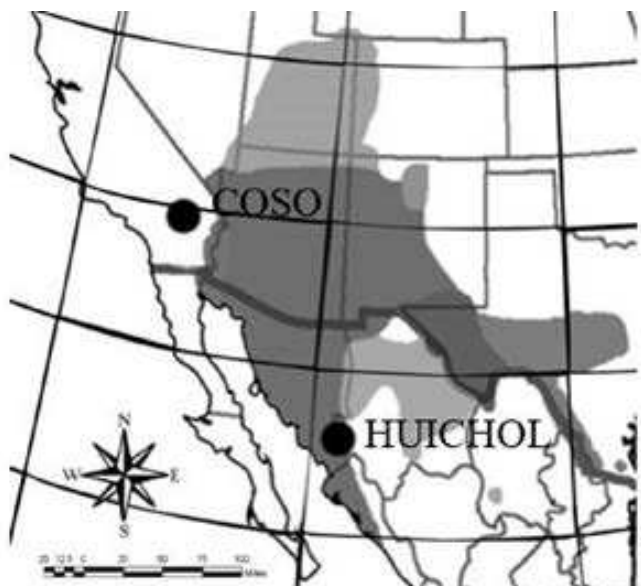
It is apparent that we can identify certain formal attributes of the Coso animal-person images that have intriguing parallels with other distant and distinctive rock art traditions. Diagrammatic PBA archetypes similar to the Coso figures appear to recur in the Dinwoody Wind River petroglyphs (rock drawings) in Wyoming (Whitley 1996, 1998a: 109; Keyser and Klassen 2001: 107; Francis and Loendorf 2002; Garfinkel 2006: 239, 2009: 7; Garfinkel and Waller 2012: 40), the Great Mural Tradition of Central Baja California, and the rock paintings of the Lower Pecos in Texas (Turpin 1990: 263; Furst 1997: 49; Whitley 2005: 3).

Other areas within an even larger sphere provide us with signs that might indicate a series of distant symbolic, analogic links in a chain of potentially related icons for the prehistoric cultures of Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, and San Luis Potosi in north-central Mexico. We can also identify similar visual motifs among rock art clusters in Santa Catarina in Coahuila, Mexico (Figure 6) and the Boca de Potrerillos rock art of Nuevo Leon. The rock art of Mexico and Nuevo Leon has been most recently studied by Turpin, Murray and others (Turpin 1990: 263; Turpin and Eling 2014: 177-194; Murray 2007: 162). One can also encounter compelling parallels in the contemporary ritual symbols in Huichol and Nayar iconography (Furst 1997: 255; Maclean 2000: 75).

The northern Mexico rock art assemblage is most fully referenced in reviews of the Lower Pecos Region rock art and in the extensive stu-

dies crafted by Schaafsma, Turpin, Boyd and Joel y Ram, and then Murray in Spanish (Schaafsma 1986: 152; Turpin 1988: 120, 1992: 275; Boyd 1996: 153 Joel y Ram et al. 2005; Murray 2007: 20). The Santa Catarina rockart complex is concentrated around the Chichimec Sea, the Rio Grande and Pecos Region of Texas, and in the areas of Coahuila and Nayarit states in Mexico, as is shown in Map 1.

The emergence of a consistent visual typology across distant regions might not have been possible unless the image was cognitively embedded for distribution in the different mental



Map 1. Map showing the distribution of Numic and Takic groups in California and the Great Basin and other Uto-Aztecan linguistic groups in the American southwest and Mexico. Shaded area represents the area of transitions and adaptations of south-bound Uto-Aztecan groups. Darker areas represent hypothesized Uto-Aztecan movements through the Sonoran Desert towards northwest Mexico and the Chichimec Sea. Lighter grey indicates the transitions of the Uto-Aztecan groups towards the Lower Pecos and northeast Mexico (the Sierra Madre Oriental in Nuevo Leon).

templates for various cultures. Analysis of the various attributes of PBAs might illustrate precisely which aspects of this archetypal symbolism were transferred or even reinvented by migratory hunter-gatherer groups that transitioned towards the southern latitudes. Visual fonts on the body of PBAs might act like morphological codes for a complex visual ethnography, which also finds its way into contemporary indigenous forms. Such connections could be evaluated against the archaeological assumption of the hypothesized autochthonous evolution of visual symbology for the Coso Region and the American Great Basin itself (Fowler 1972: 105; Hildebrandt and McGuire 2002: 242; Quinlan and Woody 2003: 380). Caroline S. Maddock's recently published work, *A Study of the Coso Patterned Body Anthropomorphs* (2015), contains the most exhaustive and detailed listing of the Coso PBA assemblage of figurative rock art. It provides a vast inventory (n = 400 figures) of Coso PBA renderings, including a large number of these PBAs that incorporate identifying recurrent patterns relating to their individual attributes. Some of the PBAs key morphological attributes are discussed in the following sections.

The Anthropomorphic Head or Face of the Coso PBA:

Concentric Circles

The PBA feature that perhaps most immediately attracts a viewer's attention is the concentric circle head or face pattern. In the Maddock study the head and face configuration admittedly varies but the concentric circle form is overwhelmingly the most predominant and consistent template. It appears on a minimum

of 153 of her 400 PBA figures.

Speculation on the meaning and metaphor of the concentric circle head or face results from an engagement with such circular and spiral shapes in almost all kinds of rock art. They are argued to be universal or entoptic form-constants of shamanistic rock art (Lewis Williams and Dowson 1988: 245; Bednarik et al. 1990: 77; Jones 2003; Garfinkel 2007). But we also believe there may be deeper levels of meaning. In fact, the Coso concentric circle face form may best be understood in terms of its distinctive structure as having some specific semantic function within the visual (iconographic) scheme of PBAs. Maddock (2015) and Garfinkel and Waller (2012: 37) observe that concentric circles are repeated features in PBAs (Garfinkel et al. 2012) (Figure 4). Much of the ethnographic and rock art literature seems to indicate that these concentric circles in shamanistic and forager cosmology are magical shapes used to visually delineate concurrent access points in an abstract, transcendent corridor (Garfinkel et al. 2009: 188). These shamanistic portal corridors

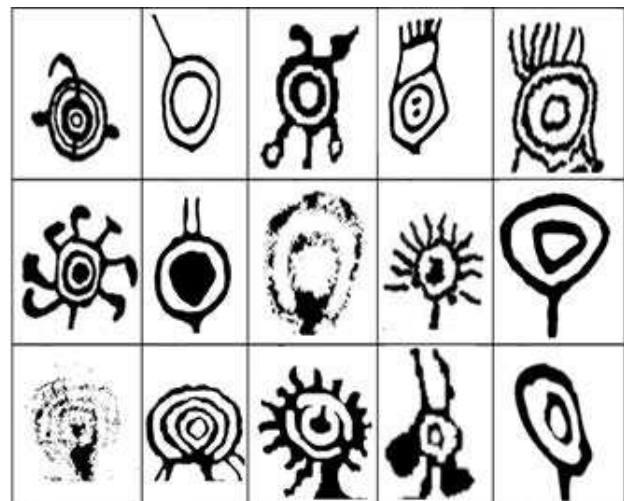


Figure 2. Coso PBAs with concentric circles depicting head patterns, indicating presumably an eye or tunnel motif.

are mutable centres, or form a nexus acting as an axis mundi used to connect mythic time and space – the underworld and celestial spheres with a terrestrial plane of current space and time (Jones 2003: 283).

Ethnographic parallels further suggest that this corridor-portal metaphor is precisely the functional attribute implied by the concentric circle face and concentric circle demarcations at the *Kawaiisu Yahwera Kahnina* (Animal Master's home). This is a place described in the sacred narratives of the Kawaiisu as the entry-way, corridor to the underworld home of the animal master (Figure 3). A prominent painting on stone hosts a nearly 4-ft tall figure revealing a central animal-human with avian qualities that adorns the identified entrance to the animal netherworld (Garfinkel et al. 2009; Garfinkel and Waller 2012). The rock art panel is located in Back Canyon near Caliente, California. This location is recognized in over six versions of the sacred oral narratives of contemporary



Figure 3. Kawaiisu *Yahwera* deity, Back Canyon, Kern County, California.

Kawaiisu and hence may have some significant time depth, as evidenced by the number of versions of the Kawaiisu (Numic) oral traditions and that it references a specific and prominent eponym (placename) in their ethnogeography. Such a notable marking for the entrance is parallel to suggestions where a centre or hole, in the middle of a concentric iconographic architecture, is symbolically associated with a hole or tunnel to the underworld, as is typical of the Tewi (of northern Mexico) *sipapu*, or the Mayan *popol vuh* narrations on chthonic origins, and the Huichol concentric circle sacred geometry with their *ojo de dios* iconography of a divine eye.

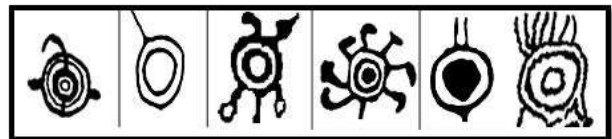


Figure 4. Apophasic eyes in the middle of a concentric circle shaped face is exhibited in a large number of Coso PBAs.

Singular Eye at the Centre: Apophasic Eye?

A second and related attribute of the Coso PBA pertains to the eye-shape constituted by the innermost circle within the series of concentric circles that adorn the face or head. Maddock's extensive discussion on the Coso PBAs finds that virtually none of these figures has eyes *per se*. However, we would like to gently define that there is a unique sensate object-hole in the concentric head structure of many Coso PBAs. It is not a diagram of a real, visual organ *per se* but is an analogical sign or an apophasic eye, literally referring to an image suggested by means of denial of an explicit sign. The Coso PBAs seem to peer at us with their concentric heads and monocular eyes, demanding our immediate attention, like a proto-human

shape, both flourishing and iconic. Coso PBAs might then be assumed to have a central eye-like feature symptomatically represented by an inner circle within a concentric circle structure. Face recognition techniques require that both children and adult observers fix their gaze on eyes as a means of detection of the mind or the assumed intention of the person being viewed. Psychological experiments show that techni-

ques of face recognition and animacy enhance, with prolonged training and learning experiences, face recognition by children and adults (Gosden 2005; Looser and Wheatley 2010: 1854). But learning about faces alone does not explain how faces and eyes elicit the attention of almost any viewer: 'it is presumably not the face itself that interests people but the mind behind it' (Looser and Wheatley 2010: 1858). Scientists



Figure 5. Various alternative representations of Coso, decorated, animal-human figures with concentric circle faces/heads and monocular eyes.

generally agree that human beings are highly attuned to specific facial cues, carried largely in the eyes: they are considered as the gate for the categorical perception of life or animacy (Goren et al. 1975: 545; Tanaka and Farah 1993: 230; Tomalski et al. 2010: 570; Looser and Wheatley 2010: 1858). The tipping point of animacy is also best identified through the eyes (Looser and Wheatley 2010: 1860).

Findings in relation to face recognition are indeed startling. If the cognitive capacities for face recognition are acquired from an infantile period (Goren et al. 1975: 555), presumably such a faculty enables humans to associate animacy with eyes. Thus if the centre of the patterned concentric head were a non-eye feature on a form which only resembles a face, the Coso PBAs would not be assumed to have an engaging, master or spirit-like character, or a mind behind it.

When any normal subject tries to identify a cluster of features as a face it takes both global parameters of the form, that is, the whole face, as well as the eyes, which are local parameters, as constitutive features of the face (Langton et al. 2000: 50; Looser and Wheatley 2010: 1854; Looser et al. 2013: 804). Concentric shapes have an extraordinary effect on the cognitive process, and create a shock-effect that is definitely exploited in visual models, especially of ritual objects and in related art such as would be embodied in masks, totemic dolls, effigies, deities and ultimately rock art. All of these are examples of this communicative effect taken to its extreme, even towards intangible conditions in which the users of such symbols might claim to have the ability to create effects without visible connections of causality (Sagiv and Bentin 2001: 945; Wilmer et al. 2010: 5238). Hence a PBA contains a sug gestive eye, rather than two realistic eyes. The same issues are now acknowledged in the literature on the subject

(Joyce 2005: 150; Ruth 2000: 227). Hence, rock drawings might have certain effects akin to hypnosis (Dimberg et al. 2000: 88; Gray et al. 2007: 619). Coso PBAs may be assumed to have a central eye-like feature symptomatically represented by an inner circle within a concentric circle structure – hence a means by which attention is riveted and meaning implied.

Adorant Posture: Symbolic Cue for Reverence

A third important attribute of the PBAs is their full frontal and somewhat static and rigid form that would seem to indicate a very early origin of conceptual, spiritual numinosity for the iconography of the Uto-Aztec hunter-gathering-groups that predated the later complex cultu-



Figure 6. Numinous figure, two with raised arms and object(s) in hands. Figure on left is a female, right appears to be male. Left figure has quail feathers adorning her head, pendant labias or a mid-birth pose with seeds, rain or mist in her belly. The female figure may in fact be in the act of giving birth to a child with the child's head breaching... Both figures have a long rod in their right hands. This can be an *atlatl*, spear, digging stick or rod of power (*aka poro*). In their left hands can be dart fore-shafts or rabbit sticks. The central male figure may also have a digging stick or seed beater in their right hand. Note the spatulate attachment at the end of the rod. Are these figures communicating concepts and metaphors relating to fertility, reproduction, increase, hunting, world renewal, or even all of these various matters in one symbiotic package? These three examples are typical of such Coso relational symbols of animal, human figures with objects like shafts, head ornamentations and other objects. (note snake and possible basket on rightmost figure).

res of the Mesoamerican geography. According to Johannes Maringer, prehistoric religious iconography contains images of ‘adorants’, indicated by gestures of supplication, prayer, oblation or sacrifice (Maringer 1979: 215). Maringer’s wide-ranging synthesis, covering both prehistoric and ethnographic religious symbolism from 30,000 BC to the historic era, consistently finds that the act of adoration ‘is always accompanied by a posture of the body ... to express or emphasize a desire to enforce a request’. The posture is hands and arms up, frequently with palms exposed. Maringer argues that this expression belongs to many forms of religion and has existed for thousands of years. It is a means of expressing the special, transcendent relationship of people to their deity. It is variously described as homage, prayer, act of offering, adoration, worship, supplication, reverence, imploring, request and humble surrender.

Indeed, the story of Coso PBAs and other animal-human confluents exhibit this paradigmatic morphology of supplication and prayer. According to Maringer, a typology of adoration is constituted by gestures of ‘raised hands’ (Maringer 1979: 216) or ‘uplifted arms with spread

fingers’ (Maringer 1979: 230).

However, visual anthropomorphs (like Coso PBAs and related animal-human confluents) may not necessarily be supplicants or oblaters *per se*; their visual appearance does not provide absolute evidence for the fact that the PBAs are shamanic ‘adorants’, as Maringer describes them to be. In the Coso Range, as is likely elsewhere, these engravings, where numerous PBAs appear to have their arms in a raised position with gestures holding an atlatl or other recognizable objects or motifs, PBAs and other such iconic forms with this adorant posture appear to us as more likely mythical or supernatural spirit-providers resembling supernatural figures such as those described in the ethnographic literature identified by Schaafsma, and Garfinkel and his colleagues (Schaafsma 1986: 33; Garfinkel et al. 2009: 183). The Coso PBAs wield a realistic rod or dart and similar rigid, shaft-like objects that associate them with symbols of hunting, spirit-gifting, beneficence and increase rites (fertility), which are likely ritual themes for the Coso artisans (Bard et al. 1979: 246; Hildebrandt and McGuire 2002: 246; Hultkrantz 1987: 40; Garfinkel et al. 2009: 185; Garfinkel and Austin 2011: 460).

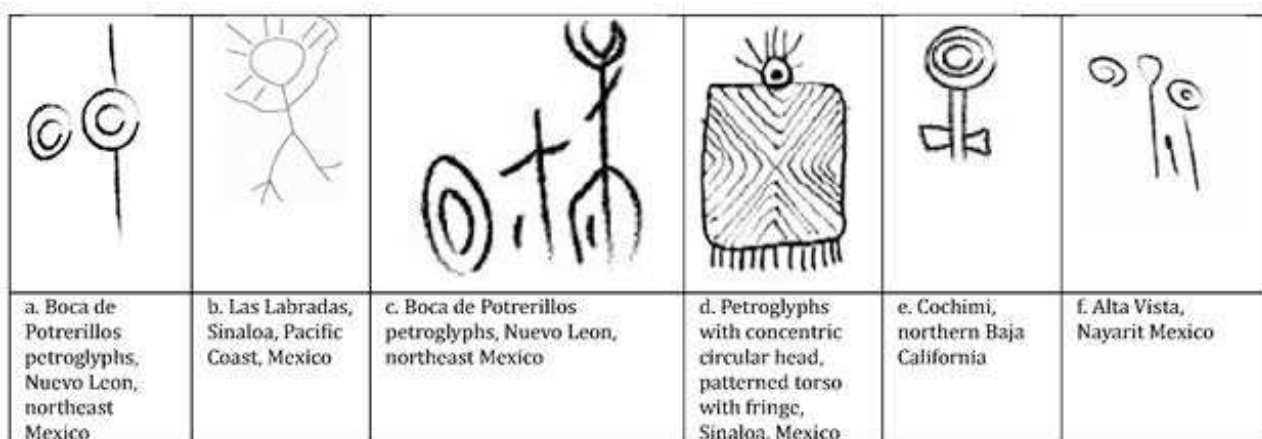


Figure 7. PBA-like facial (?) formations in presumed ancient Uto-Aztecan areas of, northern Mexico.

Everywhere, the figurative association of these human, and sometimes gendered, forms appear with associated animal images (birds [thunderbirds and quail], bighorn sheep, snakes, dogs, deer and chuckwallas). The PBA figures are sometimes associated with symbols of hunting (dart points, atlatls) and consumption (holding 'wands' that have been interpreted as *atlatls*, spears, seed-beaters, digging sticks or even the shaman's rod of power [the *poro*]) with their torsos decorated with ambivalent grids, spirals and zigzag lines appearing reminiscent, as elsewhere, of sanctificatory motifs and further revealing the animal-human figures as players in a system of relationships, and not just as 'adorants' (Quinlan and Woody 2003: 372; Webster et al. 2006: 317).

Meaning of Coso: Oral Traditions of the Numic as Potential Analogs for Coso PBAs

The age and character of bighorn game hunting and related increase rites suggests that the Coso artisans who produced the PBAs were 'pre-Numic', an ancient expression of an indigenous people affiliated with the Uto-Aztecan language family (Fowler 1972: 107; Madsen 1975: 84; Quinlan and Woody 2003: 380; Garfinkel et al. 2007, 2009: 184; Garfinkel et al. 2010). Among the pre-Numic groups that are thought responsible for the production of Coso rock art specifically are those that ultimately were replaced by Numic affiliated populations (Lamb 1958: 99; Bettinger and Baumhoff 1982: 500; Myers 1997: 40; Garfinkel 2007: 203-243; Garfinkel et al. 2007: 90). Some of these Numic people include the Kawaiisu and Great Basin Paiute or Shoshone. What is it about their sacred narratives, their oral traditions, that these groups carried forward from their pre-Numic predecessors? Indeed, there may be no better line of study for the Coso PBA images than the context of findings provided by Campbell Grant

and his associates (Grant et al. 1968; Hultkrantz 1961, 1987) and Garfinkel et al. (2009: 181) with respect to comparisons of the Coso PBAs with the *Yahwera* sacred narrative traditions of the Kawaiisu and Tubatulabal of eastern California (Barras 1984; Whitley 2000b: 78-79; Zigmond 1977: 90). Garfinkel and his colleagues argue for a potential interrelationship between Coso figures and the *Yahwera* deity of the Kawaiisu (Garfinkel et al. 2009: 30; Garfinkel and Waller 2012). In all, the indigenous sacred narratives identify a supramundane being that appears both as a spirit-keeper figure resembling a shaman and wise ritualistic supplicator (of game and food resources), that is also identified as a spirit that provides such gifts. This dual identity is remarkably similar to that identified for a key divinity, namely, the *Huasteca Tatutsi Maxa Kwaxi*, that is also recognized in many Aztec oral traditions of further south (Zigmond 1977: 70; Furst 1997: 49; Ramon 1996; Schaefer and Furst 1997: 13).

Thus the symbolic meaning of Coso PBAs has been associated with the desert people's oral traditions of the Animal Master or Mistress (Hultkrantz 1981:44, 84; Garfinkel et al. 2009:195; Garfinkel and Waller 2012). The association of a master or guardian figure is reminiscent of Nurit Bird-David's proposition that spirit-keepers in ancestral religions reproduce the notion of such masters as part of a sociological process of integrating social needs and habit (Bird-David 1999: 85; Porr and Bell 2012: 205). In the case of hunter-gatherers, the animal master or mother would have acted as a guardian who provides the wild sheep and other game animals necessary for survival. Scholars have also suggested that the icon may be an early counterpart of a widespread set of figures of the animal master or mistress (Garfinkel 2009:185) in such line of study for the Coso PBA images than the context of findings provided by Campbell Grant

xthe cosmology of the ethnohistoric Kawaiisu, Chemehuevi and Tubatulabal (all Uto-Aztec groups of California and the Great Basin) (Hopkins 1965: 55; Bettinger and Baumhoff 1982: 493, 499; Gilreath and Hildebrandt 2008: 2).

The Greater Southwest and Mesoamerica: Huichol Nierika or Eye of God

Considered in the larger context of the American Southwest and the Great Basin, the presence of some decidedly similar depictions are reported by Garfinkel, Schaafsma, Maclean, and Furst (Schaafsma 1986: 100; Maclean 2000: 75; Furst 1997: 49, 61; Garfinkel 2009: 184, 195, 198-199). The Coso legacy, if we could call it so, consists of templates that reappear in varied contexts of visual culture for a very large geographical area, which only reaffirms their resilience as cultural ideas.

Perhaps the concentric eye shape acts like a cosmological trope for indigenous populations of the region for several centuries at a stretch,

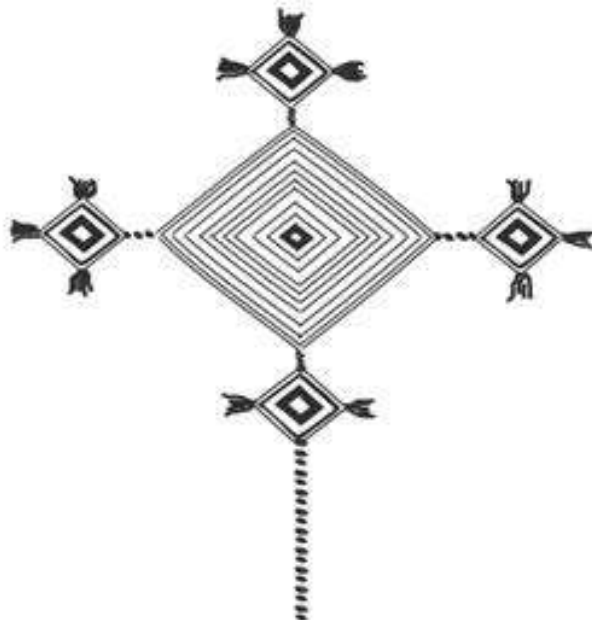


Figure 8. Huichol eye-of-god motif.

and continues to effect variations and expressive tendencies even today. Concentric circles are archetypal markers of seasonal and astronomically significant events in Hopi, O'otam and Pueblo belief-systems of the American southwest; circles with diagonals appear to indicate the horizon and also the four directions (Tanner 1948: 26; Cole 1994: 90; Maclean 2000: 75).

The Uto-Aztec cultures have evidence of such an emic cultural marker itself. The Huichol most prominently have a concentric patterned PBA-like attribute or visual motif as one of their most important iconographic symbols, namely the *nierika*, whose Spanish translation is the *ojo de dios* or the eye of god. Both Huichol and the Tepehuano (also called the Tewi), have very similar iconic motifs, none more important in their belief systems than the *nierika* or eye of god. This eye of god motif symbolizes in all such contiguous cultures the divine eye of an anthropomorphic deity or ancestral spirit. The *nierika* symbol of northern Mexican ethnic groups offer a parallel to the similar motif that appears in the pre-Numic, hypothesized, Uto-Aztec Coso rock art tradition of c. 6000 BC to AD 1000/1300 (Garfinkel 2007; Rogers 2010). In the California and Great Basin archetypes the divine eye symbolism acts as an image of an eye that also connects the ritual viewer to the spirit world, acting like an *axis mundi* (Garfinkel 2006, 2007; Garfinkel et al. 2009; Garfinkel and Austin 2011; Garfinkel and Waller 2012)). The same idea of an *axis mundi* is repeated in the discussions centred on northern Mexican Huichol-Tepehuano ritual symbolism. The studies of Lumholtz (1900), Negrin (1975), Mountjoy (1987:167), and Negrin and Neurath (1996: 60) attest to the metaphor and functional importance of the *nierika* motif. Not only this, but the connective function of a divine eye is apparently one of the most important symbolic guides

to Mesoamerican (predominantly Uto-Aztecan) belief-systems. Our collaborative research provides evidence for the expressions of an extensive artistic and cultural florescence that thrived between the southwestern fringes of the Great Basin and the cultures of central Latin America, including the Yucatan in the Atlantic coast of Mexico, to Guatemala. Evidence for later manifestations of a divine eye motif is also expectedly abundant in Mayan cultures (Neurath 2002; Furst 2007; Milbrath 2015).

Furst, following Hrdlicka's earlier classic studies, also points to the presence of an origin myth in the Tewi (also called Hewi) mythological narratives: the Tewi being intruders from the north, and of more ancient origin (like the Tepehuano), saying that the world was created out of a spider-mother goddess who came out of a hole or *sipapu*-like centre (a Huichol word which probably refers to a hole or centre through which one could pass in a metaphorical sense). This chthonic metaphor provides a striking parallel to the distant Kawaiisu creation narratives and the oral traditions relating to the *Yahwera* deity, in which these deities have been symbolically rendered in graphic forms with concentric circles and a centre or hole in the middle (Garfinkel et al. 2009: 188). This rendition also presupposes an underworld chthonic parallel to the idea of passage or origin, a kind of tunnel into or out of another world (Hultkrantz 1981: 15, 129; Garfinkel and Waller 2012: 45; Garfinkel et al. 2009: 187). This millennia-old symbolism of a central hole within a larger circle found in Tepehuano-Tewi groups reappears in later manifestations of the Huichol *nierika* (also an iconic passageway for souls to the spirit world, especially for shamanic vision questors). The centre of a layer of concentric circles or concentrically patterned squares, appears to consistently symbolize some kind of portal and is most specifically identified with the Huichol

eye-of-god motif, which is also synonymous with their metaphoric mirror symbol, through which not only do gods look down at mortals but also one through which mortals try to look and pass through to a world of their gods (Negrin 1975; Negrin and Neurath 1996: 56; Furst 2007: 34).

Additionally and of import is the psychological association of an intricate woven ritual pattern, often typical of woven mats, fringed moccasins and the weaving of basketry from the Great Basin cultures. This last is recognized as an element of the body decoration of the PBA and is sometimes considered a likely object of ritual contemplation (Kitchell 2010: 819-840). It is also, to cite a parallel, similar to the concentric Nahua and Huichol *itari*, which is none other than a prayer mat, which is used for hunting rituals and survives to this day in the fabric yarn designs among Huichols of Durango and Jalisco in northern Mexico (Lumholtz 1900: 165; Mountjoy 1982: 110; Neurath 2015; MacLean 2000: 80; Kindl 2000, 2005).

Conclusion

Coso PBAs thus contain visual-metaphorical templates that may have been acquired and transmitted by migrations. Perhaps the most distinguished of them that stands out from the rest is the concentric centre or hole pattern, which tends to prefigure an eye motif for a larger and diverse animal-human complex. Our Coso-based research of the PBA template supports the idea that the concentrics are perhaps universal templates in Mesoamerican iconography, and may reappear as the *nierika*, eye, or eye of god, or the *nierika* in contiguous migratory cultures. These patterns appear to have existed within the system of sacralization and memorabilia and are re-circulated through generations of socially organized cultures.

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