

Stone Age Metaphors: Sacred Stories and Symbolic Songs of the Immortal Bighorn

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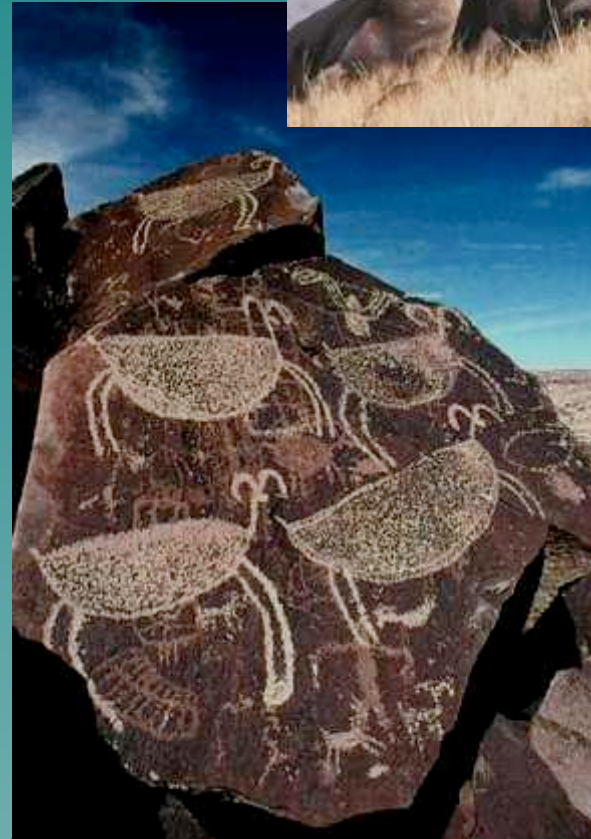
June 13, 2015





Introduction

- ◆ Bighorn sheep are fascinating animals both in physical form and in behavior
- ◆ Evidence suggests that they were more than a mere subsistence resource to Native peoples of the Desert West
- ◆ In this presentation I will explore their religious and ceremonial significance
- ◆ I will also consider a unique bighorn shrine discovered at the Rose Spring archaeological site



Introduction

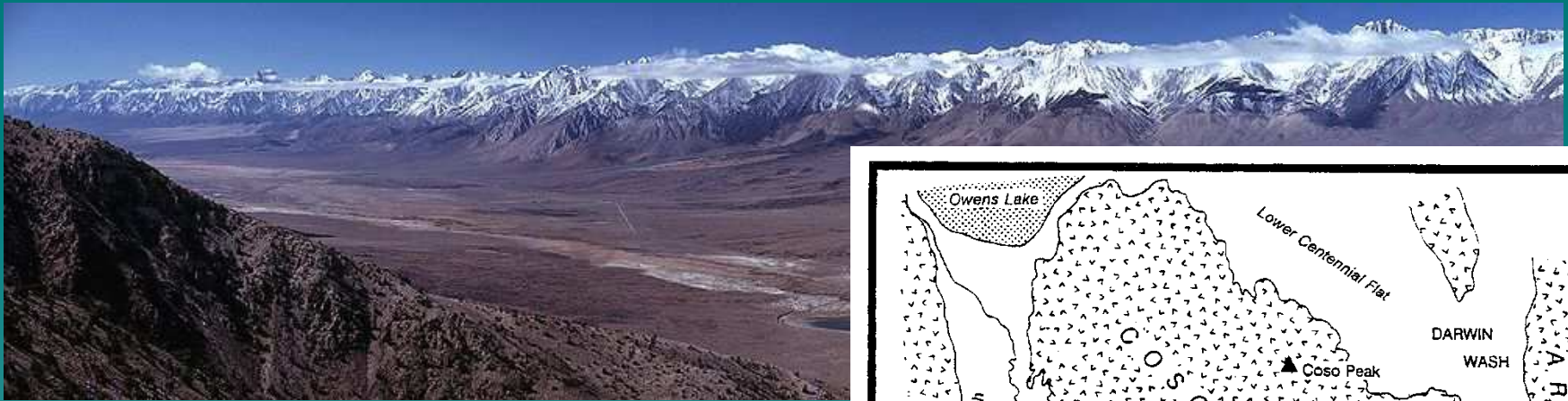
- ◆ This presentation first describes the character of the Rose Spring shrine, report its age, and at its end will posit its meaning and function.
- ◆ The shrine is all the more intriguing due to its physical location and likely association with the Coso Rock Art Tradition.



Introduction

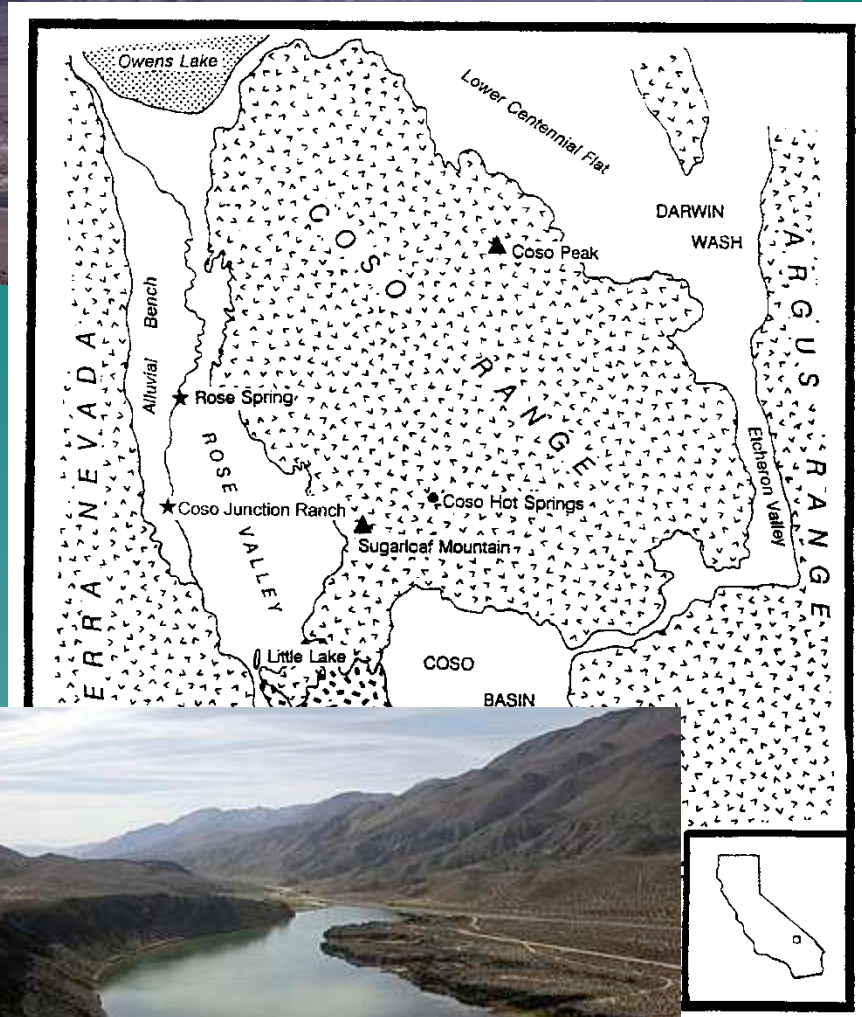
- ◆ In the course of this presentation I will review bighorn religious metaphors.
- ◆ In this regard we will explore:
 - Bighorn cultural features throughout the Far West
 - The great number of bighorn rock drawings and paintings
 - A collection of totemic increase sheep figurines
 - Ethnographic descriptions of Native bighorn hunting
 - Religious associations (Native oral traditions and rituals)





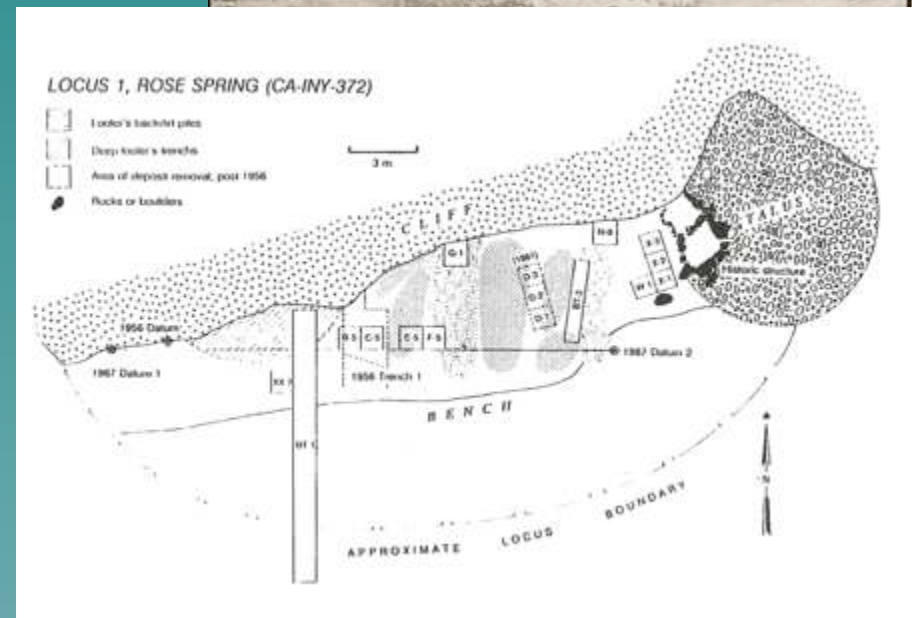
◆ Location

- ◆ The Rose Spring archaeological site is at the southernmost end of the Owens Valley.
- ◆ The site is less than 15 miles north of Little Lake in Rose Valley.
- ◆ The site is on the western edge of the Coso Range.
- ◆ It is just east of the Sierra Nevada in the southwestern corner of the Great Basin



The Rose Spring Bighorn Feature: Description

- ◆ The feature consists of a stacked rock cairn and stone pillar with a bighorn ram's skull and intact horn cores at its top
- ◆ It was discovered during excavations by Dr. Robert Yohe during his Ph.D. dissertation research in 1987
- ◆ The bighorn ram's crania was discovered at a depth of 80-90 cm on the western edge of Locus 1 in Units X-1 and X-2
- ◆ Below the horn cores and crania was a rock cairn and upright boulder of andesite surrounded by fire-cracked stones and charcoal
- ◆ This stone "platform" is perhaps best described as a possible "shrine"



The Rose Spring Bighorn Feature: Association

- ◆ A complete and finely executed Humboldt Basal-notched (HBN) dart point (or knife / also employed as a thrusting spear) was discovered within 50 cm. of the rock cairn
- ◆ Because of its completeness and fine execution it is considered a likely offering deposited at the same time as the feature was in use
- ◆ The morphology of the HBN indicates it dates to a short period of time from ca. 500 BC to AD 800
- ◆ During this time, in eastern California prehistory, grave offerings became more frequent with multiple points and other artifacts provided.
- ◆ This period sees the importance of status and prestige increasing in the region



Figure 4. Four projectile points from the Rose Spring site. The points are of varying shapes, some more triangular and others more elongated. The points are of varying sizes, some more than 10 cm long and others less than 5 cm long.

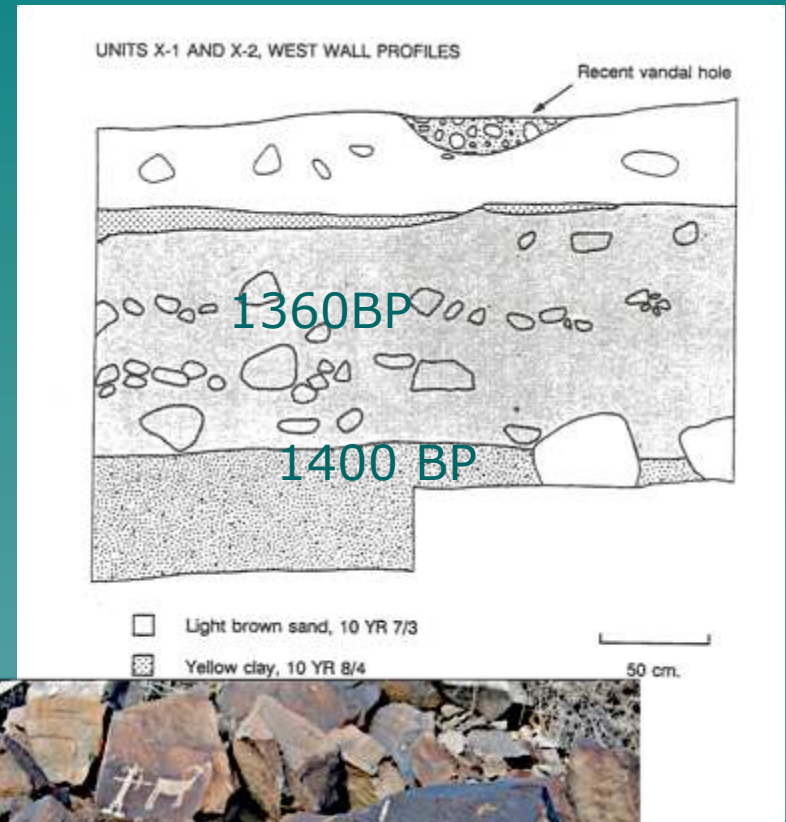


Figure 5. Four projectile points from the Rose Spring site. The points are of varying shapes, some more triangular and others more elongated. The points are of varying sizes, some more than 10 cm long and others less than 5 cm long.



The Rose Spring Bighorn Feature: Dating

- ◆ Two radiocarbon dates were obtained from a single hearth
- ◆ At the top at 90-100 cm and another at the base at 140 cm
- ◆ Top date was $1,360 \pm 70$ radiocarbon years before present (rcybp)
- ◆ The second date was $1,400 \pm 50$ rcybp.
- ◆ Both dates overlap, are roughly equivalent and have calibrated ages at ca. AD 500



Other Bighorn Features: Ethnohistory

- ◆ The Rose Spring feature appears unique but other bighorn sheep bone features have been reported in the West.
- ◆ Spanish explorers in the 17th and 18th century reported on very large accumulations of sheep horns and deer antlers along the Gila River in the territories of the O'odham and Yumans of S. Arizona.
- ◆ These bone "middens" purportedly contained 1000s of animal skulls.
- ◆ Campbell Grant identified bighorn horn and skull caches at sheep kills sites in NW Arizona and SW Sonora, Mexico at natural rock pools or tanks.



Other Bighorn Features: Ethnohistory

- ◆ Juan Bautista de Anza in his diary in 1774 notes that the Papago were carrying bighorn horns and stacking them at Cabeza Prieta Tanks to “control the wind and prevent the air from leaving that place” (Bolton 1930)
- ◆ Metaphor – horns, sound, meaning of bighorn...



Other Bighorn Features: Archaeology



- ◆ Northern Rocky Mountains of NW Wyoming the site of Mummy Cave
- ◆ Large rockshelter on banks of N. Fork of the Shoshone River, 55 km west of Cody, Wyoming
- ◆ Husted and Edgar discovered a bighorn skull shrine
- ◆ This was the only bighorn skull found at the site
- ◆ Skull at the base of a slope in association with three rock slabs in a linear array
- ◆ They interpreted it as having ceremonial or religious significance and dated to 8,800 rcybp (10,000 years ago or 8000 BC)!



Other Bighorn Features: Archaeology



- ◆ A bighorn sheep headdress was discovered cached in a small rockshelter on the eastern edge of the San Rafael Swell, near the Green River in eastern Utah.
- ◆ Headdress was found in two pieces with drilled holes in the cranium and an attached leather band.
- ◆ At least six *Olivella biplicata* (the purple Olive shell) beads were also apparently attached to the headdress
- ◆ Those beads and a radiocarbon date of the cordage provide the exact same date for the headdress to ca AD 1050-1150
- ◆ The headdress would be "Fremont" in affiliation and might have served as religious regalia or as a hunting aid.

Other Bighorn Features: Archaeology

- ◆ 30 km north of the Reno-Sparks area, a prehistoric village site was recently excavated by Far Western (CRM Firm based in California)
- ◆ In a Middle Archaic (2000 BC – AD 500) house floor, the center of the structure, they discovered a bighorn ram skull
- ◆ That cached cranium had its horns still attached.
- ◆ Two spear points were found in association with the feature.
- ◆ Thought to be an example of ritual curation and display
- ◆ Researchers suggested that the skull was employed “to reinforce the benefits of a successful hunt...(and for) enhancement of a hunter’s prestige within a larger group”.
- ◆ Houses were dated to 2800 to 3700 cal bp. (ca. 800 -1700 BC)



Other Bighorn Features: Archaeology

- ◆ Loyalton Rockshelter, Sierra County, CA, northern Sierra Nevada
- ◆ Wilson (1963) reported on a small temporary hunting camp in a rockshelter
- ◆ Located at over 6,000 feet elevation
- ◆ Site appears to be a hunting station occupied intermittently mostly during the Middle Archaic
- ◆ Excavations discovered 6 cache pits containing only the cranial remains of 12 bighorn (9 mature and 3 juvenile)
- ◆ In the pits with the sheep crania were offerings –rare and exotic artifacts – an obsidian blade, several bone pins, a stone pipe, and two charmstones
- ◆ Researcher suggested that these features were religious in nature - the physical manifestations of rituals



Other Bighorn Features: Archaeology

- ◆ Nopah Cave, east of Death Valley in S. Paiute territory
- ◆ Sutton and Yohe (1987) discovered a cached bighorn atlas vertebrae
- ◆ Researchers thought this significant and posited that this is a physical manifestation of the important association with Great Basin Native oral tradition
- ◆ In many Paiute-Shoshone creation stories Coyote uses a bighorn atlas vertebra to break the murderous genitalia of his lover
- ◆ When he does so, he successfully reproduces with the girl, she gives birth to the various tribes



Other Bighorn Features: Archaeology

- ◆ In the Tehachapi Mountains, Sand Canyon, eastern California, Creation Cave, *Tomo Kahni* State Historic Park
- ◆ Site where the Kawaiisu people were created, this is where the animals celebrated and painted their pictures, grizzly bear invited the animals for a fiesta
- ◆ A bedrock mortar cup at the site marks the emergence site
- ◆ Sutton discovered a burned atlas vertebra of what was likely a bighorn sheep at the site
- ◆ Posits this a physical re-creation of the oral tradition



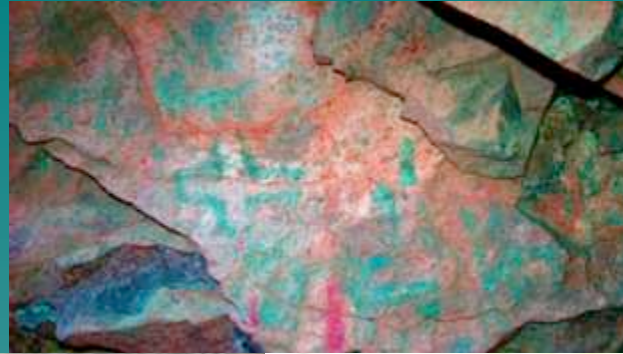
Prehistoric Bighorn Sheep Art

- ◆ Strong religious associations suggested by prehistoric representational art
- ◆ Great Basin rock drawings, paintings and totemic figurines
- ◆ Most frequent in the Cosos – a minimum hundred thousand pictures; with 25,000 images of the bighorn sheep - more than all other areas of the Great Basin combined



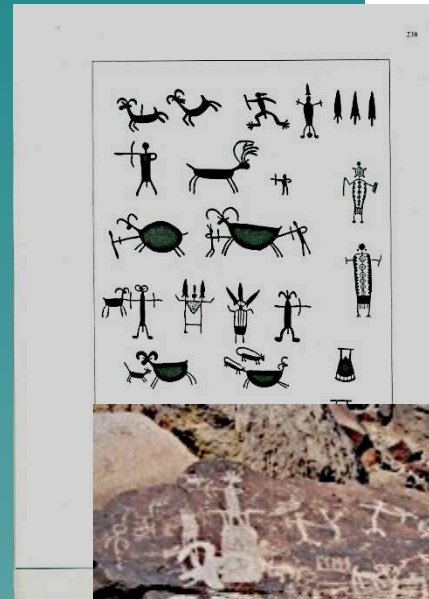
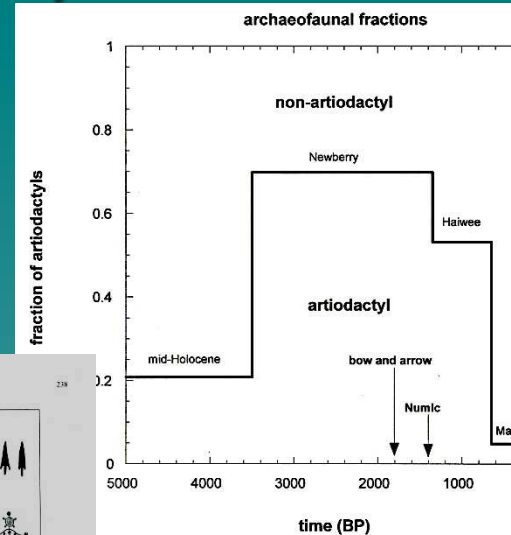
Prehistoric Bighorn Sheep Art

- ◆ Split twig figurines at Newberry Cave in the East Mojave – 10 complete & over 1000 fragmentary figures
- ◆ Other ritual paraphernalia + complete points, paint palettes, sheep dung pendant, painted quartz crystals, wrapped feathers, red, green, white, and black pigment with pictographs on the shelter walls.
- ◆ Dates to 3000 to 3700 rcybp
- ◆ Posited as totemic figurines associated with increase ceremonies



Rose Spring, the Cosos, and Bighorn Hunting

- ◆ Rose Spring on western edge of Cosos and at other sites, archaeofaunal remains... (2000 BC-AD 600)
- ◆ Coso people emphasized big game for the meat portion of their diet – esp. bighorn
- ◆ Coso rock art –, many hunting scenes, hunting blinds, dummy hunters, associated with game drive sites, natural tanks (*tinajas*), game diversion wing traps.



Post-Mortem Bighorn Funeral and Skull Display

- ◆ Notable but unusual panel in Parrish Gorge in the Cosos may be a significant example of bighorn ritualism
- ◆ Appears to be a ceremony venerating sheep skull set atop a pole
- ◆ CA-INY-43 depicts nearly life size figure of a standing man (4 feet in height)
- ◆ Man has hands outstretched reaching for a weighted atlatl and connecting to the "power" line reaching down into the Netherworld
- ◆ Man carries a fringed bag on his back
- ◆ At his feet is small wand with a bird's foot (feathers?, blade of digging stick?) on its tip



The graphic may be a visual representation of the mythic journey: hunt, death, ascent to the upper world via the sacred pole, and seasonal return/regeneration back to the middle human world, upon being restored, traveling up from the lower world – arising from the animal underworld

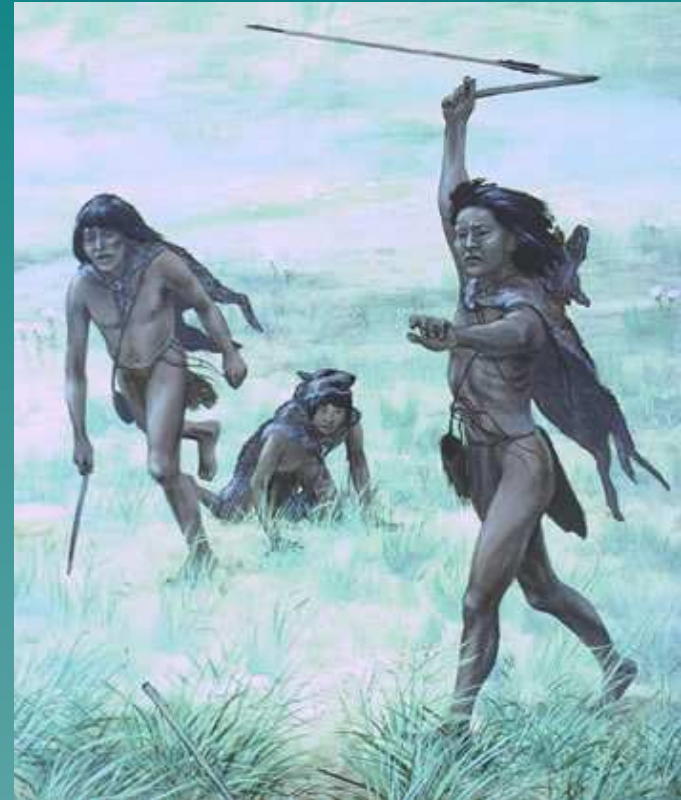
Bighorn Hunting In the Great Basin: Timing

- ◆ Fall best time during rutting season when rams, ewes, and yearlings co-occur, animals fattest
- ◆ Sheep most vulnerable
- ◆ Considerable tension, rams intent on breeding
- ◆ Fall is time for communal hunts: antelope, rabbits, and bighorn
- ◆ Time for people to get together, Round Dance
- ◆ Round Dance functioned to promote game, ensure bountiful supply of seeds
- ◆ Fertility ceremony



Bighorn Hunting Methods In the Great Basin

- ◆ Gilmore (1953) describes a bighorn hunt NE of Bishop in the Owens Valley.
- ◆ First a Round Dance was held prior to the communal hunt
- ◆ Celebrants followed hunt leader and/or singer into the local mountains
- ◆ Group spread over wide area worked together to draw bighorn into a v-shaped wing trap
- ◆ Trap composed of rocks and brush leading to a coral where the animals were slain



Bighorn Hunting Methods In the Great Basin

- ◆ Solitary hunters stalked alone with a decoy headdress – skull with horns
- ◆ Concealed behind the rocks
- ◆ Hunter would let horns protrude
- ◆ Make sound plucking bow
- ◆ Jab and scrape ground making sounds like rams in dominance display



Bighorn Hunting Methods In the Great Basin

- ◆ Activity attracts animals and would shoot within 25 feet or less
- ◆ Arrow directed under animal's chin
- ◆ Steward (1941) said Indians thumped logs or pounded rocks to attract sheep
- ◆ Curious animals would again think there was a dominance display going on



Basin Shoshone (Numic) Oral Traditions

- ◆ Big game hunting rites and group religious ceremonies were strongly expressed in Desert West (Malouf 1966).
- ◆ Hunting religions have certain characteristic features (Hultkrantz 1986).
- ◆ David S. Whitley (1982) recognized symbolic import of the bighorn.



Great Basin Shoshone Oral Traditions

- ◆ 12 Western Shoshone groups had myths with common elements
- ◆ Coyote (key central deity) could only attain manhood (sexual maturity and marriage) by slaying a bighorn sheep.
- ◆ Hence the Shoshone saw bighorn as a symbol of male hunting success and correlated with rites of passage



Basin Shoshone (Numic) Oral Traditions

- ◆ Other Shoshone oral traditions told how – Rat invites Bighorn Sheep to join in the Round Dance.
- ◆ Rat's charade was an attempt to woo Bighorn to his side in order to kill him.
- ◆ In another story Crow, Eagle, Wildcat, Yellow Hammer, and Rat team up and sing a song at their pre-hunt dance
- ◆ The song says, "We are going to shoot mountain sheep!"



Basin Shoshone Bighorn Ritual

- ◆ Northern Paiute said bighorn gave power to heal disease
- ◆ Southern Paiute had game dreamers and dances. These dreamer-singers would dream of killing game, bighorn food, rocky places, rain, bows and arrows, and sometimes arrows turning into bighorn rams.
- ◆ They would dream of songs. These were gifts from the bighorn.
- ◆ Songs were a means of enhancing the killing of game and would make the game animals come and would increase their number.



Basin Shoshone Bighorn Ritual

- ◆ Chemehuevi ritualists had religious specialists known as sheep dreamers.
- ◆ These religious were especially good at charming game animals – ritualists of the hunt.
- ◆ These sheep dreamer-game charmers had visions of rain, bullroarers, and a quail tufted cap of mountain sheep hide.



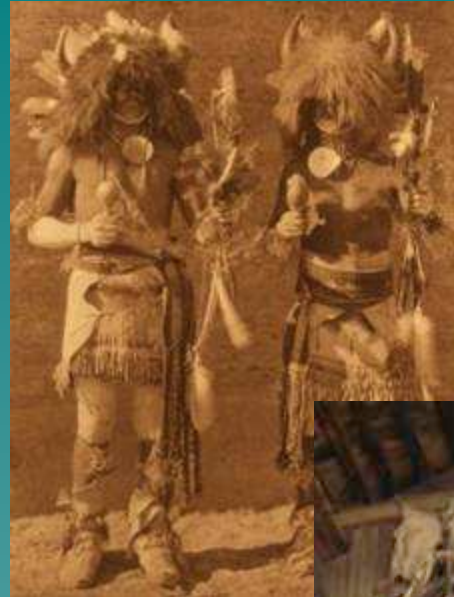
Basin Shoshone Bighorn Ritual

- ◆ Songs used as a way to attract game.
- ◆ Ritualists could capture the animal's souls and make them tired and easy to kill.
- ◆ Southern Paiute sang to attract sheep. Would feast, sing and dance mimicking game movements.
- ◆ Mt. Sheep Dreamer-singers would direct hunters to the place where they could find and slay bighorn.
- ◆ Bighorn Song was one of the four principal Southern Paiute songs.
- ◆ The Desert/Mountain Serrano also have a number of Bighorn Sheep Songs they sing. They believed they were descended from the Sheep people (their ancestors).



Power In The Bones

- ◆ Many foragers believe in the innate power in the bones of hunted animals
- ◆ Skulls were sacred and believed to be alive with such power.
- ◆ Skulls embodied the energies of animal ancestors.
- ◆ The planting of skeletal remains of hunted animals assures the regeneration process – as a source of new life.



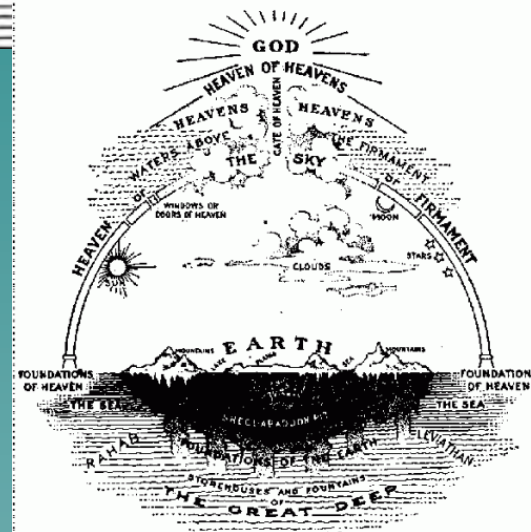
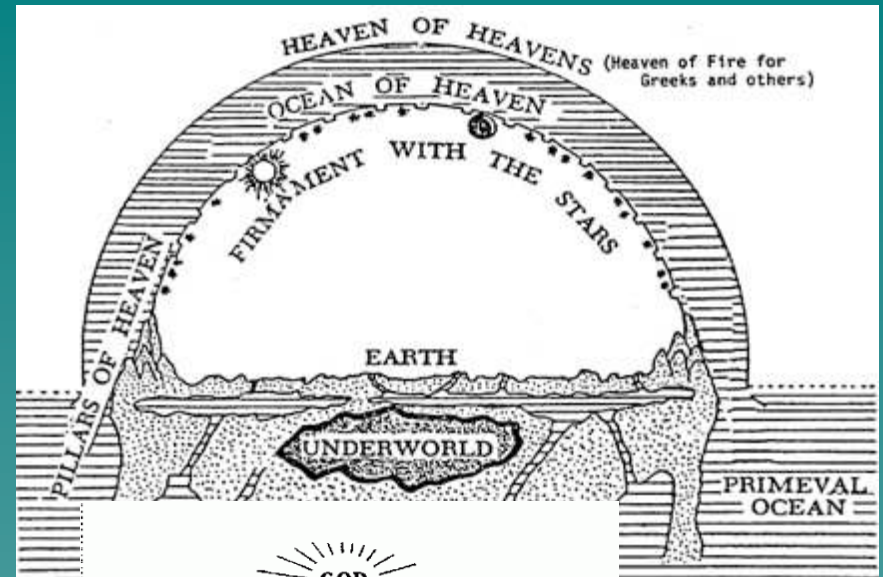
Power In The Bones

- ◆ Catherine Fowler (1986:95): “... respect was shown for animals and plants taken to meet human needs. Portions of larger game animals, including the...**skulls...were specifically set out in the brush or trees or buried after a kill.**”
- ◆ In addition to showing respect, these acts were a form of manipulation that would insure that game would be continually supplied.
- ◆ Slain game animals were often placed with their heads to the east and addressed with special terminology, again to show respect.”



Basin Native World View

- ◆ Native Basin cosmology / world view saw the universe (cosmos) as tiered (layered).
- ◆ Divided into strata including upper, middle, and lower realms.
- ◆ Each stratum was inhabited by different groups of Animal Persons (
- ◆ s).
- ◆ Native taxonomy classifies these animals according to their environment and behavior (habits and habitats).

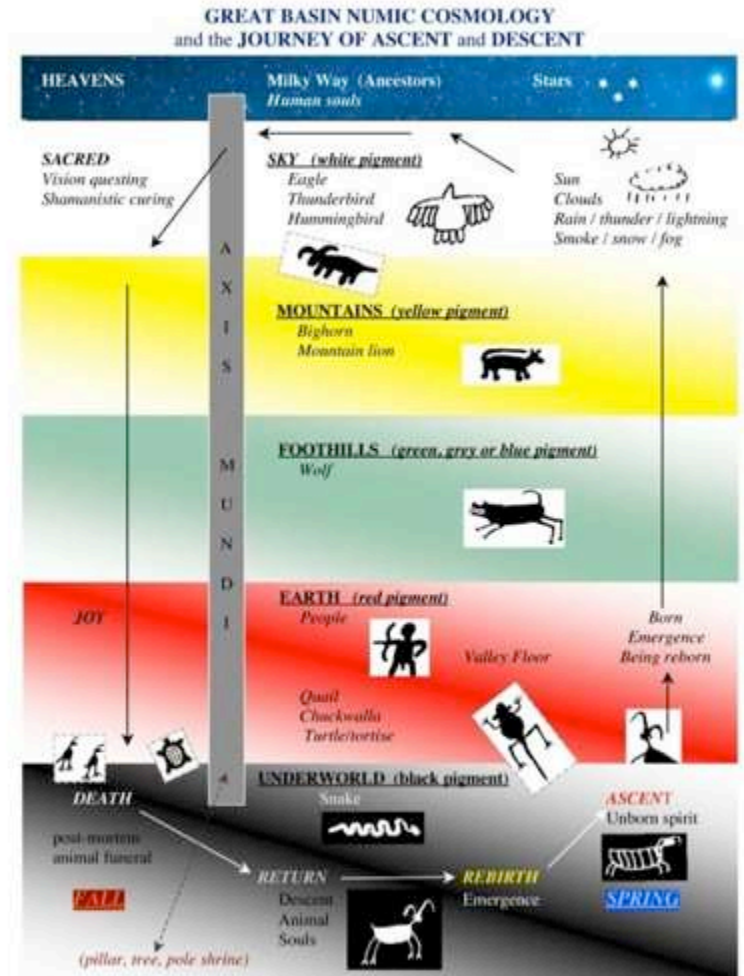


THE ANCIENT HEBREW CONCEPTION
OF THE UNIVERSE

TO ILLUSTRATE THE ACCOUNT OF CREATION AND THE FLOOD

Basin Native World View

- ◆ Here, to summarize, we see a stratified or layered view of the Numic universe linked by the *axis mundi*, also known as the world tree (5 levels)
- ◆ The central grey bar is the tree, road or portal.
- ◆ This is a corridor or mutable center, connecting mythic time and space, the roadway from the underworld up to the celestial spheres.
- ◆ The road or portal links mythic time and space with current space and time.
- ◆ In the Basin cosmology and in many indigenous worldviews, some animals are recognized as immortals in that when killed their spirits go down to an Animal Underworld where they are revived by the Master/Mistress or Guardian of the Animals and emerge in the Spring.



Based on Goss (1972); Vander 1997:112-117; Francis Loendorf 2002: 120-121
Chart by Dr. Alan Gorfinkel; adapted by Geron Marcom, © 2014

Figure 6.36

Basin Native World View

- ◆ Bighorn habitat is in the elevated crests of high rugged mountains. Myers study of Numic myths indicates that the bighorn is consistently associated with topmost symbols.
- ◆ Tiered Basin Cosmos – attributes color white to this Sky realm – tips of eagle's wings, white rump patch of bighorn
- ◆ Sky realm is filled with elements of white: clouds, snow, fog, and smoke.
- ◆ Each strata has a key animal as the Shamanistic Boss of a class of animals.



Basin Native World View

- ◆ Word for bighorn in Numic means all large hooved game animals as a class (including deer, elk and pronghorn).
- ◆ The bighorn is the shamanistic boss of the artiodactyls or ungulates.
- ◆ Bighorn inhabits one of the most powerful strata – one having nearly the most supernatural power, spiritual content, and sacredness.
- ◆ This topmost strata considered symbolic of the highest good including elements relating to: healing, curing, upland hunting, shamanism, and vision quests.



Basin Native World View

- ◆ These uppermost planes are home to Immortals and Supernaturals.
- ◆ Bighorn is one of the most difficult animal to kill, lives in the highest and roughest country
- ◆ In fact, the Numic term for bighorn derives from the words to kill or hunt.
- ◆ The Eagle (Shamanistic boss of the sky and birds) is symbolic of the topmost being with the most supernatural power
- ◆ Just below the Eagle and having similar symbolism (color – white, association with mountain tops) is the bighorn



Summary and Conclusions

- ◆ A number of archaeological features and isolated bighorn skeletal elements in the Desert West represent the caching and interment of selected bighorn bones.
- ◆ Numic oral traditions provide us with a context for the possible symbolism of these features.
- ◆ Caching of low meat mass elements unlikely to represent simple provisioning. Would normally have been left at the kill site.



Summary and Conclusions

- ◆ If trophy skulls would imply symbols of hunting success – perhaps this would be the case with Rose Spring and Reno-Sparks features where they may have been exposed and not concealed.
- ◆ The hidden nature of some cached bighorn bones would lessen that possibility and suggest we pursue alternative meanings.
- ◆ In that case they might be seen as representing: increase rites, means of facilitating the rebirth, reproduction, and fertility of game animals, healing, coming of age, veneration and ancestor worship.



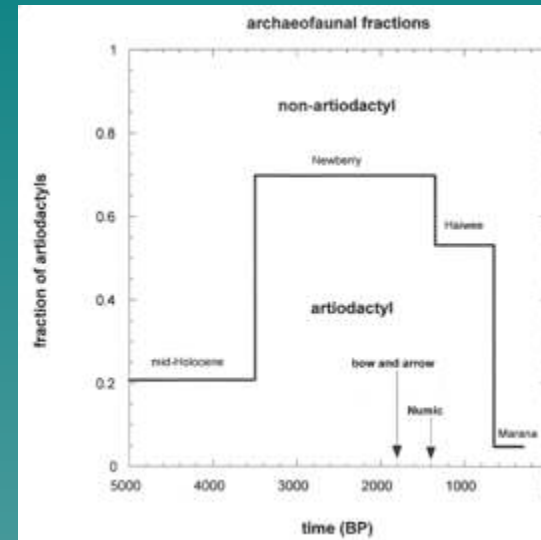
Summary and Conclusions

- ◆ The Utah bighorn headdress must have been used in a public ritual or as a hunting disguise...



Conclusions: The Rose Spring Feature

- ◆ The Rose Spring feature was fashioned during a time that many researchers now agree Coso hunters were drastically depleting local bighorn.
- ◆ This was also the time when the bow and arrow was introduced.
- ◆ Also a peak period for Coso rock art production.



Summary: Bighorn Sheep Metaphor

- ◆ All symbols, as does the the venerable bighorn have multiple meanings, (compound metaphors).
- ◆ Shamans, commoners, and hunters.
- ◆ Visions, myths, and cosmology.
- ◆ Individual vision quests and group ceremonies (coming of age rites, “hunting magic”, increase rites, world renewal).
- ◆ Rain, hunting magic, animal and human fertility, “increase” (game and plant multiplication and magnification), rebirth, and world renewal
- ◆ Male, female, dimorphic (double-sexed), and androgynous (non-gendered)
- ◆ Dead sheep and spirit sheep. Sheep being chased and killed. Immortal sheep and supernatural sheep.
- ◆ Energetic, lively and, abundant animals. Fat, pregnant, and birthing sheep.
- ◆ Human-animal coitus and reproductive symbolism.



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- We have a standing invitation for philanthropists with prior board experience who desire to help financially underwrite our major projects and organizational mission.
- Board members with background in accounting, finance, marketing and business development are especially needed.
- Feel free to contact the Founder and Director, Dr. Alan Garfinkel Gold at 805.312.2261 or via email at avram1952@yahoo.com

UltraSystems Environmental, Inc.

- ◆ My current employer is UltraSystems.
- ◆ They were kind enough to underwrite my participation for this presentation (they picked up the tab...)
- ◆ The firm has been around for 25 years, has 65 employees and tenders engagements throughout the Far West and Pacific Rim.
- ◆ We do all kinds of compliance work (including biology, paleontology, water, and hazardous waste)
- ◆ If you know of or need CEQA or NEPA compliance for a construction project, please let us know.
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