

#### The Cosmological Connections to Rock Art in the Great Basin and California

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This project examines the deeper cultural and cosmological meanings of the rock art found in California and the Great Basin Area by analyzing the art of the Chumash tribe, located in Southern coastal California, and the Fremont culture, located in the Great Basin area of central Utah. There is an exploration of rock art symbols with their religious and ecological connections and a comparative examination of motifs and meanings between the two cultures.

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# The Cosmological Connections to Rock Art in the Great Basin and California



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This project examines the deeper cultural and cosmological meanings of the rock art found in California and the Great Basin Area by analyzing the art of the Chumash tribe, located in Southern coastal California, and the Fremont culture, located in the Great Basin area of central Utah. There is an exploration of rock art symbols with their religious and ecological connections and a comparative examination of motifs and meanings between the two cultures.

### Introduction

The Chumash and Fremont people are two groups who utilized rock art in their cultures for reasons including religious, territorial, and storytelling purposes. The Chumash rock art is carbon-dated to be from around 500 –1700 AD and the Fremont Rock art is carbon-dated to be from around 1100 to 1500 AD (Smith et al. 1975). Both groups used different mediums such as painting, carving, pecking, scratching, or scraping to create rock art (Smith et al. 1975). The rock art seen in this region was predominately done with red, black, white, and yellow colors, however, there were occasionally other colors such as green and blue present within the art. The process of making rock art required dyes and pigments. The specific resources used by the Chumash tribe were ochre and hematite for red pigments (Scott et al. 2002). Black pigments were made by using coal and hydrous manganese oxide (Scott et al. 2002). White pigments are believed to have come from burnt shells and white kaolin (Scott et al. 2002). The composition of the blue and green pigment has been under debate but is widely thought to be composed of mineral fuchsite (Scott et al. 2002).

### Methods

This project utilizes the comparative method to draw out similarities of rock art between two different groups who had different environments and religions. Those involved in this project strategically analyzed rock art from the Chumash and Fremont by looking for specific factors found in the art of both groups. Motifs such as agriculture, lifeways, cultural dynamics, and cosmology were researched to find connections between the two groups. The locations of rock art, the materials used to create it, and the patterns and symbols used were analyzed to gain a better understanding of the Chumash and Fremont people's rock art. Data gathered through this research method allowed the conclusions regarding connections between the two parties to be drawn.

#### Results

Chumash rock art was often portrayed in caves. This was used as an entrance into the mythological underworlds. While in the underworlds the Chumash would have rituals including magic and shamans (Hudson and Conti 1981). The Chumash tribe has multiple rock art aquatic motifs, which are consistent with their cosmology and ecological practices. This is due to the Chumash's main food resource comes from the ocean. The Chumash people had an abundance of rock art with a focus on the sun and moon. The sun motif comes from their intricate religious beliefs about the powers and personalities of the sun and moon. The Chumash symbolism in rock art related to supernaturalism and executed by ritual officials ethnographically identified as antap (Hudson and Conti 1981). Chumash narratives describe a celestial ocean near the Land-of-the-Dead (Hudson and Conti 1981). It was occupied by two large, undescribed monsters who would rise from the water and give out a loud cry when a soul drew near (Hudson and Conti 1981). Souls ignorant of the old religion or who had no dream helper would become frightened of the cry and fall into the water (Hudson and Conti 1981). They were then transformed into a were-fish, were-frog, or a were-turtle (Hudson and Conti 1981). This suggests the aquatic motif (Figure 9), is tied into the celestial realm of the supernatural. Chumash shamans and specialists served as the artists painting the walls of the inland caves and rock shelter with abstract representations of the sun, stars, human beings, birds, fish and reptiles (Fagan 2019). Some painted sites may have served as solstice observations, such as the Condor Cave (Fagan 2019). The Condor Cave is in the coastal mountains of California and has rock art possibly dedicated to the Condor bird (Figure 6) (Fagan 2019). The rising sun shines through a hole carved by a shaman in the cave wall, the shaman also painted his spirit helper, a red-legged frog, on the wall (Figure 3) (Fagan 2019)

Fremont rock art is often high on cliff walls and in locations difficult to access. The high settings emphasize the heroic and ceremonial nature of the subject matter (Cole 1990). The Fremont culture is poorly understood as it vanished around 1300 CE, perhaps due to environmental hardships and warfare (Fagan 2019, Spangler 2013). Fremont rock art frequently features militaristic motifs, the shield-bearing warrior being a distinctive motif characteristic of the rock art of the eastern Great Basin and a popular element of Fremont rock art (Loendorf and Conner 1993). Detailed similarities between Plains and Great Basin shield figures suggest cultural relationships between the two areas (Gebhard 1966). It is suggested that the Shoshone borrowed the motif from the Fremont Culture during a period of interaction between the two groups, presumably warfare (Gebhard 1996). Fremont rock art also has other war-related tools such as bows and arrows, and possibly scalps or heads, suggesting they were at war consistently (Cole 1990). Rock art in Nine Mile Canyon exhibits shield figures engaged in combat, also, suggestive of warfare are the shield-bearing anthropomorphist (Cole 1990). Hunting themes appear to be the most common Fremont rock art. "The Great Hunt" petroglyph appears to be related to shamanistic activities to bring hunting successes as depicted by anthropomorphic with headdresses or horns; some shown holding bows and arrows (Cole 1990). The native bighorn sheep was the most frequently depicted animal indicating high value (Figure 10). The Fremont rock art of corn depicts ownership suggesting not having abundant resources (Figure 12). Fremont rock art motifs may depict events in the supernatural or mythological realm. Shamanistic and mythological imagery in Fremont rock art was represented by masked and supernatural anthropomorphic, in addition to bird-like representations (Cole 1990). The ceremonial attire of the anthropomorphic, especially their horned and other types of ornate headdress, suggests these figures have supernatural power (Figure 14). Fremont anthropomorphic heads are rectangular, helmetshaped and rounded sitting directly on the shoulders (Cole 1990). Headdresses may include elk antlers, feet and hands were often enlarged, and arms and hands hung down (Figure 17) (Cole 1990).

## Conclusions

Conclusively, the rock art of both the Chumash and the Fremont cultures represent strong ties to their beliefs and their everyday life. Specifically, the two group's motifs are often derived from necessity and religion. The Chumash depicts numerous aquatic motifs because the ocean was a major source of food. Similarly, the Fremont culture's rock art depicts agrarian motifs like corn and big horned sheep because these were their main food sources. Food sources are not the only depiction of everyday life found within both parties' rock art, the Chumash rock art shows shaman motifs, depicting individuals highly regarded within the community. The Fremont depiction of warriors similarly represents individuals who were significant within their more militaristic society. Lastly, the Chumash and Fremont both have large amounts of cosmological motifs within their rock art. The Chumash depicts a prolific amount of sun motifs throughout their body of work. The sun is easily found within many different Chumash rock art sights due to its deep cosmological connections. Likewise, the Fremont show their religious beliefs and practices through the depictions of anthropomorphic figures. Although the Chumash are located on the Californian coast and the Fremont are located inland within the Great Basin, there are a plethora of connections tying these two groups together. One of the biggest connections between the two is their use of rock art and the use of specific motifs.

# **Chumash Rock Art**



Figure 1, A Shaman Is Born, located in the Carrizo Plain of Southern California



Figure 2, Chumash Cave Paintings located in Burro Flats Painted Cave, Simi Valley, California

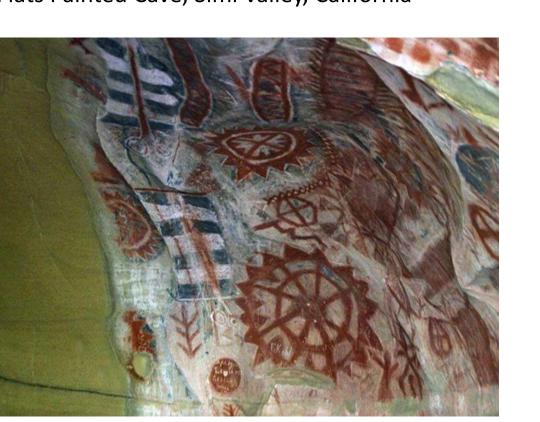


Figure 3, Chumash rock art located in Pleito Creek Kern County, California



Figure 4, aerial view of the Chumash cave located in San Louis Obispo, California



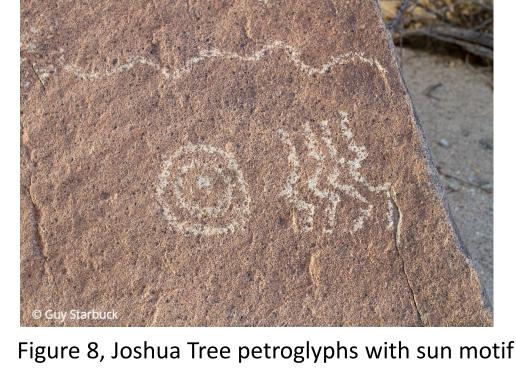
Figure 5, pigmented sun located in cave at Cary's Castle, Joshua Tree



Figure 6, Semi abstract painting most likely done by Shamans



Figure 7, petroglyphs in Joshua Tree National depicting a possible serpent motif



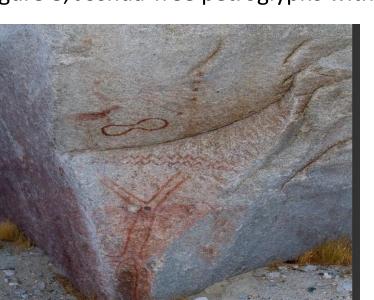


Figure 9, Agau-Pah petroglyphs in Nevada, believed to represent a serpent swimming into a stream or other similar aquatic motifs

# Fremont Rock Art

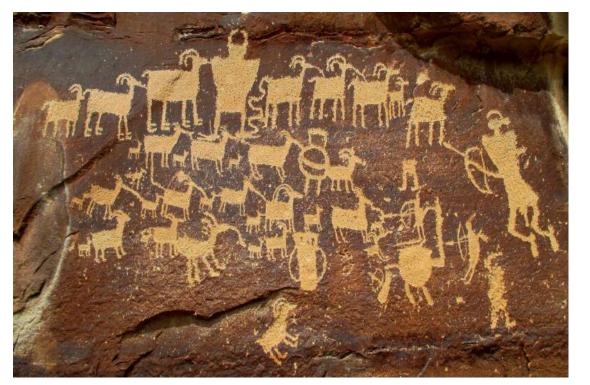
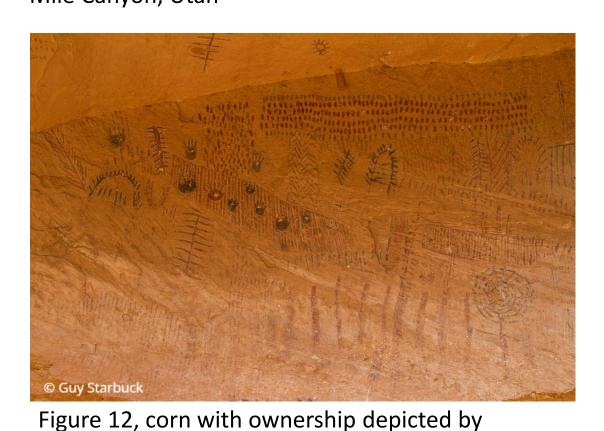


Figure 10, The Great Hunt located in Nine Mile



Figure 11, Fremont family portrait located in Nine Mile Canyon, Utah



handprints located in Black Dragon Canyon, Utah

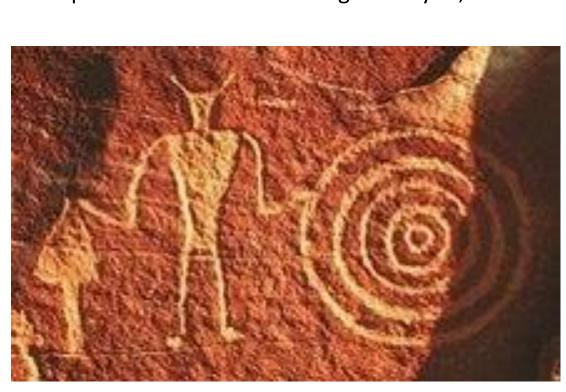


Figure 13, Spiral Petroglyph in Dinosaur National Monument located in Utah



Painted Cave and Black Dragon Canyon

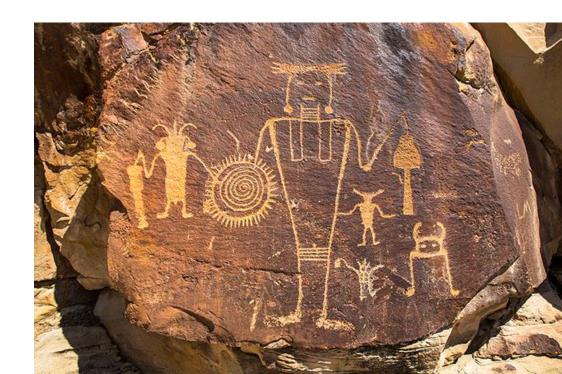


Figure 14, Fremont warrior holding a spiritual shield and possible scalp, or head located in Nine Mile Canyon, Utah



Figure 15, From left to right, two sheep, a tall person, a begging person and the snakelike figure located in Black Dragon, Utah

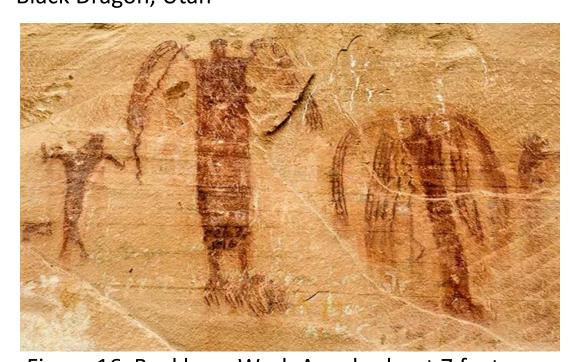


Figure 16, Buckhorn Wash Angels about 7 feet tall in Central Utah

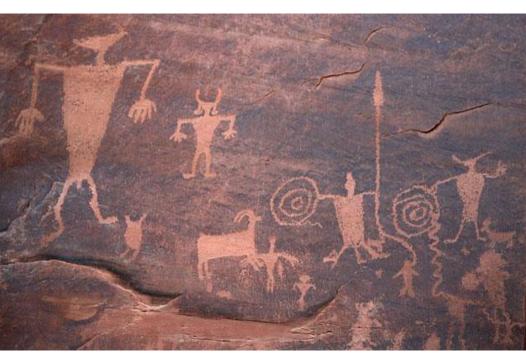


Figure 17, Barrier Canyon Style figure in Moab,



Figure 18, The Rochester rock art panel located in Emery County, Utah

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- 2005 Nine Mile Canyon Petroglyph Site Guide. Retrieved November 30, 2019 (https://www.climb-utah.com/Misc/ninemile.htm 1993 The Pectol Shields and the Shield-Bearing Warrior Rock Art Motif. Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology 15(2):216-224