



The House of Dawn: Visualizing Sacralized Spaces of Ritual & Emergence Through Rock Art from Paint Rock, Texas

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The House of Dawn:
Visualizing Sacralized Spaces of Ritual & Emergence Through Rock Art from
Paint Rock, Texas

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A Thesis in the Field of Anthropology & Archaeology
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Abstract

This thesis presents an investigation of the art style techniques used in four Red Monochrome Style rock art panels found at Paint Rock, Texas. The aim is to further understand how design concepts in rock art show art intentionality to transmute ancient messages of myths and orations that invoke ritual practices into iconography. This research builds on the innovative methods developed by Boyd and Busby (2021), Boyd and Cox (2016) and Boyd et al. (2023) for examining design concepts and art techniques used during the creation of ancient rock art panels. Using the same method, I examine the panels for Blood Moon, the Ball Player and Emergence and Corn panels to identify symbols that stand as direct embodiments of visual culture through paint application techniques that contain function and meaning. Then, through reviews of ethnographic records, I connect the meaning of symbols and motifs to records of Pueblo stories and orations, and Mesoamerican myths. The findings suggest that Blood Moon and the Ball Player highlighted particular attention to characters of a story, adopting art concepts and storylines from Mesoamerican deities that were transformed into Pueblo art. In contrast, the Emergence and Corn panels emphasize importance to the actions being performed to establish a new “Flower Mountain” through the invocation of Puebloan rituals and orations. The recurring solar alignments and themes of emergence and transcendence that appear throughout the panels consecrate Paint Rock as a “House of Dawn” where Pueblo and Mesoamerican cultures of the Southwest coalesced.

Frontispiece



Winter Solstice Pictograph with Sun Light Dagger. Photograph taken December 2020, used with permission of Kim Cox.

Celestial models that ancestral communities build with images, totems or altars formalize the ritual where the divine is now situated in the terrestrial plane. These archetypes act as conduits that maintain a connection between different cosmological planes thereby connecting ancestral people to the divine, to their oral history and to their symbols, even after they are gone.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this paper to my dear friend Kim Cox who recruited me to participate in this wonderful project. I would also like to extend this dedication to my grandmother, both my parents, my brother Gaston, and Cindy who have always supported me and believed in me. Above all, to God.

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Chapter I.

Introduction: A Sacred Landscape for Ancient Rock Art

“Some of the most potent vehicles for the communication of religious meaning and social hierarchy are the images, icons, and sacred objects utilized in ritual communities and ceremony.”

— David Carrasco (1999, 44)

Indigenous rock art has often been overlooked and dismissed as “primitive” or “picture-writing” (Hampson 2023, 1026) that could not possibly yield meaningful contributions to the field of archaeology, though, the reality is that rock art is far more complex than anyone could ever have imagined. Pictographic symbols contain ancient messages of cosmovision adapted through art techniques that emphasize figure, forms and outlines of anthropomorphs performing orations, as seen by the speech scrolls emanating from their mouth (Boyd et al. 2021, 249). Design concepts reveal that coating overlays on figures, outlining and wet stencil brush were used for important events and characters, which required planning and strategic execution (Boyd et al. 2021, 249). Therefore, rock art was not a simple random act, but a heavily planned one that warranted pilgrimage to other sites that possessed qualities of “emergence” (Schuetz-Miller 2012, 356). These places were often canyons, caves, rock shelters or springs of water that were “imbued with power and agency” (Steelman et al. 2025, 14; see also Wright and Russell 2011, 366).

The power embodied through the spirit of the land was enough to activate the geographic characteristics of a landscape that housed ancient rock art or “chromatic symbols” showing adoration for the site (Hill 1992, 119). These geographical attributes are found throughout the Lower Pecos Canyonlands, as well as other southwest regions of Texas that held special significance to their Indigenous populations (Steelman et al. 2025, 1). My interest in these themes, and others, led me to investigate the pictographs at Paint Rock, a site I was introduced to through an archaeological field school. One evening during this field school I attended a lecture by Mesoamerican enthusiast Kim Cox who discussed the findings of the White Shaman Mural and its connection to other rock art sites of Texas. This encounter inspired me to learn more about Paint Rock, which I first visited towards the end of July 2023 where I was deeply moved and captivated by the rock art and its cosmovision.

Throughout the Late Archaic, rock art became a mode of communication that materialized ritual practices, orations and myths into symbols of cosmovision that had ancestral meaning and possessed knowledge and wisdom (Boyd et al. 2021, 246; Steelman et al. 2025, 14). These ancestral landscapes contained “vivified actors in visual narratives” that portrayed spiritual adoration through the adornments that the anthromorphs wore such as headdresses, body decorations as well as power bundles that were highly symbolic during spiritual practices (Boyd et al. 2021, 246). The chromatic symbols that were used left transcendental marks on rock walls where each subsequent visit increased the power and the sacredness of the land (Steelman et al. 2025, 14). These symbols allowed the divine to materialize in physical form and connect the terrestrial world to create portals of light that narrate themes of emergence and regeneration

(Wright and Russell 2011, 367). This investigation will prove that similar to other canyons located in the Lower Pecos, Paint Rock was a place of emergence where processional worship activated the rituals performed and materialized them through ancient rock art, also transforming the dynamics of center and periphery for ceremonial landscapes located in the Southwest.

The Sacred Setting: Visiting Paint Rock



Figure 1. Frontal Aerial View of Paint Rock Cliff

Ekaterina Menkina (left) & the author (right), on their first expedition to the site. Photograph taken with aerial drone, July 2023, used with permission of Ekaterina Menkina.

The city of Paint Rock is located in Concho County, Texas, in the Edwards Plateau region of the state. The rock art site of the same name is located northwest of town, just under a mile away, roughly a 3-minute drive (Figure 1). The site is privately owned by the Campbell Ranch. The perimeter of the site is fenced, and it is only accessible through a front gate entrance, adjacent to U.S. Highway 83. Considered part of the eastern periphery of Central Texas, the landscape is a mix of arid land with trees and shrubs that are fed by smaller tributaries of water. The Concho River flows directly through the middle of the town in a semi-downward slope starting northwest and moving southeast, eventually meeting with the Colorado River on the southern eastern front. With permission of the Campbells or by booking through a third-party system, you traverse along a private man-made road inside the ranch that leads you past an office building into the cliff site where the rock art is present. Upon arrival, the limestone bluff is quite impressive in size. The cliff rises about 70 feet from the valley floor and extends out a little over 1000 feet with pictographs peeking through the “broken edges of the rocks” (Newcomb 1967, 146) (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Access to the Paint Rock cliff site

Aerial photograph of the Paint Rock cliff site showing Campbell's private ranch. Photograph used with permission of Ekaterina Menkina, July 2023.

Upon entering this secluded location, time appears to stop. The ambiance is calm, and many pictographs are highly visible in their red monochrome color appearing to greet all its visitors. The air is quite dry, and Texas heat on this side of the region is not to be taken lightly as the temperatures can easily reach 120 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer and remain steady throughout the year, with the exception of winter and the rainy season. Perhaps this aridity is one of the reasons why the pictographs are still strongly visible today. Although conservation resources have been limited, the cliff's overhanging ledges provide great shelter from the weather to some of the pictographs, while others unfortunately are more exposed. Multiple panels are increasingly fading with time while other pictographs painted at the bottom of the cliff have been lost forever.

In response, one of the biggest attempts to preserve rock art was conducted by artist Forrest Kirkland who initially visited the site in 1933 and 1934 to create scaled copies of the pictographs found at Paint Rock (Newcomb 1967, 3-7). After visiting several different sites and speaking with various locals, Kirkland felt compelled to preserve as much “Indian rock art” as possible by producing watercolor paintings of about 80 different sites (Newcomb 1976, 1). His early 20th century records left for the public an assortment of paintings that captured many pictographs, some of which are unfortunately no longer visible today.

Anyone then who has visited Paint Rock can attest to its dramatic and difficult history. The cliff’s walls reveal historical names, graffiti and many pictographic stories that demonstrate it was a highly trafficked area with many Indigenous groups passing through the site as well as early non-Indigenous settlers of the early 17th century. Additionally, graffiti names reveal historic post-conquest explorations of Texas performed by Spanish, French and Portuguese settlers. *Authentic Texas Magazine* (2018), *The New York Times* (2024), and the *Texas Archeological Society Newsletter* (2025) have published multiple articles that speak of Paint Rock as the largest pictographic site in Texas with over 1,500 historical pictographs. Scholars have suggested based on a rough timeline, that indigenous groups inhabited the site during the Late Archaic (~600 BCE - 200 CE) and then again during the Late Prehistoric through colonial periods (~800 CE - 1700 CE), alongside friar missionaries who became newly established in the region post conquest (Lidz 16 July 2024, 1; see also Newcomb 1967, 145-6).



Figure 3. A Difficult History

There is mixing and overlaying of graffiti and pictographs on the walls, showing the dramatic and often difficult history of the site. Photograph by author, June 2024.

Thus, as evangelism grew rapidly in the Americas, so did rock art. Interactions between Indigenous groups and early Franciscan missionaries were left captured in the rock walls displaying various scenes of churches, missionaries dressed in European clothing, and symbols of crosses. Over time, overlaid graffiti with people's names destroyed several pictographic panels, but after these lands were acquired by the Campbell family between 1878-1886, the site was fenced, secured, and cared for (Hoogstra 7 December 2018, 1). Detailed examinations of the art were completed and documented many disjunctured images covering several different timelines with a mix of anthropomorphic figures, zoomorphs of varying size, abstract geometric shapes and large amounts of post-conquest interactions (Figure 3). Since various pictographs of different time periods were also mixed together with multiple overlaid, it became essential to

classify them by era as this would allow the panels to be interpreted and recorded correctly in their respective time period.

Paint Styles & Choice of Panels at Paint Rock

In order to follow a conservative approach for this research and determine which rock art panels to examine, I first decided to classify the panels based on period style since I wanted to study the painting techniques of the pictographs that were drawn preconquest. As a result, I decided to use the same instrumental classifications that were previously used by Dr. Solveig Turpin (1990) and Dr. Carolyn Boyd (1998) who have dedicated their lives to researching rock art of the Southwest, leading all the way down into the Lower Pecos River Valley of Texas. These two scholars have identified five different chronologically distinct styles of rock art: 1) Pecos River Style (PRS), 2) Red Linear Style, 3) Red Monochrome Style, 4) Bold Line Geometric Style and lastly, 5) Historical Style (Boyd 1998, 18-22; Turpin 1990, 268-275).

As Indigenous artists of different time periods painted a repertoire of rock art images that contained structured stylistic elements of each era, common themes were identified in rock art through style classifications found within their respective period sequence (Figure 4). The Pecos River Style (PRS) pictographs that date to approximately 5,760 to 1035 calibrated years before present (Steelman et al. 2025,1) display pictographs of long-wired or fuzzy-haired anthromorphs with U-shaped heads that are considered to have religious or shamanic significance. Red Linear Style somewhat overlaps with PRS, dating to roughly 4830 ± 35 and 4275 ± 35 radiocarbon years before present (RCYBP) (Roberts 2023, 4), with various pictographs composed of miniature stick figures that treat sexuality as focal themes portrayed by large pregnant bellies, breasts and ithyphallic

figures on males. Red Monochrome Styled pictographs first appear around 600 CE with the introduction of the bow and arrow (Turpin 1990, 274) and extend through 1300 CE (see Mathiowetz et al. 2015, 2). This style is composed of realistic human anthropomorphic figures that are accompanied by animals and sometimes shown as hunting bands sporting spears, bow and arrows. Meanwhile, Bold Line Geometric Style refers to abstract figures resulting in patterned motifs with blanket designs that are seemingly closely related to Red Monochrome styles approximately dating to the Late Prehistoric (~900 CE) (Turpin 1990, 274). Lastly, Historical Style pictographs start appearing after 1600 CE (Turpin 1990, 254), often showing post-contact images of churches, horses, domesticated animals and priests wearing European styled clothing.

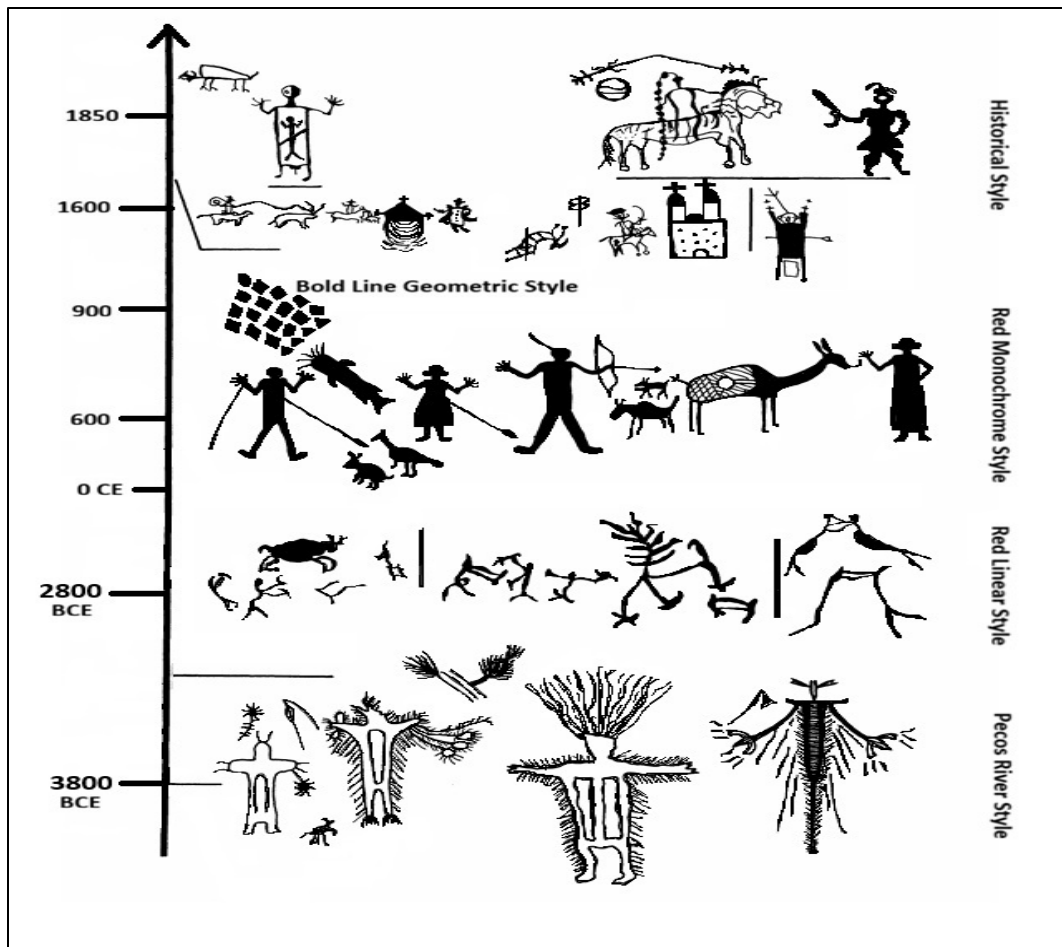


Figure 4. Sequential Timeline of Lower Pecos Region Rock Art

Timeline sequence roughly showing when different styled pictographs first appeared. Redrawn by author from Turpin (1990: 269, fig 2).

Examination of the cliff site with these period styles in mind proved extremely fruitful and revealed that the site currently houses four styles of rock art (Figure 5). The most prevalent styles are the Red Monochrome Style, Bold Line Geometric Style and Historical Style. There are very few Red Linear style pictographs and a couple possible Pecos River Style that are too deteriorated to interpret.

After classifying various pictographs within their corresponding styles, ten of the most well-preserved panels were selected. Then, the sample size was reduced a second time to include four panels that portrayed attributes of Red Monochrome Style period sequence while the other six panels that were part of the first sample were set aside for potentially falling in between different styles and eras. The initial examination of the four panels selected demonstrate overarching themes of death, rebirth, transformation, agriculture and emergence.



Figure 5. Four predominant design styles at Paint Rock

1) Red Linear Style pictographs represented by simple stick figures. 2) Red Monochrome Style represented by the well-composed figure of the ball player, 3) Bold Line Geometric Style noted by the pattern-shaped motifs, 4) Historical Style recognized by the churches and Christian-related symbols like the crosses. Photographs by author, July 2023.

Through the preliminary classification process, color usage at Paint Rock revealed very conservative and muted tones. Most of the pictographs sport pigments of red dyes probably deriving from iron oxides (hematite) (Newcomb 1967, 146). Very few images contain mixtures or overlay of purple and violet hues. Occasionally, other colors were employed, like yellow and orange ochres deriving from earth's natural clay pigments, while images that were drawn with white chalk and black charcoal have long faded or are almost unrecognizable. Therefore, for most of these images, color spectrum and color patterning did not yield meaningful results like in other sites like in The White Shaman Preserve, where color overlay and sequence became codified ways to demonstrate meaning (Boyd and Cox 2016, 61-65). Though it may be possible that some pictographs at Paint Rock have color-specific patterning, for the most part, they were drawn in no particular order in terms of choice of color.

In the near vicinity of Paint Rock, there are not that many sites that contain color-specific panels or rock art. There is a rock shelter south of Paint Rock called Kincaid Shelter that has similar characteristics to Paint Rock's landscape, but reveals preference for portable art over rock art, even though large discoveries of red pigment dyes have been found in several baking pits of the site (Mock 2016, 40). This leads me to argue that rock art was not a common occurrence but rather highly symbolic.

Scholars explain that there is a great emphasis placed by the Indigenous populations on the type of rituals, songs and orations performed during processional worship that help spiritual essences materialize into symbols like rock art that are responsible for the sanctification of a place (Steelman et al. 2025, 14). These symbols embody culture by invoking the "spirit of the land" (Hill 1992, 19) to fill the landscape

with sacred knowledge that was passed down by Indigenous ancestors who also paid homage to the site (Steelman et al. 2025, 14). These consecutive visits increase the power of the land and transform it into a Flower Mountain where myths, songs, and orations call forth the divine solidifying the connection between different worlds. This suggests that although site choice was important, the purpose of the journey was of higher importance since the orations that accompany it not only call to the divine, but they also allow it to manifest in the terrestrial world through the power of ancient orations.

Organization of the Study

In this thesis, the purpose of Chapter 1 is to present Paint Rock's landscape to better acquaint the public with its general location and introduce the styles of rock art present on this site. I briefly discuss how rock art was used to sacralize a place through subsequent visits by adorning the site with divine symbols that help form deep bonds between the land and the divine.

Chapter 2 explains why celestial archetypes like myths, rites and symbols became a necessary part of shamanic ascension in order to acquire visions from the divine. I argue that the visions produced during ancient ritual practices were left captured in the pictographs at Paint Rock and over time became shared beliefs that filled the hard nucleus of a society with themes of Indigenous cosmovision. Through motif comparison of shamanic art, I then argue that the cores of Indigenous cosmovision can be identified and be traced back to origin stories depicting themes of emergence, transformation and death.

Then in Chapter 3, I examine the design styles and structural composition of four Red Monochrome Style pictographic panels from Paint Rock, Texas. The objective is to

examine how design concepts in rock art were adapted to show intentionality and motivation to better interpret social and ideological themes transmuted through rock art of the indigenous groups that inhabited the Edwards Plateau region of Texas. I argue that by examining design styles, including dry brush painting, wet stencil painting, dabbing/splotching/dripping, outlining, and coating, patterns can identify art techniques that will show intention during the creation of the pictographs. Then, by examining the art's compositional structure through design analysis of balance, proportion, patterning, unity, and organization these techniques will help identify which images belong to each panel, as there are overlapping layers of pictographs from different time periods in close proximity to each other. Chapter 3 also incorporates ethnographic records of ancient myths, songs and orations to provide an interpretative analysis of the pictographs. The goal is to determine whether a close examination of art techniques and composition provides a better understanding of the meanings behind the pictographs by the way they were drawn.

Chapter 4 compares the design and compositional structure of the art techniques employed amongst the four panels selected to reveal potential patterns, causation, and methods of expression through art techniques. The findings suggest that there are two distinct grouping patterns identified as either character-driven panels or action-driven panels. During the investigation, I also observed that three of the four rock art panels show dynamic movements through solar alignments while only one panel exhibits "still life" characteristics. Based on the findings, I claim that the creation of rock art takes an enormous amount of effort requiring strategic planning to track the sun's placement and

to plan long journeys of processional worship, refuting any argument that states that rock art was a simple and random act with no real purpose or meaning.

Finally, Chapter 5 explains how chromatic symbols granted divine access by creating transcosmological portals of light through rock art that connected the terrestrial plane to the divine in order to obtain sacred visions. These visions describe themes of emergence, transformation, death and renewal. Based on the themes revealed, I conclude that Paint Rock was considered a “Flower Mountain” by the Indigenous groups that journeyed to this site. Lastly, I argue that through repetitive themes of emergence, life and death the Indigenous people of the Southwest invoked the dawn of a new cycle to bring renewal, fertility, and corn consecrating this site as a sacred landscape.

Chapter II.

A New Dawn

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the
Word was God.*

—John 1:1 (NIV)

Ongoing research on rock art demonstrates its great complexity. Variability in styles depict group identity, cultural rootedness, and sacred visions (Boyd 2016; Whitley 2023). Shifts in style and technique reveal intentionality and interconnectedness to ancestral pilgrimages of the early peoples of the Americas dating back to the dawn of time (Boyd et al. 2021, 258). During long processional journeys, accounts of ancient storytelling described the creation of the world and of the gods. Therefore, before any written language, communication was driven by oral stories that contained powerful messages of wisdom, self-sacrifice and altruism that descended from the divine (Fulbright 1992, 228). These stories helped foster social cohesion, transmit important information, and set parameters of acceptable social behavior (Steelman et al. 2025, 6), thus setting the foundation for orations and stories of creation to become the portal that connected the people directly to the gods or in other instances becoming the supernatural beings “who could speak the very language of the gods” (Tedlock 1996, 21).

In ancient Mesoamerica, a variety of creation stories exist, but one of the most notable versions can be traced to the nation of the K’iche’ people through the ancient text of the *Popol Vuh* (Tedlock 1996). This story has traveled throughout North America and

morphed into various versions that have been adapted to fit different cosmologies, audiences, and ultimately tailored for specific regions of the Americas (Pickands 2019, 33). This thesis then examines four panels that I argue connect the artists of Paint Rock to pan-Mesoamerican, and perhaps even pan-American, generational stories with similar frameworks as those described by the *Popol Vuh*. The stories captured through rock art illustrate a young maiden who conceives twins via the sun and dies during childbirth; a story of emergence where corn is gifted to the Indigenous people by the gods; and lastly, the ball game, a ceremonial journey that takes place in the underworld.

Although it is somewhat unusual to find three generational stories paired together in one remote location, it is not unlikely since stories can travel exceptionally long distances (Mathiowetz et al. 2015, 2). In the case of Paint Rock, stories of creation were reenacted through calendrical ceremonies performed on site and manifested into rock art. As a result, the powerful messages that were left behind now serve as “spiritual copies” (Taussig 1993, 115), that connect the divine to the material world and allow stories to transcend over time. Such was their importance during rituals, that stories and orations accompanied by chanting, drumming or psychoactive plant usage, became the method by which to access the divine in order to maintain the spirits of the gods alive (VanPool 2024, 2). For this reason, it is important to examine how celestial archetypes invoke the spirit of the land in order to access ancestral cores of knowledge and wisdom that were part of ancient stories of creation.

Celestial Archetypes

In one of the most influential books of the late 1950s, *Cosmos and History, The Myth of the Eternal Return*, Mircea Eliade (1959, vii) explains that archaic societies are

connected with the cosmos, and not necessarily with history. The core difference is that archaic peoples are connected with the “cosmic rhythms” (Eliade 1959, viii) of the world, adapting the creation of their history through the sacred which was conveyed through the use of myths. Ancient orations performed by either “a god, an ancestor, or a hero” (Eliade 1959, 21) consecrated new places of worship and incorporated mythical beings that were utilized to preserve cosmic order and record events of great magnitude, like emerging into a new world or establishing a recurring regenerative cycle to bring forth a new dawn of life. Such was the force that they evoked in people, that by virtue of celestial archetypes like myths, rites, and symbols, they were able to maintain a society operational and sustainable through origin myths passed down through generations (Eliade 1959, 5-6; Pickands 2019, 33).

Perhaps, this was one of the main reasons that great city-states in Mesoamerica and the American Southwest were able to thrive in ancient times and why stories of creation are so popular and influential to this day. In essence, myths provided ancestral communities with norms and values to follow, rites gave intrinsic value to repetitive actions of divine provenience (Eliade 1959, 5), which granted symbols the ability to withstand time. In a similar manner, the myths recounted through the pictographs at Paint Rock activated this site as a ceremonial landscape where myths led the processional journey with purpose, rites materialized divine visions into rock art and over time this site became an extension of the sacred. This meant that processional worship had the ability to create temporary ceremonial mounds or “Flower Mountains” that could shift the power of the divine to different locations and institute temporary centers of worship during annual pilgrimages (Carrasco 1999, 33). This shift in power dynamics then explains how

Paint Rock acquired so much rock art through centuries of pilgrimage, though it does not explain how a place becomes sanctified for ceremonial purposes.

In his book, *Aztec, Ceremonial Landscapes*, David Carrasco (1999, 33) asserts that processional worship can make consecrated spaces “expand, retract, meander and transform...[into] a metamorphic vision of a place” by commemorating journeys to a holy place or a place of high spiritual significance revealing that the creation of the world does not sit statically in one place. Instead, he argues that processions, pilgrimages, and mythical heroes guided the people to new places that “moved beyond static conceptions of a sacralized space” (Carrasco 1999, 33). These places were sanctified by the myths and orations that were repeated with each visit where they transformed into symbols that functioned as an extension of the sacred. These symbols then utilized images or pictographs, to allow the physical body to experience closeness to the divine, granting mankind the ability to connect deeply to the cosmos and to the land. Then through the perfected fusion that occurred between myths, rites and symbols, mythology converged with ontological truths allowing ancestral communities to explain the “cosmos in mythical terms” (Broda 1999, 79). This idea not only transforms the dynamics of center versus periphery, but it also provides insight as to how pictographs function as an extension of the divine by displaying the mythical heroes that once guided Indigenous communities to new places of worship through the stories that were narrated during annual pilgrimages.

Therefore, if the amalgamation of myths and rites manifest into divine symbols in rock art, then visual patterns must also appear as “cosmological concepts of life and creation” that are traceable throughout different regions of the world as Boyd and Busby

(2021, 28) suggest. This means that patterns in art should express mythical characters as well as mythical themes of spiritual flight/journey, emergence, or self-sacrifice where transformation, maturation and death are involved. As seen in other regions of the Americas, shamanic art captures these themes through entoptic images, vortex tunnels and pipetted motifs, while others capture fuzzy-haired or anthropomorphic figures with noticeable physical transformations, each representing a different design according to their region (Schaafsma 2018, 421; VanPool 2024, 3; Wright and Russell 2011, 362). It then appears crucial to examine shamanic rock art in order to understand how themes of life, creation and death were expressed through different art motifs to determine function and meaning.

Shamanic Visions Captured in Rock Art

Over the past thirty years, several leading scholars, like Boyd and Cox (2016), Boyd and Busby (2021), Van Pool (2024), and Schaafsma (2009, 2018), have worked countless hours to decipher stories and hidden messages left behind in rock art to offer cultural insight on how ancestral societies embodied spiritual and physical attributes of the ancient world. They have developed theoretical frameworks that combine studies of linguistics and semiotics, shamanic ceremonialism and ascension, as well as art history related to anthropomorphic taxonomy of rock art, in order to understand how signs and symbols function across societies and influence the formation of indigenous worldviews.

Although there has been extensive research conducted on Mesoamerican cosmovision for mural art and epigraphic work (Boyd and Cox 2016, 6), rock art appears to have been brushed aside with minor “salvage ethnographies” performed sporadically throughout the 20th century, failing to yield any meaningful results (Hampson 2023,

1028-9). Dismissive comments of rock art have also been detrimental and highly erroneous as great advances in technology and interpretation are proving their great sophistication.

Modern software has allowed researchers to expand rock art interpretative analyses and map connections to old language dialects that move scholars closer in identifying origin and meaning (Boyd 2021, 245). Scholars are also identifying ways to utilize laboratory chemical analyses to ascertain dates for pictographs and examine old records of ethnographic commentary to understand how rituals influenced some of the visions that were captured through rock art (Boyd et al. 2023, 6-8; Steelman et al. 2021, 3-7). In other studies, researchers are also examining artistic processes to identify patterns in paint application, arrangement and action that can provide clues on how rock art was meant to be “visually read and experienced” (Boyd and Busby 2021, 28).

Certainly, the authors that created intricate art panels in the Lower Pecos, like the White Shaman Mural, considered the environment, sun placement, dimensional planes, and paint layering (Boyd and Cox 2016, 3-5). It was by no means a simplistic approach, as much thought and planning had to have taken place. This is particularly true if solar alignments were also vital to express messages to the gods or if they resonated with shamanic rituals of the region. The implications of attributing meaning, origin, functionality, and usage to rock art as ‘shamanic’ must be tread lightly, though, since shamanic rock art is not universal across all cultures and ancient societies.

For example, Turpin (1990) believed that rock art rooted in shamanic traditions embodied attributes of ascendancy with the ability to separate the material world from the spiritual. This was done by mixing a range of shamans depicted as long-wired haired

humans holding power bundles with various kinds of animals like fish, rabbits, turtles, and snakes (Turpin 1990, 270). Similarly, Schaafsma (2018, 420) explains that some Pueblo cultures in the Southwest practiced “permeable boundaries” between humans and animals that allow shamanic transformations to take over the physical body through a trance-like state and acquire supernatural powers of those animals. As a result, several shamanic rock art panels are also accompanied by bears, felines, or birds (Schaafsma 2018, 421).

Meanwhile, Whitley (2023, 280) claims that rock art motifs vary by intention and design. For example, he states that there are several pictographs in California that are known as “shaman caches” where tribal priests used to paint the inside of a rock tunnel with “curing vortices” to store their ritual paraphernalia for healing practices (Whitley 2023, 283). In other pictographs found in Sierra Nevada he states that they were created to illustrate “supernatural bridges or shaman’s dreams” connected to ascension journeys (Whitley 2023, 255). Similar to Whitley’s research, Vanpool’s (2024, 3) assessment of ascension journeys also documents entrance tunnels depicted by vortex swirls during spiritual flight. Yet others like Wright and Russell (2011, 367) document that movement between worlds was more fluid and less restricted as depicted by the pipetted iconography that acted as ladders between worlds. These pipetted motifs not only symbolized a tiered cosmos, but they were also used to re-enact themes of emergence into the current world (Wright and Russell 2011, 367).

While many scholars have articulated deep connections between shamanic ascension and rock art, it is used so differently throughout North America that it is far from becoming a “one fits all” scenario. Therefore, I agree with Whitley that each rock

art panel is meant to be examined individually in order to capture intentionality, motivation and themes that could otherwise be misrepresented or missed by applying a general function to all of shamanic rock art.

Hence, this investigation is meant to rely on the foundational scholarship that was developed by Boyd and Busby (2021), Boyd and Cox (2016), and Boyd et al. (2023) when identifying patterns in iconography that could be useful to interpret the meanings of the panels at Paint Rock. Assuming that most, if not all, of the case studies that helped shape the theoretical approach of this research consist of art panels that were created during an altered state of consciousness (ASC), the ethnographic review in the next chapter will also connect ceremonial practices, stories and orations that led some ASC rituals to manifest into rock art.

While rituals and ceremonies of ASC will be discussed, consideration of the consumption of hallucinogenic plants will be kept to a minimum, since Paint Rock has not undergone extensive archaeological examination and there is little information to go by. Nevertheless, it is evident that consumption of medicinal herbs was a common practice in the American Southwest as there are panels at Paint Rock depicting a Sun Priest smoking a ceremonial pipe. While it is unclear what the contents of the pipe were, tobacco and peyote were frequently consumed during ASC practices by the Indigenous tribes of the Southwest, so the probability that they were using similar entheogens to initiate trance-like states is relatively high (Van Pool 2024, 3).

Van Pool's (2024, 3-4) investigation also notes repetitious iconography created when using tobacco-based products such as pecked dots, swirls, vortex circles, and zig-zag lines that convey material reality that is "moving" or that is "alive." Understanding

these designs is instrumental in this research as they are also present in some of the art panels examined. Although these entoptic designs were extremely overlooked in the mid-twentieth century, ethnographic commentary of tribal chiefs and pioneering archaeologists indicate that these patterns have real meaning and are deeply associated with ASC journeys (Whitley 2023, 277). As a result, patterns can be identified through repetitive motif usage, demonstrating that pictographic designs are also able to withstand time.

Remnants of a Hard Nucleus

Places of mist are often described in ancient orations through myths, poetry, songs, and hymns (Lopez Austin 1997, 3). They are what Hill (1992, 117) calls “chromatic symbols” that include passageways between life and death. They often describe places of light and shadow, creation and death, and of good versus evil. While these archetypes develop religious expressions of ancient Mesoamerica, they are also deeply “woven into the very fabric of [Puebloan] society” (Boyd and Cox 2016, 6). With time, these concepts become hard units of communication that are able to withstand time. Their long duration persists since they are far from becoming “decayed expressions of ancient Mesoamerican religion” (Lopez Austin 1997, 6). Instead, they make up fundamental values and beliefs of a unified hard nucleus that are taken from myths, rituals, iconography, cosmovision and oral traditions (Lopez Austin 1997, 5).

These units identify relationships established via cosmovision and form ideological systems that provide reasoning of the world which then permeates throughout all social activities. Over time, the highly repetitive cores become established notions of how the world is perceived and acted upon to encourage social cohesion (Steelman et al.

2025, 6). Similarly, the pictographic panels at Paint Rock contain shamanic art that captures visions of the divine and passes down knowledge and wisdom that are helpful when navigating the terrestrial plane. These can be transferred in the form of physical attributes or animistic spirits that can guide decision-making during important events or stages of life (Boyd and Busby 2021, 32).

Scholars like MacLean (2000, 82) further explain that there are two major distinctions noted in the realm of animism separating cores from the physical body versus “souls” captured within rock art, which have different meanings and purposes. MacLean states (2000, 80-3) that the ‘soul’ can be inspired by internal processes like dreams and visions, while outward concepts related to the body and mind guide the body’s function and movement to externalize what is already found within.

Fundamentally speaking, dreams and visions capture the essence of the soul which lives inside the body that naturally helps inspire the mind, while the physical cores like the heart, body and spirit, build passageways from the spiritual world and moves the body to create divine connections through art, architecture, songs, orations, and rituals. These chromatic symbols become resistant to historical change and appear as repetitive patterns that can be traced throughout the Southwest deep into South America (Van Pool 2024, 3). These ancestral cores then operate as symbols that are intentional and purpose driven and contain “origin history” that captures visions from the beginning of time (Taussig 1993, 116).

In sum, through the examination of celestial archetypes like myths, rites and symbols, it is evident that storytelling and ancient orations were important to the people of the Southwest. These archetypes were necessary when performing long journeys as

they became portals that connected the people to new places of worship. This shows that the center of the world moved where people needed it to move, thus expanding its sanctity to include other ceremonial mounds or “Flower Mountains” to their landscape (Coltman 2023, 168; see also Hill 1992, 122). Hence, this investigation will prove that ancestral communities worshipped Paint Rock as a Flower Mountain by the rites they performed and the symbols that were left behind showing themes of emergence, renewal and transformation.

Lastly, with such diverse variations captured through shamanic rock art, it proves vital to conduct studies that show how regional themes and variations in art styles appear throughout the Southwest since the art captured does not prove to be exclusive to one ethnic group or region of the world. Therefore, the examination of the rock art panels in the next chapter will demonstrate that artistic techniques emphasize character forms and figures to expose plots and story lines that are traceable through origin stories of creation. This examination then helps identify patterns in iconography that have function and meaning and explains adaptations of the Puebloan worldview that resonate in many ways with the cultural imaginings of Mesoamerican cosmovision.

Chapter III.

Interpreting Rock Art Through Art Analysis & Ethnography

In this chapter, I present a qualitative approach when conducting a formal feature analysis of four Red Monochrome Style panels from Paint Rock, Texas. These pictographic panels were selected based on repetitive themes of life, death, emergence and transformation. I will argue that through motif comparison and association, the panels selected recount scenes of creation myths and orations that were translated into rock art. Photographs of the pictographs are presented and enhanced with iDStretch, an open software system that allows for enhancements to capture most, if not all, of the original outlines of the pictographs at the time of creation. An interpretative analysis of ethnographic records will follow to determine connections of magico-religious significance to the art motifs being studied via cosmovision or creation myths.

The art feature analysis of the pictographs examines the artistic techniques used to draw the images. This approach, although inspired by Boyd and Busby (2021, 27), will also include other units of observation such as outlining and coating to determine if meaning was enhanced through an anthromorph's form, figure and outline. The documented observations provide information on stylistic patterning, style deviations, and identify intentional art techniques through outlining and coating as part of the planning phase of the pictographs. The artistic formal feature analysis includes the identifications of:

1. Painting technique: Dry brush versus wet stencil, or finger dabbing, dripping, or splotching.

- a. Dry brush normally results in a rough, textured finish with visible brush strokes. Finger painting and wet brush painting result in a smoother look with a more generous amount of paint left behind. Dripping can be the result of copious amounts of paint falling off the brush/fingers as an artistic error or it can be intentional. Splotching refers to a technique that was utilized by blowing paint from the mouth or using hollow bones or similar materials to produce a spray color finish or air brush finish (Newcomb, Jr. 1967, 150). Smearing and dabbing are sometimes used as well.

2. Types of lines and shapes of figures used.

- a. Circles/concentric circles, geometric shapes (triangles, rectangles, squares, zig zags, etc.)

3. Outlining or filling in shapes, versus no fill.

- a. Outlines are mostly drawn with black paint or using charcoal. Paint is then added to the top of the drawing to fill it in.

4. Coating: Simple coat or multiple coats of paint layering.

- a. Coating is important and can be used to add texture, dimension, or to enhance the frame of an image. Layering multiple coats of paint results in a deeper color that is highly visible and vibrant and does not fade easily.

5. Color usage and texture.

- a. Color intensity and texture are ways to attract attention to specific details that indicate high significance to the author.

After the artistic process was completed, an analysis of compositional structure was performed to identify possible relationships among figures and provide useful information of how indigenous communities utilized spatial planning (Boyd and Busby 2021, 31). This method determines whether there is congruent relationship between pictographs, or if the neighboring images are separate from the panels being observed (Boyd et al. 2023, 8). These relationships are determined based on the following elements:

1. Balance

- a. Refers to the visual weight of a panel. Images can be distributed evenly or askew (unbalanced) to increase tension or instability to the panel.

2. Proportion

- a. Determines the height, width, or length of the images to provide depth or designate relation to an object.

3. Patterning

- a. Presents repetition of specific motifs or visual elements.

4. Unity

- a. Visual elements either work together to create a sense of harmony and wholeness, or their placement is set in the periphery for a feeling of separation.

5. Organization

- a. Refers to the distribution of images and where the visual weight of interest lies in a panel (i.e., Are elements centered, dispersed, or set

in the periphery? Is there a sense of belonging with the rest of the images?).

Analysis and interpretation of compositional structure was imperative to determine relationships and connections between pictographs to infer whether multiple panels comprise one scene or if the nearby pictographs were unrelated. As previously mentioned in the introduction, the limestone bluff is covered in over 1500 pictographs, so the second part of the artistic analysis must be extremely methodical to ensure precise association for each pictograph.

Following the artistic and compositional examination, an ethnographic review of each panel was assessed by determining themes based on imagery, interactions between characters, and metaphors that could be represented by symbols. The objective was to determine if the themes in the art mirrored other symbols throughout the Southwest into Mesoamerica and if they were connected with ancient stories, rituals or songs that could explain the actions being portrayed on the rock art panels.

When examining the panels for Blood Moon and the Ball Player, investigative research concentrated mostly on symbolic iconography related to the character's headdress and attire to determine possible identities. Mesoamerican codices were examined like the *Madrid Codex*, *Dresden Codex*, *Telleriano-Remensis*, and *Codex Borgia* since they exemplified deities with similar headdresses, attire and cosmic purpose. Regional art from northern Mexico was also examined along with stories of the Southwest that paralleled to the stories being depicted through rock art at Paint Rock.

Hence, for Blood Moon's panel, ancient stories of the Maya, Hopi and Navajo were examined since they convey scenes of a mythical woman-figure giving birth to twin

boys, while the Ball Player examined stories related to the ancient ball game through accounts of the Ch'orti' myth of the Kumix, the *Popol Vuh* and the Twins of the Gulf Coast. Themes of death, transformation and rebirth were used to filter through stories that best paralleled to the scenes found at Paint Rock. The artistic analysis then connected the panels of Blood Moon to Hopi culture and the Ball Player to Pueblo style art from northern Mexico.

For the other panels of Emergence and Corn, examinations of ethnographic stories recorded by anthropologists and ethnohistorians were employed. Particular focus was placed on mythical stories of creation that included maize as a sacred plant, ancient orations and rituals related to the agriculture of corn as well as corn metaphors used in the Southwest. Through symbolic representations of corn metaphors depicting young females as 'corn maidens' or corn as 'mother', themes of emergence, maturation and renewal appeared drawing parallels of Pueblo culture through the iconography and story plots. These connections confirmed that the Emergence panel depicted an ancient story of Hopi culture emerging into the Fourth World while the Corn panel depicted an ancestral story of Hopi/Tewa culture identifying a maturation ceremony that was meant to expand Pueblo kinship bonds into other regions of the Southwest.

All four panels examined in this chapter will include individual sections discussing artistic features and compositional analysis, as well as the ethnographic review that demonstrates connections between the pictographs and ancestral stories and orations.

Blood Moon Panel Feature Analysis

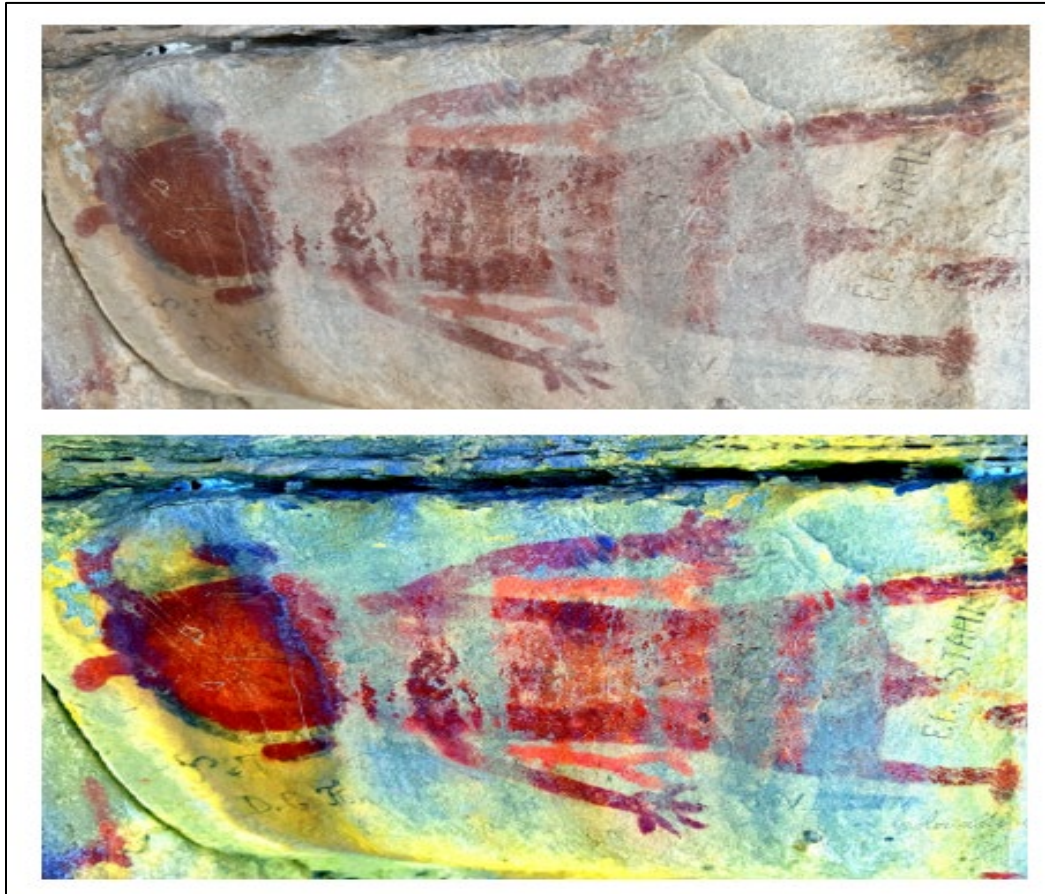


Figure 6. Blood Moon Panel

The top picture shows the unedited, original photograph taken of Blood Moon's pictograph on site. The bottom picture shows iDStretch enhancements with YDT filter. Photographs by author, July 2023.

The first pictograph examined is of a woman who, for the purposes of this research, will be named “Blood Moon” (Figure 6). She stands as the representation of a moon goddess also known in other cultures as Changing Woman, Spider Woman, Ix Chel, or Tonantzin. While she may not be Mayan per se, her maroon coloring makes it a

captivating and appropriate name for her. The solar alignments captured at Paint Rock may also directly link her to the pre-harvest ceremonies conducted during the vernal equinox and the renewal ceremony during winter solstice. The limestone bluff begins with this pictograph, and her presence sets the stage for the reason behind her name and the formation of various creation myths she is associated with. This panel falls within the Red Monochrome Style.

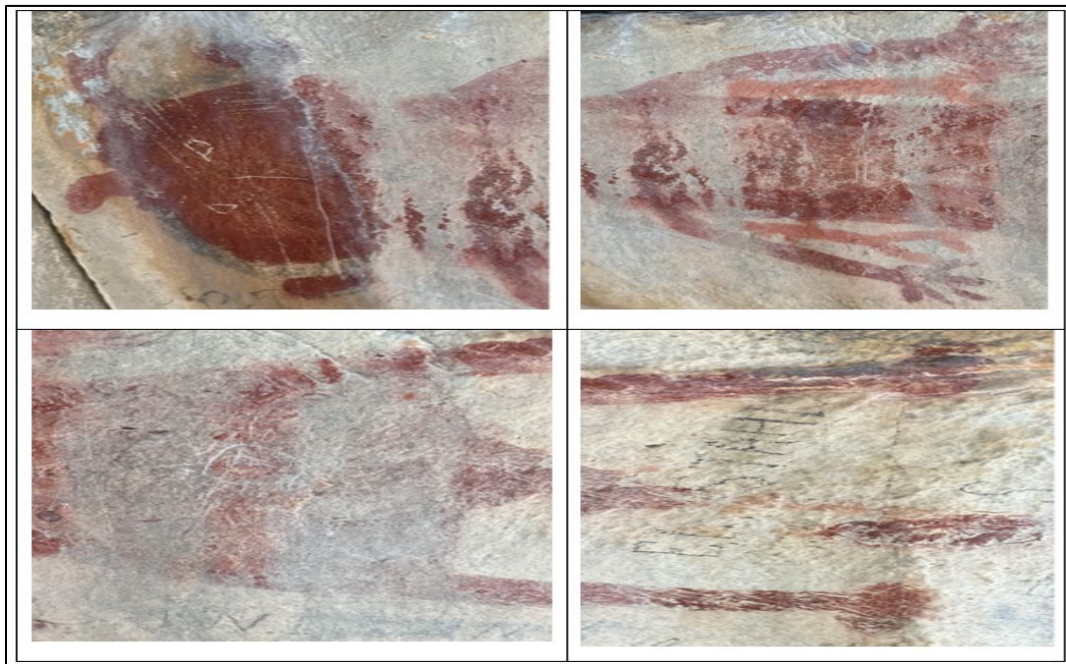


Figure 7. Blood Moon's Feature Analysis.

Close-up shots of Blood Moon's head/neck, torso, skirt and legs. Notice the black outline of her head and the paint layering of her headdress, frame of her body, and legs. Black undertones of what appear to be shin-high boots and a slight orange ochre that surrounds the placental detachment are visible. The etchings of her facial features and bird motif are also present. Photographs by author, July 2023.

Blood Moon's panel exhibits fascinating characteristics and elements of design. Starting with the outline of her head, she appears to be wearing a serpent or coiled-knotted headdress that has an etched projectile feather coming out of it in a deeply faded orange ochre. The projectile feather has been picked off, and small pieces of rock are missing. The robust part of her headdress, including the tail-end, exhibits signs of paint layering which are double coated, giving it a deep maroon color. The top of the headdress contains a simple coat of paint with no added outlines. Her head and ears are outlined in black while the inside of her head is filled in with the same maroon monochrome color. She displays etchings for her eyes, nose and what appears to be a long etching for a mouth. Following down her neck, she appears to be wearing an indigenous dress with a high collar that seems to be slightly bulging, perhaps detailing a denser material resting on her neck and top of the shoulder area (Figure 7).

Her frame is rectangular and also presents paint layering that is highly visible without any enhancements. Her twin boys are painted in an orange ochre that stands out against the deep maroon frame of her body. Her skirt, although heavily faded, was filled in with a maroon monochrome color, and there were no signs of paint layering. Her extremities, arms, legs and feet were double coated following the paint layering technique utilized for her frame and outline. However, it appears that her shins all the way down to her feet have black paint facing outwards to outline a small portion of her extremities. Maroon paint was then placed on top, sealing the black paint as an undertone. Since this pattern differs from the rest of her frame, it signals intentionality. The black paint stops at her shin, and a double layer of paint was dabbed on possibly signaling boots as footwear.

Her circular navel also seems to be double coated in a now faded, black charcoal color aligning vertically with her genitalia and her placental detachment.

The delivery of the placenta was also drawn in an orange ochre which indicates that the twins were recently delivered and are still covered in birth fluids. Imagery connection seems plausible and would indicate that the artist was skilled and gave deep thought to the connections in respect to choice of color. Lastly, there is a small figure adjacent to her right leg, but it is too degraded to be made out completely. This image may have been drawn at a prior time as it is heavily faded and appears to have been made with the use of black charcoal as the material of choice.

Blood Moon's image is by far one of the most intricate pictographs at Paint Rock for the level of effort it took to create her. The black undertones in her frame reveal that an outline must have been drawn prior to the maroon paint. There were no signs of paint-mixing, so the artist must have waited for the outline to dry first or at least set and then spread the maroon coating afterwards. Moon's outline is very clean and stylized, though the hands of the figure and footwear appear to have been dabbed on. There were no signs of dry textured paint throughout her frame, so a close representation of a wet stencil brush and dabbing were the primary techniques used. The dimensions of paint color, her headdress and attire signal that she was a person of rank and of great importance to her people. There are several linear and square-like etchings in her abdomen area, and the middle of her skirt has an engraving of a bird's head with a long beak, perhaps detailing a hummingbird motif. The drawing rendered in Figure 8 shown below illustrates a clearer image of those etchings.



Figure 8. Drawing render of Blood Moon

Drawing render of Blood Moon's panel showing what she may have looked like during her time of creation. Drawing by author, August 2025.

The compositional structure of creating Blood Moon was well thought out and perfectly executed. Her placement on the site demonstrates that she was an important individual since her image was one of the first to be painted on the cliff's entrance on the east side (Elliott 2024, 201). The size of her body and her proportions were well manufactured, and her panel has even visual weight distributed amongst the rock. Furthermore, there are two panels on opposite ends of her image that slightly skew the balance of the scene. The pictograph to her left depicts an anthromorph holding a macaw bird that has been shot with an arrow. This scene is small and simple. The pictograph to her right depicts a spiritual ceremony taking place with a Sun Priest smoking a pipe inside a dwelling, performing prayers for the dying mother (Figure 9) (Elliott 2024, 201).

The style and composition of the Sun Priest differ against Blood Moon's as it is evident that there is more profundity in Blood Moon due to her sheer size and the level of

detail her figure displays. The Sun Priest appears next to her as a simple linear figure with no real characteristics, and the importance does not lie in him but rather in the ceremony being performed. Also, based on the paint and color gradient, it appears that all three scenes were created concurrently, though, the characters show variability in style and in depth. This evidence suggests that the multiple artists who created these scenes were knowledgeable in creating rock art, as they were using elements of depth and composition to attract attention to specific details. In this scene, Blood Moon is depicted as the main protagonist of the story. In contrast, the Sun Priest smoking a pipe is setting the stage for the ceremony, while Capturer of the macaw is offering a sacrifice up to the gods for her recovery.



Figure 9. Blood Moon with Opposing Panels

The photograph displays multiple scenes surrounding Blood Moon's birth scene. To the left of Blood Moon there is an anthromorph (Capturer) holding a macaw bird that has been shot with an arrow. Image to her right is a Sun Priest smoking a ceremonial pipe, raising prayers for the dying mother. Photograph by author, July 2023.

Ethnographic Review of Blood Moon

A myriad of images and glyphs of the moon are recorded throughout all of North America. They often express lunar phases, astronomical positions, or dictate belief systems of the female role associated with pregnancy, childbirth, agriculture, weaving, spinning and water (Milbrath 2010, 105). In other contexts, she is considered the mother of maize, patroness of the midwives, or the mother of all curative or destructive forces (Pickands 2019, 33). Such reverence makes her a popular icon throughout different regions of the world and through the myths she embodies. She stands as a multi-dimensional being who acquires various qualities depending on the story she portrays.

Her character is layered with complexity and duality, where in some cases, she is regarded as a male Moon God closely related to the ancient ball game or to the agriculture of maize (Milbrath 2010, 135). When depicted in male form, she is closely associated with the full moon and seldomly with the lunar crescent cycle (Milbrath 2010,137). In some instances, one of the ball players, Yax Balam, may be depicted as a female waxing moon when maize seeds are being planted, and then as a male full moon when maize is being harvested (Milbrath 2010, 154).



Figure 10. Blood Moon dies during winter solstice

Photograph shows a solar alignment splitting Blood Moon in half during winter solstice narrating her death after childbirth. Photograph used with permission of Joshua Alkire, December 2024.

In the case of Paint Rock, though, Blood Moon appears to be a young female moon goddess who conceives the twins via the sun during the vernal equinox and dies after childbirth during the winter solstice (Figure 10). This context aligns with the Kachina solar ceremony when sun priests used to return during winter solstice for the Soyal Ritual, and the kachinas were shown emerging from the underworld illustrating the emergence from “dark to light to a new cycle of life” (Schuetz-Miller 2012, 361). This suggests that the pictographs along with the solar alignments from Blood Moon are narrating the ending of an old cycle so a new one can begin, bringing renewal and fertility to the land through the birth of her twins.

In a similar fashion, an old Hopi tale narrates a story of a young Hopi maiden that longed for copulation and cried out to the Sun for his love (Stephen 1929, 13-14). The story states:

One day while she was seated in her house, she spread her legs and drew up her dress... [crying out loud she said] “Sun! my father! For sure you do not love or care for me.” [Through a small] crevice in the house roof... the sun rays penetrated and fell upon her exposed vulva... [Then] the clouds came up, and the rain fell and the maid went under a projecting cliff for shelter... As the falling rain collected in a pool on the edge of the cliff and flowed over in drops, again they fell upon her vulva... Like an antelope, she gave birth to two... the first born was the child of the Sun and the other was the child of the Water.

Although this story and my interpretations of Blood Moon’s solar alignments differ from Elliot’s (2024), we both agree that this panel recounts a story of a moon goddess. He, however, leans towards the Navajo version called “Changing Woman” but taking into consideration the Hopi tale, her solstitial alignments, and the motifs prevalent in Hopi art, I have to disagree. It is true that both versions of the story share similar plots, but all evidence suggests that it is Hopi-inspired art.

The solstitial alignments that this panel exhibits not only aligns perfectly to the Hopi and Tewa annual ceremonies, but it also follows the solar trajectory for choosing ceremonial meeting places called “Houses of the Sun” (Schuetz-Miller 2012, 360). These ceremonial centers were chosen by sun priests that regularly monitored and tracked the sun’s progress from “southeast to northeast” for the harvesting of crops (Schuetz-Miller 2012, 361). This means that Pueblo Indians of various tribes possibly gathered in this ceremonial landscape established by sun priests to perform sacred rituals and exchange religious doctrines at Paint Rock.

Schuetz-Miller (2012, 356) states that around 700 CE, Pueblo people began the construction of complex dwellings in the Mesa Verde region near Chaco Canyon and

eventually established Pueblo Bonito as one of the nine “Major Great Houses” of the American Southwest. This major hub established a road system connecting many pueblos to its vast trade network leading all the way down into Mexico for macaw birds, macaw feathers, and copper bells (Schuetz-Miller 2012, 356). It is estimated that by 1070, Pueblo Bonito contained around 800 rooms with 37 kivas, with various pueblos containing sophisticated dam systems to support its dense population (Schuetz-Miller 2012, 356). Therefore, with expansive trade networks leading down into the valley of Mexico and relatively high population numbers, it is possible that multiple artists from different tribes gathered at Paint Rock and created these pictographs in unison, mixing various Pueblo art styles together.

Through a mixing of art styles, a core motif that stands out in Blood Moon which is prevalent in Hopi, Aztec and Maya culture is her headdress. In both Hopi and Aztec iconography, Moon’s headdress is sometimes depicted as a coiled umbilical cord symbolizing Spider Woman’s “woven mantle of creative wisdom” as illustrated in Puebloan creation myths or can signify metaphors for womb or weaving in Aztec iconography (Schuetz-Miller 2012, 300-301). In some cases, the young Moon Goddess of the *Madrid Codex* wears a cotton coil headdress with spindles, or as an old lady she wears a serpent headdress (Figure 11c, d). Similarly, in the *Dresden Codex*, the young goddess also wears cotton coils while the older goddess wears a knotted-serpent headdress (Figure 11a, b) (see Milbrath 2010, 142-143).

Yet, in other places like Palenque, Maya lunar glyphs depict a “snowy egret” or as Milbrath (2010, 151) suggests, a “white heron”, that also portrays a feathered headdress. Similarly, in other accounts by the Aztecs, Sahagún wrote that a male Moon God also

wore a “heron-feathered headdress,” reaffirming a possible lunar connection that substitutes the white rabbit with a white heron (Figure 11e) (Milbrath 2010, 151).

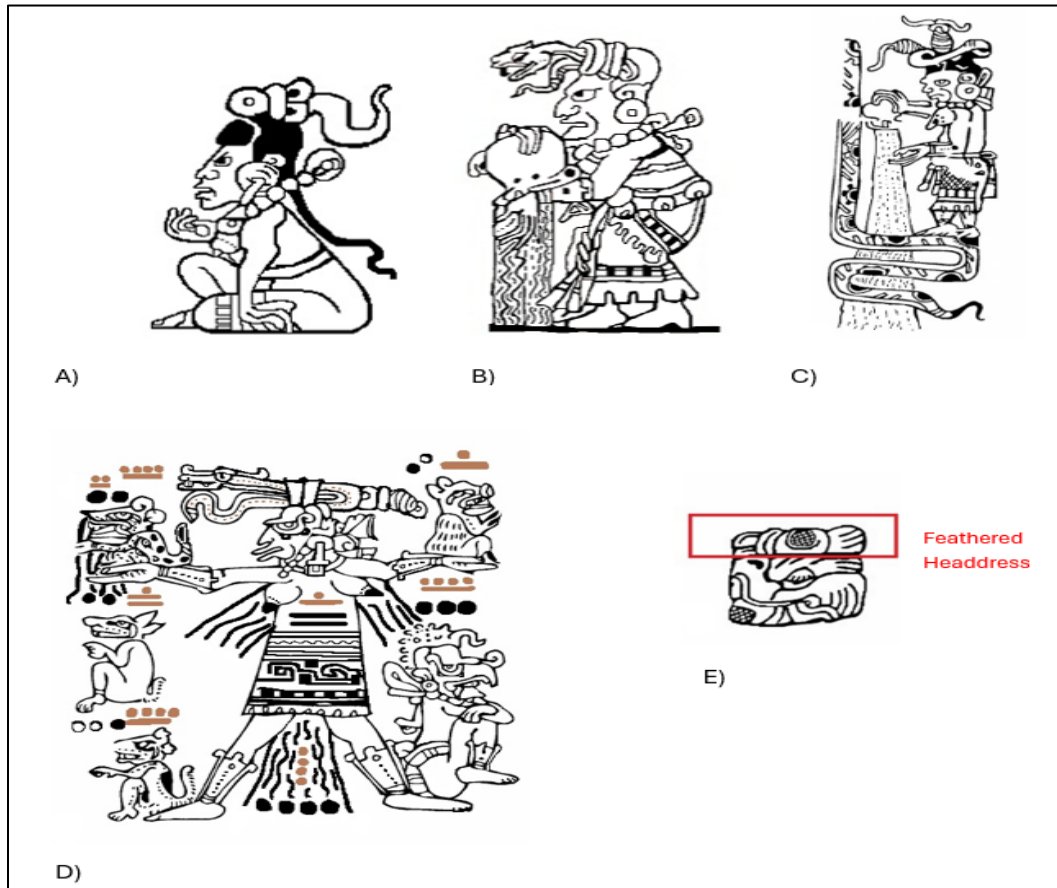


Figure 11. Representations of Lunar Goddess' Headdress

A) Young Moon goddess with cotton coil headdress, from the Dresden Codex (18b) B) Goddess O pouring out rainwater wearing a serpent knotted in her head, from the Dresden Codex (39b), C) Old Moon Goddess wearing cotton coil with spindles as a headdress, while also pouring out water, from the Madrid Codex (30a), D) Old Moon Goddess wearing serpent headdress, from the Madrid Codex (30b) E) Glyph of the White Heron named Zac Bak, from Palenque's Temple of Cross and associated with possible lunar connections. Re-drawn by author from Milbrath (2010: 139, fig. 4.7b (A); 144, fig. 4.8 c (B); 144, 4.8b (C); 144, fig 4.8g (D); 152, fig. 4.10e (E)).

It is, however, difficult to determine whether Moon's headdress is a coiled umbilical cord, cotton coil or serpent-knotted headdress since there is not much detail attributed to it other than paint layering. Although the feather motif on top of her headdress may suggest stronger connections to the Hopi as they believed that feathers carry the powers of prayer up to the gods since feathers are light, they are highly mobile, and birds are able to reach high altitudes which can help carry prayers up to the divine (Hill 1992, 131). It is also interesting to note that the dimensions of Blood Moon's frame (torso, arms, legs, and skirt) also share similar attributes to other Hopi style mural artwork that was found in kiva niche in the Rio Grande Valley region in New Mexico (Schaafsma 2009, 673-680) (Figure 12).

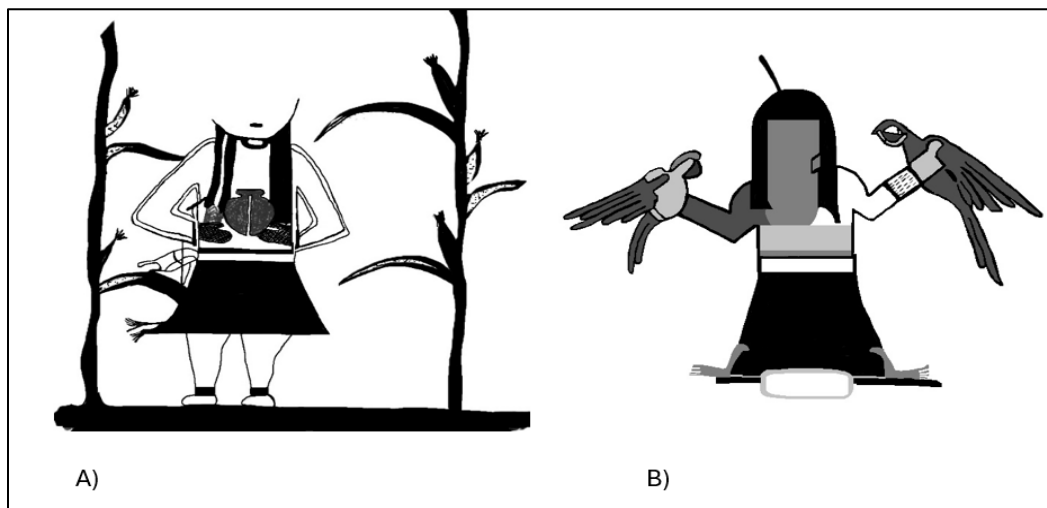


Figure 12. Female Mural Paintings found in Kiva Niches in New Mexico

A) A corn maiden holding a pot. B) A female with a feather on her head, holding two macaw birds. Mural paintings found in Pottery Mound in New Mexico. Redrawn by author, from Schaafsma (2009: 673, fig. 5A (A); 680, fig. 15(B)).

The intriguing part of the mural art found in New Mexico is that it also includes artwork with macaw birds, maize plants, and “sipapus” or places of emergence where Pueblo people came into the Fourth World or went into the underworld when diseased (Schuetz-Miller 2012, 356). These *sipapus* were often constructed with a square-like shape and built as “semi-subterranean pit houses, each with a side tunnel that functioned as both entry and air vent” (Schuetz-Miller 2012, 356). This prompts me to argue that the square-like figures in between Blood Moon and the Sun Priest are in fact a representation of a tiered cosmos represented by pipetted iconography that stands as a place of emergence and transcendence after she passes away from childbirth (Wright and Russell 2011, 367). In addition, the solar alignment that is also visible during the vernal equinox confirms this theory as the sun enters the dwelling through the bottom entrance in order to copulate with Blood Moon (Figure 13).



Figure 13. The Sun enters through the sipapu

During the vernal equinox, the solar alignment comes in through the bottom square opening, identified as a sipapu, to copulate with Blood Moon. Notice how the solar alignment ascends directly to her genitalia to impregnate her. Photograph used with permission of Joshua Alkire, September 2025.

Similar representations of places of emergence with square-like shapes can be found in other texts like the *Codex Borgia* where ancestral communities of the Maya descended into different worldly planes for ritual sacrifice or for altruistic purposes as narrated by several ancestral myths of the *Popol Vuh* (Tedlock 1996) (Figure 14).

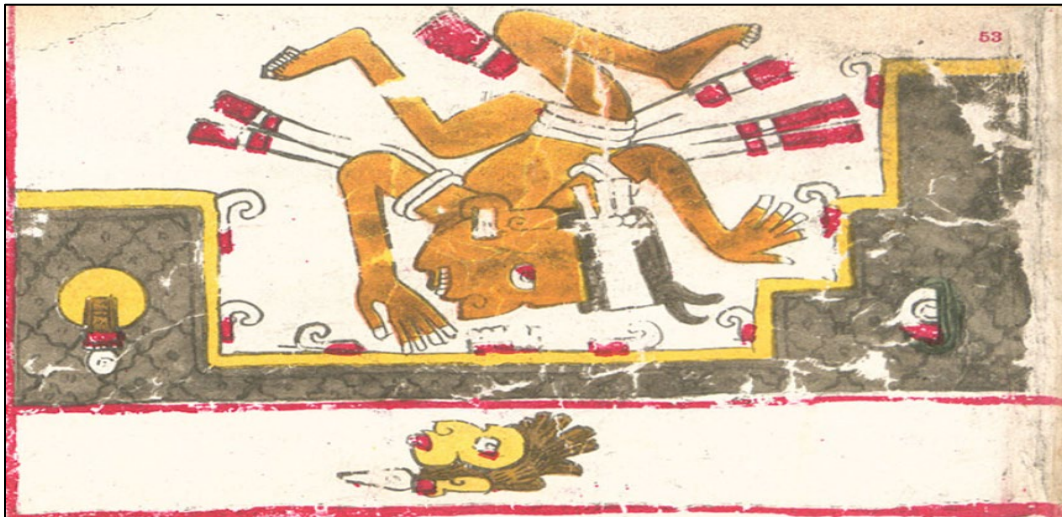


Figure 14. Journeying into the Underworld

A partial image from Plate 53 of the Codex Borgia displaying a place of emergence or descension into different worldly planes. In a different context, it can also signify the center of the world. From the Messicano Borgiano (Loubat 1898), Codex Borgia, FAMSI Website.

Additionally, to the right of the Sun Priest, there appears to be a zig-zag vine-like motif coming up through the earth, connecting the shrine with the ritual offerings of the smoke pipe. The zig-zag lines narrate that the Sun Priest is in a deep meditative state that is undergoing spiritual flight to plead for Moon's life (VanPool 2024, 2). His large, feathered wings show his spiritual transformation as he ascends into the upper world. In

this pictograph, he also appears to have a feather next to his head, verifying intentionality in the use of feather motifs that narrate prayers being raised to the divine. The three dots floating around his head represent speech scrolls or in this case the prayers he is raising for Blood Moon (Boyd and Busby 2021, 23). To the right, an anthromorph is holding a macaw bird that has been shot with an arrow sporting a scorpion motif on his head possibly representing the symbol for death or foreshadowing Blood Moon's journey into the underworld. (Figure 15).

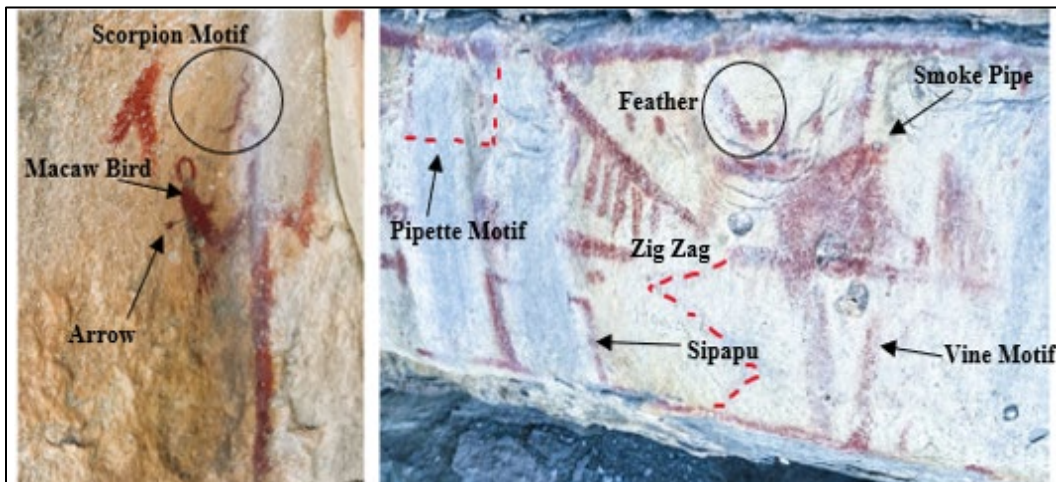


Figure 15. Capturer of Macaw & Sun Priest

Picture on the left shows an anthromorph capturing a macaw bird that has been shot with an arrow. The capturer exhibits a scorpion on his head and there is a small black thread attached to the arrow coming from the scorpion. Picture on the right shows a picture of the Sun Priest smoking a ceremonial pipe, elevating prayers to the gods for Blood Moon. A pipette motif separates Blood Moon from the Sun Priest. Photographs by author, July 2023.

Representations of a tiered cosmos often characterized by pipette iconography as shown in Figure 16 found below, establish metaphorical ladders that allow transcendental

movement between different worlds (Wright and Russell 2011, 366). These portals are often created near caves, *cenotes* or cliffs that feature creation myths and stories where mythical characters emerged between worlds (Wright and Russell 2011, 367). In some parts of the American Southwest, this structural design is represented in the architecture of kivas featuring holes on the ground that represent sipapus visualizing the re-enactment of emergence into the Fourth World (Wright and Russell 2011, 267). Interestingly, the three panels that make up Blood Moon's scene depicts a divine meta structure that displays a tiered cosmos that orients the world into three different planes: the upper world, where the Sun Priest is residing in his spiritual transformation, the middle world (terrestrial world), where Capturer of the macaw is offering the bird as a ritual sacrifice and the lower world, where Blood Moon is descending after passing away during childbirth.

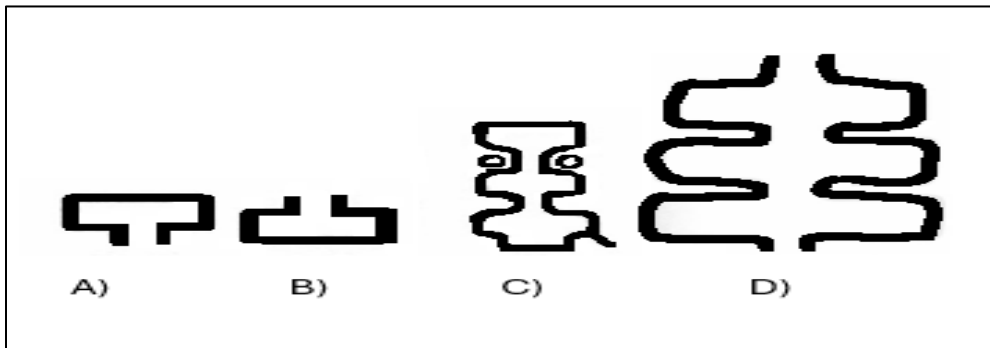


Figure 16. Pipette motifs representing a tiered cosmos and places of emergence

A) Hopi cloud clan symbol. B) Hopi snow clan symbol. C) Pipetted petroglyph of San Miguel, New Mexico. D) Stylized pipette represents a tower kiva. Redrawn by author, from Wright and Russell (2011: 374, fig.6cc (A); 374, fig.6dd (B); 363, fig.1u (C); 368, fig.3 (D)).

Therefore, I would argue that the creation of this scene was highly intentional, and the artistic and creative choice to have this be the first scene depicted on the limestone bluff was meant to establish this location as a tiered cosmos as it captures transcendental movement between worlds. Symbolic associations to the divine also narrate highly developed understanding of core religious beliefs that demonstrate deep connections between rock art, language, and oral history.

Emergence and Corn Panels Feature Analysis



Figure 17. A Story of Emergence and Corn

The top image shows the unedited, original photograph taken of the panels. The bottom picture shows iDStretch enhancements with YRE filter to enhance the faded outlines. Note: The black outlines do not appear with YRE filter. Photographs by author, July 2023.

The second set of pictographs examined depict a story of emergence and corn (Figure 17). The artistic analysis of Panel 1 suggests that the pictographs were created by

wet stencil with no visible drippings of paint. The lines are clean and stylized, and there are no evident signs of dabbing or splashing of paint. The top handprint is the only image made by impression. This was performed by dipping the base of the palm into paint or by directly adding paint to the palm and fingers and then stamping it on the surface of the rock wall. Based on the figure of the palm and the little finger slightly curved to the right, the artist chose to stamp a left hand in the rock surface. The hand was then carefully removed without making any smears, smudges, or dragging of paint.

On the edge of the rock wall there is a linear stroke with smaller, added strokes towards the bottom that appear to be measuring height. Another small stroke of orange red paint appears on the left side of the handprint. Then, towards the top of the panel, there is a pictograph of an unidentified bird painted in maroon with 3 large tail-end feathers. The breast and belly of the bird are touching the large leaf blades of a plant. The plant was painted in a red ochre and is displaying what could potentially be a bundled leaf or an ear of corn on its right side. On top of the leaf blade, there is a neighboring maroon circle with an orange red dot as well as four black spikes emerging from the top.

Next to the red circle, there is a black circle with a smaller circle inside that is deeply faded towards the bottom. Lastly, it appears like a spiritual essence is transforming from touching the plant and is shown floating to the right, sporting a long projectile tail. Panel 1 also illustrates remnants of black paint with maroon pigments sitting on top of the spirit essence that have an appearance of a dust cloud or a dust terrace.

Based on the technique used, it appears that the artist preferred outlining for Panel 1, while also integrating slight fill to the large leaf blades, the bird motif and the spirit

essence. There are no clear signs of double coating or paint layering in any of the figures other than the dust terrace that rests on top of the spirit essence and the maroon circle.

There are slight variations of color used, including orange red, red, maroon and black.

At first glance, it is not apparent whether there is symbology in color usage.

However, it is worth noting that the bird, maroon circle and spirit essence are all the same color gradient, including the paint layer of the clouds. Interestingly, there is a duality aspect to the double circles, as they were drawn with contrasting effects reflecting a ying-yang effect. They show red to black, top to down, and eventually fusing with an apparent black splendor emanating from the maroon circle, perhaps describing an event in the sky.

The compositional structure and analysis of Panel 1 also show even visual weight distributed among the figures. The panel highlights the tall plant as the main focal point of the scene. The handprint and spirit essence are placed in the periphery, allowing the focus to remain on the plant. The proportions of the figures are well balanced. The artist instilled depth in the scene by adding other figures to opposite ends. Although the horizontal stroke may seem out of place and appears to have no significance, the pictograph lands within the spatial plane of the handprint narrating that the placement of the stroke was intentional and there is meaning associated with it. The elements surrounding the plant appear detached for a feel of separation, though still remaining part of the scene. The organization looks somewhat skewed since the outer elements are slightly dispersed, but the spatial planning of the art affirms that there is a sense of belonging among all of the images that were drawn. However, the heaviest visual weight lies in the center with slight tension to the right (Figure 18).

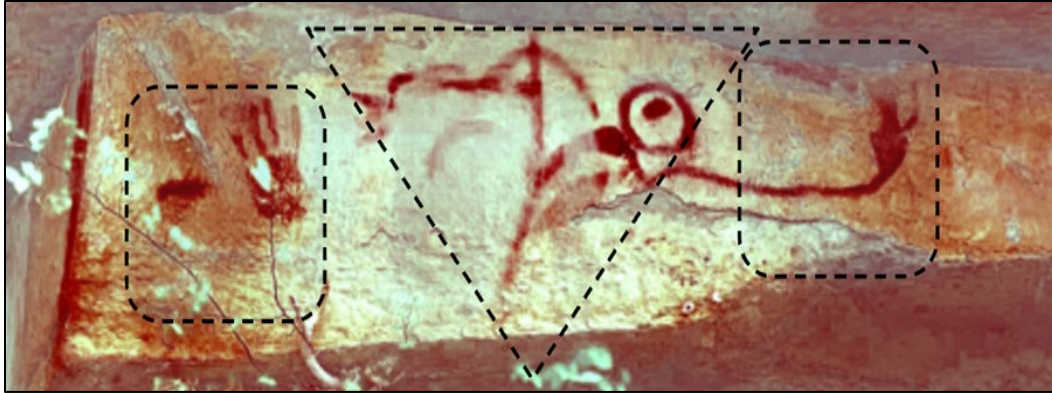


Figure 18. Visual Weight of Panel 1

The visual weight of the scene draws attention to the center as shown by the inverted triangle, although there is a slight visible pull to the right. Photograph by author, July 2023.

In contrast to Panel 1, the artistic analysis of Panel 2 suggests less stylized art that appears rough and coarse. This panel starts with an imprint of a left hand stamped horizontally instead of vertically. It is followed by a zoomorph that displays slight smudging on both of its lateral sides. The zoomorph exhibits a long tail with four legs and a round, elongated head, possibly depicting a bison. There are four anthromorphs behind the animal, followed by another imprint stamped at an angle. The two handprints share similar morphology as they both display deep palm arches in the left hand, visible by the lack of paint at the base of the palm.

Following the handprint, a corn plant displays with a fully matured pollen tassel that appears to have been coarsely dabbed on, possibly with fingers. Next to the corn plant stands an anthromorph wearing a long skirt, probably depicting an indigenous woman, waving with her left hand and possibly depicting the author of the left handprints on Panel 2. Next to her lies a sun medallion drawn with two concentric circles inside that

were created neatly by a wet stencil. A vertical line splits the smaller inner circle and the bottom portion of the larger circle. This line could be representing a sun post to determine the setting of the sun or be representing a prayer-stick to request rainfall for the harvest. The sun medallion has roughly 26 sun beams.

The second panel was also composed primarily by outlining as there is no fill present, with the exception of the handprints which were pressed on and the woman anthromorph wearing a long skirt. All the pictographs of Panel 2 display simple coating of paint except for the large circle that comprises the sun medallion which exhibits multiple layers of paint. The colors used for the second panel consist mostly of orange red ochres. The only two pictographs drawn in maroon were the anthromorph woman wearing a skirt and the large outer circle of the sun medallion.

In terms of compositional structure, Panel 2 presents even visual weight distribution amongst the pictographs. The images maintain close to equal distance from one another, and they exhibit consistent sizing throughout the panel. Their consistent proportions demonstrate that all the pictographs belong to the scene since clustered arrangements have very defined boundaries where spatial planning is limited and constrained. Thus, Panel 2 evokes a sense of harmony and belonging as opposed to Panel 1 where there is slight tension caused by the pictograph's placement in the periphery. Therefore, based on the different structural design of the panels, I would argue that they were created by separate artists as the painting application and technique differ.

In Panel 1 the art appears highly stylized showing very clean outlines with no dripping or smudging of paint. Panel 2, however, shows much coarser art that contains drippings of paint near the bison's tail and smudging is present underneath the bison, the

corn plant and the sun medallion. Therefore, by comparing painting applications, it appears that the artist who created Panel 2 was less careful due to the smudging and dripping of paint. Spatial planning was also used differently by having Panel 1 capture a scene of an open landscape shifting the focus of the panel to different areas by creating slight tension to the opposing sides. Meanwhile, Panel 2 captures a more intimate scene where pictographs are shown clustered together almost in a familial way.

Then, by comparing Blood Moon's panel against Panel 1 and Panel 2 of this section, I show that the artist who painted Panel 1 uses similar painting techniques and applications as that of Blood Moon's. This is evident as both panels exhibit clean outlines and appear to have been drawn mostly by wet stencil as opposed to dabbing or dry brush. The paint's texture is also smooth and evenly coated on both panels, suggesting a similar use in brush and possibly the same artist. Panel 2, though, has similar characteristics to the panel of the Sun Priest as the artist preferred dabbing and dry brush rather than wet stencil. The art style present in the Sun Priest and Panel 2 also share similar techniques that illustrate simple outlines while also using filling sparingly on the pictographs. This suggests that there were multiple artists creating rock art panels simultaneously, each displaying their preferred art techniques and their own individual art style.

Lastly, as I examined the limestone bluff past the sun medallion, there were no more legible pictographs to the right of the panel. While there are remnants of paint, no other pictographs were able to be read through iDStretch or with the naked eye, so the final render shown below includes only the pictographs that were visible (Figure 19).



Figure 19. Final Render for Emergence & Corn Panel

The final drawing was rendered by taking into consideration the colors used by the Indigenous artists and outlining the images first and then shading them based on the iDStretch enhancements. Drawing by author, August 2025.

Ethnographic Review of Emergence and Corn Panels

The symbiotic and complementary relationship between corn and ancestral communities reveals important aspects of their cosmovision surrounding themes of emergence and the sustenance that feeds the spirit and the soul, all of which makes life possible (Black 1984, 280-286). Through corn, life has meaning and it is the “energy by which things move, happen and endure” (Black 1984, 286).

As a dominant symbol throughout the Americas, corn is used to represent developmental stages of life, extending far beyond fertility and nourishment. In some stories, corn is used to narrate themes of emergence and creation, drawing upon

important symbols that begin with mother earth granting humans access to emerge into the earth and care for them thereafter by providing them with food (Black 1984, 282). In other accounts corn is seen as a symbol for transformation, maturation, and maidenhood, allowing humans to multiply in numbers to populate the world (Black 1984, 280). The remarkable metaphors that describe corn as ‘mother’ or ‘people as corn’ must be explored further to better understand the context in which corn was used at Paint Rock.

While performing research on corn metaphors, I came upon a Hopi origin story recorded on the First Mesa in 1893 by ethnographer Alexander M. Stephen, who later published the account in 1929 retelling a Hopi story of emergence that is relevant to this investigation. It states (Stephen 1929, 4-8):

The horizon was not so far around as it is in this world. In the daytime, in the Underworld, it was beautiful... but at night the sky contracted, and it was disagreeable. There were both sun and moon at that time. Then the bubbling waters increased and encroached upon the dry land and pressed close up towards the people. The chief said, “Perhaps there is a *hü’chi* (hole doorway) in this *to’kpela* (sky)”. So, Spider Woman, planted *salab’uyi* (spruce plant) and it grew up against the sky, but the sky was hard, and the spruce could not penetrate. Again, Spider Woman thought, “Perhaps reed will pierce through”. So, she planted a reed, and it grew four days and reached the sky and found a small crevice which it penetrated. Before reaching this present world, people sat upon the leaves of the reed which grew in the daytime only. It remained stationary at night... and people slept on them...[until] the next morning just as the sun rose, the reed reached through the *sipapu*. Before people got on the reed the Lalakontu [women tribe] sent out the *huwi* (dove)...seeking the sipapu... but could not find the opening and came back tired. The people reviled it ... [and then sent the] *mochini* (bird closely resembling a mockingbird) ... and it flew around, but it already knew where to look for the opening and flew directly overhead and found it. At the sipapu came up Pahano (White people), Hopi, Yota (Navaho’s older name was Yotahuni), Yochemu, Tashabu and Payutsi. A’tkyuka, the west, direction of the below, was where people first came up, far in the west. Massawu then linked his left arm under the right arm of each person as he emerged and thanked [them] for coming. Mockingbird, [knowing’ all the tongues] emerged from the sipapu and taught them Hopi talk... then ceased to speak Hopi and began teaching the emerging people... Yota, Payutsi,

Yochemu, Navaho. After all had reached this earth surface, [those] who were permitted, the Americans built beautiful stone houses, large, rectangular, and many storied, and the Hopi imitated them, but the Hopi houses were smaller and ruder. The Yota made houses of willow; the Payutsi wind breaks of sage brush and greasewood; the Navaho made the hogan, and the Yoche sought shelters among the rocks.

This Hopi tale is important for three reasons. The first is that it marks the beginning of how various Pueblo tribes came to exist and co-habited peacefully together. The second re-affirms my argument that multiple groups gathered at Paint Rock as there is a mixture of collective ideology and multiple combinations of Pueblo art styles present at the site. The third reason is that this story helps transcribe the pictographs from Panel 1 by connecting them to the visual scenes of the Hopi story of emergence that is explained below.

The Hopi story begins by stating that the underworld was beautiful, but the sky was disparate as both sun and moon were present at all times. Similar to the story, Panel 1 displays two different circles adjacent to one another. One circle was drawn in maroon red and the other in black paint, representing the sun and the moon respectively. The four spikes rising out of the red circle may refer to the four nights that it took for the grass reed to grow fully into the sky or it can also represent a solar eclipse. The *Codex Telleriano-Remensis* (Love 2018, 227) and the *Dresden Codex* (Love 2018, 232) both depict the sun and moon together as archaic portrayals of solar eclipses possibly leading to the tumultuous waters rising from having both sun and moon at the same time (Figure 20).

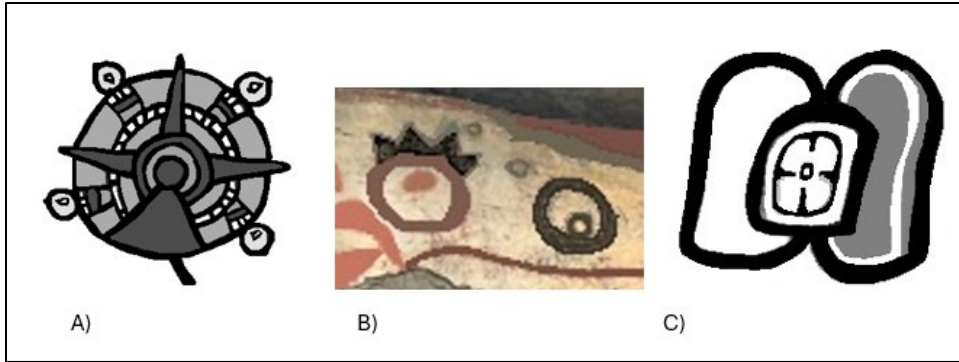


Figure 20. Comparing eclipse glyphs

A) Drawing of 1510 eclipse from Codex Telleriano-Remensis. B) Figure 19 representation of eclipse in the sky. C) Drawing of eclipse glyph from Dresden Codex. Notice the 4 points on images A and B. Image C also demonstrates 4 petals in its center. Redrawn by author, from Love (2018: 227, fig.13f (A); 220, fig.1b (C)).

This then explains the linear stroke of paint visible at the edge of the wall cliff that appears to be measuring the height of the infringing waters, and why there are remnants of paint stretched out over the land where the grass reed was planted. The text also indicates that the chief of the community clamored for Spider Woman's help to get the Pueblo out. This request is represented in Panel 1 by the large handprint with a stroke next to it, as Schmader (2025, 13-14) claims that rock art handprints appear to have ceremonial meanings where concepts of "emergence, journeying and unformed worlds" began. This shows how the Pueblo had to claw their way out into the current world from underneath (Schmader 2025, 13-14). Similar to the Hopi story, the Pueblo found a way to emerge into the Fourth World by having Spider Woman plant a tall reed that was able to break through the dust terrace. During their ascension, it was also said that the people had to sleep in the leaves of the reed, which is represented by the bundled leaf in Panel 1.

This part of the story explains why the leaves of the reed appear to be thicker, sturdier and more flushed since they were meant to house people during their ascension to the new world. An interesting detail of the plants shows how the framework of both stalks is different since the grass reed (Panel 1) appears sturdier while the mature corn plant with pollen tassels (Panel 2) appears droopier and pendulous. The differences that the plants exhibit affirm good technique and well thought out process for the physical attributes of each plant. Adjacent to the corn plant, another central figure is also introduced in the name of Mockingbird.

This character not only finds the crevice in the dust terrace from where to emerge, but it also leads the Pueblo out into the next world where it teaches the different nations their unique tongues. Therefore, the bird shown flying next to the reed plant in Panel 1 must be a representation of Mockingbird, while the spiritual essence that is shown touching the bundled leaf is a representation of the different nations that emerged through the dust terrace. The pictograph's connection to the story also suggests that the dust terrace can be interpreted as a *sipapu* where the Pueblo emerged from the west, where the underworld was located. Interestingly, the dust terrace also faces west at Paint Rock.

The ethnographic evidence then suggests that there is mnemonic function attributed to the pictographs of Panel 1 as they visualize scenes of the Hopi story of emergence. Similar visualizations of themes of emergence were also captured in the panels for Blood Moon that represented a tiered cosmos which allowed transcendental movement between worlds. These referential symbols were often employed by the Hopi and include "upper pipette boxes resembling cloud terraces" (Wright and Russell 2011, 376) that often signified the sky or the clouds (Figure 21). Therefore, the cloud terrace is

not only an emergence symbol, but it is also a representation of transcendental movement between worlds.

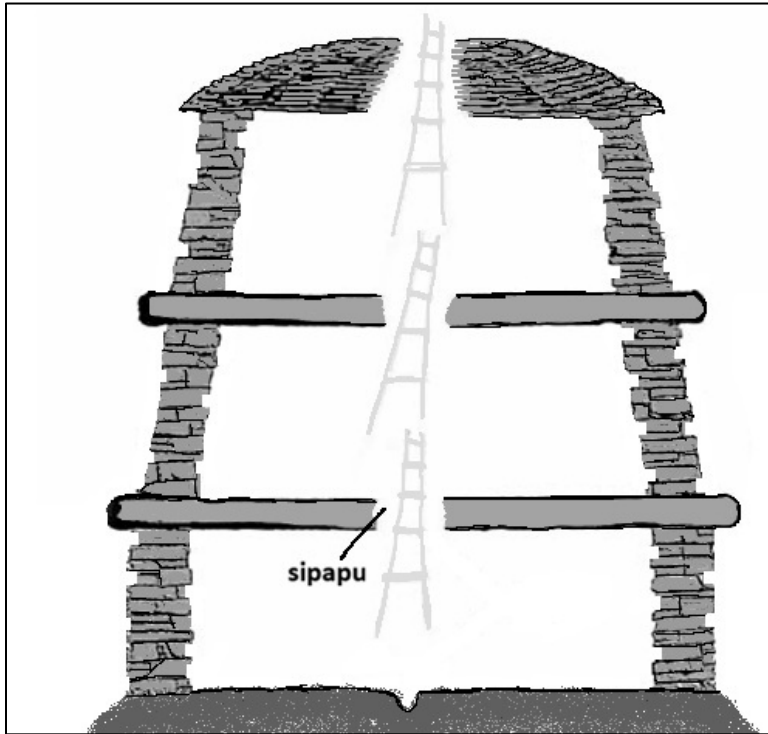


Figure 21. Mesa Verde style tower kiva

Kivas normally feature a tiered cosmos connecting the different worlds with a ladder-like hole on the floor called the sipapu. They re-enact emergence into different worlds. Redrawn by author, from Wright and Russell (2011: 368, fig.3).

Even though the Emergence Panel (Panel 1) does not portray any actual symbols of corn, the story is still connected to its provision as it is later stated that after emerging into the Fourth World Maasawu gifted the people corn so they could continue their journey into the east (Black 1984. 279-280). Hence, after receiving their gifts, the Hopi were warned to never reject corn as the sustenance of life, or the orders that Maasawu

had decreed for them, otherwise they would be “robbed of the vitality of life and lose the Hopi way” (Black 1984, 281). This order was sufficient for the tribe as they set out in all four cardinal directions to find the center of the world where they would come to establish their new nation in the Mesa Verde region in Southwest Colorado, near the Four Corners, where Utah, Arizona, New Mexico and Colorado meet.

Corn became such a staple crop to the Hopi that it was later perfected and transformed into ceremonial cornmeal called *hooma* to maintain the breath of life, their soul, and the spirit of all living things (Black 1984, 282). Through a perfected white cornmeal and Soyal ceremonies, the Hopi also began applying the cycles of life to the developmental stages of corn to symbolically represent maturity, purity and maidenhood (Fulbright 1992, 228).

Metaphor references calling young corn plants ‘maidens’ or mature corn as ‘mother’ became widely accepted, culminating in ceremonial songs that included corn as a female entity representing fertility. Katsina songs like “Qötsaqa’ömana” or “Poliitiva Tawi” denote young females dancing in the corn fields to let the rain come, or for the rains to bring in a harvest full of bountiful crops (Black 1984, 283). In other instances, when corn reached full maturity and grew corn tassels known as *talaa kuyva*, the katsinas would refer to them as “virgins awaiting fertilization or pollination” (Black 1984, 284).

In this manner, both the young maidens and the corn were described as ‘virgins’ and were deemed ready for copulation or fertilization. This ritualized system along with the association of corn manifests symbolically in songs, myths, and orations (Black 1984). It evokes the spirit of the land by recounting stories of emergence that center on spirituality, dreams, and visions of ascension (Hill 1992, 119).

Parallel to the Hopi songs mentioned above, Panel 2 also illustrates pictographs that express profound symbolism as they connect cultural and religious practices to traditions that conform to communal values. These rituals maintain practices alive, so it is no coincidence that the anthropomorph standing next to the corn plant with long pollen tassels is depicting a young woman of indigenous descent. Her handprints signal that the art is part of a sacred ceremony that establishes a rite of passage for the ‘corn maidens’ as depicted by the prayer stick planted on the far right shown to be splitting the sun medallion in half.

In Hopi Sodality ceremonies, prayer sticks were often created to align the body and mind through rituals that transform a person from adolescence into adulthood (Fulbright 1992, 226-228). They help explain the responsibilities that come with adulthood through self-sacrifice and the moral obligations that extend through kinship bonds. Sometimes, these processes are modeled after the life processes of corn and clouds as they were meant to represent the “flesh and blood” that is required for the rite (Fulbright 1992, 227). The elements used to represent flesh and blood in prayer sticks are stalks of mature corn, cotton and feathers.

Through the powers of animism, mature corn is meant to symbolize the flesh that brings life into the world. Cotton is then wrapped around the corn to represent the spiritual life of clouds and the moisture that maintains plants and humans alive. Then, at the top of the prayer stick, rain feathers are attached symbolizing the “morally pure heart” that is acquired during the ritual (Fulbright 1992, 227). Once the rites conclude, the prayer sticks are planted in the corn fields, rivers and mountain shrines to embody the familial roots that will establish “larger circles of relational bonding” that build on self-

sacrifice and social and moral obligation for the '*communitas*' (community) (Fulbright 1992, 230).

Fulbright (1992, 228-229) also mentions that during sodality initiation, young people must offer prayer sticks to the Sun Father, the Moon Mother and their deceased ancestors so they can transform into a person of good moral compass embodying self-sacrifice through ritual giving. The idea of offering prayer sticks to the Sun Father and other gods is extremely important since the sun medallion is the only pictograph out of Panels 1 and 2 that exhibit solar alignments throughout the year (Figure 22). This also means that the sun medallion was created to represent the Sun Father during the sodality ritual. Similarly, in other cultures like the Cora and Huichol, the sun is also represented during fertility ceremonies as they consider him to be a "husband to the multi-colored Corn Maidens" (Mathiowetz et al. 2015, 23).



Figure 22. Solar alignment of Sun Medallion

During the cross-quarter day, Panel 2 exhibits a solar alignment that illuminates the prayer stick at the center. This recurrence symbolizes the sacrificial obligation that the Hopi have to make to the gods and their deceased ancestors. Photograph used with permission of Kim Cox, May 2023.

Although ceremonial songs are often recited during ritual celebrations of maturation, generational stories are also used to explain how tribes extend out into larger kinship networks. An old Hopi-Tewa tale describes how the Hopi was able to bring buffalo people into the village and even adopted some of them as wives (Stephen 1929, 27). The story states:

A Tewa youth and his sister sat by a river. Their village was there. They prepared a prayer stick and placed it on the stream bank. He wished to see the Mushaizru (Bison) people. [When they arrived] a ladder projected and the youth going down found many people seated around an altar and bison skins hanging round the walls. When these people put their bison skins on, they became real bison; when they took the skins off, they became real people. He learned his songs and when about to return, he took a bison maid as a wife.

By considering the overall plot of the Hopi-Tewa tale, it is clear that relational bonding was extremely important to the tribes of the Southwest and suggest that building familial connections allowed their networks to extend far out into other territories. Doing so would not only extend familial networks, but it would also explain the mixture of Pueblo ideology and art that is present at Paint Rock since it was used as a meeting place for worship and ritual performance.

Although, it is unclear whether the bison pictograph from Panel 2 shows a regular bison animal or a bison ‘maiden’, the metaphor that is used to represent bison people is common and is also used in Blood Moon’s panel. Representations of physical transformations appear frequently in all three panels and suggest that transcendental movement is always at the core as revealed by the projected ladder that allowed the youth to descend into the land of the bison, or to ascend into the Fourth World as depicted by the spiritual essence breaking through the dust terrace, or through the pipette iconography that is found between Blood Moon and the Sun Priest.

Plate #105 painted by Forrest Kirkland further confirms transcendental movement of the Hopi-Tewa tale by showing several pictographs that were once part of Panel 2 (Figure 23).



Figure 23. Watercolor painting of Plate #105 by Forrest Kirkland, 1934

Plate #105, documented as Panel 2 in this research, was painted at a 1/8 scale by Forrest Kirkland. Courtesy of the Texas Archaeological Research Laboratory, The University of Texas at Austin, Kirkland-TMM-2261-104.

Kirkland's plate shows two additional anthromorphs that appear to be falling and/or jumping (probably from the ladder), while an additional bison appears to be grazing to their right with an additional handprint appearing next to a broken ladder, with a small log fire. These newly revealed pictographs of Panel 2 then confirm the connection between the Hopi-Tewa tale referenced above with Panel 2 by stating how two youths descended into the world of the bison through a ladder and found many sitting around an altar before taking one of them as a wife (Stephen 1929, 27).

Based on the upward and downward movements captured in Panels 1 and 2 of this section, transcendental movement appears as a key element to the stories of emergence. The design concepts of the pictographs also demonstrate that physical transformations are common during these stories which could be attributed to an altered state of consciousness (ASC) or be connected to the use of entheogens like tobacco and peyote. Similar patterns were also noted in Blood Moon's panel since it also revealed themes of

transcendental movement through pipette iconography and the physical transformation of the Sun Priest.

Solar alignments were also noted in the sun medallion as well as Blood Moon demonstrating ritualistic offerings of self-sacrifice to the Sun Father and Moon Mother as described earlier in this section. These patterns present the larger relational bond that exists between people and the gods that extends beyond the terrestrial world into the metaphysical. Even though there are no physical artifacts of prayer sticks found at Paint Rock, the presence of the sun medallion was sufficient to consecrate corn fields, rivers and mountain shrines into sacred places, recalling the idea that Paint Rock served as a Flower Mountain through themes of emergence and renewal.

Lastly, based on the different representations of a tiered cosmos present at Paint Rock, ranging from pipette iconography to dust terraces to ladder-like symbols that contain sipapu entrances into other worlds, I can confirm that Panels 1 and 2 stand as direct embodiments of Hopi culture. These elements not only shape the physical architecture of kivas, but they also influence the pictographic designs found at Paint Rock and other sites throughout the American Southwest.

The Ball Player Panel Feature Analysis



Figure 24. The Ball Game, A Ceremonial Journey

The top figure shows an unaltered photograph taken of the Ball Player panel. The middle section was intentionally damaged, and the footprints of the ball player are very faint without filter as the panel has undergone extreme weathering. The bottom photograph was enhanced with iDStretch using YRE filter. Note that the YRE filter does not make black pigments visible. Photographs by author, July 2023.

The artistic analysis for the Ball Player panel is perhaps one of the most difficult to interpret since it has experienced severe weathering as well as intentional defacement of the middle section (Figure 24). However, immense efforts were made to follow some of the visible outlines and carvings of the rock surface to make out a portion of the middle section.

The artistic analysis suggests that this panel was created by dry brush painting with minor use of wet stencil for the hands and arms. There is no dripping or splotching of paint but there is some smudging present near the chest area. The overall form was painted maroon with slight usage of black and white chalk. Maroon double coating appears to be used on the anthromorph's arms and hands. The rest of the body appears to be one coat and faintly outlined by white chalk.

The overall figure of the anthromorph is very detailed. He is wearing a conical hat that holds either double corn stalks as his headdress or a corn stalk accompanied by crossed bones on the top of his headpiece. The stalks have different shapes so it may be an artistic way of distinguishing different materials. His headdress also has a long white feather plume hanging on the back, painted in white chalk with a small, tan-colored ribbon. There are four white shooting rays depicted in white chalk over the front area of its face.

The anthromorph also sports a black collar with a black nose piece that is attached to the headpiece. A portion of the nose piece is also sticking out, appearing like an oration or a scroll emanating from its mouth. His arms are wide open, his hands are very large, and he holds a wide stance. He is shown holding a white rope interlocked between his fingers on his right hand, with additional rope tucked in his back. He has a lassoed

ball tied to his hips through either a belt or yoke painted in black. The ball was drawn in a slight orange ochre and has a protruding knob or navel, similar to a calabash fruit. The Ball Player also has black specks near its chest that appear to be exploding outwardly, while a dart pierces his left foot.

The middle section of the panel has slight indentations that used to be painted in black paint and white chalk but are now completely gone. However, based on the shape of the indentations in the rock surface, it appears that there was a Venus “star complex” associated with this panel. Lastly, to the right of the panel, there are almost four pairs of maroon footprints signaling that the ball player was performing a ceremonial journey related to the ancient ball game (Figure 25).



Figure 25. Drawing of the Ball Player

*The enhancements were produced using similar colors to the ones used by the artist.
Drawn by author, October 2025.*

The compositional structure of the journey scene suggests that the panel has great visual weight distributed amongst the rock walls. It is clear that the pictographs at one point were shown to be evenly dispersed, creating a very impactful visual of a plate. Like Blood Moon, the Ball Player has immense detail attributed to his figure demonstrating that the artist had great understanding of human proportion and was able to illustrate rank and importance based on attire, performance, and activity. Patterning is also highly visible in the linear progression of the anthromorph's footprints.

Based on the unity of the images, the panel shows great harmony, and all the pictographs can be attributed to the scene of the ball game. This panel follows a linear progression of the story as it ends with the footprints of the Ball Player, and although there is nothing directly next to them, there is a pair of hummingbirds right above it. Unfortunately, one of the hummingbirds that was originally drawn in white chalk is no longer visible. However, an outline was created for the white hummingbird to showcase it for better visualization, while no enhancements were needed for the maroon hummingbird (Figure 26).



Figure 26. The Hummingbirds

The panel shows two hummingbirds above the Ball Player panel. The hummingbird on the left was originally drawn in white chalk and displays seven tail feathers. The maroon hummingbird to the right shows only four feathers on its tail. Photograph by author, July 2023.

It is also worth noting that there is another panel farther inland near the center of the cliff that shows a less detailed Ball Player with only one arm, preparing to shoot a ball against Big Dipper. Even though I will not be examining the artistic and compositional structure of this panel, the repetition of the ball player suggests that this was an important character. The two large cliff walls that contain this scene also have an abundant number of pictographs spread throughout (Figure 27). Based on the unity and symbolism identified through this research, the pictographs found in these two rock walls appear to be closely related and will be briefly discussed below.

Starting from left to right, and reading top to bottom, the rock wall begins with an image of a turkey representing a “flower world” symbol deriving from Hopi iconography. It is then followed by a migration symbol that is narrating a ceremonial journey

(described as feet) is taking place when Scorpius (scorpion) was highly visible in the night sky or can also be suggesting the death of one of the characters of the story. A tribal mask (probably Kachina) is present suggesting that a masking ceremony must have taken place in order to descend into the ninth level of the underworld characterized by the 9-petaled flower. Then, in order to defeat their rival, the twins had to seek help from a Hopi ancestor called Lizard Woman as depicted by the lizard-like creature on this panel. With her help, the twins were able to defeat Big Dipper, also known as Seven Macaw in the *Popol Vuh* (Tedlock 1996). In this scene, Seven Macaw severs one of Hunahpu's arms, which explains why the anthromorph only has one arm. Lastly, the scene and landscape are then consecrated as 'sacred' by the splotching of the handprint motif that ends the scene.

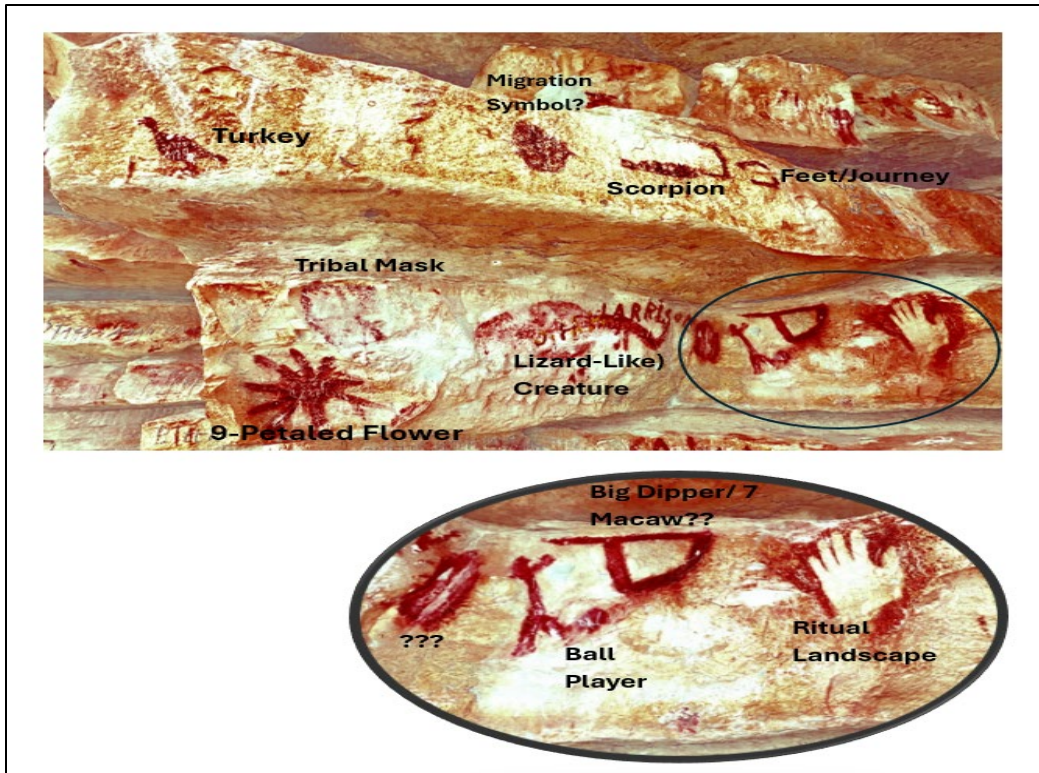


Figure 27. A Sacred Landscape of Symbols

The photograph was enhanced by using iDStretch software with YRE filter. Photograph by author, July 2024.

Ethnographic Review of The Ball Player Panel

Another significant pictograph from Paint Rock is the Ball Player panel. This panel adopts the storyline from the Maya Hero Twins, illustrating a journey into the underworld to play the ancient ball game in order to defeat the Lords of Xibalba. This panel integrates Maya iconography and blends it with Pueblo style art to construct Paint Rock's version of the ball player. This story, like Blood Moon's, has traveled throughout North America and morphed into different versions that change the plots of the story, character names and their traits. Yet one concept always remains the same – that a

woman gives birth to twin boys who possess complementary qualities but have distinct roles (Chinchilla Mazariegos 2017, 26). The complementary qualities the twins possess share common themes of death and rebirth portrayed by the myth of the ancient ball game explained below.

In a 16th century K'iche' scene and modern day Ch'orti' myth, it is stated that the Lords of Xibalba lured the twins into the underworld so they could take their gaming equipment away (Chinchilla Mazariegos 2017, 4). The twins, knowing what the Lords were after, defied their demands and set out to recover their father's ball in the underworld (Chinchilla Mazariegos 2017, 4). After passing every test the Lords had set out for them, they performed a ritual of self-sacrifice and jumped into a stone oven where their bones were eventually recovered, grounded and thrown into the river (Tedlock 1996, 130-131). After the twins came back to life, they went back to the Lords of Xibalba to try to deceive them by performing ritual sacrifices on themselves, severing their arms, legs, digging out their hearts and cutting their heads but never dying (Tedlock 1996, 136). This fascinated the Lords of Xibalba and one by one, they volunteered to be sacrificed but not one of them came back to life.

In a similar manner, Paint Rock's Ball Player appears to be performing a journey wearing all of his ball game gear into the underworld. He is shown standing widely with his arms and fingers spread apart and with his right hand interlocked with white rope. A ball is hanging from his hip and appears to be wounded. His chest is exploding outwards as captured by the black specs of paint and smudging of red paint in the torso area. His performance may be suggesting a direct link to the ritual sacrifices that the twins performed on themselves to deceive the Lords of Xibalba. This is demonstrated not only

through pictographic art, but also by the solstitial alignments that occur throughout the year with this panel (Figure 28a-d).

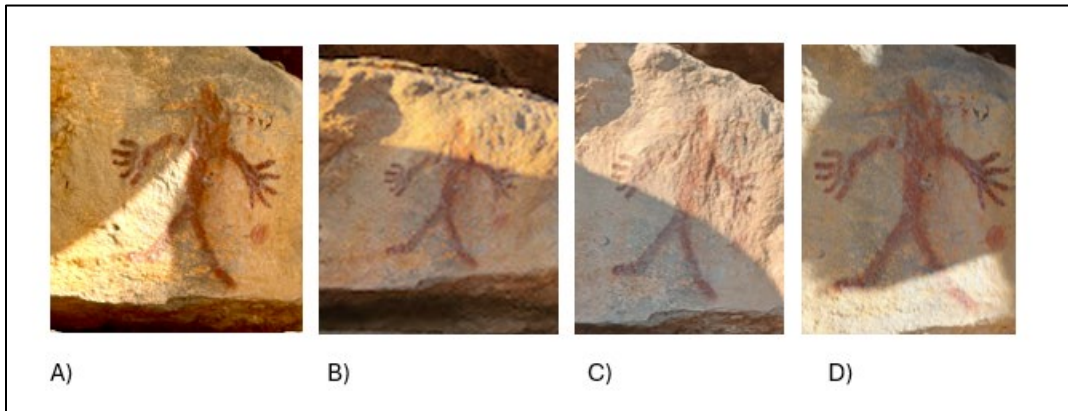


Figure 28. Solar alignments showing the ritual sacrifice of the Ball Player

A) The solar alignment severs the Ball Player's arm. B) The Ball Player gets beheaded by solar alignment. C) The Ball Player gets split in half by the solar alignment. This photograph could also represent a bursting chest. D) Solar alignment pierces the Ball Player's foot during Winter Solstice. Photographs are used with permission of Kim Cox, taken in the respective order November 2021, December 2025, September 2023 and December 2018.

In another text, the left foot piercing of the Ball Player is also documented in the *Codex Borgia* where Plate 54 shows four ritual piercings that are associated with every cardinal direction. These four scenes make up the center of the world. Paint Rock's Ball Player is best represented by the bottom left scene on Plate 54, showing a dog-faced Venus striking the corn god Cintéotl on his left foot with a spear (Figure 29). Eduard Seler's 1944 commentary suggests that the Venus deity is closely related to the eastern direction while the corn god, Cintéotl, is associated with the western direction (Diaz et al. 1993, xxviii). It is also noted on Plate 54 that this scene occurred on the calendrical days

of Dog, Monkey and Grass followed by 13 Reed, found at the top-left hand corner of the scene.



Figure 29. A partial of Plate 54, Codex Borgia – The Foot Piercing of Cintéotl

This scene is depicting one of the four ritual piercings showing a dog-faced Venus deity striking the corn god on the left foot. From the Messicano Borgiano (Loubat 1898), Codex Borgia, FAMSI Website.

Recalling a different scene from the Emergence and Corn Panel, the Hopi myth also stated that the people ascended into the Fourth World from the west, where the underworld was located and then settled in the east where they ended up finding the center of the world. Based on the metaphorical connection between corn, the Ball Player

and the maize god Cintéotl of Plate 54, the text may be suggesting that the death of the Ball Player is necessary in order to become the new eastern direction. This means that the Ball Player would have to undergo a physical transformation through death and rebirth, or through a static physical death in order to begin a new cycle as suggested by the date 13 Reed.

Transformation through death as suggested in the Ch'orti' myth supports my argument since this allowed the twins to return in a different form after they self-sacrificed in an oven by their own free will. Through this transformation, the twins acquired a new form as either fish men, orphans, or through a fish giving birth back to them after consuming nixtamal water from an old woman (Chinchilla Mazariegos 2017, 5). In other stories, transformation can also be represented by physical death to become static symbols like the sun or moon, though a new cycle would begin through both physical and metaphorical deaths.

Therefore, the interwoven connections found between all four panels examined in this research demonstrate that the panels stand as direct embodiments of major themes of transformation, renewal and death, all of which are closely tied to the agriculture of maize. This connection is perhaps one of the reasons why characters like Blood Moon and the Ball Player portray high levels of detail to their figures. In essence, the artist is attempting to identify the Ball Player as the God of Maize by illustrating his headdress, game attire, and performance during the ball game.

In other Mesoamerican cultures, maize is also inextricably connected to the young Hero Twins by linking the fertility of the earth through rain or maize, as suggested by some modern-day accounts of the maize heroes of the Gulf Coast (Chinchilla Mazariegos

2017, 4). Other versions, such as the Ch'orti' myth of Kumix or the *Popol Vuh*, indicate periods of transition between generations, where mythical heroes acquired supernatural powers through rebirth and became young gods of maize as is apparent by their head ornamentations (Figure 30b) (Chinchilla Mazariegos 2017, 7).

These reincarnations have been identified in Postclassic codices through a particular characteristic: their head shape. Chinchilla Mazariegos (2017, 6) explains that in some Maya iconography, the Maya Maize god is depicted with an upwards and highly elongated head similar to an ear of corn (Figure 30a). In other instances, the Maize God's relationship to water combines the traits of a mixed gender god, which Chinchilla Mazariegos (2017, 13-14) agrees, stands dually as a Male Moon God. This effigy is normally accompanied by God S in the Late Classic, sporting a "downturned half-mask that projects from the god's ear, passing by his upper lip [symbolizing]... the snout of the Water Lily Serpent, a distinctive attribute frequently worn as a combined mask and headdress by the Maize God in his lunar aspect" (Figure 30c) (Chinchilla Mazariegos 2017, 14). This also suggests a linear connection between Blood Moon's tale where she birthed two sons where one was labeled the son of the Sun while the other was the son of water. This complementary trait indicates that the Ball Player was created to represent a fusion of two dual gods.

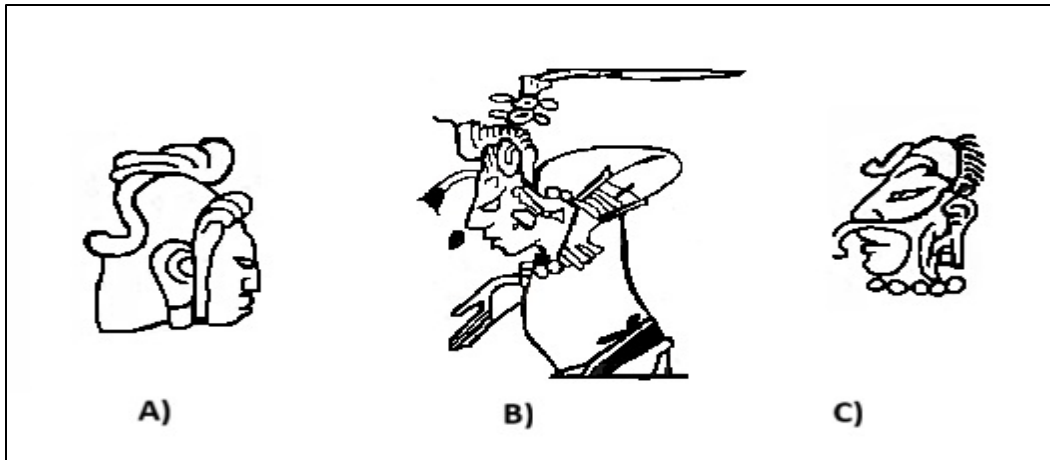


Figure 30. Representations of Maize Gods in Mesoamerica

A) Drawing from a Late Classic Sculpture from Quiriguá, Structure 1B-1, in the lowland Maya area. Notice the upward, elongated head shape to match an ear of maize. B) Drawing of vase from Calakmul, Mexico. Notice how the head ornamentations consisted of jewels, flowers, feathers and maize foliation. C) Drawing from a Late Classic sherd from Santa Rita Corozal, Belize. Notice the downturned half mask passing by the upper lip in shape of a Water Lily Serpent, normally used to describe a “Lunar Maize God”. Re-drawn by author, from Chinchilla Mazariegos (2017: 6, fig.91c (A); 7, fig.92c (B); 13, fig. 106d (C)).

In other geographic regions of central and northwest Mesoamerica, symbolic expressions of deities like Venus, Morning Star, and *Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli* became more evident, capturing symbolism of warfare and *Aztlán* culture. The iconographic expansion of warfare symbols was so vast that Mathiowetz et al. (2015, 2) states that by 900 CE these symbols had reached west Mexico expanding northwest and reaching the American Southwest by 1300 CE.

In addition, several ethnographic accounts from west Mexico suggest that there was a strong affinity to the Morning Star deity as it was generally associated to the stars, warfare and weaponry-making; the agriculture of corn; as well as the feathered serpent

(Mathiowetz et al. 2015, 17). Variation of these deities portrayed “curved conical heads and corn headdresses” representing Morning Star or Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli as the “Lord of Dawn” (Mathiowetz et al. 2015 5-7).

Often, the Lords of Dawn were accompanied by projectiles, darts and arrow points that would emanate from their bodies and shine like luminous rays of light that could be used against their enemies (Mathiowetz et al. 2015, 8). These rays of light are sometimes shown to illuminate the face of a skeletal Morning Star or appear crested on top of the head, radiating light around the face (Mathiowetz et al. 2015, 13) (Figure 31a–c).

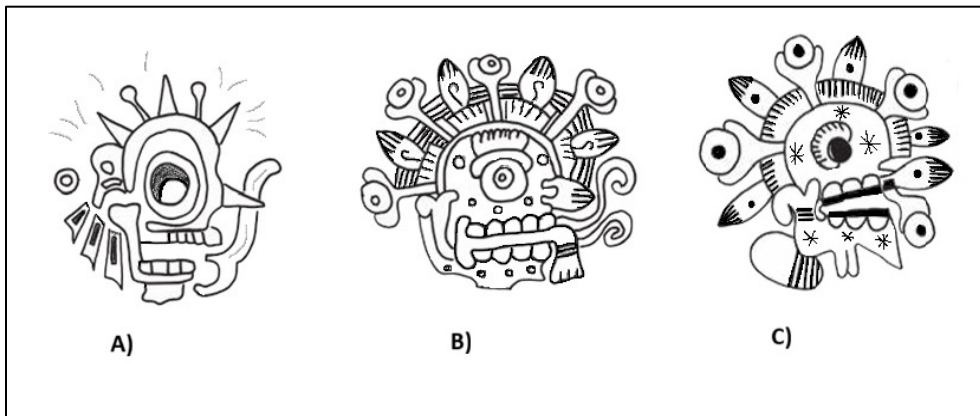


Figure 31. Representations of Morning Star during Aztatlán Era

A) Drawing of Morning Star from west Mexican style gold disk; note the skeletal figure with emanating darts crested on the head with song scroll coming from the mouth. B) Drawing of Skeletal Morning Star from Botadero incised vessel, from the Museo Regional de Nayarit; note the projected flint blades from the head and the tassel flower emerging from its mouth. C) Drawing of Morning Star from the interior of Cerritos polychrome vessel, from the Museo Regional de Nayarit; note the crested head with flint knives and stellar eyes emanating from the head and face. Re-drawn by author, from Mathiowetz et al. (2015: 57, fig. 11a (A); 57, fig. 11g (B); 59, fig. 12a (C)).

Scholars have also attributed this luminescence to heliacal rising stemming from a scene found on the Upper Temple of the Jaguars in Chichén Itzá, where a warrior with an appearance of a feathered serpent is shown to have darts and flames emanating from its body (Mathiowetz et al. 2015, 10). Similarly, the Ball Player from Paint Rock also exhibits similar associations to heliacal rising through solar alignments that illuminate the ball player's face during morning dawn (Figure 32).

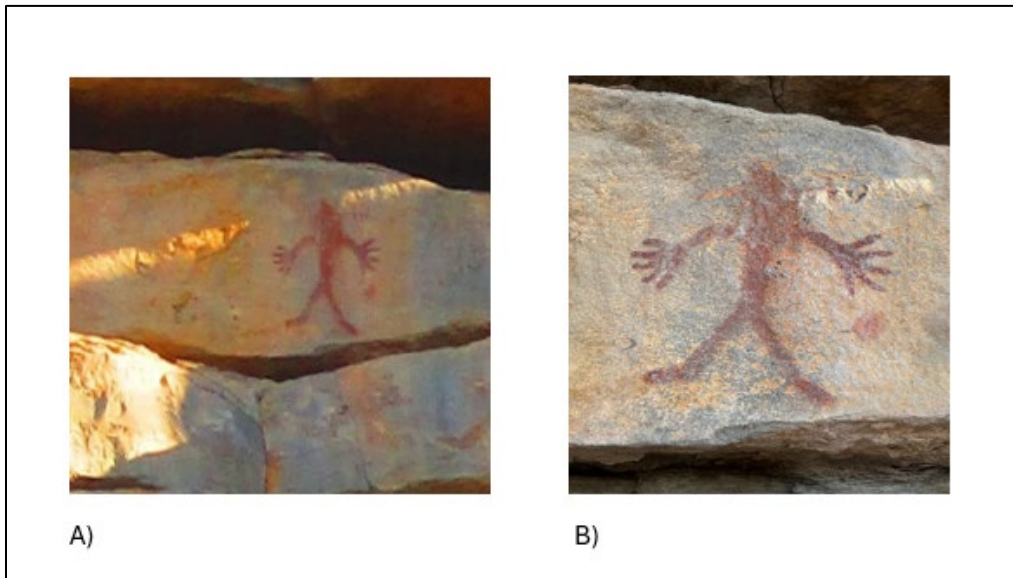


Figure 32. Heliacal rising illuminating the Ball Player's face

A) A shooting ray is captured in the morning around 8 a.m. during cross-quarter day. B) Solar alignment illuminates the Ball Player's face during morning dawn. Photographs are used with permission of Kim Cox, taken February 2024 and February 2025 respectively.

As other identifications of Morning Star appeared amongst the Huichol, Cora, Tepehuan and Tamáts, it was also believed that Morning Star served as a messenger to

the other gods, so they gave him access to receive sacred songs and hymns that are shown emanating from his mouth (Mathiowetz et al. 2015, 19). These “speech scrolls” are often shown coming out from the mouth of Morning Star when represented in skeletal form (Mathiowetz et al. 2015, 20) (Figure 31 a, b). Interestingly, these same speech scrolls appear in the center panel of the Great Ballcourt in Chichén Itzá, associating Morning Star with a loud and deadly sport (Mathiowetz et al. 2015, 21).

Although having a skeletal Morning Star and a Maize God together would be contradictory, it is not uncommon since this helps solidify their complementary aspects. As mentioned earlier, both Hero Twins were created to be the opposite of each other. For example, if one twin was created to represent the sun through light and day, the other one would complement it by becoming the moon to symbolize nightfall or darkness. If another twin was shown with maize on hand to conceptualize fertility, regeneration and rebirth, the other one would then become the lord of the night depicted as a skeletal figure to symbolize death.

These figures are shown in the Early and Late Postclassic of central Mexico wearing “tall, plumed headdresses” in skeletal form with darts emanating from their noses and heads (Mathiowetz et al. 2015, 15). Others in West Mexico were shown as skeletal figures sporting headdresses with “crossed long bones” suggesting a connection to death (Mathiowetz et al. 2015,16).

These patterns in iconography then suggest that the Ball Player from Paint Rock exhibits adaptations of Mesoamerican art motifs. This was confirmed by the Ball Player’s figure showing similar attributes to Morning Star and the God of Maize by sporting a conical corn headdress with a stalk of crossed bones at the top with a second stalk of corn

underneath, while four rays of light illuminate his face. He is also shown wearing a nosepiece, similar to the water-lily serpent nosepiece that the God of Maize wore during his lunar phase, which also coincides with the harvest of maize. His pictograph also displays scrolls emanating from his mouth suggesting that a loud oration, song, or hymn must have been performed during the ball game. This suggests that both Morning Star and the God of Maize are meant to be complementary figures to each other while the Ball Player embodies attributes from both.

To substantiate this claim further, the Cora from west Mexico also acknowledge Morning Star as a central figure that is directly tied to the agriculture of corn. This group identifies Morning Star during their *mitote* ceremonies by creating two arrows where one represents the indigenous people while the other arrow represents corn. In this way, the Cora summon Morning Star as the mediator between the people and other gods like the Sun and Moon during the agricultural cycle (Mathiowetz et al. 2015, 19-20). This ceremony is performed to bring fertility to the earth while people help prepare the fields to sow and harvest the corn (Mathiowetz et al. 2015, 21).

In other stories reflected in the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*, as well as some iconography found in Teotihuacan, Quetzalcoatl is sometimes depicted as the morning star Venus, after he cremates himself in the east to become the “new dawn” (Mathiowetz et al. 2015, 10). This suggests that the scene of the Four Piercings in Codex Borgia is most likely indicating the physical death of the Maize God Cintéotl so that he can become the eastern direction by embodying the morning star sign of Venus. Notably, other complex elaborations of Venus stars are also found throughout Tula, Chichén Itzá, as well as in Tenochtitlan and Oaxaca (Mathiowetz et al. 2015, 11). Hence, if we

compare the iconographic similarities of these stars against the outlines of the middle section of the Ball Player panel, we can appreciate great similarities and resemblance to each other (Figure 33).

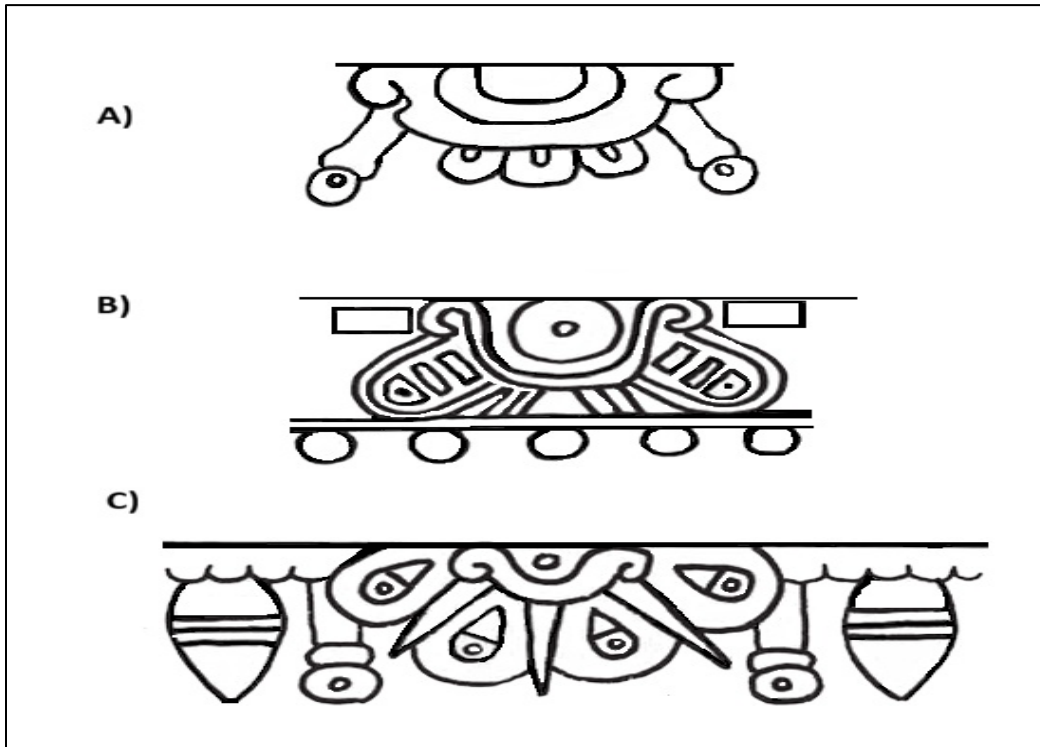


Figure 33. Representations of Venus stars in ancient Mesoamerica

A) Drawing of a star from the Upper Temple of the Jaguars, Pilaster K5, Chichén Itzá. B) Drawing of a star in Tula that shows up next to the head warrior. C) Drawing of the Sky band containing flint darts and circular stellar eyes from Palace IV in Mitla. Redrawn by author, from Mathiowetz (2015: 56, fig. 10a (A); 56, fig. 10c (B); 56, fig. 10d (C)).

Surprisingly, other locations like Teotihuacan also have murals that portray a serpent's body with a series of stars followed by footprints (Mathiowetz et al. 2015, 11). Perhaps, this was a unique way to establish a "Flower World" by having both the "young

Sun god warrior” paired up with a representation of the feathered serpent disguised as Venus to serve as the “celestial path or flowery road for the newly emerged dawning sun” constituting one of the more obvious examples of ‘east’ meeting ‘west’ (Coltman 2023, 168).

This unique metaphor then suggests that Paint Rock is a direct embodiment of a Flower Mountain characterized by the gods that were painted in the rock surface, as well as the feathers, flowers, and birds that accompany them in their journey through the underworld. It is then no coincidence that two hummingbirds are sitting above the Ball Player panel and that these motifs are also prevalent in other Flower Worlds like Chichén Itzá where a pair of hummingbirds are shown sitting next to each other also facing opposite directions like Paint Rock (Figure 34).

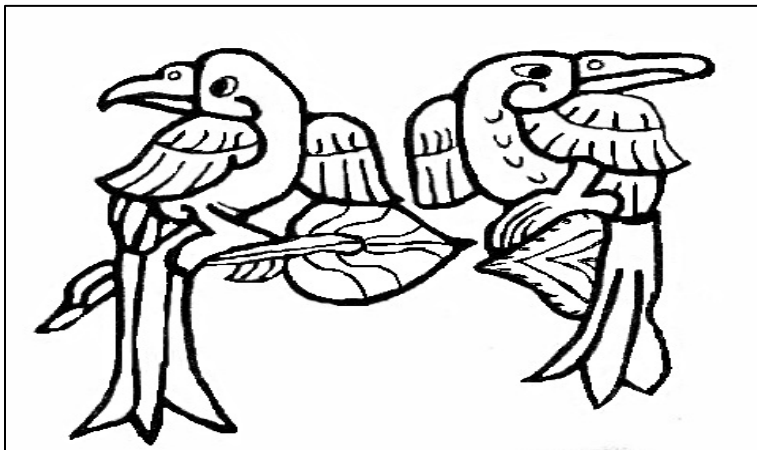


Figure 34. Hummingbirds of the Maya Flower World

Drawing of two hummingbirds from the Maya Flower World, from an Early Classic Deletaille tripod from Chichén Itzá. Aesthetics of the Flower World often included an abundance of birds, floating blossoms and jewels to denote an ethereal visual of paradise. Notice how the two hummingbirds are facing opposite directions similar to the hummingbirds from Paint Rock. Re-drawn by author from Coltman (2023: 168, fig. 8.1).

Visual Patterns and Overarching Themes

The iconography examined from the four panels then suggest that there are interwoven themes of death, emergence, renewal and transformation. Themes of death and transformation were captured in Blood Moon's panel by the solstitial alignments that display her death during winter solstice and the transformation that the Sun Priest undergoes to raise prayers for Blood Moon. The Ball Player also captures themes of death and transformation by signaling ritualist sacrifices during different solstitial alignments in order to become the new dawn. Themes of emergence and renewal were established through the Emergence and Corn panel as demonstrated by the emergence of the Pueblo into the Fourth World and the maturation rituals during the sowing and harvesting of corn.

Transcendental movement between worlds was also captured through pipette iconography, dust terrace sipapus, and ladder-like symbols that connected upper and lower worlds to the terrestrial plane. These patterned motifs suggest that re-enactments of emergence were often associated with a tiered cosmos where different worlds were vertically stacked on top of one another. During transcendental journeys, characters were also accompanied through recurring bird motifs such as macaw birds, mockingbirds, hummingbirds and turkeys suggesting that these birds served as guides that led the way into other worldly planes by establishing the "flowery road" that needed to be traversed (Hill 1992, 125). These birds were used as chromatic symbols that invoked the "Flower World complex" in order to consecrate Paint Rock as a Flower Mountain during processional worship.

Therefore, based on the pictograph's design, the application of the paint, the technique used alongside patterns in iconography, I can confirm that there was real understanding between how an action was portrayed and how symbols were used in rock art. This proves that Paint Rock was a consecrated Flower Mountain as demonstrated by the rituals and ceremonies performed, the stories that materialized into pictographs, and the solstitial alignments that were built-in where the sun embodied the ritual practices through dynamic rock art.

Chapter IV.

Invoking Ritual Practices through Dynamic Movements in Rock Art

In this chapter, I will summarize the results of the artistic and structural composition of the four Red Monochrome Style plates found at Paint Rock. I will reaffirm that the formal feature analyses of the panels show early identifications of art intentionality that hold deeply embedded meanings behind the works of art. To reiterate, I argue that the panels have more than utilitarian usage and instead act as a direct embodiment of Pueblo culture that invokes materialized ritual practices into visual art. Thus, the conscious or semi-conscious and yet deliberate decisions behind creating these four rock art panels show engaged motivation that is not at all random but contains structure, planning and sacred purpose.

Through the examination of the panels, I argue that the artists revealed vital relationships that connected ancestral myths to ceremonial rituals and orations. The findings of this research also suggest that stylistic elements and compositional structure were adapted to transcribe ancestral messages that originate from stories, orations, songs and ceremonial rituals. Amounts of effort placed on a character's figure suggest that the artists were highly skilled and understood how to distinguish elevation in status and rank by adding details such as headdress, attire, and details to physical form (limbs, fingers, etc.). In contrast, when the artists described a ritual or ceremony, they lessened the details of the associated anthromorphs, while the overall scene gained more context through additional visual imagery. This suggests a visible structural difference in how rock art was created based on motive, which I classify in this research as two distinct categories: character-driven panels versus action-driven panels.

Character-Driven Panels vs Action-Driven Panels

After examining the four pictographic panels, I noticed that they all exhibited unique artistic features that portray a clear dichotomy in motive by either showcasing an important event or action versus an important character. Based on design style and structural composition, I was then compelled to classify Blood Moon and the Ball Player as character driven panels while the Emergence and Corn panels were categorized as action driven. Specifically, a character-driven panel is distinguished by the visual importance of a high-ranking character or deity in the story, while an action-driven panel is characterized by the importance of the ceremony or action taking place in a scene.

For example, in Blood Moon's panel, the artists use various stylistic techniques, including outlining, wet stencil, dry brushing and fill-ins, to create the overall forms of the three figures consisting of Blood Moon, Capturer of the macaw and the Sun Priest (Table 1). Their precise application reveals careful execution as noted by the absence of dripping or smudging of maroon paint. Moreover, the three different panels that complete Blood Moon's birthing scene were created to represent different parts of the story that narrate one full scene. This results in a skewed scene that is slightly unbalanced caused by the variation in pictograph size, since Capturer of the macaw is small and simple, Blood Moon's panel is highly detailed, and the Sun Priest is large and contains a lot of visual imagery (Table 2). However, based on the placement of the three different figures, their unity and proximity to each other, as well as the color gradient present on the pictographs, all three panels seem to belong together as one full plate completing the scene.

Similarly, the Ball Player Panel also exhibits outlining, dry brush painting, fill-ins and partial dabs of color near the torso area (Table 1). The overall figure is clean, and there is a variation of materials used, from white chalk to black charcoal to the common maroon, ochre paint normally present in Red Monochrome Style rock art. The artist also intentionally used etchings to convey dramatic bodily piercings to the left foot and in the headdress to represent crossed bones. In addition, there is a large area in between the Ball Player and its footsteps that appears intentionally damaged to erase a second figure from the scene. These alterations make this panel appear quite dramatic and dynamic as the focus shifts from the Ball Player over to the linear footsteps, which lead the viewer into other parts of the cliff, including overhead to meet the Hummingbirds (Table 2).

As a result, I argue that in the case of Blood Moon and the Ball Player, since the artists concentrate more on the detailed figures of the anthromorphs, as they were meant to represent high-status, high-ranking individuals of the story, these two panels must be categorized as character-driven panels. Also, considering that the focus of the stories revolves around two mythological deities, it makes sense that more effort would be placed on their elaboration since it can also materialize as an act of worship. Furthermore, since both panels also portray very dynamic features that shift the focus into other parts of the cliff that allow viewers to follow the storyline plot into other nearby pictographs, I classify them as dynamic plates. This is based on the linear progression of character-driven scenes as they shift the viewer's focus between multiple scenes that revolve around one of the main characters of the story.

While also documenting comparisons through artistic technique in Blood Moon and the Ball Player, the findings revealed that though similar techniques were used, both

panels demonstrated differences in structure and symmetrical arrangement. To reiterate, Blood Moon's panel presents slightly skewed by the variations in pictograph size of the opposing panels distorting the full scene. Meanwhile, the Ball Player presents linear progression, even spacing and similar proportions for nearby panels like the Hummingbirds. This could be the result of integrating multiple artists with different art styles that created an artistic distortion between pictographs or, potentially, it could also suggest that some stories demanded rituals of ASC while others did not. The use of entheogens would explain why some panels appear distorted while other panels that did not require spiritual flight had regulated and balanced drawings.

Table 1. Comparing Design Styles – Blood Moon & Ball Player Panel

Style	Panel Name	Design Elements	Present/ Absent	Findings
Character Driven Panels	Blood Moon Panel	Dry Brushed	Present	Sun Priest.
		Wet Stencil	Present	Blood Moon and anthromorph w/ macaw bird.
		Dabbing	Present	Blood Moon's Hands and Twin Boys.
		Dripping/Spotting	<i>Absent</i>	<i>Not present.</i>
		Geometric Shapes	Present	A pipetted/tiered metastructure.
		Outlining	Present	Outlined throughout.
		Fill in	Present	Blood Moon's figure is entirely filled in.
		Simple Coat	Present	Top of headdress, skirt and twin boys.
		Multiple Coats	Present	BM's extremities, shin-high boots, and navel.
		Color Usage	Present	Maroon, Black Charcoal & Orange Ochre
	Ball Player Panel	Dry Brushed	Present	The Ball Player is a mix of dry brush and dabbing.
		Wet Stencil	Present	Hands and arms.
		Dabbing	Present	Dabbing and smudging on the legs and torso area.
		Dripping/Spotting	<i>Absent</i>	<i>Not present.</i>
		Geometric Shapes	<i>Absent</i>	<i>Not present.</i>
		Outlining	Present	Present throughout.
		Fill in	Present	The entire panel shows fill in.
		Simple Coat	Present	Present on the head, torso, legs and footprints.
		Multiple Coats	Present	Hands and arms.
		Color Usage	Present	Maroon, Black Charcoal, White Chalk & Orange.

Notes: Character importance is shown by adding details to the anthropomorphic figure through attire and form (i.e., adding limbs vs. simply stick figures). Both panels integrate dynamic styles that shift the viewers' focus as they follow linear progression of the story timeline to describe what is happening. This ensures that the message does not get lost in translation and always comes back to the main character of the story.

Table 2. Comparing Structural Composition – Blood Moon & Ball Player Panel

Style	Panel Name	Compositional Structure	Uniformity	Findings
Character Driven Panels	Blood Moon Panel	Balance	<i>Imbalanced</i>	Scene is unbalanced by opposing panels.
		Proportion	<i>Distorted</i>	The pictographs exhibit various sizing.
		Patterning & Unity	<i>Unified</i>	All panels show progression of story.
		Organization	<i>Asymmetrical Arrangement</i>	Skewed scene. Possibility of multiple authors.
		<i>Etchings:</i>	<i>Nose, mouth and a hummingbird head found at the center of her skirt.</i>	
	Ball Player Panel	Balance	<i>Balanced</i>	Images were evenly distributed.
		Proportion	<i>Even</i>	Images show good proportion size.
		Patterning & Unity	<i>Unified</i>	Images maintain good distance from each other.
		Organization	<i>Symmetrical Arrangement</i>	There is linear progression of the story by the footprints. The scene is slightly more dramatic and dynamic than the others by adding smudging as a way to detail injuries and bloodshed.
		<i>Etchings and Smudging:</i>	<i>Top stalk in the headdress was etched out and then painted over to represent crossed bones. Etching on left foot shows piercing. Smudging on chest area shows dramatic injuries. The middle section has been defaced.</i>	

Notes: Both panels show differences in structure and symmetrical arrangement. Blood Moon is skewed, and the sizing is distorted while the Ball Player is balanced and symmetrical. This may be a result of advancing art techniques that progress into dynamic styled art that is highly intentional, and purpose driven.

On the other hand, the Emergence and Corn panels focus on delivering a bigger visual of the scene taking place and thus fall into the action-driven category. Their visual structure is quite remarkable since they uniquely capture different expressions of art style. This is highly visible in how clean and stylized the lines for the Emergence panel are compared to the coarser art that is displayed in the Corn panel (Table 3). Composition and structure were also used differently in these two panels, resulting in mismatched designs that I can only conclude were created by different artists (Table 4).

Specifically, the Emergence panel shows great imbalance and tension to divert the viewer's focus from the center of the panel over to the periphery. Images are shown to be unevenly dispersed, creating slight tension as the focus shifts from one side to the other. Additionally, the size variation of the pictographs adds to the tension of the panel, resulting in a feeling of stillness caused by the unique asymmetrical arrangement that makes the panel seem static and unchanging. The highly stylized design also provides a sense of repose quite similar to that seen in "*nature morte*" (dead nature) paintings. Therefore, I must argue that the only "still-life" panel out of the four examined is the Emergence panel. The panel's immobility and quietude marks it a day of observance when the Pueblo emerged from the underworld into the Fourth World, making this particular event not recurring as it symbolizes the very beginning of life in the new world.

Meanwhile, the Corn panel presents as a loosely dynamic panel where outlining was performed by dabbing paint into the rock surface. The style of art is rough, and smudging is visible under the bison, corn plant and sun medallion. Paint also dripped down from the bison's tail demonstrating that the artist who created this piece was either

pressed for time, which led to a brisk presentation, or perhaps it was an amateur artist who was beginning to learn the trade.

Although the presentation is not as meticulous as the rest of the panels, the compositional structure of this panel is exceptional as it maintained even proportion and equal distance between all the pictographs. The panel appears uniquely clustered together, unifying all of its pictographs to harmonize the overall scene. The handprints throughout both panels also assert ceremonial sanctity and the sacrality of both panels. This confirms that ancestral people found it important to leave behind handprints that extend their presence onto the cliff site for others to acknowledge. It is also important to note that the story related to this panel was meant to integrate themes of kinship and maturation ceremonies that built strong connections between different groups. Therefore, I must argue that the cluster of images represents an intimate gathering where different groups assembled to celebrate rituals of maturation and sodality.

Table 3. Comparing Design Styles – Emergence & Corn Panel

Style	Panel Name	Design Elements	Present/ Absent	Findings
Action Driven Panels	Emergence Panel	Dry Brushed	<i>Absent</i>	<i>Not present.</i>
		Wet Stencil	Present	Scene created by wet stencil. Clean lines.
		Dabbing	<i>Absent</i>	<i>Not present.</i>
		Dripping/Spotting	<i>Absent</i>	<i>Not present.</i>
		Geometric Shapes	Present	Red circle w/ 4 spikes. Black circle.
		Outlining	Present	Preferred method used for the exception of handprint.
		Fill in	Present	Reed/bundled leaf, spirit essence and dust cloud terrace.
		Simple Coat	Present	Paint stroke, water elevation marks, and tall reed.
		Multiple Coats	Present	Bird, leaf, red/black circle, spirit essence and dust cloud.
		Color Usage	Present	Orange red, Red, Black Charcoal, Maroon.
	Corn Panel	Dry Brushed	<i>Absent</i>	<i>Not present.</i>
		Wet Stencil	Present	Two concentric circles that make up the sun medallion.
		Dabbing	Present	Pictographs were created by dabbing and smudging paint.
		Dripping	Present	Bison's tail. Smudging under corn plant and sun.
		Geometric Shapes	Present	Sun medallion.
		Outlining	Present	Entire scene created by outlining.
		Fill in	Present	Anthromorph woman standing next to corn plant.
		Simple Coat	Present	Entire scene minus sun medallion.
		Multiple Coats	Present	Large circle of sun medallion.
		Color Usage	Present	Orange red and Maroon.

Notes: Based on the visual imagery of the scenes, the panels reveal action driven scenes of emerging through the cloud terrace and the harvesting of corn by the corn maidens. The style in both panels vary drastically as the Emergence Panel is highly stylized by wet stencil, while the Corn Panel is much coarser due to dabbing and smudging of paint.

Table 4. Comparing Structural Composition – Emergence & Corn Panel

Style	Panel Name	Compositional Structure	Uniformity	Findings
Action Driven Panels	Emergence Panel	Balance	<i>Imbalanced</i>	Images are distributed unevenly. Creates slight tension on the periphery by opposing pictographs.
		Proportion	<i>Distorted</i>	Images vary in size. Location enhances tension.
		Patterning & Unity	<i>Skewed but Unified</i>	Outer elements are dispersed.
		Organization	<i>Asymmetrical Arrangement</i>	Reed contains heavy visual weight. Outer elements provide asymmetric arrangement.
		<i>Handprints (imprints)</i>	<i>1 Left hand was stamped on rock surface.</i>	
	Corn Panel	Balance	<i>Balanced</i>	Images are evenly distributed.
		Proportion	<i>Even</i>	Images show even proportion.
		Patterning & Unity	<i>Unified</i>	Images maintain equal distance. Clustered together.
		Organization	<i>Symmetrical Arrangement</i>	There is evenness between each pictograph.
		<i>Handprints (imprints)</i>	<i>2 Left hands were stamped on the rock surface. The palm exhibits similar morphology as displayed by the deep palm arches.</i>	

Notes: The panels exhibit differences in symmetrical arrangement and composition. The Emergence Panel shows oddly distributed pictographs where the heaviest visual weight lies in the center, while the elements in the periphery are slightly dispersed making the scene imbalanced. In contrast, the Corn Panel shows all the pictographs evenly clustered together in unification with even sizing throughout. Both panels exhibit left handprints that have been stamped onto the rock surface.

Another interesting pattern noted during the artistic and structural comparison of all four panels was how different symbols referenced transcendental movements between worlds. These consisted of pipette motifs found in Blood Moon's panel, the breakthrough of the sipapu dust terrace in the Emergence panel and the ladder-like symbol that the Hopi-Tewa tale reference in the Corn panel. Although all three symbols conveyed upward or downward movements, their designs looked very different.

Visually all three pictographs exemplified a connection between worlds, but the designs were often altered to fit the context of the story and oration that was being performed. These findings suggest that elements of design and composition were adapted to transmute messages accurately into rock art. Perhaps this is also why outlining was one of the most common techniques used in all of the panels as it allows for skeleton rubrics to be created underneath the paint, guiding the artist's work in the process. In fact, three out of the four panels examined in this research proved to be pre-planned before being painted onto the rock, as confirmed by the solar alignments that were visible throughout the year. These optical illusions of movement and recurrence make these panels active and dynamic.

Static Nature versus Dynamic Movement in Rock Art

Two additional characteristics that stand out from this research are the optical illusions of "static" versus "dynamic" features in rock art. Static and still-life panels are classified by traits that are unchanging and never recurring. Still-life panels also do not interact with the sun, and they only capture one-time occurrences. In contrast, loose and dynamic panels establish re-enactments of rituals that allow time to become cyclical in nature. Oftentimes, solar alignments described as sunlight daggers illuminate pictographs

during solstices and equinoxes but sometimes occur outside of these seasonal events in order to portray an important action in a story. These never-ending, built-in-expressions in rock art act as direct embodiments of visual culture where major planning was involved.

The panels at Paint Rock were extremely symbolic to the Pueblo that they planned long journeys to seek out locations through sun priests who tracked the sun's placement throughout the year. These sun priests would then venture out exploring the land to establish landmarks that would serve as ritual sites to perform their ceremonies. During seasonal changes, entire groups journeyed to the established location set by the sun priests to perform rites that were transmuted into rock art suggesting that it was an essential part of a widespread and collective ritual practice. Therefore, not only was site selection key, but placement of the pictographs was also pivotal to ensure that divine messages never became 'decayed expressions' of Puebloan culture. Thus, the solar alignments that appeared throughout the year maintained the panels at Paint Rock alive and active. The three panels that contain dynamic movements through solar alignments are Blood Moon, the Corn panel and the Ball Player as explained below.

In Blood Moon's panel the solar alignment activates the Soyal ritual of renewal by demonstrating her death as she gets split in half by the solar alignment (Table 5a). Then, during the vernal equinox, the solar alignment enters through the bottom box identified as a sipapu and vertically ascends to her genitalia to demonstrate copulation between Blood Moon and the sun (Table 5b).

The Corn panel also exhibits a solar marker that highlights the middle of the sun medallion and points directly to the top of the prayer stick. This pictograph represents the

sodality offering that is made to the Sun Father marking a day of celebration for reaching an age of maturation. It can also represent the request for rain to have a bountiful harvest of corn (Table 5c).

Lastly, the Ball Player panel also displays multiple solar alignments that describe various scenes where the twins performed self-sacrifice rituals on themselves to deceive the Lords of Xibalba. The solar alignments capture scenes where the twins severed their arms, legs, head and cut out their hearts from their chest (Table 5d-g). In other scenes, the solar alignments capture attributes where the Ball Player embodies attributes of Morning Star as shown through the emanating darts of light that appear illuminating his face and headdress. This indicates the complementary qualities that he acquires through different transformations (Table 5h- i).

Table 5. Dynamic Movements in Rock Art through Solar Alignments

Name of Panel	Solar Alignments	Solar Event	Description
Blood Moon Panel	 <i>A.</i>	Winter Solstice (21 st)	Photograph taken December 2024. (See Fig.10). Solar alignment splits Blood Moon in half confirming her death. Demonstrates the renewal of a cycle by ending an old one and starting a new one. Aligns with the Kachina's Soyal Ritual.
	 <i>B.</i>	Equinox (Autumnal & Vernal)	Photograph taken September 2025. (See Fig.13). Sun enters through the bottom square sipapu and ascends vertically on her genitalia demonstrating copulation. She conceives twins during the vernal equinox.
Corn Panel	 <i>C.</i>	Cross Quarter Day (May 5 th)	Photograph taken May 2023. (See Fig.22). Solar alignment highlights the center of the prayer stick inside the sun medallion. This recurrence symbolizes the sacrificial obligation offered to the Sun Father during Sodality rituals. It can also represent a request to the gods for rain to bring fertility to the earth.
Ball Player Panel	 <i>D.</i>	Cross Quarter Day (Nov.4th)	Photograph taken November 2021. (See Fig. 28 for D-G of this table). Solar alignment severs the arm of the Ball Player during a self-sacrifice ritual to deceive the Lords of Xibalba.

Name of Panel	Solar Alignments	Solar Event	Description
Ball Player Panel Continued.	 E.	Winter Solstice (21 st)	Photograph taken December 2025. Solar alignment beheads the Ball Player so he can transform from the Maize God over to Morning Star and embody the eastern direction as the new dawn.
	 F.	Equinox (Autumnal & Vernal)	Photograph taken September 2023. Solar alignment splits the Ball Player in half and shows a bursting chest representing a self-sacrifice ritual to deceive the Lords of Xibalba.
	 G.	Winter Solstice (21 st)	Photograph taken December 2018. The solar alignment pierces the Ball Player's left foot representing one of the four piercings shown in Plate 54 of the Codex Borgia confirming that his death is imminent in order to transform into Morning Star.
	 H.	Cross Quarter Day (Feb. 3 rd)	Photograph taken February 2024. (See Fig.32 for H-I). Shooting ray is captured around 8:00 a.m. showing rays emanating from his body.

Name of Panel	Solar Alignments	Solar Event	Description
	 I.	Cross Quarter Day (Feb. 2 nd)	Photograph taken February 2025. Solar alignment illuminates the Ball Player's face during morning dawn representing heliacal rising.

Notes: Time was viewed as circular and rhythmic in ancestral communities. The solar alignments capture this rhythm through each passing cycle. Photographs A-B are used with permission of Joshua Alkire. Photographs C-I are used with permission of Kim Cox.

As a result, the solar alignments captured through the photographs presented in this research help confirm that recurring cycles were necessary to invoke the spirit of the land. The ritual practices performed at Paint Rock activated the pictographs and transformed them into mechanical units of art that help us visualize their spiritual world. In this manner, the Indigenous communities that visited Paint Rock utilized earth's synchronicity to connect them to the divine and consecrated Paint Rock as a Flower Mountain.

Concluding Comments

To conclude, based on the findings and examinations of the art style and composition of the panels, it is evident that all four panels show unique structure, pre-planning, and expertise execution. The art techniques and figures used were uniquely crafted to fit specific stories, songs and orations. Their details, organization and uniformity, or lack thereof, presented different ways in which the Indigenous artists utilized composition to shift the viewers' focus to ensure that messages were wholly captured.

Similarly, by comparing the four panels, I confirmed that the artists of the plates understood the difference between capturing the importance of a scene versus a character. This demonstrates that the artists possessed innovative creativity to transmute messages efficaciously into pictograph form. Extended elaboration time on a character's physical form and attributes demonstrate that the people admired, respected and worshipped the deities of ancient myth. These gods created the cosmos and self-sacrificed themselves for their people in order to restart a new cycle of life. Although physical death was imminent, their essences never left this site as they were meant to be forever captured by the

pictographs present on the panels, while the solar alignments re-activated the ritual with each calendrical cycle.

Thus, the dynamic movements witnessed at Paint Rock affirm that site selection was key during the planning phase as this would require large amounts of time to track the sun's progress. The people would have to endure long pilgrimages, and vast knowledge would be put into creating dynamic art. This appears to be a crucial feature for the panels, since they were created not only for the worshipping of the gods, but it was also invoking ancient spiritual practices that made the spirit of the land come alive.

This leads me to argue that recurring cycles were so important in Puebloan culture that invoking ritual practices through art went beyond establishing a Flower Mountain. It became a way to align themselves to the tiered cosmos by embodying the powers of the gods so that they could remain connected to them and carry their messages back to the people.

Chapter V.

The Flower World Complex:

Embodying the Spirit of the Land

A ritual system that centers around flowers reveals a complex spiritual model that developed in the ancient Maya world among the Tzotzil of Chiapas called the “Flower World” (Hill 1992, 123). This world captured chromatic symbols that evoke the spirit of the land through songs, orations, and poems that describe colorful flowers, hummingbirds, iridescent light and celestial events in the sky amongst many others (Hill 1992, 117). As previously discussed, these symbols acted as celestial archetypes in the terrestrial world that established a connection to the divine in order to honor the gods in the afterworld. Thus, their visual imagery in pictograph form became materialized ‘spiritual copies’ that provided safe passageways during meditative or trance-like states to acquire visions from the gods. As a result, the construction of the Flower World model became so widespread that it launched an “ancient level of religious thought” that those living near a contact zone became heavily influenced by it (Hill 1992, 123).

This cosmological framework reveals sophisticated understanding of visual metaphors and of shared ideas that helped strengthen indigenous connectivity. Each exchange slowly gave rise to a shared belief system that utilized the power of songs, oration and narration to fulfill spiritual quests embodying chromatic symbols for their collective rituals and shamanic journeys. Over time, these repetitive actions became deeply embedded into normal day behaviors and practices that developed into ancestral “core” beliefs that compelled movement of ideas from Mesoamerica into the American Southwest.

In this manner, as seasonal cycles drew near winter solstice, many Indigenous communities of the Southwest and northern Mexico set the stage for winter storytellers to perform the creation of the world where “figures in the myth could sing or speak as orators, and the narrative sequence was elaborated with recitative songs” (Hill 1992, 120). These ceremonies led many communities to exchange symbols that called forth mythical heroes and ancestral gods by turning them into drawings, etchings, and rock art paintings, creating widespread symbols that laid the “flowery road” into other places of mist (Hill 1992, 121). This suggests that metaphorical systems were not only acknowledged and understood but they also generated visions of “parallel worlds” where creation consisted of death and vice versa (Hill 1992, 124). Often, movement between different spirit worlds resulted in arduous journeys where physical and metaphorical death was imminent.

The Journey of Death & Rebirth

Paint Rock exhibits multiple traces of difficult journeys that took place in ancestral times, but two predominant journeys stand out from this research are the death of Blood Moon and the rebirth of the Ball Player. Both of these journeys appear to borrow core concepts from the “Flower World Complex” of ancient Mesoamerica where women who died during childbirth and men who died during battle got escorted by the sun through his flowery path into paradise (Hill 1992, 128). For Blood Moon and the Ball Player, though their ascensions were somewhat different, they were both meant to personify places of mist where their deaths resulted in the birthing of a new world.

The Flower World complex then suggests that mythical heroes who died during their adventures could retain their eternal existence through various forms, thereby

transforming into essences that were captured in “stones, minerals, trees, plants, vegetation and stars” (Lopez Austin 1997, 19-20). In a similar fashion, after Blood Moon passed away, her essences ascended to the night sky to become the moon so she could grant the earth its renewal through the birth of her twins.

As the creation story progresses to the second act, the Hero Twins are shown journeying into the underworld to retrieve their father’s ball defying the Lords of Xibalba. After jumping into an oven and being resurrected after their ashes were thrown into the river, they return to deceive the Lords. The twins end up performing several self-sacrificial rites until the Lords agree to be sacrificed. Then by tricking them into dying, the twins restore balance to the world and are able to receive the gift of corn.

Several of the self-sacrifice scenes from the *Popol Vuh* are captured by solar alignments that occur throughout the year. Others, like the piercing of the foot, are documented in texts like the *Codex Borgia*, where the God of Maize is struck on his left foot by the dog-faced Venus that represents the eastern direction while the Maize God represents the west. Based on the calendrical date of 13 Reed that is found on Plate 54 of the *Codex Borgia*, I argue that a new cycle is about to restart, which means that the God of Maize will have to undergo a metaphorical death in order to become the new eastern direction.

Similarly to Blood Moon, both characters must undergo death and transformation to become newly created, divine beings (Lopez Austin 1997, 23), thus allowing their essences to transform into superior gods who possess divine hierarchy over the rest in order to expand their dominion. This argument is supported by the visual iconography present at Teotihuacan, as previously mentioned, where Quetzalcoatl transforms into the

new Venus after cremating himself to become the new dawn. This resulted in a newly appointed, divine being that was forged under extreme conditions to bring the people of the earth new beginnings, similar to the actions of the Ball Player.

Conversely, not all panels represent or require death for renewal as is the case with the Corn panel, since this panel achieved renewal through maturation processes that helped extend kinship systems. For example, corn was used to express themes of fertility and growth by using metaphors between the ‘corn maidens’ and the mature corn stalks that were called ‘mother’. During Soyal rituals, communities would apply developmental stages to corn to symbolically represent purity and maidenhood. These practices not only became living embodiments of culture and of cosmovision itself, but they also integrated natural processes of the earth to give “regularity and meaning to the things of the [terrestrial] world and to those of the world of the gods” (Lopez Austin 1997, 12). Thus, corn not only symbolized fertility and maturation, but it was also adapted to represent sodality rituals that embodied self-sacrificed through ritual gift giving, helping the individual align themselves with the worlds of the gods.

In other rock art panels at Paint Rock, including the Emergence panel, symbolic iconography captures movement between different world that suggests that emergence, renewal and death divided the cosmos into horizontal space tiers as people moved from one world into another (Wright and Russell 2011, 366-367).

Birthing of the House of Dawn

Cosmic transcendences are common themes in Native American creation myths, and they are notable not just in architecture, but are also prevalent symbols of emergence and ascension. This transcendental movement prompts vertically stacked worlds to

regenerate as a way to escape the corrupted, lower worlds (Wright and Russell 2011, 367). This symbolism is captured in the Emergence panel as the Pueblo breaks through the dust terrace to ascend into the Fourth World. Importantly, Wright and Russell (2011, 367) suggest that lower worlds normally carry “spring portals of water, *cenotes* and aqueous caves,” which explains why the story of emergence starts with a deluge that was trapping the Puebloan people in the underworld. Wright and Russell (2011, 366) also explain that the middle world carries daily living actions as the one represented in the Corn panel through the harvesting of corn, while the upper world is home to the “sun, moon and stars [where] birds, smoke, and trees” carry human messages to the celestial beings of the heavens.

Undoubtedly, this explains the reason why chromatic symbols like birds, feathers, pipe smoking and growing vegetation were prominent in the panels and are integrated in the metastructure that forms around landscapes containing water (Wright & Russell 2011, 367). These landscape characteristics also support my argument that Paint Rock served as a Flower Mountain, by the physical attributes it possesses including its close proximity to the water as it is located next to the Concho River, its great height rising over 70 feet above the valley floor, and its walls composed of limestone which are perfect for painting rock art.

Based on concepts of death and rebirth, if these themes orient the cosmos horizontally as ‘east meets west’ like Coltman (2023) proposes, and concepts like ‘agricultural and renewal’ stack the cosmos vertically like Wright and Russell (2011) suggest, then what is being attested is the birthing of a new world called the “House of Dawn”. Paint Rock then represents a Flower Mountain as it holds astronomical

significance confirmed by the solar alignments that manifest during important calendrical dates. This means that Carrasco (1999, 33) was also correct when he stated that the center of the world does not sit statically in one place as it has the ability to transform new places into sacralized spaces.

Therefore, the chromatic symbols present in the pictographs at Paint Rock are confirmed ritualistic symbols expressing cosmic transcendence of a vertically tiered world. This is evident in Blood Moon's panel, as confirmed by the pipette iconography found between Blood Moon and Sun Priest, the dust terrace sipapu that allows the Pueblo to ascend into the Fourth World and the ladder like motif in the Corn panel that captures transcendental movements between worlds. In sum, based on the chromatic symbols, the tiered metastructures, and religious importance that the characters of the story portray, I can confirm that Paint Rock was a transcendental place with Native American affiliation as well as Mesoamerican influence.

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