

Contents

Marc Thompson

Defining Mimbres Rock Art Sites2
References Cited 11

Welcome to the final 2011 issue of NewsMAC. For this issue, Marc Thompson reports some of the results of his work on Mimbres rock art sites. This research was funded in part by a NMAC grant.

This is my last issue as editor of NewsMAC. I want to take this opportunity to thank all of you for allowing me to fill the post for the past two years. It has been a real pleasure. In January, 2012 Jim Railey will be taking up the post again, and we can all look forward to many interesting NewsMAC issues in the future!

If you have a paper that you would like to share with all of us, your colleagues, please let us know. Research papers, book reviews, opinion essays, photographic essays, publication announcements, collages: if it has to do with New Mexico archaeology NewsMAC is interested! Email Jim at: jrailey@swca.com.

Thanks, and enjoy!

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Defining Mimbres Rock Art Sites

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The New Mexico Archaeological Council provided funds to cover the costs of transportation, lodging, and food during a week-long rock art recording project of sites within the Mimbres Mogollon area north, east, and west of Deming, New Mexico. In May thirteen petroglyph sites, in Dona Ana, Grant, and Luna Counties, were visited in the company of a professional photographer and two volunteers from the Grant County archaeological Society. The purpose of this project was fourfold, to: (1) compare petroglyph images with those recorded on Mimbres ceramics; (2) record the occurrence and percentage of Venus glyphs at these sites; (3) document the presence and correlation of mortars, rock shelters, mesquite, and scrub oak at the sites; and (4) assess the potential for production of a Mimbres rock art travelling exhibit. The sites are located on BLM (10), private (2), and State (1) property. They range in elevation from 4,539 to 5,960 ft. amsl. All of the petroglyphs are visible on the surface of the Sarten Sandstone, a hard, massive, primarily quartzite material that forms a geological unit in the area. Sarten Sandstone is found at the sites as: outcrops (6); exposed in canyon walls (3); on ridges (3); and as large boulders in a narrow draw (1). Four of the sites are situated between 100 m to 2 km from known pithouse or pueblo villages.

Previous Commentaries

A website, <http://www.ancestral.com>, claims: “Unlike many other southwest cultures, the Mimbres did not leave a rich set of rock art.” In truth, there is a dearth of *published* data on Mimbres rock art.

J. Walter Fewkes (1914:14-17) was perhaps the first researcher to illustrate petroglyphs (referred to as pictographs) and comment on the similarities between ceramic and rock art imagery in the Mimbres area. He was also the first, and apparently the last, to draw attention to clusters of bedrock mortars located adjacent to petroglyphs in the

foothills of the “Cook’s Range” north of Deming. Likewise Polly Schaafsma (1980) referred to “Cooks Peak” and published photographs of and described petroglyphs from the Pony Hills and Frying Pan Canyon sites. A focus of these discussions is her contention that Southwestern forms of Tlaloc (the central Mexican Rain God) and Quetzalcoatl (the Mexican Feathered Serpent) are represented in Jornada and Mimbres Mogollon rock art. Later (1992) she discontinued her distinction between the eastern and western (Mimbres) expressions of what she termed the Jornada Style. With respect to similarities in rock art and ceramic images she stated, “Absolute dates for the initial appearance of the Jornada Style are suggested by the comparison made...between rock art figures and their counterparts in Mimbres ceramics” (Schaafsma 1992:71). Although admitting that, “there is no archaeological evidence for any clear pattern of interaction with Mesoamerica at this time” (Schaafsma 1992:73), she continued to propound “Jornada Style analogs with the Mexican deities Tlaloc and Quetzalcoatl” (Schaafsma 1992:74).

Within a five-kilometer-long section of the middle Mimbres Valley near the NAN Ranch Ruin, Darrell Creel (1989) recorded 69 prehistoric sites. Of these, 23 contained rock art and 11 included representations of anthropomorphic figures. Some of these figures resemble what Schaafsma (1980, 1992) has referred to as Tlaloc and Quetzalcoatl icons, but as Creel (1989:73) observed, “It has not been demonstrated, however, that the source of the Southwestern imagery was Mesoamerican rather than some early pan-regional iconographic complex ancestral to the later expressions.” Further, he concluded that, “a general correlation of Jornada Style rock art to various depictions in Classic pottery vessels is of only limited aid in attempting to date the anthropomorphic rock art figures” (Creel 1989:79), and “Tlaloc-like figures have no clear parallels in Mimbres area ceramic representation” (Creel 1989:83).

Harry Shafer (2003:53) has suggested that most Mimbres Valley rock art images may date to the Transitional and Classic periods and stated, “I do not agree that ‘Tlaloc’ motifs are necessarily

Mexican in origin.” Similarly, J. J. Brody expressed this admonition concerning purported Mesoamerican icons, “the so-called Tlaloc images of the Mimbres more closely resemble contemporaneous and later Jornada Mogollon petroglyphs than they do any Mesoamerican deities...there is no reason to accept any of them as transplanted Mesoamerican concepts, and every reason not to give them Mesoamerican names” (Brody 2004:172-173). With respect to gender affiliation and Mimbres rock art Brody offered this opinion:

Most Mimbres narrative pictures, even those of people engaged in activities generally associated with men, such as big-game hunting and what seem to be male-dominated ceremonies, are painted on well-made vessels that can be mastered only after a lengthy apprenticeship by a skilled pottery painter, most of whom are assumed to have been women...Males likely participated in a pictorial tradition that is closely related to Classic Mimbres pottery painting -- the carving of petroglyphs. Some petroglyph sites displaying Mimbres-style images are in and near the Mimbres Valley; others are as far away as the Chiricahua Mountains in Arizona, more than 100 miles to the west...and the Jornada Mogollon regions of New Mexico, more than 120 miles to the east... These show that important stylistic and iconographic elements of Mimbres pottery paintings were also used in an art medium that, at historic pueblos, is generally associated with men
[Brody 2004:99-101, emphasis mine].

Mimbres Icons, Metaphors, and Myths

In Episode Two of the PBS series *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth* in 1988, the late mythologist Joseph Campbell explained to Bill Moyers, “Ritual is the enactment of myth.” One need only contemplate Holy Communion to appreciate Campbell’s succinct observation. It is widely believed that prehistoric rock art resulted from the

performance of ritual activities. Like all systems of communication, rock art utilizes images to represent ideas and concepts. Mimbres rock art figures, like those found in Mimbres ceramics, appear to present images and meanings derived from mythological and cosmological narratives. Many of these icons were based on models from nature, such as animals, but to infer literal meanings from all of these is a projection of our own Western beliefs and biases onto the iconography of another ideology. Naturalistic or literal interpretations suggest what images depict, as opposed to what they symbolize. It seems apparent that this metaphoric communication system connoted and carried meanings far more complex than mere identification.

Rabbits

The lunar rabbit, or rabbit in the moon, is an example of a quintessential Classic Mimbres icon from nature painted in ceramic bowls representing a metaphor from the mythic realm. Similar depictions in Mesoamerican media and myth suggest an ancient and shared ideology with respect to this celestial motif. Simply put, images of rabbits lateralized to the left with lunate bodies, some with infixed white crescents, are visual metaphors for the moon (see Thompson 1994:95-98, Figures 9.I.a-d). A petroglyph from McGee Canyon (Figure 1) confirms the orientation of the rabbit (lateralized to the left, feet do not point toward the ground) in direct association with a lunar crescent. Other images of rabbits, similarly oriented, appear later in time and elsewhere in the Southwest as petroglyphs and in kiva murals at sites such as Three Rivers, and Kuaua (Coronado State Monument), New Mexico, and as distant as Wyoming.

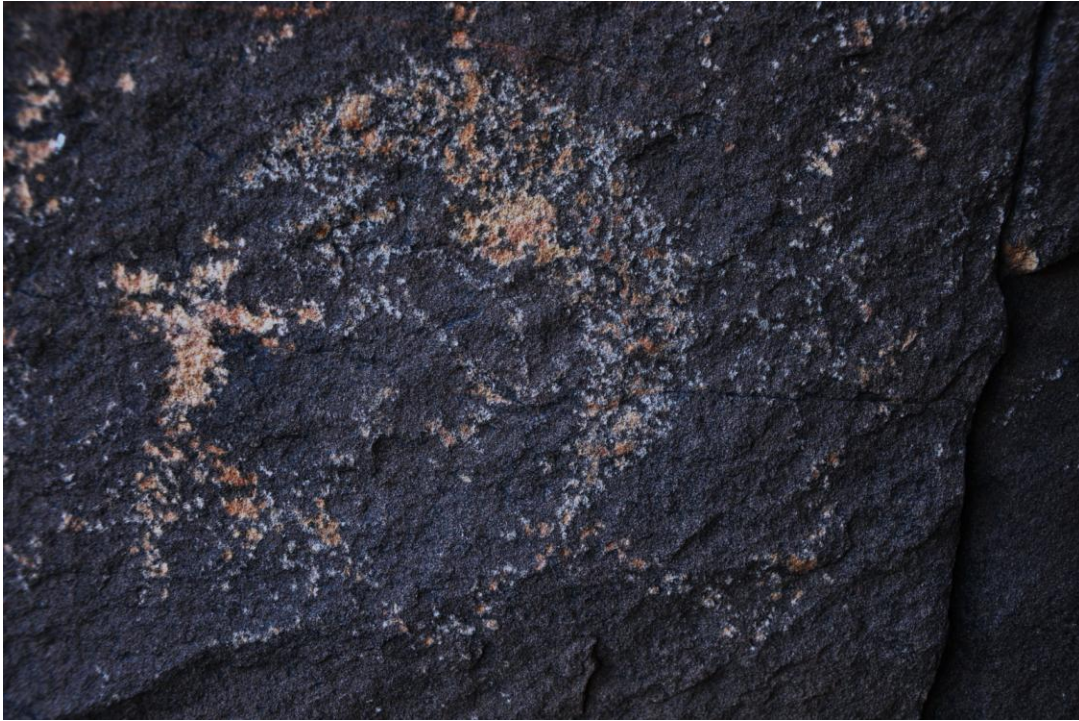


Figure 1. Rabbit lateralized to the left within the arc of a crescent moon. McGee Canyon.



Figure 2. Outlined Venus glyph. Rock House.

Venus Glyphs

Classic Mimbres Venus glyphs, outlined (Greek) crosses with arms of equal length (e.g., Figure 2), are part of a Southwestern component of a graphic cultural tradition represented throughout the Americas. They occur on Classic Mimbres pottery (Thompson 2006: Figure 10.11; Townsend 2005: Plate 14), and at six (46%) of the 13 rock art sites surveyed. Thirty such glyphs appear at Frying Pan Canyon, including a rare set of twinned Venus glyphs. These face to the south suggesting depictions of Venus as morning star (east) and evening star (west). A variant, an encircled Greek cross, occurs individually and infixed on two macaws at Pony Hills and Frying Pan Canyon (Figure 3), respectively. Curvilinear or Classic Mimbres style Venus petroglyphs have also been recorded in the Reserve area (Schaafsma 1980:Figure 149, 1992:Figure 74), and at the Petrified Forest National Monument (Schaafsma 1980:Figure 118), and similar petroglyphs are known to occur in the Hohokam area (Thompson 2006). The curvilinear, outlined, cruciform petroglyph does not appear Jornada Mogollon rock art, ceramics, or other media, although there may be a similar petroglyph near Ruidoso (Margaret Barrier, personal communication 2011). Scores of both styles of Venus petroglyphs, curvilinear outlined, and encircled, occur at Petroglyph National Monument, Albuquerque. These could be of PII to PV age, but are of unknown cultural affiliation. Circled cruciform Venus glyphs are depicted on Casas Grandes ceramics and they have been recorded as outlined petroglyphs in Chihuahua (Brown 1998:Figure 12) and Sinaloa, Mexico (Sanchez 2008:Figures 4, 6). Additionally, the curvilinear, outlined, Venus glyph is represented in petroglyphs in Venezuela (Sanchez 1980:6-10, Figures 7-24).

Macaws

Immature and fledgling macaws, as well as other Mexican parrots, are depicted in Classic Mimbres bowls, especially in the company of female anthropomorphs (Creel and McKusick 1994). As was suggested above with respect to Venus glyphs, two Mimbres petroglyphs appear to be macaws, based on the configuration of tail feathers and

recurved beaks. These are depicted at Pony Hills and Frying Pan Canyon (Figure 3). Both exhibit a variant of the Classic Mimbres Venus glyph, a Greek cross within a circle located on the wing of each bird. This type of Venus glyph appears elsewhere at Classic Mimbres sites and at later petroglyph sites in conjunction with four-pointed stars and shields dating to the PIV period (Thompson 2006: Figures 10.12, 10.13). The Mimbres petroglyphs and ceramic icons are early Southwestern representations that continue on ceramics in Casas Grandes culture, as well as PIV petroglyphs and kiva murals at sites such as Petroglyph National Monument and Pottery Mound Pueblo, respectively.

Anthropomorphs

Mimbres anthropomorphs on ceramics and petroglyphs are similar, singular and probably classic in age, i.e., A.D. 1000-1130. Although ostensibly more common on pottery than in rock art, facial profiles of Mimbres figures in both media tend to have sharply defined features such as almond eyes, aquiline noses and prominent chins (Figure 4; Schaafsma 1992:Figures 78, 79). The bodily form of depiction is distinctive enough that an anthropomorphic petroglyph to the east of the Mimbres area is recognized at Three Rivers, New Mexico, as in the "Classic Mimbres style" (Brody 2004:101, Figure 97). Like many anthropomorphs illustrated on Classic Mimbres bowls, petroglyphic images often appear to be animated with a narrative quality indicated by the position of the body and limbs. These similarities suggest common affiliations of age, ethnicity, and meaning.

Figure 5 is an example of a full form frontal figure, rather than a profile. The figure is in what appears to be a birthing posture (e.g., Townsend 2005: Plate 68), but without indication of gender. Additionally, an element surrounding the head of the anthropomorph may be a Mimbres style indication of a fish head. This motif compares favorably to several Classic Mimbres bowls (Brody 2004: Figure 37, Plate 18; Townsend 2005: Plate 14) that depict a similar figure in this posture with a fish body around the head in the first two cases, and a scalloped fish tail around the head in the third case.



Figure 4. Macaw with encircled Venus glyph. Frying Pan Canyon.



Figure 3. Anthropomorph profile face with headdress. Apache Flats.



Figure 5. Anthropomorph in birthing posture with fish head element. McGee Canyon.

Mortars, Mesquite, and Men?

Bedrock and boulder mortars are present at nine (70%) of the Mimbres petroglyph sites visited during this project. This accords with 67% of Jornada Mogollon pictograph sites with mortars at Hueco Tanks, Texas (Howard 2010:143). Rock shelters are associated with 78% of the Mimbres sites with mortars. Rock shelters are associated with mortars at 72% of the Hueco Tanks rock art sites (Howard 2010:141). The rock shelters at the Mimbres sites are small and shallow, bear no signs of use other than temporary habitation (probably for shade), and most contain bedrock mortars in the floors. Additionally, there is a strong correlation of Mimbres petroglyph sites with modern stands of mesquite and scrub oak. Table 1 illustrates the correlations between petroglyphs, mortars, rock shelters, mesquite and scrub oak (see also Figure 6). Bedrock or boulder mortars and petroglyphs require rock. That they exist at all requires the presence of rock, but their co-occurrence at the same loci begs for explanation. Unfortunately, mortars are no more amenable to dating than petroglyphs, even stylistically. Mortar holes could have been established by Late Archaic peoples and used in historic times by Apaches. The presence of these features (non-portable facilities) at rock art sites could have been associated with rituals, but it seems more parsimonious to suggest that they were used for processing mesquite seeds and/or scrub oak acorns, both of which require pulverization rather than grinding before consumption. Some of the mortars observed approached nearly one meter in depth suggesting that they were used for many generations if not centuries or millennia. One site had an estimated 70 bedrock mortars.

The presence of 39 mortars (mean depth and diameter 20 cm) at Dog Canyon, New Mexico, combined with hundreds of Archaic projectile points but few sherds suggested that these features were established during the Late Archaic period (Thompson 1979:182-188). Ethnographic analogy with the Seri of western Sonora, Mexico, who use ironwood pestles to produce up to 40 kg of mesquite flour a day, and acorn preparation by the Chumash of California provide examples of historic mortar use (Thompson 1980:142-143).

Ethnographic analogy also suggests that prehistoric mesquite and acorn pulverization was probably accomplished primarily by females. If this was the case at the Mimbres petroglyph sites it indicates the presence of women, and perhaps children, at the sites at least seasonally. It also opens the door to the possibility that females were present when the petroglyphs were made and perhaps created some as well. As Brody suggests in the quote above, rock art sites from the historic Pueblo period are thought to be associated with, or the result of, male activities. This assumption *may* be correct for the past, but like the difficulty of dating the petroglyphs or mortars, it remains difficult to test.

Mimbres petroglyph site data bear comparison to a recently published study of Emigdiano/*Hulkukhu* pictograph sites with bedrock mortars (BRMs) in the Chumash region of south central California (Robinson 2010). Among the observations and conclusions of this study are the following:

1. “the majority of *Hulkukhu* pictographs correlate with the majority of BRMs” (Robinson 2010:803);
2. “pictographs are most often placed at locales where multiple families aggregated together...this points to an association between intensive acorn preparation and employment of pictographs” (Robinson 2010:804);
3. “the rock art must have been present during the majority of the occupational activity, and much of it was likely to have been made during the span of that activity” (Robinson 2010:805);
4. “the ethnographic literature overwhelmingly indicates that women prepared acorn meal, and in at least some instances had personal ownership of individual BRM stations” (Robinson 2010:809-810);
5. “making of food would have happened under the presence of the most visible media in the landscape” (Robinson 2010:812); and
6. “subsistence and symbolic practices were conjoined” (Robinson 2010:813).

These six statements are a good fit with observations and speculations concerning Mimbres petroglyph sites with mortars.



Figure 6. Two bedrock mortars in direct association with scrub oak plants. Bear Paw.

**Table 1
Correlation of Mimbres Petroglyph Sites with Features and Vegetation**

Site	Mortars	Rock Shelter(s)	Mesquite	Scrub Oak
Indian Wells				
McGee Canyon	X	X	X	X
Bear Paw	X	X	X	X
Man		X	X	X
Apache Tanks	X	X		
Apache Flats	X		X	X
Fluorite Ridge 1	X		X	
Fluorite Ridge 2	X	X	X	X
Pony Hills	X	X	X	X
Frying Pan Canyon	X	X	X	X
Rock House	X	X	X	X
Eby Ranch			X	X
McSherry			X	

Summary and Conclusion

The relationship between economic and ritual use of landscapes by prehistoric peoples is complex; it would be a mistake to separate them. Ancient American cultures did not make distinctions between the supernatural and the natural as we do. This is not to say that Mimbres petroglyphs did not connote ethnoreligious content even during activities representative of the economic realm. Comparison of pottery motifs and petroglyphs suggests similarities in age, ethnic affiliation, and meaning. Based on stylistic grounds one site, Indian Wells, within two km of both a pithouse village and a Mimbres Pueblo, appeared to be earlier than most others. It contained neither mortars nor Classic Mimbres motifs. It was one of only three sites that contained goggle-eyed figures Schaafsma (1980, 1992) refers to as representations of Tlaloc.

Venus glyphs were present at six sites. Although the outlined, curvilinear, cruciform is not unique to Mimbres petroglyphs, it is depicted in both Mimbres ceramics and rock art. This glyph appears in neighboring Hohokam petroglyphs to the west, but is rare to absent in Jornada Mogollon media to the east.

Mesquite and acorns are typically harvested and processed in late summer and early autumn. We can *assume* that women, children, and perhaps men were present at these sites seasonally. Although it is supposed that Mimbres women painted pottery and men created rock art, this assumption cannot be verified or quantified. Nor do we know if some men painted some pottery and women created some rock art. It is estimated that figurative motifs account for about 30% of the petroglyphs. If this is the case, it accords well with Mimbres ceramics at 70% geometric and 30% figurative motifs. The level, complexity, and knowledge of esoteric symbols and graphic metaphors evident in Mimbres ceramic painting is approached in Mimbres petroglyphs. Many of these elements, icons, and motifs are ethnically, stylistically, and geographically unique. Although Mimbres rock art shares some affinities with Hohokam and Jornada Mogollon rock art, Mimbres petroglyphs are as distinctive as are Mimbres painted ceramics.

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