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COMMENTS

Comment on Backes’ “More than Meets the Eye: Fluorescence Photography for Enhanced Analysis of Pictographs”

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In a recent issue, Backes (2004) presents an analysis of two pictograph sites in Kern County, California, using ultraviolet fluorescence photography. Two sites, CA-KER-735 and CA-KER-736, were thoroughly studied. Backes’ innovative approach is a useful tool in pictograph site research. It has resulted in the identification of new elements that were previously invisible to the ‘naked eye’ or impossible to document through conventional photographic means. I applaud Backe’s efforts. My comments here are aimed at clarifying several minor yet significant contextual, classificatory, and interpretive matters, rather than in disagreeing with his technical methods or results *per se*.

INTERTRIBAL RELATIONSHIPS, ETHNIC AFFILIATIONS, AND TERRITORIALITY

My first comment relates to the ethnic affiliation of the two painted sites. Both pictograph sites are located at the upper end of Indian Wells Canyon, on the eastern scarp of the far southern Sierra Nevada just north of Walker Pass in eastern Kern County. The author states that the sites are located “on the border between the southern Sierra Nevada and the western Mojave Desert [...] this site also marks a general boundary of two neighboring sociopolitical groups, the Koso Shoshone and the Tubatulabal...and this boundary may be reflected in the dual styles of rock art” (Backes 2004:196). By way of clarification, the sites are actually situated near the juncture of the territories of *three* ethnolinguistic groups: the Tubatulabal, the Panamint Shoshone, and the Kawaiisu.

Tubatulabal territory is centered in the far southern Sierra and includes the region naturally drained by the Kern River. Their territory begins at the North and South forks of the Kern River, near Mount Whitney, and terminates below the confluence of the two forks in the Kern River canyon northeast of Bakersfield (Smith 1978:437). The easternmost edge of their traditional territory runs along the crest of the Sierra less than a mile west of the location of the paintings.

The term Panamint Shoshone or Koso (also spelled Coso) refers to the people who lived in the Coso Range and surrounding areas. The Little Lake or *Kuhwiji* district would have been the territorial unit nearest the paintings. Their nearest village was at Little Lake or *Pagunda* (Steward 1938), less than ten miles from the Indian Wells paintings.

The Kawaiisu also occupied an area just south of the Indian Wells pictographs. Grosscup (1977), using the notes of C. Hart Merriam, attest that the Kawaiisu claimed the territory near Walker Pass. Voegelin (1938) also identifies a village situated at an unnamed spring near the mouth of Spanish Needle Creek in the Walker Pass vicinity that is attributed to the Kawaiisu.

Voegelin mentions that three village sites were located in the vicinity of Walker Pass, not far from Canebrake Creek, and that one of these sites was occupied mutually by both the Panamint Shoshone and the Kawaiisu. The Panamint Shoshone (Voegelin 1938) exclusively occupied the two other villages in the Walker Pass area. Voegelin suggests that these “exotic” occupations may be an historic in-migration of Numic groups into little-used Tubatulabal territory as a result of historic Euroamerican incursions (but see Grosscup 1977 for a contrary opinion).

Multiple ethnographic sources (Driver 1937; Irwin 1980; Sennett-Graham 1989; Steward 1937, 1938:93, Figure 7; Underwood 2005) indicate that the Kawaiisu were strongly allied with the Panamint Shoshone. I would also argue that an amicable relationship existed during precontact times between the Kawaiisu and Panamint Shoshone. This relationship appears to be long-standing, has deep historical roots, and may be traced to even more ancient prehistoric connections.

However, ethnographic evidence hints that the Tubatulabal were not on good terms with either the Panamint Shoshone or Kawaiisu, and some ongoing conflicts occurred. Steward notes that the Panamint Shoshone from Little Lake called the Tubatulabal *Nawavitc* or *Wavitx*, translated as “tough” or “mean” (Steward 1938:71–72). As well, Voegelin (1938:49) indicates that the Tubatulabal were engaged in hostilities to a greater extent than their Numic neighbors (Panamint Shoshone, Owens Valley Paiute, and Kawaiisu).

One native consultant suggested that the Tubatulabal often fought with the Kawaiisu and the Koso (Panamint Shoshone). That consultant also stated that the Tubatulabal had waged a large battle with the Panamint Shoshone at Walker Pass (near the rock art sites discussed by Backes) and that another battle was fought with the Kawaiisu near their border at Nichol’s Peak, south of the studied sites. Several Native American consultants recounted details of another major battle at Haiwee Springs (in the southern Owens Valley), where the Panamint Shoshone fought to defend their territory and killed many Tubatulabal (Irwin 1980:38–40). Steward also notes a battle with an invading group at Coso Hot Springs where all the intruders were killed (Steward 1938:83).

Smith (1978) indicates that the Tubatulabal engaged in warfare with all their neighbors, and their motivation for such conflicts was always revenge for prior hostilities. The Tubatulabal would take prisoners and scalps, and kill men, women, and children during battles that lasted one to two days. From these accounts it appears that Numic groups (Kawaiisu and Panamint Shoshone), residing in the vicinity of the rock art sites studied, were far more amicable with one another than the Tubatulabal were with them.

Lee and Hyder (1991) posit that the context and style of rock art may indicate the character of social interaction between ethnolinguistic groups. Amicable relations are often associated with open, well-placed, recognizable elements; less friendly interactions are correlated with closed borders marked by sharper boundaries and distinctive differences in rock art elements and style.

CLASSIFICATION OF PICTOGRAPH ELEMENTS AND REGIONAL ROCK ART STYLES

Backes indicates that the two Indian Wells Canyon paintings under discussion display elements and characteristics of

the Southern Sierra Painted Style. However, I believe that the two pictograph sites are not easily affiliated with that style and are rather better categorized as examples of what I originally called the Coso Painted Style or Coso Style pictographs (Garfinkel 1978). These sites and others of similar style and element content (cf. Garfinkel 2005; Garfinkel et al. 2006) are part of a wide-ranging style of Numic Ghost Dance paintings found in eastern California that are located mostly within the former territory of the Kawaiisu (n = 10) and Panamint Shoshone (n = 5) (Garfinkel et al. 2006; Schiffman and Andrews 1982; Stoffle et al. 2000).

Coso Style pictographs (the Coso Painted Style) were first described by Garfinkel (1978) when he identified this peculiar, regional, rock art expression. The same two sites Backes analyzed were the ones originally noted, and attention was drawn to the fact that there were similarities in the style and subject matter of these paintings to those of the older Coso Representational Style petroglyphs (Grant et al. 1968; Schaafsma 1986). Over the years, further work has expanded the array of sites conforming to the Coso Painted style (Garfinkel 1982; Marcom 2002).

Independent evaluation supports the validity of the Coso Painted style through the statistical correlation of element types (Whitley 1982:108–109). Whitley (1982), for example, has emphasized their apparent historic age, as attested by the strong correlation of horse and rider elements with bighorn sheep images. Whitley’s research has differentiated the Coso Painted sites from those he identifies as a Tubatulabal variant of the Southern Sierra Painted Style. Whitley has been able to distinguish Tubatulabal sites from Coso Painted Style sites—the former lack bighorn depictions and also fail to display horse and rider elements.

Whitley (1982) has also statistically correlated element types identified at sites within Tubatulabal territory. Such sites are characterized by concentric circles, chains, sunbursts, rayed simple circles, rayed concentric circles, and spoked circles. He considers such correlations as defining something equivalent to a “Tubatulabal Painted Style,” considered by him to be a variant of the Southern Sierra Painted Style originally identified by Heizer and Clewlow (1973). Whitley has further demonstrated the validity of this style through his analysis of 1,523 rock art elements from 89 sites in the far southern Sierra Nevada. Whitley includes both the Indian Wells sites studied by

Backes in the inventory of sites covered by his analysis. He believes these sites lack the formal characteristics and element forms typical of the Tubatulabal Painted Style, since they contain both bighorn sheep and horse and rider elements.

I would not describe either site as containing typical elements of the Tubatulabal variant of the Southern Sierra Painted Style, nor does Whitley's work support such a conclusion. Lee and Hyder (1991), in an earlier article, noted several distinctions between Kawaiisu and Tubatulabal rock art styles. The Tubatulabal variant of the Southern Sierra Painted style often depicts pelt-like figures and round-headed forms, and rarely contains anthropomorphs of any sort. The Tubatulabal sites use fewer colors than the Coso Painted sites; Coso Style pictographs contain some colors that are almost never recorded in Tubatulabal sites, including yellow and green.

Prior research seems to argue for a Numic rather than a Tubatulabal origin for Coso Style paintings. It would seem reasonable to posit that the makers of the Coso Style paintings were people who spoke a Numic language. The most likely candidates would be Native Americans speaking Kawaiisu and/or Panamint Shoshone. A number of subgroups or districts contained a mix of speakers of the Kawaiisu and Panamint languages (Thomas et al. 1986:280). Three Panamint Shoshone districts—the Koso, Panamint Valley, and southern Death Valley districts—contain most of the known and many of the largest Coso Style paintings. Those districts have been described by a number of anthropologists as having a mixture of Native peoples (multiethnic or multilingual settlements). The Koso District (*Pawo'nda*) had members who spoke Panamint Shoshone, but there were also speakers of Owens Valley Paiute and Kawaiisu. Similarly, the Panamint Valley (*Haita*) and southern Death Valley districts (*Tumbica*) manifested an almost equal balance of Panamint Shoshone and Kawaiisu, with their southernmost portions being predominantly Kawaiisu (Driver 1937; Steward 1938; Zimmond 1986).

THE COSO STYLE

Backes mentions that the depictions of sheep are a hallmark of the "Coso style." However, it is useful and rather important to clarify that matter and point out

that there are actually two Coso styles—Coso Style paintings or pictographs, and Coso Style Representational petroglyphs or rock drawings (Garfinkel 1978, 2005; Schaafsma 1986; Grant et al. 1968). It is the representation of specifically boat-shaped/bodied sheep with full frontal facing and bifurcating horns that is the most distinctive feature and hallmark of the Coso style.

The historic paintings analyzed by Backes do contain sheep conforming to the Coso Painted Style. I have argued elsewhere that Coso Paintings are likely a manifestation of and are associated with revitalistic/nativistic movements of Numic Ghost Dance ceremonies (Garfinkel et al. 2006). These paintings include elements that appear to be *copies* of earlier portrayals of bighorn sheep and prehistoric weaponry (atlatls and dart points) found in the Coso petroglyphs. These images are incorporated in a novel environmental context (they are found in caves and rock shelters, unlike the earlier rock art that adorns exposed basalt boulders or canyon walls), and they are rendered with a different technique (being painted rather than pecked). Therefore, it is probable that the Coso Painted sites, including the ones described and analyzed by Backes, were associated with the Kawaiisu and/or Panamint Shoshone, and are therefore Numic in affiliation. I would argue—and the weight of evidence seems to support my position—that pre-Numic (or non-Numic) populations were the authors of the earlier Coso Representational Style petroglyphs found mainly in the Coso Range (Garfinkel and Pringle 2004; Gilreath 1999; Quinlan and Woody 2003).

Backes' innovative use of technology is to be commended. His identification of new elements that were previously unrecognized bolsters the claim that these sites are truly historical in age (e.g., long-horn cattle and horse and rider elements), and of Numic origin (bighorn sheep) rather than Tubatulabal in affiliation.

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