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**Petroglyphs and Pueblo Myths of the Rio Grande.** By Carol Patterson-Rudolph. Albuquerque, NM: Avanyu Publishing Inc., 1991. 132 pages. \$29.95 paper.

In 1952, Michael Ventris, an architect and gifted amateur linguist and cryptographer, surprised the scholars of Minoan and Mycenaean archaeology with the news that he had successfully deciphered Linear B. This cursive Minoan script was discovered during excavations at Knossos, Crete, on about 1,800 clay tablets written around 1400 B. C.

In reviewing Patterson-Rudolph's report about the Southwestern petroglyphs, we should ask what questions Ventris needed to answer in order to accomplish the task he set for himself. There was no doubt that the clay tablets contained linear writing. What he needed to decide was, first of all, which language was recorded in the script. Once he discovered that he was dealing with an archaic form of Greek, he was able to go on to working out the inventory of sounds, i. e., the phonology of the script; from there, he could progress to a lexical translation of the texts. In fact, other scholars could, and indeed soon did, begin to translate additional tablets of Linear B.

With the material presented by Patterson-Rudolph, we are entering into an area of human communication that is far removed from Linear B and is much more complex. For what Patterson-Rudolph is dealing with is not cursive writing but rather groups of pictures pecked into rocks. Still, she posits the assumption that these drawings on rocks in the Southwest, specifically at La Cienega near Santa Fe and elsewhere, are not haphazard, disjointed pictures but rather writing in the most general sense, namely, textual material joined systematically by rules of grammar, such as the relationship between subject, verb, and object.

Some features of the panels discussed by the author put a considerable burden on a more specific, received definition of writing, namely that it is a system of human communication by means of linearly arranged, conventional, agreed-upon signs that represent language, corresponding to spoken words. First of all, the individual segments of the panel are not arranged linearly but in a somewhat circular fashion. As known from the ethnographic literature, this is typical for the reporting of visions, and it seems to be a phenomenon appearing worldwide in early picture writing. (Linear B was preceded in the region of Knossos by an earlier and possibly ancestral notation system, dubbed Linear A, that has

never been deciphered. The signs, although produced in clay, seem to be pictorial and are not arranged linearly but rather in a more or less circular fashion.)

To be sure, as Patterson-Rudolph argues convincingly, the petroglyphs are conventional signs generally agreed upon not only among Pueblo Indians but even in a culturally different group, namely the Navajo. In other words, here is a system that transmits ideas through a symbolic language that bypasses the lexicon specific to one culture or tribe. The argument, in fact the author's entire analysis of the material, effectively does away with the often-repeated assertion in the literature that "pictures cannot represent abstract thought." For example, the picture of a stepped pyramid, popularly known in the Southwest as "kiva steps" or "cloud pyramid," is generally used by Tewa speakers to designate the abstraction of "piling up" and is applied in that meaning also by Navajo creators of petroglyphs. The latter used it to produce a record of how the soldiers, during Kit Carson's Navajo campaign of 1863–64, burned their "piled up" corn.

Actually, as the author shows, the glyphs transmit their meaning not by way of lexical entries, but rather by way of metaphor and metonymies. With the added feature of "sign vehicles"—pictures of quadrupeds that do not represent a mythical animal or a deity but rather relate information about the conditions, movements, and other attributes of people—the author is able to demonstrate the intricate communication system of these story panels.

Nowhere do the individual petroglyphs represent morphs of a specific language. What the author shows instead is that the petroglyph panels communicate as an integrative assembly the core content of two important Pueblo Indian myths, one of the Water Jar Boy, the other of the Cochiti origin myth concerning the struggle between Uretsete and Naotsete, together with two complementary panels treating Naotsete as Mother Woodrat and the pivotally important Iariko panel dealing with the relation to the Lower World. Her interpretation is cogent, thoughtful, quite original, and totally convincing. Yet some nagging problems are not addressed, and these have to do with the fact that she designates these pictorial records as writing. I am aware of the fact that this categorization is conventional for hieroglyphic writing around the world, but I wonder if it is appropriate in this case. My point is that the author is able to decipher the panels because she knows the myths. How about panels representing unknown myths? Are her elaborate charts of basic and applied symbols—although incorporating, as

she does, American Indian sign language—sufficient as a lexical resource to decipher panels containing unknown mythic material? Can Linear A not be deciphered because the shamans are gone who knew the myths? And, in fact, can Patterson-Rudolph be sure of her own interpretation, aside from the obvious superficial meaning of the story? She has only Western, Anglo sources to rely on. Pueblo Indians are generally secretive about the core issues of their religion, and rightly so. “It becomes weaker if you talk about it,” a cacique of the region is reported to have said.

If it is not writing, then how could this type of activity properly be classed? Perhaps the answer can be approached by returning to the matter of communication. What is the communicative intent of this creation of pictures on rocks? Who is communicating and with whom? In order to make sense of the cultural phenomenon in question, we need to understand that the creators of such records were hunter-gatherers and horticulturalists, people for whom the sacred and the profane were inextricably associated with each other. Obviously, the panel that, with infinite care, highlights the origin myth about Mother Uretsete and Mother Naotsete is not ordinary communication. Instead, it marks the edge between the ordinary and the sacred reality. It seems to me that in this sense the panels are sacred; in fact, they are specific rituals rather than generalized writing.

When full-blown agriculture enters the Indian historical scene, the sacred ritual is pressed into serving the concerns of ordinary reality: It becomes mundane communication. Maya and Aztec writing, in the same way as Linear B on Crete, is needed to record secular information. The structure turns sequential, linear, the scribes add phonetic elements, and metaphors become stripped-down signs as the writers begin to report the dates of wars, the names of princes, the number of prisoners, the lists of conquered villages, the goods handed over as taxes or tributes.

We can assume that the passage between the two worldviews left its telltale marks in American Indian writing systems. The transition would certainly be worth exploring and could lead to a deeper understanding of an important facet of American Indian cultural evolution. Patterson-Rudolph’s pioneering study provides a possible first step in this direction.

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