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Egyptian And Hmong Clues To A Western American Petroglyph Group

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This study first updates the inventory of known sites of a particular genre of western U. S. petroglyphs, published by Albert B. Elsasser and E. Contreras in the 1958 California Archaeological Survey, Number 65. It adds significant finds in Idaho and Utah, and additional related sites in California and Nevada. In addition to the four categories of elements identified by Elsasser and Contreras, this study identifies a pervasive Egyptian influence.

Secondly, this study introduces a claim by some Hmong Asians, nationals resettled from Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and other areas within the region, who profess some understanding of these glyphs. The study traces the history and legends of the Hmong, and their discrete written alphabet, which purports to be an ancient language.

1. SITE INVENTORY

Originally, seven sites were identified by Elsasser and Contrera which contained elements that were distinctive and not recognized in the more than 200 petroglyph sites recorded within the same general area.¹ Four of the sites are within a 35 mile radius of Oakland, California. The other three sites are more widely located within a 250 mile radius of Oakland; one north near Dunsmuir, California; one east near Genoa, Nevada; and one southeast near Lone Pine, California.

The sites are, by location and survey numbers:

1. Rockville, Solano County, CA; called "SOL-16".
2. Tilden Park, Alameda County, CA; called "TILDEN PARK #1, and TILDEN PARK #2".
3. Claremont Creek, Alameda County, CA., called "ALA-19".
4. Vargas Road, near Mission San Jose, Fremont, Alameda County, CA., called "ALA-51".
5. Castle Crags, near Dunsmuir, Shasta County, CA., no survey number given.
6. Shoshoni Cemetery, Alabama Hills, Inyo County, CA., no survey number given.
7. Genoa, Douglas County, Nevada, no survey number given.

Subsequently the following five sites have been identified as containing the same elements, sizing, composition, etc., removed by up to 1000 miles from the original groups:

8. Pocatello, Idaho, 12 glyphs.
9. Nephi, Utah, 8 glyphs documented by Kenneth B. Castleton.²
10. Manti, Utah, 5 glyphs, same as Tilden Park #2 but in different order.
11. Fillmore, Utah, 27 glyphs.
12. Cedar City, Utah, 45 glyphs.

To these may be added two other sites, recently identified as containing some of the same elements, but are not included in this study;:

13. Benton, Mono County, California, 38 characters, a few of which exhibit the elements of this study, and were documented in 1879.
14. Hickison Summit Petroglyph Site, US Highway 50, about 30 miles east of Austin, Nevada.

2. GENERAL ANALYSIS

In general these sites have several similarities:

LOCATION: They are generally located on a rock outcropping, often on or near a ridgeline, usually prominent, with no apparent attempt to conceal nor reveal.

MEDIUM: The characters are carefully incised, cut, engraved or chiseled to a uniform depth of 1/8" to 3/16", generally in hard sandstone, granite, or other hard rock, arranged as a "panel" usually on an exposed face, and at an easily accessible level or height. They are precise, with little evidence of original error, chipping, or broken cuts.

SIZE: The characters are quite uniformly 2" - 3" in height.

ARRANGEMENT: The characters are usually arranged uniformly spaced approximately 1" apart in groupings, or panels. They are generally arranged in level lines, ranging from as few as 4 or 5 characters to as many as 45. In the larger groupings, there are usually no more than 10 or 11 characters per line, generally indexed to the left.

CHARACTERS: The characters range from simple parallel, curved, or angled lines and stick figures, to rather complex, intricate depictions, often with human or animal motifs. Wherever the same characters occur at the same or at different sites, they are exact or nearly exact duplicates. Regardless of their widespread geographic diffusion, they are so similar as to share a very close conceptual authorship. Occasionally a character will occur exact, though inverted. In some of the larger groups characters may repeat two or three times, although the most complex characters never repeat in the same grouping, or site.

At these 12 sites there are a total of nearly 100 different characters. Of this total, 18 characters occur at 4 or more sites for a total repetition of 92. Without exception, all 18 of the most frequently occurring characters are found at both the California and the Utah sites. (See Fig.1)

A. AMERINDIAN INFLUENCE: A great many of the characters are easily recognizable concepts of Amerindian as found in Tompkins³ yet many are not. No recognizable message or theme appears present in those glyphs which are recognizable as or antecedent to Amerindian.

B. MESOAMERICAN INFLUENCE: Originally, a few Mayan elements were identified. To these several others have been recognized as MesoAmerican. One character in particular, occurring at least 3 of the sites is apparently the only "composite" character. It consists of a petroglyph "eye" motif, with a superimposed "painted" "hand" in the vertical, front facing position. This motif is widely distributed throughout the Americas.⁴ Earliest reports of these glyphs contained descriptions of the stained or painted hand.

C. EGYPTIAN INFLUENCE: Although not mentioned specifically by Elsasser and Contreras, one of the more pervading influences in these glyphs is Egyptian. In addition to the widespread occurrence of the "Ankh" or Egyptian "life" symbol, the majority of glyphs bear some influence quickly recognizable as Egyptian.⁵

3. THE HMONG CONNECTION

In 1985 while visiting the site at Fillmore, Utah, a Mr. Del Allgood discovered a section of lumber containing a message, which had been placed in a hole at the base of the outcrop containing the Fillmore petroglyphs.

The message, written in red ball-point pen upon the lumber stated "To gold book your American finding here we are Hmong peoples We goted already in Laos If need to know further information Welcome to Laos." Close to this message on the same piece of lumber were a group of 22 characters, 12 of which were among the 25 inscribed petroglyphs at this and other sites, and 10 interspersed characters which were unknown. The whole of the group of characters was arranged in the same fashion as the petroglyphs.(See Fig.2)

Mr. Allgood immediately contacted a Hmong friend of his who was working in Fillmore, and was told that the message was left by 7 Hmong friends of his from California who had recently visited Fillmore, and while sightseeing had inadvertently chanced upon the petroglyph site. Upon discovering the petroglyphs, one of the seven Hmong became quite excited, said that he understood them, and therefore had left the message. Unfortunately, shortly afterwards, the Fillmore resident Hmong moved, and Mr. Allgood lost contact with him for two years. When he next heard from the Hmong, who was then living in Sacramento, California, correspondence was immediately instituted in an attempt to locate the author of the message.

Now a year later, we have been unable to locate the author, but have made contact with those who state they are his relatives, and that he wants to know our motives before he explains the message. His relative explains

that the petroglyphs tell of something gold of importance buried, but we can get no further definitive answers at this writing. During the past several months, since knowing of the Hmong connection, we have investigated to find what we can about the Hmong, their language and history.

3A. HMONG HISTORY AND WRITTEN LANGUAGE ORIGINS

Tradition among the Hmong is that they originated near what is now England then migrated to Mongolia. They then began a southern migration and settled in China, farming its river valleys for centuries. Bullied by Han invaders from the north, they renewed their southern migration. They were called "Miao"(barbarians) by the Chinese, but they have always referred to themselves as "Hmong", which means "free men". Although generally considered to be originally from China, they differ from the Chinese. They are shorter, and their eyes show less epicanthic fold or Mongolian slant.⁶

The first reference to the Hmong in Chinese text is 2283 BC.⁷ Some Hmong suggest that there is a connection between the term "Hmong" and "Mongol" because of the period spent in that region. They state that the Hmong once had light hair, but that it is due to intermarriage with the Chinese, "Lin-Min" (black hairs), that they now have black hair.⁸

In 800 BC the Chinese drove them into the mountains of the west and southwestern sections of Kweichow province. From there they have settled also in southern Hunan, Tonking, Burma, Laos, and recently into Thailand.

Linguistically they are far apart from the Chinese, and their language has not been established as being affiliated with any other known language.⁹ Language has a special meaning as a symbol of ethnic identification for the Hmong, since theirs is essentially an oral tradition. They fear that the loss of their language would mean loss of their sacred traditions. They are bound by a belief of their being a "special people" whose existence has a purpose for all mankind.¹⁰

The Hmong have a tradition of an ancient Hmong kingdom, with a written constitution and laws. They say that the Chinese burned their ancient books and threatened death for anyone who continued writing in the old script. Some Hmong women used the old script alphabet as designs in their textiles and clothing, thereby preserving some of their script from the watchful Chinese.¹¹ In spite of their endeavors the ancient written language eventually became lost, except to be referred to in their oral tradition.

Contact with the Christian world was limited until this century. In about 1650 the Jesuit missionary, Gabriel de Magaillans commented upon the Hmong as an independent people with their particular language.¹² When Roman Catholic missionaries mapped China about 1820, they charted parts of Kweichow as occupied by "independent Miao".¹³

The history of missionary activity among the Hmong dates from the 1880's when the China Inland Mission (CIM) began proselytizing in southern China, however little missionary work was carried out among the Miao in some areas until the early 1950's.¹⁴ Apparently the first Hmong were converted to Catholicism in 1907, and by 1930 there were about 2000 Christians.¹⁵

Although many Hmong have since converted to Christianity, their traditions are held to pre-date any knowledge of Christianity. Nevertheless, they have strong ancient traditions of a creation by a creator, descent from two original parents, a universal flood, a confusion of tongues, animal sacrifice, a heavenly "messiah", and a pre-eminent evil spirit personality as well as both good and evil spirits generally. Though some authors conclude that these are learned Christian traditions, Christian and non-Christian Hmong alike generally maintain that they pre-date all Christian contact, and are ancient Hmong ideas descended thru oral traditions and elaborate Hmong sacred rituals.

Earliest efforts to develop the Hmong oral language into a written alphabet appear in 1952, when Catholic and Protestant missionaries met together to develop the "Romanized Popular Alphabet" (RPA) for the Hmong oral language. A draft plan was presented in 1956. In 1968 Protestant missionaries William A. Smalley and Doris Whitlock put the Hmong oral language into Lao script. The next year Ernest E. Heimbach published the "White Meo-English Dictionary", and in 1974 Thomas A. Lyman published "Dictionary of Hmong Njua". In 1981 an "English-Hmong Phrasebook With Useful Wordlist" was developed by Cheu Thao at the Washington, D.C. Center for Applied Linguistics, and finally, in 1983 that Center developed a primer.¹⁶

Interestingly, however, the non-English message left at the Fillmore, Utah petroglyph site by Hmong was not written in the Romanized Hmong language developed by the above process. Rather, it was written in what has become known as "Pahawh Hmong", a language purported to be the ancient lost language of the Hmong ancestors, which was restored to the Hmong by supernatural means in the 1950's.

It is said that a Hmong farmer named Ntxoov Zuha had twin sons who died, and subsequently appeared to him in a dream, indicating that they were to teach him the lost ancient Hmong language. He protested that he could not learn the language, but his sons convinced him to try. Over a period of 60 days he was visited nightly in dreams until he had mastered the system of writing. He then published the system and taught some of the Hmong in Laos the language, but his followers were scattered and killed, and he was killed in 1967 by the communist authorities.¹⁷

Since that time, the Hmong have been very secretive regarding this Pahawh Hmong written language, and it has been largely ignored by scholars due to its supernatural origin account. Recently, however, there has been an effort to learn more about the language, as scholars have concluded that regardless of its purported origins, it is a very complex and orderly writing system, complete with vowels, consonants, and tonal accents, together with a numbering system and rules of syntax.(See Appendix A)

Since the death of the Pahawh Hmong script's author in 1967 there have been changes made until now there are four versions: a "Religious Version", a "First Standard Version", "Second Standard Version", and a "Final Version". Scholars are now surveying known Hmong nationals by census questionnaire to find those who have heard of, or can read or write this language.(See Fig.3)

4. IMPLICATIONS

Those Hmong who are willing to comment upon the Fillmore, Utah petroglyphs, and the message left there by those who identified themselves as Hmong, indicate that the petroglyphs speak of a record, or something gold and ancient that is buried, ascribing authorship of the glyphs to those whose ancestors left the area prior to a great flood, hoping to return.

Their insistence upon understanding these glyphs opens an avenue to pursue for scholars who can obtain more information from Hmong who acknowledge understanding of the Pahawh Hmong script. It adds an interesting development to the examination of this class of western U.S. petroglyphs.

(APPENDIX A)

PAHAWH HMONG

Pahawh Hmong is a native Hmong writing system devised during the 1960's by one or more native Hmong persons then living in Laos. Use of the system continues among refugees in the United States as well as in other areas of the world. Pahawh Hmong should be distinguished from the Romanized Hmong writing system which came into use among scholars, Christian missionaries, Chinese linguists and many Hmong people during the 1950's as a means of bringing literacy to what had largely been a preliterate culture. Romanized Hmong is, of course, written in characters of the alphabet common in western languages such as English. Pahawh Hmong, however, consists principally of non-romanized characters. There are at least four versions of the Pahawh Hmong system some of which substitute some Roman type characters, apparently to simplify printing the language.

Spoken Hmong consists of 13 vowel sounds each of which may be pronounced in seven different tones or inflections making 91 different pronunciation possibilities for the 13 basic vowel sounds. Spoken Hmong also utilizes 60 basic consonant sounds. The expression of these 151 total sounds in written Pahawh Hmong is based upon 26 vowel symbols and 20 consonant symbols. Both the vowel and the consonant symbols are varied in meaning by means of insignia over the symbol. These variations make possible three versions of each of the 20 consonant symbols, three versions of 13 vowel symbols and four versions of the remaining 13 vowel symbols or 91 vowel symbols total.

Hmong words almost always consist of a single consonant combined with a single vowel, in that order, when spoken. Almost no words end with a consonant sound. Sentences in written Pahawh Hmong are read left to right just as in English. However, Pahawh Hmong words are written right to left or just opposite of the sentence flow. Thus, the reader follows the sentence left to right but words within the sentence are each written right to left.

Analysis by Scott R. Jenkins
Salt Lake City, Utah
1988

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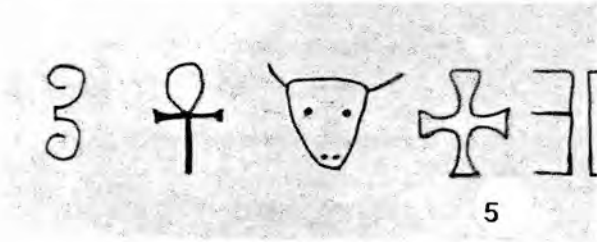
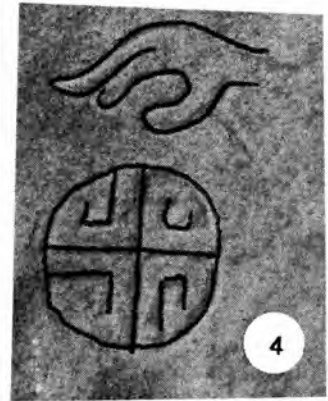
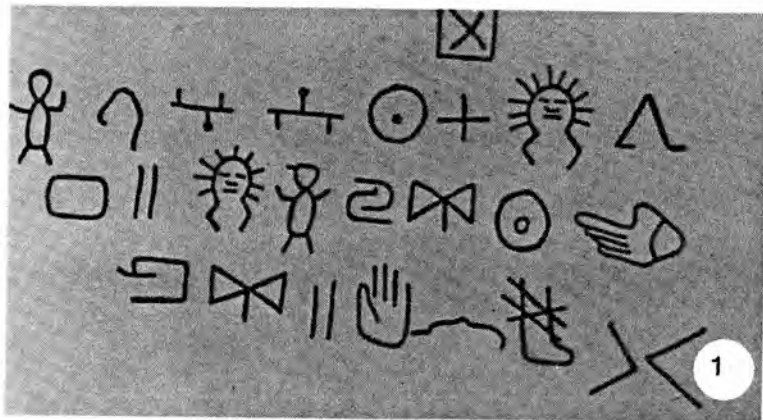
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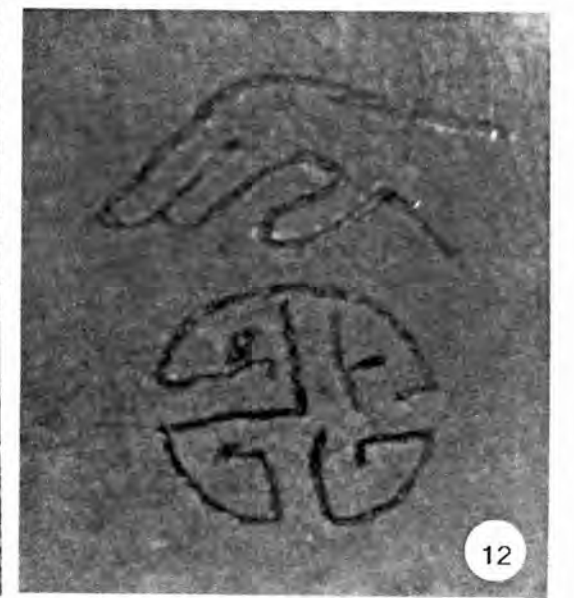
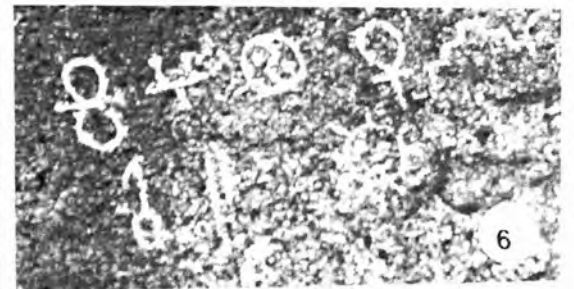
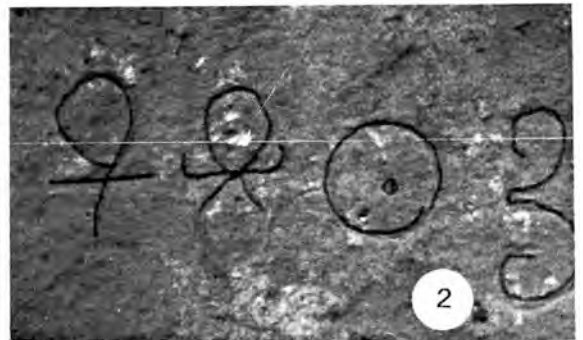
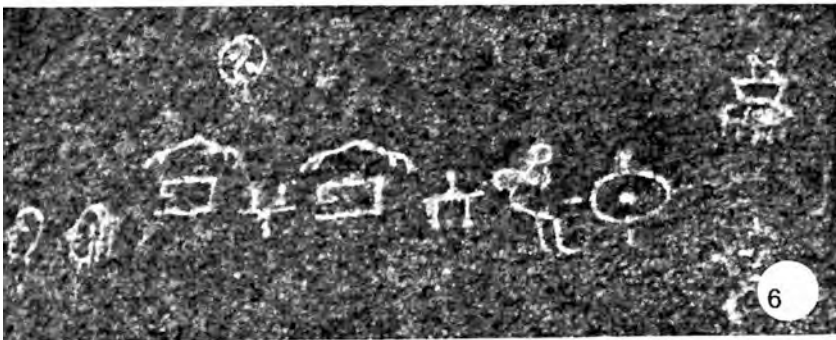
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Captions for Figures

Figure 1, Rockville, Solano County, CA, called SOL-16. Figure 2; Tilden Park, Alameda County, CA, called TILDEN PARK # 2. Figures 3 and 4, Vargas Road, near Mission San Jose, Alameda Co., CA, site known as ALA-51. Figure 5, Castle Crags, near Dunsmuir, Shasta Co., CA. Figure 6, left panel, Shoshoni Cemetery, Alabama Hills, Inyo Co., CA. Figure 7, Genoa, Douglas Co., Nevada. Figure 8, Pocatello, Idaho. Figure 10. Manti IIT. Figure 11. two elements at the site at Fillmore, UT. Figures 12 (2 so labelled) cedar City UT. Figure 13, Fillmore UT.





ELEMENTS

SITE	OCCURRENCE	ELEMENTS																	
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
#1 (SOL-16)	12			//															
#2 (TPK 1&2)	7	x	x		x		x	x	x			x							
#3 (ALA-19)	7		x		x		x					x					x	x	x
#4 (ALA-51)	9	x		x	x		x			x	x			x	x	x			
#5 (CCrags)	3	x	x					x											
#6 (INYO)	9		x	x	x	x		x				x		x				x	x
#7 (GENGA)	8	x	x	x		x				x				x					
#8 (POCATELLO)	6	x		x	x									x					
#9 (NEPHI)	4	x	x	x															x
#10 (I-IA:TI)	4	x	x						x				x						
#11 (FILLMORE)	11	x		x			x	x		x	x			x			x	x	x
#12 (CEDAR CITY)	12	x		x	x	x		x		x	x			x			x	x	x

To gold book your American
 finding here
 we are Hmong peoples
 We goted already in
 Laos if need to know further
 Information
 Welcome to Laos

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The table above represents all 12 sites, and the 18 elements that occur at 4 or more sites. Also listed is the number of characters within the site and which occur at 4 or more of the other sites. Most of these 18 most frequently occurring symbols have strong Egyptian roots or similarities.

The figure to the left reproduces on a reduced scale a message left in 1986 at the Fillmore UT site by a group of Hmong visitors Part 1 comprises a message in English. Part 2 comprises in part the symbols found at the site, interspersed with characters of the "Pahawn Hmong" written language.