
Western Message Petroglyphs: Esoterica in the Wild West

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Twenty-nine petroglyph sites found scattered across eight Western States appear to be highly associated with one another, and to date from the historic period, approximately 1847 to 1903. Drawing on several lines of converging evidence, we propose that these petroglyph sites are the result of one actor, or a small group of individuals who were all “in-the-know.” For reasons we will present here, we propose that it may be productive to search for the historic author, or authors, during the period of western expansion, among individuals with roots in Mormonism, experience with fraternal association, and a connection to quarry and mining activity.

Since the 1950s, an enigmatic collection of petroglyphs has created an ongoing mystery for students of American rock art. Scattered across eight western states with concentrations in Utah, Nevada, and California, the panels often appear in dramatic locations with expansive views of the surrounding landscape (Figure 1). With repeating motifs and identifiable syntax, the glyphs appear to convey messages that remain undeciphered.

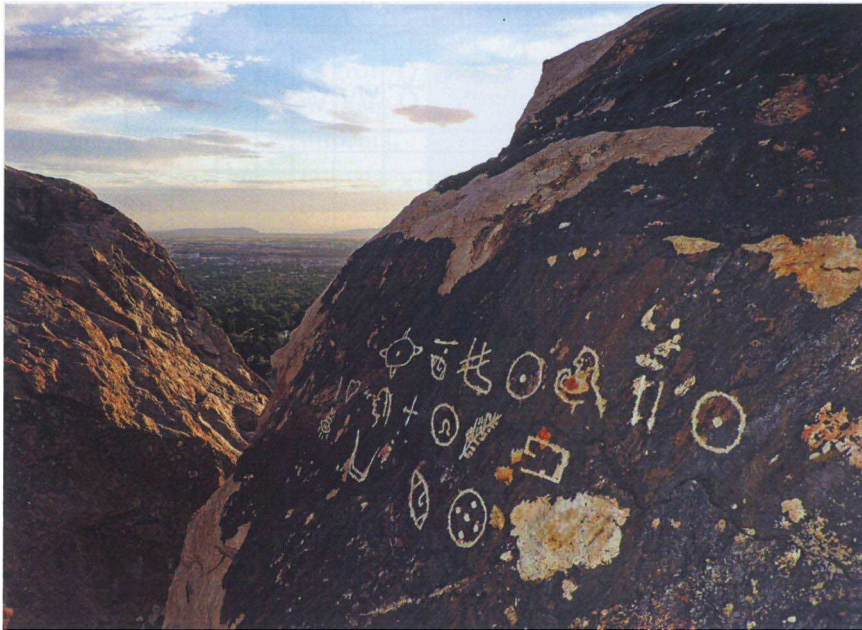


Figure 1. Western Message Petroglyph panel, Ogden, Utah.

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History of Research

Al Elsasser, co-author of the first publication on “Modern Petrography” (Elsasser and Contreras 1958), first became aware of what has subsequently been termed “Western Message Petroglyphs” in 1950 when a local resident reported the existence of some unusual carvings located at the lower end of Berkeley’s Claremont Canyon (*Oakland Tribune* 1954) in California. Subsequent discoveries in nearby Bay Area locations alerted the Berkeley archaeologists that something odd, and worthy of further investigation, was afoot. The Tilden 2 site was reported by local newspapers in 1953 following its chance discovery by Henry R. Alden, a Berkeley resident who was participating in a promotional treasure hunt sponsored by the San Francisco Chronicle newspaper. Alden notified the Park Superintendent, who in turn brought the discovery of the panel of unusual carvings located on a high ridge within the park boundary to the attention of Robert Heizer and his archaeology team at the University of California, Berkeley (Hanson 1953; *San Francisco Chronicle* 1953). The following year Daryl C. Sweeney, a UC Berkeley undergraduate student, chanced upon the Tilden 1 carvings while hiking the upper slopes of Claremont Canyon. Earlier in 1954 a report of a similar panel located 40 miles north in Rockville, California, near Cordelia, had come to the University’s attention (*Oakland Tribune* 1954). Other reports of additional sites soon followed, including the discovery of the Castle Crag petroglyphs in northern California by two Dunsmuir High School students (Frank 1998).

In their “Modern Petrography” monograph, Elsasser and Contreras reviewed seven known sites in California and Nevada and concluded all were related based on their use of similar iconography and arrangement. Elsasser’s element typology (Figure 2) was the first to illustrate that the iconographic conventions

were drawn from early Ojibway/Sioux pictographic writing co-mingled with the use of pan-cultural icons. These authors concluded that these “modern” petroglyphs were likely the result of an individual or group with a mischievous or esoteric intent.

Although not initially identified with their California and Nevada counterparts, several Western Message Petroglyph (WMP) sites have long been known in Utah. The site at Fillmore (Figure 3) was discovered in 1939 when Clifford Purcell, a local amateur prospector, chanced upon it while prospecting up Chalk Creek Canyon with local café owner, Rube Melville (Purcell 1982). Purcell stated that “green lichen” nearly filled the grooves of the carvings when he first found it. Pur-

ELEMENTS.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22																					
	[Icons 1-22]																					
Sol -16			x			x	x	x	x	x	x					x	x	x	x	x	x	
Ala - 51		x																				
Genoa, Nev.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x									x	x					
Tilden Park 1										x												
Tilden Park 2		x					x									x						
Castle Crag		x																				
Ala -19				x						x						x						

ELEMENTS.	23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42																			
	[Icons 23-42]																			
Sol -16									x											
Ala - 51		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Genoa, Nev.	x																	x		
Tilden Park 1														x						
Tilden Park 2						x	x													
Castle Crag																				
Ala -19										x									x	

ELEMENTS.	43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57														
	[Icons 43-57]														
Sol -16															
Ala - 51															
Genoa, Nev.	x								x						
Tilden Park 1															
Tilden Park 2	x				x				x						
Castle Crag	x														
Ala -19	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	

ELEMENTS.	58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73														
	[Icons 58-73]														
Sol -16															
Ala - 51															
Genoa, Nev.					x										
Tilden Park 1									x	x	x	x	x	x	
Tilden Park 2															
Castle Crag		x			x									x	
Ala -19		x	x			x	x								

Figure 2. Element distributions as shown in Elsasser and Contreras Table 1 (top) and Table 2 (bottom).

cell and Frank Beckwith, amateur rock art researcher from Delta, Utah, chalked and photographed the site shortly after its discovery.

A Mormon interpretation of the glyphs at the Fillmore panel was popularized by Jose Davila (1965) with fanciful readings based on a variety of Egyptian scripts complete with attributions to the Angel Moroni and the concealment of ten lost golden tablets. Davila's misguided and tragic treasure hunt for the lost golden tablets is chronicled in local newspaper accounts of the day and is recounted in Stephen B. Shaffer's sensationalist account (Shaffer 1996), which follows Terry Carter's more circumspect rendering of the tale (Carter 2009).

The sites at Fillmore, Cedar City, and Nephi, Utah, entered the rock art research literature when briefly described by Kenneth B. Castleton (Castleton 1987:65, 91, 113–115). Castleton (1987:91) suggested that all three sites were rendered by the same modern hand, but saw them as anomalies and was not familiar with Western Message Petroglyphs as a corpus.

Dr. Paul R. Cheesman and David L. Tomlinson were the first to publish an expanded corpus of known sites by adding to those sites described by Elsasser and Contreras those found in Castleton (Cheesman and Tomlinson 1989). They also added the sites at Austin (Figure 4) and Hickison Summit, Nevada; Manti, Utah; and Pocatello, Idaho, to the growing list. They included a few images found near Benton, California, in their list of sites, but later investigators have been unsuccessful in locating any glyphs near Benton that might qualify.

Cheesman and Tomlinson noted the use of pan-cultural influences in the iconography, especially American Indian, Mesoamerican Indian, Egyptian, and, controversially, Hmong. Based on these 12 sites (we accept 11 of them) as the basis of comparison, Cheesman and Tomlinson observed and reported many of the key features that define the corpus.

Epigraphers, including Cheesman and Tomlinson, Roberta C. Smith (n.d, circa 1986), and Barbara Holley Rock (1998), among others, have explored the topic, offering descriptions of new sites while muddying the waters with interpretations of the script with attributions to Hmong texts, Egyptian hieroglyphics, and even fanciful connections to the Lost Continent of Mu. Smith added a description of the Alabama Hills site in Lone Pine, California, to the roster following its discovery by botanist Vincent Yoder in 1982 (Figure 5). Rock provided the first published description of the Silver City, New Mexico, site following her visit in 1991.

In his unpublished notes, Andy Pate (1993), President of the Santa Clara Archaeological Society, coined the term "Western Message Petroglyphs"—a term later adopted in print by Bill Sonin, a member of the Bay



Figure 3. Western Message Petroglyph panel, Fillmore, Utah.



Figure 4. Western Message Petroglyph panel, Austin, Nevada.

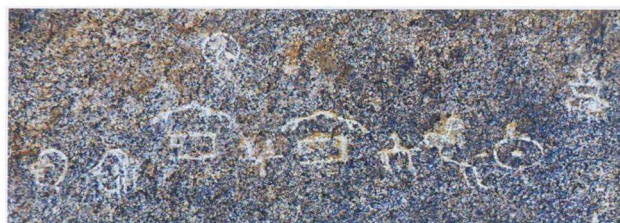


Figure 5. Western Message Petroglyph Panel 1, Lone Pine, California.

Area Rock Art Research Association (BARARA), and by Alvin McLane, a research associate with the Desert Research Institute in Reno, Nevada. This term has become generally accepted to describe these petroglyphs.

Andy Pate reviewed fourteen sites including Alabama Hills in Lone Pine, California, and Silver City, New Mexico. Pate defined the Western Message Petroglyph group by virtue of six shared characteristics; among these are the observation that the sites are found along historic travel corridors and near Mormon settlements.

Bill Sonin's article on Western Message Petroglyphs, written for the Bay Area Rock Art News (Sonin 1993, reprinted 1995), provided a succinct, tongue-in-cheek synthesis of the known data and current theories. He increased the published roster of sites to twenty (we accept nineteen of them) by networking with BARARA member Richard Schwartz, who was first to report the "Truckee Hands" site in Truckee, California; Alvin McLane, who was familiar with several WMP sites in Nevada; and Judy Hilbish, who saw her first WMP site in her teen years at Tonopah, Nevada, after she had been gifted by a boyfriend with a rock spall from the Tonopah site that had one of the WMP images carved on it. Bisbee, Arizona, is included in Sonin's list but, to date, the site has not been relocated or described in print.

Amateur investigators Terry Carter and Shawn Davies began investigating Western Message Petroglyphs in the early 1990s (Carter and Davies 2006). Carter made it a point to visit 24 of the known sites and, together with Davies, established a web site to archive information and promote interest in the petroglyph group that they alternatively term "Mystery Glyphs."

Table 1 summarizes all of the known Western Message Petroglyph sites considered in this study.

Iconography

Two broad categories can be used to classify the individual icons found in all of the WMP panels and we use these as the basis of our intra- and inter-site

Table 1. List of Western Message Petroglyph sites.

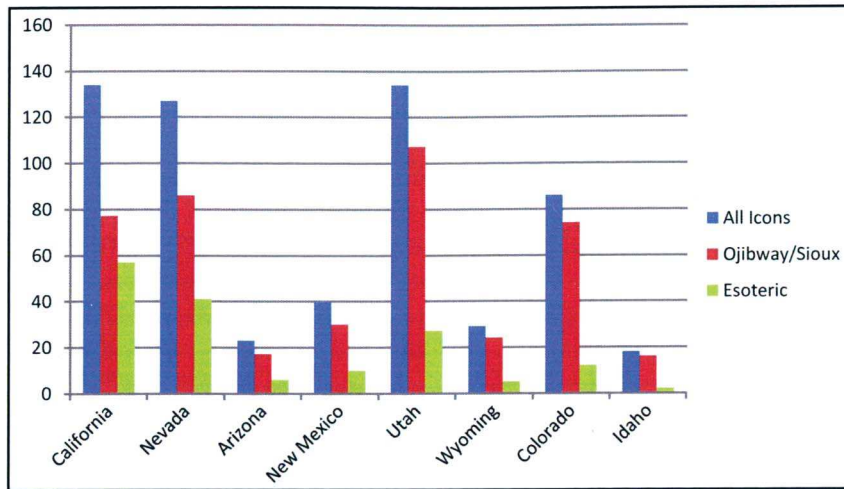
Site #	Site Name
1	Claremont Creek (CA-ALA-19), Berkeley, California
2	Tilden 1, Claremont Canyon, Berkeley, California
3	Tilden 2, Tilden Park, Berkeley, California
4	Vargas Road (CA-ALA-51), Mission San Jose (now Ohlone Cemetery, Fremont), California
5	Castle Craggs, Dunsmuir, California
6	Rockville (CA-SOL-16), California
7	Truckee, California
8	Birch Creek, Bishop, California
9	Alabama Hills, Lone Pine, California
10	Virginia City, Nevada
11	Genoa, Nevada
12	Pioche, Nevada
13	Tonopah, Nevada
14	Austin, Nevada
15	Hickison Summit, Nevada
16	Tempe, Arizona
17	Chloride Flat, Silver City, New Mexico
18	Hat Top, Lordsburg, New Mexico
19	Ogden, Utah
20	Provo, Utah
21	Nephi, Utah
22	Chalk Creek Canyon, Fillmore, Utah
23	Cedar Canyon, Cedar City, Utah
24	Manti, Utah
25	Grand Junction, Colorado
26	Durango, Colorado
27	Lookout Mountain, Del Norte, Colorado
28	Green River, Wyoming
29	Pocatello, Idaho

analyses. The categories we use are Ojibway/Sioux pictographic writing and pan-cultural esoteric icons.

Approximately 75 percent of the images derive in whole, or in part, from Ojibway/Sioux pictographic writing (Table 2).

According to Sioux Indian historian William Tomkins (1929), Ojibway/Sioux pictographic writing is a late form of Native American written communication derived from a combination of universal Indian sign language and a variety of predecessor iconographic conventions drawn from hide painting, tree bark scrolls, and rock art conventions.

Table 2. Number of Ojibway/Sioux and esoteric icons by state.



Synonyms include, among others, obscure, enigmatic, opaque, and mysterious (accessed January 28, 2016).

The ratio of Ojibway/Sioux to pan-cultural esoteric icons is not evenly distributed across sites, nor between the states where Western Message Petroglyphs are found. We have noted an increased preference for the use of pan-cultural esoteric icons in the panels found in the farthest western states (41 percent in California, 32 percent in Nevada, for example; see Table 3), but we do not know what this means.

In 1850, Mississaugas Ojibway author and missionary George Copway published a few of the reported two hundred known pictographic icons used for long distance written communication (Copway 1850). Garrick Mallery (1893) published on the topic, primarily with reference to Copway, and was later followed into print by Ernest Thompson Seton (1918) and finally William Tomkins (1929). The latter two authors introduced Indian hand gesture language and pictographic writing into the Boy Scout handbooks of the day.

Because the published images of the Ojibway/Sioux pictographic lexicon have been accompanied by definitions of individual symbols, we can sometimes hazard a guess as to a Western Message Petroglyph panel's overarching theme, although detailed interpretations are beyond our reach. For example, we find images related to sickness and health, white man and Indian, good and bad, hunger and plenty, Wise Man and Great Spirit, etc. (Figure 6).

The remaining 25 percent of the Western Message Petroglyph iconography can best be described as pan-cultural esoteric symbols. We use the term "pan-cultural" to refer to the diverse origins of these symbols: Egyptian, Maya, Chinese, pan-Indian, possible animal brands, possible variants of fraternal signs, and possible individual insignia (Figure 7). Our choice of the term "esoteric" to describe this subset of the icons is intended to highlight the apparent restricted nature of these messaging texts. For a definition of "esoteric" we prefer the Google Search definition: "intended for or likely to be understood by only a small number of people with a specialized knowledge or interest."

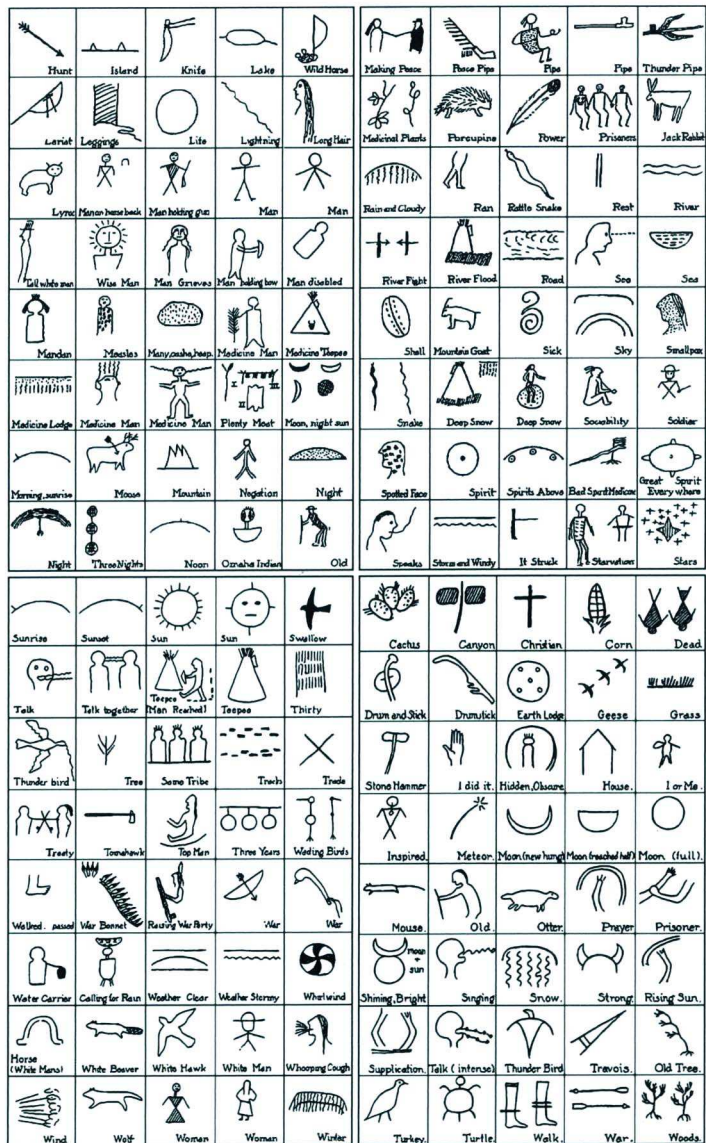
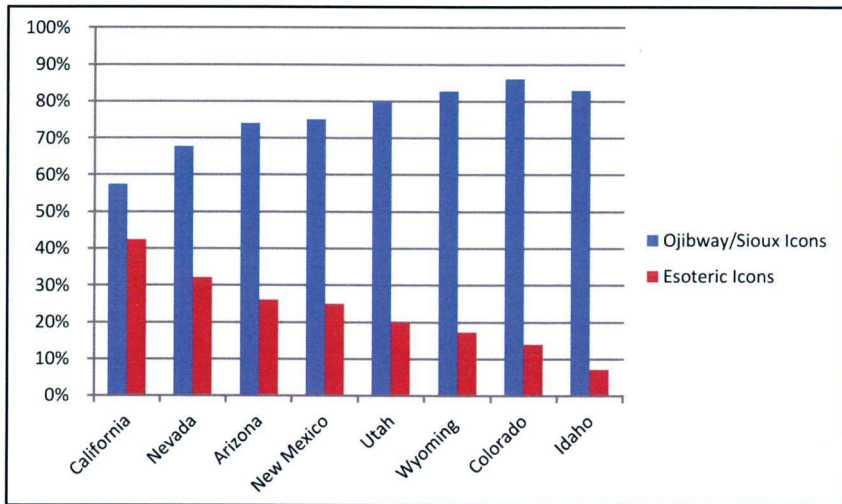


Figure 6. Ojibway/Sioux pictographic symbols (Tomkins 1929).

"M" variants	"All-seeing Eye"	Yin-Yang	"Walk"	"Negation"	"Negation" paired	"Figure 8" w/ tabbed line	Ankh
Individual	Fraternal	Chinese	Egyptian	Mayan	Egyptian O/S	Brand?	Egyptian
Terrace	Back-to-Back "E"	Stylized Bovid bust	Face/Mask	Inscribed Palm	Ellipse	Amorphous "skull-like" figure	Swastika
Pan-Indian	Brand?	Unique	Mayan	Fraternal	Mayan	Individual?	Pan-Cultural

Figure 7. Some of the many esoteric icons found embedded in WMP texts.

Table 3. Ratio of Ojibway/Sioux to esoteric icons, by state.



Syntax

The classic arrangement of icons presents as many as 39 images arranged in one to four horizontal rows. Some images represent objects, people or places (nouns), actions (verbs), and states of being (adjectives), and some appear to represent punctuation. Some of these "messaging texts" are preceded, or followed, above, below, or to the side, by a unique stand-alone image, suggesting a "header," "footer," or "signature." Other conventions found within the texts include the use of symmetry, repetition, inversion of images, and pairing. Of 50 panels in total across the 29 sites, a few panels are found that have only one to four icons and lack the classic syntax, and a small number of panels tend more toward a clustered arrangement, which blurs the classic syntax. The icons tend to be small, and are neatly and uniformly carved or incised.

Geographic Context

Western Message Petroglyph sites are thus far found in eight western States: California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, Colorado, Idaho, and Wyoming.

Their placement in the landscape is not random. The sites constellate around a nexus of historical features dating to the period of western expansion, specifically historic trail and rail corridors adjacent to, and overlooking, quarry and mining sites that famously boomed and busted during the same period (Figure 8). Over one third of the WMP sites are located at historic Mormon settlements and along Mormon travel corridors.

Many Western Message Petroglyph sites are bounded by the confines of what might be described as the "Mormon Cultural Sphere" of the mid- to late-19th century. Centered along the western front of the Wasatch Range in Utah, the boundary includes the path of western expansion along the Mormon Trail (1847–1869) and movement into the mining districts of California and Nevada primarily along the Midland and Emigrant Trails (Figure 9a), as well as the march of the Mormon Battalion from Council Bluffs to San Diego along the Santa Fe and Gila Trails (1847–1848) (Figure 9b). Most Western Message Sites fall within or adjacent to the bounds

of the provisional Mormon State of Deseret (Figure 9c), established in 1849 and disenfranchised in 1850.

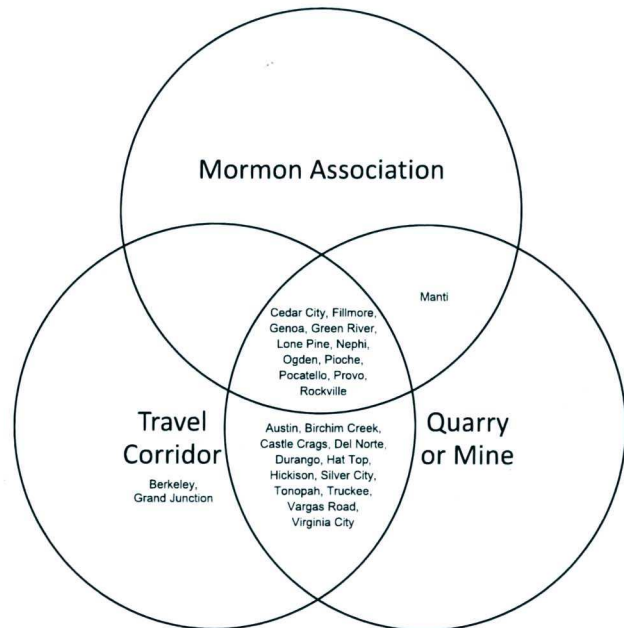


Figure 8. WMP sites are not randomly distributed.

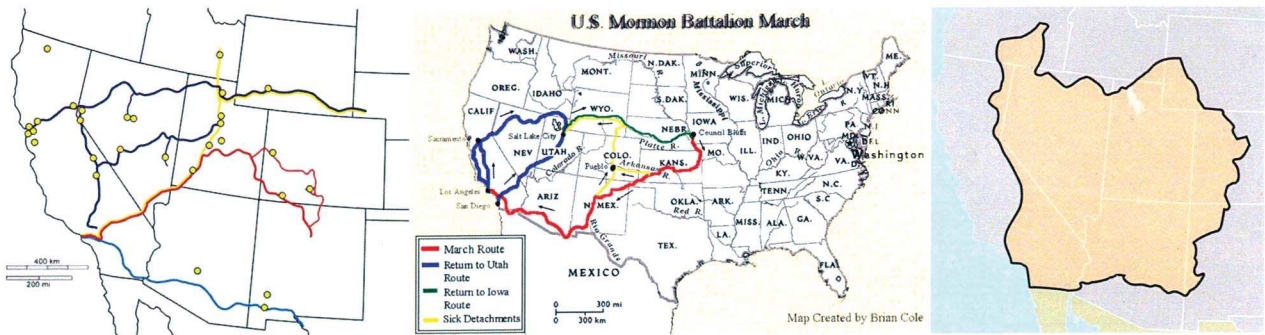


Figure 9. (a) WMP sites occur along historic routes; (b) the march of the Mormon Battalion (map by Brian Cole at English Wikipedia/Wikimedia Commons/CC BY-SA 3.0), (c) the provisional Mormon state of Deseret, 1849–1850 (map by Mangoman88/Wikimedia Commons/CC BY-SA 3.0)

Assuming that not all Western Message Petroglyph sites have been found, we can predict future sites will be located along these trails at historic quarries, mines, and Mormon settlements. The vicinities of St. George, Utah; Las Vegas, Nevada; and Mormon Rocks in the Cajon Pass, California, all seem to be good candidates.

Landscape Setting

Many of the Western Message Petroglyph Sites are carved on rock faces that occupy high ground, set away from and overlooking their adjacent travel corridors, quarry sites, and mining districts. Unlike “Hobo Signs” (DeLorenzo n.d.) of a later era that were plainly placed in train yards, on fence posts, and in roadways in plain view for all who came along behind to heed,

WMP sites are set apart, often difficult of access, and difficult to find. For this reason, we propose that these sites have a private or restricted intention, rather than a public one (Figure 10).

Time Markers

A number of observations help to establish a time frame for these sites. Western Message Petroglyphs are chiseled and incised into a variety of types of stone surfaces of varying hardness. Frequently the angular edge of individual tool strikes can be discerned, indicating metal tool manufacture and thus assigning the panels to the historic era (Figure 11).

There are identifiable historic objects carved in some of the panels including stick figures with hats, rifles,



Figure 10. Typical landscape settings: (a) Virginia City, Nevada; (b) Lone Pine, California; (c) Grand Junction, Colorado; (d) Green River, Wyoming; (e) viewshed, Austin, Nevada; (f) viewshed, Tilden 1, Berkeley, California. See also Figure 1.

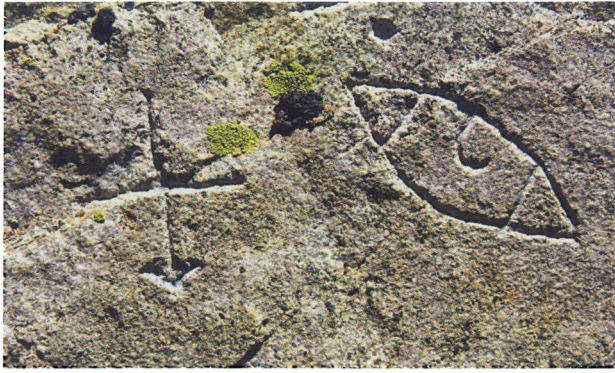


Figure 11. Angular tool strikes in Andesite, Virginia City, Nevada).

domestic animals, and western style houses (Figure 12).

Associated surface artifacts from the historic period are sometimes found at WMP sites; for example the authors found a fragment of pre-1906 bottle glass (Figure 13) on the surface at the base of one of the panels at the Tilden 1 site in Berkeley, California.

One approach to setting an oldest possible date for WMP sites that incorporate Egyptian iconic conventions is to note the dates of entry of, and peak fascination with, Egyptology in the American cultural mainstream. Historically, the Frenchman Jean Francois



Figure 12. (a) Panel showing historic images (stick figure with hat, whiskey keg, house, domestic horse), Virginia City, Nevada; (b) panel showing historic images (stick figure with hat and rifle, domestic horse), Hat Top, New Mexico.



Figure 13. Pre-1906 bottle glass found at the base of a WMP panel, Tilden 1, Berkeley, California.

Champollion's decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphics beginning with the Rosetta Stone in 1823 sparked an Egyptology craze in Europe and North America that continued unabated through the 1850s (Irwin 1980). Champollion's *Grammaire Égyptienne*, based on his extensive hieroglyphic research, illustrated an icon "representing two human arms extended as if to put an obstacle to the passage of a person or thing," used floating above a secondary character (Figure 14) and translated as the sign for negation, meaning "no" or "none" (Champollion 1836:519). Garrick Mallery (1893:515) illustrated the icon of two conjoined arms in his publication on Indian pictographic language, comparing it to the shape of the Indian hand sign gesture of similar meaning, and citing Champollion as his source. However, pairing of the down-turned human arms motif floating above another icon was illustrated only in Champollion, and because our WMP author uses this convention we propose that the earliest possible date for panels where the "down-turned human arms" icon appears is 1836.

Judy Hilbish (n.d.), in her unpublished manuscript on Western Message Petroglyphs, draws attention to a mask, or face, image at the Genoa, Nevada, site (Figure 15). The image is quite unique, and she finds a convincing analog for it published by Pim and Seeman (1869:128). She points to it again, republished by H. H. Bancroft in *The Native Races* (Bancroft 1883:62). From this she concludes that our author was literate and familiar with either Pim and Seeman, and/or H. H. Bancroft. The earliest possible date for the Genoa panel is 1869.

We have been researching periods of boom and bust at quarries, mines, townships, and construction activity at Mormon temples as a method to derive his-

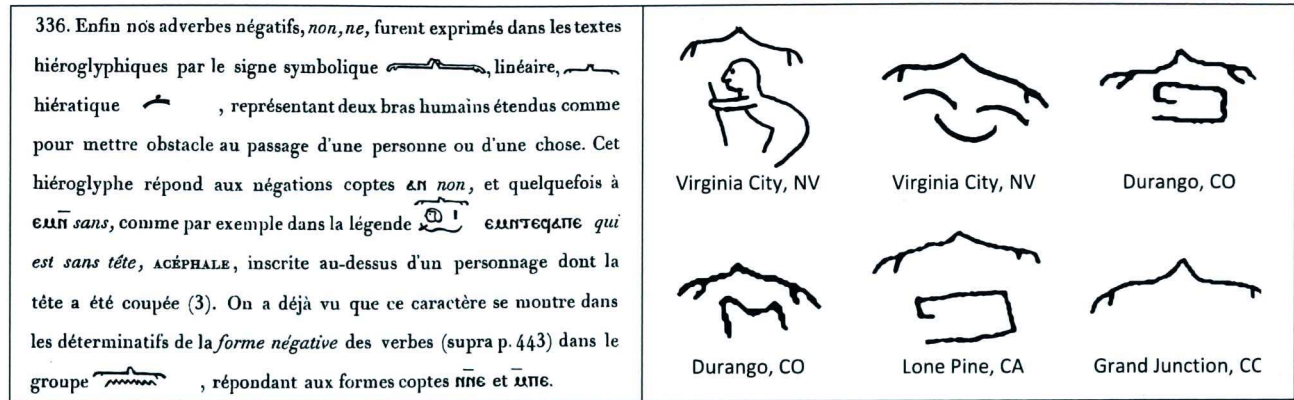


Figure 14. Iconic convention for negation in Egyptian hieroglyphics (left) illustrated by Jean François Champollion in 1836, with WMP examples (right) of the use of the iconic convention as published by Champollion.

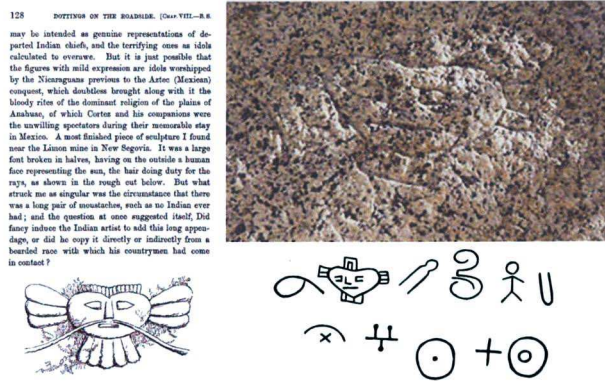


Figure 15. Central American icon (Pim and Seeman 1869) and its analog found at Genoa, Nevada.

toric brackets for the carved panels at each site. For example, at Manti, Utah, two WMP panels are carved at a location that overlooks the Oolite limestone quarry that was the source for limestone blocks used in the construction of the Manti temple. Quarrying began in 1877 and the Temple was dedicated in 1888 (Parry 2013:53)—we propose that the convergence of the placement of the WMP panels with the quarry and temple site indicates a likely date of carving between 1877 and 1888.

The panel at the Tilden 2 site (Figure 16a), Berkeley, California, can be directly associated to Panel 1 at the Manti, Utah, site (Figure 16b) by virtue of the



Figure 16. (a) Panel 1 at Tilden 2, Berkeley, California; (b) Panel 1 at Manti, Utah.

author's use of nearly identical icons and syntax. We bracket the dates at Tilden 2 by its close proximity to the Tilden 1 site located in Claremont Canyon. Claremont Canyon served as the primary stage road and travel corridor between San Francisco via Oakland to Martinez between 1860 and 1903. Seamed bottle glass found adjacent to a Tilden 1 panel and the opening of a more direct route to Contra Costa County via Tunnel Road in 1903 which led to the abandonment of the Claremont Road (until it was paved in 1927) (Claremont Canyon Conservancy n.d.), both suggest an upper limit for the WMPs circa 1903. The lower limit would likely be dated after the Manti carving, no earlier than 1877.

Finally, in support of our argument for a relatively recent age for Western Message Petroglyphs, roughly between 160 and 110 years before present, we note that painted motifs that were reported at several sites by early observers in the 1950s have completely disappeared today. Five of the WMP sites have, or had at one time, handprint icons in frontal view with varying design motifs inscribed in their palms. In three of those sites (Tilden 2, Berkeley, California; Castle Crag, Dunsuir, California; and Fillmore, Utah) only the inscribed palm icons remain while the painted hands are completely gone. Computer digital enhancement using DStretch analysis of those images fails to show any paint remnants, suggesting the pigments used may have been surface colorants, with little or no binder to leave a saturated stain on the rock. Frank Bascom of the U. S. Forest Service visited the Castle Crag site immediately following its discovery in the 1950s and described four painted handprint elements with inscribed palms that were colored in a reddish hue "with some unknown liquid solution." Bascom described the icons that were inscribed in each palm and based on

his description, we know exactly where the painted hands were once observed (Frank 1998:77–81). Our reconnaissance of the site in July of 2015 confirmed the loss of all pigment in the course of the ensuing sixty years following Bascom’s report. In like manner, Elsasser and Contreras (1958:14) described two painted handprints “(actual size) filled in with hematite.” All remnants of the red pigment were completely gone circa 1983 when Elsasser first introduced the senior author to the Tilden 2 site, approximately thirty years after its discovery. A handprint colored with red hematite inscribed with the “All-Seeing Eye” motif was first described at Fillmore, Utah, in 1939 by Clifford Purcell and Rube Melville (Purcell 1982:3). In 1965 the decorated boulder was removed from its protected location in a north-facing cliff wall, and when left exposed to the weather, the pigment soon washed off. Today, fifty years later, only the inscribed eye motif remains. Two inscribed-palm handprints at Truckee, California, appear today as ghostly remnants without color (Figure 17). An inscribed handprint outline with an inscribed-palm at Green River, Wyoming, has a very faint reddish cast which may be the faded remains of pigment or possibly only the reddish cast of the sandstone host rock on which it is incised.



Figure 17. Inscribed-palm handprints at Truckee, California.

Authorship

Our argument for attributing common authorship for the 29 Western Message Petroglyph sites to one individual, or to a small group who were “all in-the-know,” takes into account the observation that highly individualized and pan-cultural esoteric icons that are embedded in the Ojibway/Sioux texts are found to recur across sites, thereby establishing a high level of association between those sites. We propose that, where one or

more unique esoteric icons occur in a panel, the panel can be said to share authorship with all panels where any one or more of those unique esoteric icons occur.

The “All-Seeing Eye” icon is a common pan-cultural symbol that can be found in a variety of contexts including Egyptian hieroglyphic writing; the American dollar bill, where it is shown hovering at the apex of an Egyptian-style pyramid; numerous fraternal associations; and in carvings on the Mormon Temple at Salt Lake City, Utah. Indeed, the use of the “All-Seeing Eye” icon, along with other rites and rituals, was adapted for symbolic use in the new Mormon religion by Joseph Smith, founder of the Church of the Latter Day Saints, directly from its usage in Freemasonry, of which Smith was a member (Barrus 2009). The repeated appearance of the “All-Seeing Eye” icon at Western Message Petroglyph sites (Figure 18), the frequent placement of WMP sites at quarries and mines, and the common location of the sites within the Mormon cultural landscape of the mid-nineteenth century informs our proposal that the WMP author, or authors, shared a connection to all of these converging histories.



Figure 18. “The All-Seeing Eye” convention and variants.

If we define the Western Message Petroglyph conventional use of this icon (surmounted by a pedestal and the letter “M”) as a unique construction indicating individual authorship, then we can conclude that the entire subgroup of WMP sites where this icon appears is authored by the same individual (or group). The “All Seeing Eye” surmounted by a pedestal and letter “M” icon is found at ten of the Western Message Petroglyph sites with three additional sites containing variants of the seeing eye motif. All of these we propose were authored by the same hand (or group). Other subgroups of WMP sites can be assigned to common authorship by virtue of other shared esoteric icons.

The recurring use of the esoteric icons across panels and sites allows us to eventually link all of the

WMP sites to a common author by virtue of logical extension. For example, we assume subgroup A is attributed to a common author by virtue of the “All-Seeing Eye” icon, and we assume subgroup B is attributed to a common author by virtue of the use of the amorphous skull-like icon (Figure 19). Because some sites contain both the “All-Seeing Eye” and the amorphous skull-like icon, we assume all the sites in both subsets are attributed to the same shared authorship.

Table 4 illustrates how the seven most frequently used pan-cultural esoteric icons in the Western Message Petroglyph tradition, all found at the Austin, Nevada, site, are used to establish a high level of association be-

tween the 29 sites, thereby indicating common authorship for the WMP group as a whole.

The appearance of nearly identical brief, multi-icon phrases of text increases our confidence in the shared authorship hypothesis. Two esoteric icons, the “All-Seeing Eye” and the “yin-yang,” appear together at three sites: Lone Pine, California (see Figure 5); Fillmore, Utah; and Austin, Nevada (see Figure 4). At Tonopah and Genoa, Nevada, we find the same phrasing utilizing the “ankh,” “mountain,” “spade,” “boat-shape,” and “barred figure-8” (Figure 20). At Manti, Utah, and Berkeley, California, we find the “ankh,” “reversed-scroll E-shape,” “barred figure-8,” and “circle with center dot.” Although we can’t read the messages, we can clearly see how they are repeated across sites.

Summary and Conclusions

In order for a petroglyph site to merit the WMP designation, it must share key features that define the tradition: Chiseled or incised petroglyphs made with metal edge tools; the images are often carved in linear fashion, sometimes in as many as four rows; the linear arrangement shows elements of syntax and grammar that imply a messaging intent; the images draw heavily from a late historic form of Ojibway/Sioux pictographic writing; inserted within, and/or adjacent to the Ojibway/Sioux pictographic texts are esoteric images that draw from pan-cultural sources (Egyptian,

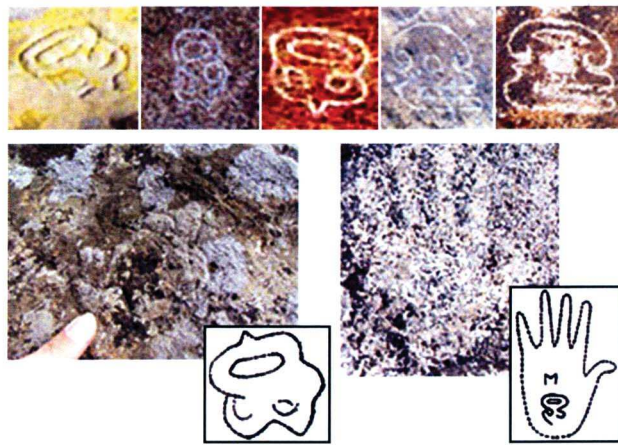


Figure 19. The “amorphous skull-like” subgroup.

Table 4. Common authorship based on recurring esoteric icons among the 29 sites.

Inter-site use of recurring esoteric icons suggests common authorship for the Western Message Petroglyph group as a whole.	♀ + ☉		♀ ☉ + ♀		♂ ☉ + ♀		♂ ☉ + ♀		♂ ☉ + ♀		♂ ☉ + ♀		♂ ☉ + ♀		♂ ☉ + ♀	
	Ankh	All-seeing eye	Walking legs	Domestic animal busts	Swastika	Skull-like	Barred figure 8	Skull-like	Swastika	Skull-like	Barred figure 8	Skull-like	Swastika	Skull-like	Barred figure 8	Skull-like
Austin, NV	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Chalk Creek Canyon, Fillmore, UT		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Castle Crags, Dunsmuir, CA	X															
Green River, WY	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Tonopah, NV	X	(b)														
Nephi, UT	X															
Manti, UT	X		X													
Alabama Hills, Lone Pine, CA	X	X														
Truckee, CA		(a)														
Lookout Mountain, Del Norte, CO		X	X													
Grand Junction, CO	X	X	X													
Hat Top, Lordsburg, NM			X				X									
Genoa, NV	X															
Tilden 2, Tilden Park, Berkeley, CA	X								X							
Cedar Canyon, Cedar City, UT		X	X													
Chloride Flat, Silver City, NM	X	X	X													
Tempe, AZ	X	X					X									
Ploche, NV	X						X									
Tilden 1, Berkeley, CA																
Virginia City, NV																
Durango, CO	X															
Vargas Road, Mission San Jose, CA																
Ogden, UT		X														
Rockville (CA-Sol-16), CA			X													
Claremont Creek, Berkeley, CA			X													
Birchim Creek, Bishop, CA									X							
Provo, UT																
Hickison Summit, NV	X															
Pocatello, ID																
Variants		(a) Truckee (b) Tonopah			(c) Stylized animal bust (d) Double animal bust											



Figure 20. Recurring iconic phrases as seen at Tonopah (top) and Genoa (bottom), Nevada (digitally enhanced).

Maya, Chinese, fraternal, cattle brands, etc.); WMPs are found primarily along historic travel corridors dating from the era of western expansion (1847–1903); WMPs are often found in association with historic quarry and mining sites from the same period; many WMP sites are found in association with historic Mormon settlements and routes; WMP sites are often located on high ground, overlooking adjacent travel corridors, town sites, quarries, and mines; the locations are often of moderate to difficult access, and the carved panels are remote enough to be described as “hidden in plain sight.”

We argue in this paper that the author of *Western Message Petroglyphs* is one individual, or a small group who were all “in the know.” Intra- and inter-site analyses of the icons in their geographic context allow us to conclude that the author(s) was likely Mormon, literate, and conversant in Ojibway/Sioux pictographic language; influenced by esoteric symbol systems; perhaps influenced by a fraternal society that valued tiered access to knowledge; and associated with quarry and mining activity, creating the carvings with a messaging intent for private expression or for a restricted audience and actively carving during the years of western expansion between 1847 and 1903.

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