

“The Birthing Cave”

By
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Feather began her presentation with some general remarks about rock art. Native Americans believe that it was created for specific purposes at high level sacred places. She noted that the geography of the Cave Valley region of Zion National Park has the elements necessary to create one of those places.

She discussed the symbology associated with the geography of the area. She noted the association of Mother Earth with a “turtle” shaped hill (Figure 1) and Father Sky with a “lying down indian” shaped hill (Figure 2). Getting closer to the cave, she noted the rock shaped “midwives” (Figure 3), the rock shaped phallic symbol (Figure 4), and the ridge line forming the legs and feet of mother earth (Figure 5). Finally the at the cave entrance you enter the womb of mother earth (Figure 6).



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

At the entrance to the cave, you see a Paiute petroglyph of a birthing scene (hence the name of the cave) (Figure 7). This scene has a figure with one hand up and one hand down, a motif seen inside the cave as well as other rock art sits in SW Utah. A power symbol is over the head of one figure along with a swastika style movement symbol.



Figure 7



Figure 8

Upon entering the cave, you begin to encounter pictographs on all the walls.

Beginning on the left wall are pictographs in black paint on a very dark surface, making the glyphs very difficult to see if you do not know they are there. The black paint represents the underworld or the “before” world. The prominent figure is a bat (Figure 8). This is a “bat woman” who is the guardian of the mystics and can “see” in the dark.

Moving toward the rear of the cave, you encounter Masau (Figure 9), who in the 3rd world was an evil being, but in the 4th world was a good being (he was given a second chance).



Figure 9

On the back cave wall, the glyphs are in a brighter color, yellow or white. This represents the current world. The main character in the cave is shown in Figure 10. This is a transitional figure - note he has only 4 toes. He is important – note the flute players playing in his ear, which is up signifying he is listening. He also has an array of dots above his head. Interestingly, it appears that the design of his legs was changed at some point in time.

Also on the back wall are other figures in yellow, with at least one having flute players playing in his ear (Figure 10). The flute players give this cave an alternative name, the “flute” cave.

The figures on the rear wall (Figure 10) have unique triangular shaped bodies, arms, legs and heads. This design motif has been given the name “Cave Valley” style.

Note also in Figure 10, the figures with one arm up and one arm down. In Chinese mythology, this motif means either friendship or prosperity, depending on which arm is up.

Continuing to the right wall are more yellow figures including a “snake dancer” (Figure 11).



Figure 10



Figure 11

The right wall then changes into figures from white or blue / turquoise paint, representing the sky world. This is called the “spirit” wall.



Figure 12

Figure 12 is a white figure with one hand up and one down, giving a blessing. Note the red ornamentation.



Figure 13

Figure 13 shows a number of white and blue figures. Some figures are very faded; however the red ornamentation still shows in many places. Also shown is a “T” symbol which is portal into the next world.



Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 16



Figure 17

Figure 14 is a very “ghostly” white figure. Figure 15 is a red shaman figure, similar in design to other “red” men in the SW Utah area. Figure 16 is a black and yellow figure. Figure 17 is a black and white image of what could be a mask.

Closer to the entrance of the right wall are many poorly defined images of what are thought to be “kachina” masks.

The discussion brought out a couple of points. Some of the glyphs in the cave are thought to go back to the archaic time period. This is likely because there are many layers of glyphs in the cave, where only the top surface glyphs being readily seen. However, some DAS members have photographed the cave using a program called “D-Stretch” which can pick up the underlying images.

Feather closed with the comment that she believes that the cave represents how one “transforms” or “transcends” from the underworld to the current world to the sky world.

John Mangels