

COMMENTS

Correcting the Rock Art Record

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The recent important article by Saint-Onge, Johnson, and Talaugon (*JCGBA* 29(1):29–57), “Archaeoastronomical Implications of a Northern Chumash Arboglyph,” unfortunately perpetuates erroneous records of poorly known rock art sites in California’s Carrizo Plain that we wish to bring to your attention.

We have spent some thirty-five years drawing, photographing, and documenting the rock art of the Carrizo Plain, amongst other Chumash sites/areas, and we have accumulated a large corpus of photographic materials as well as drawings made “on site” and to scale (Hyder, Lee, and Oliver 1986; Johnson and Lee 1985; Lee 1984). In addition, we are fortunate to have copies of slides and drawings made in prior years by such early *aficionados* as Campbell Grant and others who collected considerable numbers of images of the rock paintings. We are very familiar with the paintings. We were thus dismayed to see the image in Figure 5b, entitled “Carrizo foothills,” as drawn by Saint-Onge. The black figure, as shown in the article, does not have a red circle with a cross inside the head, as drawn by Saint-Onge. There are a few small red dots inside the head area but they do not form a cross within a circle. But there is, indeed, a star or sunburst form above the head; Lee’s drawing (Fig. 1) is quite close to that drawn by Grant (1965: Plate 8).¹

The rock art site in question is located on privately owned, fenced land, and is seldom visited. In years past, however, Lee was able to view the site with Campbell Grant. Lee personally drew and photographed the image in question, which is Grant’s (1965) Plate 8.² Later on, William Hyder, as part of a documentation project, took detailed photographs of this pictograph (Fig. 2).

We realize that most Chumash paintings are faded and that at times pigment is flaking from the sandstone walls. Some have suffered from vandalism. But there



Figure 1. Lee’s finished scale drawing of the figure illustrated incorrectly in Saint-Onge, Johnson, and Talaugon (2009: Figure 5b).

is also another factor involved, and that is how the pictograph was recorded. Many visitors take photographs and then make drawings from slides or photographs; sometimes a light-table is employed, or a projector is used to flash the image on a screen. The added factor of light passing through a slide can result in misrepresentations.

Lee has, in most instances, drawn rock paintings *in situ*. This method involves many hours of careful measurement and intense scrutiny, often in different lighting situations as the day wears on. But by intensively studying a painting, it is possible to determine faint traces that may have been painted under or over a motif, note minute indications of brush strokes or spatter, and document any traces of vandalism. In addition, the artist doing the on-site recording has to examine every part of the painting, taking care to include all information possible. This is not to suggest that perfection or infallibility is either possible or necessary; we only wish to point out the time and effort that goes into accurate documentation.



Figure 2. Hyder's photograph of the figure incorrectly illustrated in Saint-Onge, Johnson, and Talaugon (2009: Figure 5b). Red pigment has been digitally emphasized as a dark black to help it stand out in contrast to the lighter black pigment.

In that light, we draw attention to another painting at the same Carrizo site that was also published by Grant (1965: Plate 11). The central figure in the panel appears to be a black angel with wings and a fancy headdress, and with a pinwheel for a belly button. However, the actual rock painting varies from Grant's drawing in significant ways (Fig. 3). What Grant interpreted as "wings" are actually outstretched arms with large fingers. Curved lines above the arms were misinterpreted as the tops of wings. In addition, the "body" of the figure extends further down than is shown in Grant's rendition. This panel is badly eroded and is very faint, and it is not our intention to disparage Grant's work; we wish only to point out that using secondary methods (such as projectors or light tables) can result in erroneously interpreted motifs.

We would also like to briefly mention another site in the Carrizo, known as Sulphur Springs, that is now closed to public access. As opposed to many Carrizo sites, which

are painted in open cave shelters and are thus relatively easy to view, the Sulphur Springs site is in a deeply recessed and narrow crevice. The main panel measures 163 by 368 cm. and—due to its size and the confined space—it can be viewed only in sections.

This panel has been noted and sketched by many, starting with Douglas Allen, who made notes and sketches in the 1920s (Allen n.d.). In the 1950s, the site was visited by Lathrap, Pilling, and Fenenga (Lathrap 1950), who published a sketch of the main panel. We do not know if their sketch was made on-site or from photographs, but it contains many errors, including "plumed serpents," and the published drawing shows only a portion of the panel (Lee 1994).

Grant (1965: Plate 7) did a better job on this panel. He took 37 slides with a wide-angle lens, projected them onto a wall, and painted the image in his studio. However, it was not field checked. Grant repositioned some of the designs in order to make the figures fit better on a page.



Figure 3. Hyder's photograph of the black "angel-like" figure incorrectly reproduced by Grant (1965).

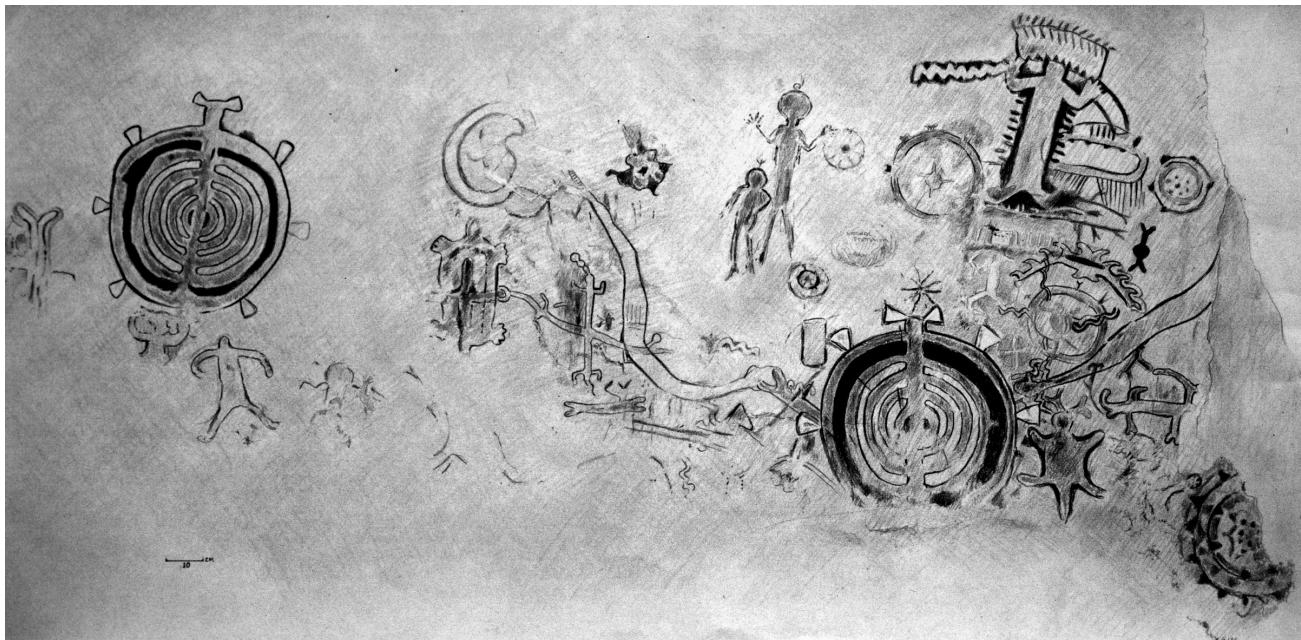


Figure 4. Lee's to-scale drawing of the painted panel at CA-SLO-100. Because of the narrowness of the slot into which one must crawl to observe the panel, it cannot be photographed as a single image. Attempts by Grant (1965) and Lathrap (1950) to reproduce the panel resulted in images with elements reproduced out of order and in incorrect relationship to one another.

In 1991, Hyder, Lee and a crew returned to Sulphur Springs to compare the condition of the paintings with earlier slides and drawings, and to check for erosion (Lee 1991). We made a variety of records, mapped the site, and took photographs. The main panel was traced on pliofilm, producing a full-size drawing which was then field checked and corrected where necessary. We strove to keep the subtle relationships between designs, and to note all superimpositions and faint traces (Fig. 4). The ultimate goal of scientific documentation is to be able to reconstruct the rock art solely from the collected data should the site somehow be lost (Lee 1992a:16; 1992b:63).

Many individuals have, over the years, sketched, drawn, and photographed the rock paintings in the Carrizo. Some had time constraints or relied too much on photography, and (while they had the best of intentions) it is clear that—in terms of end results—much information would have been lost forever if the site at Sulphur Spring, for example, had vanished before our full documentation in 1991.

While we are interested in and appreciate a variety of approaches that help us understand the enigmatic art left behind by Native Americans, we believe that it is important to accurately reproduce the images, for that is the one piece of concrete data upon which we all should be able to agree.

NOTES

¹Saint-Onge's drawing for Figure 5C left out two other pinwheels in addition to two 'sun' symbols, one of them quite elaborate.

²Grant's version is very close to Lee's on-site drawing. Grant took slides of the sites and, back home, flashed the image from a projector onto paper on a wall. He then drew the images and painted them. While most are basically correct, Grant tended to fill in missing bits and "slick" them up. His drawings are very attractive. However, those who study his book and then compare the actual sites to his illustrations are often dismayed by the differences.

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