Archaeology and Rock Art of the Eastern Sierra and Great Basin Frontier

Alan P. Garfinkel
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Reviewed by Robert M. Yohe II
California State University, Bakersfield

Archaeology and Rock Art takes on a huge task that has occupied various researchers for decades: linking rock art, linguistics, ethnicity, population movements, and archaeological data in a way that provides explanations for both the presence of the rock art itself and the people who most likely made it. But it is also much more than this; as a test of linguistic archaeology, this represents one of the better examples of its type around. This was the original purpose of Garfinkel's dissertation, which has translated nicely into this surprisingly readable and not pedantically dense treatise that should appeal to both the lay rock art enthusiast as well as the seasoned archaeological researcher.

The specific geographic foci of Garfinkel's work are the northern portion of the Mojave Desert and the eastern Sierra (specifically segments of the Pacific Crest Trail on the Kern Plateau and parts of the Scodie Mountains), within the center of which is the Coso Volcanic Field, home of one of the greatest concentrations of petroglyphs and pictographs in North America. First tackled in earnest by Campbell Grant et al. in the seminal work *Rock Drawings of the Coso Range, Inyo County, California* (1968), questions about who made the rock art, when, and why have continued to be topics of deep inquiry and debate by many scholars over the subsequent four decades. Unlike previous researchers, though, Garfinkel's more holistic appraisal of these problems has resulted in an integration of the latest research in linguistic prehistory, ethnography and ethnohistory, contemporary hunter/gatherer theory, and archaeological data (much of it previously unpublished). In other words, it would be a huge mistake to consider this just another rock art book; in fact, there is far less rock art *per se* than there is ethnography and dirt archaeology.

Archaeology and Rock Art is laid out in a seven-chapter format that includes an introduction, the environmental and anthropological background of the region, chronological considerations, a discussion of settlement patterns, and linguistic evidence for population movements or *in situ* development. The first chapter introduces the nature of the problems to be addressed by the book, which relate primarily to changes noted in the archaeological record in the region in question that might be related to migrations of populations (comprised of specific ethnic or linguistic groups) or perhaps developments in place over a long period of time. Many of Garfinkel's data are derived from archaeological studies conducted prior to the construction of the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT), primarily by the author himself, at 69 different sites along a 35-mile stretch of the Sierra Nevada/Transverse Range interface. Linguistically, this study area included people speaking Northern Uto-Aztecan languages, Tubatulabal and Numic (Kawaiisu and Koso/Panamint Shoshone), the former of which is believed to have had a long *in situ* development, while the Numic speakers are more recent additions to the scene. Do pre-Numic and Tubatulabal peoples appear the same archaeologically? Do they look like presumed Numic-speakers? Is it possible to tell? Garfinkel suggests such distinctions are possibly discernable stylistically in rock art as well as in other aspects of material culture.

Chapter 3 examines the methodology of linguistic prehistory as well as the ethnographic and ethnogeographic record of the study area, further elucidating what is known about the Tubatulabal, the Kawaiisu, and the Panamint Shoshone. Based on this discussion, Garfinkel suggests that the Tubatulabal and Numic peoples *could* be distinguished archaeologically. Chapter 4 looks in detail at dating methods used in establishing a chronology for this region, with an emphasis on the Kern Plateau sites. The methods employed include radiocarbon dating, source-specific obsidian hydration analysis, and temporally-sensitive artifacts (projectile points, beads, and pottery). Garfinkel can feel fairly confident about the dating of the Kern Plateau sites, given that he had 475 obsidian hydration readings, 28 radiocarbon dates, and 222 classifiable projectile points, as well as numerous potsherds and beads.

Chapter 5 is an evaluation of Kern Plateau settlements based on the archaeological data, including

anthropogenic soils, milling and rock ring features, and types of milling implements. Also considered are rock art styles, which are limited to pictographs on the Kern Plateau. It is suggested that rock art can be an indicator of ethnic boundaries in the case of the Tubatulabal, based on both elements and pigments, and distinguished from the "Numic Style" as exemplified by the Coso pictographs.

Chapter 6 is the longest and densest in terms of its scope and content. The title of the Chapter is "Linguistic Archaeology," and it is here that Garfinkel evaluates his data with respect to replacement vs. *in situ* models of cultural/linguistic development. Here he argues, as he did previously, for the "Tubatulabal case" involving a long-term, *in situ* development rather than population in-migration and displacement/replacement. He then lays out the evidence for the "Numic case" involving in-migration and displacement, and compares it to pre-Numic in-place cultural development and eventual disruption using the direct historical approach, mitochondrial DNA data from the region, and burial patterns. Significant shifts in ungulate exploitation and a general subsistence shift to a hard seed and small mammal emphasis are also noted increasingly post-A.D. 600. Garfinkel then uses his analysis of the Coso representational petroglyphs to bolster the argument for stylistic discontinuity, dating the period of Coso stylistic fluorescence to between A.D. 600 to A.D. 1300 and the appearance of simple, scratched, grid-like glyphs to this same period, signaling disruption but also indicating likely cohabitation of this area by both pre-Numic and Numic populations. He finally suggests that Bettinger and Baumhoff's (1982) model of economic displacement is the best suited thus far to explain what happened in eastern California post A.D. 600.

The book finishes with a short synopsis of the various conclusions reached by the study: the Tubatulabal appear to have been in the Kern River region for at least 2,500 years, but the bulk of the archaeological data supports the presence of pre-Numic populations in eastern California that were then disrupted by the appearance of Numic populations around A.D. 600. As Garfinkel puts it:

> The weight of the evidence suggests that a Numic population incursion was in part responsible for the archaeological record in portions of eastern California and the far southern Sierra Nevada Crest. Some researchers see continuity between the historic Numic occupants and some of the more ancient archaeological manifestations in the region. This is especially the case with respect to the realistic petroglyphs recorded on the lava cliffs and canyons of the Coso Range. Yet, the body of evidence, when reviewed in detail and considered contextually, strongly indicates otherwise [p. 146].

Although the book is generally less about rock art than it is about just about every other aspect of archaeology in eastern California, it does tie the rock art to the archaeological data more completely than any other effort to date. Furthermore, it is most certainly an important contribution to the archaeology of the region, and will no doubt influence researchers in eastern California for years to come.

REFERENCES

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