



Canolfan Sophia  
The Sophia Centre

## CULTURE AND COSMOS

*A Journal of the History of Astrology and Cultural Astronomy*

Vol. 8 no 1 and 2

Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter 2004

Papers from the fourth conference on the Inspiration of  
Astronomical Phenomena (INSAP IV), Magdalen College, Oxford,  
3-9 August 2003.

Published by Culture and Cosmos  
and the Sophia Centre Press,  
in partnership with the University of Wales Trinity Saint David,  
in association with the Sophia Centre for the Study of Cosmology  
in Culture, University of Wales Trinity Saint David,  
Institute of Education and Humanities  
Lampeter, Ceredigion, Wales, SA48 7ED, UK  
[www.cultureandcosmos.org](http://www.cultureandcosmos.org)

Cite this paper as: Allen, Hubert A., Jr. and Terry Edward Ballone, 'Star  
Imagery in Petroglyph National Monument', *Culture and Cosmos* 8, nos.  
1 and 2, Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter 2004, pp. 7–14.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue card for this book is available from the British Library

*All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any  
form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying,  
recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without  
permission in writing from the Publishers.*

ISSN 1368-6534

Printed in Great Britain by Lightning Source  
Copyright © 2021 Culture and Cosmos  
All rights reserved

## Star Imagery in Petroglyph National Monument

---

**Hubert A. Allen, Jr., and Terry Edward Ballone**

**Abstract.** Petroglyph National Monument, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA, is dedicated solely to preserving an estimated 17,000 carvings on rock (petroglyphs) made by ancestral and historic Native Americans, early colonists and regional visitors. Among the images that recur along the 17 miles of volcanic escarpment is a four-pointed star, sometimes called the 'star-being' or 'star-head' by locals and park guides, as it usually involves some degree of anthropomorphism. This image may be as simple as a circle with four symmetrically disposed points and no other details to as elaborate as the basic star-head with facial features, crown and body with, perhaps, limbs holding objects – a cane, staff, or club. This project involved a photographic field survey of the 'star-head' image in the Monument. Two teams of two and three surveyors combed the escarpment rock (height ranging from 10m - 100m high) and identified and photographed approximately 100 'star-head' images. Results include a classification of 'star-head' images according to level of detail, size of images, and associations with other petroglyphs and archaeological remains. The literature review discusses the possible role of this icon as a war symbol and a Venus deity and provides a rough time line of their creation and cultural associations.

### **Introduction**

This paper will demonstrate a strong consistency in the star imagery found at Petroglyph National Monument while revealing an array of embellishment to the basic image. We will use photographs and notes taken while conducting a field survey within the monument to describe the consistency and variety of this image. We will report on associations with other petroglyph images and archaeological remains. Our discussion will include brief selected images from outside the park but also within

---

Hubert A. Allen, Jr., and Terry Edward Ballone, 'Star Imagery in Petroglyph National Monument', *The Inspiration of Astronomical Phenomena: Proceedings of the fourth conference on the Inspiration of Astronomical Phenomena*, Magdalen College, Oxford, England, 3-9 August 2003, special issue of *Culture and Cosmos* 8, nos. 1 and 2, Spring/Summer-Autumn/Winter 2004, pp. 7-14.  
[www.CultureAndCosmos.com](http://www.CultureAndCosmos.com)

the Middle Rio Grande Valley (with one case from further northwest) that substantiate the image. Further evidence from historic kachina figures and excavated kiva murals will show that the star image of the Middle Rio Grande is truly an icon of the American Southwest.

### **Description of the image**

In its simplest form these petroglyphs are carved into symmetric 4-pointed stars; the next level of detail is adding a simple, circular centre with eyes and a mouth. Complexity of detail continues by adding limbs, headdresses, clubs, bows, arrows and other facial marks to the star-being body. Some companions found in association with the star image include snakes, the shalako kachina figure and animal images.

### **Geographical and temporal range**

The United States Congress established Petroglyph National Monument in 1990, preserving almost 7,300 acres over 17 miles of black basalt and high desert.<sup>1</sup> Petroglyph National Monument is located along Albuquerque, New Mexico's West Mesa, a thin ribbon of preserved land including out-crops of volcanic rock and broken boulder on which the petroglyphs have been carved. Development and a city of over 500,000 people encroach ever closer to these fragile remains.

A detailed discussion of the geographic range, cultural associations, and approximate dating of the star image has been published by Schaafsma.<sup>2</sup> This particular star icon is described as being post-Chacoan and post Mesa-Verde to the Pueblo IV period of between 1300 and 1600 CE, when most of the local population had moved into the Middle Rio Grande Valley. Along with this physical migration came dramatic changes in petroglyph style and content. It has been suggested that 95% of the petroglyphs in the monument are of this 'Rio Grande Style', including the star icon.<sup>3</sup>

### **Methods**

The team of two persons (TB, HA) systematically searched Petroglyph National Monument for star images. Notes on the location of each petroglyph, some measurements and photographs were taken when a star

---

<sup>1</sup> Susan Lamb, *Petroglyph National Monument* (Tucson, AZ: Southwest Parks and Monuments Association, 1993), p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Polly Schaafsma, *Warrior, Shield, and Star: Imagery and Ideology of Pueblo Warfare* (Santa Fe, NM: Western Edge Press, 2000).

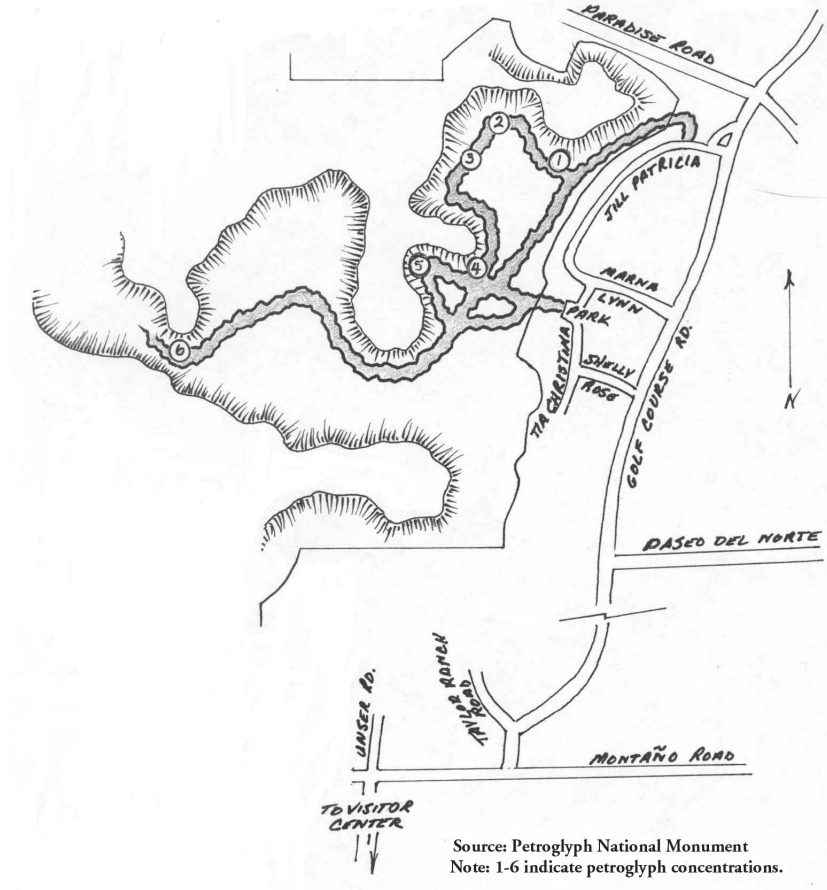
<sup>3</sup> Lamb, *Petroglyph*, p. 8.

image was found. Photographs and notes were taken of other petroglyphs and archaeological remains found in the vicinity. Some field trips to sites outside the park but within the Middle Rio Grande Valley rounded out the display of images discussed here. A literature review was conducted for other evidence of this image.

**Results**

It required approximately two seasons to locate approximately 100 star images in the park, of which detailed analysis is given to a sample of 38 unique images found in the Piedras Marcadas ('Marked Rocks') areas of the park (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Piedras Marcadas area of Petroglyph National Monument.**



The authors developed a simple classification system for the star images and used this to summarize the Piedras Marcadas data (See Table 1).

<b>Star Pattern</b>	<b>Number of Images</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Definition / Comments</b>
Simple stars	8	22%	Simple stars: no facial features; pecked-out or not; cross-type star.
Basic Star Icon	7	19%	Basic Star Icon: 4-symmetric start points; circular centre with eyes and mouth
Embellished Star Icon	11	30%	Embellished Star Icon: Basic plus adornments such as limbs, headdress, implements. Additional facial details. Includes a progression in complexity.
Full-Body Star Icon	2	5%	Full-Body Star Icon has a torso, limbs, other embellishments, claws, feet and/or legs. Adornments of clothing and implements may be present.
With Snake	2	5%	The Basic Star Icon has been explicitly incorporated into a snake image.
Other Variants	7	19%	Star Icon may lose symmetry (three points versus four or one of uneven length).
Totals:	37 Unique	100%	

**Table 1: Patterns of Star Images in Piedras Marcadas area of Petroglyph National Monument.**

Photographic examples of these star types are shown in Figure 2. While our sample is small, there is a clear preponderance of the embellished star icons in Piedras Marcadas, 30% of the sample. Simple stars, the Basic Star icon and the other variants come in at 22%, 19% and 19%, respectively. There were two full-bodied Star Icons and two grafted onto snake bodies, 5% each of the sample.

**Figure 2: Examples of star images.**



Copyright T.E. Ballone 2003, all rights reserved.

Note: Full-body image from Comanche Gap, New Mexico.  
All others from Petroglyph National Monument.

### **Archaeological companions**

At the turn of the twenty-first century, lithic and pottery remains, if they had been present, have been depleted by casual appropriation and downhill development. However, one form of archaeological remain, metatés or grinding stones, can be found in near proximity of some star images. Some grinding stones are large, almost two meters across, and there may be multiple grinding areas (e.g., Staghorn area) suggesting communal activities took place there amongst the star images.

More significantly, the remains of Piedras Marcadas Pueblo is just east of the petroglyphs. It was a large community covering some seven acres on the banks of the Rio Grande. Archaeologists have estimated that Piedras Marcadas Pueblo had one thousand rooms, several storeys high with two central plazas.<sup>4</sup> Thousands of people over hundreds of years must have hunted, fished, gathered wild foods, farmed and, eventually, carved into the volcanic rock.

In this section we focus on other petroglyphs on the same rock or panel as the star. The precise order in which these were made cannot always be known. Occasionally, obvious variation in weathering or repatination (when one petroglyph is clearly cut on top of another) provides the relative order in which they were laid down. One companion found in association with the star image and identified in the literature is the shalako kachina figure.

### **Images outside the park**

Selective star image petroglyphs from outside the Monument show the image to be strong in the Rio Grande Valley in New Mexico. The three sites identified here are: (1) Commanche Gap / Gallasteo, approximately 30 miles north of Albuquerque; (2) Ten Abo, approximately 80 miles southeast of Albuquerque; and (3) the Pueblo Blanco, approximately 100 miles northwest of Albuquerque and Lyden approximately 80 miles north along the Rio Grande. In these areas full-bodied petroglyphs with war elements do show up.

### **Other Archaeological Sources of the Image**

The literature review found two important sources of images related or identical to the Basic Star Icon or its embellishments: kachinas from the Western Pueblo, Hopi; and kiva wall murals from Pottery Mound outside of Albuquerque, New Mexico, less than 30 miles from Petroglyph

---

<sup>4</sup> Lamb, *Petroglyph*, p. 8.

National Monument. The evidence from the Pottery Mound kiva murals is even more significant. Hibben reported that the Acoma described the star head images found at Pottery Mound as 'soul faces'.<sup>5</sup>

### **Discussion**

While simple star petroglyphs cannot be uniquely associated with the Rio Grande Valley, the next form encountered in the field survey, the Basic Star Icon and embellishments, appears frequently and distinctly in Petroglyph National Monument. The Star Icon plays a pivotal role in an on-going controversy and we feel this study sheds some light on the debate. In short, in Ruth Benedict's landmark book, *Patterns of Culture*, we see the Zuni, a member of the Pueblos in western New Mexico, portrayed as Apollonian, peace-loving, noble savages who eschewed war.<sup>6</sup> More recently, the park's semi-official publication states about the Pueblos, 'There is much evidence for exchange but not for warfare'.<sup>7</sup>

In sharp contrast to the peace view, Schaafsma presents a strong case for the presence of conflict in her book.<sup>8</sup> In particular, Schaafsma bases this conclusion on the Star Icon described in this paper to support the importance of the icon to warfare imagery. She selects certain images which do have war iconography, but gives no sense of how common this is in comparison to other star images which do not have war associations.

From the objective survey of the star image in Petroglyph National Monument, the evidence suggest that the war imagery link was small but significant in that it was found with the most elaborate and full-bodied Star Icons. The common presence of claw-like appendages, without other more definitive war images in the same petroglyph or even on the same panel, may not necessarily be war versus, say, hunt or simply supernatural. In her review of the link between the star image and Venus in particular as a Morning Star, Schaafsma concludes that it was a generic morning star, not necessarily the planet Venus. Our preliminary data shows a variety of orientations, but the rigorous data collection must continue.

---

<sup>5</sup> Frank Hibben, *Kiva Art of the Anasazi at Pottery Mound* (KC Publications, Las Vegas, Nevada 1975), pp. 43, 48, 133, 134, 135, 135.

<sup>6</sup> Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (1934; repr. New York: Mentor, 1958).

<sup>7</sup> Lamb, *Petroglyph*, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Schaafsma, *Warrior*.



In conclusion, the field survey revealed that a variety of stylized star images adorn the volcanic rocks of Petroglyph National Monument and can be found extending further along the Middle Rio Grande Valley.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Harold S. Colton, *Hopi Kachina Dolls* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press), Plate 28 (Oraibi variant); Jesse Walter Fewkes, *Hopi Kachinas Drawn By Native Artists* (Glorieta, NM: The Rio Grande Press, Inc., 1969), Kachinas 1, 2, and 3. (Originally the Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology Annual Report, 1903); Dorcas S. Miller, *Stars of the First People* (Boulder, CO: Pruett Publishing Company, 1997), p. 172; Alex Patterson, *Rock Art Symbols Of the Greater Southwest* (Boulder, CO: Johnson Books, 1992), pp. 1–2; Petroglyph National Monument, ‘Boca Negra Canyon Trail Guide’ (Albuquerque, NM: Petroglyph National Monument and City of Albuquerque Open Space Division, 2003), pp. 1–2; Petroglyph National Monument, ‘Piedras Marcadas’ Map (Albuquerque, NM: Petroglyph National Monument, 2003), p. 1; Petroglyph National Monument, ‘Rinconada Canyon’ Pamphlet (Albuquerque, NM: Petroglyph National Monument and City of Albuquerque Open Space Division, 2003), pp. 1–2; Petroglyph National Monument, ‘The Volcanoes’ Pamphlet (Albuquerque, NM: Petroglyph National Monument and City of Albuquerque Open Space Division, 2003), pp. 1–2; Alph H. Secakuku, *Following the Sun and Moon* (Flagstaff, AZ: Northland Publishing in cooperation with The Heard Museum, 1995), Kachinas 4A and 5.