

# **Petroglyphs and Paintings of Cedar Mesa: A Photographic Essay**

Sally J. Cole

Natural History Museum of Utah and  
Fort Lewis College Department of Anthropology



Basketmaker II–Pueblo III style paintings

Hunter-gatherers, Ancestral Hopi and Pueblos, and historical Ute and Navajo of the Cedar Mesa area signified their presence, social identities, activities, and worldviews in an array of images dating from 3000 B.C. or earlier to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Bold and intricate paintings and petroglyphs appear on cliffs, alcoves, and boulders across the varied and rugged landscape. In these settings, rock art images are often clustered and show a variety of closely juxtaposed, superimposed, and modified forms from diverse eras. The subject matter and patterns of reuse have narrative qualities that point to the significance of the images and places over time.

The archaeological contexts and associated styles, motifs, colors, and patterns of weathering place the imagery in time while recurring, ritualistic, themes offer insights into related ideas and practices. For cultural descendants, the fragile paintings and petroglyphs contain icons marking pathways and events recounted in traditional histories. For archaeologists, they are evidence of cultural interaction and social affiliations that help to explain continuity and change over time on Cedar Mesa and the greater Colorado Plateau.

My photo essay begins with the earliest styles of Cedar Mesa rock art, those attributed to Archaic hunter-gatherers and to farmers of the long Basketmaker II era. I continue, chronologically, with imagery from the late Basketmaker II into the Basketmaker III and Pueblo I periods. This is followed by Pueblo II–Pueblo III rock art representing the final eras of major occupation by Ancestral Hopi and Pueblo peoples. The essay concludes with Ute and Navajo petroglyphs.



## Archaic—early Basketmaker II (~4000 to 1000 B.C.)

The earliest identified styles, Glen Canyon Style 5 and Abstract-Geometric tradition, appear generally contemporaneous but have different patterns of distribution. Style 5 marks river corridors and other waterways where it was surely viewed by numerous peoples over time and probably influenced development of Basketmaker II and other anthropomorphic expressions. Abstract-Geometric rock art occurs widely in the Southwest but is relatively rare in the Cedar Mesa area.



Glen Canyon Style 5 anthropomorphic (humanlike) figures, elk or deer, and a masklike image.







Anthropomorphic (Style 5-like) and Abstract-Geometric petroglyphs on a large tilted boulder shown (*left*) in the present vertical position and (*detail above*) when horizontal. (*far left*) Smaller, upright, Basketmaker II-III style human forms were made after the boulder tilted.





Archaic Abstract-Geometric paintings on alcove wall and ceiling.





(left) Large bighorn composed of fine stipple-pecks and superimposed by dots (probably Basketmaker II age).



(right) Netlike form, two anthropomorphs (one superimposed by arm and hand of a Basketmaker II-style figure); row of dots superimposes and visually links the humanlike forms.



# Part 2 Petroglyphs and Paintings of Cedar Mesa : BMII-early BMIII



## Basketmaker II—early Basketmaker III (~1000 B.C. to A.D. 550)

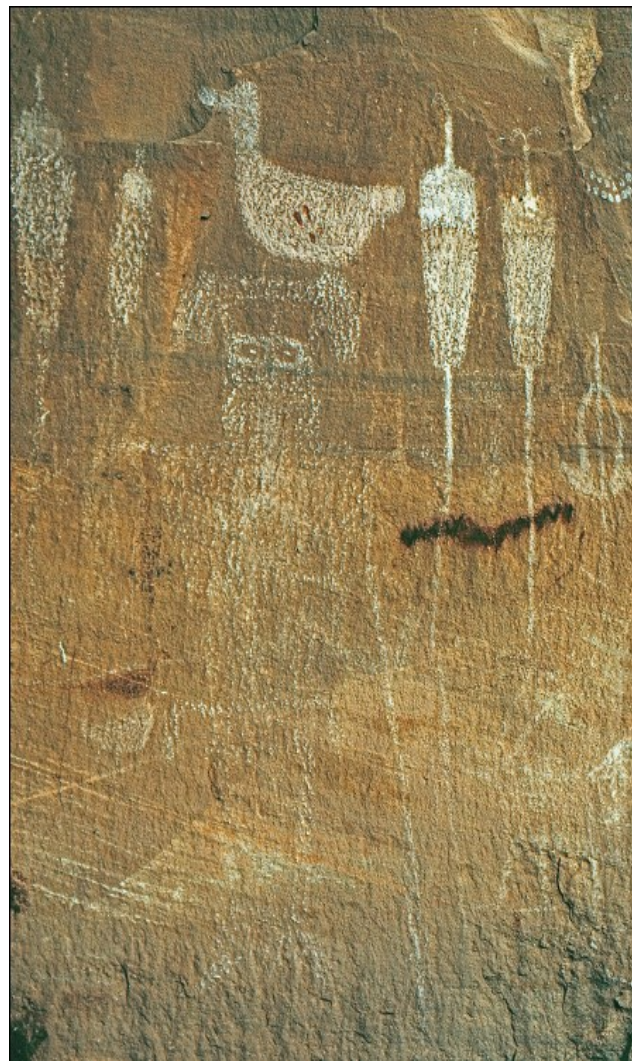
Basketmaker II expressions are the foundation of subsequent Ancestral Hopi and Pueblo rock art in the study area.



Broad-shouldered figures with embellished bodies, headdresses, and masklike faces: (*upper left*) distinctive headdresses and ear extensions are also seen south of the San Juan River; (*upper right*) female and male figures marked by handprints (outlines of possible Pueblo origin); (*lower*) probably females wearing fringed and diaper-like menstrual aprons.

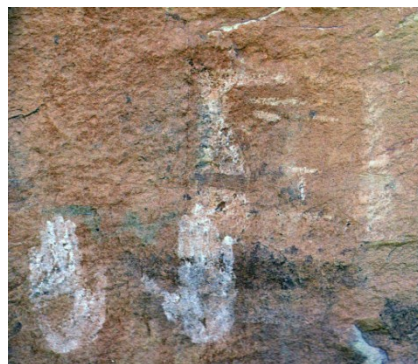






Human forms with crescent-shape headdresses (with ducklike and fishlike forms atop). Other forms include (*above*) a “bag” resembling animal skin pouches and (*right*) darts with projectile points and cattail-like fletching and “atlatl” with weight.





(left) Masklike faces: leftmost modified to show nose-line and bared teeth; center image probably represents painted, full face-and-hair scalp; face at right has lip embellishment (handprint superimposes). Long side hair-bobs resemble hair styles of local people.

(below) Human forms, “bags” lobed circles and wading birds.

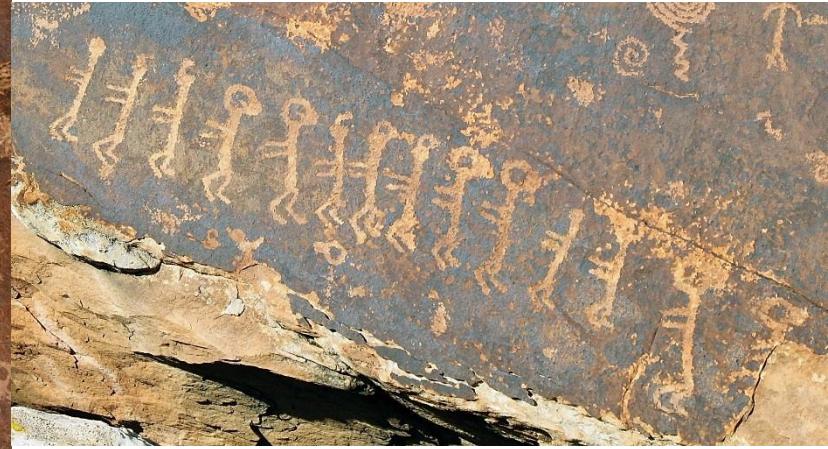






Human figures with a wading bird, turkey- and duck-like birds over and on heads, bighorn, atlatl and darts, paw-print motifs, possible fringed tobacco plant, multi-leg animal, and a snake.





Dynamic signboards , histories, and stories: atlatls and darts, dancing “twins” with lobed-circle heads, and groups and processions of people and animals. Rows of figures follow rock contours suggestive of surrounding landscapes and trails.



# Petroglyphs and Paintings of Cedar Mesa Part 3: BMIII-PI, PII-PIII, Ute, Navajo



## Basketmaker III–Pueblo I (~ A.D. 500 to 950)

Imagery from this period displays continuities with Basketmaker II while introducing new forms and ideas comparable to motifs and designs on pottery and textiles.



(above) Bright white paintings of human forms (including a possible female with hair-whorls) and textile-like motifs overshadow faded Basketmaker II-style imagery. (right) Human forms that closely resemble Basketmaker III-Pueblo I pottery motifs.







Female, running figures, butterfly, and bear.



## Pueblo II–Pueblo III (~ A.D. 950 to 1300)

New and diverse imagery appears in combination with existing motifs and designs, reflecting population dynamics of the times.



Ubiquitous spread-arm-and-leg human forms and a variety of hand and geometric motifs and designs resembling those found on pottery and architecture.





Cliff house imagery: (*left upper*) possible shield and/or moon motifs; (*left lower*) orb of concentric lines and vertical rows of dots juxtaposed with small human forms and marked by a handprint; (*right*) horned-snake, handprints, and geometric motifs and designs.





(above) Humpback flute player superimposed on Basketmaker II figure embellished with dots.

(right) Precise painted and incised sandal motifs and stencil handprints.



# Ute

Equestrians, game animals, shields, warriors, and spiritual figures such as war and hunting chiefs and shamans or healers characterize Ute rock art from the 1700s to the mid-1900s .





# Navajo

Distinctive subjects and styles of historic Navajo sand paintings and other traditional arts appear in petroglyphs of the study area.



(left) Slender horses with small heads, long legs, and hooves resembling hoof prints or horseshoes.



(right) Lightly-repatinated Navajo style figure with pinched-waist and profile-view legs is juxtaposed with a possible snake and other forms; equestrian below is probably of Ute origin. Basketmaker and Pueblo images are superimposed.