

# An archaeological approach to the rupestrian images at La Angostura, Central Baja California

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Intensive and extensive studies of rock art images within Baja California have been conducted in the peninsula for well over a century (Crosby 1975:16-17; Ritter 1991). Jesuit missionaries in the eighteenth century were the first to write historical accounts of the art (see Crosby 1975:13-16). Early remarks were often brief, anecdotal and descriptive, with whimsical or just incorrect offerings. For instance, North unsuitably concluded in 1908 that “until some method of deciphering these petroglyphs is discovered, all that can be predicated of the earliest Californians is that they were sufficiently advanced in civilization to clothe themselves and to employ an alphabet” (North 1908:126).

Studying rock art by modern standards is complex, and approaches and interpretations vary, with considerable debate in the professional ranks on the merits of diverse theoretical and documentary schemes. Aside from ten Kate’s (1883), Diguet’s (1895, 1899) and Engerrand’s (1912a, 1912b, 1912c) early science-based observations, it has only been since the 1950s that rock art research in Baja California has been broached in a scholarly fashion by avocational and professional archaeologists. Modern research on the various images and their environmental and archaeological context has added noticeably to the understanding of prehistoric behavior and use of the land within the peninsula. Such studies have advanced rock art research on a much broader scale than solely Baja California. However, there is considerable more work to be accomplished in the realm of research (and management), and this rock art study at the La Angostura site can be hopefully counted as a small contribution toward a meaningful understanding regarding what people did in various locations within the peninsula during the prehistoric past.

## **The setting**

La Angostura is an archaeological complex dominated by its cliff images. It is situated in central Baja California on the fringes of the Vizcaíno Desert and the Mexican government’s “Area de Protección de Flora y Fauna Silvestre Valle de los Cirios”, with the southern boundary roughly equivalent to the southern extent of the cirio (*Idria [Fouquieria] columnaris*) occurrence of today. The site is 17 km inland from the Pacific coast and just 3.5 km northeast of the community of Rosarito (Figure 1). The low volcanic cliffs form a narrows transected by the Arroyo de Rosarito with an elevation of 160 m (Figure 2). Within this narrows occur small rock shelters and scattered prehistoric archaeological remains from apparent brief residency, with a moderately expansive display of petroglyphs and pictographs for about 340 m along the adjoining cliff face.

La Angostura seems to be a component of a dynamic coast-interior interaction sphere where, for instance, marine resources and obsidian could be exchanged for agave products (see



Figure 1. Site location map.



Figure 2. View of site to southeast.

Aschmann 1959:101), or certainly where interior products could be had by groups who also used the moderately close coast for its marine goods. This is the first location east of the Pacific coast along a presumed ancient and modern major pathway where a large cliff face was available for rock art decoration. This is the setting of a narrows and also an entryway to resource-abundant interior lands that could compliment the nearby coastal resource base. The possible downside to La Angostura's location as a major gathering location is the apparent paucity (at least today) of fresh water except during or just after storm events. Of course, there were surface fresh water sources available during prehistory only a few kilometers distant, near the present village of Rosarito.

## **Theoretical approach**

Aside from serious management concerns, the focus of research at La Angostura was on the articulation between the rock art and associated environmental and cultural remains and the place of the site complex within the greater landscape. The cooperative work between the University of California and the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia at this complex was carried out in 2002.

This archaeological study is approached from a rationalistic, multifaceted, synergistic, focus following behavioral/evolutionary/processual tenets merged with cognitive/post-processualist views (see Whitley 2000 and Wylie 2000 for related commentary). As noted in a recent work (Ritter 1999:82), it is an attempt to examine and understand local and more distant sociocultural and natural ecological influences on aspects of past behavior, variability in cultural expressions and decision-making, relationships of the art to social changes, if any, and ideology. Scientific analyses require rigor and systematic data collection and analysis. There should be a presentation of multiple, workable hypotheses that are "logical" and "reasonably" testable within the constraints of today's knowledge, historic/ethnographic records, logistical considerations, and theoretical biases.

One of the investigative topics originally formulated prior to the La Angostura work was the proposition that the Rosarito-San Borja corridor was a presumed ancient route of travel and trade between the highlands and the western coast of central Baja California. This corridor was used in the mission period and continues as a significant route into modern times. This passageway, following a well-traveled dirt road and east-west arroyo system, was a logical choice for initiating archaeological explorations of prehistoric interactions and developments including an investigation of the La Angostura archaeological complex. Furthermore, this corridor is logistically expedient for archaeological work, a character that has also led to known and probable future site damage and illegal collecting.

## **Documentation procedures**

Rock art recording at La Angostura involved a multitude of techniques to insure accurate documentation. Panels are defined as naturally bounded rock faces or boulder sides containing single or discrete groups of images.

The images were documented through use of a tape measure and freehand drawings, either by a single individual or teams of two. Munsell color charts were employed to ascertain objective pigment and rock colors. This writer attempted to assist in ascertaining the configuration of obscure figures for those doing the drawings. Almost all panels were

photographed using color slide, digital and black-and-white methods. Each panel was mapped using a GPS instrument, although cliff locations made such determinations sometimes difficult. Clear plastic sheets or Mylar was placed over two complicated, large panels and taped onto the rock away from any pigment with masking tape. Permanent ink pens were used to trace the figures with different colors or symbols employed to depict color variations while minimizing the sheet's touching of figures. These sheets were later reduced to graphic form.

A detailed rock art recording sheet was used for each panel, noting various characteristics related to associations, production, superpositioning, deterioration, Munsell color, aspect, inclination, definition, etc. Post-documentation manipulation of rock art digital images was conducted on select panels to bring out obscure figures. These techniques included decorrelation stretch enhancement (Harman 2005) and Adobe Photoshop digital image enhancement (Mark and Billo 2002). Such techniques helped in defining images and image superpositioning.

### **The rock art/images**

Seventy-two distinct panels were defined during the inventory. The panels include 354 motifs or design element combinations, including both pictographs and petroglyphs. Three-fourths of the motifs are pictographs. An earnest attempt was made to objectify this classification using geometric or neutral terms where possible, but naturalistic appellations were applied to those motifs that appear unambiguous. Needless to say, it is reasonable to assume that the categories described herein are not likely those used by the maker.

The classificatory attempt was conducted to eliminate biases and to provide comparative categories. Some of the difficulty arose when dealing with complex or compound motifs, faded images, panel integration, and those figures or marks that were obscure or faded or where overlap was present. To a large extent, preexisting rock art and Southwest ceramic motif/element typologies were examined and used, including several Baja California works (cf. Bennett 1974; Buono 1983; Meighan and Pontoni 1978; Nissen 1982; Shepard 1965; Wallace and Holmlund 1986). In cases, the author designed the description, since no clear parallels could be found. Each panel was also rated subjectively as to its relative complexity: low, moderate and complex. Forty-four of the panels are relatively simple, with one or two small motifs; eight of the panels are complex, with a large painted area and sometimes large motifs, numerous motifs, multiple techniques, sometimes superpositioning, and multiple colors. Between these extremes are 20 panels. The average number of motifs per panel is five (standard deviation 6.6) with a minimum of one and a maximum of 44 motifs. To look at it another way, there are 13 panels with only one motif and seven, mostly in the eastern section, with 10 or more motifs.

Panels vary considerably in size, with an average length (total length of image placement, not rock face) of 79.52 cm (standard deviation 66.56 cm) with a maximum of 3 m and minimum of 12 cm. Panel widths average 44.3 cm (standard deviation 34.46 cm), with a maximum of 1.75 m and a minimum of 12 cm. The larger panels generally are toward the central part of the decorated cliff. The panels in the main face a northerly direction, and no panels were found with an aspect between 120° and 280°. Panel inclination averages 82.9° (standard deviation 11.9°) with a maximum of 98° and a minimum of 40°. In other words, with exceptions, these are relatively large vertical displays. In any case, these panels are generally quite visible to the visitor, no doubt more so when they were fresh. Nevertheless, smaller scratched images and some of the other petroglyph and pictograph elements are only visible up close, likely even when newly produced.

The rock images are divided into petroglyphs, including pecked, rubbed and scratched motifs, and pictographs, incorporating monochrome, bichrome and polychrome designs. Eleven of the panels (15%) contain petroglyphs only; 39 panels (54%) contain only pictographs, and 22 panels (31%) contain both types of imagery. Breaking out these divisions further, there are 20 panels with scratching (28%), 20 with rubbing (28%), 11 with pecking (15%), 30 with monochrome pictographs (42%), 22 with bichrome pictographs (31%), and eight (11%) with polychrome elements. Some panels contain a number of the above motif types. In a most general sense, the 354 motifs (the vast majority of which are geometric/abstract or poorly defined), are dominated by rectilinear figures with 197 (55%) but also counting 32 (9%) curvilinear; 38 (11%) a combination of rectilinear and curvilinear motifs; 11 (3%) representational, figurative or naturalistic; one a battered panel edge and another an enhanced vesicle in the volcanic face, and 74 (21%) that can be classified as smears, blobs, rubs or obtuse images. Petroglyphs generally occur toward one end of the site.

The cliff face or canvas is variable in color due to differential rock weathering, lithobiontic coating, etc., but generally it is gray to light brown or reddish brown. Pictograph colors in a standard Euroamerican scheme are various shades of red, orangish, white, black and yellow. Munsell color determinations include various reds, reddish brown, pink, reddish yellow, dark gray, pale yellow, and white. Many of the pictographs appear to have been painted with a brush, often with a straight border. Some are sloppier and could have been painted with the fingers. A few of the smears may have been applied by hand. Petroglyphs do not exhibit definable or appreciable rock coatings, and Munsell colors range from white to light gray and pinkish gray, with one a pale yellow.

Various shades of red (including infrequent orangish tones) are the dominant pictograph color with three-quarters of the panels containing such motifs. Hohenthal (2001:285, 318) remarked on the Native American attachment to the color red, a term equated with blood among the Paipai to the north. Less than half of the panels (31 or 43%) contain white figures. Eleven panels (15%) contain yellow images, and only four panels (6%) include black figures. Looking at color image distribution in a slightly different way, 23 panels (32%) contain only red figures, while white motifs occur singly on only four panels (6%), and yellow occurs singly on two panels (3%). Black does not occur without other colors being present. Red and white paint occurs on 26 panels (36%), red and yellow on seven panels (10%), yellow and white on two panels (3%), black and red on three panels (4%) and black and yellow come about only once together.

Dr. Alan Watchman of the Australian National University conducted an analysis of small pigment samples. Red pigment is hematite, with possibly some antarcticite. White paint is composed of serpiolite and polygorskite (clay minerals), quartz, and possibly alunite, an expanding clay found in volcanic rocks. Black pigment contains magnetite, hematite, maghemite, pyrite, siderite (an iron carbonate found in hydrothermal veins), and potassium feldspar. Yellow paint includes gypsum and possibly calcium aluminum oxide or copper iron phosphate/iron phosphate.

As to the images themselves, descriptions of each panel are generally detailed and ponderous to present in paragraph form. For instance, the pictographs at Panel 65 are classified as five blobs or smears, two splayed lines, a filled circle, an "X", double-tear drop with line, curved "Y", oval, and two nested wavy lines or an outlined "W". Pecked petroglyphs at Panel 10 are described as seven parallel vertical lines and a vertical sinuous line (Figure 3). Scratched petroglyphs on the same panel include 12 parallel vertical lines, and five parallel diagonal lines.





Figure 3. Panel 10, illustrating pecked, rubbed and scratched petroglyphs and battered edge. (The scale is 10 cm.)

There is in addition an area of rubbing and a battered edge.

Vertical and diagonal line motifs, cross-hatchings and zigzags along with 10 individual figures dominate the 41 scratched images. Only 10% of the scratched figures contain curvilinear elements, and no identified scratched naturalistic motifs are present. Blobs or amorphous areas, vertical lines, other line and band arrangements, zigzags, a handful of curvilinear geometric figures and a possible vulva figure dominate 39 rubbed images.

Considering all methods of execution, just over one-half of the panels (39, or 54%) contain line sequences, mostly vertical, less frequently diagonal and rarely horizontal with the ground. One-quarter of the panels (17) include zigzags. Eighteen percent of the panels (13) hold large, often horizontal bands or strips of designs, almost always in pictograph form (Figure 4). These compositions often form a complicated and dramatic appearance. Examples include horizontal bands of equally spaced lines (including one with connected ovals) somewhat crenulated in appearance (Panels 19, 20 and 27); horizontal and vertical wavy and straight serrated or diamond bands (Panel 32); horizontal serrated or zigzag band with loops, almost clover-leaf-like (Panel 33); a horizontal checkerboard band (Panel 35); a complex grid band (Panel 40); various serrated vertical bands, blocks or rectangular figures (Panel 49); two side-by-side hourglasses with diamond designs (Panel 34) and a diamond chain strip or band (Panel 68) (Figure 5). Some of these design belts are outlined with narrow banding. Panel 38 includes a large band with zigzags and triangles adjoined by a unique concentric ovals motif, a very large zigzag, vertical lines and other minor figures (Figure 4). Another group of striking figures are the bichrome and polychrome shield-like motifs (Panels 30, 55 and 61).

The hallmarks of the site are two panels. The largest panel (49) is dominated by 27 white motifs, with 17 red figures including a number of smears (Figure 6). Aside from the bands or block designs described above, there are various geometric figures such as rakes, grids, triangles and vertical and horizontal lines. This is the only panel with a clear anthropomorph, a four-digitated repainted figure with arms outstretched, a knobby knee, protruding hips and several dots around the ovate head. This figure may be phallic with an apparent baseline. The digitated figure is similar to those of the ancestral Yuman cultures displayed in sites further north (cf. Hedges 2002:34). Other possible realistic images on this panel are a three-toed foot (frog-foot; see Ewing 1985:14?) and a possible club, rattle, wand or baton (see Hyland 1997:346).

Other potential naturalistic figures include several possible vulvas, a skeletal or x-ray-like form (Panel 31), two herringbone or phytolith-like figures (Panels 31 and 59), and a possible bird track (Panel 32). Panels 40 and 42 hold what appear to be stylized long bones, almost like human tibias. Panel 52 is a striking contrast to the remainder of the site, holding Great Mural realistic figures including two zoomorphs, possibly deer, along with a problematical figure or two (Figure 7).

What is salient at this site is the diversity in presentation, for the most part within the geometric/abstract subject. Central Panel 49, with its 44 disparate motifs, stands out in pictographic diversity. Yet other panels range from simple unique figures to more elaborate presentations suggesting considerable artistic variation.

Thirty-five percent of the panels (25) exhibit some level of overlap or repainting (see Figure 6). Scratched petroglyphs overlap pecked, rubbed, red and red-and-white figures. Red-and-black and red were found to overlap scratched designs on the other hand. Rubbed figures superimpose red-and-white motifs, and pecking was found over one rubbed figure. There is one case of a black figure over a red figure. Red designs were found to cover white and various additional tones of red, including an orange-appearing motif. Red smears over other figures





Figure 4. Panels 37 and 38 (enhanced with DStretch). Length of upper motif is 114 cm.



Figure 5. Panel 68: small, isolated diamond chain and line. (Scale is 10 cm.)





Figure 6. Complex Panel 49: bichrome pictographs; note anthropomorph. (Scale is 10 cm.)

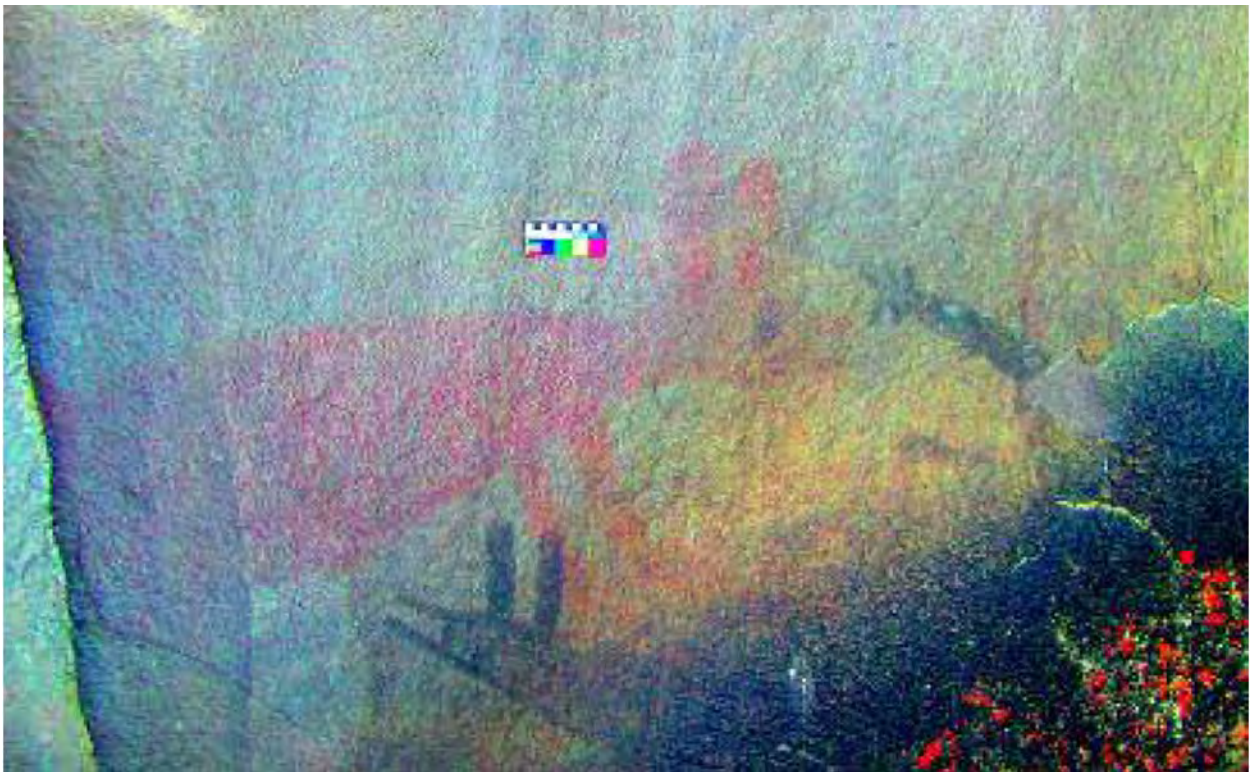


Figure 7. Panel 53 enhanced with DStretch, illustrating Great Mural style pictographs. (Scale is 10 cm.)

appear recurrently. White figures were found to superimpose red, white-and-red and white figures. Finally, yellow was found over a red motif, suggesting yellow as one of the more recent colors used (also see Hyland 1997:359). Scratching and rubbing generally appear to be contemporary and/or later offerings than pictographs. More elaborate panels, such as No. 49, show many cases of superpositioning as well as repainting (see Figure 6).

### **Style or tradition variations**

Generally speaking, all but one panel can be classified as Northern Baja California Abstract style or rock art tradition (cf. Ewing 1986a:87; Ritter 1991:24), a predominately painted approach in this locality. There is a rather clear differentiation between the dominant geometric/abstract assemblages north of the Sierra San Borja and the Great Mural art style to the south (see Ritter 1999 for further discussion). This is notwithstanding limited numbers of motifs of both styles transcending the approximate geographic barrier (cf. Crosby 1975:60, 154; Ewing 1986a; Ritter 1993, 1995a). La Angostura is clearly another example of a site near the border of this style change.

In the central region of the peninsula north of the Sierra San Borja, there are not only a seeming concentration of rock art sites but some variation from site to site in the Northern Baja California Abstract motif complex, style or tradition. This subregional difference is likely the result of factors beyond distinctions among the painters in their artistic skills. In a subjective comparison, some of this artistic variation can be briefly described, especially since this deviation has potential temporal, social and behavioral implications.

Two of the closest sites with significant numbers of motifs, predominately painted abstract/geometric figures, are Las Tinajitas and Montevideo, both east of La Angostura. These sites share with La Angostura their outward visibility. Las Tinajitas artists used considerably more black paint in their works and far less white compared to La Angostura. Red figures dominate at all sites. There are many more curvilinear figures such as concentric circles and polygon clusters at these neighboring sites than at La Angostura. Stick anthropomorphs and/or lizard figures occur occasionally and at least one deer or rabbit of Great Mural style is present. There are also a number of grids, rayed circles or arcs and straight and wavy line sequences and zigzags. Large bands or belts of designs are not obvious. Infrequent yellow figures, scratched images, and smears or blobs are present.

At Montevideo there are numerous similarities and focal differences (cf. Buono 1983; Schwartz 1975). Color use is comparable, but with black and yellow more common but still less frequent than red designs. There are many more shield-like figures at Montevideo than at La Angostura and a tendency for more curvilinear designs to occur, such as concentric circles and ovals/circles with lines and long line sequences. There are similarities in the band figures, including those displaying zigzag/triangular or serrated elements. More grids and rakes are apparent at Montevideo, and elements rare or lacking at La Angostura are found here, such as crosses and segmented chains, flower-like images, and small zoomorphs and apparent anthropomorphs.

Both sites have a checkerboard design, and at Montevideo there is a small painted hole in the rock face. Montevideo is also considerably more complex overall than La Angostura, with more figures and only a little scratching noted over the Great Mural-style bicolored and repainted anthropomorph.

Ewing's (1985, 1986a, 1986b, 1993) work in the general region, as at Yubay and the gulf

coast mountains between Bahía de los Ángeles and Bahía San Luis Gonzaga, provides additional comparative images, largely pictographic, from residential and nonresidential locales. In the many small shelters she has studied, there are considerable displays of concentric circles, nets, grids, straight and wavy line sequences, rakes, starbursts, dot patterns, zigzags, a spoked wheel, lizards, possible frog, small simple apparent anthropomorphs (including one with three digits on each foot), possible atlats, serrated/triangle bands (some polychrome) and occasional use of outlines or figure banding. There are also a vulva-like design and scattered *yonis* or naturalistic large vulva-like renditions in the granite country.

### **Painting and other artistic analogs**

The Indians of Baja California and immediate adjoining locales incorporated various artistic traditions in their culture as found among hunter-foragers worldwide. These diverse customs, especially with regard to painting, may hold clues to interpreting the La Angostura rock art. Nevertheless, considering ethnic, temporal and spatial disconnects, such practices must be viewed very cautiously in attempting explanations for the prehistoric images.

Alvarez de Williams (1973) and Mathes (2006) summarized the dress and adornment of peninsular Indians based on ethnohistoric accounts. Some of these accounts are briefly repeated here, along with other descriptions to provide recognition of strong and possibly long-standing artistic customs in the peninsula. Alvarez de Williams (1973:24) suggested that there may be a connection between the painting of leaders and *guamas* or shamans and rock art. There are also other accounts of design application worthy of consideration. It seems almost certain that all historic tribes in Baja California practiced body and face painting for various reasons beyond simple adornment, many of which eluded the earlier observers. For example, the initial observations by explorers found that among the Pericú they painted themselves white and black (or black during mortuary ceremonies, per Francisco de Ortega in 1634; Mathes 1992), as did the Kumeyaay on the opposite end of the peninsula (Father Antonio de la Ascención in 1602, as translated by Wagner 1929:194, 233). Pedro Porter y Casanate in 1644 (Mathes 1992:95) noted that the Indians were painted on their bodies in various colors. Shevlocke (1726:405) declared among these people that aside from scarification “others use a kind of paint, some besmearing only their faces and breasts with black and others are regularly painted over from the face to the navel with black, and from thence down to their feet with red.”

The nearby Guaycura (or Cora) included a male shaman painted in black all over and a female leader painted in many colors (Moriarty and Smith 1970:51, 56). Lucenilla in 1668 (Cavallero 1966:50) found the Indians of La Paz Bay striped with colors. The Cochimí also had a robust painting tradition. Missionary Jakob Baegert (1952:62) noted: “on certain occasions and on festive days, the Indians paint their entire bodies with red and yellow colors, which they obtain by burning stones.” On Cedros Island in 1540, Ulloa related that Indian men in a bellicose state “painted themselves with some little cakes of white earth they had in their hands, marking their legs, arms and breasts” (Wagner 1929:41). On the nearby mainland, Ulloa noted a man painted entirely in black and a separate group painted to the knees in black and white (Mathes 2006:53). Clavijero (1937:109-110) observed that during one Cochimí religious festival a youth, a principal in the ceremony, was painted with several colors so he would not be recognized.

The Dominican Luis Sales (1956:43-46, 48) observed that the peninsula Indian men during the harvest fiesta painted themselves in a thousand colors and the women were also painted. Older men during the fiesta for the dead were painted in black. Other individuals during



funeral gatherings were painted black and yellow. Women in fiesta dances were variously painted black, red-and-white or yellow.

Among the northern peninsula tribes, Hohenthal (2001) made numerous observations regarding painting practices. He noted that the Tipai (Kumeyaay) only face-painted using black, red and white (Hohenthal 2001:220-221). Men at war used black, including various facial bands. Women used white in the mourning ceremony, smeared over their hair in streaks. For the Paipai, Hohenthal (2001:318) stated that red, black, white and yellow were used in face painting. Designs included red and black around the eyes, three black lines on the chin and various black or red lines on the cheeks. Among the Kiliwa, Hohenthal (2001:329) noted painted wooden idols. An 1880 black-and-white photograph by Francis Parker of Kumeyaay people in Tecate dressed for a special occasion (used on the INAH Encuentro Internacional Balances y Perspectivas 2006 poster) shows dot and band patterns on torsos and arms of men, bands on faces of men and women, and triangular bands on one breechcloth worn by a man.

Gifford (1933:278) related Cocopa face painting practices, either for decoration, curative or prophylactic purposes, included patterns that could change daily. Everyone painted, and designs could consist of various bands and stripes on the face, also including concentric rings with brown dots near the corner of the mouth, and triangles, perpendicular crossed lines and crosses. Gifford (1933:299-300) noted that warriors painted faces all red, all black, half red and half black, etc., and that during the scalp dance the dancers were profusely painted with horizontal stripes. Kelly (1977:99) noted that Cocopa initiates painted their faces completely with white paint.

Face painting among the cross-gulf Comcáac (Seri), as discussed by Felger and Moser (1985:152-156), could be for decorative, curative, supernatural or protective purposes, or to influence nature. Designs varied among the sexes and age groups and among married and unmarried women, with similarities to the river Yuman groups noted. Designs were quite assorted, including representations of lightning, rain and clouds; flowers, leaves and waves; knives, snakes, shark's teeth and the moon as seen in dreams; and stylized representations of a wide array of subjects.

Among other decorative traits among the Comcáac are powerful designs painted on the carapace of a leatherback turtle as part of the leatherback fiesta and designs on a leatherback bone fetish used in the ceremony. These designs include zigzags, dots, circles of dots, vertical lines and other small and larger dots and line patterns (Felger and Moser 1985:45-46). A crown used in Seri dances and religiously significant due to its association with the Coyote (see Bowen and Moser 1970:169) has alternating red and blue stripes. Some Comcáac informants stated that this was only of decorative value. A similar Comcáac crown in the author's possession has other designs, including zigzags, diamonds, "X's" and dots and rectangular bands with a crossbar and bifurcated ends, motifs seen at La Angostura.

Sales (1956:45) noted that during northern peninsula mortuary ceremonies, the religious leaders produce "some tablets painted with a thousand ridiculous figures which represent the most able men they have had, the best *curanderos* (quack doctors), the bravest, the best runners and the strongest." Other tablets with holes were also produced for ceremonial use. Mathes (1974:100-105) discussed a case of idolatry among the Cochimí where a white painted *tabla* and painted small wooden child figure (face painted black) are thought to be religious accessories involved in a fall funerary ceremony. Aschmann (1959:116) commented that the Jesuit priest Hostell, who served at the southern peninsula Mission Dolores del Sur, noted that the designs on a tablet had a mnemonic function, enabling the shamans to reproduce long rituals, and bore a

name, *tijeicha*, which is translated as “it can speak.” Clavijero (1937:112-113) discussed little boards in his discourse on *guamas* or shamans or “charlatans.” During the training of select young children to be religious leaders, or shamans if you will, they take them to secret places and

especially to make on certain little boards some strange figures which they pretend were copies of those which (as they said) the visiting Spirit had left them on departing. These little boards were their books, in which they professed to read the nature of illness, the remedies suitable for them, the future changes of atmosphere, and even the destiny of men.”

Historic-period painted *tablas* from northern Baja California were discussed by Davis (1968), Hedges (1973, including the same *tablas*), Meigs (1974), Cassiano (1988) and Ortega Esquinca (1998). These *tablas* are painted in red and black with some white pigment. Designs, some overpainted, include, variously, circles, zigzags, short oblique bands, sawtooth design with dots, concentric circles, triangles in rows and other configurations, central four-pointed rectangular or “butterfly” figures much like a spool, wavy lines, a grid, X-shaped configuration, hatching and diamond chain, among others. Ritter’s (1974a) report on a remotely cached undated *tabla* and “spirit stick” from the Bahía de la Concepción region of the peninsula revealed a *tabla* with white and yellow paint remnants forming a grid-like or checkerboard figure. Even as far north as the southern San Joaquin Valley of Alta California, there is a report of a prehistoric or protohistoric board with ends painted with a red with black transverse stripe on the inner side, possibly a grave marker (Gifford and Schenck 1926:109).

Hedges discussed the correlations between Kumeyaay rock art and ceramic designs. He concluded that “on a design-element level, Kumeyaay pottery, like ceramic wares from many cultural contexts, exhibits considerable overlap with rock art” (Hedges 1998:57). He particularly called attention to the La Rumorosa style of the northern peninsula, with simple and digitate anthropomorphs, lizards, sunbursts, various grid forms and numerous non-figurative elements, painted in red, black, yellow and white. Pottery motifs include circles, concentric circles, bordered crosses, wavy lines and dots, zigzag lines, drips, and smears, and figures like those found in La Rumorosa rock art and to some extent in the rock art of La Angostura. Gifford’s (1933:272, 330) description and illustrations of Cocopa pottery also reveal serrated designs, circles, circles and cross, circle and dot and dot designs, nested curves, parallel line sequences, and curved line patterns. Hohenthal (2001:172) discussed Tipai pottery painted with zigzag lines.

Among the Kumeyaay, Cocopa and Paipai, there is also a sand painting tradition generally depicting the world symbolically, including representational and geometric images (see Gifford and Lowie 1928:342; Spier 1923:319-320; Waterman 1910:350-351). Among the Kumeyaay, this was related to boys’ initiation. Waterman (1910:329) noted that Kumeyaay women’s gambling dice contain diamond and triangular decorations.

Hohenthal (2001:263) recounted that a Tipai mourning ceremony included a gourd rattle painted with reddish brown stripes. Meigs (1939:51,54) reported that in the Kiliwa mourning ceremony, not only do the participants paint their faces and bodies but also a wooden effigy figure used by the shaman is painted red and black.

This sample of various ethnohistoric descriptions of designs used points out the broad-scale use of many geometric patterns and some figural images on the people and items that participated in or were employed in both ritual and non-ritual contexts. This dichotomy is not as clear-cut as it would seem, especially when employing a Western perspective.

## Archaeological associations and dating

As part of the rock image analysis at La Angostura, other archaeological signatures were examined. A surface survey was undertaken along the arroyo in the vicinity of the escarpment imprinted with images. Additionally, two small rock shelters immediately below cliff images were test-excavated.

An exotic quartzite nodule was found wedged in a crack near Panels 2-7, and another was similarly wedged in a crack by Panel 13. On the arroyo edge near the rupestrian art was a broken basalt metate with red ochre staining and a small basalt palette with similar staining, perhaps from the painters. Further discoveries along the arroyo near the rock art complex revealed diffuse, primarily domestic refuse, including flaked stone, milling tools, a square foundation, shells, biface fragments, and brown ware pottery. Near the painted cliff portion on the rock face top were several stacked stone enclosures of unknown function, possibly including hunting blinds and vision/prayer seats. The rock shelters yielded general residential trash such as shellfish remains; broken faunal bone, including deer, rabbit and fish; a small obsidian Manuela Contracting Stem projectile point, cores and flakes, several very small spire-lopped *Olivella* beads and a rhyolitic mano fragment with red ochre staining, suggesting contemporaneity with some rock image production.

Pollen analysis from the main rock shelter sediments undertaken by Susan Smith of Northern Arizona University shows that pollen of the Chenopodiaceae family and *Amaranthus* genus was nearly twice as high percentage-wise as the off-site sample, suggesting processing or storage/use of these important Cochimí food plants (see Aschmann 1959:86-87) in the shelter.

As stated in a previous paper (Ritter and Aceves 2006), the arrow point and a sample of obsidian flakes are derived from obsidian from Isla Ángel de la Guarda, with relatively small hydration readings (3.8 and 3.9 microns). Shellfish remains are Pacific species for the most part. The deposit yielded a measured radiocarbon age of 2790 ±40 B.P. (Beta-195010) that may apply to the age of some of the rock art. Artifacts and dating methods seemingly place the rock shelter deposit and likely the art at least in the late Archaic period, probably extending into the late prehistoric Comondú period.

On a broader scale, dating La Angostura and the Northern Baja California Abstract style, tradition or motif complex remains problematical. The radiocarbon and obsidian hydration determinations on both La Angostura and the relatively close Montevideo site (see Ritter 1997) suggest pre-contact use of these sites going back some 3,000 years or so. Atlatl-like figures at nearby Yubay with similar-style pictographs as reported by Ewing (1985:8-9) could indicate possible pre-bow-and-arrow times, perhaps 500-1,500 years ago or older. The Great Mural art figure could be Comondú complex in age or thousands of years older (see Watchman et al. 2002). There is clear evidence at La Angostura of extended, if not intermittent, use judging from the number of figures, re-painting, overpainting and petroglyph overlap of paintings or vice-versa and rubs generally over painted figures.

## Discussion

The preponderance of evidence suggests the rock images at La Angostura served more than artistic expression. As Layton (1991:4) pointed out, art across cultural boundaries can be approached in terms of aesthetics and as communication distinguished by a particularly apt use of images. Certainly one cannot deny the creative achievements of the artists at La Angostura,



and it is quite apparent in the execution and placement of many of the images that they were made to be seen and valued by various tribesmen and visitors/intruders. But there are also intimate figural configurations on the rock that are not so visible: the scratching, pecking, rubbing and smearing. Exploring the potential meaning of the rock art beyond its mere artistic merit is a worthy archaeological goal. One of the steps to do this is to see what others have had to say about the denotation of art in the general region and observe how La Angostura images bear on these interpretations/hypotheses. This will assist in generating further explanations or more refined hypotheses.

As related by Taçon (1999:40) in other world locations, we can look at regional rock art sites as mostly richly adorned locations, often with elaborate imagery and symbols and a sense of aesthetics that reflect the unique identities and experiences of their makers. One can perhaps visualize or hypothesize that these places were symbolically charged and integrated with larger systems of land use. Certainly in the central peninsula beyond the better-known and better-studied Great Mural area, there is a range of rock art site complexity, cultural and environmental association, placement and content. But there are some general patterns within the region that seem to hold.

As declared in an earlier paper (Ritter and Aceves 2006), much of the present literature for the regional rock art sites place the images within the ritual/sacred realm, proposed variously as associated with visions and dreams, mythology and mythic beings, human and resource fertility, death and rebirth, creation, initiation, shamanism, solstice and equinox celebrations, continuance of societal order, and group maintenance. Not all sites have one interpretation, nor do all posited interpretations necessary fall to one site. Some of these interpretations are quite speculative.

Beyond art for art's sake and issues of temporal and spatial placement, hypotheses regarding La Angostura rock art function fall within at least seven domains, not necessarily mutually exclusive. These include portrayals related to (1) religious formulator/shaman or shaman-influenced vision questing/dreaming; (2) puberty ritual and human fertility/reproduction; (3) religious ceremonialism related to death, ancestors and myth; (4) world renewal/harvest ceremonialism and hunting magic; (5) identity/territorial/ownership marking; (6) warfare/conflict-related ritual; and (7) images associated with cosmology and astronomical phenomena. The interpretive path and "testing" follows ethnographic and ethnohistoric documentation within the peninsula and beyond regarding hunters-gatherers or band-like societies, principles of neuropsychology and archaeological context. Certainly it is valuable to consider lines of thought by other rock art researchers among similar hunting-gathering peoples with rupestrian and other art displays. There is no final word on what the La Angostura rock art means. However, there are informed propositions at hand.

Guenther (1999:426) noted that a "systematic, cross-cultural look at hunter-gatherer religions reveals that underneath all of the contextual and cultural diversity, there indeed is a substrate of ritual, cosmological, and symbolic commonality. This is fundamentally shamanic (and sometimes totemistic)." Furthermore, "hunter-gatherers regard nature as pervasively animated with moral, mystical, and mythical significance." It seems likely that at least some, if not all of La Angostura's rock images fit within the natural world and ideological bounds.

### *Visions and dreams and conflict*

The interpretation of rock art for hunter-gatherers (and even other cultural developmental

levels) that has undergone the most reflection in recent years is an expanded neuropsychological model, a model that sees at least some of the graphic presentations (phosphenes, geometric figures, entoptics or elementary hallucinatory images) in a ritual or ceremonial context and most often associated with the religious formulator, shaman, vision seekers and/or dreamer seeking or affirming his or her power (cf. Quinlan 2001; Whitley 2000; with other references therein). The merits of this interpretation and its foundations, including the ethnographic record, have been much debated (cf. Bahn 2001, Hedges 2001; Helvenston and Bahn 2005; Lewis-Williams 2001, 2002; Quinlan 2000, 2001; Whitley 2000).

The model deals with rock art that results from a trance state, altered state of consciousness, dream or some measure of cortical stimulation by an individual, shaman or other, with resulting entoptic imagery subsequently graphically displayed, either by the shaman, by someone commissioned by the shaman or by the dreamer/individual artist or some combination thereof. Such imagery can be conditioned by talent and other individual or group variables, but holds to certain proposed, much-debated universal principles. The entoptic phenomena are projected as generated in various geometric forms, the most common of which are listed as variations on grids (including lattice and expanding hexagon patterns); nested catenary curves; rows of lines; spirals/concentric circles; zigzags (both angular or undulating); dots, flecks or dash patterns; meandering lines (see Ritter and Ritter 1995:29-30) and filigrees, one or more with elaborations and construals as the altered state intensifies (see Layton 2000; Lewis-Williams 2002:339-341; and Dronfield's 1996:389 cautions on using such figures without testing against nonsubjectively derived arts).

There are a number of principles of perception that have been proposed as applying to this model, including superpositioning, replication, fragmentation, integration, juxtaposition, duplication, and rotation in different stages, depending on the psychological level of the trans-state or dream/vision. There is a proposed increasing level of iconic composition if the stages advance in their strength. Both a large sample of rock art images and "best-fit evaluation across the shape categories" may be prerequisites for "confirmation" (Dronfield 1996:387). The rock art of La Angostura is seemingly adequate to examine a measure of fit, recognizing that there is danger in accepting the premise discussed above so as not to fall into the realm of "dreamy speculation" as noted by Helvenston and Bahn (2005:44).

La Angostura is represented by a preponderance of *possible* entoptic, hallucinatory or dream-time figures (petroglyph and pictograph) including many zigzags (and elaborated triangular and diamond shapes); grids and checkerboards; rare concentric ovals; dots and sequences of lines, but no nested catenary curves and filigree-like images. Not all of the most common images need to occur in a vision or series of visions or dreams. Regional rock art sites do contain examples of these missing motifs, along with some of those just listed. Various principles of perception are also present, including fragmentation (as in ladder-like forms), superpositioning, integration (including pictographs with petroglyphs), juxtapositioning, duplication (including repainting), and rotation. These are most common, as can be seen on the most complex panels at La Angostura. Some of the figures have elaborations and combinations, and there are the occasional figurative forms in association. Information, nevertheless, has been presented that shows that the presumed secular or mundane decorative arts of historic Indians of the greater peninsular area include a number of these geometric or abstract motifs or elements as well, but not in terms of La Angostura's variation, complexity, composition, integration and manipulation.

Morphy (2001:444) noted that geometric forms among some Australian hunter-gatherers

encode social distinctions and represent relations between topographic features. They also allude to aspects of the form of the ancestral beings themselves. These geometric forms, which require external keys for their interpretation, are an integral part of the system for transmitting esoteric knowledge.

Munn (1986:32-33) commented that graphic, abstract-appearing but denotative designs of the Australian Walbiri are strong, powerful, important totemic images derived from dreams. These observations have some possible application to La Angostura, especially considering its key placement in the landscape.

Some researchers do not follow the interpretation that many rock art sites in the west are associated with vision quest/dream/hallucinatory/shamanic relations (cf. Quinlan and Woody 2003; Ricks 1996), noting the domestic association of much of the rock art. There is no doubt that La Angostura includes both rupestrian images and domestic/workshop residue of unclear chronological association. It must be remembered that La Angostura is a distinctive location of narrowing canyon walls, among the first location with easy access and suitable surfaces to be encountered when traveling from the western coast. This was also an appropriate locale for small group domestic activities. A shaman or other individual on a vision/dream/power quest or the like quite easily could have entered an altered state of consciousness at the site, or visited the site soon after such a state or dream (or been commissioned to visit the site by a religious formulator). This ritual practice could straightforwardly and logically be completed as a prelude to group visitation and/or subsequent to departure, a time for spiritual intervention and/or recognition (e.g., Miller 1983:78).

It should be recognized that alterations of sensory and image processes can be private or public and, as among the Australian aborigines, can include the open production of images (cf. Price-Williams and Hughes 1994:6-7). At La Angostura, various signs or symbols may have been visible to an individual in close proximity to the cliff, but their meanings may have been entrusted to only certain individuals or segments of a society. Symbols often held different meanings for different divisions of a society. Even among individuals as a whole, there could be more than one meaning, and meanings could change over time (cf. Faulstich 1992:20; Frost et al. 1992). Thus, the association of a domestic unit or units with the art would not be inappropriate.

### *Conflict and hunting magic*

The suggestion that the La Angostura images somehow correlate with warfare or group hostilities has no apparent foundation. For instance, there are no perceptible weapons, impaled humans, or combat scenes (see Hyland 1997:361). This does not preclude, of course, the incorporation of warfare magic or the like into the past act of manufacturing various esoteric images whose meanings escape the researcher.

The two zoomorphic images of Great Mural style could correlate with hunting magic as suggested by the author for similar images to the south (Ritter 1974b). But such an interpretation has not well stood the test of time except in a most general sense (see Hyland 1997:361). Nevertheless, Guenther (1999:428) stated in his generalizations regarding shamanism among hunters-gatherers, "the shaman's focus upon hunting, the game animals, and their spirits, as well as his possession by, or his control of, animal familiars, all link him ritually and symbolically to the hunt." Thus, a harvest-like festival at this location with resulting imagery related to the pervasive importance of deer (whether dietary, mythological, prestige-based or otherwise) to the local inhabitants (see Ritter 1986 for a discussion of ethnohistoric references) cannot be



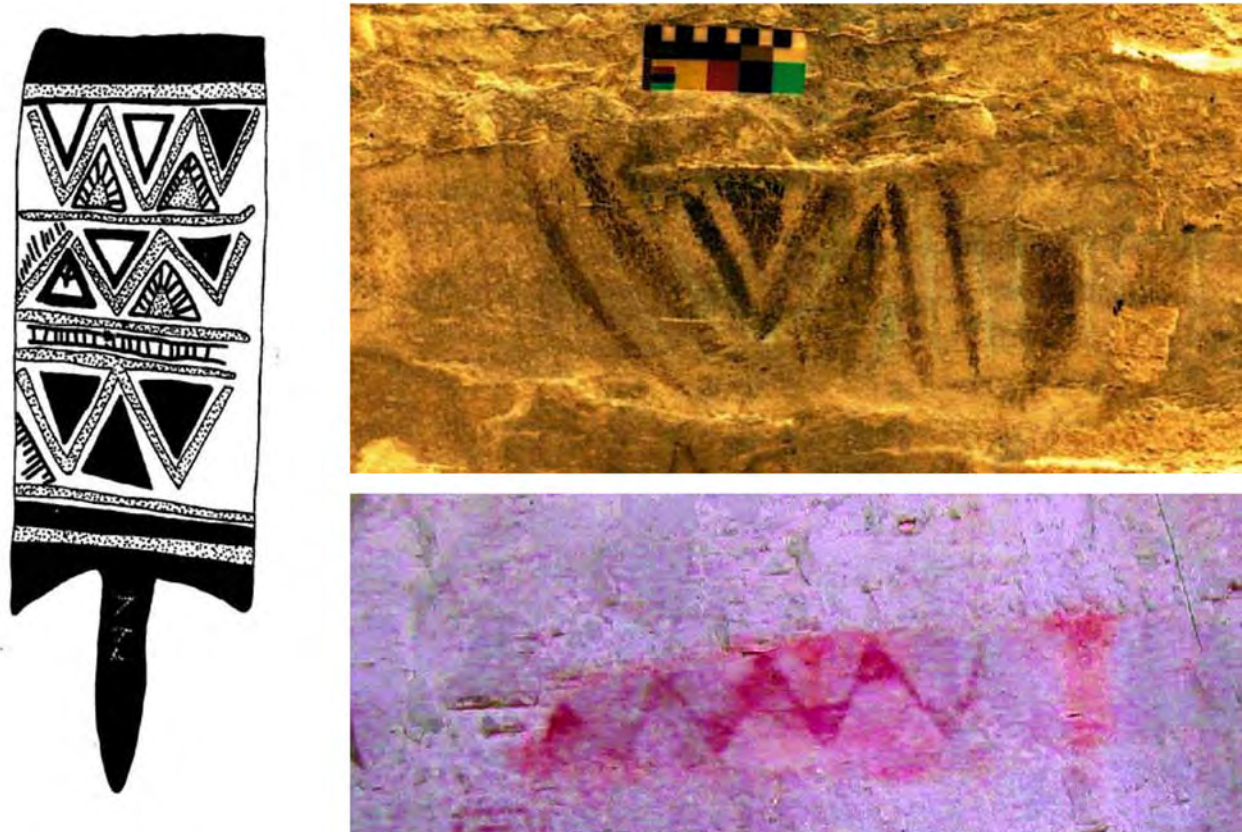


Figure 8. Comparison of *table* designs (see Hedges 1973) with La Angostura motifs.

discounted.

### *Tablas, images, myth and death*

One of the strongest parallels in artistic expression between La Angostura and the ethnohistoric/ethnographic record can be found in the elaborate rock art band motifs and those figures painted on the documented *tablas* or painted boards from locations to the north in the peninsula and beyond (see Cassiano 1988; Davis 1968; Hedges 1973; Ortega 1998; Ritter 1974a; and possibly Gifford and Schenk 1926) (Figures 8-10). This association was not lost on Buono (1983), Garvin (1978:25-27), King (1978:158-159), and Barranco Torres and Ortega Esquinca (1989a, 1989b) in their studies of regional Northern Baja California Abstract sites. Furthermore, some of the rectangular images at La Angostura could be depictions of *tablas* (as perhaps in Panels 38 and 49). Hyland (1997:34-357) discussed a ceremonial wooden tablet or *tabla* as one of a number of integral elements or paraphernalia of shamans of the “peninsula ceremonial complex” that he related to lineage-based ancestor veneration. Hyland (1997:356) postulated that because of the long-standing peninsula ceremonial complex as defined from ethnographic, ethnohistoric and archaeological evidence, the central peninsular figurative Great Mural art represents the result of (1) shamanic trance and spirit possession, with communications with ancestors and myth figures; (2) metaphors for death and dying; and (3) ancestor and myth figure impersonation. Hyland (1997:359-360) discussed associated grids and geometric figures as entoptic representations resulting from shamanic trance and resulting painting.

Laylander (2005) seriously questioned aspects of Hyland’s conclusions, but consented



Figure 9. Comparison of *table* designs (see Hedges 1973) with La Angostura motif.

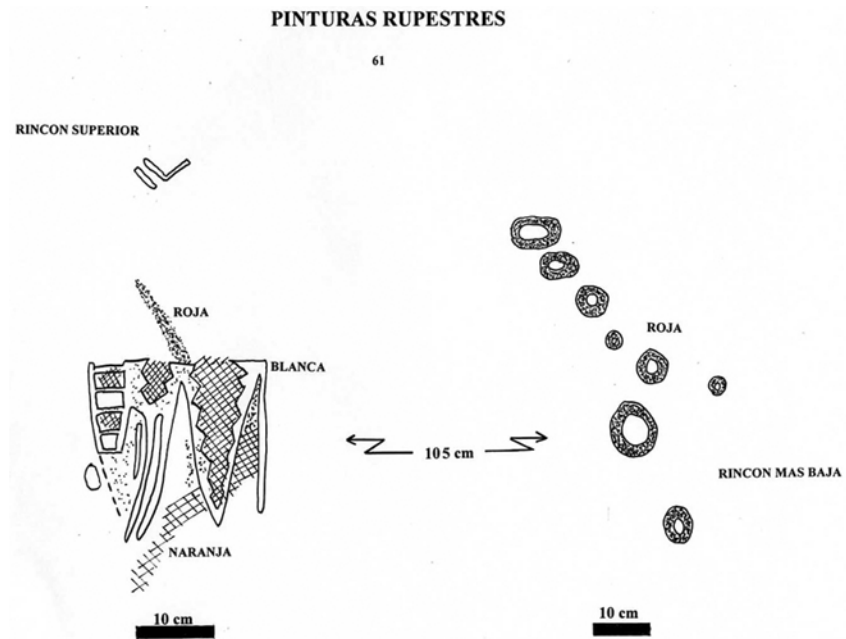
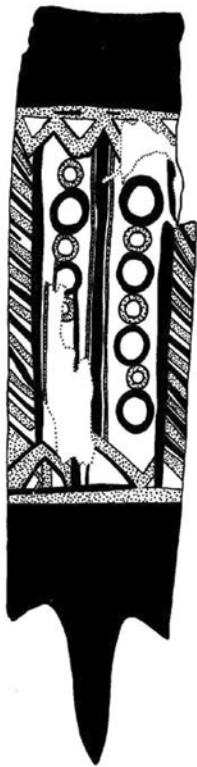


Figure 10. Comparison of *table* designs (see Hedges 1973) with La Angostura motifs.



## PINTURAS RUPESTRES

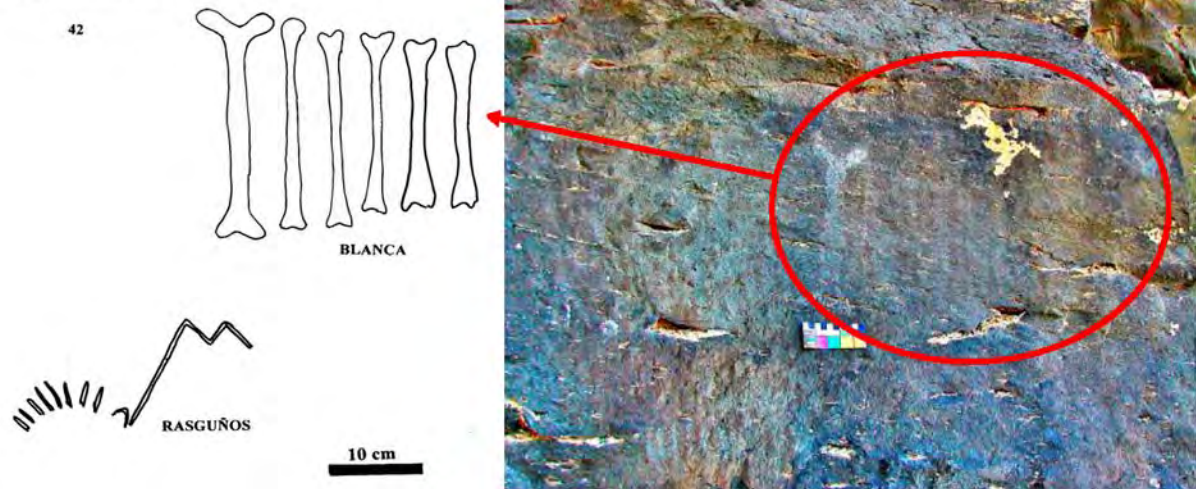


Figure 11. Possible human bone images.

(2005:175) that Sales's (1956:45) one account of *tabla* use "does suggest an ongoing commemoration of dead predecessors." Still, as has been previously stated in this document, *tablas* have been shown to have other ritual functions, including use as a mnemonic aid in shaman training/indoctrination in curing practices, weather forecasting, foretelling the future, use in ritual-related incantations and, among the Kiliwa, as ritual paraphernalia used by young men in the *ñiwéy* mourning ceremony (Meigs 1939:57-60; 1974; also see Mathes 1974). Ortega Esquinca (1998:83) saw their use among the Kiliwa as a means to secure social cohesion, a representation of their cosmivision. It is appealing, if not too biased, to note human bone and skeletal-like motifs present on several panels (No. 31 and 42 and possibly 29 and 40) (Figures 11 and 12). What is lacking, apart from one digitate anthropomorph, are what Hyland (1997:362-363) proposed are "the representations of ancestors and common mythological ancestors (and/or shamans impersonating these figures)," as prevalent in human form in the Great Mural area. One such Great Mural-style anthropomorph is present at nearby Montevideo. While no burials were encountered in the residential deposits, the cemetery area could be in a separate, special location as found in the south-central peninsula cordillera and gulf coast in a number of locations (see Hyland 1997:279-280; Massey and Osborne 1961; Ritter 1979, 1994a, 1995b, 1997).

At La Angostura, aspects of both the art and the associations may indicate the presence of a shaman, healer, religious formulator, dreamer or the like. The central human figure on Panel 49 may be the representation of a shaman's spirit helper (cf. Pearson 2002:73). Levi (1978:51) noted the importance of crystal magic and shamanic power among the California Yumans (also see Hohenthal 2001:252-253). Whitley et al. (1999:221) noted that quartz is almost universally associated with shamans. At Sally's Rockshelter in the Mojave Desert, quartz rocks were found by Whitley et al. in cracks adjoining rock art and were thought to be offerings. Quartz was found to have been used in the manufacture of the engravings, and its association with vision quests, supernatural power and shaman or shaman-controlled artists was hypothesized, in part based on its piezoelectric properties. Unmodified quartzite nodules nestled next to petroglyph panels at La Angostura may be associated with shamanic activity directly or indirectly as in the postulated situation cited above.

Another possible interpretive thread for ritual association of the art is the frequency of rubbing and presence of some pecking and edge battering. Hann (2001) noted that the rhythmic

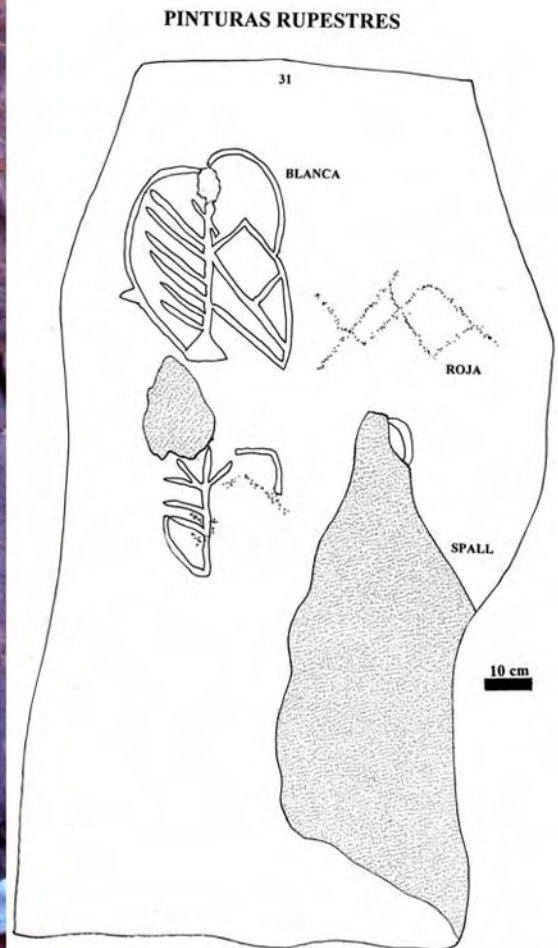
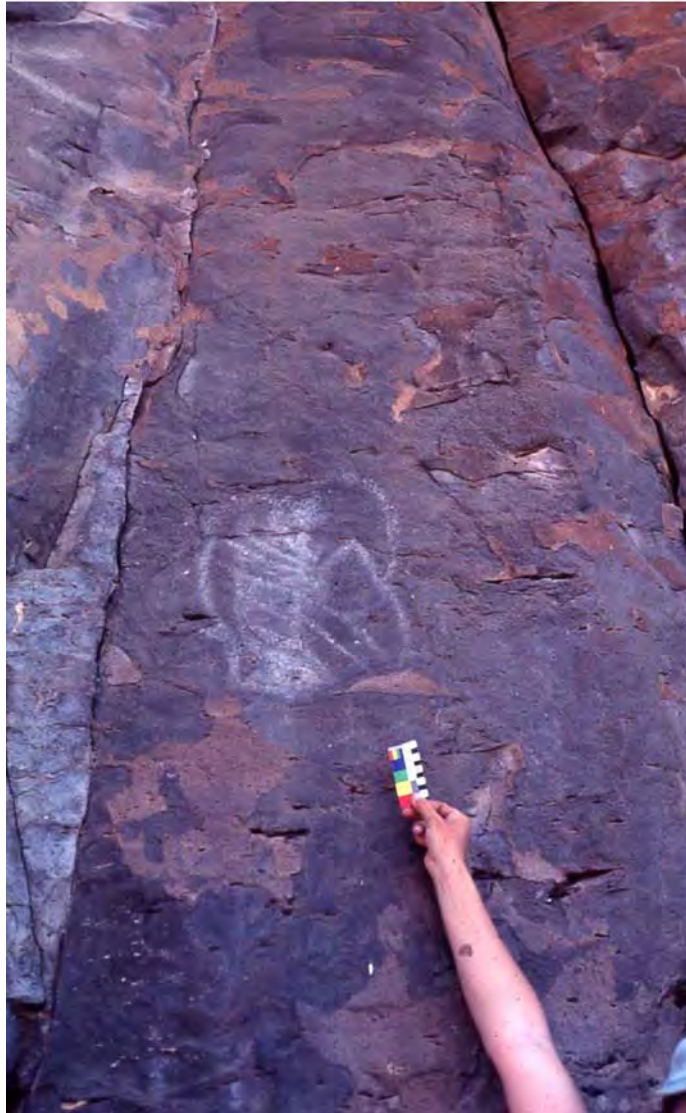


Figure 12. Panel 31, possible skeletal image. (Scale is 10 cm.)

and repetitive patterning of sound and movement is used in many cultures as an element of rituals designed to induce a trance state (also see Ouzman 1998:38; Waller 2002). It is perhaps a stretch to suggest that such images as La Angostura might explain this part of the rock art as opposed to concluding that the Indians were merely testing the rock with a hammer stone for petroglyph manufacture suitability or rubbing and pecking for another reason. Furthermore, dints in the rock could be phosphores, and the rubbing a preparation of the “veil” between two worlds (Waller 2002). Scratching, on the other hand, may well have been a method of identifying with and acquiring (or even negating) some of the associated image’s power and potency (cf. Bettinger and Baumhoff 1982 regarding Numic expansion in the Great Basin and scratched images, and Ritter’s 1994b discussion). Additionally, it is perhaps too fanciful to state that the act of repainting, superimposing figures on top of other figures, and rubbing, scratching and smearing paint on figures and panels may have been sympathetic attempts at possessing and elaborating powerful, instructional images and panels.

### *Landscape, identity, territoriality*

This author and Patricia Aceves-Calderón in 2006 clarified the well-known assumption that the central peninsula landscape was composed variously of economic and settlement locations and presumed ritual or religious centers with rock art that were interconnected by corridors or pathways of movement and transportation. These corridors, such as passes by La Angostura, are apparently long-standing and sometimes obvious in their passageways of least resistance through the mountains and hills. It is likely, as Shepard (1996:32) postulated among the Luiseño to the north, that “rock art sites emerge not as ‘islands’ of sacred place in an otherwise secular landscape, but part of a fabric in which abstract and pragmatic landscape meanings are woven closely together.”

It is very likely that the La Angostura rock art site with vast vistas was related to the natural topography beyond the presence of cliff faces suitable for rock art placement, a location reused and revisited over a poorly defined period of time. There are a modest number of images, but nonetheless this can be hypothesized as a potent location that has the appearance and character of aesthetic and symbolic infusion. Franklin (2007:94-95) found that certain motifs in parts of Australia (including geometric figures) extended across group boundaries and may have facilitated meetings between local groups and traveling groups for gift exchange and rituals associated with certain myths. Thus, as possible at La Angostura, a shared understanding of motif form provided a means for negotiating the rights and obligations of travelers along certain pathways. In this part of Baja California, most interaction appears to have been on an east-west basis, as along the Rosarito-San Francisco de Borja Ádac-Bahía de los Ángeles corridor, and far less so to the south in the more difficult mountainous terrain. Still, some interaction toward the south is evident in the few Great Mural motifs present.

Quinlan and Woody (2003:382) suggested that one motivation for Great Basin rock art production may have been to socialize the new landscape people encountered. The use of La Angostura to establish a social identity and mark an important economic, even mythological passageway cannot be ruled out.

### *Fertility relationships*

A handful of motifs appear to represent vulviforms, including circular or oval with central slash motifs and possibly the modified vesicle. Few such images are known from the various regional sites discussed previously. To the north in Alta California and the Great Basin, Whitley (1998:21) saw vulviforms as representing female genitalia, created by male shamans in sorcery. Overall, the possible vulviform motifs at La Angostura are not nearly as distinct as those vulviforms reported to the south in the Great Mural and Bahía de la Concepción region (see Ritter 1994c:22-23). It is also probable that the central anthropomorph on Panel 49 displays an enlarged phallus (Figure 6). Such displays could have fertility/reproduction implications. But overall, not much confidence can be placed on fertility interpretations, including female initiation association. Thus, fertility/sorcery interpretations must remain suspect.

### *Archaeoastronomical reflections*

This aspect of rock art with respect to the study site is only briefly considered here. Certainly more work could be accomplished in this regard by performing observations at key



times, looking for any interplay of light and shadow and key dates, such as summer solstice. When one looks at the orientation and aspect of the various panels, there is clearly tremendous variability. Ewing and Robin (1987:122) found a possible correlation of a number of regional rock art sites with the solstice (and perhaps equinoxes as well) and by further extrapolation, shamans and male and female fertility. More definitive work in this regard is needed.

### **Concluding remarks**

There has been considerable discourse offered herein based on various signs, signatures, context, placement and threads of information to arrive at a functional model of rock image production at La Angostura. It must be reemphasized that there is no best and final answer, but there are hints of understanding, utilizing the rationalistic approach embraced. The method taken in this work is still exploratory.

Hyland (1997) discussed in some detail the “Peninsular Ceremonial Complex” as expressed in historic and ethnohistoric accounts. This proposed pervasive complex in various permutations would appear to have some time depth, and an associated suite of Northern Baja California Abstract rock art figures might just be related to this complex. Franklin (2007:94) noted that there is an Australian cosmology and belief system (Dreamtime) that appears to have lasted for thousands of years. In this sense the direct historical approach to the rock art of La Angostura has likely merit.

Also, Hyland (1997:363-365) noted that major rock art sites in the Great Mural area (and to a lesser extent here) required an investment of time and labor conceivably corresponding with an occasion of seasonal aggregation or gathering, as during mourning, harvest and/or initiation ceremonies. Such use at La Angostura, if it occurred at all, was likely periodic. Hyland (1997:365) suggested that the neighboring Great Mural art related strongly to “an overarching ancestor-based religion in which the presence and active participation of the dead in the rituals fundamental to social reproduction were necessary.” Laylander’s (2005) critique has value, and it might be better to think of La Angostura as a site or ceremonial complex that in part served in a group commemoration or honoring of the dead, recent or otherwise. The similarity of many motifs and motif complexes with mortuary-related *tabla* paintings seems more than coincidental. But this location is hypothesized as serving other functions as well, just as *tablas* and their mystical symbolism supplied a number of purposes in historic times. For instance, spring was a season of chenopod abundance in some areas (cf. Aschmann 1959:86-87), perhaps a time of harvest at La Angostura based on pollen evidence (but also see Mathes 1974 regarding a fall harvest ceremony). This could have been a time of fiesta and ceremony, a time of teaching, invocation, evocation, ritual and curing when various plants (and perhaps certain animals) were abundant or more readily available (e.g., rabbits, deer, etc.), when puberty ritual and group interchange and exchange could occur without subsistence risks. A literalist look at some of the La Angostura rock images suggests phytomorphs (Panel 66) and deer (Panel 53).

Direct and indirect involvement of a religious formulator in the various ceremonies and instruction could have involved trance-state and dream/vision-seeking and resultant imagery from memory placed on the sacred canvases; at least that is postulated based on the many recurring images. Some of these panels estimated as 500-3,000 years old or so are more secluded and small, perhaps associated with an individual’s vision or dream, instruction or veneration.

The canvases or rock faces in cases were heavily utilized, and in circumstances initial images were augmented with other rock markings such as scratching, paint smearing, rubbing

and pecking, possibly for power acquisition or sympathetic application. Many of the panels are easily visible, with bold and at one time vivid images. There is no discounting the aesthetic qualities of the images, qualities no doubt not lost on the Indians.

Likely instructional if not inspirational to visitors, some of these banners and figures may have served as emblems to negotiate identity, to perhaps establish symbolic relationships with visiting groups. Furthermore, these figures also may have served knowingly or coincidentally to mark a north-south boundary and a travel/exchange corridor. There are also slight variations in figure and panel composition and technique at La Angostura compared to those sites to the east and north previously discussed, variations that seem more than individualistic. As such, La Angostura may be related to groups predominately aligned with the western side of the central peninsula.

It would appear that this rupestrian art location was a place of religious/spiritual importance to past peoples in their use and recognition of the greater cultural landscape, perhaps a periodic scene for public exhibition of instructional messages of an esoteric/mystical order and/or displaying dream or visionary experiences related to mythical beings or spirit helpers, historic/mythological/ancestral beings or events, and tied, in cases, to trance-state imagery. Some of the symbols in this regard may relate to designs on known shaman's religious *tablas* or boards with records meant to serve mnemonic purposes and used as symbols of power connected with death observances (cf. Hedges 1973; King 1978:158-159; Mathes 1974). It is also interesting that the site is interior, possibly related to general locations of seasonal gathering, camping and ceremony when interior resources were of sufficient quantity to bring groups together. This would have been a time for first-fruit and puberty ceremonies and initiation.

Enigmatic and esoteric may be labels appropriate to the rock images at La Angostura. But it appears unambiguous that these images represent a deep-rooted artistic achievement with many purposes to many generations and local groups. Hypotheses that seem reasonable are related to individualistic and group welfare, to native exegesis, communication, identity, achievement, celebration of life and death, fecundity and solidarity.

The religious formulators in various roles and/or dreamer-vision seeker seem paramount in much of the art's creation. The marks and paintings on the rocks were likely an integral part of the cultural landscape and passageways through that terrain and the ideological, sociopolitical and economic life of these past peoples.

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