

4-1-2015

Cosmographies in Stone: Polly Schaafsma's Contributions to Southwestern Archaeology

Robert W. Preucel

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr>

Recommended Citation

Preucel, Robert W.. "Cosmographies in Stone: Polly Schaafsma's Contributions to Southwestern Archaeology." *New Mexico Historical Review* 90, 2 (2015). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr/vol90/iss2/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in *New Mexico Historical Review* by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu, lsloane@salud.unm.edu, sarahrk@unm.edu.

Cosmographies in Stone

Polly Schaafsma's Contributions to Southwestern Archaeology



ROBERT W. PREUCEL

Polly Dix Schaafsma is one of the world's foremost authorities on rock art. She has almost singlehandedly professionalized the field of Southwestern rock art studies and, in the process, made valuable contributions to archaeological method and theory. She has defined regional rock art styles, developed working chronologies, and explored complex issues of interpretation. More specifically she has expanded our understanding of such central topics as katchina ceremonialism, Navajo (Diné) cosmology, Pueblo Indian warfare, and the nature of Southwest-Mesoamerica interaction. Her distinguished career provides a continuous thread that weaves together the field's changing theoretical interests from culture history, to culture process, to ideology and power, to ethics and stewardship.

Rock Art Systematics

Schaafsma pioneered the development of rock art systematics—the study of the patterned variability of rock art across space, time, and form. Prior to her work, scholars widely regarded Southwestern rock art as idiosyncratic and difficult, if not impossible, to date and interpret. Schaafsma challenged this notion by developing a scientific recording methodology and by investigating chronological and geographical patterning in rock art styles, first at the local level and then on a regional scale. Indeed, she treated rock art in much the same way that A. V.

Robert Preucel is Director of the Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology and Professor of Anthropology at Brown University. His research centers on the social changes within Southwestern Native communities during the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 and its immediate aftermath.

Kidder (1924) treated ceramics in constructing his famous synthesis of Southwestern cultural areas.

In 1961 Alfred Dittert, the director of the Navajo Reservoir project, invited Schaafsma to examine the rock art in the area impacted by a planned dam and reservoir. This area, in the canyon country of northwest New Mexico and southwestern Colorado, is one of the richest archaeological districts in the Southwest and contains both ancestral Pueblo and Navajo occupations. The archaeological surveys and excavations conducted here between 1956 and 1962 stand as one of the largest mitigation projects ever conducted in the United States prior to the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966.

Schaafsma conducted her rock art survey in the summer of 1961. At this time, there was no standard recording methodology beyond simple photography. She developed her own documentation approach, which involved photographing the pictographs on cloudy days when the rock art was most visible. She then used a string grid of half-foot squares as a guide for drawing the images on graph paper. As an aid in copying, many of the images were chalked in outline, and in some cases, tracings were made with plastic sheets taped to the stone's surface. Schaafsma took detailed field notes on technique, weathering and patination, and site situation. She collected samples of pigments for analysis. In the laboratory, she duplicated rock paintings in pastels and created permanent India ink drawings of petroglyphs.

Schaafsma's stylistic approach involved a typological analysis, a consideration of chronology and cultural affiliation, and concluded with preliminary interpretations. Her typological analysis typically focused on the human figure, a major theme in the art, and then broke it down into specific stylistic elements. She sought to identify types that might be useful in comparative work in other areas. She carefully used associational dating; for example, she concluded that since there was a strong correlation in space between Pueblo pictographs and the Rosa Phase settlement, there must also be a correlation in time. This suggested that the Pueblo pictographs date to the Rosa Phase (AD 700–900).

In 1966 Dittert invited Schaafsma to conduct a similar study of rock art in the Cochiti Reservoir District. She accepted his offer and began work in the fall of that year (Schaafsma 1975). She recorded seventeen petroglyph sites using the basic methodology she devised in her Navajo Reservoir work. She found that the Cochiti Reservoir petroglyphs were representative of a general PIV/PV Rio Grande rock art style. They were broadly similar to the rock art in the Galisteo Basin to the east, in the Chama Valley and Jemez Mountains to the north and west, and along the Rio Grande Valley from Velarde and Pilar in the north to San Marcial, south of Socorro. She speculated that the more developed rock art in the Jornada Branch of the Mogollon to the south inspired the Rio Grande

style. She noted a stylistic continuity between Rio Grande and Zuni and Hopi before such relationships had been explored fully.

In 1968 Stephen Williams, Director of the Peabody Museum at Harvard University, contacted John Campbell at the University of New Mexico to invite specialists to conduct a study of Donald Scott's collection of rock art photographs. Scott had been director of the Peabody Museum and had compiled a large collection of photographs from around the world. Campbell immediately thought of Schaafsma for the project. After examining the collection, Schaafsma decided to focus on the richest sources: the rock art of eastern Utah, including the photographs of the Claflin-Emerson Expedition (1927–1931). Her subsequent publication, *The Rock Art of Utah* (Schaafsma 1971), is notable for its systematic discussion of the style concept and its characterization of the Fremont and Puebloan Virgin Kayenta cultures.

Schaafsma published *Rock Art in New Mexico* in 1972, the first major synthesis of New Mexican rock art. This study, sponsored by the New Mexico State Planning office and modeled on her Utah publication, established the broad geographical regions that are still in use today (Schaafsma 1972). Several important synthetic studies quickly followed. In *Indian Rock Art of the Southwest*, she positioned rock art as a valuable tool for identifying cultural relationships, patterns of communication, evidence of trade, as well as other types of cultural contact. She also noted that “changes in style and content of rock art are often indications of the adoption of new ideologies and religious practices which in turn reflect other shifts within the cultural matrix” (Schaafsma 1980:3). By 1992, when she published the second edition of her classic New Mexico synthesis (Schaafsma 1992), the field had grown exponentially. As a testament to this growth, her bibliography grew from seventy-four entries in the first edition to more than two hundred and fifty entries in the second.

Interpretive Challenges

The study of rock art is at once a fascinating and a frustrating enterprise. Rock art is immediately recognizable as the product of past human actors dynamically representing their own impressions and experiences as a means of engaging with their world. However, the precise meanings underlying these rock art practices are notoriously fugitive. Rock art sites are often the product of multiple interactions by different groups over time, which complicates the issue and creates disparate meanings. As Schaafsma (2013:1) explains, “Rock art presents a kaleidoscope of meanings that shift through time depending upon the viewer.”

Schaafsma (1985:256) advocates the cautious use of ethnographic analogy. Ethnographic analogy involves inferring the use or meaning of an ancient site

or feature, such as rock art, based on the use of similar sites or features by historically documented or contemporary peoples. The assumption that present behaviors are similar to past behaviors underlies the principle of cultural continuity. Many scholars have critiqued this approach on the grounds that it locks past peoples into a contemporary framework and thus denies cultural change. For example archaeologist Steadman Upham (1987) argued that the demographic shifts due to disease and the effects of Spanish colonization make the modern Pueblo peoples a poor analogy for ancestral Puebloan sites.

Schaafsma is well aware of this critique and the idea that the “ethnographic present” cannot adequately account for the variety of rock art produced in the past. However, she is also cognizant that this situation does not mean the ethnographic record should be rejected. Some experts argue that processual archaeology prematurely abandoned ethnographic analogy in its zeal to pursue culture process. Contemporary Native American societies are not identical with their prehistoric antecedents; yet continuities in beliefs and practices do exist. For Schaafsma analogies should be seen as working hypotheses, useful only insofar as they survive testing against data and stimulate new thinking. From this point of view, ethnographic analogy is not “tyrannical” (Upham 1987), but only a first approximation in an ongoing interpretive process that is always subject to change in the face of additional information.

Schaafsma (2013) interprets rock art as an ethical project that requires careful consideration of different constituencies—past actors, descendant communities, archaeologists, and the general public. Within each of those semiotic domains—for example, past actors—a range of meanings likely existed depending upon gender, age, and position in society. Interpretation also requires consideration of a contemporary political economy. For example commercial organizations or contemporary artists routinely appropriate rock art. This usage can be construed as disparaging the original culture and descendant communities, while subjecting traditional imagery to trivialization (Schaafsma 2013:2). Such commercial and artistic uses raise questions about ownership of rock art imagery and the circumstances to consider rock art as part of a global heritage.

Pueblo Katchinas

One of Schaafsma’s most important contributions is her study of the origins of katchina ceremonialism. In 1974 she and her husband, Curtis Schaafsma, published a pathbreaking article marshalling the available archaeological evidence on the topic (Schaafsma and Schaafsma 1974). They identified the Rio Grande rock art style as marking the first unequivocal evidence

for katchina ceremonialism. Rock art and kiva murals of the Pueblo IV period provide strong evidence, although there is earlier evidence in black and white and glaze ware ceramics, and ceremonial pipes. They argued two key points: first, a distinct break in the rock art preceded the Rio Grande style both in the Rio Grande Valley and the Colorado Plateau; and secondly, stylistic continuities existed between the Rio Grande style and the Jornada style from the Jornada division of the Mogollon. The Rio Grande style, they concluded, with its Jornada iconographic elements “may be viewed as an archaeological document of a new religion and ceremonial pattern in the Pueblo world. In addition to the katchina cult, the presence of which is evident in the numerous masks, the subject matter suggests that other institutions and ideographic systems also may have been either newly introduced or elaborated at this time” (Schaafsma and Schaafsma 1974:540–541).

In 1984 Charles Adams began archaeological research at Homolovi III, an ancestral Hopi village in northern Arizona. In the course of this work, Adams challenged Schaafsma’s Rio Grande hypothesis and argued for the local development of katchina ceremonialism. According to him, the katchina cult emerged on the Colorado Plateau in the fourteenth century and spread east to the Rio Grande Valley. He also asserted that katchina ceremonialism can only be definitively identified in the archaeological record by means of masks and masked figures (Adams 1991:17). His thesis also linked representations on ceramics, rock art, and kiva murals with architectural and chronological evidence. At the same time, he documented the rise of large, plaza-oriented pueblos due to the emigration of different social groups. He concluded that katchina ceremonialism was a solution to the problem of developing social systems capable of integrating diverse populations (Adams 1991, 1994).

To further the debate and incorporate new perspectives, Schaafsma and Ellen Bradbury organized a three day seminar entitled “World View and Ritual: Katchinas in the Pueblo World” at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture in Santa Fe in 1991. The seminar brought together scholars from various subdisciplines to share their specialized knowledge of the multifaceted meanings of katchinas. The resulting volume, *Kachinas in the Pueblo World*, stands as a major contribution to the field (Schaafsma 1994). It featured new statements on the origins of the katchina concept (Charles Adams, Polly Schaafsma), evidence for katchinas in multiple media (Kelley Ann Hays, Patricia Vivian, Marc Thompson, Jane Young), a review of katchinas in the ethnohistoric period (Curtis Schaafsma), discussions of modern Pueblo spirituality (Fred Eggan, Ed Ladd), contemporary interpretations of katchinas (Dennis Tedlock, Barton Wright), and a consideration of katchina carvings as art objects (J. J. Brody).

Schaafsma enhanced her work on katchina origins by tracing out its linkages

to Mesoamerican cultures and belief systems. She postulated that the *katsina* complex is “a northern peripheral manifestation of a Mesoamerican constellation of ideas in the realm of Tlaloc” (Schaafsma 1999:165). She revealed a shared conceptual system that linked the Southwest and Mesoamerica, which consisted of shared metaphors emphasizing rainmaking. These metaphors include a sacred geography involving mountains, caves, lakes and springs associated with supernaturals and an underworld cosmology. This landscape ideology links to a complex ideology of water containers, sacred bundles, and masked effigies that integrate the living and the dead through acts of reciprocity and sacrifice required to maintain harmony and a cosmic balance.

Navajo Holy People

Schaafsma’s studies of Navajo ritual practice during the formative Gobernador Period (1630–1800) in the Dinéétah directly relate to her work on *katsina* ceremonialism. Prior to her work, archaeologists interpreted this period as a time of rapid Navajo acculturation. Due to the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, some Pueblo peoples sought refuge from Spanish rule among the Navajos (Kidder 1913, 1920). Scholars believed that during this time Navajos adopted many Pueblo cultural traits such as architecture, pottery making, weaving, clans, matrilineal descent, and matrilocal residence (Hester 1962:89, Brugge 1983).

Schaafsma has greatly strengthened this argument by incorporating rock art as an independent line of evidence. She identifies *ye’i* figures as the diagnostic features of Navajo rock art (Schaafsma 1963, 1966, 1975). Male *ye’i* were generally depicted with round heads, straight bodies, decorative kilts, and a variety of headgear ranging from feathered, pointed caps, and horns, while female figures were shown with rectangular heads, mantas, and feathered headgear. Both genders were represented holding staffs, dance wands, and corn stalks. She argues that these religious subjects were likely made by Navajo religious leaders inspired by the Pueblo tradition of wall and altar painting, as well as by ceremonial rock art representations (Schaafsma 1975:32). Significantly, Schaafsma attributes some of these rock paintings to the presence of Pueblo refugees fleeing the Spaniards to take up residence alongside their Navajo neighbors (Schaafsma 1975:40).

Schaafsma also integrates contemporary Native perspectives on rock art into her work wherever possible. In 2008 she collaborated with Will Tsosie, a field archaeologist and ethnographer and a member of the Navajo Nation, to develop a more nuanced understanding of the origins and meanings of Navajo rock art (Schaafsma and Tsosie 2009). Together, they drew attention to the enduring meaning of rock art, not primarily as records of historical events, but rather as religious accounts that maintain health and harmony in the here and now.

They directly attributed the absence of knowledge about Diné'tah and its rock art among some Navajo today to the forced removal of Navajos from Arizona to New Mexico by the U.S. government in 1864.

Pueblo Warfare

Additionally, Schaafsma has significantly contributed to the study of Pueblo warfare. Anthropologists have historically relegated warfare to the margins of the profession, perhaps a legacy of Ruth Benedict's (1934) characterization of Pueblo personality and culture as "Apollonian," a society of moderation. Only in the late twentieth century has it been taken up as a research topic (for example LeBlanc 1999, Wilcox and Haas 1994), though most of these studies have approached Pueblo warfare from a functional point of view. LeBlanc (1999), for example, argued that the marked deterioration of the climate caused by the Little Ice Age, which led to competition over scarce resources, underlay the intense Late Period (1250–1540) warfare in the Southwest.

Schaafsma offers a complimentary perspective highlighting the social meanings and ritual significance of warfare. In her classic article on katchina ceremonialism, she proposed that the introduction of the katchina cult may have been accompanied by other institutions, such as a warrior's society (Schaafsma and Schaafsma 1974:542). Numerous shields and shield bearers in Rio Grande style rock art may represent this society. She wrote, "The seemingly disparate categories of fertility, curing, hunting, and war are not discrete or independent of one another, but the lines between them are blurred and overlapping, and they embody a vocabulary of symbols and a system of relationships that define a conceptual universe that is distinctly Puebloan" (Schaafsma 2000:156). Pueblo warfare "was not an insular activity involved solely with defense or revenge, but was integrated with the primary business of maintaining cosmic balance and ultimately Pueblo well-being" (Schaafsma 2000:156).

Pottery Mound

Only a handful of archaeological sites have produced kiva murals, and one of the most important of these sites is Pottery Mound in central New Mexico. In 1954 Frank Hibben established an archaeological field school at the site for the University of New Mexico. He worked there for eight years training numerous students. Schaafsma (then Polly Dix) was a member of the field school in 1957. In the course of his excavations, he discovered more than eight hundred murals and mural fragments in seventeen kivas. Hibben published a popular book on the murals (Hibben 1975) and several articles, but unfortunately never prepared

a synthetic account of his discoveries.

Fifty years later Schaafsma completed Hibben's task. She explained that she was inspired "to do something" by several of the "veteran students" of the Pottery Mound project (Schaafsma 2007b:xv). She invited a group of distinguished scholars (some of whom had worked with Hibben) to participate in a School of American Research seminar and a Society for American Archaeology session. They reviewed the history of research, maps, and excavation profiles, as well as reexamined the architecture, the kiva murals, rock art, textiles, faunal remains, and ceramics from a contemporary perspective. The result of this research was Schaafsma's landmark volume, *New Perspectives on Pottery Mound Pueblo* (Schaafsma 2007a).

Schaafsma's contribution was to compare the Pottery Mound murals and Rio Grande rock art to reveal their implications for regional interaction (Schaafsma 2007b). Since neither art form is an isolated phenomenon, Schaafsma considered them together within a common artistic tradition and a broader ideological sphere. She observed that katchina masks never appear as an isolated element in kiva art (Schaafsma 2007b:143), and also noted that the Hand, Somaikoli, and Shalako katchinas, which are frequently depicted in contemporary rock art, are absent in the mural paintings. These findings strongly implied significant ceremonial differences in the two ritual contexts.

Conclusions

Schaafsma's contributions are fundamental to rock studies and our understanding of Southwestern peoples past and present. She has established a scientific approach to rock art and revealed discrete patterns in the distribution of particular rock art styles at different time periods and in different places. Although not a language (since there is no syntax or grammar), rock art nonetheless draws upon a shared sign system and can reveal aspects of ideology, power, religion, and spirituality that otherwise would be difficult to study. Rock art is thus not secondary to the study of past societies, rather it is central. Rock art is both a medium for people's self-representation and a social practice that stimulates the circulation of culture.

Schaafsma has greatly expanded our understanding of the interactions between Southwestern cultures and those of Northern Mesoamerica. Her work reveals deep ideological connections with respect to warrior cults and rain ceremonialism. Additionally, she has made a compelling case for the southern origins of katchina ceremonialism so characteristic of contemporary Pueblo society. Finally, she has demonstrated that Navajo rock art borrowed from Pueblo iconography, and developed it in new, but distinctly Navajo, ways. Her commit-

ment to elucidating the specificities of particular Southwestern peoples and, at the same time, her insistence on the interconnectedness of Southwestern cultures and societies is an enduring legacy.

Bibliography

- Adams, E. Charles. 1991. *The Origins and Development of the Pueblo Katsina Cult*. University of Arizona Press, Tucson.
- . 1994. The Katsina Cult: A Western Pueblo Perspective. In *Kachinas in the Pueblo World*, edited by Polly Schaafsma, pp. 35–46. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque.
- Benedict, Ruth. 1934. *Patterns of Culture*. Houghton Mifflin, New York.
- Brugge, David. 1983. Navajo Prehistory and History to 1850. In *Handbook of North American Indians, vol. 10: The Southwest*, edited by Alfonso Ortiz, pp. 489–501. Smithsonian Institution: Washington D.C.
- Hester, James J. 1962. *Early Navajo Migrations and Acculturation in the Southwest*. Museum of New Mexico Papers in Anthropology No. 6. Museum of New Mexico Press, Santa Fe.
- Hibben, Frank C. 1975. *Kiva Art of the Anasazi at Pottery Mound, New Mexico*. KC Publications, Las Vegas, NV.
- Kidder, A. V. 1913. Some Undescribed Ruins of the Historic Period from the Upper San Juan. *American Journal of Archaeology* 2(17):88–90.
- . 1920. Ruins of the Historic Period in the Upper San Juan Valley, New Mexico. *American Anthropologist* 22:322–329.
- . 1924. *An Introduction to Southwestern Archaeology*. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.
- Le Blanc, Steven A. 1999. *Prehistoric Warfare in the American Southwest*. University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City.
- Schaafsma, Polly. 1963. *Rock Art in the Navajo Reservoir District*. Papers in Anthropology No. 7. Museum of New Mexico Press, Santa Fe.
- . 1971. *The Rock Art of Utah: A Study from the Donald Scott Collection, Peabody Museum, Harvard University*. Papers of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, vol. 65. Cambridge, MA.
- . 1972. *Rock Art in New Mexico*. University of New Mexico Press,

Albuquerque.

- 1975. *Rock Art in the Cochiti Reservoir District*. Papers in Anthropology No. 16. Museum of New Mexico Press, Santa Fe.
- 1980. *Indian Rock Art of the Southwest*. School of American Research, Santa Fe, and University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque.
- 1985. Form, Content, and Function: Theory and Method in North American Rock Art Studies. *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory* 8:237–277.
- 1994. The Prehistoric Kachina Cult and Its Origins as Suggested by Southwestern Rock Art. In *Kachinas in the Pueblo World*, edited by Polly Schaafsma, pp. 121–137. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque.
- , ed. 1994. *Kachinas in the Pueblo World*. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque.
- 1999. Tlalocs, Kachinas, Sacred Bundles and related Symbolism in the Southwest and Mesoamerica. In *The Casas Grandes World*, edited by Curtis F. Schaafsma and Carroll L. Riley, pp. 164–192. University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City.
- 2000. *Warrior, Shield, and Star: Imagery and Ideology of Pueblo Warfare*. Western Edge Press, Santa Fe, NM.
- 2001. Quetzalcoatl and the Horned and Feathered Serpent of the Southwest. In *The Road to Aztlan: Art from a Mythic Homeland*, edited by Virginia M. Fields and Victor Zamudio-Taylor, pp. 138–149. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles.
- , ed. 2007. *New Perspectives on Pottery Mound*. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque.
- 2010. Landscape and Painted Walls: Images in Place. In *Painting the Cosmos: Metaphor and Worldview in Images from the Southwest Pueblos and Mexico*, edited by Kelley Hays-Gilpin and Polly Schaafsma, pp. 19–40. Museum of Northern Arizona Bulletin 67, Museum of Northern Arizona, Flagstaff.
- 2013. *Images and Power: Rock Art and Ethics*. Springer, New York.
- Schaafsma, Polly and Keith Davis. 1988. *Marks in Place: Contemporary Responses to Rock Art*. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque.
- Schaafsma, Polly and David Muench. 1995. *Images in Stone*. Brown Trout Pub-

lishers, Inc., San Francisco.

- Schaafsma, Polly, and Curtis F. Schaafsma. 1974. Evidence for the Origins of the Pueblo Katchina Cult as Suggested by Southwestern Rock Art. *American Antiquity* 39 (4):535–545.
- Schaafsma, Polly and William B. Tsosie. 2009. Xeroxed on Stone: Times of Origin and the Navajo Holy People in Canyon Landscapes. In *Landscapes of Origin in the Americas: Creation Narratives Linking Ancient Places and Present Communities*, edited by Jessica Joyce Christie, pp. 15–31. University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa.
- Upham, Steadman. 1987. The Tyranny of Ethnographic Analogy in Southwestern Archaeology. In *Coasts, Plains and Deserts: Essays in Honor of Reynold J. Ruppé*, edited by Sylvia Gaines and G. A. Clark, pp. 265–279. Arizona State University, Anthropological Research Paper No. 38. Tempe.
- Wilcox, David R. and Jonathan Haas. 1994. The Scream of the Butterfly: Competition and Conflict in the Prehistoric Southwest. In *Themes in Southwest Prehistory*, edited by George J. Gumerman, pp. 211–238. School of American Research, Santa Fe, NM.

