TRACE: UNRAVELING THE LANDSCAPE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN INDIGENOUS PETROGLYPHS AND MOUND SITES IN THE SOUTHEAST

by

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ABSTRACT

AMELIA G. ZYTKA. Trace: Unraveling the Landscape Connections Between Indigenous Petroglyph and Mound Sites in the Southeast
(Under the direction of DR. SHIMON GIBSON)

This study examines the visual, contextual, and geographic connections between mounds and petroglyph sites created by Native people in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia during the Mississippian period (c. 800–1600). By integrating the study of petroglyphs with Indigenous burial and civic mounds, this research offers a comprehensive analysis of how these sites functioned within ancient Native life and culture. Employing interdisciplinary methods, including geographic mapping, visual analysis, and contextual interpretation, the project situates petroglyph and mound sites within the broader context of Indigenous art history and landscape use. This interconnected approach enhances the appreciation and understanding of these sites, revealing their cultural and geographic significance while contributing to ongoing scholarship in rock art studies in the American Southeast.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES vi
PREFACE viii
INTRODUCTION 1
PART I: SETTING THE STAGE 5
Relative Age and Dating Methods 10
The Peopling of the Americas 15
PART II: THE IMPORTANCE OF LANDSCAPE 22
An Introduction to Landscape 22
Landscape and the Importance of Visibility 29
List of Native Historic Sites 32
Mountain Region 32
Piedmont Region 47
Coastal Region 52
PART III: A SACRED DISCUSSION 63
A Sacred Introduction 63
Part IV: Interpreting Symbols 70
Symbols and More 74
Circular Motifs 78
The Vulva 84
Spiral Motifs 89
Animals and Human Figures 97
Four Sided or Pointed Petroglyphs 104
Discussion and Concluding Remarks 109
Bibliography 113

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Excavation of Judacullah Rock 12
Figure 2: Petroglyph at Hagood Mill Petroglyph Site 14
Figure 3: Petroglyph carved out of metal 14
Figure 4: Visual Timeline 18
Figure 5: Map of North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia 24
Figure 6: Judacullah Rock 26
Figure 7: Ghost Forest at Harkers Island 28
Figure 8: Nacoochee Mound 36
Figure 9: Drawing of Track Rock Gap by James Mooney 38
Figure 10: Drawing of Track Rock Gap by Johannes Loubser 38
Figure 11: Color-coded image of Judacullah Rock 41
Figure 12: Three petroglyph figures at Hagood Mill Petroglyph Site 46
Figure 13: Chippewa man standing next to a tent 46
Figure 14: Reconstructed round house at Town Creek Indian Mound 49
Figure 15: Reconstructed platform mound at Town Creek Indian Mound 50
Figure 16: Huntersville, North Carolina petroglyphs 52
Figure 17: Harkers Island shell mound 55
Figure 18: Map of Cape Lookout National Seashore 57
Figure 19: Pottery sherds 59
Figure 20: Image of Bear Butte State Park 67
Figure 21: Craig Style gorget 74
Figure 22: Charcoal remains at petroglyph site 76
Figure 23: Nighttime archaeology at Parkers Landing Petroglyph Site 77
Figure 24: Circle and dot petroglyphs at Looking Glass Rock 80
Figure 25: Circle and dot petroglyphs in Pickens County, South Carolina 80
Figure 26: Interactive map 81
Figure 27: Pottery sherd from Harkers Island 82
Figure 28: Pottery sherds showing corn cob impressions 83
Figure 29: Handrawn vulva petroglyph 84
Figure 30: Old-woman-who-never-dies effigy sculpture 86
Figure 31: Copperhead snake pattern 88
Figure 32: Hiwassee River rocks 90
Figure 33: Shoal Creek petroglyphs 91
Figure 34: Detail of Judacullah Rock petroglyphs 92
Figure 35: Archival photograph of Miles Parker at Judacullah Rock 94
Figure 36: Photograph of a Brasstown Rock 98
Figure 37: Drawing of a Brasstown Rock 98
Figure 38: Parkers Landing river otter petroglyph 99
Figure 39: Parkers Landing underwater panther petroglyph 100
Figure 40: Hagood Mill petroglyph figures 101
Figure 41: Petroglyph of Judacullah and Birdman 102
Figure 42: Drawing of petroglyph by Scott Ashcraft 103
Figure 43: Four sided petroglyph at Hagood Mill 105
Figure 45: Detail of Judacullah Rock 107

Figure 46: Example of pareidolia 107
Figure 47: Drawn in example of pareidolia 108

PREFACE

When I first began to research petroglyphs and Indigenous mound sites I did not realize how difficult it would be to find primary source material to analyze. Information regarding locations of many of these sites is vague, which made pursuing leads a unique challenge. This problem was compounded by the fact that the scholarly world of petroglyph researchers is quite small in the Eastern part of the US and even smaller in the Carolinas and Georgia. Six months into my graduate research I had not made a significant amount of progress, until an accidental discovery in an unexpected place bolstered my belief in serendipity and inspired me to press on.

When I began working in the museum world, it was always my goal to spend my career in a collections closet by myself surrounded by historical artifacts. Much to my surprise, I accomplished this goal early and one afternoon I found myself in this exact situation at the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum on Harkers Island, North Carolina. I pulled out, yet another box of what I thought contained a collection of minerals, but as I picked up a piece to take a closer look, I realized they were not minerals at all - they were sherds of Native pottery found on Harkers Island. I picked each one up carefully in my hands and examined the gentle curves and ran my fingers over the decorative impressions in the fired clay of a once-whole vessel. I did not realize it fully at the time, but these sherds would play a significant interpretive role in my future research. Just as importantly they bolstered my enthusiasm and gave me the inspiration to restart my research.

INTRODUCTION

Encoded into stone long ago are trace markings from America's ancient past. Chiseled and painted onto rock faces, ancestors of today's Native people portrayed the world from their point of view. Ancient symbols, extinct animals, hunting and other pictorial scenes echo the visual history of the past, created by the early inhabitants of America. Enshrouded by the passage of time, these symbols and figures create a visual narrative, in the form of rock art. Rock art refers to anything from petroglyphs, pictographs and hieroglyphics to modern-day graffiti. The scope of this project focuses primarily on rock art found on rock faces in the Carolinas and Georgia and relates them within the wider context of the regional landscape.

Due to age, accessibility issues, degradation and lack of cultural context, rock art is notoriously difficult to study.[1] The southeastern region of North America has examples of rock art pointing to a rich artistic history, but Southeastern rock art is not as well studied as other rock art locations such as the American Southwest, or the cave systems in Altamira, Spain. These locations have the benefits of being either in a dry, arid climate, or exist in caves, which offers additional protection from the elements and people. In contrast, the Carolinas and Georgia suffer from the effects of a humid climate. Extreme weather events shape and reshape the landscape leading to erosion and loss of culturally significant sites. While the condition of southeastern rock art makes the sites difficult to study, this does not diminish their contribution as part of the pictorial

[1] Steven R Ahler, et al. *The Rock Art of Eastern North America.* Edited by Carol Diaz-Granados and James R. Duncan, Tuscaloosa; The University of Alabama Press, 2004. 3-4, 260-262; Tommy Charles, *Discovering South Carolina's Rock Art* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010), 13–15.

language of Indigenous people who lived in this area in the past as well as those still living here today.

As I narrowed my research focus to the South Appalachian Mississippian Cultural Tradition beginning at approximately 800 AD,[2] I realized early that focusing on petroglyphs alone would not be sufficient. While many studies exist (which will be discussed in the following section) on rock art found in the eastern part of North America, with several focused studies in the American Southeast, the majority of the literature lacks direct connections between the petroglyph sites and other aspects of Native material culture, most notably mound complexes and their landscape.[3] In contrast, scholarly literature focused solely on mound sites is more comprehensive and integrates more fully into the complexity of ancient Native life, language and culture. By comparison, researchers of rock art studies often depend on highly elaborate and overly-complicated interpretations of the petroglyphs which muddies the analysis with overtly mystical language. There are reasons for the different analytical tones scholars use when studying these sites, which will be discussed later on. *Trace* aims to provide a foundational analysis in clear language and prove that this simplified approach is more beneficial and easier to understand.

Trace considers the visual, contextual and geographic connections between mounds and petroglyph sites constructed by Native people in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, during the Mississippian period, which lasted from

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[2] All dates will be in BC/AD format unless otherwise stated. Some scholars estimate this date a little later, but I am including the overlap of cultural traditions between the Woodland and Mississippian

[3] Mounds can be funerary in nature, or utilitarian, but are often a mix of the two. Most mound complexes show evidence of use by multiple cultures over 100s-1000s of years.

approximately 800 to 1600.[4] The embodiment of this research aims to integrate the study of petroglyphs into the study of Indigenous burial and civic mounds within the region, while increasing the appreciation and understanding of petroglyph sites within the wider context of Indigenous art history, geography and landscape to provide an interconnected analysis as to how these historic sites functioned in ancient, Native life and culture.

Most scholars of ancient America acknowledge the connection and importance of rock art, but do not consistently probe the topic deeply. Christopher Rodning and Lynne Sullivan write in chapter 5 of *The Historical Turn in Southeastern Archaeology,* "Elements of narratives are likely to have incorporated in some ways in iconography depicted on engraved shell gorgets, on pottery and in rock art…"[5] Comments such as these prevail throughout the literature regarding rock art and mound site connections.[6] In a purposeful effort to nuance the connections between Southeastern rock art and provide more comprehensive contextualizing evidence and connections to artistic materials created by Native people pre-colonial contact, *Trace* considers the relationship between Native mound sites and rock art in North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia during the Mississippian period from approximately 800-1600 AD.[7] This parallel study adds to

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[4] Depending on the source this date estimate may vary, however, the decline of the Mississippian culture coincides with colonialism in North America.

[5] Christopher B. Rodning and Lynne P. Sullivan, "An Archaeology of Native American Placemaking in the Southern Appalachians," *The Historical Turn In Southeastern Archaeology,* Edited by Robbie Ethridge and Eric E. Bowne, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2020), 114.

[6] Megan Kassabaum, *A History of Platform Mound Ceremonialism: Finding Meaning in Elevated Ground*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press), 2021; Susan M. Alt., Robin Beck, Eric E. Bowne, Robert A. Cook, Robbie Ethridge, Jon Bernard Marcoux, Timothy R. Pauketat, et al, *The Historical Turn In Southeastern Archaeology,* Edited by Robbie Ethridge and Eric E. Bowne, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2020);
Christopher B. Rodning and Lynne P. Sullivan, "An Archaeology of Native American Placemaking in the Southern Appalachians," *The Historical Turn In Southeastern Archaeology,* Edited by Robbie Ethridge and Eric E. Bowne, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2020).

[7] For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to my research area as the "Carolinas and Georgia."

the current research by tracing the connections in time and space between these two different types of archaeological sites and materials through research and careful observation with the objective of bringing them into a harmonious and literary balance of history, identity, place, and symbolism.

In order to bring the subject of the Carolinas and Georgia's rock art into conversation with mound sites and geography, *Trace* sets forth a series of goals. Starting first with a broad focus, *Trace* sets the stage by providing the historical background of Native American people living in the Carolinas and Georgia during the Mississippian Period. Second, a more finely tuned focus on geography and landscape provides an overview of important mound and rock art sites within the Carolinas and Georgia including the importance of their temporal and geographic placement. The final pinpoint analysis includes a robust discussion of symbols seen on the rocks while constantly integrating Native history, art history with the significance of each location. Each section will provide a brief historiography of the primary and secondary sources used to compile the research and additional sources in each analysis.[8]

[8] When speaking in a general fashion about the ancestors of present day Native American people, I will primarily use the nomenclature of Indigenous, or Native interchangeably. If the specific tribe is known I endeavored to use the tribal names of the people who I cite throughout the course of the research. Infrequently, I also use Native American, however in most of my conversations with Native people, during the course of this research, I learned that they prefer Native or Indigenous over Native American, as America was imposed on them against their will. That said, the exact naming preference is somewhat subjective from individual to individual and different nations may have more exacting specifications. If necessary, I am willing to adjust and/or correct my language use to those specifications as needed.

PART I: SETTING THE STAGE

The research period for *Trace* begins with the South Appalachian Mississippian Cultural Tradition beginning around 800 AD and ends at the dawn of the 20th century.[9] The additional terminology of "South Appalachian" binds the *Trace* study geographically and temporally to the people who lived throughout what is now the Carolinas and Georgia from 800-1600 on the southeasternmost side of the Appalachian mountain range. A wealth of scholarship and analysis exists on the transitional periods between the Archaic, Woodland and Mississippian periods in North America, of which I will highlight some important details. The Archaic and Woodland periods are not the primary focuses of this study, but it is useful to have a base working knowledge of both in order to understand the time period of the Mississippians.[10]

As an acknowledgment of a pre-existing research bias, much of the historical information and sources in the upcoming historiography section are based on written documentation by the first European explorers, specifically Hernando de Soto in the 16th century, John Lawson in the 17th century and American-born James Mooney in the late 18th to early-19th centuries. All three were active in the region during the latter stages of the South Appalachian Mississippian Cultural period. Due to the fact that the written documents from the explorers are in a language non-native scholars understand,

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[9] Kim Decoste Leighton and Virgil Simmons, *The Mystery of Town Creek* (Netherwood Production and Multi-Vision Production, digital film and photography, March 28, 2017). The label of South Appalachian Mississippian Cultural Tradition comes from this video. It is a useful designation as it binds the focus of this study in both time and place.

[10] Lawrence Gardner, *First Peoples: Americas*. Public Broadcasting Service U.S., July 11, 2015. Digital film. David J. Meltzer, *First Peoples in a New World: Colonizing Ice Age America*, 1st ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), digital media; A.R. Kelly, "Prehistoric Cultures of the Southeast," *National Park Service Popular Study Series,* The United States Department of the Interior, 1941, 28.

it is tempting to rely too strongly on the first European explorers and ethnographers as sole primary sources of information. While these documents have their place, relying on them alone presents a one-sided view of Mississippian life and culture as seen and experienced through the eyes of white, European men.

While these men were not eyewitnesses to Native life pre-1500, much of the information we can ascertain from de Soto, Lawson and Mooney are stories, cultural traditions and Mississippian history as told to them by the Indigenous people with whom they interacted. Many of these stories point back to an earlier time period prior to European contact. Mooney says as much when he recounts the story of "The Mounds and the Constant Fire: The Old Sacred Things." This oral tradition tells the story of mound building, detailing the process of burials of prominent individuals in the mound, how women brought buckets of earth to pile up into the mound shape, the building of a townhouse as well as the practice of keeping a constant fire burning in the townhouse. Mooney abruptly concludes the story with, "All the old things are gone now and the Indians are different."[11] It is unclear if this quote is the author's interjection, or Mooney recounting the story as he had heard it, but it points to a massive change to Indigenous that brought an end to mound building.[12]

Prior to 1500 there is no formal written account of the history and movements of people living in North America, however archaeology and anthropology provide tangible evidence which traces the movements of people throughout the North American continent. Indigenous historians such as Kathleen Hayes and Dr. Brooke Bauer possess a

[11] James Mooney, "#111," *Myths of the Cherokee,* (Washington: Cornell University, 1902), 397.
[12] This same quote may also be interpreted as a racist comment by Mooney, suggesting that the Native American people he wrote about, could not possibly be related to the Native people who built the mounds, or created high art forms.

more comprehensive view of their own history and are much better sources of Indigenous history. Kathleen Hayes of the Catawba Nation travels locally to various institutions, giving a presentation called “Catawba 101,” which summarizes all of Catawba history into a one-hour talk. While Haye’s presentation is purposely short, it highlights the long history of the Catawba and all Native Americans over thousands of years. Her synopsis provides her audience with a framework to understand Indigenous history as well as spark interest to explore the topic further. Dr. Brooke Bauer, also a member of the Catawba nation and author of *Becoming Catawba: Catawba Women and Nation Building from 1540 - 1840*, focuses on the impact of women as nation builders and preservers of Catawba culture. Dr. Bauer’s book draws attention to the importance of women in Catawba culture as mothers, protectors and crucial to the continuation of a society that at this time in history was under threat from outsiders and the devastating impacts of new diseases.[13]

In addition to Native scholars, the discipline of anthropology focuses on how people construct a unique culture, complete with language, religious practice, and social function. In *A History of Platform Mound Ceremonialism: Finding Meaning in Elevated Ground,* Associate Professor of Anthropology, Megan Kassabaum, goes into an extensive overview of past anthropological methods such as; time perspectivism, historical processualism and long term prospective[14], which are backward-facing,

[13] Brooke Bauer, “A lecture featuring her monograph *Becoming Catawba: Catawba Indian Women and Nation Building, 1540-1840*,” President James K. Polk State Historic Site, Pineville, North Carolina, July 29, 2023; Kathleen Hayes, “Catawba History 101,” President James K. Polk State Historic Site, Pineville, North Carolina, April 29, 2023.

[14] Time perspectivism - when an object is seen and understood within its own temporal context, but does not necessarily take into account how historical concepts from an earlier time period play a role in its creation.
Historical processualism - a highly objective approach that analyzes historical processes in terms of how things are created or destroyed.

retrospective and narrow methods of analyzing history. All three of these methods have merit, but they may at times fall short and do not look as far back in history as necessary to incorporate the forward-facing methodology that Kassabaum uses to structure her research on mound building.[15] Kassabaum states that historical people knew their actions before they knew the outcome whereas we, as historians, know the outcome, but perhaps do not understand the actions that led to the outcome. This is why scholars tend to incorporate a top down perspective to studying history. By purposely incorporating a forward-facing approach and choosing to look at history as a set of building blocks becoming more complex over time, a more comprehensive view of Native American history emerges. Later actions and innovations were built on the prior historical actions by their ancestors.[16] Kassabaum also introduces the term palimpsest, which is change over time, or the moving aside of part of one piece of something to make room for improvements, additions or innovation.

Chickasaw author, Chadwick Allen's 2022 monograph, *Earthworks Rising,* examines mound building from an Indigenous perspective. Allen's introduction emphasizes the reality that when the new world was "discovered" it was not an empty land devoid of people. Those of us who grew up in American schools and learned the typical canon of American history learned to believe in a certain image of *Indians* as barbaric, low technology people with under-developed society and infrastructure. This is a fabricated lie based off of propaganda in the 1500s, and (despite our society's supposed enlightened view of humanity) is still perpetuated in today's American history

Long-term prospective - Analyzes a long period of time and tries to determine the cause and effects that led to certain outcomes.

[15] Kassabaum, *A History of Platform Mound Ceremonialism*, 36.

[16] Ibid., 39.

curriculums. Allen illustrates how the very presence of mounds is proof of advanced civilizations, high culture in the form of art, religion and social structures with complex interconnections spanning the continent. Much of the history written about Native people started at the time of colonial contact, and many of those writers ignored the vast history of Indigenous people prior to 1500. It does not take a significant amount of investigation to realize that Native Americans were never a stagnant culture unchanged until colonial contact; rather, they were constantly building and developing culturally, artistically and architecturally and, over time, evolved a palimpsest of more complex systems from simpler concepts.[17]

In a similar method to Kassabaum, the anthropologists, archaeologists, and historians of *The Historical Turn in Southeastern Archaeology* incorporate the same forward-facing perspective focused on how actions led certain outcomes. This monograph speaks to the changing trend in the historicizing of Native peoples in that it focuses on people, their humanity and accomplishments. *The Historical Turn in Southeastern Archaeology* combines multiple disciplines in a collaborative effort to create a rich and flowing narrative of Native culture and history. Through the examination of history, anthropology and archaeology, the authors of this book chart the changing attitudes and trends toward Indigenous history and bring what is sometimes

[17] Chadwick Allen, *Earthworks Rising: Mound Building in Native Literature and Arts* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022), 4-6.

called, “prehistory,” or “deep history,”[18] out of the ground and into the minds and living memory of a 21st-century audience.[19]

Shana Bushyhead Condil, of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians, and Executive Director of the Museum of the Cherokee People, speaks publicly about how the Cherokee have always known and understood their ancestral lineage and connection to the land. Condil shares in the excitement of the archaeological finds and studies, but, in addition, she strives to iterate that the Cherokee do not need physical confirmation to realize their long history and heritage with the land.[20] The Cherokee have always known their ancestral heritage and in spite of disease and forced removal from their homeland in the 1830s, The Cherokee have managed to preserve many aspects of their culture, including, but not limited to; their language, artistic practices and sacred mound and petroglyph sites.

Relative Age and Dating Methods

There is no single tried and true method to determine the age of mound sites and petroglyphs, especially since these sites were worked on continuously for thousands of years. Such longevity of use and construction complicates dating methods somewhat because there is often no definitive starting point. When dealing with thousands of years of history, a variety of dating methods should be employed, including basic observation. An exact date may not be possible to determine, but identifying a general time period

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[18] This is the one and only time I will use either of these terms. In my opinion pre-history and deep history suggest that Native history did not exist until it was “found” by Western people, which makes the term racist and derogatory. I use it here because it is common to find these terms in scholarly literature, especially in regards to Native American history.

[19] Alt, Susan M., Robin Beck, Eric E. Bowne, Robert A. Cook, Robbie Ethridge, Jon Bernard Marcoux, Timothy R. Pauketat, et al. *The Historical Turn In Southeastern Archaeology.* Edited by Robbie Ethridge and Eric E. Bowne, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2020).

[20] Shana Bushyhead Condill, Personal Conversation, September 11, 2023.

and giving a chronological account of what happened first provides a suitable foundation for interpretation. Granted scholarly documentation of petroglyphs only goes back a few hundred years in American history, however, it is possible to compare Archival photographs and drawings to the present day appearance of the petroglyphs to determine if and when new imagery was added. Additionally, the content of the imagery can ascertain the time period. For example, if horses, ships, or guns appear in the imagery, this addition dates the petroglyph to after European contact. Observation is a relatively simple method, easy to execute and requires no special equipment, or training other than a keen eye.

Juxtaposition is also a reliable method of determining chronology. Using the Hagood Mill petroglyphs and Judacullah Rock as examples, both of these boulders were partially underground until the 21st century. The Hagood Mill petroglyphs were re-discovered in 2003 by Michael Bramlett. At that time, most of the boulder was buried in the ground with only the top visible. Judacullah rock was in a similar state of partial burial until an excavation in 2007 exposed the remainder of the boulder. Removal of excess dirt and debris revealed more petroglyphs on both boulders, presumably created during an earlier time period, due to the simple fact that, prior to excavation, the only accessible part of the boulder was the highest point. Additionally, close inspection of the heavily carved petroglyph boulders show carvings carved over and through each other. This suggests that the carvings on top are more recent than the ones underneath. While this method may not give a precise date for each petroglyph, it does show a

chronological creation for each carving in terms of which petroglyphs were carved first.[21]

Figure 1: The 2007 image shows the excavation of Judacullah Rock. On the right side, we can see that the sediment layer came up just above the spiral motifs. Photograph courtesy of B&E Roberts Photography, 2007.[22]

While metamorphic rock cannot be dated, organic material can. The collection of buildup, lichen and fungus provides a rough estimate of date. Analyzing the molecular and isotopic residue collected in the grooves of petroglyphs is another possible method of dating these carvings, however this does not seem to be a method commonly used in the field of petroglyph research today, at least not in the American Southeast. This is likely due to the extremely small number of rock art researchers in the region, lack of

[21] Michael Bramlett (Archaeologist and rock art researcher), Personal Interview and tour of Hagood Petroglyph Site, Pickens, South Carolina, April 19, 2023. www.yondercarolina.com/interviews

[22] Photographs from B&E Photography are used with the expressed permission of the original photographers, Bruce and Elaine Roberts. www.be-roberts.com/se/native/jud/jud1.htm

funding and access to a laboratory in which to conduct these tests. Molecular and isotopic analysis is especially popular in dating pottery. While this method would not harm the petroglyph carvings, it involves close, physical contact with the petroglyphs, many of which the present-day Native community regard as sacred. Commonly with Native American, even the ones on public land like Judacullah Rock and Kituwah, visitors are not permitted to touch the petroglyphs and are not allowed beyond a certain point. Due to the sensitive and sacred nature of these sites it is always best to have the permission and involvement of the local Indigenous community before conducting any scientific experiments.

A final dating method comes in regards to tool usage. Carving a petroglyph, even a small one, is a slow and laborious process. The expertise employed by the original, indigenous carvers would have sped up the process, but certainly, introduction of metal tools after colonial contact made carving into the rock surface easier.[23] In terms of dating the petroglyphs, the carvings created out of metal implements have sharper edges and look different in appearance than those made with stone tools with blunter, more rounded edges.[24]

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[23] Michael Bramlett. "Personal Interview"

[24] There are archaeologists in the field who believe that all petroglyphs carved with metal tools are "non-Native." Their rationalization is that it is impossible to tell the difference between a petroglyph carved by an indigenous person and a colonial post contact if metals tools were used in the carving process. This is not a universal opinion, or a predominantly accepted idea amongst rock art researchers, but it is part of a current, yet to be published debate. Those who disagree with this opinion say that despite the metal tool usage, there are certain hallmarks of Native rock art that are simply not present in colonial rock art, such as composition, form and repetition of symbols and figures that despite the difference in tool usage, remain the same.

Figure 2: Petroglyph of a human figure pecked into the rock with a stone tool. Hagood Mill Petroglyph Site, Pickens County, South Carolina.

Figure 3: Carved using metal implements (possibly written in Cherokee). Hagood Mill Petroglyph Site, Pickens County, South Carolina.

The Peopling of the Americas

Scholars debate on exactly how and when the peopling of North and South America occurred. One long accepted model is known as the Clovis-First Model. For thousands of years, most of North America used to be covered by a giant ice sheet. Approximately 13,000 years ago, the climate began to warm, which opened a corridor in the ice sheet, providing an opportunity for humans to explore and expand their range.[25] The people, who scholars refer to as Clovis, began to migrate from the area of Alaska and gradually moved southward. Dating ranges for this migration vary widely in the scholarship which is likely due to the inability to accurately carbon date artifacts attributed to the Clovis migration. Due to the changing geologic landscape and climate of North America during the Clovis migration, the levels of carbon fluctuated extensively, leaving scholars with estimates of dates, but no conclusive method of measuring the age of bone, or other organic materials.[26]

The Clovis-First Model has been challenged by the discovery of, what appear to be, older Folsom sites in areas such as Mexico and Texas. These findings, which seem to predate the Clovis culture, have more recently cast a shadow of doubt over all Native ancestors entering through the ice corridor and migrating from North to South. In Jennifer Raff's monograph, *Origin,* she examines the genetics and archaeological findings associated with human migration to the Americas. Raff cites comprehensive

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[25] Scholars disagree wildly on exactly when the North American and South American continent were occupied by human beings. Any and all dates pertaining to this time period of ancient America should be taken as the author's best guess based on research and current scholarship.

[26] Gardner, *First Peoples: Americas*; Meltzer, *First Peoples in a New World*; Linda Crawford Culberson, Arrowheads and Spear Points in the Prehistoric Southeast: A Guide to Understanding Cultural Artifacts, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993).

studies on the topic as well as more recent literature challenging the Clovis-First Model. One of the more interesting points she makes is that while there is evidence of human beings residing at the northernmost point of the ice sheet (most likely having crossed over from Beringia), there is no evidence of downward human migration. In a fascinating twist all of the evidence of human migration along the ice corridor suggests that people migrated northwards and not south. If this evidence is being interpreted correctly this refutes the long standing Clovis-First Model and reopens the question of a human entry point to the Americas. If it was not exclusively through the Beringia land bridge, then there must have been an additional entry point farther south to populate at least some of the Folsom sites.[27]

Another, more recent hypothesis possibly explaining these seemingly older sites revolves around the idea that humans migrated to the Americas via boats along a system of kelp highways. Archaeologist Jon Erlandson, one of the main developers of the kelp highway hypothesis, partnered with ecologists to form this new explanation of the peopling of the Americas by anatomically modern humans. While ancient peoples, who first migrated to the continent were not thought to be seafaring, Erlandson explains that the ecological richness and the vast string of the kelp forests would have provided plenty of food for the long journey across the Pacific. The time period for this migration would have been at the end of the Pleistocene era during what is known as the Last Glacial Maximum, or LGM. Toward the end of the LGM, sea levels were still relatively low and

[27] Jennifer Raff, *Origin: A Genetic History of the Americas*, chapter 2 (New York: Twelve, 2022); Tom D. Dillehay and Michael B. Collins, "Early Cultural Evidence from Monte Verde in Chile," *Nature* 332, no. 6160 (1988): 150-152; David J. Meltzer, Donald K. Grayson, Gerardo Ardila, et al., "On the Pleistocene Antiquity of Monte Verde, Southern Chile," *American Antiquity* 62, no. 4 (1997): 659-663; M. Thomas P. Gilbert, Dennis L. Jenkins, Anders Götherström, et al., "DNA from Pre-Clovis Human Coprolites in Oregon, North America," *Science* 320, no. 5877 (2008): 786.

there was more land mass above the surface of the water. The slowly rising temperatures (while still relatively cold) would have provided a suitable habitat for kelp to grow and marine life to flourish. While not conclusive and in need of further study, this hypothesis has the potential to explain an earlier date for the people of the Americas as well as the islands of Hawaii.[28]

While the debates on human migration continue to play out in the scholarly arena, clearly human beings spread out and inhabited the entire North and South American continent in bands of hunter-gathering societies. Hunter-gathering societies' primary focus was gathering food such as edible plants, nuts, berries and major protein sources such as the wooly mammoth and bison. At this time period, scholars start to refer to the indigenous population as Paleoindian and further along the timeline, Archaic.[29] Approximately 3000 BC, the technical innovation of pottery is introduced into the archaeological record, which marks the transition from the Archaic to Woodland period.[30] The Woodland period encompasses a mixture of permanent settlements and hunter-gatherer societies, with possible combinations of both lifestyles. Petroglyph carvings was most likely a routine practice by this point in history, but the Woodland

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[28] Jon M. Erlandson et al., "The Kelp Highway Hypothesis: Marine Ecology, the Coastal Migration Theory, and the Peopling of the Americas," *Journal of Island and Coastal Archaeology* 2, no. 2 (2007): 161–74.

[29] Micah Hanks, "The Hopewell Social Networking and Trade," produced by Jason Pentrail, *Seven Ages Audio Journal*, May 25, 2023, 1:25:55, https://sevenages.org/podcasts/the-hopewell-social-networking-and-trade-saaj-065/.

[30] Kelly, "Prehistoric Cultures of the Southeast."
Adam King, "The Southeastern Ceremonial Complex: From Cult to Complex," *Southeastern Ceremonial Complex Chronology, Content, Context*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007), 1-14.

period also marks the dawn of mound building and the beginnings of the domestication of corn, a product grown widely by the Mississippian period.[31]

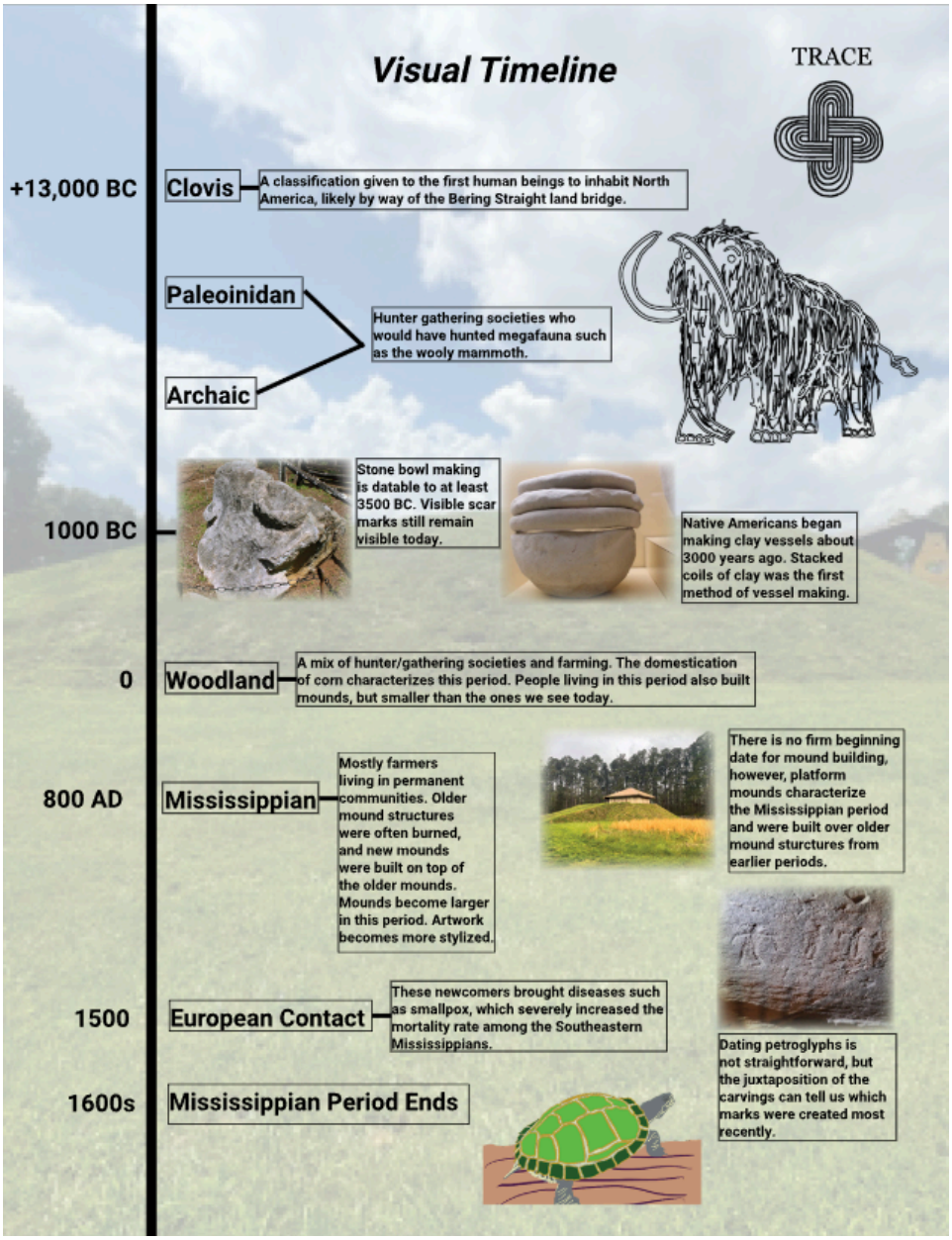

Figure 4: Visual Timeline showing major milestones in Indigenous history[32]

[31] Megan Allen (Historical Interpreter II), A Tour of the Town Creek Indian Mound, Amelia Zytka, Mount Gilead, North Carolina, April 1, 2023; Joffree Coe and Leland G Ferguson, *Town Creek Indian Mound: A Native American Legacy,* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 233- 235.
[32] "Maps, Videos, and More," YonderCarolina, accessed November 7, 2024, https://www.yondercarolina.com/mapsvideosandmore.

As the Woodland period gives way to the Mississippian period, domestication and permanent settlements become the new standard of living. Rather than an entire or partial hunter-gathering society, most people lived in farming communities and homes built for year-round habitation. Mound building significantly increased during the first millennium with Native civilizations such as Cahokia, Fort Ancient, Adena and Hopewell constructing some of the largest mound complexes still in existence today.[33] These mounds were mostly built along major river highways stretching up and down the Mississippi River and branching out into other river systems. The juxtaposition of the mound sites corresponds with established networks of dynamic trade routes via rivers.[34] It is in this period, of innovation and technological advancement, that the people of the Mississippian period flourished and lived. This would also be the world that the first Europeans encountered during the contact period.

The South Appalachian Mississippians refers to a geographic distinction of the Mississippian culture living in what is now the southeastern part of North America from the mountains to the coastal plains. We can envision these people as master craftsmen and craftswomen with the skills to build large canoes capable of carrying as many as 80 passengers.[35] Those living in smaller villages traveled to larger villages and mound complexes for yearly festivals such as the yearly fire festival. Every new year, people extinguished their home fires and traveled to the main mound complex to receive the new year's fire from the eternal flame. With burning embers smoldering in a *tusti*[36]

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[33] H. C. Shetrone and Bradley T. Lepper, "Distribution and Classification of the Mounds," in *The Mound-Builders* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 27–35, 129, 435–436.
[34] Hanks, "The Hopewell Social Networking and Trade."
[35] Trevor Woods, cabin tour at the James K. Polk State Historic Site, July 15, 2023, Pineville, NC.
[36] A small, covered, clay bowl.

bowl, each family returned to their homes, probably by canoe, to reignite the fire in their hearths for the new year. They lived in a cyclical rhythm with a great emphasis on family and a strong veneration toward women as matriarchs.[37]

To this day, many Native communities revere women as the ones who brought life into the world. As a result, Mississippian families tracked their lineage through a matrilineal line, making women the primary authority in society.[38] This is still true today in the majority of tribal nations, but in the past it was likely more pronounced. Family ties were such that a father would not raise his own children, rather he would become the father of his sister's children and his biological children would be raised by his wife's brother.[39] Family possessions belonged to the woman and stayed in the female line. Generally, it was the women who were the master potters, which makes sense as women were also primarily responsible for food and food storage.[40] Women took charge of their family home and served as elders, medical practitioners and chiefs while constantly anchoring their families to the land, defining and binding identities and teaching the same cyclical rhythm of life passed down from the women in their ancestral lineage.[41]

This description of ancient Native life sounds harmonious and idyllic, but we can ascertain from oral traditions times of conflict with neighboring bands, including strife

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[37] Allen, tour of the Town Creek Indian Mound.
[38] Most Native American families still track their family lineage through a matrilineal line.
[39] Johannes Loubser, "The Enigma of Judacullah Rock," produced by Jason Pentrail, *Seven Ages Audio Journal*, July 7, 2023, 1:54:11, https://sevenages.org/podcasts/the-enigma-of-judaculla-rock-track-rock-gap-saaj-066/.; Allen, tour of the Town Creek Indian Mound.
[40] Megan Allen. Personal Interview, April 1, 2023.
[41] Dr. Brooke Bauer, "A lecture featuring her monograph *Becoming Catawba: Catawba Indian Women and Nation Building, 1540-1840,"* President James K Polk State Historic Site, July 29, 2023, Pineville, North Carolina.

with animals. Other cautionary tales include stories of the consequences of mismanaging Mother Earth's resources. Thousands of years of development apart from the rest of the world allowed for Native people to invent their own cultures in relative isolation. However, this same isolation came at a deadly cost beginning in the 15th century. Contact with Europeans broke this continuity down with the introduction of diseases such as smallpox, measles and influenza as well as the forced removal of Native Americans from their homeland.[42] Known as The Trail of Tears, this forced and violent relocation cut Native American people off from their homes, but also from the very land that constructed their historical and present day identity as well as their material culture. Devastating mortality rates of up to 90% in some areas additionally contributed to a loss of knowledge and wisdom from the older generations.[43] Today, we see Native descendants seeking to revive the vivacity of their indigenous heritage in artistic forms, public awareness, activism and cultural traditions that honor the past and point to the future.

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[42] Deborah Bassett, Ursula Tsosie, and Sweetwater Nannauck, "Our Culture Is Medicine: Perspectives of Native Healers on Posttrauma Recovery Among American Indian and Alaska Native Patients," *The Permanente Journal*, no. 1 (2012): 16, 19-27.
[43] Kathleen Hayes, "Catawba 101;" Bernhard Knollenberg, "General Amherst and Germ Warfare," The Mississippi Valley Historical Review 41, no. 3 (1954): 492-493; Catherine M. Cameron, et al., eds. Beyond Germs: Native Depopulation in North America. University of Arizona Press, 2015.

PART II: THE IMPORTANCE OF LANDSCAPE

An Introduction to Landscape

A focus on landscape should play a role in any study conducted on petroglyphs. Scholars do not always integrate the study of landscape with the study of petroglyphs, in favor of conducting more focused studies on individual symbols found on petroglyphs. While helpful, this type of narrow research focus often utilizes a methodological focus on cosmology, which can create interpretive issues. The cosmological method has its place as it generates topics for research, but often reads as theoretical and overly complicated while ignoring the actual contextual landscape of the historic sites in question. Developing a base level understanding of the geography and geological features of these sacred sites is a better method to obtain a clear understanding of how these sites function in the landscape and uncover clues revealing why the Indigenous people of the past selected certain places for significant purposes.

Native people possess tribal histories and stories that have been passed down for thousands of years. Many of these stories relate to the land where their ancestors lived, but more specifically relate to the elements of nature and play a role in carving out an identity. Native American philosopher and author of *Think Indigenous*, Doug Good Feather, explains how identity is more than just a connection to a geographic point on a map. Identity includes spiritual partnership with Mother Earth herself. For instance, many stories focus on animals as well as the elements of fire, earth, wind and water, as active anthropomorphic characters alongside humans. The elements of nature and how it interacts with human beings are meant to be life lessons.

The Importance of Landscape

The natural landscape in the Carolinas and Georgia is such that all three states in this study have a mountain, piedmont and coastal region and an important geological boundary known as the fall line. The fall line is where the Piedmont rises in elevation toward the Appalachian Mountain range and serves as a geologic distinction point between the coastal and inland areas. Geographers Shankman and Hart study the differences in vegetation on either side of the fall line and as a result are able to read the historical narrative of the land geographically. The fall line, visible especially on a topographic map, serves as a dividing point in areas of climate and vegetation. The entire area is considered subtropical, however the climate rising toward the mountains cools off west of the fall line, which separates the climates into the coastal plains and Appalachian highlands with the piedmont region acting as a transitional area between the two.[44]

[44] David Shankman and Justin L. Hart, "The Fall Line: A Physiographic-Forest Vegetation Boundary," *The Geographical Review,* 97, no. 4 (2007): 502, 503.

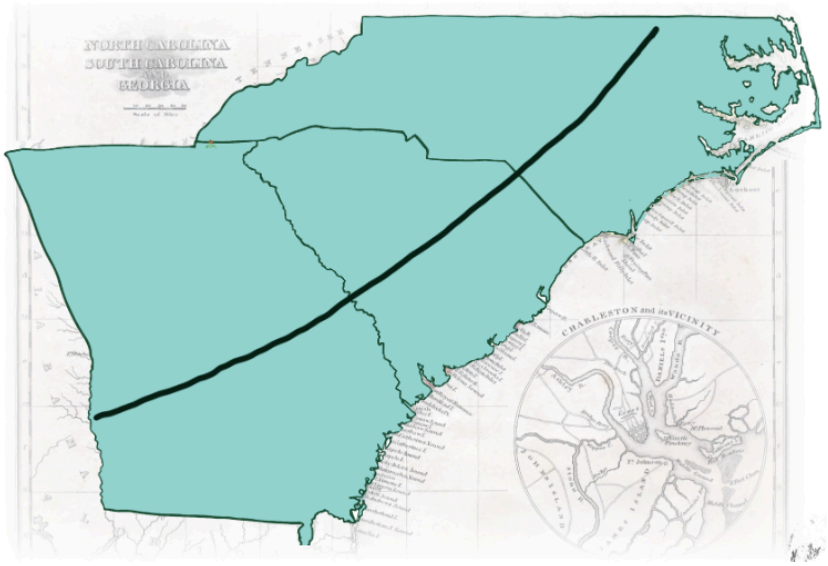

Figure 5: Fall line designated by the black line. Interactive map from YonderCarolina.com.[45]

Prior to the migratory periods of people populating the Americas, much of North America was carved out by glaciers. Entomologists Whitehead and Davis can track climatic changes by looking closely at plant life and the historical spread of vegetation throughout thousands of years of history. As the climate began to warm and the glaciers receded, trees emerged and flourished along the coastal plains.[46] Most schools of thought argue against the glaciers extending as far south as the Carolinas and Georgia, however more recent topographic and lidar studies show evidence, which has been interpreted as the existence of large ice sheets in along the coastal plains.[47] While the accuracy of these

[45] YonderCarolina, “Maps, Videos, and More.”
[46] M.D. Davis, "Quaternary History and Stability of Forest Communities," in *Forest Succession: Concepts and Application*, ed. D. C. West, H. H. Shugart, and D. B. Botkin (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1981), 132-153.
[47] John B. McKeon et al., “North Carolina Glacier: Evidence Disputed,” *Science* 184, no. 4132 (1974): 88–91; C. S. Swezey, “Quaternary Eolian Dunes and Sand Sheets in Inland Locations of the Atlantic Coastal Plain Province, USA,” in *Inland Dunes of North America,* ed. Neil Lancaster and Paul Hesp (Cham: Springer, 2020).

interpretations is a hotly disputed topic today amongst scientists, what the evidence shows in abundance is significantly colder temperatures around the Last Great Migration (LGM). By the time of the Mississippians, the landscape was similar to the way we see it today, minus the large buildings and major roadways of urban development.

Another point of variation to note in the region is the occurrence of soapstone. Also known as steatite, this metamorphic rock is an important factor to consider in landscape archaeology. Many of the Native Americans before, during and post the innovation of pottery, harvested soapstone to make vessels for cooking and food storage. The University of Florida's Laboratory of Southeastern Archaeology has an extensive study (spanning three decades of research) on the use of soapstone artifacts and dating. Soapstone is common all throughout the southeast, but this study shows a prevalence of most soapstone artifacts west of the fall line as well as more abundance in the north and northeastern region. Discoveries of soapstone artifacts in areas generally not known for soapstone harvesting, such as the coastal plains of the Carolinas and Georgia, show the social movements of people and explains at least some of the markings on rock faces. Judacullah Rock (pictured below) shows evidence of Archaic humans harvesting soapstone to create stone bowls. Soapstone harvesting is a practice dating prior to the development of pottery (approximately 3000 BC) and leaves behind scars which can be seen in the following pictures.[48]

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[48] Kenneth Sassaman, "Soapstone Vessel Dating Project," *Laboratory of Southeastern Archaeology*, University of Florida, accessed June 12, 2024, https://lsa.anthro.ufl.edu/projects/soapstone-vessel-dating-project/.

Figure 6: Judacullah Rock, Cullowhee, North Carolina, Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians, September 2023.
This boulder shows evidence of thousands of years of people carving into it. While we do not know for sure when native people began carving into this rock, the presence of bowl scars (bottom right) proves that people started manipulating this boulder at least five to six thousand years ago.

The vast majority of academically documented[49] petroglyphs exist west of the fall line in the mountains while petroglyphs are not thought to be as common among the coastal plain. However, the absence of evidence is not conclusive evidence of absence. One probable reason for the lack of petroglyphs could correlate to a lesser amount of available soapstone outcroppings in the piedmont and almost none in the coastal plains region along the Carolinian and Georgia coasts. Unlike most of the Appalachians with its hard and durable rock, the coastal plains are made up of sandy and much softer materials, which are not as conducive for long term preservation. This lack of sites is not confirmation that petroglyphs did not/do not still exist in this area, but due to the harsh

[49] I say "documented" to distinguish petroglyph sites that I have read about in books and journals, or was able to visit in person. There are likely many "undocumented" (at least by the academic world) petroglyphs in the Carolinas and Georgia that are either unknown to the public, or purposely kept hidden.

beatings from hurricanes and a quickly eroding shoreline, the preservation of such delicate sites is far more difficult in the coastal plains than in the mountains. Strong natural forces are also capable of moving and displacing incredibly large boulders.[50]

In contrast, the prevalence of indigenous mound sites is more evenly distributed across the region, but with a marked difference in materials used to build the mounds. While earthen mounds exist in all physiographic areas of the Carolinas and Georgia, there are a greater number of shell mounds along the coast. Shell mounds are among the oldest types of mound construction with some dating as far back as the Archaic period. Accessibility to these sites today is mostly by boat, however during the active periods of these mounds, they were more likely to be located on dry land. Based on Shankman and Hart's discussion of glacial recessions, we can discern this difference in historical shorelines in comparison to present day shorelines, which are more eroded today than in historical times.

Direct physical evidence of shoreline erosion exists in the form of what is known as ghost forests along the coastal areas. These forests consist of dead birch trees which now stand along the shores of salt ocean water, however at one time they must have existed on dry land with a fresh water source. Karen Amspacher, the Executive Director of the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum & Heritage Center on Harkers Island, North Carolina, has worked tirelessly with climatologists and geologists to raise awareness and preserve the rapidly disappearing shoreline in the Outer Banks of North Carolina and the Down East Communities. She often references the ghost forests as present day visual reminders of shoreline loss and sea level rise.

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[50] Hurricane Helene of 2024 displaced entire towns, roadways and recarved parts of the Appalachians.

Figure 7: Cape Lookout National Seashore, Harkers Island, North Carolina, September 2021.
Photograph shows dead birch trees along the Atlantic coast adjacent to the Coast Guard Station.

Asa Randall has written extensively on shell mound construction, usage and abandonment of such sites in *Constructing Histories: Archaic Freshwater Shell Mounds and Social Landscapes of the St. Johns River, Florida.* Randall refutes the old belief that shell mounds were once thought to be garbage heaps based on the evidence of habitation, social use and deliberate arrangement encompassing human and animal remains.[51] Matthew Sanger corroborates Randall's claims in his own study published in the *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* several years later, "Joining the Circle: Native American Philosophy Applied to the Study of Late Archaic Shell Rings of the Southeast United States." Sanger's analysis examines how the shell rings were

[51] Asa R. Randall, *Constructing Histories: Archaic Freshwater Shell Mounds and Social Landscapes of the St. Johns River, Florida* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2015), 1-7.

constructed with food remains as well as animal and even human remains in a central pit of the midden (shell mound construction material).[52]

Landscape and the Importance of Visibility

Site selection was never random in regards to mound and petroglyph placement, rather the indigenous people deliberately selected sites, based on topography and certain geographic features. Carol Diaz Granados', edited volume *Transforming the Landscape: Rock Art and the Mississippian Cosmos,* contains articles written by numerous rock art research specialists.[53] Their methodology utilizes interpretation through the landscape therefore considering the findspot, or the physical location of a rock art site as evidence. The authors outline questions such as: what happened at this site? Is there something geographically significant about the site? Is there a possible relation to religious, or medical practice?[54]

Similarly, in Donna Gilette's edited volume *Rock Art and Sacred Landscapes,* the authors consider rock art as spiritual and sacred landscapes constructed by human hands.[55] Scott Ashcraft and Johannes Loubser have similarly conducted bilateral studies of petroglyphs and mounds in relation to their proximity to each other and unique landscape markers, which shows deliberate decision making regarding the cultural and

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[52] Sanger, Matthew C, "Joining the Circle: Native American Philosophy Applied to the Study of Late Archaic Shell Rings of the Southeast United States," *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 28, no. 3 (Sep 2021, 2021): 755-765.
[53] Carol Diaz-Granados, Jan Simek, George Sabo, and Mark Wagner, *Transforming the Landscape: Rock Art and the Mississippian Cosmos*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2018), 14–30.
[54] Diaz-Granados et al., *Transforming the Landscape,* 3.
[55] Donna L. Gillette, ed., *Rock Art and Sacred Landscapes* (New York: Springer, 2014).

social constructs of the original creators of these sites.[56] Both scholars have written extensively on petroglyphs in the American Southeast, particularly in the Carolinas and Georgia. Additionally, Loubser is the founder of Stratum Unlimited, LLC, a company that works collaboratively with the indigenous communities to preserve and map rock art sites and preserve them for the next generation.

While reading about mounds and petroglyphs inspires the intellectual side of the research, an in-person encounter ignites and stimulates the visual aspect of each site. In order to understand the visible impact of these sites there is no substitute for visiting sites in person. Differences in visibility between petroglyph sites and mound sites emerge in addition to topographic differences. The size differences between the mounds and petroglyphs are obvious, even to the casual observer, however it is important to look beyond size and question why and how size and scale contribute to visibility. This difference plays a role in the purpose of these two sites that, while different, are inextricably related to each other. Naturally, due to their size, mounds are significantly easier to spot than petroglyphs from a distance. All of the mound and petroglyph sites in this study, without exception, share a strong proximity to waterways. This proximity and visibility suggests that mound sites were always meant to be visible and easily found by passing travelers. If that is the case we need to understand how the landscape may have changed over the centuries. It is likely that mound complexes were much more visible in antiquity than they are in the present day. For example, the Town Creek Indian Mound

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[56] Johannes Loubser, Scott Ashcraft, and James Wettstaed, "Betwixt and Between: The Occurrence of Petroglyphs between Townhouses of the Living and Townhouses of Spirit Beings in Northern Georgia and Western North Carolina," in *Transforming the Landscape: Rock Art and the Mississippian Cosmos*, ed. Carol Diaz-Granados, Jan Simek, George Sabo, and Mark Wagner (Barnsley: Oxbow Books Ltd, 2018).; Johannesburg Loubser, "Stratum Unlimited," 2024, http://www.stratumunlimited.com/.

site in Mount Gilead, North Carolina today is surrounded by tall trees, but during the Mississippian period, the present-day surrounding woods were vast expanses of prairie grass, making the mounds plainly visible from a great distance either by river or land.[57]

In contrast, petroglyphs are much smaller and not visible unless one is right on top of them, but findable if one knows where to look. Similar to mounds, they were likely more visible in the past than they are today. The contrast between the intentional visibility of petroglyphs and mounds in the past and the charged secrecy, invisibility and, in many cases, utter destruction, of these same sites today marks a massive shift in social and cultural constructs. Sites that were, at one time, public gathering places and signposts for Native American communities across the region, are now shrouded in secrecy often with highly restricted access. Given the exploitation of Native American burials and artifacts it is not surprising how passionately the Native American community protects their sacred sites today and seeks to preserve them for future generations and the cultural activities historically associated with them. People of these ancient cultures did not randomly select locations to build burial mounds, or casually carve symbols into rock. Instead, each site shows a careful and deliberate selection process for a specific and significant purpose.[58]

Overview of Important Sites in the Carolinas and Georgia

The following section provides a working knowledge of the historical sites presented in this article, as well as their geographic spread in the Carolinas and Georgia.

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[57]Allen, interview by Zytka.

[58] Johannes Loubser, "From Boulder to Mountain and Back Again: Self-Similarity Between Landscape and Mindscape in Cherokee Thought, Speech, and Action as Expressed by the Judaculla Rock Petroglyphs," *Time and Mind* 2, no. 3 (2009): 287–311.

Listed regionally (mountains, piedmont and coastal), this brief overview aims to show how mounds and petroglyphs function as a social network as well as show how mound construction varies regionally throughout the Carolinas and Georgia. In order to accomplish this goal, the explanation of each site will answer the following questions: What is it? Where is it? To what time period does it date? And how does it relate to this study?[59]

Historically, each site connects the South Appalachian Mississippian communities together via waterways. In this river system, mounds and petroglyphs functioned as public meeting points, landmarks and signposts. Today, these sites are not as public and many sites exist either on private property, or have been plowed over due to farming and development. Likely, many more are kept secret in order to protect them due to the fear of vandalism and exploitation.

List of Native Historic Sites

The following list of historical sites does not include every significant Indigenous heritage landmark, however, Trace acknowledges all of these sites' existence, pre-existence and significance to Native peoples past and present.

Mountain Region

Etowah Indian Mounds: Located off the banks of the Etowah River, in Cartersville, Georgia, is the state historic site of Etowah Indian Mounds State Park. The site gives visitors the chance to walk the mounds, climb them and learn about the lives

[59] Rivers are an important point of reference for all petroglyphs and mounds in this study. To see a comprehensive and interactive map of all of the rivers in the US, including their headwaters and endpoints, visit webapps.usgs.gov/streamer/

of the Indigenous community living in the area prior to European contact, and the deadly effects of the post-contact era. Active from approximately 1000-1550, Etowah dates to the Mississippian time period and the most active time of mound building in the continent. Beaten only by the Cahokia mounds in Illinois, the largest platform mound at Etowah is the second largest intact mound in North America and the largest in the Southeast. Today, the site has three large platform mounds, and three, much smaller rounded mounds, which blend into the landscape and look more like gentle slopes, but during the Mississippian period they were more elevated. Located geographically where the piedmont meets the mountain region, Etowah serves as a gateway into Appalachia and the higher mountains to the west.

Archaeological excavations at Etowah were somewhat minimal, however they showed signs of habitation, abandonment and rehabilitation throughout its history. The arrival of Hernando de Soto and the Europeans who followed shortly after, marked the beginning of the end of this thriving Native metropolis and others like it. In 1830, Andrew Jackson's administration instigated the Indian Removal Act, which displaced the residents of Etowah and the remaining Native peoples in the region, by forcibly and brutally relocating them farther west to Oklahoma. This act or forced extradition led to the additional deaths of a third of the Indigenous people who undertook this journey, known as the Trail of Tears. Such a loss was compounded by the extreme loss of life they already experienced via the influx of foreign diseases, made worse by Indigenous

slavery and the living and working conditions imposed on the Native population by the incoming colonists.[60]

Etowah is an excellent place to begin this listing of historic sites in the region as it introduces visitors to the hard history of Indigenous people. Visitors who make an effort to visit Native sites, especially habitation sites where people lived, will find this same story of life, conflict, death, disease and more death repeated at each site they visit. This history is difficult, and exceedingly heartbreaking, especially when we understand that these acts were conducted by a government who half a century earlier (not even a full lifetime) signed a Declaration stating that "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."[61] Those of us educated in American schools may be familiar with this phrase as applicable to all, but a journey through American history shows otherwise.

Our patriotism may be challenged as we understand some of the horrific sacrifices, instigated by our government, that made the United States the freest country in the world. It is through histories, such as the history of the Native people of North America, that we learn these "truths" were not applied equally to "all men." For many American people this may be hard to accept, especially since we are taught one version of history in school, a version meant to foster patriotism and the American Spirit. While

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[60] Becky Marshall and Jim Couch, "Southeastern Indians Documentary," *YouTube Video,* 15:02, Published December 21, 2018, https://youtu.be/2fVX-2o5YY4?si=CVK0jPbbMcWbQN9K; *Etowah Indian Mounds State Historic Site: A Historic Guide* (Kennesaw, GA: Department of Museums, Archives and Rare Books, Kennesaw State University, in coordination with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources: State Parks and Historic Sites); Andrés Reséndez, *The Other Slavery: The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America,* 1st Mariner Books ed. (Boston: Mariner Books, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017). Introduction.

[61] U.S. Declaration of Independence, 1776, https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript.

this is a difficult reality to grasp, there is no reason to not be patriotic. Patriotism should always incorporate the understanding of the historical scars of one's own country. Nurturing this more fully rounded view of history will not only make us more informed as a nation, but will also create better and more responsible citizens intent on keeping history (both good and bad) alive and relevant for the benefit of future generations.

Nacoochee Indian Mound: Nestled in the mountains south of the Track Rock Gap petroglyphs, is the Nacoochee Platform Mound in Helen, Georgia located off the banks of the Chattahoochee River. According to a 1918 report written by George G Heye, F.W. Hodge and George H. Pepper, the mound was excavated in 1915.[62] At this time, there were deposits of gold found in the area and a strong, false belief that the Native people built mounds purposely to hide gold. This belief was prolific enough to spark a popular drive and motivation to excavate Native American mound sites. While no gold was found, excavators did find numerous artifacts including copper tools,[63] soapstone tools, pottery, animal effigies and human burials. The burials, which were completely uncovered and exposed as part of the excavation, totaled 75 individuals including men, women and children.[64] The excavators determined that Nacoochee, at one time, had a large town house on top of it and would have been the center of a large Cherokee town with many individual homes in the vicinity of the mound.[65]

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[62] It is worth noting that a man named Dr. Hardman gave permission for the excavation to move forward, not the Native community.
[63] Copper is a metal originating from the Great Lakes area, specifically Lake Superior. The evidence of copper implements here exemplified the presence of complex trade networks spanning from the north to the south and all along the Mississippi River.
[64] The original archaeological report shows photographs of human burials in situ. Out of respect, these images are omitted from this study.
[65] Charles C. Jones, "Antiquity of the North American Indians," *The North American Review* 118, no. 242 (1874): 78.

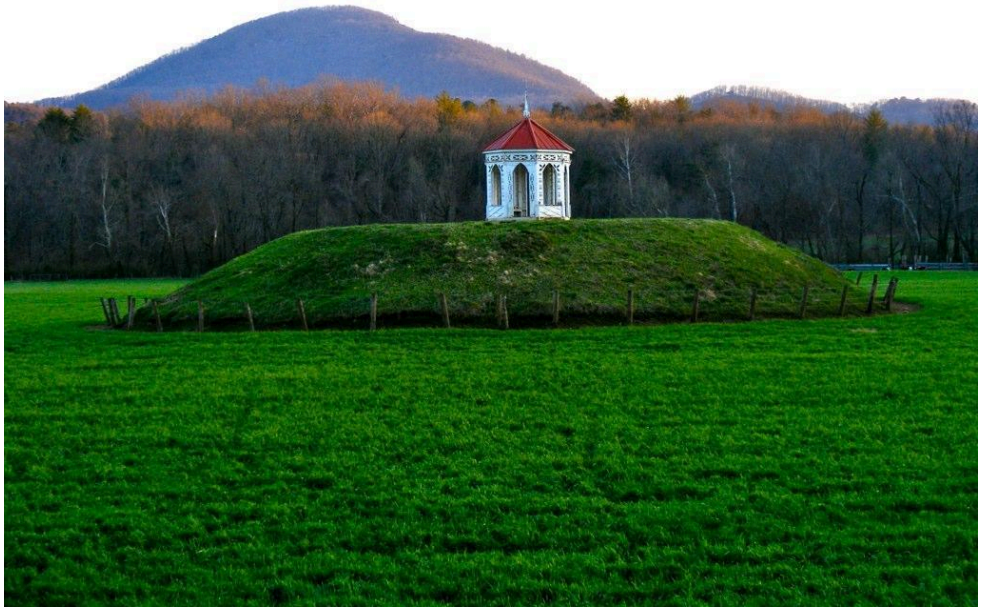

Figure 8: Reconstructed Nacoochee Mound in Helen Georgia as it appears today.

Platform mounds, as Nacoochee appears today, are the most recent mound development stylistically. Most mounds began much smaller and more conical or rounded than they appear in modern times. Nacoochee mound showed distinct stratified layers including a charcoal and burnt bone layer, one layer of animal bones as well as several burn layers of red clay. These layers indicate use and reuse of the site as well as continual rebuilding of the mound spanning many generations and thousands of years.[66] Just as importantly, Nacoochee's location off of the Chattahoochee River highlights its importance as public architecture and pivotal point of contact for the Native communities. This evidence suggests that Nacoochee was a stopping point for those

[66] George G. Heye, F.W. Hodge, and George H. Pepper, *The Nacoochee Mound in Georgia*, vol. 4 (New York: Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, 1918). 1-50.

traveling between Etowah mounds further south and mound sites farther north in North Carolina.[67]

Track Rock Gap: North of Nacoochee, the Track Rock Gap petroglyphs exist in the northern part of the Georgia mountains near the North Carolina border. The Track Rock Gap petroglyphs are known for their wide variety of carvings including footprints, cupules, bird tracks, meandering lines and many variations of what is known as the vulva shape. Unfortunately, this group of petroglyphs was displaced from their original location in order to make room for a modern day road. Relocation of petroglyphs makes it difficult to determine their significance based on location, however, we do know from James Mooney's writings that the boulders are still relatively in the same location.

Track Rock Gap is interesting and important for many reasons, however it is one of the petroglyphs in the region that shows additional carvings since Mooney first recorded them in 1890. Comparing James Mooney's drawing to a 2018 drawing in an article written by Loubser, Ashcraft and Wettstaed, we see significantly more petroglyphs on Loubser's 2018 drawing (labeled as "Boulder 6") than in Mooney's drawing. If both sketches are accurate at the time in which each man sketched the rock the additional motifs in Loubser's sketch show active usage of this site very close to the 20th century

[67] Christopher B. Rodning, "Mounds, Myths, and Cherokee Townhouses in Southwestern North Carolina," *American Antiquity* 74, no. 4 (2009): 627–63.

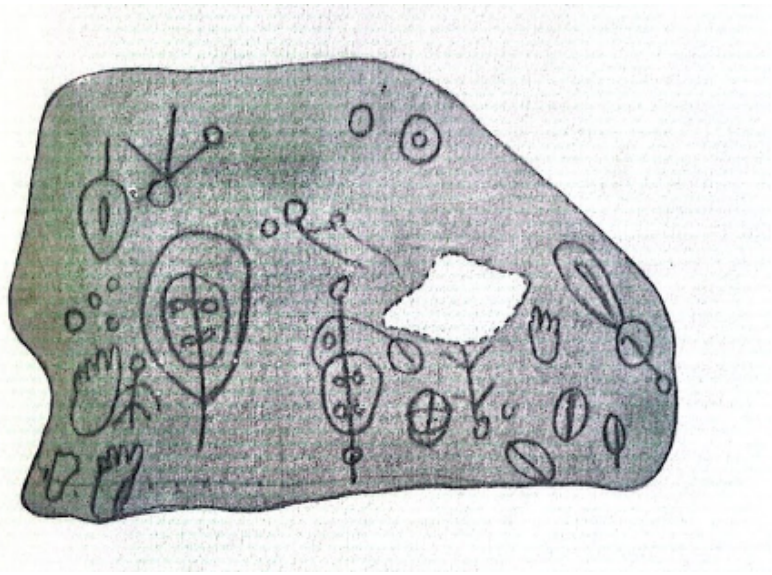

Figure 9: Hand drawn sketch of Track Rock Gap petroglyphs in Georgia, James Mooney, 1889, from the Bureau of American Ethnology, 19th Annual Report PL. XX.[68]

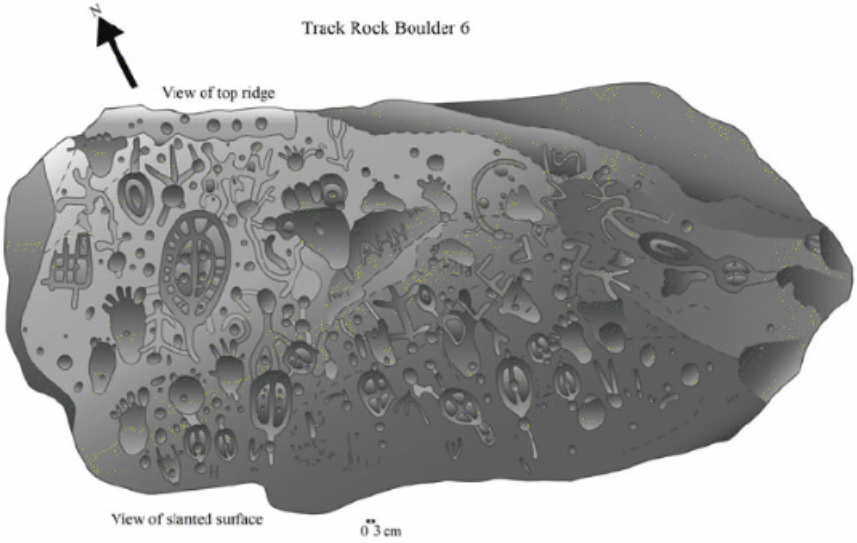

Figure 10: Recent drawing by Johannes Loubser, of Boulder 6, Track Rock Gap Petroglyph Site. 2018[69]

[68] James Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee* (Washington: Cornell University, 1902), 418–19.
[69] Johannes Loubser, Scott Ashcraft and James Wettstaed. "Betwixt and Between: the occurrence of petroglyphs between townhouses of the living and townhouses of spirit beings in northern Georgia and western North Carolina," *Transforming the Landscape: Rock Art and the Mississippian Cosmos.* Barnsley: Oxbow Books Ltd, 2018. 210.

Judacullah Rock: Moving farther north to Cullowhee, North Carolina, Judacullah rock is one of the most informative petroglyphs in this study. Designated as a historic landmark in 2013, Judacullah Rock rests near the Caney Fork river, which connects to the larger Tuckasegee River, Adventurous visitors can drive up the curvy mountain road to see this historic landmark. Imagery contribution over thousands of years proves that Judacullah Rock is a place Native people returned to and actively used for millennia. Today Judacullah Rock is still an active location used by the Eastern Band of the Cherokee for festivals and sacred cultural traditions.

Mooney's descriptions of Cherokee oral traditions illustrate the connection between identity and place. Judacullah (also spelled Tsul'kălû) is said to be a god-like being in the old Cherokee stories.[70] For example, the story of Judacullah, a slant-eyed giant/god-like figure with six fingers lands on top of what is now known as the Judacullah Rock. The story goes that when Judacullah landed on the rock he had to brace himself with his hand. This action left a six-fingered handprint on the rock. While this handprint is extremely weathered thousands of years later, visible markings still remain.[71]

The rock shows a palimpsest of evidence in the form of stone bowl harvesting dateable to at least 3000 years ago, as well as markings that look like modern-day vandalism. Husband and wife photography team Bruce and Elaine Roberts, undertook an extensive photographic study of Native American mounds and petroglyphs in the Carolinas and Georgia as they were at the time of the photographs.[72] Their photographs

[70] James Mooney, *Sacred Formulas of the Cherokee,* Washington: Wellcome Library, 1891, Introduction.
[71] Judacullah Rock, Archaic, Woodland, Mississippian Cultures, Cullowhee, North Carolina.
[72] Due to Hurricane Helene, many of these sites likely suffered damage in September 2024.

encompass an updated and comprehensive view of the condition of petroglyphs and mounds as well as a rough location of each site.[73] Bruce and Elaine Roberts' photographic work includes an older photograph of Judacullah rock prior to its excavation in the 21st century. The image shows at least half of the boulder underground with the excavation revealing hundreds of previously unseen petroglyphs. Based on the 2007 photograph, presumably the petroglyphs underground would be much older than the petroglyphs on the most exposed part of the rock. We will return to the story of Judacullah rock later, but the takeaway here is that thanks to the photographic records and local, native knowledge we can regard Judacullah Rock as a reliable timeline of petroglyph design going back thousands of years.[74]

[73] Bruce and Elaine Robert's, "Native American Site: North Georgia and Western Carolina, "B & E Roberts Photography, 2024, https://www.be-roberts.com/se/native/na-index.htm. The Roberts' are cognizant in maintaining a high degree of confidentiality regarding the Native American sites they photograph. This level of caution is to protect the sites from vandalism and to prevent curiosity seekers from trespassing on private property. Unless the sites are on public land, the Roberts do not divulge the exact location.

[74] Johannes Loubser, "The Enigma of Judacullah Rock."; Ashcraft; Bruce and Elaine Roberts

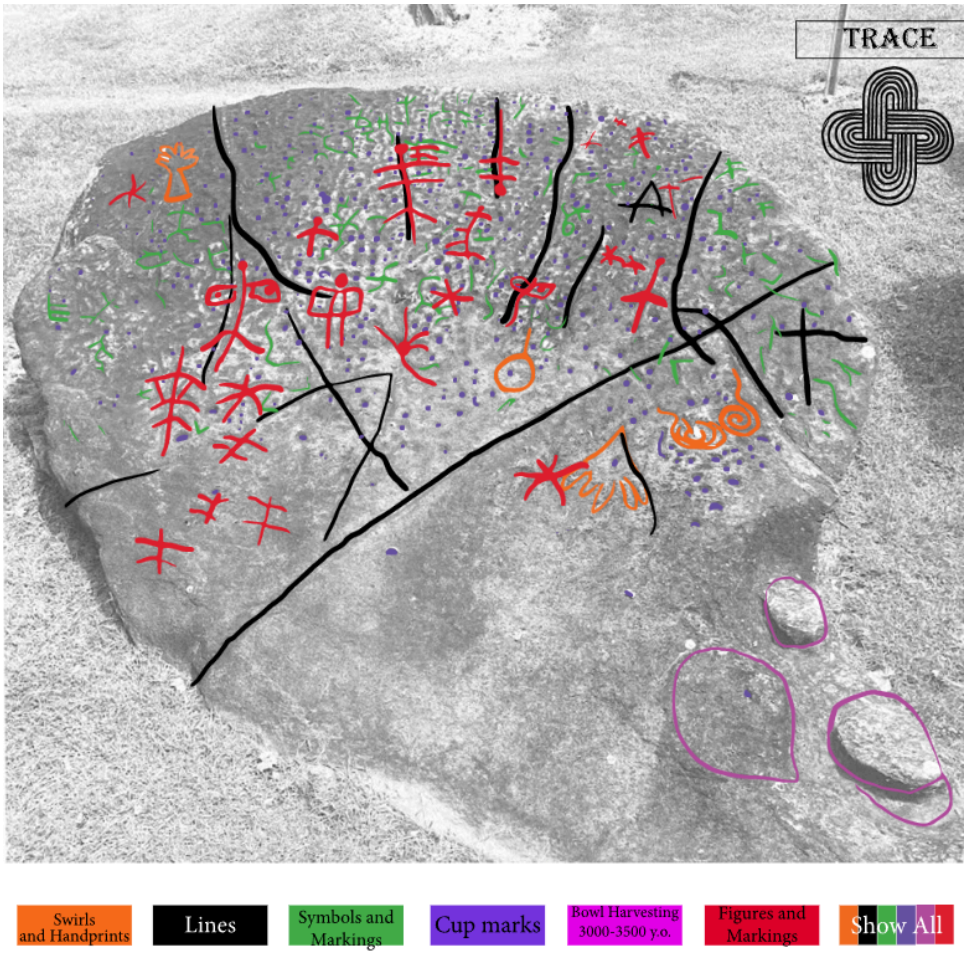

Figure 11: Color-coded Image of Judacullah Rock, Cullowhee, NC.[75]

Kituwah Mound: Slightly west of Judacullah Rock and located on a bend in the Tuckasegee River and on the sacred motherland of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee is the Kituwah Platform Mound in Cherokee, North Carolina. The Cherokee own and control the land on which this mound sits, which they have turned into an expansive nature preserve with walking trails and a large community garden. The Cherokee actively preserve the mound, the area around it and hold sacred ceremonies on the land.

[75] "Trace" *YonderCarolina,* Updated June 2024. YonderCarolina.com/Trace. For an interactive version of this graphic, visit the YonderCarolina website.

The Anotasgi Cultural Specialists, a group of local native Cherokee associated with the Museum of the Cherokee People, seek to educate Native and non-Native people about Cherokee history, culture and the importance of respecting the land provided to us by Mother Earth. According to the Antotasgi, Kituwah has been mostly flattened by farming, but a small portion of the mound is still elevated above the surrounding ground. As one of the most prominent mounds in the area, Kituwah would have had a large town home sitting atop and also would have been a source of eternal fire and therefore a meeting place for the surrounding community.[76] All townhouses, like the one at Kituwah, had a constant fire burning at its center. A fire keeper tended the flames and kept the fire burning at all times, even in the rain. As part of the festival of eternal fire, the surrounding community members would travel yearly to retrieve an ember from the townhome's fire. While keeping the ember smoldering in a *tusti*[77] bowl, they traveled by canoe back to their homes and light their home fires with the ember from the eternal fire.[78]

Nikwasi Mound: Approximately 30 minutes south of Kituwah, is Nikwasi mound located in the mountain town of Franklin, North Carolina. Visitors to the historic Native American town of Nikwasi, will notice how the modern day town of Franklin, developed around the mound. Given the mound's size and location near the banks of the Little Tennessee River, Nikwasi was definitely a major crossroads during Mississippian

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[76] Anotasgi Cultural Specialists, Museum of the Cherokee Indian, *A Tour of Kituwah Sacred Motherland of the Cherokee*, Cherokee, North Carolina, April 7, 2024.
[77] A *tusti* bowl was a small jar with a lid.
[78] Allen, *A Tour of the Town Creek Indian Mound*; Christopher Bernard Rodning, "Mounds Townhouses, and Cherokee Towns" *Center Places and Cherokee Towns: Archaeological Perspectives on Native American Architecture and Landscape in the Southern Appalachians* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2015). 40-45.

time period and much earlier in history. According to the historical marker, Nikwasi mound was the location of a treaty in 1730 between the Cherokee and Sir Alexander Cuming. Scottish born, Cuming served as a voyager and part of the British delegation to the Cherokee Indians.[79] According to Cuming's journals, his relationship with the Cherokee was extremely positive to the point where the Cherokee named him Commander and Chief of the area. According to the story, Cuming managed to convince (or perhaps manipulate) multiple Cherokee Chiefs to return to England with him following the treaty. Whether this story is completely true, or an instance of re-framed history from a colonizer's perspective, this story solidifies Nikwasi as a major center in history.

Unlike many of the other mounds in the region, Nikwasi has never been excavated. It remained under Cherokee control into the 19th century and was eventually purchased by a wealthy North Carolinian who, fortunately, sought to preserve it for future generations. Other than some minor elevation of the ground in Franklin to protect it from floodwaters and occasional herbicide treatments to the mound itself, it has been left undisturbed and in its original state.[80] Aging the mound is not straight forward, as the platform mound seen today was likely built on top of much earlier mound structures. Likely, the mound has its roots in the late Archaic and Woodland periods even though the platform mound today may be only 800-900 years old.[81] According to the Cherokee, Nikwasi is a sacred place and acts as a warning for any outsiders who seek to control

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[79] Gordon Goodwin, "Cuming, Alexander," in *Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. Leslie Stephen, vol. 13 (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1888), 294–295.
[80] "The Nikwasi Mound," *The Cultural Landscape Foundation*, accessed August 9, 2024, https://www.tclf.org/sites/default/files/microsites/landslide2021/locations/nikwasi.html.
[81] B. A. Steere,"The Nikwasi Mound: Archaeology, Preservation, and Politics in the Eastern Cherokee Heartland," *Native South* 15 (2022): 60-77.

this location in the future. According to the story, if an instance arises where the Cherokee Nation needs to defend itself, an army of the *Núñnè'hĭ (the immortals)* lies in wait beneath the mound, ready to protect and defend at a moment's notice - and it would not be the first time the *Núñnè'hĭ* have had to do so.[82]

Hagood Mill Petroglyphs: South and eastward into South Carolina, the Hagood Mill Petroglyph Site is located in Pickens County, South Carolina. Prior to the re-discovery of the petroglyphs near the river, Hagood Mill was already designated as an historic site in 1972, which inadvertently protected the petroglyphs. Michael Bramlett, who re-discovered the petroglyphs in 2003, recounts the story by saying that on rainy day, he had an urge to check out a large boulder at the site, that other rock art researchers such as Tommy Charles and Dennis Chastain had already eliminated as a possibility for petroglyphs. While standing on top of the rock. Bramlett looked down at his feet and noticed three faint anthropomorphic figures.[83] At this time, only the top portion of the rock was visible as the majority of the boulder was completely covered with sediment and vegetation.

Shortly after Bramlett's exciting discovery, the rock was excavated further and more anthropomorphic images emerged as well as symbols and shapes and other carvings that appear more recent.[84] Bramlett conservatively dates the petroglyphs to several hundred years old. He states that an old wagon road built in 1822 used to run right over the rock. Grooves from the wagon wheels are still visible. Since the dirt for the road was hard packed until boulders excavation in 2003 Bramlet can date all of

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[82] James Mooney, "The *Núñnè'hĭ*," *Myths of the Cherokee,* 330-335.

[83] Conditions such as overcast sky and lightly wet surface are ideal for spotting petroglyphs.

[84] Tommy Charles, "The Survey" *Discovering South Carolina's Rock Art*, 1st ed. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2012). 20-22.

lower petroglyphs to before 1822, at a time period which corresponds to the Trail of Tears.

In an interview with Bramlett, he explained how Hagood Mill Petroglyphs are unique and somewhat anomalous in what we currently know about petroglyph carvings in the region. As an active participant in Tommy Charles rock art survey for his book *Discovering South Carolina's Rock Art,* we know that the vast majority of known petroglyphs in the area are what the study refers to as "abstract," meaning not identifiable to a 21st century audience. While Hagood Mill petroglyph boulder has some carvings of unknown meaning, they also include a significant number of human figures, which is unusual for the area. As Bramlett probed this anomaly further, he connected with a rock art researcher familiar with the Jeffers Petroglyph site in Minnesota. Some of the figures, especially the figures wearing square shaped regalia, are strikingly similar petroglyphs in the Great Lakes Region. These glyphs depict a Shaking Tent Ceremony, which is a powerful ceremony performed by shamans and medicine men as a way of communing with a higher power of nature. When the tent begins to shake, the shaman knows he/she has made contact.[85] What exactly this observation points to is unclear, but it presents an interesting line of inquiry as to how imagery and ideas travel over a long distance. [86]

[85] John M. Cooper, "The Shaking Tent Rite among Plains and Forest Algonquians," *Primitive Man* 17, no. 3/4 (July 1944): 60–84.
[86] Bramlett, personal interview and tour of the Hagood Petroglyph Site.

Figure: 12: Image of possible Shaking Tent Ceremony at the Hagood Mill Petroglyph
Site, Pickens County, South Carolina April, 2023.

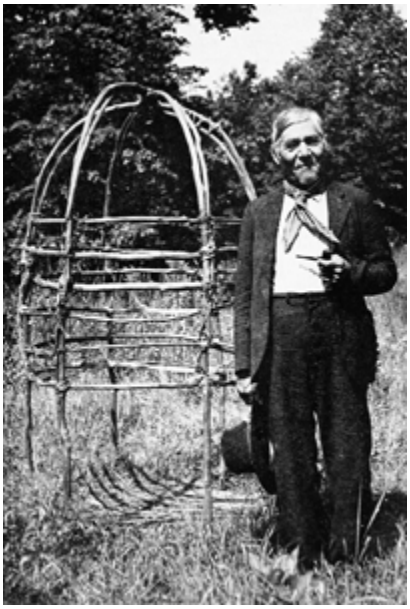

Figure 13: Chippewa man standing next to his shaking tent in the Sand Lake, St. Croix Settlements, WI, 1942. Photographed by Robert E. Ritzenthaler (Milwaukee Public Museum neg no. 50113).

Piedmont Region

Ocmulgee Historic Mounds: Pushing farther east into the Piedmont the landscape turns into rolling hills, but at a much lower elevation. Visitors to Macon, Georgia may have the opportunity to visit Ocmulgee Historic Mounds. The mounds found here are more spread out than the Etowah Mounds farther west and a bit smaller. In addition to a lodge site, several earthen mounds including a funerary mound, the visitor center features a museum that is free and open to the public. Visitors to the site can hike to all of the various mounds sites within the historic park's vicinity.

The Great Temple (as it is known today) is a massive fifty foot structure. The Native architects made use of the natural rolling hills of the landscape and constructed the mound on top of an elevation rising over 300 feet which causes this mound to appear inherently larger than it actually is. Including the natural elevation the mound stands at well over three hundred feet. Overlooking the Ocmulgee River and the Walnut Creek tributary, which served as access points to this mound complex via waterways.[87]

In the 1930s, Ocmulgee was the site of one of the most extensive archaeological excavations in US history, with nearly every mound being completely desecrated and raided. Over a three year excavation consisting of an 800 person crew, they uncovered over two and half million artifacts and hundreds of human burials. Prior to the excavations, the Central of Georgia Railroad destroyed a portion of the funeral mound in order to lay tracks. As a result of archaeological abuse and transportation construction, Ocmulgee mounds suffered significant damage. In 1936, the mounds were designated as

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[87] *Ocmulgee Mounds* (National Park Service US Department of the Interior in coordination with the Nation Park Foundation).

a historical monument by Franklin Roosevelt and received the additional redesignation in 2019 by Donald Trump as a National Historic Park, which expanded the park's area by 2100 acres.[88]

Today the mounds are largely reconstructed, albeit not always with a great degree of historical accuracy, which the site's wayfinding signage is quick to point out. For example, the lodge mound appears today as an earthen lodge covered with a turf. In an aggressive preservation effort, the entire flooring of the lodge was covered completely with concrete. In antiquity, this location would have been less of a mound and more of a longhouse with a hole in the roof to let out the smoke of a communal fire in the center. This model does not support the earthen mound reconstruction that we see today as any fire lit in an enclosed space would have suffocated those meeting inside.[89]

Town Creek Indian Mound: Close to the fall line, one of the most well preserved sites in the piedmont is the Town Creek Indian Mound located off the Pee Dee River in Mount Gilead, North Carolina. In 1955, the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources of North Carolina designated Town Creek as a state historic site and manages its continued preservation. Today, the reconstructed central mound points to the history of the entire complex. As a platform mound, it supported the structure of a townhouse, or a government center on top of it.

Originally excavated by Joffre Coe in an exceptionally long-lasting (50 year) archaeological excavation program from 1937-1987,[90] as well as Stanley South, a well

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[88] Funerary Wayfinding Sign. Ocmulgee Mounds National Historic Park, Macon, Georgia; "Stories," National Park Service.
[89] Earthen Lodge Wayfinding Sign, Ocmulgee Mounds National Historic Park, Macon, Georgia.
[90] Joffre Lanning Coe and Thomas D. Burke, *Town Creek Indian Mound: A Native American Legacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995). 23-27.

known archaeologist in the region, excavated with Coe beginning in the 1950s.[91] The large platform mound dates to the Mississippian period, making it hundreds of years old. However, similar to Nikwasi, Nacoochee and Kituwah, since the land was used by Native ancestors for millennia before the present day, the actual mound site is ancient, likely thousands of years old. Excavations directed by South and Coe show evidence of earlier structures as well as burials within the mound itself.

Figure 14: Reconstructed round house. The shape indicates a domicile versus an official building
Town Creek Indian Mound, Mount Gilead, North Carolina.

[91] Stanley South, "Part II: The Developmental Years" *An Archaeological Evolution*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Springer US, 2005). 67-94.

Figure 15: Reconstructed platform mound and townhouse. The square shape of the building designates it as a place of official business and high importance. Town Creek Indian Mound, Mount Gilead, North Carolina.

Similar to Kituwah, Town Creek was also the source of the eternal flame and a yearly destination for the surrounding villages, marking Town Creek as a major mound complex during the most active periods of the South Appalachian Mississippians. Certainly, cultural and language differences existed between Native American communities, but this shared tradition across a wide geographic area, exemplifies commonalities in culture and communication across the Carolinas and Georgia.[92]

Coe and South uncovered and documented artifacts such as thousands of sherds of pottery and evidence of numerous building structures, mostly circular buildings. The presence of the circular structures indicates domiciles and points to the presence of a large community living and working at Town Creek during the Mississippian period.[93] Additionally, Coe and South, along with their archaeological team, excavated hundreds of burials in the vicinity of the mound and beyond. Up until NAGPRA laws went into

[92]Allen, A Tour of the Town Creek Indian Mound.
[93] These round domiciles are not a universal characteristic found at mound complexes. Etowah exhibits square shaped domiciles.

effect in 1990, the historical site exhibited human remains on site. They have since been returned to the nearby tribes and reinterred and the site no longer displays human remains.[94]

Mountain Island Lake Petroglyphs:[95] Petroglyph sites in the Piedmont area are exceedingly rare. This could be due to development and higher human population in the Piedmont than elsewhere in the Carolinas and Georgia. However, given the right conditions and locations, it is possible to find some likely sites as is the case with Mountain Island Lake. Mountain Island Lake is a manmade lake created by a dam, however it still follows the same meander of the pre-existing Catawba River. The lake has a series of large boulders which to this day draw people to them for recreation and a convenient place to rest. The presence of these large rocks and their location along the meander of the Catawba River make them prime petroglyph search areas. One of the boulders exhibits a faded vulva motif as well as a single cupule and a series of interconnected lines similar to several of the petroglyphs Tommy Charles documented in his book. Unfortunately, the site also exhibits signs of serious erosion and large, fallen boulders rolled to their current place over time, as well as a high level of human activity. This is an interesting find, especially since not many petroglyph sites seem to exist in the Piedmont area, it requires further study.

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[94] NAGPRA, or the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act was signed into law by George H.W. Bush on November 16, 1990.
[95] The name of this lake is deceptive as it is neither a mountain, nor an island.

Figure 16: Weathered petroglyphs in Huntersville, NC.[96]

Coastal Region

Santee Indian Mound: Leaving the piedmont region and moving closer to the coast is the Santee Indian Mound in Summerton, South Carolina. Santee Indian Mound is located in the Santee Wildlife Refuge. When the Santee Indians and their ancestors established a mound in this area, it would have been off of the Santee River. Today the major waterway next to the mound is Lake Marion, however this is a manmade lake and

[96] YonderCarolina, "Maps, Videos, and More."

not part of the Santee people's historical landscape. Santee Mound was built and rebuilt continuously during its active period stretching from approximately 1200s - 1700s. Interestingly enough, the British built a small, temporary fort on top of the mound from 1780-1781. Known as Fort Watson, it served as a temporary outpost during the American Revolutionary War. Signage at the mound site recounts that the mound's abandonment by this time in American history. John Lawson's journals support this claim as being true and provide additional contextual reasoning for the mound's abandonment. During Lawson's journey through South Carolina, he writes that the Santee Indians experienced a devastating loss of 90% of their population due to the new diseases they contracted from the incoming colonists.[97] Likely, survival became the Santee's primary focus during this time period and there were not enough people and community spirit to keep the mound maintained.

An active site for thousands of years, Santee Mound provided a stopping point along the Santee River for travelers coming and going from the Atlantic Ocean. Due to shoreline erosion, Santee appears relatively coastal today, but in antiquity was probably surrounded by somewhat drier, less marshy land. Santee mound's importance to this study begins to move us from the piedmont area to the coast where mound building material for mound site construction undergoes a change.[98]

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[97] John Lawson, *A New Voyage to Carolina*, ed. Talmage Lefler (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 17–18.

[98] Shell mounds exist in other parts of the country besides the coastal region. While not the focus of this study the Mississippi River is also a source of multiple shell mounds. For more information on Mississippi River shell mounds, please refer to the following article.
William H. Marquardt, "Shell Mounds in the Southeast: Middens, Monuments, Temple Mounds, Rings, or Works?" *American Antiquity* 75, no. 3 (2010): 551–70.

Harkers Island Shell Ring: As we move directly toward the coast, mounds take on a different type of construction and are constructed out of coastal materials and shells. Often they have a pit in the center, giving them the designation of shell ring. In the North Carolina coastal barrier islands, Karen Amspacher, Executive Director of the Harkers Island Core Sound Waterfowl Museum and Heritage Center is a living witness to the presence of a large shell mound that used to exist on Harkers Island, North Carolina. Harkers Island is part of a string of islands along the North Carolina coast that makes up the Down East Communities. According to Amspacher, this mound was part of a string of shell mounds reaching all the way to Cape Lookout, some of which are still visible through Google Earth satellite imagery. Amspacher, as well as other Down East locals, remember stories of friends and family climbing (or driving) on top of the shell mound as children, even finding Native American artifacts, pottery and human and animal remains in the mound.

Figure 17: Archival photograph of the Shell Mound on Harkers Island. Photograph from the Cape Lookout National Seashore. Circa 1920s.[99]

Shell rings are some of the oldest mounds in existence and therefore the artifacts found with them may date to the Archaic period. While they are difficult to study due to their location and poor state of preservation they are an important part of Native American mound building history.[100] Reportedly, the locals dismantled the Harkers Island Shell Ring over time and eventually ground up the remainder for fertilizer. Such a decision has many ramifications including additional loss of indigenous material culture and burials. However, there are still existing signs of the presence of this mound. Just

[99] Cape Lookout National Seashore, "Did You Know" Shell Point on Harkers Island was named for a large shell mound left by American Indians, very likely the Coree tribe," Facebook, November 15, 2013, https://www.facebook.com/CapeLookoutNPS/photos/a.478460295508129/650741111613379/?type=3&mibextid=cr9u03.

[100] From the perspective of Western Civilization, shell rings may be as old as Stonehenge in Great Britain. Stonehenge dates to the late Neolithic and early Bronze ages.

offshore of the museum and the coast guard station, is a location known as “Shell Point,” which is approximately where the mound was located.

While there is no existing memorial to the mound, other than this single photograph, this does not diminish the importance of this mound as part of a complex system of shell ring networks stretching up and down the Atlantic coast.[101] Today, the Outer Banks are part of the Cape Lookout National Seashore, inaugurated in 1966. This includes the eastern point of Harkers Island where the shell mound was located. Since it is illegal to remove anything from a national park, Native American artifacts are now protected by park rangers and the US Coast Guard. Perhaps if the shell mound was still around today, it would also have been preserved.[102]

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[101] Cape Lookout National Seashore, “Did You Know,” Facebook, November 15, 2013.

[102] There are two shell rings still visible by satellite imagery on Cape Lookout. Additionally, a development group uncovered thousands of indigenous artifacts on Cedar Point which is also in Carteret County. Such major sites and discoveries point to this area being a major settlement of Indigenous people long before European contact.
"Native American Remains Found at Indian Burial Ground in North Carolina," *Axios Raleigh*, June 10, 2024, https://www.axios.com/local/raleigh/2024/06/10/native-american-remains-indian-burial-ground-nc-developers.

Figure 18: Areas marked in green are part of the Cape Lookout National Seashore.[103]

The existence of a shell mound on Harkers Island points to the significance of the area as a thriving Native community for thousands of years. Residents report finding Native American artifacts on the island including arrowheads, pottery sherds and fossilized bovine teeth. The Core Sound Museum has a collection of pottery sherds found on the island that most likely date from the late Woodland to Mississippian periods (800-1850).[104] We can determine this by comparing them to similar-looking sherds of a known date. In Joffre Coe's book *Town Creek Indian Mound: A Native American Legacy,* Coe meticulously documents artifacts found during the archaeological

[103] "Cape Lookout National Seashore," *National Park Service*, accessed August 9, 2024, https://www.nps.gov/calo/index.htm.
[104] Sandy Asher Collection, "Documentation of Native American Pottery Finds on Harkers Island," The Core Sound Waterfowl Museum and Heritage Center, Harkers Island, North Carolina.

excavation of Town Creek. Coe includes hundreds of photographs of pottery and sherds excavated from the site. Since corn was not grown widely until the Mississippian period, the corncob impressions found on many of the sherds indicate a Mississippian time period. This corn cob impression is identical to many of the sherds in the Core Sound Museum's collection. Further analysis must be completed to provide a more conclusive date, but the corn cob impression provides physical evidence of the Mississippian period.

Figure 19: Town Creek sherd (left) and Sandy Asher sherd (right) both have near identical impressions from a corn cob stamp, indicating a Mississippian origin date.[105]

Edisto Shell Ring: Journeying south to the South Carolina coast Edisto Shell Ring, or Spanish Point, as it is also known, is mostly destroyed due to erosion. A final assault from hurricane Irma in 2017 nearly dismantled the remaining wall completely. However, visitors to Edisto Beach State Park can see the remains and read about the archaeological excavations and preservation attempts associated with the mound. The

[105] Joffree Coe and Leland G Ferguson, *Town Creek Indian Mound: A Native American Legacy,* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 233- 235.

shell ring at Edisto continues to erode and decay, but the park preserves its history and will continue to pass it down to visitors for as long as the area remains a state park.[106]

Archaeologists determined that the Edisto Shell Ring once stood nearly 20 feet high and took up an area of half an acre. Biological remains include a number of different animals, with deer being the most prevalent. Edisto is made largely of thousands of oyster shells along with food remains, artifacts including bone artifacts and pottery sherds with distinct styles typical of other shell rings found along the same coastal network. In an interesting connection to the piedmont and mountain region, archaeologists identified a layer of soapstone in the mound, even though soapstone is not found along the coast. The presence of soapstone here is significant because it points to trade-based relations with Native communities farther inland.[107]

St. Catherine's Island: Farther south, towards Georgia shows a larger amount of still visible shell rings such as Fig Island, in South Carolina and in Georgia, St. Catherine's Shell Ring and McQueen's Shell Ring. Matthew Sanger conducted extensive studies on shell rings in the American southeast and has analyzed the sedimentary deposits and construction of McQueen and Fig shell rings. Sanger specifically notes that these two rings performed different purposes. St. Catherine's Shell Ring, in particular, functioned as a food storage location for produce such as hickory nuts and acorns and likely other types of food that could be smoked, salted and preserved in such a way. In the central part of the St. Catherine's mound, multiple pits which could have stored

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[106] Another shell ring known as Fig Shell Ring can be found slightly north of Edisto and is in a better state of preservation.

[107] South Carolina State Parks, "Coastal heritage Under Threat: Spanish Mount at Edisto Beach State Park" *YouTube* South Carolina State Parks, October 12, 2022. youtu.be/YQoSqPB4XpE?si=rW0dFOaqpVa-.lZU1

separate food items. McQueen's shell ring has a single pit containing human burials and appears more funerary in purpose. Along the Savannah River shell rings it is a common pattern to find two shell rings, one for storage and one for burials.[108] Interestingly enough, the funerary mound contained articulated animal remains along with the deceased. Sanger speculates that the presence of animal remains point to the rippling interconnectivity of humans and the universe. This is underscored by the fact that many of the human remains were found with remains of animals originating from the sky, earth and sea, or the three planes of existence present in Native American cosmology and comprehension of existence and show active use of the resources nearby in shell mound construction.[109]

These are not the only two shell rings off the Georgia coast, but they represent an important realization for scholars. It used to be commonly accepted that hunter-gathering societies did not settle in one place or create monumental architecture. The presence of Archaic shell rings flies in opposition to this theory. It shows that, at least in this area, Archaic hunter-gatherers did in fact construct large structures and seemed to have other pursuits beyond hunting and searching for food.

The objective of taking time to review the previous sampling of historic sites is multifaceted in its purpose. One purpose is to show how the changing landscape plays a role in mound and petroglyph construction and continued preservation. Petroglyph sites seem to disappear once out of the mountains, with a smattering of possible sites in the

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[108] Matthew Sanger, "Evidence for Significant Subterranean Storage at Two Hunter-Gatherer Sites: The Presence of a Mast-Based Economy in the Late Archaic Coastal American Southeast," *American Antiquity* 82 (2017): 50-59.

[109] Matthew C. Sanger, "Joining the Circle: Native American Philosophy Applied to the Study of Late Archaic Shell Rings of the Southeast United States," *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 28, no. 3 (September 2021): 737–765.

piedmont and none reported in the coastal region. This is not confirmation that coastal petroglyphs do not exist, but at the time of this study they are either destroyed by climate and development, not known, or kept secret.[110] Likely, the difference in carving material and lack of soapstone along the coast plays a role in the lack of preserved petroglyphs in the coastal region. In contrast, Mound sites have a stronger presence and prominence in the landscape and seem to explode in number along the coast in the form of shell rings. Heaping mounds of earth or shell is not dependent on hard carving material, such as soapstone, in order for construction and preservation to occur. Another point of reference is the age and mound features become much older the closer they are to the coastal region. This suggests that habitation took place along the coastal areas first and then people began to move inland.

As the study transitions into a discussion of symbolic features and the significance and meaning of the word "sacred," it is important to understand these things as much as possible from a Native American philosophical understanding of the world. From an Indigenous perspective, the world is a part of us and we are a part of the world. Human beings are not a cosmic accident, but rather part of a dynamic network originating from a central point working in conjunction with other forces of nature. This central point echoes in artwork as well as philosophy. While the following section examines petroglyph symbols individually, it is vitally necessary to see symbols and imagery as a radiating network with many connections, some known and many unknown.

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[110] It is my hope that I am completely wrong about this supposition and that we can find, record and preserve coastal petroglyphs for the future.

PART III: A SACRED DISCUSSION

A Sacred Introduction

"Almost any tribe can be examined and the result will be a bevy of stories about how the people used spiritual powers to live, and these powers are almost always made available to us in a sacred place where time and space do not define the terms of the experience."[111] ~ Vine Deloria, *God is Red.*

In order to define sacred space and locations, this section uses Native sources as much as possible. The concept of space, physical space and how people choose to take up space is a facet of rock art research that seems mostly absent. Space is power and the ability to claim said space for a specific purpose denotes power to the individual or group of people taking up and constructing their own space. This is true in art as well as architecture.

Non-Native scholars often overuse the words such as sacred and ceremonial when they do not understand the true purpose of the subject. Karin Tansem, in *The Norwegian Historical Review,* writes on the tendency of archaeologists and researchers to view such things as rock art in mythological and supernatural terms without considering other possible interpretations and intentions.[112] Adding to Tansem's argument, a further challenge is to see rock art symbols as part of a larger,

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[111] Vine Deloria Jr., *God is Red: A Native View of Religion*, 30th Anniversary Edition (New York: The Putnam Publishing Group, 2003), xvi–xvii.

[112] Karin Tansem, "Always Ritual, Symbolic and Religious? An Essay on the Alta Rock Art and the Archaeological Quest for Meaning," *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 55, no. 2 (2022): 159–185;
David H. Dye, "Mississippian Religious Beliefs and Ritual Practice: Earthen Monuments, Rock Art, and Sacred Shrines," *Reviews in Anthropology* 48, no. 3-4 (2019): 122–147;
Donna L. Gillette, ed., *Rock Art and Sacred Landscapes* (New York: Springer, 2014);
Diaz Granados et al., *Transforming the Landscape*, 45;
David H. Dye, ed., *Mississippian Culture Heroes, Ritual Regalia, and Sacred Bundles* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, an Imprint of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2021).

interconnected world view, rather than isolated elements. All the Native scholars cited in this section speak copiously about how all things connect through nature. This interconnectivity comes through the innate and continued activity of the ancestors' existence that, while not visible, is keenly felt by all Native people as part of their long history and connection to North America.[113]

Rock art scholars often tap into cosmology as an analytical method for studying rock art symbols. In doing, so they try to understand the cosmological perspective held by indigenous people in the past and present. Scholars describe Native cosmology as three separate planes with an upper, middle and lower level. While there are three separate dimensions, the directionality is not necessarily how a Native person would describe their spiritual worldview. Rather than three separate planes with one on top of the other, it is more accurate to say there are three separate dimensions, with only the sky being directional. Good and evil exist as alternate realities to each other and alongside each other. This duality is the classic struggle of good versus evil, but humans can protect themselves by learning not to live in fear as evil feeds off fear.[114] Into which dimension does rock art fit into? Rock art exists on the same terrestrial plane as humans. It can have a logistical purpose, or point toward another dimension, which, from the carvers' worldview, we can also consider to be logistical.

Historically, much of the compiled research on Native American symbolism and iconography does not come from native voices. It was not until the 1970s that Native authors began writing more routinely on religion, symbolism, history, social justice and

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[113] Many indigenous tribes refer to the North American continent as Turtle Island, based on its turtle-like shape.
[114] Tobey Rocket, personal consultant, Charlotte, North Carolina, July 16, 2024.

philosophy from their unique Native perspectives. According to healer Doug Good Feather from the Standing Rock Lakota and Dakota Nations, the Native American philosophical understanding of existence states that all things are interconnected in the Sacred Hoop of Life. Therefore, if human beings are a part of the natural world and share a dynamic connection with all natural things, then anything humans make; art, buildings, weapons, mounds, etc… is an extension of this network, rather than completely separate classifications. This deep and innate sense of common spirituality provides a lens to view rock art and mounds sites, as these, while constructed by human hands, are also a part of the network in the Sacred Hoop of Life.[115]

Mother Earth encompasses all that is sacred and hidden. Nature is sacred, and all things encompassed in nature are sacred. Good Feather's monograph, *Think Indigenous,* nuances the meaning of the word sacred. Good Feather explains sacred as something beyond the constructed concept of religion or ceremonial practice. These are man-made practices, and while important for forging a connection to the ancestors, what truly is sacred is what Good Feather calls the 'original truth.' He further explains how something that is considered sacred (whether in reference to a physical location, or not) is invisible because the sacred is invisible. However, something that is visible may point to something sacred inside what is visible. A primary example is mound sites, especially burial mounds which encompass the remains of ancestors who have passed on into the spirit world. Burial mounds are visible while the ancestors, enshrouded within the mound, are not.[116]

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[115] Doug Good Feather, *Think Indigenous: Native American Spirituality for a Modern World* (Carlsbad, CA: Hay House LLC, 2021), 1–17.
[116] Good Feather, *Think Indigenous,* Chapter 7.

Vine Deloria, from the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, was one of the first indigenous authors to successfully draw attention to Native American issues through his first book published in 1969, *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto.* In 1973 Deloria published the well-known monograph *God is Red,* where he delves into Native American history and philosophical explanations. Deloria's definition of sacred space is broader than Good Feather's and states that locations may become sacred for several reasons. These reasons may include tragedy, spiritual revelation and places where a moment of divine intervention occurred. Additionally, what is sacred to one tribe, may not be sacred to another, however due to the communal, spiritual interconnectivity of Native people, what is sacred to one group is respected and elevated above the mundane by all.[117] A well-known example of a sacred location is Bear Butte State Park in South Dakota east of the Black Hills. Visually, Bear Butte demands attention as it juts up sharply from the landscape standing in stark contrast to the gently rolling surrounding hills. Regarded as a sacred place by Native people and especially the tribes in South Dakota such as the Lakota and Sioux, Bear Butte encompasses thousands of years of Native history. Vitally important today, Native people still conduct important ceremonies and partake in time-honored practices, such as sweat lodges and vision quests, on the mountain.[118]

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[117] Vine Deloria Jr. *God is Red: A Native View of Religion.* 275-283.
[118] Other types of ceremonies are held here as well, but many of these practices are performed by skilled practitioners, and not intended for a general audience.

Figure 20: Bear Butte State Park, Sturgis, South Dakota

Karuk, Seneca and Cherokee healer and shaman Bobby Lake Thom gives practical and straightforward examples of Native American symbolism in his book, *Spirits of the Earth: A Guide to Native American Nature Symbols, Stories and Ceremonies.* Thom refers to sacred sites as power centers.

> From the very beginning of Creations there have been "power centers." Our elders teach us that the Great Creator made such places for a reason and a purpose. Ancient myths and stories teach us that power centers are sacred places where the spirits and alleged "gods" reside, while some religious doctrines reveal that specific, newer centers are where one goes to ask for direct contact with the Great Spirit that flows through all life, seen and unseen. Such places are sacred and holy; hence they should be respected, protected, preserved and used properly.[119]

Lake Thom adds to the definition of sacred by associating symbols as tangible representations of spiritual messages. Symbols derive almost exclusively from the natural world, with animal symbols being especially common. Lake Thom explains how

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[119] Bobby Lake Thom, *Spirits of the Earth: A Guide to Native American Nature Symbols, Stories and Ceremonies* (New York: Penguin Books USA, 1997), 178.

nature teaches us everything we need to know about life. The modern world and technological advancements have merit, but they take us out of nature, our primary instructor. If we take the time to be in nature, we can learn practical life lessons by observing how animals behave, the meander of a stream, or how the earth changes with the seasons.[120] Everything in nature is inextricably connected and exists for our benefit, but we must take the time to pay attention to what it is trying to tell us. It is within this context, that we can better understand the Mississippian worldview.

Wampanoag and Pequot artist, Tobey Rocket, generously served as a voluntary consultant over the course of this research. Rocket reiterates Thom and Deloria's stance on spiritual interconnectivity among Native people and further nuances how indigenous beliefs tie back into each other in a way that links to indigenous spirituality. Rocket states that, from a Native worldview, everything is alive and everything is related. Certain signs from nature, such as seeing a hawk, or an eagle fly overhead, is a sign that you are on the right path. If a Native person takes something from nature, for example cutting down a tree to build a home, or a canoe, the Native person doing so should thank the tree for its sacrifice and often leave something behind in return. Rocket believes that all indigenous people have an innate understanding of ancient Native symbolism, whether they fully grasp it, or not. This understanding does not come from within oneself, but from the ancestors who serve as guardians and guides to Native people throughout their lives. It is the ancestors, acting as spiritual guides, who provide Native people with clarity and understanding at pivotal moments.[121] To put this more succinctly,

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[120] Lake Thom, *Spirits of the Earth,* 23-30.
[121] Tobey Rocket, personal consultant, Charlotte, North Carolina, July 10, 2024.

the specific meaning of certain symbols may not always be known today by contemporary Native people. Rather, the potential to harness this understanding and nuance symbolic meaning is always available to those who have the training and authority to know how to properly perform practices meant to interpret these messages. Therefore, sacred things are not always meant to be seen or known by a wide audience.

The method of comparing personal accounts, stories and symbols concerning iconography, perspectives from the Native community with the archaeological record, aids in a better understanding of the original creators of rock art in the Carolinas and Georgia. Rock art, as is the case with all artwork, is a specialized and highly developed communication system. Art is an expression of the inner workings and ontological development of humanity. It shows how people in the past and present, use their minds to see and make sense of the world, and for this reason, it is important to look at artwork as a type of language.[122]

Art is language, and while the artwork studied in this article may look very different from the Latin alphabet, rock art is just as communicative (and likely a much more efficient way of communicating) as anything we identify today as the written word. Studies of ancient Native North Americans analyze the history of people with no written language. Some may use the word illiterate. I argue that any society that has the capacity to create a system of symbols important enough to carve into stone does not qualify as illiterate. Native Americans used all of these symbols as communication devices in the past.

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[122] Margalit Berriet, "Intellectual and Spiritual Expressions of Non-Literate Societies: Art and Culture, a Journey through the World of Mankind," in *Intellectual and Spiritual Expression of Non-Literate Peoples: Proceedings of the XVII UISPP World Congress (1–7 September, Burgos, Spain): Volume 1 / Session A20*, ed. Emmanuel Anati (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2016), 39–44.

Research artist Margalit Berriet suggests that rock art is the intellectual and spiritual manifestation of illiterate people. As an artist Berriet understands the need for people to express and create in an artistic format. Berriet rationalizes that artwork from literate and non-literate societies qualifies as a type of language with a wide array of subjects. Since art, at its core, is a method for human beings endeavoring to explain, as Berriet states, "the phenomena of life."[123] While the exact interpretation of each and every symbol of the Mississippian world and older time periods may be lost on our contemporary world, each symbol has the potential to provide information. Observing each location and its relationship to the landscape while simultaneously remembering that all things are intricately connected, is vital to this parallel study on petroglyphs and burial mounds in the Carolinas and Georgia. These historical sites are more than objects and places. They are permanent and physical ties to location and identity that reference a Native world view.

[123] Berriet, "Intellectual and Spiritual Expressions," 39-44.

PART IV: INTERPRETING SYMBOLS

The symbolism section intentionally comes last in this research, but when I first began looking into this topic, like many other rock art researchers, I looked into symbolism first, thinking that was the most logical starting point. In truth, starting with symbolism is akin to running a race backwards from finish to start, rather than start to finish. It is not that starting with symbolism is completely devoid of value, but this approach is narrowly focused and lacks the foundation and grounding of seeing these sites within the wider context of the landscape and geography.

The benefit of starting with simple observations lessens the risk of developing an interpretive theory that may or may not be in line with what the original carver had intended. Early scholarship focuses on petroglyphs in a way that encapsulates them within their own neat subcategory of Native art rather than integrating the petroglyphs within the broader concept of their immediate surroundings. It is important to keep an open mindset while studying these motifs, as it is easy to become locked into a certain interpretation, which may in fact be wrong. While interpretations and explanations will be offered in this section, note that these are hypotheticals, meant to spark interest in the subject and provide context. In terms of what these symbols represent, it is usually best to think of them in more simple terms rather than immediately delving into cosmological and ritualistic theory.

This section's primary focus is on petroglyphs and will relate them to the landscape, natural landmarks, mound sites within the vicinity and any commonalities with each other. Those who come from a Western worldview, are more likely to be very

concerned with analysis and understanding the minute details of an issue down to a scientific level. Many of the site specific rock art studies engage with petroglyphs by primarily focusing on the cosmological interpretation of the symbols, and secondarily on interpretations for each symbol. This method of study tends to categorize and subcategorize symbols into different classes, similar to how scientists classify living organisms into taxonomies. While this strategy helps generate fascinating data tables, it prohibits the integration of the petroglyphs into the broader arena of Native art history. If the goal is to view petroglyphs as much as possible from a Native perspective, where all things are connected, then a more inclusive research methodology needs to come to the forefront.

An important interpretation method employed by Matthew Sanger in 2020 is ontology.[124] Ontology is the study of existence, how people understand their place in the world, or how one element exists as part of an interconnected web of the universe. While Sanger's research largely focuses on shell rings, his use of the ontological analytical method can easily be applied to a study on symbolism and iconography found on petroglyphs. Since the messages encoded in rock art are not easily discernible by today's English language standards, scholars utilize different methodologies to interpret meaning. Rather than seeing a petroglyph symbol as an isolated glyph on a rock and existing only on that rock, it is much more accurate to understand it as part of a complex system that makes up a state of existence and understanding.

Cosmology, at its most basic, is the scientific study of the universe and its origins, but also includes how humans make sense of their surroundings. Cosmology is a

[124] Sanger, "Joining the Circle," 737-765.

useful strategy toward studying symbolism.[125] The value of the cosmological lens comes from the discourse surrounding it, as it triggers conversation into the interpretation of artistic motifs. Cosmology moves beyond the simple questions of what do we see and where do we see it, to why is it here and how is it important. The current literature using cosmological analysis suggests great importance was placed on smoke and fire in Native art history. Michael Gaudio's 2008 monograph, *Engraving the Savage: The New World and Techniques of Civilization,* iterates at length on smoke patterns and considers how different patterns of smoke took on special meaning to Native peoples. While it is possible that smoke patterns may serve as compositional fodder for rock art, it is unclear whether the smoke patterns in Mississippian artwork are truly symbolic, or an artistic choice.[126] Gaudio is not the only author to draw attention to smoke motifs in Native American artwork. The authors of *Mississippian Culture Heroes, Ritual Regalia, and Sacred Bundles,* David H. Dye et al. show multiple examples of Mississippian artwork with swirling depictions of smoke. As seen in the image below, two figures resplendently dressed in regalia hold a large vessel. The highly stylized and swirling smoke coming out of the vessel is similar in appearance to some petroglyphs seen in the region, but dissimilar enough to be inconclusive.[127]

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[125] Aaron M. Wright, *Religion on the Rocks: Hohokam Rock Art, Ritual Practice, and Social Transformation* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2014), 140, 192.
[126] Michael Gaudio, *Engraving the Savage: The New World and Techniques of Civilization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
[127] Diaz-Granados et al., *Mississippian Culture Heroes*, 64-65, 234-237.

Figure 21: Swirl motif of smoke rings. Craig Style Gorget, redrawn by F. Kent Reilly III from Philips and Brown 1984: Plate 127.[128]

Symbols and More

What is the purpose of petroglyphs? The age-old question of what petroglyphs are and what they mean is one that every rock art researcher endeavors to answer. The explanations range from sacred symbols, to maps carved into stone, boundary markers, to ancient teens goofing off. I argue that there is value in considering all of these possibilities to be true, and it is very likely that all of these possibilities are accurate in certain situations. Symbolic language is easy to confirm as these symbols clearly mean something and were significant to ancient Native ancestors. Otherwise they would not have taken the time to carve them. While the meanings today are either lost, obscured by time or intentionally kept secret by trusted Native Elders, they would have been more

[128] Diaz-Granados et al., *Mississippian Culture Heroes*.

universally understood in the past. Some are still easily understood today, particularly imagery that relates to our world, such as animal motifs.

Typically, rock art sites are archaeologically clean, meaning they do not have a copious amount of artifacts found in their vicinity. There is evidence pointing to the use of fire at petroglyph sites, but these fires appear to be used for light sources rather than large dwelling places.[129] While it is true that the lack of artifacts flies in stark contrast to mound sites. At sites of human habitation, archaeologists find artifacts, such as pottery and burials which provide a plethora of information used to decode the site whereas petroglyphs have very few of these helpful clues around them. In spite of the lack of artifact evidence surrounding most petroglyph sites, their purpose is in their place and location. Rather than searching for points, pottery sherds and burials, rock art researchers need to concentrate their attention on what is immediately in the area surrounding the petroglyphs, such as rivers and other mound sites, geographic landmarks, or significant natural resources, and acknowledge their own internal and personal reaction to the location.

[129] Walter Skrzypek, Personal Conversation, September 30, 2024. Skrzypek worked with other archaeologists on an excavation in the Northwestern region of Pennsylvania, at a petroglyph location known as Traister Rock. Excavations next to the rock showed indications of charcoal from a fire, and a small fire ring, or hearth, likely used as a light source, or for occasional cooking.

Figure 22: Images above show a small hearth and carbon remains. Photographed by Ken Burkett, Traister Rock, Pennsylvania. October 2024 Excavation Photo.

The element of fire adds an interesting and additional dimension to petroglyph viewing. Scholars and researchers usually will view petroglyphs either early in the morning or later in the day, when the sun casts the longest shadows, however few consider viewing the petroglyphs by firelight on a dark night. Rock art researchers from the Pennsylvania Archaeological Society undertook this experiment at the Parkers Landing Petroglyphs along the Allegheny River and spoke of how the petroglyphs seemed to come alive under the glowing light of the fire. Rather than stagnant light from the direct sun, the flickering of the firelight caused the shadows to dance and move. Given the archaeological features of fire at some petroglyph locations, it is a strong possibility that indigenous people viewed the petroglyphs in a similar manner.[130]

[130] Skrzypek, personal conversation.

Figure 23: Archaeologists viewing the Parkers Landing Petroglyphs at night by the light of a fire.
Foxburg, Pennsylvania. Photograph by Walter Skrzypek.

Still, as human beings we are naturally curious and will continue to develop theories. A common theory, often mentioned, is that petroglyph sites sporting a wide array of different types of imagery, function as a type of map of the area. This theory only works if we can directly relate what we see on the rock to corresponding landmarks, or other maps created close to the time period. Petroglyphs as maps is an interesting line of research to pursue and has been suggested as one possibility for at least some of the carvings on Judacullah Rock. While more research needs to be done on the possibility of a map on Judacullah, some petroglyphs are known to function as maps. The Jefferson Petroglyph site in Comfrey Minnesota, along with its many thousands of carvings, is the site of a confirmed large petroglyph map of the surrounding area with

confirmed landmarks denoted by swirls, circles and wavy lines which designate rivers. Covering an enormous portion of the rock, well over 50 feet in diameter, it is known as the largest map in North America.[131]

Corresponding evidence suggests that petroglyphs functioned in a communicative way that was nearly universally understood. While differences existed between tribes, both culturally and linguistically, it is likely that certain symbols functioned as a universal system of communication. A practical example of this universality is handtalking. *Hand Talk: Sign Language Among American Indian Nations* by ASL linguist Jeffrey E. Davis covers the topic of the Plains Indians Sign Language (PISL). Native sign language, or hand talking, was an alternative to speech, but its use likely stretched beyond the hearing impaired. While the deaf community were the most prolific users of PISL, this language also functioned as a pidgin or creolization of other Native languages. Pidginized handtalk assisted with communication across a wide geographic region of people.[132] The purpose of this comparison is to suggest that petroglyphs functioned in a similar method of pidginized communication to ensure that the symbols carved in stone were understood by many people from diverse language groups and cultural backgrounds.[133]

Circular Motifs

Circular motifs are one the largest categories of rock art found in the Carolinas and Georgia and a significant number of artistic motifs in Mississippian art derive from

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[131] Chuck Broste (Archaeologist), Personal Conversation, July 19, 2024, Comfrey, MN, Jefferson Petroglyph Site. The Jefferson Petroglyph Site exists on the Dakota Homeland. The present day Dakota tribe prohibits photography of the carvings at their sacred site.
[132] Jeffrey E. Davis, *Hand Talk: A Guide to Native American Sign Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). 9-13.
[133] Larry Cesspooch, Ute Spiritual Leader, Utah.

simple circles, rings and spirals, which can be gradually more complex. Circles may relate to many different things such as, the circle of life, the roundness of the earth, the moon and the appearance of the stars in the sky. While symbols may be individual, they are part of a broader story and need to be understood both on their own terms and as part of a wider context. The rocks on which petroglyphs are carved are not to be underestimated, rather they need to be seen as power centers. Mississippian depictions of smoke rings in artwork similarly takes on highly stylized and complex circular shapes. As we delve into a discussion of individual symbols, continue to remember the settings and places of these symbols as public gathering spaces, alive and full of vitality.

Circle-and-Dot

The circle-and-dot is a common petroglyph design. As its name suggests this motif is characterized by a single circle with a dot in the middle. Seemingly trivial to a casual observer since circles are common in many types of Mississippian designs, but this simple motif is highly specific. The dot at the center is in *high* relief while the outside circle is in *bas* relief.[134] Note how the circles on the petroglyphs are exactly the same size and perfectly round. This suggests some type of implement used to create the rounded shape during the process of *pecking*[135] the motif into the rock surface.

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[134] *High relief* refers to a carving raised above the surface of the rock, while *bas relief* is carved into, or beneath the rock's surface.

[135] Pecking refers to the stone on stone method of carving into rock. Indigenous people used this method prior to the introduction of metal implements.

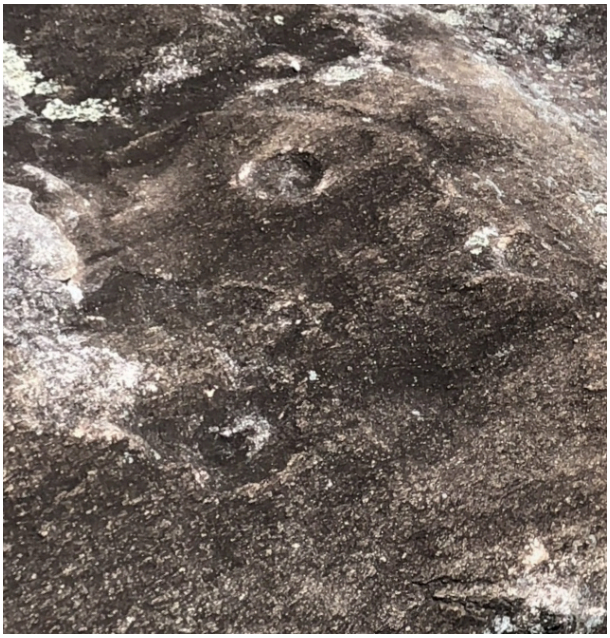

Figure 24: Circle and dot motifs, Looking Glass Rock, Photograph by Brad Witzman, March 2019.

Figure 25: Circle and dot motifs, Circle and dot motifs in Pickens County, South Carolina, one of several found on high rock domes. Tommy Charles, *Discovering South Carolina's Rock Art.*[136]

Rarely will the circle-and-dot occur by itself. It is more typical to see it as part of a sequence. These types of motifs often appear in high places, or places open to the sky

[136] Charles, *Discovering South Carolina's Rock Art*, 45.

such as at Looking Glass Rock in North Carolina or Table Rock State Park in Pickens County, South Carolina. Overall, they appear similar in shape, usually occurring in sequences, sometimes carved over each other as newer versions were added. Looking Glass and Table Rock are over forty miles apart, but share the same design. Their similar appearance points to a widespread usage and comprehension of this symbol in the region.[137] Several well-known mound sites between these two areas include Peachtree Mound (now plowed over), Cowee, Nikwasi, Kituwah, Hiwasee, and certainly many more that have been destroyed over time.[138]

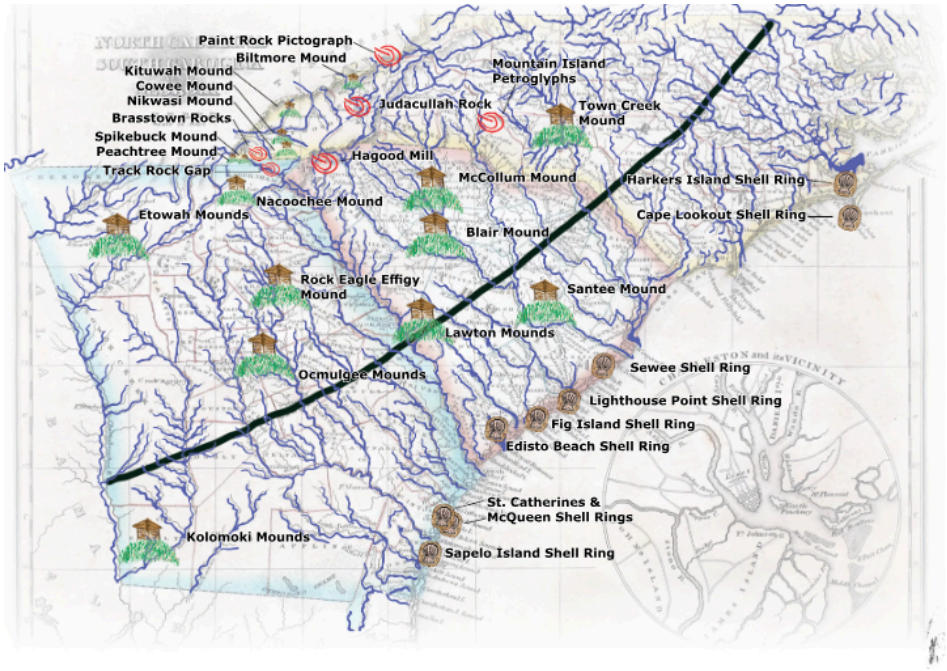

Figure 26: Interactive Map image from YonderCarolina

The circle-and-dot presents on other types of artwork as well. The Sandy Asher collection of artifacts housed at the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum and Heritage Center

[137] This symbol stretches beyond the Carolina Region and is documented on the Dakota homeland in Comfrey, MN at the Jeffers Petroglyph Site.
[138] The included map shows the location of each site mentioned, denoting mound sites as landmarks along rivers used as major highways.

on Harkers Island, North Carolina exhibit similar circle and dot designs as found in the mountainous sites. The pottery sherd shows the identical bas-relief circle and high-relief dot in the center, and they are all exactly the same size. This could be achieved using a simple implement such as a reed, or hollowed-out bamboo, or the tip of a shell impressed into the wet clay before firing. This circle-and-dot motif shows commonality in design patterns across a wide geographical area and on multiple artifacts and within a Mississippian time period.

Figure 27: Pottery Shard from the Sandy Asher Collection, Collected from the south side of Harkers Island, North Carolina

One strong interpretive theory persists throughout the literature for the circle-and-dot motif. There is a common belief amongst rock art researchers that given the shape of the circle-and-dot and its most frequent proximity to the open sky could suggest that these symbols represent stars. More specifically, they relate to constellations in the night sky during certain times of the year and may be a way of marking time and

seasons. Theorized in the Carolinas and Georgia, there is a circle-and-dot sequence at the Jeffers Petroglyph site in Minnesota that appears to line up with Orion, during certain months of the year.[139] While this theory is provocative in that it provides a simple and instant explanation for some of the petroglyph compositions it is not definitive. It is extremely easy to line up just about anything with the path of the sun and stars based on your own bodily position in space. For example, at high noon, my body will be lined up with the sun as will everything else it currently shines on at that moment. We know this based on the disappearance of our shadow while the sun hangs directly overhead.

In terms of dating this symbol, the Sandy Asher sherds provide the most useful information. As previously stated we can compare them to similar-looking sherds of a known date. In Joffre Coe's book *Town Creek Indian Mound: A Native American Legacy,* he meticulously documents artifacts found during the archaeological excavation of Town Creek in Mt. Gilead, North Carolina. Since the circle-and-dot sherds were found with the corncob sherds, we can date them to the Mississippian period.

[139] *Walking Tour of Jeffers Petroglyph Site*, guided tour, Comfrey, Minnesota, July 19, 2024; Brian Fritz; Brian Fritz, personal conversation, Foxburg, Pennsylvania, August 2, 2024.

Figure 28: Town Creek sherd (left) and Sandy Asher sherd (right) both have near identical impressions from a corn cob stamp, indicating a Mississippian origin date.[140]

The Vulva

In the Carolinas and Georgia we see the vulva shape from the mountains to Piedmont, but it is also a prevalent motif across the Mississippian world stretching as far north as Lake Erie.[141] The vulva is a variation of the circle-and-dot motif. The name comes from its supposed vaginal-shaped appearance and is similar to the circle-and-dot, but not as perfectly round. It is slightly more oval in appearance, with a line bisecting at least one third of the circle effectively splitting it into two parts. There are instances where another globular shape appears to emerge from the bisecting line, giving the appearance of something emerging from the central part of the glyph.[142]

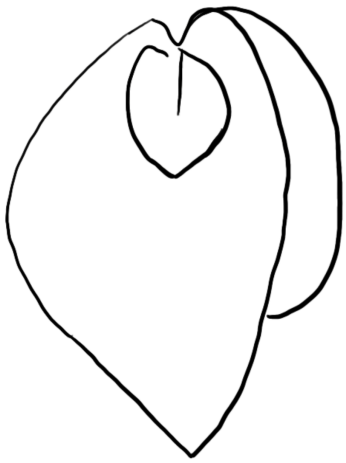

Figure 29: Hand drawing of the vulva motif.[143]

[140] Coe and Ferguson, *Town Creek Indian Mound*, 233- 235.
[141] Carol Diaz Granados, "Early Manifestations" 29–46.
[142] The label of "vulva" automatically creates a research bias that this motif must refer to women's fertility in general. Labeling this symbol as a "vulva" is problematic as this is a contemporary naming convention for this symbol and it does not necessarily accurately describe what the shape refers to and its purpose. Scholars should be cautious when creating labels for objects and symbols so as to prevent a biased analysis based on an arbitrary naming convention given by modern day scholars.
[143] "Interactive Petroglyphs," YonderCarolina.

In terms of dating, the vulva is a common symbol likely used for thousands of years. It is easier to determine chronology of what was carved first and compare this to events of known dates. As an example, we can look at the juxtaposition of the vulva motifs in relation to other motifs as seen on one of the Track Rock Gap boulders. Returning once again to the image drawn by James Mooney in 1890 and comparing it to a 2018 drawing in an article written by Loubser (Page 39), Ashcraft and Wettstaed, we see significantly more petroglyphs on this recent 2018 drawing than we do on Mooney's 1890 version.

There are two possibilities as to why Mooney's drawing only portrays half of Boulder 6. One reason is that perhaps a portion of the boulder was covered in the overgrowth, or partially buried, in Mooney's time. The problem with this theory is that the section of the boulder Mooney drew in 1890, now shows in 2018 additional vulva motifs added to the same section and beyond. It seems unlikely Mooney would edit these out of his drawing, which is otherwise accurate. If these symbols are more modern carvings (post-dating Mooney), then this indicates that the additional vulva shapes are as recent late 19th - early 20th century.[144]

This shape's physical appearance, combined with a story from Cherokee stories, leads many rock art researchers to interpret the symbol as a vulva leaking menstrual blood. Loubser, who has conducted a significant amount of research on rock art in the American Southeast and South Africa, runs a direct parallel between the vulva shape and

[144] It is important to note that drawing and tracing petroglyphs is a subjective practice and not a definitive analysis. What one person sees another may see differently and therefore illustrate differently. While sketches are helpful for documentation purposes, they still need to be held up to scrutiny and viewed as a piece of evidence which may assist scholars in telling part of the story.

a story about Judcaullah's wife. There are variations, but primarily, the story goes that while the couple was traveling in the mountains, Judacullah's wife sat down on a rock, while menstruating. After a lightning fast pregnancy, she gives birth to twins, who grew at an accelerated rate. Taking after their father, the twins each had six fingers each of their hands and six toes each foot. Therefore any six-toed or six-fingered print is a sign that the gods are among us.[145] While this initial analysis is compelling, based on the story and on the physical appearance of the vulva motif, it is only one point of comparison and it is insufficient to confirm or deny the validity of the interpretation.[146]

[145]Johannes Loubser, "The Enigma of Judacullah Rock."; James Mooney, "Tsul'kălû, The Slant Eyed Giant," *Myths of the Cherokee,* 337-341; G. Keith Parker, *Seven Cherokee Myths: Creation, Fire, the Primordial Parents, the Nature of Evil, the Family, Universal Suffering, and Communal Obligation* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2005), 123.

[146] Peter Annick, "More Hands on Deck: New England's Growing Collection of Carved Handprints," lecture, Foxburg, Pennsylvania, August 3, 2024. Annick's study of carved handprints in New England suggested a different theme and purpose of the handprints. According to the local tribes such as the Mashantucket and Pequot the handprint is a representation of a peace treaty between two parties.

Figure 30: "Old-Woman-Who-Never-Dies" bottle, Crittenden Co., Arkansas. Photograph © David H. Dye.

Another parallel drawn between vulvas and Native oral traditions is the story of "The-Old-Woman-Who-Never-Dies." The Old Woman is a Mother Earth figure, one who is responsible for the fruitfulness of the land and is the giver of all life on earth.[147] Effigies of the Old Woman deity have a similar overall appearance, at least in the basic outline, to the vulva motif creating an interesting parallel with the vulva symbol. However, the Old Woman effigies are figural, whereas the vulva motif does not clearly depict a person. Arguably, this makes them more different than similar. It is an interesting comparison, but once again, it is not conclusive enough to decipher an interpretation and may, in fact, be a case of pareidolia, or seeing connections where none exist.

As a final point of comparison and rebuttal, there is still another shape similar in appearance to the vulva, known as an ogee symbol. The ogee symbol appears widely across the southeast in rock art pottery and virtually every other kind of medium. It may have the appearance of an eye at times but is most strikingly similar to the scaled pattern on a copperhead snake.[148] The reason this symbol is thought to represent women is its somewhat similar appearance to the vulva motif. This theory is based on cross comparative studies conducted early in the 20th century by Henry Stoddard. Stoddard's studies focused on comparing symbols, numerology, and mythology with an end goal of

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[147] Matthew H. Colvin, "Old-Woman-Who-Never-Dies: A Mississippian Survival in a Hidatsa World," (Texas State University San Marcos, 2012) 57,58.
[148] Robert V. Sharp, "Earth Mother in the Middle Cumberland and a Portal to the Otherworld," in *Mississippian Culture Heroes, Ritual Regalia, and Sacred Bundles*, ed. David H. Dye (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021), 223–234.

finding the true and original source of each symbol. Stoddard took interest in symbolic similarities between the ancient cultures of the Americas and how symbols from these cultures matched ancient Asian cultures, or at least seem to.[149] These studies make for fascinating reads and provide a significant amount of background information and possible origins for iconographical usage spanning multiple trans-Pacific cultures. The main issue with Stoddard's study is that his explanations divert wildly from studying the ogee and the vulva symbol within the Southeastern Appalachian context.

Figure 31: Image Left: Copperhead snake, Photograph courtesy of John White, Virginia Herpetological.
Image Right: Pottery vessel exhibiting the ogee symbol, Mississippian, approximate date, 1250 AD.[150]

A simpler explanation exists that grounds already established research to a much simpler starting point without completely disagreeing with it. It is a well-known fact that women were the master craftsmen of the Mississippian world. Women were the potters, the weavers, the flint knappers in charge of creating arrowheads and weapons.[151] If

[149] Henry L. Stoddard, "Intercommunication and Transmission of Symbols between Asia and America," *Publications of the Arkansas Historical Association* 1 (1906): 455-465 (Fayetteville, AR); Henry L. Stoddard, "Phallic Symbols in America," *American Antiquarian and Oriental Journal* 27, no. 5 (1905): 281-294; Henry L. Stoddard, "Relics in Arkansas Show Eastern Origin," *Publications of Arkansas Historical Association,* 2: 536-552.
[150] Dye, *Mississippian Culture Heroes,* 234,236.
[151] Xoloti Bembe Ek, "Flint Knapping Demonstration," Jeffers Petroglyph Site, Comfrey, MN, July 20, 2024.

copper was available to them they were also the braziers skilled in creating highly valued and stylized artwork of the time period. There is no evidence suggesting that rock art was only the purview of men. In fact, given the amount of similarity in symbolism between rock art and other types of artwork (created by women) it is highly likely that women were definite contributors to petroglyph carvings. With this observation, yes, the ogee symbol is associated with women, but women as artisans and experts, not as fertility symbols. It is scholars who seem to have a hyper obsession with female genitalia when it comes to interpreting symbols they do not understand, but there is no direct evidence that this is the case with rock art.

Rather than overcomplicating an interpretation, it is best to consider the most simple explanation first. The ogee symbol is identical to the copperhead snake pattern, a snake, which to this day, is rampant in the American Southeast and would have been part of the Mississippian world too. Rather than deriving from Asia, or elsewhere in the world, a much simpler and more concrete explanation is that the Mississippian people were inspired by their immediate environment, which Native people still expound on to this day. Furthermore, the notion that Native people were incapable of deriving their own symbolic language, and that it must be based on another world culture is entirely ethnocentric.

Spiral Motifs

Spirals dominate Mississippian artwork in the Carolinas and Georgia. In rock art, their beauty and symmetry make them one of the more profound symbol types and one of the most interesting to study. A spiral at its most basic is a coiled shape, ranging in

size, but usually having the appearance of several coils wrapped around each other. They can also look more like ripples with multiple sequences of circles inside of each other and appear similar to the way water ripples when something breaks the surface. Swirls can occur by themselves, as part of a sequence, or they may be part of another composition.

Figure 32: Hiwassee River Rock, North Carolina, Photograph courtesy of B&E Photography[152]

Other petroglyph sites in the region, specifically those located in water, feature significantly more spirals, such as the Brasstown petroglyphs on the Hiwassee River. The Hiwassee River boasts a truly impressive array of spiral motifs on the North Carolina side (the Hiwassee River extends further across the border into Tennessee). The Hiwassee petroglyphs rest in the river itself on many of the rocky outcroppings located in the riverbed. Depending on the time of year, they will be completely covered by water. These rocks exhibit spiral motifs by the dozen. Similar to Judacullah Rock, the

[152] Bruce and Elaine Roberts, "Hiwassee River Petroglyphs," https://www.be-roberts.com/se/native/petro/nc/petrnc1.htm.

Hiwassee river rocks are excellent examples of continued use over time and exhibit cupules, as well as figural, therianthropic and anthropomorphic petroglyph designs.[153]

Figure 33: Shoal Creek Petroglyphs, Georgia, photography courtesy of B&E Photography.[154] This image shows a series of swirls next to the river. Depending on water levels, these will be underwater at certain times of the year.

Judacullah Rock has at least two clearly defined swirls on it, and possibly more obscured by time and additional carvings. The spirals occur near Judacullah's large six-fingered hand print. The swirl on the left has a similar look to the vulva motif in that a central line appears to bisect the two lines making up the swirl. The swirl to the right appears as two rings inside each other.[155] A

[153] Anthropomorphic - animal like, or having the features and characteristics of an animal. Therianthropic - A figure exhibiting a combination of human and animal traits.
[154] Bruce and Elaine Roberts, "Shoal Creek Rock," https://www.be-roberts.com/se/native/petro/shoal/shoal1.htm.
[155] Bruce and Elaine Roberts, "Judaculla Rock," Jackson County, North Carolina," https://www.be-roberts.com/se/native/jud/jud1.htm.
Different times of day and environmental conditions, as well as sunlight conditions, will alter the appearance of the petroglyphs in photography. For this reason I am including an additional image by professional photographers Bruce and Elaine Roberts, which shows nearly the same image photographed under slightly different lighting conditions.

myriad of other carvings surround the swirls and handprints including numerous cupules, long meandering lines and markings that are more difficult to decipher.

Figure 34: Detail of Judacaullah Rock showing the swirl motifs and a large six-fingered hand print. Cullowhee, North Carolina, September 2023.

The juxtaposition of the swirls on Judacullah Rock provides important clues to their purpose as well as chronological dating. Visitors to Judacullah Rock today see the

entire boulder completely excavated, however as recently as 2007, the boulder was nearly halfway covered with sediment. Removal of the sediment layers revealed the two spiral motifs, Judacullah's handprint and bowl scars from stone bowl carving (dating to at least 3500 BC). The photograph shows how sediment covered the spirals, suggesting that the spiral motifs are older than some of the petroglyph carvings on the higher portions of the rock. In this sense, we could conservatively read this rock chronologically from the bottom up, with the petroglyphs on the bottom originating from an earlier time period.[156] However, this observational method does not hold up, as an older photograph, circa the 1930s, shows caretaker, Miles Parker, sitting next to the boulder, which is completely uncovered at the time of the photo. At some point after this photo was taken, perhaps a storm, flood, or a landslide partially buried the boulder. Based on photographic evidence, the only conclusion we can make is that all of the petroglyphs were carved before the 1930s. Beyond that, we can only determine the chronology of which symbols were carved first, but exact time periods are more difficult to pinpoint.

[156]Amelia Zytka, "Trace," YonderCarolina, Last updated September 2023, https://azytka.wixsite.com/yondercarolina/trace.

Figure 35: Miles Parker sits next to Judacullah Rock, Cullowhee, North Carolina, circa 1930s. Photographer Larry W. Mull.[157]

Since comparing the boulder in the two photographs is not completely helpful in determining a carving date, the next method is to observe how they were pecked into the rock in relation to the other carvings immediately around them. The positioning of the spirals in comparison to other types of carvings on the rocks still suggests that the carvers created the spirals first. One of the cupules seems to be carved directly into the center of the spiral, meaning the cupule glyph came later than the spiral. The same is true for the Hiwassee River rock, where the spirals where we can see many cupules taken out directly out of the lines of many of the spirals providing further evidence that the spirals predate many of the cupule markings. Additionally, it is interesting to note

[157] "Judaculla Rock," *Blue Ridge Heritage Trail,* accessed [Accessed November 2, 2024], https://blueridgeheritagetrail.com/explore-a-trail-of-heritage-treasures/judaculla-rock/.

that the cupules seem to surround the spirals and handprint, almost as if the carvers were trying to preserve them as much as possible. [158]

There are plenty of examples in Mississippian artwork found at Native American mound sites that provide a visual link to the petroglyph spirals. Swirled artwork varies widely in complexity, but we do see examples of swirls forming the image of certain animals such as snakes and spiders.[159] Snakes are mysterious creatures who exist in multiple dimensions. Snakes have the ability to slide around on the ground surface, swim in water and slip beneath the surface of the earth. Spiders are also revered and prevalent in a wide array of Mississippian artwork.[160] What exactly these spirals mean is not clear to a 21st century audience. In some cases they seem to be entirely stylistic choices by the artisan, but in the case of rock art it is likely the spirals convey a message, or perhaps warn of an element of danger ahead.[161]

A common theory in rock art analysis is that at least some of these swirl markings identify vortexes, or portals to another dimension. James Mooney documented

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[158] In conversations with other well respected rock art researchers, they suggested to me that when these cupule markings occur in the river some of them may be natural, unless they are very large. I am not so convinced, since the cupules markings I have seen during my research truly seem to be associated with other petroglyphs. If they were completely natural, then all of the rocks in the river would have cupule marks on them, but this is not what I saw during my field research.

[159] George Lankford, "The Swirl-Cross and the Center," in *Visualizing the Sacred: Cosmic Visions, Regionalism, and the Art of the Mississippian World* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 65–78. There are times when the swirl motif acts as a connecting point in a larger composition and/or depicts rings of smoke. In regards to petroglyphs, swirls are the entire composition.

[160] Snakes exist on two planes of existence, earth and the underworld.

[161] James Mooney, "The First Fire," *Myths of the Cherokee, 240-242*. If you have ever seen a spider, or any type of water bug running across the water, you may have noticed the slight ripples they produce as they run across the surface of the water similar in appearance to the spiral motif. Spiders are fascinating motifs to analyze because we can tie the water spider directly to Cherokee folklore, mound artifacts and water, which is highly important to a Mississippian worldview. According to the stories collected by James Mooney, the spider is responsible for saving the rest of the creatures from freezing to death. In the story of the "First Fire," while other creatures tried and failed to retrieve a burning ember from the sun, the spider was the only one able to do so and return with it safely. In the story, the spider walked across the water, spun a small vessel with her spider silk (a *tusti* bowl) and brought the burning ember back without serious injury. This is the story of the first fire.

a story, from Cherokee oral tradition, of two rivermen who got sucked up into a whirlpool. Only one survived the ordeal. As the story goes, the riverman who survived claimed to see people at the bottom of the whirlpool who tried to grab him and pull him down.[162] Such a story points toward the Native belief in the existence of whirlpools as portals to another parallel dimension. In another oral history, also documented by Mooney, those venturing near the water's surface would do well to heed the warnings. The beings living in this world below the water's surface, while looking similar to us and living in a familiar manner, are actually cannibals. As the story goes, a sick man is taken to the water world by a female being. The man reported seeing the bodies of his friends and neighbors dead in this world and being prepared and consumed by the inhabitants. In an unclear twist, the woman does not harm the man, rather she nurses him back to health and safely returns him to his own world.[163] Whether one ascribes to the natural explanation of whirlpools, or the spiritual explanation of inter-dimensional portals. The presence of so many spiral motifs in the Hiwassee riverbed could logically serve as a warning to mariners of dangers ahead. The sheer number of spirals at this location increases the probability of rivermen heeding the message to proceed with caution.

Whirlpools are naturally occurring vortexes of water that present a serious navigational danger. Depending on the time of year, these whirlpools can be highly dangerous. Lawson cautioned river travelers to be on their guard, as the river can change in an instant. The Mississippians would have been familiar with whirlpools since their

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[162] James Mooney, "The Haunted Whirlpool," *Myths of the Cherokee, 347;* James Mooney, "The Water Cannibals," Myths of the Cherokee, 349.
[163] Loubser, "The Enigma of Judacullah Rock,";Lewis-Williams and Loubser, "Bridging Realms," 109–139.

primary mode of transportation was via canoe. James Mooney writes about a location across the Tennessee border known as "The Suck" or "The Pot," which at one time was known for its dangerous assortment of lethal whirlpools.[164] While Suck Creek is not directly connected to the Hiwassee River, it proves the existence of whirlpools in the Western part of the region during the Mississippian period. A century earlier, John Lawson traveled through the Carolinas by river, also noting in his journal the roughness and unpredictability of river travel, even in Piedmont.[165]

Animals and Human Figures

Animals: The Mississippian people and their ancestors carved their world into stone. We can learn a significant amount about the flora and fauna (including megafauna) from looking at rock art sites. Animal motifs are not overly common in the Carolinas and Georgia, but they are not completely absent. There are several different types of animals such as the Hiwassee River dog (pictured below) along with another four-legged critter on the right hand side of the rock, sprinkled throughout the area. A swirl with what looks like a dragon head coming off of it stands in between the two mammalian carvings.[166] The two four-legged animals are in a similar stance facing each other. The dog figure on the left has an additional component coming out of its mouth, but it is not clear what this element is. The four-legged animal on the right is facing the

[164] Locally, this location is still known by the same name.
[165] Lawson, "A Journal," 17.
[166] Most of the literature that references this petroglyph names it as a panther. I disagree with the interpretation that this particular petroglyph shows a panther. The pointed upturned ears and the long protruding snout suggest a canine more than a feline.

dog, but is missing its ears and its tail is markedly different from the dog tail. What exactly this image depicts is not clear, but it is likely another type of woodland creature.

Figure 36: Photograph by Bruce and Elaine Roberts, B&E Photography, Hiwassee River, Brasstwon, North Carolina.

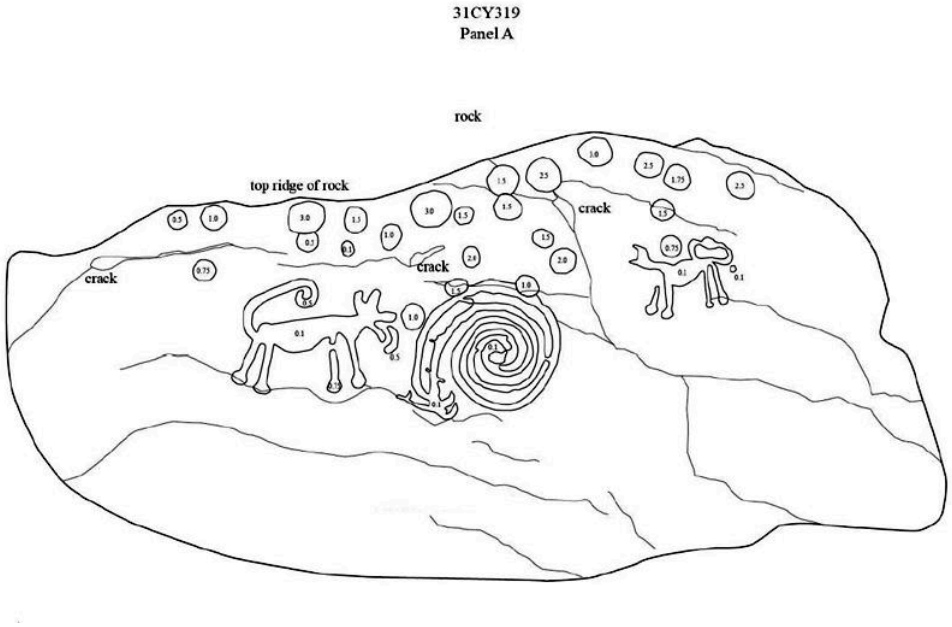

Figure 37: Drawing of previous rock by Johannes Loubser

In comparison, petroglyph sites in other parts of the country feature heavily in animals both real and those from oral tradition. The Parkers Landing Petroglyph site in Foxburg, Pennsylvania has hundreds of individual carvings including imagery of birds, bugs, turtles, fish, humans, a large carving of a river otter and an underwater panther. Other non-figural imagery comes in the form of swirls, turkey tracks as well as symbols and images of animals that we simply cannot identify today. These petroglyphs, similar to the Hiwassee site, are located in the Allegheny River and depending on the time of year, the level of precipitation and the nearby dam, the rocks may be completely submerged. While located outside of the research zone for this particular project it is interesting to see both similarities and differences in image use amongst these two highly different regions. Similar to petroglyph sites in the Carolinas and Georgia, this site, among others located nearby, is also devoid of artifacts at the petroglyphs themselves with some evidence of indigenous habitation located close by, but not at the rock art sites.[167]

[167] Kenneth Burkett, "On the Rocks at Parkers Landing," lecture, Foxburg, Pennsylvania, August 3, 2024.

Figure 38: River Otter, Parkers Landing Petroglyph Site, Foxburg, Pennsylvania.

Figure 39: Underwater Panther. Parkers Landing Petroglyph Site, Foxburg, Pennsylvania.

Human Figures: Imagery of anthropomorphs is also not as common in the region. Hagood Mill Petroglyph Site is one of the most predominant sites (that we know of) of human anthropomorphic figures in the region. The figures on the Hagood Mill rock typically occur in groups of three, with one figure off to the side. This pattern repeats itself throughout the rock. When looking at other anthropomorphic groupings at the site in the area a similar composition of three and one emerges consistently. Hypothetically, it may point to the symbolic number of three and four, the combination of the two adding up to seven, which is also a sacred number. In terms of numerology, the numbers three, four and seven are culturally significant and relatively universal across all tribes. Three symbolizes the three planes of the universe, the sky, the earth and underworld. Four is indicative of the four cardinal directions. Seven encompasses a combination of four and three, and points to a complete picture of the world, physical and metaphysical.[168]

[168] Garrett, Garrett, and Brotherton, "Inner Circle/Outer Circle," 17–30.

Figure 40: Hagood Mill Petroglyph Site, Pickens County, South Carolina, May 2023.

The Hiwassee River also boasts several human figures including a depiction of Judacullah, the six-fingered giant. His extra digit makes him easy to identify. Juxtaposed above is a depiction of an therianthropic image known as Birdman. To the left of Birdman is a heavily weathered circle and dot motif and directly above is a swirl as well as two ambiguous shapes that seem to be associated with the swirl. Above the Judacullah image are several cupule marks.

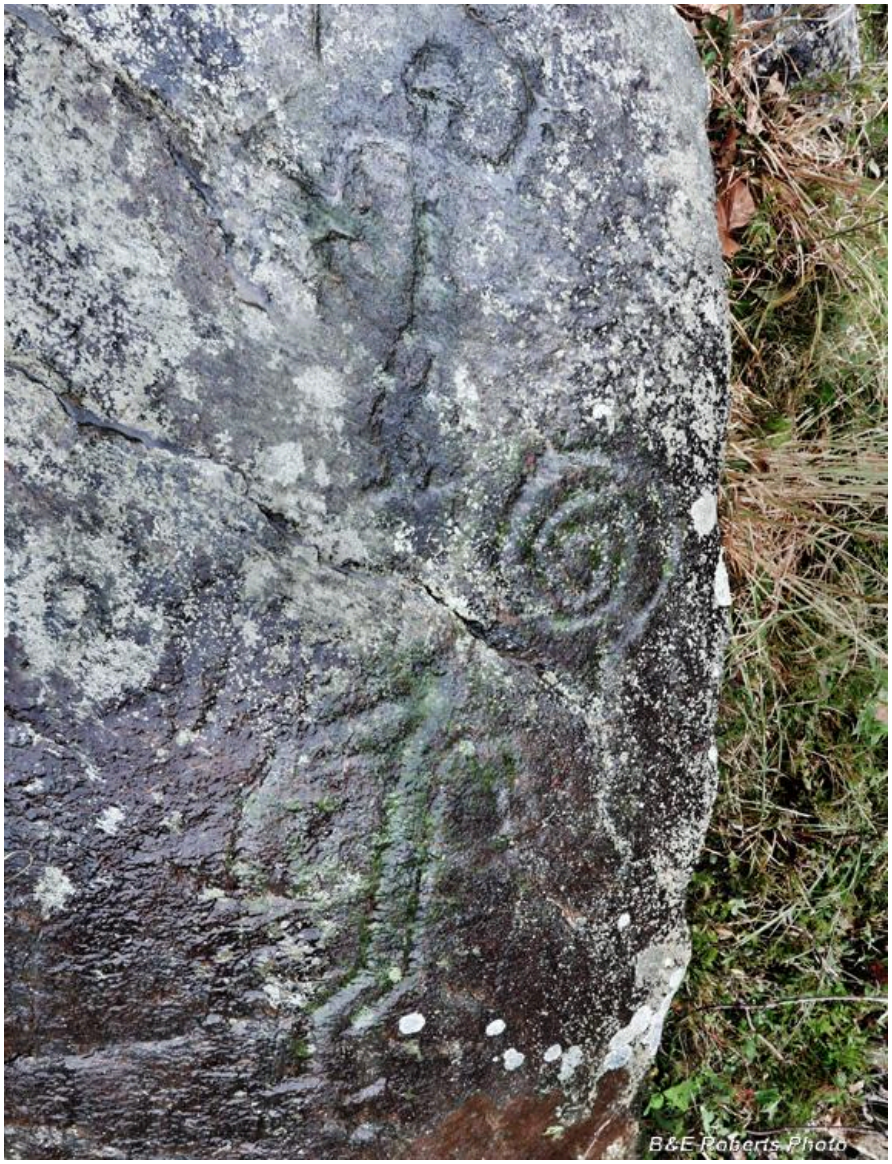

Figure 41: Image of Judacullah and Birdman together on the same rock. Photography by Bruce and Elaine Roberts B&E Photography.[169]

[169] Bruce and Elaine Roberts, "Hiwassee River Petroglyphs," https://www.be-roberts.com/se/native/petro/nc/petrnc1.htm.

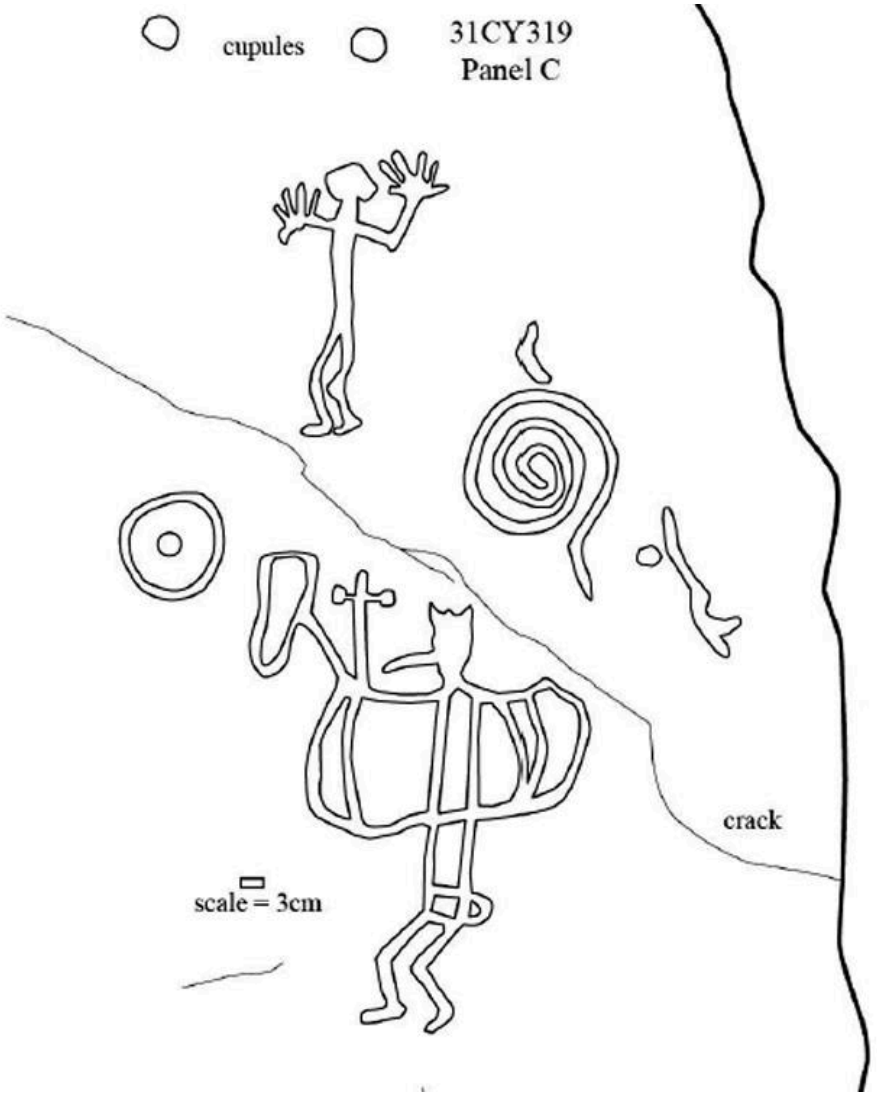

Figure 42: Tracing of the same rock by Scott Ashcraft.[170]

Human and animal figures are not as common within the research range of the Carolinas and Georgia. Also scenes taken from Native stories are not predominant in rock art. This could be down to the carving surface. More detailed human figures, animals occur commonly in cave art, rather than out in the open like most of the petroglyphs referenced in this study. Picture Cave in Missouri shows many images of

[170] Bruce and Elaine Roberts. B&E Photography. https://www.be-roberts.com/se/native/petro/nc/petrnc1.htm

human figures, some displaying therianthropic traits. Somewhat closer to the Carolina Region, The 19th Unnamed Cave in Alabama also portrays several large and highly detailed mud glyph drawings of human and animal figures dancing across the ceiling.[171] Most of these images were created as part of a sequence and illustrate native stories from oral traditions.[172] When we see similar imagery in petroglyphs, it is likely to also derive from historic oral traditions, but the level of detail is not as easy to achieve with stone, or metal tools on a rock surface. Cave art is often carved, or both carved and painted, sometimes with a plaster, or mud base. Cave walls that can be prepped in this way provide an easier working surface and paintings and mud glyphs are more protected from the elements and can be preserved long-term.[173]

Four Sided or Pointed Petroglyphs

In an attempt to not apply any interpretation to a symbol there is an entire grouping of petroglyphs that scholars refer to as "abstract."[174] However, some of the symbols falling into this category do seem to have a distinct purpose. To wrap up the final section on symbolism, I will draw attention to rock art petroglyphs that resemble

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[171] Jan F. Simek, Stephen Alvarez, and Alan Cressler, "Discovering Ancient Cave Art Using 3D Photogrammetry: Pre-Contact Native American Mud Glyphs from 19th Unnamed Cave, Alabama," *Antiquity* 96, no. 387 (2022): 662–78. There are other caves as well, especially in Georgia that exhibit petroglyphs, but the 19th is one of the most prolific in its extensive collection of mud glyph carvings.

[172] Carol Diaz-Granados, "Missouri Rock Art - The Best of the Best," lecture, Foxburg, Pennsylvania, August 3, 2024; Jim Duncan, "Using Rock Art Imagery to Reveal Historic and Ancient Oral Traditions," lecture, Foxburg, Pennsylvania, August 3, 2024.

[173] These spaces are also less accessible, which raises an interesting question as to their purpose. Is it possible that Native artwork depicted in caves was for a more restricted audience simply because it is not as visible as rock art? Further research into this question could provide interesting comparative studies in the future.

[174] While there is a scholarly accepted grouping of petroglyphs called "abstract," this term to a 21st century audience implies mindlessness. Therefore the word abstract is not the best description of this category of symbols. There is no evidence to suggest that Native ancestors engaged in the type of mindless, non-figural and non compositional artwork that came about during the artistic period of abstract expressionism.

compass points and seem to point in four directions. There is not a significant amount of research about petroglyphs serving as directional markers, however, if they were meant to convey messages to travelers, it stands to reason that at least some of them identify the four cardinal directions for navigational purposes, but this hypothesis needs further testing. Petroglyphs that appear to have four points, or four sides are likely indicating something, but to us the message is unclear. Looking at the image below it appears as if the symbols point in four distinct directions. Even though it has this appearance, it very likely could indicate something else entirely, however based on its form, it is clear to see that it is intentional and compositional in nature and not merely an abstract carving.

Figure 43: Hagood Mill Petroglyph Site, Pickens County, South Carolina, May 2023.

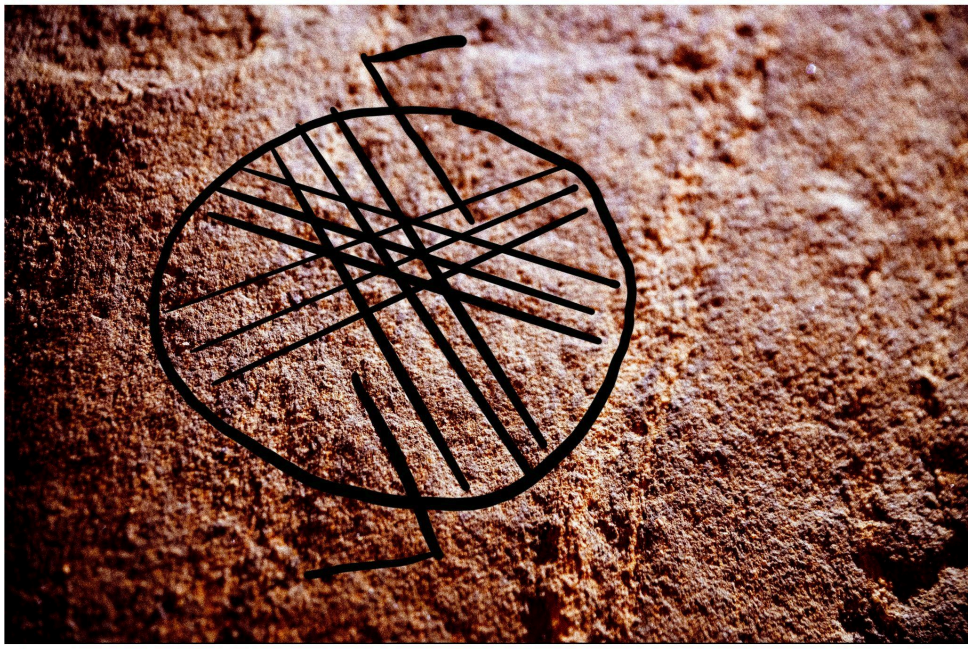

Figure 44: Same Petroglyph with different colorization and a traced pattern.

Other similar types of markings that contain four distinct points may appear more simplistic as two perpendicular lines. While ninety-degree angles typically do not occur in nature, rocks can fracture in straight lines. It is important to try and determine if the feature is intentional or entirely natural. A way to rule out the possibility of naturally occurring features is to inspect the area for other signs of possible carvings. Judcuallah rock has a similar feature of two bisecting lines forming ninety-degree angles. Since Judacullah is so heavily carved already we can associate these lines as most likely deliberate modification by a human being some time in the past.The four lines appear to point somewhat north, south, east and west, but it is not exact enough to be a conclusive reading of this particular symbol. Judacullah Rock is almost completely surrounded by

mountain ridges on all sides and does not have a clear view of the rising or setting sun, making this particular cross less likely to indicate compass point directions.

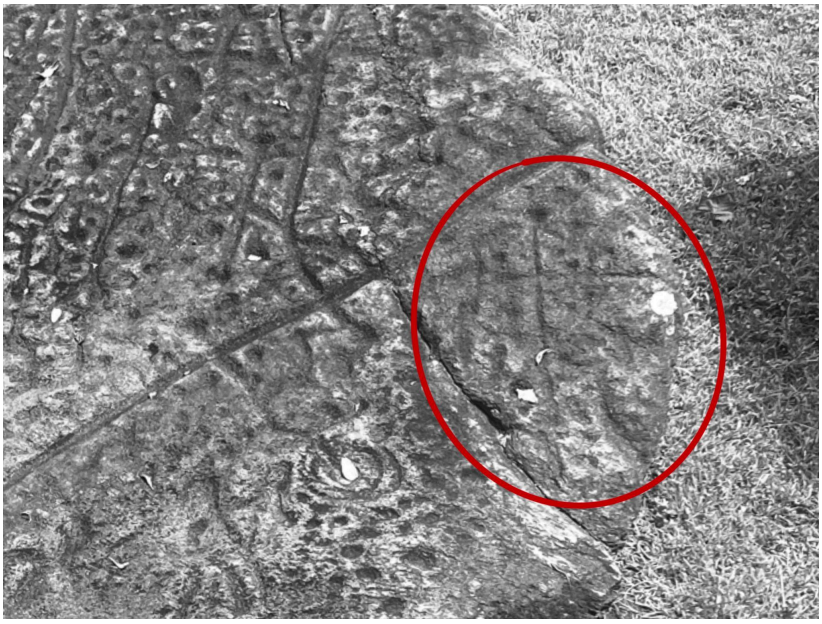

Figure 45: Image of near identical feature on Judacullah Rock. Cullowhee, North Carolina. September 2023.

Figure 46: Two perpendicular lines forming 90 degree angles. This is most likely a natural fracturing of the rock combined with a trick of the light and shadows causing

it to appear similar to actual petroglyphs. Given that there is nothing else in the area resembling carvings, it is highly unlikely that this is an authentic petroglyph. Big Rock Nature Preserve, Ballantyne, North Carolina. August 2024.

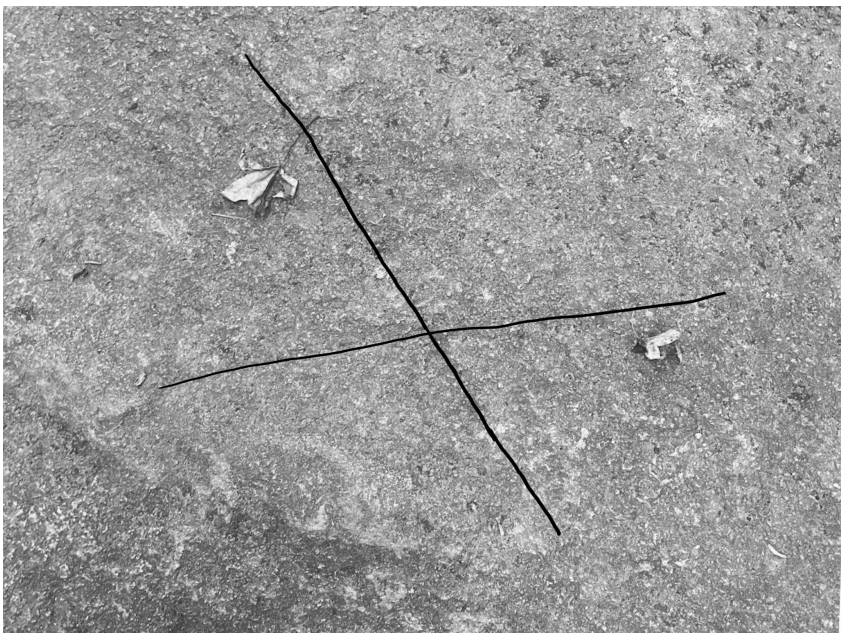

Figure 47: The same image with the lines traced.

In the end, perhaps deciphering the interpretation of each symbol should not be the most important focus for rock art researchers. A common question scholars have regarding rock art is, "why carve on this rock, or into this cliff face that is up so high no one (today) can see it without a drone? Why this location and not another location?" These questions betray our curiosity, but can only be answered by the original carvers. A better question to ask is what about this landscape prompted Native ancestors to carve their history into the rocks? Such a question snaps us out of the hyper-rationalization that comes from our training as historians and refocuses our energy on human beings. While we cannot structure an argument based on what people think, we can determine likely scenarios that could prompt someone from the past to mark a certain location in stone as sacred and important for passers by.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Presented in this thesis is the culmination of two years of research into petroglyphs and mound sites in the Carolinas and Georgia. There is still much left to learn and understand about these historic sites. While the South Appalachian geographic focus of *Trace* served as a methodological strength, it also limited the focus significantly to only three states; North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia. Except for several notable mentions for comparative purposes, other sites from surrounding states and regions do not integrate into the research focus as much as they possibly could. The potential for further exploration into this topic with a much wider geographic research range would prove a beneficial mission to undertake for future rock art scholars interested in how landscape influenced Native construction in the eastern part of North America.

A struggle I encountered with this project was in its primary source material. While my fellow graduate school colleagues had the benefit of Archival materials, many of my primary sources were made of stone, and written in a language that I could not always comprehend. My Archive was the woods, rivers, rocks and mounds and anyone who was willing to speak with me on the topic. There may not be an easy solution to this particular problem, but further research and continued relationship building with Native and non-native scholars and historians will most likely be the vital element in decoding symbolism. As with many aspects relating to historical study a collaborative approach encompassing multiple people with diverse backgrounds and skills is usually the best approach. However, with a sensitive topic involving ancient Native American sites and

artifacts this approach must come with a level of caution. There is a strong likelihood of Indigenous peoples choosing to protect the meaning of their sacred symbols from outsiders, like myself, and keep it amongst themselves. This is a reality that any ethical scholar of Native history must learn to respect, even at the expense of their own research. If they cannot do this, it is best to choose a different research path. Personally, I respect this preference and understand that not all knowledge is meant to be seen and known by the masses. I do hope that in the future I will be able to continue to build trust with my Indigenous colleagues and more in depth studies of rock art can be completed

From what I can see now, no one has truly studied the South Appalachian Mississippian petroglyphs and mounds in terms of sacred landscapes and geography to this degree. Most scholars focus on the symbols primarily seeking to interpret them, with some attention to the immediate surrounding landscape. Viewing the petroglyph and mounds sites in three geographic regions (mountains, piedmont and coastal) provides a more comprehensive view of how the sites function together and how they contribute as a vast network along river highways and shows how these sites would have functioned as public sites meant to be seen.

A final strength of this project is its simplicity of language. Rather than describing petroglyphs, mounds and symbols in complex mystical terms, *Trace* uses concrete wording and frames the complexities of these sites in a way that relates them to the landscape, nature and geography. I am not the first to take this landscape-centered approach, however, others who came before me use language that is overly complicated and reads as if they are describing an ancient secret language. If rock art was public art, it was never meant to be secret or mysterious, but clear and easy for many people to

understand. While those meanings may be lost or kept secret today, the vast majority of the compiled research for this project points to these sites being accessible and understood by anyone passing through the area.

Ultimately, rock art scholars encompass a small group of eclectic individuals with a passion for studying ancient Native artistic practices. Unfortunately, and partly due to its small size, scholars in this field do not have a younger generation of rock art scholars to train and mentor in best practices. In fact, at thirty-six years old, I am one of the youngest rock art researchers in the region and also one of only a handful of women. This is a trend that must change in order for the discipline to survive beyond the twenty-first century.

Encouraging a younger generation to care about your work and carry it forward into the future is never an easy task, but with the addition of Public History, it is possible to meet these younger historians on their own terms. As part of this project, I created a website called YonderCarolina, which uses digital media to tell local and regional stories, including *Trace.* The website contains all of the information found in this thesis, but presents it in visual and interactive ways, with videos and interactive graphics used as learning aids. In addition to the website, YonderCarolina also makes use of various social media platforms that highlight local and region historical curiosities as well as artwork I created associated with the project. While this may not be the traditional academic approach, the younger historian is more likely to engage with visual and interactive media than with a scholarly journal. As times change, it becomes necessary for historians to change with it and find new and creative ways to drive interest and engage their audience with this important research. Rock art sites are under threat of

destruction from both vandalism and development, but with continued interest, authentic relationship building and training in the field, we can work collaboratively to preserve these sites for the future and honor the intentions and legacies of the original Native ancestors.

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Hayes, Kathleen. “Catawba History 101.” President James K. Polk State Historic Site, Pineville, North Carolina, April 29, 2023.

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Pamphlets/Signage

“Earthen Lodge Wayfinding Sign,” Ocmulgee Mounds National Historic Park, Macon, Georgia.

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Ocmulgee Mounds (National Park Service US Department of the Interior in coordination with the Nation Park Foundation).