

Fremont Nationalism: Cult of the Hunter

Byron Loosle

Ashley National Forest

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I've decided to have a little fun this morning. This paper is partially a product of the cultural climate in which I currently live. Myth-making is an important industry in Vernal, UT. First there were the outlaws, especially Butch and Sundance. There are books, displays, and even a summer outdoor theater production to "set the record straight." Later came copious books and websites on Spanish gold mines of the Uinta Mountains. Numerous individuals put great stock in these legends, even spending countless hours searching for traces of the lost mines. In the last couple of years accounts of Aztec and Nephite gold have crept into the local lore. Underlying this story-telling, is a strong and heartfelt nostalgia for the good ole days. The muzzleloader and archery deer hunts have become tremendously popular in the last few years. The decline of the sheep, cattle and timber industries are lamented and solutions are vigorously debated among the ruling elite of Uintah County. Generally there is a desire to return to some point in the glorious past when people made a decent living in those professions. However, the recollections of a glorious past are probably more mythical than factual.

Edward Abbey in the Monkey Wrench Gang warned the reader when they entered Utah they needed to set their watch back 20 years. However, living in the past is not a recent problem. In 1880 Judge William Carter went to Washington DC to convince congress of the need to establish a military outpost and fort in Ashley that would protect the White settlers from the hostile Ute who had just been moved from Colorado. Nation wide the army was in the process of closing outposts as there was no longer any frontier. However, Judge Carter was able to persuade congress to reopen Fort Bridger and establish a military post near Vernal (Stertz 2005).

I suspect nostalgia, for the good ole days is not a recent phenomenon and probably occurred often in conservative prehistoric societies. Talbot, Richens (1996:197) and Coltrain (1996:121) argue that the adoption of agriculture was so rapid in northeastern Utah that it had to involve the migration of people. Talbot and Richens (1996:197) suggest a small Basketmaker population moved into the area, but was swallowed up in the larger local gene pool. I do not have sufficient time to discuss the validity of this hypothesis today. However, with nearly 50% of the burials at Caldwell Village exhibiting cranial deformation (considered a southern trait) (Ambler 1966) and the abundance of southern derived material culture at Mantle Cave (Benden and Goff 2005) the Talbot and Richens hypothesis seems plausible

One implication of the Talbot and Richens hypothesis is that the assimilation of the farmers was peaceful and perhaps trouble free. This is very rarely the case in ethnographic records when people of different ethnic backgrounds live together. Although there may be overt calm, there are significant underlying tensions that may be formally channeled and developed. Practices and institutions are created that help maintain peaceful relationships, and I would argue there may be instances when evidence of these can be found archaeologically. Would the hunter/gatherers of northeastern Utah have been any different when faced with a new reality? Sure farming was good early on, everyone was doing it, and the standard of living was up, but what about the good ole days?

Inverse Images

Consideration of some anthropological theory will help create a framework for subsequent discussion. A nearly universal condition develops when two ethnic groups live together in unequal status. Hawkins (1984) labels this pattern as Inverse Imaging. Groups tend to define themselves in contrast to opposing groups. Hawkins studied the Ladino and Indio cultures of Guatemala. There he found a wide network of family and friends connected the Ladinos. Ladinos owned businesses and were involved in politics. A life of leisure as a finca owner was their ultimate goal. On the other hand, the Indios were hard working farmers, who lived outside the cities, focused on their nuclear family, and were not involved in business or politics. One problem with Hawkins's model is that his focus is ideology, because in practice he found the ideal was often not followed. This may make it difficult to identify archaeological traces of inverse imaging, but should not discourage us from investigating the problem just yet.

A classic example of the Inverse Image pattern is the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, as each used the other to define themselves. The Dominican Republic and Haiti share the same island and have a long and turbulent history. So it should not be a surprise that Inverse Imaging has developed there. The Dominicans consider themselves White, hard working people, who speak a pure Castellano (Spanish) and practice orthodox Catholicism. While they view the Haitians as black, vagrant, who speak Creole, and practice Vodoo.

The Inverse Image pattern is nearly universal, but the relationship of the Lese Negro farmers and Efe – BaMuti pygmies of the Ituri forest of north central Zaire (Grinker 1994) may shed some insights on the current discussion. The Lese farmers are considered dominate by both groups, although a formal individual partnership arrangement, often from birth, is arranged between Lese and Efe males and they will share resources throughout their lives. The Lese male is not considered an adult without a partner. The Lese may use words like uncivilized, wild, dark, red, and moist to describe

the Efe and the forest. While they would say their village and farms are sunny, orderly, straight, and civilized. Color is very important in their ideology. The Lese associate themselves with white. Their crops (bananas, potatoes, cassava) and resources (iron) are all considered white. While the Efe provide the red resources, the meat and wild honey from the forest. A Lese lives in a rectangular well built house, while the Efe lives in a round house of leaves. However, because the Lese's wattle and daub house is made of sticks (white) and mud (red) he can only build a proper house with the help of the Efe who must come and place the mud.

The Efe are hunters and although they spend much of their time by the Lese villages, they consider the forest their home. They have no patience for farming and consider the bow a symbol of their status as a hunter. Great care is taken to preserve and protect the bow. They consider themselves more muscular than the fat, less robust farmers. They are light footed and agile, not like the heavy clumsy Lese who scare away all the game.

Cult of the Hunter

Based on examples from the ethnographic literature I would expect the tension between migrant farmers and local hunter/gatherer descendents to surface in certain areas. (1)First is the dichotomy between hunting and farming. Although the inhabitants of northeastern Utah all appear to have adopted farming relatively quickly (Johnson and Loosle 2002), there will still be a symbolic importance on hunting and the tools associated with hunting. (2)Because migrants would not be familiar with the local area they may not use some locations and even assign evil connotations to particular regions. The Lese consider the forest dark, moist and evil. However, the Efe consider it home and will often retreat to the forest when they grow weary of life in the Lese village. Fremont hunters may have had a hunting area away from the agricultural villages. Perhaps as with the Efe, certain ceremonies and activities could only occur there. (3)Because of their knowledge, skills, kinship ties, or other reasons each group had differing access to local and nonlocal resources. (4)There is always a difference in status between groups with one being more dominant. (5)Symbology, especially color, would become very important, but will probably be difficult to identify in the material culture record.

Fremont Nationalism

Now to quickly examine examples of how I believe Inverse Imaging is visible in Uinta Fremont culture. Johnson (1993) has argued most Fremont rock art was designed to be used as almanacs. On certain key dates elements in the rock art would match with sun shapes and shadows. Some prehistoric and historic Pueblo groups use rock art in a similar fashion (Plog 1997:100-101). This would have been especially important in the Uinta Basin at the northern extreme of agriculture. For a successful harvest it was

important to plant on the appropriate day, not too early or frost would take it and not too late so it had time to develop before the fall frost. Yet, in spite of this very practical and necessary role for the local rock art there are almost no agrarian motifs. However, there are a plethora of hunting panels. This seems a little inconsistent for a group who from a very early date were serious agriculturalists consuming a large amount of maize, building irrigation ditches and constructing incredible storage facilities (Talbot and Richens 1997, Loosle 2001).

Another aspect of the importance of hunting is the atlatl appears to have continued to be used until at least 1000 AD in northeastern Utah (Figure 1). Atlatls may be depicted in rock art, possible atlatl weights (Goff, personal communication, 2005), and numerous

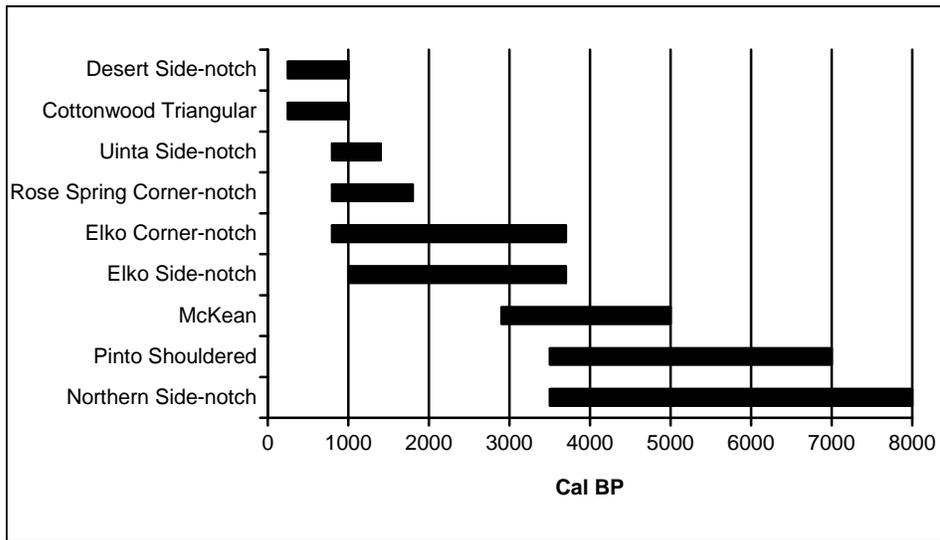


Figure 1. Projectile point chronology from Uinta Mountains (Johnson and Loosle 2002:272)

Elko Series spear points have also been found in the region. Elko points are especially common at upland hunting sites. If the bow and arrow were technologically superior to the atlatl, why for over a thousand years did the inhabitants of northeastern Utah continue to use the older weapon? Perhaps it was a symbol of the people's hunter/gatherer ancestors. The bow and arrow were probably introduced from the south and would have been associated with the migrant farmers. The atlatl may have been an important symbol of a hunter or ancestor cult.

Newcomers to the area would not be familiar with all the different local environments and settings. They would have focused on the regions most suited for farming. It is interesting that there is a marked increase in upland and mountain use during the Fremont period in northeastern Utah. This parallels a large increase in population in the lowlands. Again it seems unusual for farmers to have such a significant presence in the high country. Nelson (2001) found the Wasatch Mountains to the west were occupied much

differently. Some midelevation hunting camps exist, but the higher elevations have no apparent use during the Fremont period. While the upper reaches of the Wasatch Range can be reached in a single day, the Uinta Mountains are much more difficult to access, requiring a long trip across difficult terrain and dense forest. A nonlocal farmer might consider the mountains dangerous, dark, cold, scary and evil (and inhabited by the “Little People”). While those of us familiar with them consider them beautiful, cool, and peaceful, and the difficult ascent well worthwhile.

The majority of sites in the High Uintas are lithic reduction and hunting or game processing sites associated with large expanses of alpine grasses. Madsen et al (2000) argued these alpine settings made finding game very predictable. Knoll (2003) found that the caloric return rates for carrying processed game from high elevation sites like Deadman Lake was not practical from an economic standpoint. This suggests that hunting in alpine areas had more than an economic function. In addition, an abundance of game and a wide range of economic floral resources were available at midelevation, sites such as Summit Springs (Johnson and Loosle 2002). There is no practical reason for entering the high country. Excavation of two high elevation sites at Chepeta (Johnson and Watkins 2002) and Deadman Lakes (Knoll 2003) found considerable evidence of lower elevation economic species. The majority of plant resources gathered locally at these sites had medicinal or ceremonial uses.

The high elevation sites may have been created by medicine men gathering particular plants for medicines or even patient curing. A small party going to the high country to conduct a religious ceremony like a vision quest may have created some sites. The majority of sites, however, relate to hunting. Kent (1989) notes that hunters in agrarian societies often have elevated prestige. They are able to access a resource (protein) that is not always available to others and can convert the meat into prestige and power. This would have been more than enough incentive for some people to make the perilous and difficult journey into the high country.

Differential access to resources is another characteristic that should be evident in the archaeological record. The Uinta evidence is generally patchy and difficult to show any clear patterns. Abundant olivella shell in one burial (Janetski 2002:351) may indicate ties to the outside, but olivella is rare in the Uinta Basin, and occurs at a few larger sites. Southwestern pottery has been found, but is also rare. The flicker feather headdress from Mantle’s Cave (Benden and Goff 2005) has feathers from a flicker found on the Front Range and other feathers from a flicker common to the Western Slope, suggesting the creator had access to important resources beyond their immediate control, but again this is a unique artifact. Obsidian is much more common, but comes from a variety of sources like Malad, Idaho, central Utah, Paradise Valley, Nevada, and Jimez, New Mexico. There is no clear patterning to the distribution of obsidian either (Estes 2005).

Tiger chert and Sheep Creek quartzite were important lithic resources on the Uintas north slope. It appears that Tiger chert in particular became more important through time and certain Fremont individuals spent considerable time processing the material into bifaces, including elegant large bifaces. In some cases these craftsman created works of art. Some of these large bifaces may have had ceremonial functions. A large Sheep Creek quartzite biface was found in the bundle containing the flicker feather headdress at Mantle's Cave (Goff, personal communication, 2005) and suggests a ritual function. Tiger chert bifaces were traded quite widely, as far away as New Mexico and Arizona (Loosle 2000). The tiger chert industry of the Fremont period was an important resource for exchange. The material may have had very practical purposes as an exchange item to trade for food during periodic shortages. I suspect it also gave considerable wealth, power and prestige to those individuals who controlled the production and trade routes. We have not fully documented and mapped travel routes on the south slope of the Uintas. However, it is interesting that on the north slope it is quite clear that Sheep Creek quartzite moved up what would become the Carter Military Road, while Tiger chert moved to the east toward Dutch John and Greendale. This may suggest that different factions controlled quarry access and/or production.



Figure 2. Large bifaces reportedly found near Greendale.

As mentioned earlier it is difficult to demonstrate symbology in the Uinta Fremont record. Initial research of the Red Canyon Fremont appeared to show an exuberance and flair for decoration not documented among other Fremont. The only known example of a fired-on red cross-hatched paint design on Uinta Gray pottery came from Dutch John (Wilson and Loosle2000:148-150) Figure 3). All five burden baskets known from Red Canyon had elaborate woven designs (Merkley and Johnson 2002). Adovasio (1986) claimed that decoration was rare on Fremont baskets. However, additional study has found all Uinta Fremont burden baskets have similar stair step/lightning designs, not just those from Red Canyon. So there is still no clear symbology correlates for local hunters.



Figure 3. Dutch John grayware and Hayes site basket with design.

Summary

Obviously I have not proved anything this morning. I have used a lot of phrases found in the good Spanish gold mine books, “might have,” “could be,” etc. Hopefully I’ve convinced you that nostalgia for the old ways is not something new. Talbot, Richens, Coltrain and others may be correct to argue a group of southern farmers moved into the Uinta Basin and quickly change the economic strategy of the local populations. I have not addressed the possibility that peripheral groups in Red Canyon and northwestern Colorado may have viewed themselves distinctly from the core Uinta Basin Fremont. If that is the case, then the continued use of the atlatl, annual logistical fall hunting trips to midelevation, summer and fall high elevation trips, hunting motifs in rock art and the importance of north slope lithic resources may all be signs of a subtle resistance and demarcation from the foreigners. These are all attempts by the locals with long ties to the land to show that heritage and identify their distinctness, even while they adopted many of the wonderful inventions of the newcomers. Nothing is really new in the world, today cultures around the globe struggle with their identity while eagerly adopting the seductive ways of western society.

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