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THE BISCUIT WARE “AWANYU”: RE-THINKING A CURIOUS MOTIF



Fig. 1. Biscuit B (Bandelier Black/gray) bowl awanyu motif.
(courtesy of Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, Cat. No. 1437/11).

David H. Snow

Abstract

“Feathered serpent,” “many headed snake,” “hand-sign,” and “growing corn” are several interpretations offered over the years for the singularly curious motif on Biscuit Ware pottery called “awanyu.” However, these are not especially convincing and, along with other investigators, I expect something else was intended by Biscuit Ware potters of the Northern Rio Grande. I explore here an alternative interpretation of this interesting motif and suggest that it might be a symbol reflecting the documented violence in the Lower Chama River Basin communities during the 14th, 15th, and, perhaps, early 16th centuries. *Caveat lector!* I propose that this “awanyu” motif might symbolize the pan-pueblo association of war and bear; specifically, the latter’s power against witchcraft. I suggest that “awanyu” is a stylized Grizzly bear’s paw with claws extended (perhaps, attached to a sleeve or fore-leg). Pueblo Bear Medicine Society members donned bear paws with the skins of the bear’s fore-legs during ceremonies to cure bewitched individuals and to cleanse the community of witches. The similarity of the “awanyu” motif to bear-paw motifs elsewhere is suggestive. Although the reader might look askance at my out-on-a-limb offering, nothing ventured, nothing gained.

Introduction

Edgar Lee Hewett recounted his discovery of a “bold and striking” motif on Pajarito pottery.

In almost all decorative patterns a symbolic motif is noted. After years of effort and with the help of elderly Tewa priests very familiar with their tribal traditions, we were able to decipher the system of symbolic decoration that prevails here. It alludes to a very ancient mythological cycle of which we were able to collect only fragments and which centered around the emblem of the god Awanyu. ...He was the precursor of the plumed Serpent... of today’s Pueblo Indians, who have retained his [awanyu] name. The latter god appeared comparatively recently in the Rio Grande Valley...the former is the most archaic. His symbol was no longer used after abandonment of the large houses of the Pajarito (Hewett: 1908 [1993]: 90-91).

<p>Fig. 2a. Biscuit Ware awanyu motifs (from Kidder and Amsden 1931, Fig. 73).</p>	<p>Fig. 2b. Awanyu motifs on Biscuit B sherds (Kidder and Amsden 1931, Fig. 76).</p>	<p>Fig. 2c. Awanyu motifs (from Kidder and Amsden 1931, Fig. 75).</p>

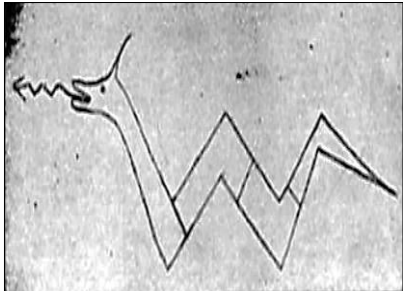
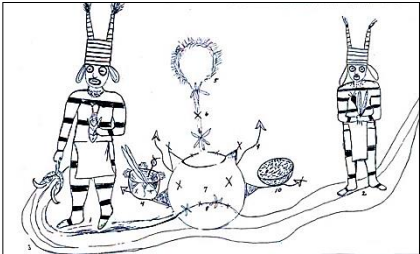
<p>Fig. 2d. Additional Awanyu band motifs (from Kidder 1915, Plate XXI).</p>	<p>Fig. 2e. Awanyu motifs from Graves and Eckert (2007 Fig. 14.7, redrawn by Eckert).</p>

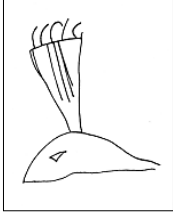

By the former “god,” Hewett referred to the motif shown in Figures 1 and 2 the same awanyu (“avaiyu”) concealed by Witches beneath the floor of their kiva for the purpose of flooding the village in a tale briefly recounted below. By the latter “god,” Hewett referred to Mesoamerica’s feathered serpent, but the ideological relationship, if any, between horned and flying-feathered serpents in pueblo mythology and imagery remains obscure (Crotty 1995; Phillips et al. 2006).

Efforts to understand the meaning of designs on prehistoric pueblo ceramics and on rock art, as well as to tease out the underlying ideology associated with such symbolism, is a fascinating, but not always, a convincing endeavor. Nor, is it one with which I have been particularly concerned in spite of my long interest in prehistoric Southwestern ceramics. Nevertheless, the peculiar motif conventionally identified as “awanyu” depicted on Biscuit Ware pottery of the Chama Basin and adjacent Pajarito Plateau in northern New Mexico, long has piqued my curiosity, not to mention my skepticism. The frequent illustrations of this distinctive motif in the literature suggest that it was not an uncommon expression of regional potters (Amsden 1931; Graves and Eckert 1998; Hewett 1908; Kidder 1915; Wilson 1918); though just how common is difficult to assess in the absence of published data. Seemingly more frequently present on Bandelier Black-on-gray (“Biscuit B”) vessels, the absence of well-dated proveniences for the Biscuit Ware types precludes little more than an estimate of ca. A.D. 1350 or so for the earliest use of the motif. Barnett’s (1969:157, Fig. 123) illustration of the “awanyu” motif on a Sankawi Black/cream jar from Tunque Pueblo (LA240), indicates its persistence into the 16th century.

Awanyu

Wilson (1918:310) noted that “Whatever may be the meaning of the symbol, it is certainly not an avanyu;” adding erroneously (presumably, following Hewett’s lead) that “Avanyu is the Tewa word for their mythological plumed serpent” (my emphasis). Wilson provides the reader with an illustration of this “plumed serpent” drawn for her by a resident of San Ildefonso Pueblo (Figure 3a).

	
<p>Fig. 3a. “Plumed Serpent” from Wilson (1918:310, Fig. 29).</p>	<p>Fig. 3b. “Kossa altar ceremony”, San Juan [Ohkay Owingeh] (from Parsons 1974, facing page 127).</p>

	
<p>Fig. 3c. Feathered snake, Pajarito Plateau (after Chapman 1938, Plate 8d).</p>	<p>Fig. 3d. Hopi Pa'lulukoña, Horned Water Serpent (from Fewkes 1903, Plate XXVI).</p>

Similarly, awanyu, “Water Old Man,” identified by the backward-tilted dual horns is seen in Fig. 3b, depicted for Parsons (1974:121) by a native of San Juan Pueblo [Ohkay Owingeh]. Clearly, in Tewa thought, awanyu is a *horned* serpent, neither plumed nor a Quetzalcoatl spin-off: feathers on snakes are, obviously, feathers (Fig 3c, 3d). Awanyu does not fly; it swims in rivers and creeks and in the pueblo’s irrigation ditches; it is to be feared and is responsible for devastating floods, landslides, and, on occasion, required the sacrifice of children (Parsons 1996:964). The water serpent sports a horn “curving *backwards* from the forehead” (Dumarest (1919:196, emphasis added). This same horned awanyu often is depicted on the famous pottery of Maria and Julian Martinez and, presumably, is the same serpent drawn in profile by Wilson’s artist. Often seen in Rio Grande rock art with what appears to be but a single horn from a side-view perspective (see Fig. 3a), it is just as often shown with two horns viewed from above (e.g. Schaafsma 2000; Slifer 1998), as seen in Fig 3b. In spite of the frequency of the “awanyu” in Rio Grande Pueblo imagery, Parsons (1996:186) cited her Hopi Tewa informant as saying the Water Serpent was “too dangerous to draw.” “Designs,” she said, “in themselves may be potent,” a potency I believe that is inherent in the motif in question.

Hewett’s “awanyu” characteristically bears five (sometimes four, occasionally six) black, triangular protuberances from what Kidder (1915) and Kidder and Amsden (1931) referred to as the “head” of this apparent snake image. Most often seen on Abiquiu and Bandelier Black/gray pottery, it occurs occasionally on “Biscuit C” (Cuyamungue Black/tan), and less frequently on the sequent Sankawi Black/cream, types believed characteristic of Tewa potters (Barnett 1969:157; Harlow 1973:148-149, 153,158; Mera 1939, Plate XI). It no longer is found on Colonial Period Tewa ceramics (Tewa, Ogapoge, or Powhoge Polychromes) and is absent on pre-Biscuitware black/white types of the Rio Grande. Moreover, this motif is not found anywhere else in the prehistoric pueblo Southwest that I am aware; in particular, nothing resembling the motif is seen on pottery from Mesa Verde or elsewhere in the Upper San Juan region.

A similar motif is seen on Salado Polychromes illustrated by Crown (1994:87, 139, Fig. 5.41, Figs 9.7, 9.8), and her Fig. 9.6 depicts an apparent serpent head with *forward* tilted horn behind which project three apparent feathers (as noted, Awanyu’s horns are always tilted over its back). Another apparent “serpent” terminates in five triangular projections, possibly representing feathers (her Fig. 9.8) but these curvilinear, often convoluted designs on Tonto and

Gila Polychromes contrast with the Biscuit Ware potters' preference for linear treatment and style. I am not convinced of any historical relationship between the Biscuit Ware "awanyu" motif and Salado Polychrome "serpents" (interestingly, the popular motif seen on the Salado Red Wares is depicted on a black-on-red vessel from the Piedra District (Roberts 1930:138, Fig.38b)).

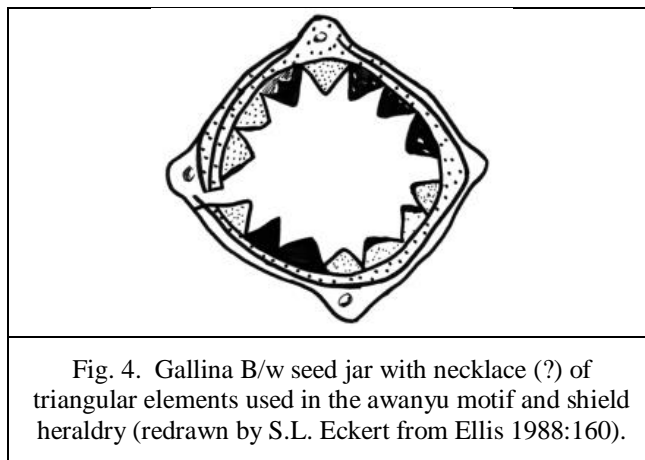
Although the "awanyu" occurs only on the types mentioned, apparently it is not ubiquitous. In his study of Pajarito Plateau ceramic styles Kidder (1915) identified 260 individual designs on Biscuit Wares, only 16.5% of which included "awanyu," an identification Kidder seemingly borrowed from Hewett (the distinction between Biscuit A and B types had not been described at the time). Jeançon's (1923) description of Biscuit Wares from Poshu refers to the "Avañu" motif, but the frequency of occurrence is not provided. Of 758 total Biscuit Ware sherds recovered at Pecos Pueblo, only 11% percent of the Biscuit A sherds bear this image (Kidder and Amsden 1931:90); unfortunately, Amsden failed to report its frequency on Biscuit B sherds there. Graves and Eckert (1998) recorded its occurrence on 33.3% of 33 Biscuit Ware vessels and sherds they examined in museum collections, but failed to distinguish between Abiquiu and Bandelier B/g types (three of those illustrated in their article, however, were identified for me by Eckert as Biscuit B; see Fig. 2d). My own inspection of Biscuit Ware vessels in the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology collections revealed seven "Biscuit-Sankawi" with the motif and nine Biscuit B (including one jar) sherds with the awanyu. Identification of a random (grab) selection of 1092 Biscuit A, B, and Sankawi sherds from San Gabriel del Yunque at Maxwell Museum disclosed the awanyu motif on but two Biscuit A sherds and one each on a Biscuit B and a Sankawi B/c example.

Based upon the frequency of the motif at Otowi (Potsuwi'i) ruin, Lucy Wilson (1918) believed that it was a specialty of that pueblo, yet her illustrations in Fig. 31 show only two of five vessels with the "awanyu" on bowl exteriors, reflecting the difference between Biscuit A and B. Since the majority of the ceramics discussed in Kidder's 1915 article evidently originated at sites on the Pajarito Plateau, in light of Wilson's speculation, it might well be that the motif was the specialty of, or originated with, potters on the Plateau. Again, without data from the excavated materials in the various Chama Valley sites and, therefore, the extent to which the motif was commonly in use by potters in those large villages, we have no way of knowing at present. Hagstrum (1985) has suggested that rim-band designs on Biscuit B (Bandelier B/g) reflect ceramic "craft specialization," and it is certainly possible that the awanyu motif was a peculiar symbol of specific groups of potters or villages.

Curewitz (2008:406, 425) found that Biscuit Ware potters on the Pajarito Plateau used exclusively volcanic ash, while her Chama Valley samples, contained various amounts of granitic and quartz sand temper in addition to the ash, materials unavailable on the Plateau. The characteristic volcanic ash tempers used in the production of the Biscuit Ware (and Sankawi B/c) do occur at three known sources in the Chama Basin: the upper Rio del Oso, the Rio Ojo Caliente, and Abiquiu (Curewitz 2008). Various quartz sand tempers are also available in the Basin. In each case, the identified Chama ash sources are adjacent to large Biscuit Ware pueblos, but the frequency of occurrence of awanyu on Biscuit Wares from those sites is

unknown. Identification of temper materials on a sample of vessels exhibiting the awanyu from various Chama Basin and Pajarito Plateau sites, together with dated contexts, clearly are needed.

“Awanyu” comprises several elements often occurring on black-on-white styles across the northern Southwest, combining several of them to form three characteristic features of the motif. First is a band containing common elements of standard band designs on late P. III - early P. IV black-on-white ceramics (e.g., Curewitz 2008; Habicht-Mauche 1993:54; Kidder and Amsden 1931; Stubbs and Stallings 1953). Second, a triangular, rounded, or squared element (the “head”) might be appended to one or, occasionally, both ends of the band; the black triangular elements are attached to this. This “head” most frequently is a triangle (Figs. 1 - 2). Finally, the “head,” of the different shapes often is filled with a random array of dots or speckles. It is this apparent “head” with projecting triangles that, presumably, gives rise to a fancied resemblance to a feathered snake’s head; however, feathers depicted on pueblo snake heads quite clearly are just that, and the awanyu’s triangular elements simply do not look like feathers to me. The cover photograph of *El Palacio* (Anonymous, 1934:5-6) illustrates what is clearly a snake, but with five quite long parallel lines emanating from what appears to be its front end, with the caption, “Awanyu – The Many Headed Snake” [!]; it bears no resemblance at all to the awanyu motif. Triangular elements, either solid, empty, or filled with individual smaller elements frequently occur in the decorative schemes on Southwestern ceramics from Basketmaker to historic times (Figure 4) but the curious configuration of this “head” with protruding triangles, attached to a band, appears to be unique to the Biscuit Wares.



I am dubious of Hewett’s identification of his “discovery,” one that Lucy Wilson (1908) suggested might be a “hand sign.” Amsden (in Kidder and Amsden 1931:124) cited Jeançon (1923:60-61), who wrote that Amsden’s informants suggested that the peculiar motif represented the “tassels on the top” of an ear of green corn, the polka-dots representing grains of corn. Amsden himself (Amsden in Kidder and Amsden 1931:124) was sure that the figures “must have been symbols or conventional representations which carried a definite meaning.” Whatever the specific meaning, it occurs in an arena, the Chama Basin in particular, during a period in which violent and aggressive behavior is well documented archeologically. “Tewa informants from San Juan, Santa Clara and San Ildefonso stated...that although it might be the plumed serpent,

they did not think so. They were positive it was not a hand sign.” (Amsden, in Kidder and Amsden 1931:124)

Of “War,” Witchcraft, and Bears

The large late Coalition and subsequent Classic Period Chama Basin and northern Pajarito Plateau pueblos are believed to have been inhabited by Tewa-speaking people; this broad region is considered the Tewa peoples’ “traditional homelands” (Duwe and Anschuetz 2013). Historically, Tewas were famed as warriors. Juan de Oñate’s colonists at the Tewa pueblo of San Gabriel del Yunque in 1601 testified that these people formerly “...had constant wars among themselves” (Hammond and Rey 1953:715). The invitation from Walpi to the Tewas to leave their homes and move to Hopi was owing to the “reputation of the Tewa as relentless and fearless warriors” (Dozier 1966:17). Fray Alonso de Benavides, writing in 1634, remarked that “when a war breaks out” the Tewa Indians “are the first to join and accompany” the Spaniards (Hodge, Hammond, and Rey 1945:68-69). *Naashashí*, “bear enemies,” is the name of the Navajo’s Tewa clan (Young and Morgan 1951:445). The priest, Torquemada, was informed that “Apaches,” believing themselves to have been the original Natives of this land, carried on continuous war with the pueblo people, noting that they have burned many times many pueblos (Torquemada 1615:679; my translation from the original Spanish). The word war in English (in particular) is loaded with historical baggage that often implies an attempt at complete subjugation or annihilation of one’s enemies and control of their territory and resources for whatever perceived reasons. To what extent, if any, such ambitious goals drove internecine conflicts among the Ancestral Puebloans, I suspect such aims were not characteristic of conflict and violence in the prehistoric Southwest.

At Ch’æwage Tewa people were living. They had troubles together through their games. One kiva...was a witch kiva and they beat all the others in the games. Everybody was getting crazy about it. Witch kiva was going to have a dance at night and called it out for eight days...They are not going to do any little thing; they are going to do the biggest thing. No way to save the people...they were going to call Avaiyu, they had him under the floor, and he was going to bring the flood....Then the Oku’wa sent lightning into the kiva and killed all the Witch people in there. Then they got cacti and closed the kiva with it, and Pati’e’enu blew on the cacti and froze it tight so they could not come out. (Parsons 1994:177-80).

This opening episode in Hopi Tewa tale prefaces the subsequent migration of Tano-Tewas to Hopi’s First Mesa during the latter years of the 17th century (a similar, though unrelated witch tale is retold by DeHuff 1938:69-73). More importantly, the Hopi Tewa episode underscores Ellis’ observation (1951:179) that internecine pueblo aggression in prehistoric times was “based primarily upon antagonisms and jealousies” which provided a rationale for violent behavior directed at specific individuals, segments of the population, or toward entire villages (also see Darling 1999; Walker 1998).

Pueblo aggression and violence in the pre-Spanish Southwest has been examined by numerous investigators (e. g., LeBlanc 1999; Lekson 2002; Nichols and Crown 2008; Snead and Allen 2011) and is suggested by the often-cited defensive situation of villages, by their hasty abandonment, by burned kivas or roomblocks, and by mutilated bodies and non-traditional internments (Kidder 1926, 1958). Aggressive pueblo behavior, either against individuals, segments of the village inhabitants, or against entire villages, might reflect pueblo “socialization for mistrust or fear” from within or without (e.g. Lekson 2002:607-08): “...from their youth their elders have taught them that nobody can know the hearts of men. There are witches everywhere” (Dumarest 1919:162). Aggressive behavior also might result from factors related to the external environment, such as resource depletion or unreliability, and competition with others for scarce resources, including women (Kohler and Turner 2006). Whether as defenders or aggressors, evidence from a number of the late prehistoric Chama pueblos, regardless of the ethnic identity of the inhabitants, is indicative of often violent behavior. For now, the identification of aggressors and the underlying causes and conditions remain unknown.

Beal (1987:147) noted that “Several Chama communities apparently were victims of conflict. Te’ewi, Pesedeuinge, Riana, Palisade, Kap [o] and Tsama have burned roomblocks, unburied skeletal remains and/or mass internments in nontraditional burial places.” Jeançon (1923:30) cited evidence for the hasty abandonment of Poshuingue; his Santa Clara informant suggested that the people were “driven away” from the large Chama Valley pueblos (1923:76). Quantities of burned corn and wood have been brought to the surface by pot-hunting at Ponsipa’keri, but whether indicative of violence there remains to be determined (Bugé 1979). At Pesedeuinge, Jeançon (cited in Beal 1987) reported extensive burning; he believed “the whole place was destroyed by enemies, killing the residents and setting fire to many of the buildings. One skeleton there had its skull crushed by a large stone.” At Posi’, above Ojo Caliente Hot Springs, Ingersoll remarked: “We had heard that many skeletons...had been found there by casual excavating;” and, trying his own hand, Ingersoll reported:

At last, by chance, we struck a skeleton....It was that of a young person, for the wisdom teeth had not yet risen...and the sutures of the skull were open. The bones were disordered...and the head had been crushed in. The same rude dismemberment and lack of burial is said to characterize all the skeletons discovered, and they are always found within the walls of the houses....I believe that the pueblo was attacked and captured by enemies during the wars which we know finally resulted in the village people being driven out of all this region, and that it was burned over the heads of the citizens, many of whom were killed within their very homes. The presence of charcoal all through the mounds of ruins, with various other circumstances, confirms the reasonable explanation. (Ingersoll 1885:86-87)

Bandelier’s (1892:45) visit to Posi’ also found that “in nearly every room opened, human skeletons were found. They were in every imaginable posture, and with the skulls fractured or crushed” and the remains of “at least twenty-four adult and sub-adult individuals” from a kiva at Te’ewi is cited often (Reed 1953:104).

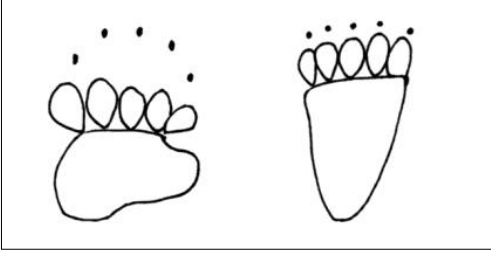
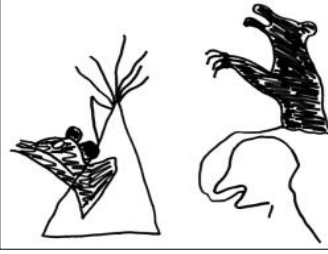
Violence is believed to have occurred at several other Classic Period northern Rio Grande villages, but the evidence in most cases is inconclusive and consists primarily of burning of some rooms and, in some cases, quantities of charred corn but whether by accident or the result of aggressive actions is not clear. Bremmer and Burns (2013:126-127) recently have questioned the extent to which the adjacent 13th and 14th century Gallina settlements were subjected to violence, suggesting that, while “violence did occur” at a “limited” (but unspecified) number of Gallina sites, they argue that many of the burned dwellings resulted from spontaneous combustion of volatile oils from stored, insufficiently dried new corn. Mackey and Holbrook (1978) found that 34% of Gallina dwellings had been burned, a rather substantial number (see Bahti 1949:55). Nevertheless, Bremmer and Burns (2013:127) admit that violence might have been internecine, “possibly linked to witchcraft.” (Also see Borck and Bremmer 2015:9-10)

Given the powerful constraints that governed architecture and ceramics, anyone suggesting change might have been subject to accusations of witchcraft and treated accordingly. This view is reinforced by the limited number of sites where multiple murders have been found (Bremmer and Burns 2013:127).

Such “powerful constraints,” in addition to accusations of witchcraft within established communities, or against migrants, for example, might well lead to intra- or inter-pueblo aggression, and war, against non-conforming others.

Ortman (2011, 2012) has argued that decorative conventions on Rio Grande ceramics reflect an influx of migrant populations from Mesa Verde into the Rio Chama Valley and its tributary drainages. Dean Wilson (2013:178) expressed partial agreement with Ortman’s thesis, but suggested that while such decorative schemes might indicate “the reappearance of earlier Mesa Verde-derived elements, other trends may also be indicated;” he suggested that decorative ideas “associated with smaller numbers of groups” that amalgamated with resident Tewa populations provided “distinct local technologies and traditions...” Such an influx of others must surely have presented a situation ripe for conflict, accusations of witchcraft, and resultant hostilities and aggression (e.g., Fowles 2005). I suggest that the awanyu motif reflects the incorporation of such a distinct ideological imagery and I suspect that a similar Northern Plains motif related to warfare is a possible source of the Rio Grande imagery and underlying ideology.

The Grizzly Bear (*Ursus horribilis*) is a formidable creature weighing up to 800 pounds, with triangular shaped claws some four inches and more in length ending in very sharp points. The Grizzly is featured prominently in Western Native American story, art, and artifacts (Ewers 1982). Grizzly and Black bears, like humans, are plantigrade and their tracks are very different from those of other animals. They can walk erect and will challenge and fight humans from this position. Perhaps, the occasional semi-circular “head” from which the triangular elements project in the “awanyu” design reflects the imprint of the Grizzly’s front paw print shown in Figure 5 but the hind feet prints are triangular in shape.




	
<p>Fig. 5. Grizzly bear front and rear paw prints. (renderings courtesy of S. L. Eckert).</p>	<p>Fig. 6. Pine Ridge Sioux “Bear comes out” name ideographs (re-drawn from Mallery 1886, Plate LXII, 52, and LXX, 185, by S.L. Eckert).</p>

The frequent triangular shape of the “head” of the awanyu motif perhaps reflects the Grizzly’s plantigrade stance in preparation for defense or offense.

Personal names among Northern Plains groups often contain the word bear. Mallery (1886), for example, counted 26 individuals (about 9%) among the Pine Ridge Sioux who’s names refer to bear or bear power, including Bear-Paw, Shield-Bear, and two “Bear-comes-out” (Figure 6; also see French and French 1996). Across the Plains, Keyser and Kaiser (2014:165) note, “Bears epitomized both offensive and defensive power in the belief system so tightly intertwined with Plains warfare.” This “Bear-comes-out” name, according to Keyser and Kaiser, is reflected in shield imagery in Northern Plains rock art (Keyser 2004; Keyser and Kaiser 2014); presumably, this is a reference to the Grizzly’s defense of den, cubs, or territory.

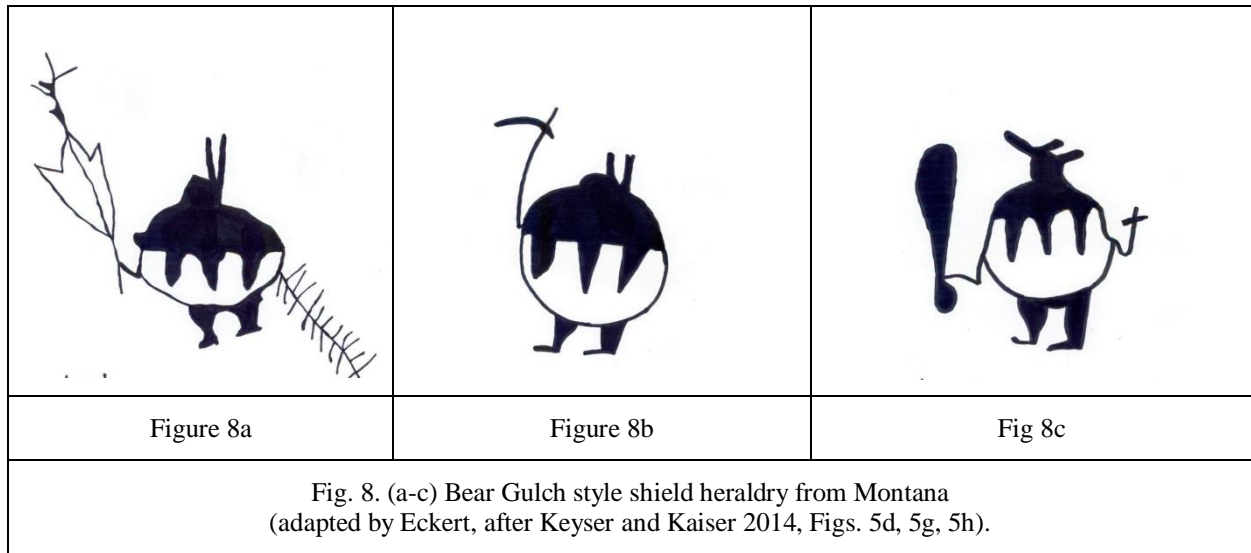
Bear medicine societies and the concept of Bear power are widespread in western North America; they were found among many Plains groups. The Osage, according to Matthews (1973:454) were said to have sought the Grizzly on the “headwaters of the Arkansas” and along the Cimarron in New Mexico. The Grizzly’s former range extended to Central Mexico’s Sierra Madre Occidental but bear ritual, ideology, and imagery are not evident in prehistoric Mesoamerican societies. The hides of “*osos grandemente crescidos*,” likely Grizzly bears, were traded by the Chichimecas of the Sierra de Topia (present states of Durango and Sonora) to the Spaniards in the 16th century (Mota y Escobar 1963:359). Formerly, bear skins were sought by the Tarahumares; the bear skins were used as mats “because they were useful in curing aches and pains;” also in “preserving chastity and conquering lust” (!). A late 18th century account from the region claimed that bear skins were good for the treatment of “various diseases” (Pennington 1997:101-102). This association with curing may be but a faint echo of pueblo and other regional native North American uses of bear medicine (see Ewers 1969:46 note 23).

Members of the Skidi Pawnee Bear Dance wore the bear’s robe: “he is possessed with the bear’s spirit...” (Murie 1989:341) (Fig. 7a), and necklaces of Grizzly claws commonly were worn (Fig. 7b)

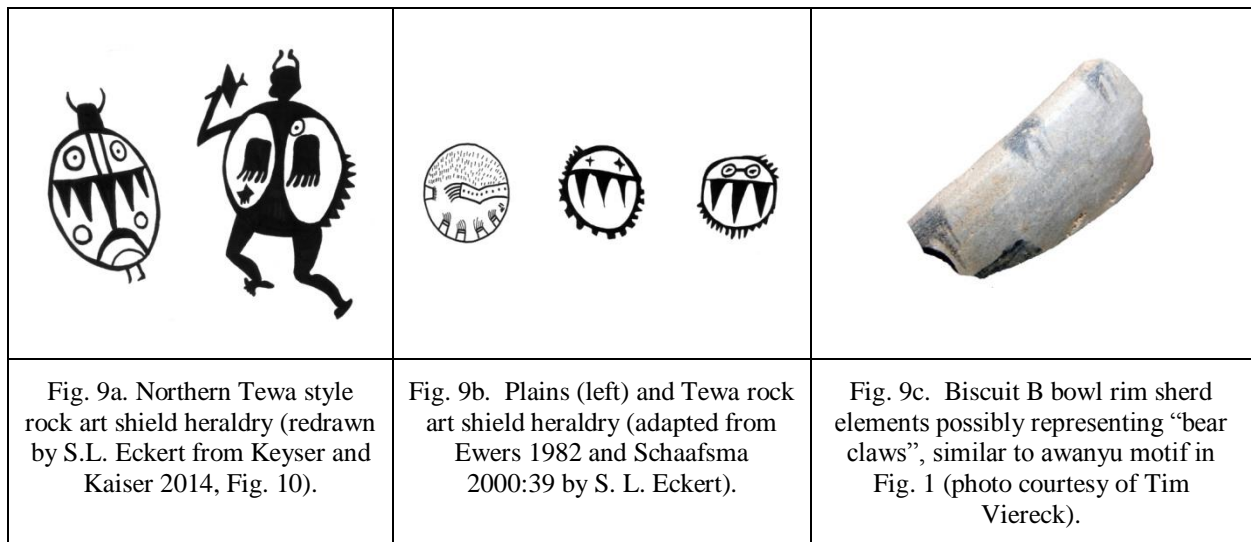
		
<p>Fig. 7a. Medicine man in curing costume (Catlin print, reproduced with permission of Dover Publications, Inc., 1973, Fig. 19).</p>	<p>Fig. 7b. Assiniboine bear society member (Ewers 1955, Fig. 1, reproduced with permission SWJA 11(1):3).</p>	<p>Fig. 7c. San Juan [Ohkay Owingeh] Bear priest (from Parsons 1974:157). Note the bear-paw gauntlets.</p>

Schultz (2010:106) noted that some Piegan Blackfoot men might wear a necklace of “three or four” such rows of claws; he described the shield heraldry of a “medicine man” among the Gros Ventre, “painted with the symbols of his particular dream-given power, two huge grizzly bears in black below which were circles of moons in red” (2010:29). Ewers (1955:2) wrote that “Assiniboine bear cult members ‘painted their faces...with tear streaks or bear paws to evoke the animal’s power’” (Fig. 7b), and “when doctoring the sick or fighting the enemy...made vertical scratches on each side of his face... (Those scratch marks represented a bear’s claw marks).” Perhaps the familiar “warrior mark” painted on pueblo male dancers and on certain ‘warrior’ kachinas (Colton 1991) as well as on the exterior of early Rio Grande Glazeware bowls, reflects similar bear claw marks? Hill (1982:120) noted that Santa Clara Tewa shields were often painted with zoomorphic figures including ‘sun bear’ (unfortunately, Hill did not further identify Santa Clara’s “sun bear”). These figures, Hill noted, are considered “the most significant part of the shield, in that they were believed to possess and impart power; such power was transferred to the user, and not only protected him, but made him more formidable as a warrior” (Hill 1982:120); (also see Keyser and Kaiser 2014:166, for the same transfer of power attributed to Northern Plains shield imagery).

Keyser and Kaiser (2014:154-156; Keyser 2004:154-156) discuss the “Bear-coming-out” or “Bear-comes-out” shield motif of the Bear Gulch style in central and southern Montana and central Wyoming suggesting that it reflects “a single group of artists...over a span of approximately 300 years” lasting until A. D. 1500 or later.



In addition to the Bear Gulch examples, the authors illustrate related rock art shield motifs in the “Tewa,” or Northern Rio Grande area previously recorded by Schaafsma (2000:39, Fig. 9a and Fig. 9b, center and right; also see Schaafsma 2000:Fig. 4.13 for the same shield motif in the Southern Tiwa area). Keyser and Kaiser suggest that these triangular elements represent “teeth” (perhaps, with the implication of bears’ teeth?); but I am tempted to believe that these “teeth” are a kind of shorthand, an abbreviated symbol for the bear claw (awanyu) motif, a symbol of warfare. Schaafsma (2000:62) noted that bears are seldom represented in rock art in the Northern Rio Grande; what clearly is a Grizzly with characteristic hump is depicted in rock art in the Galisteo Basin (Schaafsma 2000:67) and a similar rock art image occurs in the Purgatoire River valley in southeastern Colorado (Loendorf 2008:194). Bear paws are not uncommon in Rio Grande rock art but, unlike Plains tribes, bear seldom occurs in pueblo personal names (also see Voth 1905:80).

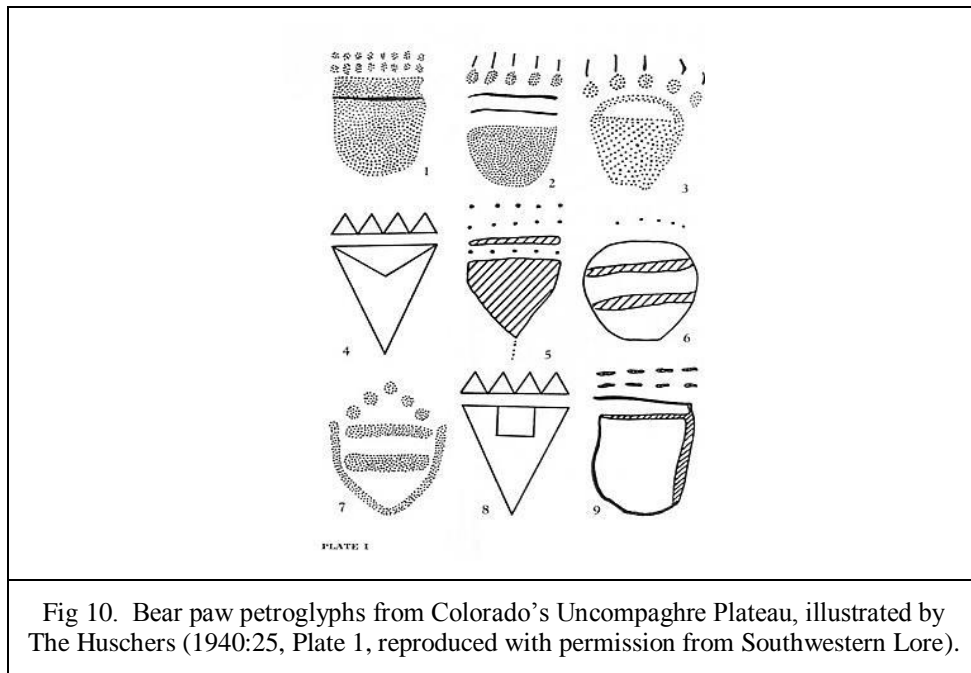


Triangular elements are fairly ubiquitous in Southwestern ceramic designs; it can be argued that they are simply decorative or represent teeth, mountains, arrow points, and whatever else our imagination might suggest. Stretching yet further, might it not be possible that the claw-like designs emerging from the interior of the Biscuit B bowl rim in Fig 9c represent the “bear-comes-out” motif discussed by Keyser and Kaiser? Inching a bit further out on this slender branch, the “necklace” of triangles around the neck of the Gallina vessel shown in Fig. 4 might conceivably represent the widespread Plains and pueblo bear-claw necklace. Very nearly the exact design is illustrated by Roberts (1930, Plate 20h) around the mouth of a seed jar from the La Plata District. If these “teeth” or claws, in fact, are symbols shared between Central Montana and the Northern Rio Grande, Dean Wilson’s suggestion (2013:178) takes on considerable, unexpected significance and, possibly, time depth.

Among the Tewa pueblos, in several instances, Bear curing societies are called “bear-knife” (Parsons 1974:118-123; for example, Nambe’s “*tsih keh*”, literally, “knife bear”) and, in each of the Tewa pueblos, the “doctors” are referred to as “*keh*” (bears). The “major preoccupation” of Bear doctors “was with the eradication of witches and misfortunes associated with sorcery” (Hill 1982:318; Parsons 1974:123; Figure 7c). At Taos, Parsons (1996:644) noted that the war and scalp chief was the Bear Society leader, a clear association of bear and warfare. Hill (1982:312) related that two members of the Santa Clara Bear Society were suspected of witchcraft, concluding that “membership in a society was no barrier to antisocial behavior, and possibly that the same power might be used to kill as well as cure and protect.” Bear “clans” were recorded by early investigators (e.g., Hodge 1907) at Nambe, San Juan, and Taos but informants likely misunderstood what was meant by “clan” and provided the names of curing societies (“*ke*” ~ *keh*, “*kua*” ~ *köa*). Nevertheless, Bear clans are recorded for many Keresan and Hopi pueblos and Bear medicine or curing societies are recorded ethnographically in most of the Southwestern pueblos, the members of which performed a variety of cures. Stevenson (cited in White 1962:136-137) was informed that bear was the third society originated by Masewi. At Zia (White 1962:137) bear-skin legs are used as “receptacles for altar paraphernalia” and necklaces of bear claws are worn. At San Felipe (White 1932:45) the Society’s paraphernalia includes “skins of bear paws and legs, which are worn at initiations and in their fight with witches.” Dumarest (1919:187) observed at Cochiti that “to frighten witches...chaiani draw over their hand a bear’s paw...” The Keres cacique is chosen from the Flint Society members (Parsons 1996:120), and both the Knife (“Flint”) and Fire curing societies of the Keresan, and “*pofuna*,” or curing societies of the Tewa pueblos, have Bear as their “tutelary spirits.” White (1943:337) noted that Taos sold dead bears to Santo Domingo and to other Keres pueblos but the distinction between Grizzly and Black bear gauntlets used in these curing ceremonies is not described by ethnographers (the last New Mexico Grizzly is said to have been shot in 1923). To what extent, if any, Keres and Tewa Bear Society ceremonies and paraphernalia might differ, is unknown; and Hill’s (1982:321-343) descriptions of Santa Clara Bear Society activities are virtually all we have ethnographically.

Bear cult knife and shield paraphernalia (Ewers 1955, 1982) were carried by Northern Plains warriors; however, I have not been able to determine if Plains Bear societies or individual members engaged in anti-witchcraft cures. Among the items included in the Santa Clara Tewa Bear Society performances (Hill 1982:329) are obsidian blades and “a large, chipped obsidian

spear point....” Jeançon’s description (cited in Hill 1982:329) of a “spear-head” he found, was seen by a (Tewa) Bear Society member who “went into raptures over it, handling it with great reverence and breathing in the ‘strength and spirit’ from its point.” In 1911, Jeançon (cited in loc. cit) reported he also found a spear-head “about 16 inches long and 3 inches wide....It was painted green with red bands at the point, middle, and butt. One of the Indian laborers said it was the same as that used by the Bear Society and that it was probably used by them in the prehistoric days....” Shield heraldry described by Keyser (2004) notes the frequent use of both red and green (and black) in “bear-comes-out” images in Montana. A “Bear-knife” (with metal blade and, apparently, unpainted) used in the Pigeon (Blackfoot) Bear Society performance is pictured in Ewers (1955: Plate 2).



Bear paw images occur in rock art recorded by the Huschers (1940:26, 1987:66-67) on Colorado’s Uncompahgre Plateau (Fig. 10), images that they claim to have traced through the upper Columbia River region into the Fraser River drainage of British Columbia; they noted that the design also occurs near Monte Vista in Southern Colorado. As a result, they believed that the motif reflects the route of migrating Athapaskan peoples. It appears that bear paw images are absent in Utah rock art, a region that some archeologists believe was one route of migrating Southern Athapaskan people as well as the home of proto-Tanoan speaking people (Ortman 2012). I am a bit dubious of the Southern Athapaskan association given the ambiguous nature of Bear, for example, in Navajo mythology. Reichard (1983:384) noted: “what amounts almost to a phobia about bears, so that, despite the mythological references as elements of good, they are to be reckoned with primarily as evils.” Opler (1994:381-387) recorded a Jicarilla Apache tale in which their enemies, in order to disguise themselves, “had been killing bears, cutting off their paws, and using the bear paws as moccasins.” The skin of the slain Jicarilla was said to have been torn to resemble bear claws. The association of enemies with bear is clear. Bear

symbolism is noticeably absent among the Southern Apaches in general; nothing resembling the Northern Plains or Pueblo Bear Societies are documented among Southern Athapaskan groups.

CONCLUSION

Regardless of the source of the imagery in the northern Rio Grande, the occurrence of the same shield motif in rock art from the Northern Plains is intriguing. The frequent occurrence of the triangular elements of the awanyu depictions, possibly representing bear claws, on shield heraldry in Montana and in the Tewa area is striking to me. Therefore, the association of Bear and its symbolism as warrior in defense and in offense should not be surprising in the Tewa area where late prehistoric violence is evident. Similarly, the adjacent Gallina culture area also reflects violent behavior; the necklace of the black triangles might also suggest the association of the awanyu motif with warfare. Perhaps this borders on heresy since Pueblo relations with any but Mesoamerican sources is scarcely to be found in the archeological literature in the Southwest; still, I suggest that the Rio Grande awanyu motif and its possible symbolism is an intriguing possibility for further consideration of contacts between the Northern Rio Grande and Northern Plains.

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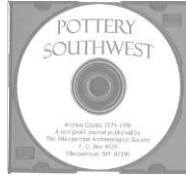
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