

"READING" ROCK ART

One Sense/Many Senses

WENDY WICKWIRE AND MICHAEL M'GONIGLE

LITTLE IN THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL record has stimulated the Western imagination more than the red-ochre paintings found on rock faces and in caves throughout the world. Having outlived their makers, these images provide endless opportunities for speculation. Who were the artists? What were they painting? Why did they intend their images to be seen and interpreted by others? Is there a message hidden in these images? Is this an early form of writing?

South-central British Columbia offers an excellent locale in which to ponder such questions. Large rock-art sites are numerous, new paintings are always being discovered in interesting places, and there is a century-long tradition of scholarly interpretation. In 1896, in the *Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History*, anthropologist James Teit published his own sketches of some rock paintings near his home in Spences Bridge, along with the interpretations provided by an elderly Nlaka'pamux woman, Waxtko. He continued sketching images and questioning local Native elders about them for the next two decades. Anthropologist Charles Hill-Tout and archaeologist Harlan Smith did the same at the turn of the century. Local rock-art enthusiast and Lytton town magistrate Neil Hallisey sketched and interpreted Stein rock-art images in the 1930s, as did Okanagan biologist John Corner in the 1960s.¹

If the investigative tradition is long, it got noticeably longer in 1993 when Annie York, Richard Daly, and Chris Arnett added to it their book, *They Write Their Dreams on the Rock Forever: Rock Writings in the Stein River Valley of British Columbia*.² Like their predecessors,

¹ For references to and descriptions of their work, see Wendy Wickwire, "Ethnography and Archaeology as Ideology: The Case of the Stein River Valley," *BC Studies* 91-92 (Autumn/Winter 1991-92): 51-78.

² Annie York, Richard Daly, and Chris Arnett, *They Write Their Dreams on the Rock Forever: Rock Writings in the Stein River Valley of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1993).

these authors are motivated by the desire to find old and new paintings, record them on paper, and then interpret them. But this most recent book goes one bold, and potentially dangerous, step further. Drawing on one detailed set of Native interpretations, it argues that these images are not just painted works of art but writings “record[ed] . . . on stone for others to read.”³ This is a novel and challenging argument. It is also one that goes to the heart of a very different cultural experience, and it must, therefore, be brought forward carefully and with great respect. In this light, *They Write their Dreams on the Rock Forever* is more than just a study of some ‘other’ culture; it is an interesting cultural manifestation in its own right.

THEY WRITE THEIR DREAMS ON THE ROCK FOREVER

This new book is the work of three people: Richard Daly, a contract anthropologist; Chris Arnett, an artist and art researcher; and Annie York, a well-known Nlaka’pamux elder from Spuzzum. Annie⁴ is credited as principal author, but the book is not written in a single voice. She is directly present in only one chapter, albeit by far the longest. Richard Daly wrote the preface, chapter 2 (“Annie Zetco York and Her Students”), and chapter 4 (“Writing on the Landscape: Protoliteracy and Psychic Travel in Oral Cultures”). Chapter 3 (“Rock Writing in the Stein Valley”) contains a running text of Annie’s statements while Daly acts as interviewer and editor. Arnett is the author of chapter 1 (“The Archaeology of Dreams: Rock Art and Rock Art Research in the Stein River Valley”), and he introduces each of the rock-art sites discussed by Annie in chapter 3.

The book opens with Arnett’s summary of rock-art research in the Stein Valley, drawing mainly on the writings of James Teit. Arnett proposes the existence of two distinct periods in coastal and interior rock painting — an early period, characterized mainly by single-image paintings, and a later period, typified by smaller-sized paintings that include both single- and multiple-image paintings often arranged in a manner suggesting a narrative. According to Arnett, the pigment in the paintings of the later period is often better preserved than is the pigment in those of the earlier period.⁵ Tracing the history of rock-art studies in the Stein, chapter 1 concludes with an account of the

³ Ibid., ix.

⁴ Annie York was known as “Annie” by all of those who knew her well. For this reason, we use this rather than “York” throughout our essay.

⁵ Ibid., 11.

important role of this spiritually significant pictography in the now twenty-year environmental conflict over the fate of the valley.

Chapter 2 consists of Daly's account of Annie York's life. Annie was born in Spuzzum at the southern end of the Fraser Canyon some seventy kilometres south of the Stein Valley, but she spent most of her childhood in the Fraser Valley, where her father worked on the dyking system. Later she moved to Merritt, where she took up homecare nursing. In 1932 she moved back to Spuzzum to live with her cousin, Arthur Urquhart. From the 1970s, she worked intensively as a consultant with linguists, anthropologists, ethnographers, film-makers, and ethnobotanists. Three years before her death in 1991, she met Richard Daly and began working with him. To us, as well as to many others, Annie York was an open and fascinating friend and coworker.

Chapter 3 is the heart of the book. Here we find Annie's verbatim interpretations of the painted images on the rocks, as recorded and transcribed by her listener, Richard Daly. Daly explains that this project began shortly after his first meeting with Annie. One day, while watching Richard flip through his notebook, Annie suddenly caught sight of a drawing of some Stein rock paintings, and she spent the afternoon telling a story about it. Daly was so interested that he located additional Stein rock-art drawings from Chris Arnett and asked Annie "if she would be so kind as to read them for [him] on tape."⁶

Over a period of some years (on page 42, Daly says two years; on page 259, he says three), Daly visited Annie's home to record her responses to Arnett's drawings of the pictographs. Although Arnett and Annie York never met, his drawings were essential for Annie had never visited the Stein Valley and, thus, had never seen the paintings first-hand. Unfortunately, Annie never saw the final book, as she died before the transcripts had reached manuscript form.

Daly's final chapter situates Stein pictography in an academic context, with the intent of demonstrating that Stein rock art is a form

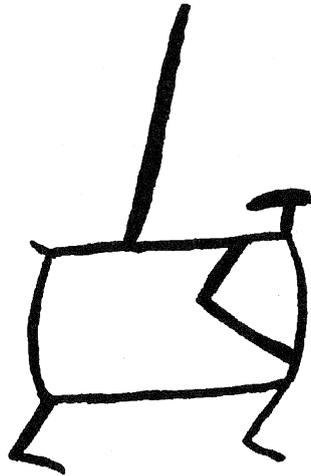


FIGURE I

⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

of “non-alphabetic literacy” (i.e., of writing) rooted in the post-Ice Age period. Daly argues that, just as Annie could “read” images from other areas, such as the Okanagan and Puget Sound, others elsewhere in the northern interior and on the coast would probably have been able to read the Stein images.⁷ To explain how this type of literacy worked, Daly takes the reader on an interesting, if meandering, tour of altered states of consciousness, Jungian archetypes, and physiological analyses of “entoptic phenomena.” Evolutionist in its intent, Daly argues that the paintings represent an early form of literacy. And he goes on to suggest that this may well have been an esoteric form of knowledge that was guarded by the “restricted literacy” of a privileged few, “who managed social life, and controlled the flow of personnel throughout the region.”⁸

Many readers will welcome the promise of the multiple skills and voices brought together in this new book. Beautifully presented, with black-and-white and colour illustrations, the book features a First Nations elder as co-author, her voice strongly present in minimally edited transcript form. And the book has academic punch as well, for it offers a new perspective on the meaning and function of pictography. But from the title to the endnotes, Daly and Arnett assert, *virtually without question*, that Stein pictography is a form of “writing” which was “read,” used, and understood over a broad region. And, alas, this is an assertion that is simply not borne out by the evidence.

MAKING PICTURES MAKING SENSE: ANNIE’S READING

The conversation between Annie York and Richard Daly in *They Write Their Dreams On the Rock Forever* can be approached from many different angles. Daly’s overwhelming interest is in Annie’s account of the pictographs, and he is not concerned with current scholarship on oral narratives.⁹ Unlike Daly’s analysis, much of this scholarship explicitly abandons interpretations and theory-building

⁷ Ibid., 224.

⁸ Ibid., 259.

⁹ See, for example, the work of David Cohen, “The Undefining of Oral Tradition,” *Ethnohistory* 36, no.1 (1989): 9–18; David Murray, *Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing and Representation in North American Indian Texts* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1991); Arnold Krupat, *The Voice in the Margin: Native American Literature and the Canon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Brian Swann and Arnold Krupat, eds., *Recovering the Word: Essays on Canadian Native Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

that are based on the possibility of finding universal truth.¹⁰ As Ruth Finnegan explains in her comprehensive overview of research methods in oral tradition:

The modern interest [is] in the detailed study of practices on the ground rather than formalistic analyses or high theory, and in processes as well as just the final products. . . . A parallel shift is away from a focus on generalising about such characteristics as comparative content, functions or broad historical sweeps to more interpretive and ethnographically specific approaches.¹¹

In this vein, critical theorist David Murray encourages students to focus on the intersection of the substantive content of oral narrative texts with the more contextual "conditions and significance of [their] telling."¹² Renato Rosaldo, one of the early exponents of this approach, expresses it as follows: "Doing oral history involves telling stories about stories people tell about themselves. Method in this discipline should therefore attend to our stories, their stories, and the connections between them."¹³

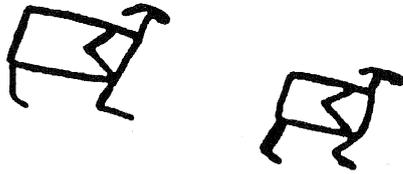


FIGURE 2

In this light, Daly's presentation of Annie's commentary raises many questions. On the surface, it appears to be a neat and tidy set of transcriptions which follow the panels sequentially from the mouth of the Stein to the central valley. There are some ambiguities, however; indeed, there is nothing in the book indicating how the narrative actually evolved. How important were Daly's questions to Annie York? How many of these were edited out of the manuscript? Was Annie interested in the theory of writing? How many sittings did it take to amass the whole? To what extent has the whole been spliced and knit together from different sittings in order to fit the form we see in the book? Daly provides us with only a sketchy view of this very

¹⁰ For an excellent historical summary of the various approaches to oral tradition, see Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Tradition and the Verbal Arts: A Guide To Research Practices* (New York: Routledge, 1992). See also Julie Cruikshank, "Oral Tradition and Oral History: Reviewing Some Issues," *Canadian Historical Review* 75, no. 3 (1994): 403-18.

¹¹ Finnegan, *Oral Tradition*, 51.

¹² Murray, *Forked Tongues*, 98.

¹³ "Doing Oral History," *Social Analysis* 4 (September, 1980): 89.

critical process: "I have edited the material down to the present length by removing repetitions, and delightful though they are, Annie's digressions."¹⁴ To some, repetitions and digressions are essential elements of the oral narrative experience; to others, the chronology of the telling is key. Every serious ethnographer will want to see evidence of such things as cutting and splicing, and note-taking versus tape-recording. In this regard, *They Write Their Pictures on the Rock Forever* is clearly lacking.

These problems aside, everyone with an interest in First Nations oral tradition will find Annie's contribution to this book both engaging and rich in ethnographic and historical information. Much of her commentary is clearly guided by, and mirrors directly, the images placed in front of her. For example:

Over on the far side, here you can see that it's a person. And a little child. The kid doesn't have legs but it has arms. That thing below them is what he's gonna drag along with him. There's a stick and a tumpline string. He's gonna drag that stick for what he's gonna build.

The child's head shows that he's also a plant. . . . Down at the bottom, looks like prints. Print of a little animal on top, and a bird underneath. . . . These are the animals the man plans to hunt all his life.¹⁵

In other places, one needs to know Annie's cultural background in order to understand her commentary. As is common amongst First Nations elders, Annie frequently responded to direct questioning by telling stories or fragments of stories. Where there are many fragments, or where a story is interrupted several times, it is difficult for readers to follow her line of thought. Annie's response to Figure 105 illustrates this point:

There's a lot of goats and deer here and the Creator's in the middle. He says to the man, "Would you like to have hunting easy so you can go straight up without having to walk?" That's the straight road to the mountain that the man dreams. It's those two lines by the man's hand. He wanted to be able to get it easy, to walk just on that straight line and get that big animal. But the Creator says to him, "No, you can't. You're gonna have to walk all over, jagged." The line across the Creator's body with the tree up at the top and the animal along it, and

¹⁴ York et al., *They Write Their Dreams*, 42.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 140.

the two direction arrows, that's the way the Creator said he had to go to find the animals.¹⁶

In this case, the reader is left wondering about the identity of the Creator, the identity of the man with whom he interacts, the nature of their conversation, and so on. These stories, when looked at for their content, are rich and interesting. For Daly and Arnett, however, this is not really of interest.

Annie's verbatim account is a refreshing change from the sanitized and edited variants found in the early records.¹⁷ Most of the stories featured in her commentary are well-known in the area: for example, the one about the boy 'Ngliksentem' who went up to the moon. In *They Write Their Dreams on the Rock Forever*, this particular story begins on page 167 with the images at site EbRk 7 and continues, with numerous interruptions and asides, to the next site (EbRk b) on pages 171 and 172. Without guidance from an interested ethnographer, however, only the very informed and dedicated reader can follow the thread of this story.

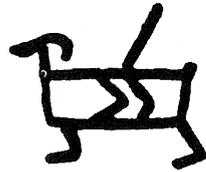


FIGURE 3

Prophets and prophecies dominate Annie's testimony. Again, however, without an understanding of the historical and cultural significance of prophets and prophecy¹⁸ and their connection with the importation of Christianity in the nineteenth century, readers may not even notice this important feature of Annie's commentary. Indeed, Daly and Arnett themselves do not dwell on the close relationship between prophets and rock art in Annie's account, even though it may have a potentially important role in rock-art research. Note the following excerpts:

The Xwekt'xwektl's was the prophet and the messenger. They were brothers. They are up in the stars now.¹⁹

Xwekt'xwektl got the power from the Creator, and after they grow big he's asked to watch over the people and check on them, all of them right down to the saltwater people. He was kind of a crippled child

¹⁶ Ibid., 158-59.

¹⁷ See James Teit, *Traditions of the Thompson River Indians* (New York: American Folk-Lore Society, 1898), 21-29. See also Ralph Maud, ed., *The Salish People: The Local Contribution of Charles Hill-Tout*, vol.1 (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1978), 87-100.

¹⁸ For a good overview of this subject see Christopher L. Miller, *Prophetic Worlds: Indians and Whites on the Columbia Plateau* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1985).

¹⁹ York et al., *They Write Their Dreams*, 98.

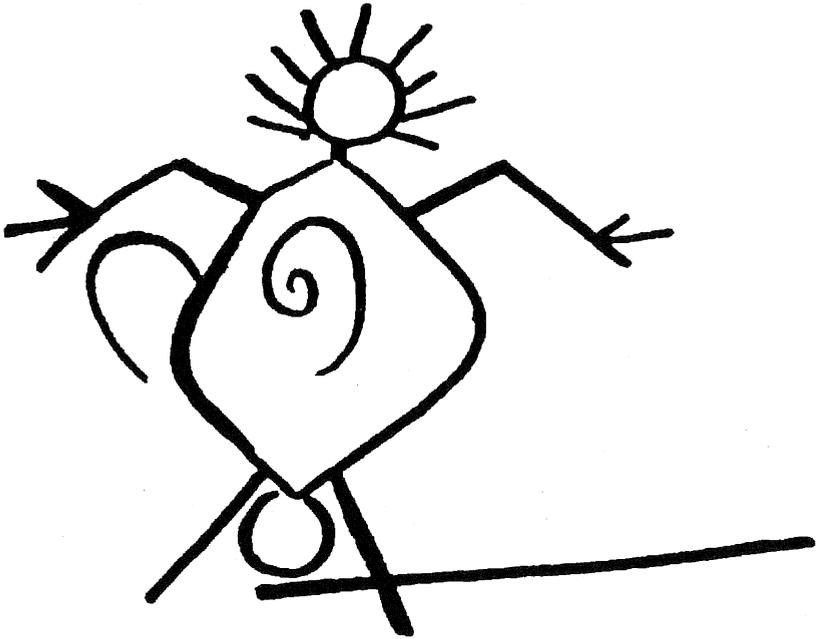


FIGURE 4

with power and his big brothers took him and sat him on that rock this side of Lillooet. The impression of his lame foot is there in the rock.²⁰

He was sent by God to be the instructor.²¹

This was in the Lytton prophet's drawing. . . . He drew things that were going to be invented. This was probably drawn in his time.²²

This thing, you see, it tells you that whenever you gonna see something dreaming, you gonna put your own marker there. That prophet told him, "You gotta put your marker on the rock."²³

It is in Annie's rich and varied relationship with the paintings that the power of *They Write Their Dreams on the Rock Forever* lies. In Annie's tellings, these pictographic images literally resonate with a miscellany of cultural meanings:

RICHARD The strong horizontal line near the top?

²⁰ Ibid., 104.

²¹ Ibid., 119.

²² Ibid., 93.

²³ Ibid., 76.

ANNIE That's the life line of the person that died. The grave box is sitting on that line. The box could be carved, but it's usually not a box here at Spuzzum. . . . They would put in that long knotted string in the coffin too. I'm not supposed to talk about this. It's very unlucky if you do.²⁴
. . . The cross over it is for respect and power, for the directions and the passing of life. There's the moon again, to the right of the coffin. That shows the date that the person died.²⁵

That Annie had never seen the images presented to her *in situ* did not hinder her ability to interpret them. On the contrary, she offered explanations, mostly in the form of stories, for everything presented to her without any hesitation. Sometimes Daly guided her along:

RICHARD What about the bear paw figure to the right?

ANNIE Really, it's not paws. It's that thing he travelled in. You see, it has a string.²⁶

Whether stories or teachings or reminiscences, Annie's response to the rock-art images, presented in her own style of speech, is a rich miscellany of information.

MAKING SENSE FOR EVERYONE: DALY'S READING

The problem with *They Write their Dreams on the Rock Forever*, and it is a big one, occurs when Daly moves from Annie's words to his own. The act of interpretation is unavoidably and necessarily a cultural act. Carrying such interpretation to the level of a whole new explanatory "theory" is a cultural act on a grand scale. One should be encouraged to be daring, but one must temper daring with care and caution. One may well be tempted to walk on untried ice, but, where one does, it is best to move forward softly, testing the footing and always keeping one's balance. Unfortunately, Daly and Arnett romp across Nlaka'pamux culture with gay abandon, unconcerned about the security of their footing.

At issue is a basic matter — evidence. If one is to engage in the rational tradition of theory-building, it would be reasonable to utilize the accompanying methodology of theory-testing. Instead, Daly and

²⁴ Ibid., 86.

²⁵ Ibid., 86-87.

²⁶ Ibid., 169.

Arnett merely assert time and again that rock-art *is* writing. For his part, Daly sat with a First Nations elder offering her account of what *she* saw in the paper drawings presented to her. Excited by her stories, Daly quickly leapt to the conclusion that, embedded in Annie's contextual interpretations of the rock-art images, there was a standardized form of language which was widely communicated. Implicitly, others who might state otherwise must have been wrong or even untruthful. Arnett, who never met Annie, became so enthusiastic that he likened their work to the discovery of the so-called Rosetta Stone which "cracked the code" of Egyptian hieroglyphics.²⁷ This is a pretty big claim, and it demands some serious justification. In this light, it is important to ask just how their theory might have been tested. At the simplest level, Daly could have asked Annie to re-tell her interpretations of specific panels on different occasions. Such double-checking is standard ethnographic and linguistic practice, especially when one is working with only one individual. In his three years of interviews with Annie York, Daly did not attempt this in any systematic way, or, if he did, he did not include the results in this book. As it turns out, where similar images appear at different sites, Annie's accounts are often internally consistent and impressive in their detail and clarity. In some cases, however, Annie provides conflicting readings. And, when she does, she is not particularly concerned:

Take, for example, what Annie refers to as an image of a woodstove (Figure 1): "Here's the stove pipe out of the top, and at the corner, that's the axe, you see. Down below's the legs. The Vee-line inside, that shows you where the wood goes in from the top."²⁸ When she subsequently encountered a similar image (Figure 2), she explained that it was a goat: "All the goats here, they are ancient goats. They say that in the early time the goat had a square body like that."²⁹ Beside it is the goat that the dreamer has speared (Figure 3).³⁰

In another case, Annie noted that a drawing depicted a man turned into the sun (Figure 4): "See that one? It's a person. . . . That's the story of Stanax'hew. That man that was turned into the sun. You see it in his head. The rays of the sun are coming out of his head. They

²⁷ "Arnett commented that Zetco York's contextual readings helped crack the markings' code the way the Rosetta Stone had helped archeologists decipher the hieroglyphics of ancient Egypt." In Val Ross, "Cracking the Code," *Globe and Mail*, 26 March 1994, C5. In this article, Richard Daly explained how Annie read the pictographic images "the way we read sentences. And she understood them to mean abstract concepts such as time and numbers." In their text, Daly refers to the goal of "cracking the code" on p. 259.

²⁸ York et al., *They Write Their Dreams*, 92.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 151.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

turned him as a sun and told him to go up in the sky."³¹ On a subsequent occasion, when she saw the same image, she explained that it was Beaver: "This drawing is Beaver as both man and animal. He's got arms and hands and human legs. He's got the tail. He has a fat tummy — you see, he went down to propose to a lady at Spuzzum Creek."³² According to Daly, when he and Annie "reviewed the two versions, Annie expressed a preference for her latter interpretation."³³ Noting this discrepancy, Daly explained it as follows:

The reading of Fig. 74 — one lone figure — gave Annie trouble. No doubt she was somewhat disoriented, because in that location there was only one image on the rock, with few clues to contextualize it. . . . Annie gave two different readings of this figure, and preferred the second one for its humour, and also because she had experienced a little epiphany of her own with the beaver and the frog on the point of land between the Fraser River and the mouth of Spuzzum Creek.³⁴

In other words, Annie preferred one explanation over another not because that was what was "written" on the rock, but because that was how *she*, with her own character and experiences, chose to interpret it personally. When one compares the evidence in the ethnographies, one sees that this more personal, more interpretive, approach was, indeed, often used by others.

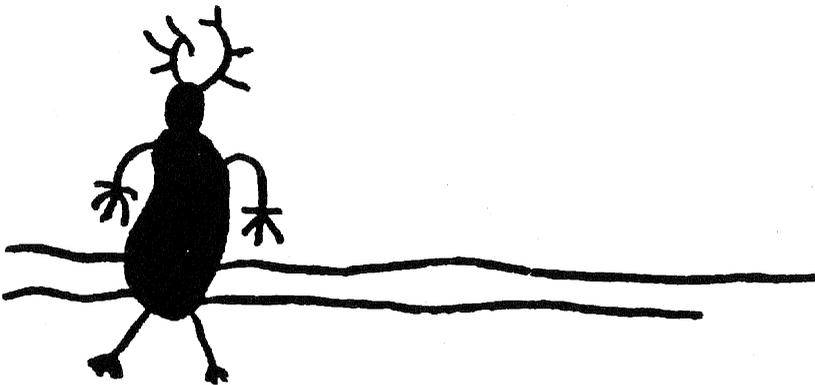


FIGURE 5

³¹ Ibid., 105.

³² Ibid., 106.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 251.

COMPARING THE EVIDENCE

Annie's interpretations are compelling. In seeking to elevate them to the status of a common language, one method of obtaining evidence would be to determine whether or not the elders could be shown to share her understanding of them. Throughout the book, no such corroborative evidence is either solicited or offered; nor are any parallels offered from among the archival records. In short, no corroborative testimony from any other person, living or dead, is offered. This omission is disappointing for an interested reader; for a book asserting a new theory of "communication," it is disastrous. Indeed, it is more puzzling still when one appreciates that a rich source of comparative archival documentation on rock art does exist, especially for Nlaka'pamux rock art. In fact, there is perhaps more information on Nlaka'pamux rock art than there is on that of any other region in Canada!

Between the years 1894 and 1922, James Teit conducted ethnographic research on a large range of subjects among the Nlaka'pamux peoples of south-central British Columbia.³⁵ His situation was unique even by today's standards, for he not only lived continuously for almost forty years among the peoples he studied (for twelve of these years he was married to a Nlaka'pamux woman), but he also communicated with them in their language. Daly and Arnett are clearly moved by sympathy for the ways and wisdom of First Nations peoples. So, too, was Teit, and in a very deep way. Living with the community for most of his years in British Columbia, he combined the daily pursuits of his life both with his anthropology and with his political activism which was dedicated to attaining justice for Native peoples. Moreover, Teit was trained in the field by the renowned German/American anthropologist Franz Boas. By everyone's reckoning, Teit recorded his ethnographic information with extreme precision. In other words, insofar as it can be said of any newcomer, Teit was an "insider," and he had great expertise. His records must, therefore, carry weight in any theory-building exercise.

Pictography interested both Teit and Boas. Teit published an article on the subject in 1896,³⁶ and he included drawings of rock-art images

³⁵ For a list of Teit's published and unpublished works, see Roderick Sprague, "A Bibliography of James A. Teit," *Northwest Anthropological Research Notes* 25, no. 1, (1991): 103-15. For a review of his research, see Wendy Wickwire, "Women in Ethnography: The Research of James A. Teit," *Ethnohistory* 40, no. 4 (1993): 539-62.

³⁶ James A. Teit, "A Rock Painting of the Thompson River Indians," *Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History* 8 (1896): 227-30.

with accompanying explanations in every one of his ethnographic monographs.³⁷ In 1918, he summarized what he had learned about pictography in a letter to F. Kermode, director of the Provincial Museum (now the Royal British Columbia Museum) in Victoria.³⁸ To date, Teit's information remains one of the most extensive and respective sources on the subject. And, significantly, it was elicited a century ago from persons who were still directly connected to the tradition. Some had even painted on the rocks themselves.

Teit conducted work in the Stein Valley prior to the turn of the century, and he included his findings on rock art in his first major monograph, "The Thompson Indians of British Columbia."³⁹ In this monograph, published in 1900, Teit set out a long list of Nlaka'pamux rock-art images with accompanying interpretations. Boas, who edited this work, also included his own drawings of Nlaka'pamux rock-art images with accompanying interpretations.⁴⁰ Daly and Arnett included some of these drawings in their book. Surprisingly, however, they omitted the interpretations which accompany Teit's drawings — *interpretations which are in direct conflict with their own*. Among the images in Teit's monograph were approximately a dozen drawings and

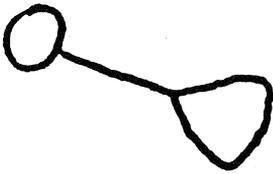


FIGURE 6

interpretations of images from "Stine Creek," clearly a potentially valuable source of comparative evidence. However, *these twelve paintings are left out of the Daly and Arnett study*. Without explaining why, the authors inexplicably opt to reproduce in their book four non-Stein images and interpretations from Teit's 1900 study. They refer only briefly to Teit's Stein rock-art findings in the text.⁴¹

In a study aimed at "cracking the code," such an omission is surprising. Moreover, an examination of this material brings up disturbing evidence for the Daly/Arnett thesis, for Teit's findings differ from Annie's interpretations *in every case but one*, the bear paw

³⁷ For a list of interpretations collected by Teit, see John Corner, *Pictographs in the Interior of British Columbia* (Vernon: Wayside Press, 1968), 29.

³⁸ James A. Teit, "Notes on Rock Painting in General," letter to F. Kermode, Director, Provincial Museum, Victoria, ms., Division of Anthropology, Royal British Columbia Museum, Victoria, BC.

³⁹ James Alexander Teit, "The Thompson Indians of British Columbia," *The Jesup North Pacific Expedition: Memoir of the American Museum of Natural History* (New York: AMS Press, 1900), vol. 1, part 4.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 378.

⁴¹ These are reproduced in York et al., *They Write Their Dreams*, 6.

(Figure 5). At EbRj 5, commonly known as the “Asking Rock,” Teit was told that Figure 16a (Figure 6) was “a vision”; Annie explained that this figure was a “a man, yet he has a deer horn on his head.”⁴² The two parallel lines beside him Annie sees as a river: “He’s standing by the river.”⁴³ Teit was told that these two parallel lines (16b) were “trails.”⁴⁴ What Teit noted to be “lakes joined by a river” (16c, Figure 7),⁴⁵ Annie described as “a hammer. . . used for meat.”⁴⁶ What Teit was told was “a cascade” (Figure 8),⁴⁷ Annie described as a sun drawing indicating the time of day and also the time of year.⁴⁸ What Teit was told were mountains and glaciers in valleys,⁴⁹ Annie said were “two sets of zigzags, that’s a way of showing the number of days of his dreaming. The top one is three-and-a-half days, and the lower one is four-and-a-half days. You count them from point to point.”⁵⁰ Teit explained that another image, similar to the one above, was “lakes connected by a river” (17b, Figure 9).⁵¹ Annie explained that the top part of this might be “a hat or a big pan.”⁵² Another commentator, the archaeologist Harlan Smith, was told by a local Nlaka’pamux man named Jimmie that this image was “a rattle.”⁵³ Clearly, a careful comparison of the early accounts with Annie’s account reveals enough variation to defy any attempt at standardization.

Daly glosses over the inconsistencies between Teit’s findings and his own in a couple of paragraphs. He mentions only two differences: “What Annie read as earth lines were hunting trails, and her hammer for getting marrow out of bones was a symbol of two lakes joined by a river.” Even with this selective contradiction, Daly is forced to come to a conclusion strangely at odds with his otherwise oft-repeated theory



FIGURE 7

⁴² Ibid., 91.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Teit, “The Thompson Indians,” Plate 20.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ York et al., *They Write Their Dreams*, 91.

⁴⁷ Teit, “The Thompson Indians,” Plate 20.

⁴⁸ York et al., *They Write Their Dreams*, 109.

⁴⁹ Teit, “The Thompson Indians,” Plate 20.

⁵⁰ York et al., *They Write Their Dreams*, 102.

⁵¹ Teit, “The Thompson Indians,” Plate 20.

⁵² York et al., *They Write Their Dreams*, 108.

⁵³ Harlan Smith, “A List of Pictographs in British Columbia, 16 June, 1932.” Copy in the Newcombe Family Papers, British Columbia Provincial Archives, Victoria, BC.

of standardized written communication: "At our present level of understanding there can be no definitive reading of these writings."⁵⁴

One should, however, pursue this contradiction more seriously. When one does, one finds that, in addition to differences in specific meanings, Teit's analysis points to a whole different way of "reading" these pictures. Without a shred of supporting evidence, Daly states baldly that "any member of society could and did produce this imagery as a socially understood form of communication."⁵⁵ Teit collected numerous interpretations for pictograph images and, although the basic meanings of the drawings were often evident to many people, the interpretations were always fragmentary — "trails crossing," "visions," "lakes connected by a river," and so on. Nor was this sketchy treatment accidental, as Teit's discussions with Boas in 1898 reveal: "I have shown the Stryne Creek paintings and others to several of the best informed men but was not able to get much additional information regarding them."⁵⁶ Nowhere were these rock paintings interpreted as stories. This is a very different situation than that encountered by Arnett and Daly, but they bury Teit's statement in an endnote to be ferreted out by only the most diligent of readers.⁵⁷

Reflecting on the subject later in life, Teit explained that knowledge of rock art was fragmentary and non-contextualized even in his day, which was so much closer to the practice than today. His findings stand in sharp contrast to those of Arnett and Daly:

It will thus be seen that all the large rock paintings were made by several or many different individuals (male and female) at different times. Some individuals made only a figure or two and other a number. Thus, one person did not know exactly the meaning of the figure painted by another, because he did not know the other person's dreams, experiences, etc.

He might guess at the meanings and also might know that certain figures represent certain things, but of their connection one with the other he could not be sure. A person who saw the pictures of say a basket and of a sun painted on a rock, would probably know that the pictures represented these things, but beyond that, he would know nothing with certainty. . . . People usually made their paintings in secret and alone. . . . Some individuals depicted the object they desired

⁵⁴ York et al., *They Write Their Dreams*, 251.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 225.

⁵⁶ Letter to Franz Boas, 3 November 1898, James Teit files, American Museum of Natural History, New York.

⁵⁷ See York et al., *They Write Their Dreams*, 267, n. 23.

to record, by painting the figure clearly, whilst others who were very poor in the pictographic art, painted figures so carelessly and rudely that other people had great difficulty in making out what they represented.⁵⁸

Inexcusably for authors intent on building a new theory, Daly and Arnett make use of the document from which this quotation is taken, *but excise this passage from their text*. Yet it clearly relates directly to the issue of pictography as a codified language. They also exclude the following:

I don't know what the Indians living nearest to this rock painting say of it, but they will likely disclaim knowledge of its history and also the exact meanings of the pictographs. This does not cause surprise to persons acquainted with the general origin of these rock paintings.⁵⁹

With such glaring omissions, it is perhaps belabouring the obvious to note that *They Write their Dreams on the Rocks Forever* suffers from a surfeit of sloppy ethnography. Inconsistencies abound and go unrecognized. For example, with no explanation, the name Stein is variously translated as “hidden river,”⁶⁰ “hidden place,”⁶¹ a “kind of a hidden place,”⁶² and “a hiding place for deer.”⁶³ Quotations are often poorly described and dated. For example, a statement by Louie Phillips is cited as “18 April 1993, Lytton, B.C.,” while, on the same page, an interview with Rosie Adams Fandrich is referenced as “Slaza'yux 'Nlaka'pamux” with no date and no location given.⁶⁴ As discussed above, the treatment of Annie's entire transcript is never explained.

WHOSE DREAMS ARE ON THE ROCKS?

One could cite a litany of technical problems in this study, but they fade in comparison with its central issue — the definitive assertion of a

⁵⁸ “Notes on Rock Painting in General,” 4.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ York et al., *They Write Their Dreams*, xi.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 161.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, xvi. Indeed, the third and fourth paragraphs of this quotation are not actually from Daly and Arnett's interview but are inserted directly from another, unpublished, source: Wendy Wickwire, “The Stein: Its People Speak, An Ethnographic Report on the Stein River Valley,” a confidential report prepared for the Nl'akapxm Nation Development Corporation, September 1988, p. 161.

cultural theory for which the evidence simply does not exist. Throughout their book, from the title on down, Daly and Arnett routinely replace the word painting with the word 'writing'. Annie herself, however, calls these images paintings just as often as she calls them writings. The authors explain their choice of terminology as follows:

A visible legacy of those who trained are the "ts'ets'ekw," the writings or records of dreams for which the Valley is famous. . . . Most of the writings are red ochre paintings, or pictographs, though there is a single rock carving, or petroglyph, and one tree writing, or arborgraph. The 'Nlaka'pamux people call them Ts'ets'ekw, which in addition to "writing" can mean a mark or picture of any kind. Annie referred to all the Stein rock art, and the single tree writing, as "writings."⁶⁵

The misconstruing of Annie's own terminology aside, we might ask whether this is the correct translation of 'ts'ets'ekw.' Other than Annie's occasional use of the word 'writing,' there is no general support for using this word rather than the word 'painting.' Teit, a careful linguist, never referred to pictography as rock 'writing.' He did note, however, that when the Indians first saw Euro-Canadian writings and drawings, they naturally used a term of their own which they believed best described them. This term was 'sts'uq':

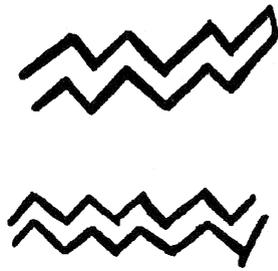


FIGURE 8

Stsuq means a mark or picture of any kind. Some Indians say that the stsuq in this story was probably a mark or picture on birch-bark. Such, when made by a person gifted in magic, had supernatural powers. Some rock paintings are also "mystery," and have not been made in any ordinary way. Some of them have not been made by the hand of man. The Indians at the present day call the white man's writing and pictures stsuq. They also call the paper stsuq.⁶⁶

In a later document, Teit translated 'sts'uq' as 'picture, painting or decoration.'⁶⁷ Indeed, even though Teit never used the word 'writing,'

⁶⁵ York et al., *They Write Their Dreams*, 3.

⁶⁶ Teit, *Traditions of the Thompson Indians*, 118, n. 283.

⁶⁷ James Teit, *Mythology of the Thompson Indians* (Memoir of the American Museum of Natural History, vol.12, 1912), 250, n. 3.

Arnett gives the impression that he did. For example, Arnett states: "Writings could also be, according to Teit, 'of a monumental and historic character.'⁶⁸ In his original, Teit's word is not 'writings' but, rather, 'paintings.'⁶⁹ In this same paragraph, Arnett states: "Teit also pointed out that people recorded sightings."⁷⁰ In the original, it is written that people "drew a picture."⁷¹

MANY SENSES

In writing this review essay, it is not our intention to raise mere technical quibbles but to point to a profound problem with both the theory being advanced and the process by which it is so advanced.

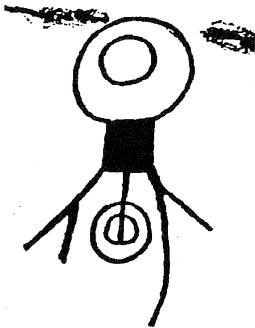


FIGURE 9

'Writing' clearly implies a standardized form of communication which is to be read in a linear, non-interpretive fashion. The words 'Watch for Falling Rocks' written on a roadside sign are a very different non-visual and non-interpretive method of conveying a message than is a sketch of a cliff with stones rolling off of it. That some human cultures moved from a pictorial form of communication to a written form seems obvious, but understanding how this occurred is not advanced simply by referring to pictures

as 'writing.' The differences between oral and written cultures are too great for that.

Beyond the problem of theorizing are: the question of responsible scholarship and the implications of not displaying an adequate concern for evidence.⁷² When put forward with verve, what is really just a theory can easily be taken for fact, and soon everyone is 'reading' rock

⁶⁸ York et al., *They Write Their Dreams*, 7.

⁶⁹ Teit, "Notes on Rock Painting in General," 3.

⁷⁰ York et al., *They Write Their Dreams*, 7.

⁷¹ Teit, "Notes on Rock Painting in General," 3.

⁷² See our review of a recent ethnographic study of the Okanagan, "*The Queen's People: Ethnography or Appropriation?*" *Native Studies Review* 7, no.2 (1991): 97-113. Interestingly, James Teit was intolerant of sloppy scholarship. In 1899, he wrote to Boas about a paper that Charles Hill-Tout had written:

Did you read Hill-Tout's paper to the Royal Society on the 'Oceanic Origin of the Kwakiutl-Nootka and Salish Stocks' and the Chinese origin of the Denes and Haida, etc. His comparisons of Salish and Oceanic words seems to me to be utter rot. I cannot see the slightest analogy between them. The whole papers [sic] are full of assertions without anything to back them up. (Letter to Boas, 8 June 1899, American Museum of Natural History)

art. Few individuals who read *They Write Their Dreams on the Rock Forever* will have any idea of the existence of contrary evidence sequestered away in authoritative, if little seen, archival writings. Daly and Arnett's empathy for Native values and insights is obvious, and it is widely shared by others. But in their compulsion to connect personally with this culture, they seem compelled to translate it into terms and ideas which *they* can understand. To be attuned to this way of life, they must first "crack the code." Only then can *they* communicate. In so doing, however, they inadvertently construct a theory of communication which is very linear — hidden messages to be deciphered and then read by the knowing reader — and very Western. What if, as personal expressions connecting each painter to his or her own particular experiences and spiritual paths, many of these paintings were not to be "read" by others at all but were to be experienced, as was the case with Annie, in the beholder's own way?

Annie was a deeply knowledgeable elder. In her later years, she worked with students not from her own culture. "Do you have your PhD?" Annie asked Daly upon first meeting him. He did, and he was on a quest. Annie fulfilled that quest *for him*. To go further is to miss the point. Why must we have it any other way?