

## **Zuni Apache-Creek Petroglyph 0: 'Hail disease laid low Stars'**

Stuart L. Harris, December 2011

### **Importance of Apache Creek Petroglyphs**

Apache Creek petroglyphs establish that between 1150 and 1300 AD, some people within the Zuni tribal boundary spoke Finnish and could read and write in Old European. This same script occurs on pots and other objects in the Zuni Museum at Zuni until 1650 AD, after which it ceased to exist. From my limited inquiries, Zuni elders have no recollection of ever having a written language, which presents a problem: who decorated their pots?<sup>1</sup> Perhaps Hopi wives, or refugees from the abandonment of Chaco Canyon in 1150 AD.

In *America BC*, Barry Fell found certain similarities between Zuni<sup>2</sup> and Libyan<sup>3</sup> in North Africa as spoken in 300 BC. In 600 BC, Libyans wrote with an alphabet nearly identical to Old European, but their language remains elusive, despite many attempts to link it with Berber. I examined every page of a Zuni dictionary and did not recognize a single word, so Finnish seems unlikely.

### **Background on Apache Creek Pueblo and its petroglyphs**

Occupied from 1150 to 1300 AD (Tularosa Phase), the Apache Creek Pueblo had between 40 and 50 rooms including a pit house.<sup>4</sup> It was built with solid masonry construction in Upland Mogollon style after the collapse of Chaco Canyon in 1150 AD.<sup>5</sup>

The pueblo lies within the border of the southern hunting grounds of the Zuni. It occupied a flat area screened by yellow pines and piñon trees, 75 feet above a fertile plain to the east where cattle now graze. To the west, a rocky slope climbed 300 feet to a lava-capped mesa. A year-round stream flowed past the pueblo into a lake a mile away on the other side of the mesa that offered a refuge for migrating fowl.

Two layers of smooth, void-free basalt capped the mesa, each about six feet thick. As erosion undercut the basalt, large rocks broke off and left flat, smooth, vertical surfaces like a slate blackboard. Inscriptions cover many of these surfaces near the pueblo, either pecked into the rock varnish or pecked and abraded. With so much room to write, inscriptions do not overlap.

Scribes at Apache Creek concentrated on inscriptions rather than images. Words were spelled in a straight-forward manner, not combined into a complicated rebus.

---

<sup>1</sup> Barry Fell, in *America BC*, found certain similarities between Zuni and Libyan in North Africa as spoken in 300 BC. In 600 BC, Libyans wrote with an alphabet nearly identical to Old European. The Libyan language, however, remains unknown, despite many attempts to link it with Berber.

<sup>2</sup> Barry Fell, 1976, *Structure of the Zuni language*; Zunis apparently speak a creolized dialect of Libyan; Epigraphic Society Occasional Papers, V 3/2, 10 pages.

<sup>3</sup> Barry Fell, 1976, *The roots of Libyan*; list of roots possibly of vocabulary of Libyan mariners; Epigraphic Society Occasional Papers, V 3/2, 6 pages.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Martin, John Rinaldo, Eloise Barter; 1957; *Late Mogollon communities: four sites of the Tularosa Phase*, Western New Mexico; *Fieldiana Anthropology* 49 (1).

<sup>5</sup> Michell Hegmon, Margaret Nelson, Susan Ruth; 1998; *Abandonment and Reorganization in the Mimbres Region of the American Southwest*; *American Anthropologist* 100, footnote 11 on page 159.

## Zuni Apache-Creek Petroglyph 0: 'Hail disease laid low Stars'

---

A zigzag visitor's trail to the basalt cap begins at a parking lot below the pueblo, whose ruins are difficult to see. The trail makes a clockwise loop, about a mile long. Petroglyph 0 lies 50 yards to the left of the top of the trail, where it turns right to follow the basalt face.

The script is Old European, the language Finnish; each of three phrases read left to right, top to bottom. The act of writing is called 'to make words'. The first phrase resembles the cross of a wooden grave marker, a premonition that her companion Star with 'hail disease' likely has deadly smallpox.<sup>6</sup> The Horse and Rider petroglyph from Hawaii describes deadly 'hail disease' as weeping red blisters on the skin as if someone had been caught in a rain of hot cinders. Smallpox at this early date implies Europeans in the area, who likely contributed to the abandonment of Chaco Canyon.

### Translation

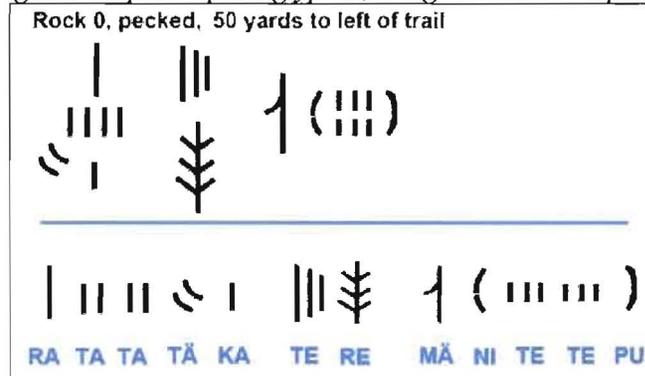
**Old European:** RA-TA TA TÄ KA. TE RE. MÄ NI TE TE PU.

**Finnish:** Raetta tauin Tähet kaa'oi. Tein rehu. Mä niin tehen tehä puhe'et.

**English:** Hail disease laid low Stars. I made some food. I am thus disposed to make words.

### Image and Transcription

*Figure 1: Apache petroglyph 0, image and transcription.*



You are invited to contact Stuart Harris about these or any other inscriptions at PO Box 60281, Palo Alto, CA, 94306; Stuart.Harris -at- sbcglobal.net; 650-888-1859

---

<sup>6</sup> From a petroglyph in Hawaii, 'hail disease' caused blisters on the skin, as if burned by hot cinders. It sounds like smallpox, which would narrow the date of the inscription to the first incursion of Europeans in 1539-40.