



Kekip Sacred Rock in southern Alberta: Moon, Morningstar, and blood sacrifice

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ABSTRACT

Glyphed (glifo) quartzite boulders (rocce, macigni), six singles and two pairs, have been found on prairie hilltops in southeastern Alberta. Boulder weights range from about 60 to 400 kg. The glyph styles indicate ages ranging from about 5000 to perhaps 2000 years, with cup-and-groove oldest. Two singles and one pair are glyphed on the entire surface, including the bottom. Offerings of Sweetgrass, tobacco and sage (incenses), food, money, and cloth (skin) are left at glyphed rocks that Indians still have access to. But Indians keep their deepest spiritual thoughts to themselves. On most of the hills, the glyphed rocks were several metres northerly or westerly of the actual summit. Six of the eight hills have an elongated shape, with the long axis north or north-northwest. North is the direction of the "Star That Doesn't Move Much," the "North Star," which evidently had a ceremonial significance. All glyphed rock sites provide a distant view to the east, the direction of sunrise, and there is a source of fresh water within a few kilometres easterly of each. These are Sacred Rocks. One of the Sacred Rocks that has cups and grooves over its entire surface has a dominating glyph of the crescent Moon (groove) nesting a Star (cup). The Rock was on Kekip Hill, 26 km north of a visible 5000-year-old Temple Hill that holds rock effigies of the Sun and crescent Moon with a Star between them. Kekip in old Blackfoot means "Flint Knife," and the glyphed rock was an Altar for Blood Sacrifice.

RIASSUNTO

Rocce di quarzite incise, sei singole e due in coppia, sono state ritrovate in una prateria sulla cima di una collina a sud-est di Alberta. Il peso di questi macigni va dai 60 ai 400 Kg. Lo stile delle incisioni ne consente una datazione tra i 5000 e i 2000 anni fa, con coppelle e scanalature più antiche. Due singole e una coppia sono interamente incise, fondo compreso. Offerte di Sweetgrass, tabacco e salvia (incensi), cibo, soldi e tessuti (pelle) vengono lasciate alle rocce incise dagli indiani che hanno ancora accesso a questo luogo e che custodiscono i loro pensieri spirituali più profondi. Sulla maggior parte delle colline, le rocce incise sono dislocate parecchi metri più a nord o ad ovest dalla sommità. Delle otto colline, sei hanno una forma allungata, con il lungo asse rivolto a nord o nord ovest. Il nord è la direzione della stella "Che non si muove molto", "la Stella del Nord", che evidentemente ha un significato cerimoniale. Tutti i siti offrono un'ampia vista verso est, da dove sorge il sole ed entro alcuni chilometri ad est rispetto ai massi vi è una sorgente d'acqua fresca. Queste sono Rocce Sacre. Su una roccia sacra incisa con coppelle e scanalature sull'intera superficie, risalta l'incisione del falcetto di Luna (scanalatura) che fa da nido a una Stella (coppella). La roccia si trovava sulla collina di Kekip, dalla quale si vede il Tempio della Collina, situato 26 Km più a nord. Nel tempio, risalente a 5000 anni fa, è conservata l'effigie in roccia composta nell'ordine dal Sole, dalla stella nel mezzo e dal falcetto lunare. Il termine Kekip nella lingua antica dei Piedineri significa: "Coltello in selce" e la roccia incisa era un altare per i sacrifici di sangue.

An Amerindian name for the Earth is Turtle Island. One of many versions of the creation story is that Sky Woman fell from her home way up in the sky, into a great Ocean. Birds and animals that lived on and in the Ocean decided to help her by making a place for her to live. A Muskrat dived to the bottom of the Ocean and brought up mud. He asked the other animals where to put the mud, and a Turtle said "Put it on my back." The Muskrat dived many times to bring up mud to make the land on the Turtle's back very large. That is how the Earth was formed. Sky Woman gave birth to humans. After some time she returned to the Sky to become Grandmother Moon, who watches over her children. Grandfather Sun is her husband. Morningstar is their son.

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From archaeological dating of cultural artifacts it is known that during at least the last 5000 years humans on the North American Plains have arranged rocks into many patterns on the ground, and carved symbols into a few rocks. During the last 100 years European immigrants moved most of the rocks from patterns into piles and plowed the land, but some rock patterns remain on unplowed land. We struggle to preserve them.

Glyphed quartzite boulders have been found on eight hilltops in southeastern Alberta. The styles of the glyphs indicate ages from about 5000 to 2000 years, with cup-and-groove the oldest. Six of the hilltops held a single quartzite with glyphs, and two hilltops each held a pair. The boulders weigh from about 60 to 400 kg. Each pair consisted of a large and a small quartzite.

All of the carved quartzites except one pair have been removed from their original places, some to museums. Indians still leave offerings at the sole remaining pair (**Figure 1**). The main offerings I have seen during the last three decades have been incenses: tobacco, sweetgrass (*Hierochloe odorata*) and longleaf sage (*Artemisia longifolia*). Incense is something that is burned to produce a purifying, fragrant white smoke, and has been used in religious purification ceremonies around the world for many thousands of years. Other offerings I have seen at the glyphed quartzite pair are food (berries, candy, fish), money, cloth (substitute for skin, **Figure 2**), crow and raptor feathers, and rarely an old stone tool such as a hide scraper or knife, or a rifle bullet (a modern arrow). These and the other glyphed quartzites are Sacred Rocks, either Altars or Effigies. White men tend to refer to other people's religions as "magic," or "superstition", and that is how the intrusive Whiteman Government's sign refers to this sacred place.

In Fès, Morocco, one time while I was eating in a tiny restaurant, the cooking area and the corners of the room were purified by the smoke from incense burned in a censor swinging on a rope, of the type used in Catholic Churches. This purification practice is evidently used also outside religious ceremonies.

At the Sacred Rock pair shown in Figure 1, three years ago someone re-oriented the long axis of the smaller quartzite from its ancient southeast-northwest to east-west. This might have been done in a re-dedication ceremony, because White people had protected the smaller glyphed quartzite from theft by anchoring its base in concrete. But the Whiteman's concrete was a desecration. Indian traditions are now slowly re-forming after a century of severe suppression. I think that Cree Elders held a ceremony at the Sacred Rocks, removed the concrete base to re-place the Rock on Mother Earth, and reoriented it to east-west. Perhaps the religious symbolism has been Christianized, and east-west is now more significant than the ancient southeast-northwest (Winter Solstice Sun rise and Summer Solstice Sun set). The larger glyphed quartzite remains oriented north-south, and the Sacred Rocks are on the north edge of the hill summit. North is the direction of The Star That Doesn't Move Much, the North Star. North had a ceremonial significance.

The quartzite pair mentioned above is glyphed over most of its exposed surface. The other quartzite pair, now in a museum in Wetaskiwin, Alberta, is glyphed over its entire surface, including the bottoms.

Three of the single quartzites are glyphed over their entire surfaces. One of them was on the north edge of the summit of *Kekip* Hill. *Kekip* is Old Blackfoot for 'Flint Knife.' The hill is in territory that was occupied by Blackfoot until 1877. During 1871 to 1877 the Canadian Government forced suppressive Treaties on Indian Tribes, confining them to "Reserves" of less productive land. Indians in the United States suffered the same genocidal fate during the nineteenth century.

By 1880 the invading British in Canada, and Americans to the south, had destroyed the millions of bison that had been the sustenance of Prairie Indians. Indian cultures were largely destroyed with them. After a few decades the sizes of the Indian populations and of the Reserves had been further greatly reduced.

KEKIP SACRED ROCK

The glyphed quartzite was stolen off *Kekip* Hill in 1882 by the Government Interpreter, Jean L'Heureux the fake Priest, to present to the Governor General of Canada, the Marquis of Lorne, during his tour of "The Northwest Territories." In 1905 that southern part of the Territories became the Prairie Provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta.

The Sacred Rock from *Kekip* Hill is now in the Canadian Museum of *Civilization*, 3600 km east of its Sacred site. *Civilized* theft by the conquerors! Ironic word mongering. There are two glyphed quartzites in the Canadian Museum of Civilization, the second one stolen from a Sacred Hill near Sunnynook, Alberta in 1912. Elders of both Cree and Blackfoot Tribes have in recent years held Sweetgrass (Incensing) Purification Ceremonies at both of the Sacred Rocks in the Museum. Blackfoot and Cree continue to try to recover the Sacred Altars, but the White bureaucrats believe that Indians wouldn't take care of them! The facts that the original sites are now farmland owned by Whites, and most Indians have been Christianized, complicate the problem.

Kekip Sacred Rock is sandy colored quartzite, roughly hemispherical in shape, 43 cm average diameter, 29 cm high, about 80 kg. It is completely covered with cups and grooves (**Figures 3 to 5**). The cups and most

of the grooves were incised by pecking. The bottoms of the grooves and parts of their sides were smoothed by abrasion. Some of the smaller grooves were formed only by abrasion or pecked.

The velvety smoothness of the bottoms of some of the grooves might have resulted from millennia of rubbing with fingers.

The most prominent feature of the engraving is an 18 cm diameter, 2 cm deep crescent with a 7 cm diameter, 2.5 cm deep cup nested in it (**Figure 3**). The cup has seven short grooves radiating from it. Jean L'Heureux lived with the Blackfoot many years before 1882, and recorded much of their language and some of their ceremonies. He interpreted the crescent and radiating cup as the Moon and the shining Morningstar (*Episors* is old Blackfoot for Morningstar).

A real star can never be seen nested in the crescent Moon, because the spherical Moon blocks light from any star behind the full circle of its cross section. However, a star nested in a crescent Moon is an ancient symbol that is still used in flags of several Muslim nations such as Tunisia, Pakistan and Malaysia. The flag of Turkey shows the Morningstar in conjunction with the roughly realistic, waxing 3-day-old Moon.

There is another 7 cm diameter, 3 cm deep cup symmetrically across the top of the Rock from the Star (**Figure 6**). From a certain angle the pair of cups seem like "eyes looking up". The pair is almost identical to the "eyes looking north" in one end of another completely-glyphed quartzite that was on the summit of a Sacred Hill 80 km to the northeast. It is now the Sunnynook Sacred Rock in the Canadian Museum of Civilization.

On the bottom of *Kekip* Rock are about 25 cupules and one groove (**Figure 5**). The groove has the shape of an open mouth or vulva. It is directly beneath the lower portion of the Moon glyph, which seems to favor the vulva interpretation. A vulva is the entrance for seed and the exit for new life. (*What makin' her fat din't go in froo her mouf.*)

WRITING?

There are many other grooves on the Rock that L'Heureux thought were a form of writing (**Figure 7**). The symbols seem to be in a counterclockwise outward spiral from the top of the Rock. Outward spirals of symbols, some clockwise and others counterclockwise, were common formats in ancient writing systems. An attempt to separate the symbols is shown below L'Heureux's sketch. My sketch transferring the symbols from the hemispherical Rock to flat paper is much cruder than L'Heureux's, but the relative sizes are more in proportion (**Figure 8**). I think L'Heureux's sketch was influenced by knowledge of ancient writing systems, a popular subject during the nineteenth century. L'Heureux was an amateur anthropologist, interested in the roots of language and symbolism.

If anyone wishes to pursue the suggestion of writing, fruitful directions might be ancient North Africa, and Arizona, New Mexico and Utah, USA. Controversial material and a lot of inspiration may be found in several books by Barry Fell, particularly *Saga America* (1980). Fell was a widely experienced genius with a photographic memory suited to pattern recognition, before pattern recognition was widely acknowledged as a powerful tool in the approach to understanding complex systems. Sometimes his mind was too quick to wait for confirmation of some of the presumed facts. His books are a rich ore for smelting.

AGE

Petroglyphs of cup and groove style date back at least 5000 years, but the complex symbols on *Kekip* Sacred Rock might be more recent. The surface of the Rock is completely and deeply glyphed, so the glyphs might have been made over a long period. The Rock evidently was used as an Altar up to about 200 years ago. *Kekip* Hill summit is almost due north (26 km, 8 degrees) of a Temple to the Sun, Moon and Morningstar, a vast lacework of stone patterns that began to be constructed more than 5000 years ago. The Temple contains accurate calendrical lines to Solstitial Sun rises and sets that date to 5000 years ago, and the lines might have taken several centuries to lay down and adjust to their amazing accuracy of less than one-tenth of a degree. North is a ceremonial direction, so I think that something ceremonial was on *Kekip* Hill 5000 years ago. Possibly this quartzite.

WHY QUARTZITE?

Although quartzite is metamorphosed sandstone, the quartzite boulders I have seen in Temples in Alberta, Tunisia (Al Qayrawan, in desert) and India, have been rounded by eons of being rolled by moving water. The quartzite boulders are sometimes mentally associated with water, and are considered "clean and cleansing". Where there is no water, rubbing a quartzite rock before prayers is considered a form of ablution. Perhaps the clean aspect, and the hardness for durability, were reasons that quartzite was chosen to engrave for Altars on hilltops. Hilltops were anciently equivalent to the soaring cathedrals of the last millennium.



BLOOD SACRIFICE

L'Heureux described an example of the use of *Kekip* Sacred Rock in a Blackfoot blood sacrifice to the Morningstar.

But first, a caution. Symbols can remain the same while their interpretations change through millennia. For example, Roman Catholic and Protestant Christians use the *Latin cross* as a symbol for the crucified Jesus. The Latin cross is a modification of the *equal-armed cross* that is used by Middle Eastern Christians to symbolize Jesus, and the equal-armed cross is an ancient symbol for the *Morningstar*. Several of the ancient Sacred Rocks of Alberta contain equal-armed cross glyphs. In many Christian Churches, displays of the ancient Holy Trinity of Sun, Moon and Morningstar are used as mnemonics for a more recent Holy Trinity of God The Father, the Virgin Mary, and Jesus. The continuance of symbols through conversion in religion serves as a comforting precaution.

So the Blackfoot blood sacrifice described below might not represent a use of *Kekip* Rock 4000 years ago. However, the channels for liquid-flow on the Rock are a clue, so ancient uses might have been something similar.

In a time of great crisis, a warrior hero went in the evening to the hilltop Altar. After an all-night vigil, at the rise of the Morningstar in the east, he laid a finger of his left hand on top of the Rock Altar, and with a *Kekip* (Flint Knife) in his right hand he cut off the finger, leaving blood to flow down into the Star basin. After a prayer to the Morningstar, he put the severed finger into the basin and descended the hill easterly to the water's edge, to dress the wound.

This type of self-mutilation in an attempt to help the community survive a crisis was even more honorable than receiving a wound in war.

Subtle channels in the surface of the Rock guided blood from the top through particular glyphs, and to a particular place on the bottom. I experimented with water. The cast is of Fibreglass, a polar polymer; it wets in a manner similar to rock, so water flow in a groove or down a side of the cast would be similar to that on the quartzite rock.

The flat bottom of *Kekip* Rock cast was placed on a horizontal bench, which represented the Earth. I let a tiny stream of water from a 5-millilitre pipette flow into the largest groove on top of the cast (**Figure 9**). The groove filled to a depth of 3 mm, then water drained down into the Star cup, which collected a pool to a depth of 3 mm then drained through a groove to the bottom of the crescent Moon, then down across a concaved portion of the side of the Rock to one end of the vulva groove on the bottom of the Rock (**Figure 10**), then dripped onto the bench (Mother Earth).

Three areas of the Rock bottom touch the bench top, but the area of the vulva is a few mm above the bench and slightly sloped in such a way that the fluid from the Moon bottom reaches the nearest end of the vulva and drips off. An amazing sculpture.

Was this a ritual bloodletting and menstruation to fertilize the Earth? Blood from the Warrior offered to the God Morningstar, passing through the Goddess Moon and dropping as menstrual blood onto Mother Earth? Menstruation is a symbol of regeneration. Blood fertilizes the earth. The symbolism seems to have several layers.

Was red ochre put into burials as symbolic menstrual blood for regeneration in a new life?

There is powerful symbolism in self-sacrifice. And powerful symbolism in the return of human blood to the earth. Could that be one of the subconscious driving forces of war? And of seemingly bloodthirsty religions? War and "Drink this my blood in remembrance of me" seem so stupid, but are so widespread in human societies.



figure 1



figure 2

Figure 3



figure 3

Figure 4



figure 4

Figure 5

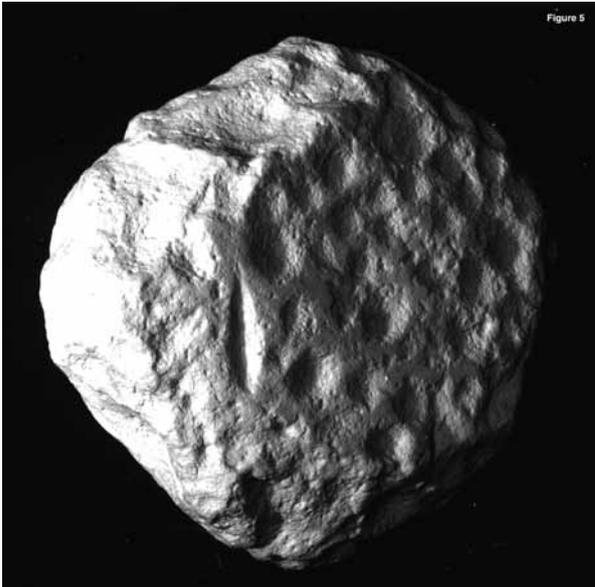


figure 5

Figure 6



figure 6

Figure 7

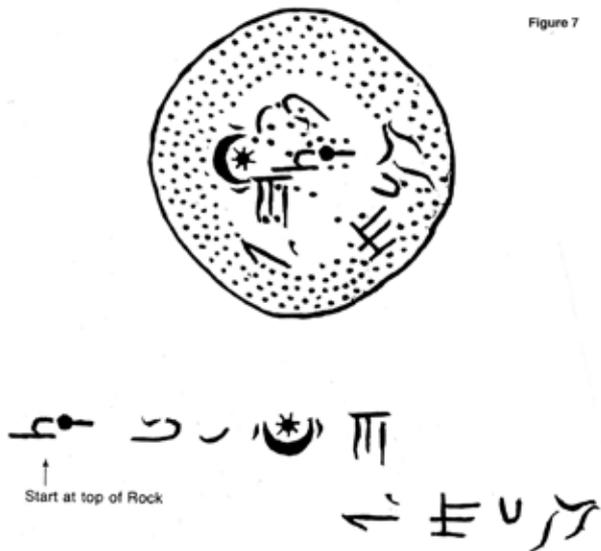


figure 7

Figure 8

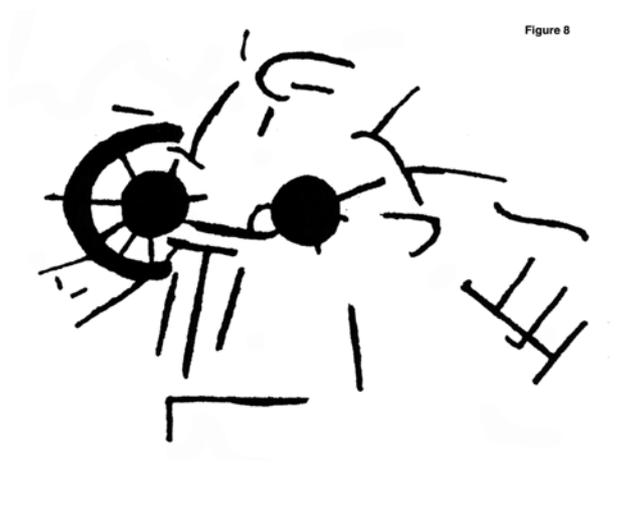


figure 8



figure 9

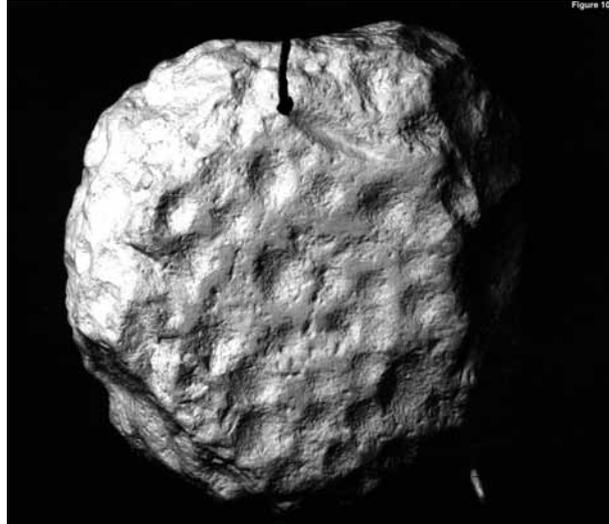


figure 10

FIGURE LEGENDS

Figure 1. Glyphed quartzites, a Sacred Rock pair near Viking, Alberta. Looking northwest.

Offerings of tobacco (cigarettes) are on the ground, and two 30-05 rifle shell casings are in the north cupule of the larger Rock. Beneath the west end of the smaller Rock are two crow feathers, and there are two 22-caliber bullets in the large cupule in its west upper end. 5 November 2005. Until 2004 the orientation of the smaller glyphed Rock was northeast-southwest, but it was changed to east-west three years ago, possibly by a Council of Cree Elders in Ceremony.

Figure 2. Cloth offerings on aspen trees that surround an oval-shaped depression in the hilltop,

30 m southwest of the Sacred Rock pair. The depression in the Sacred Hilltop is probably a vulva entrance/exit to the subterranean Spirit World. Looking north, 29 May 2006.

Figure 3. Sacred Rock taken from the north edge of the summit of *Kekip* Hill in 1882. Crescent Moon nesting a Star, with cups and grooves in the entire surface. Photo from National Museums Canada, Ottawa, 1980.

Figure 4. *Kekip* Sacred Rock rotated about 150 degrees from Figure 3. National Museums Canada photo, 1980.

Figure 5. *Kekip* Sacred Rock bottom. Fiberglass cast made for me by National Museums Canada in 1981.

Figure 6. *Kekip* Sacred Rock top cups. Fiberglass cast.

Figure 7. Sketch by Jean L'Heureux of perceived symbols pecked into *Kekip* Sacred Rock, from reference 2. I separated symbols in an assumed counterclockwise outward spiral, by cut-and-paste, to put them on two straight lines for attempts at interpretation.

Figure 8. My illiterate attempt to sketch the symbols on the hemispherical Rock. The relative sizes of the glyphs are more in proportion than those in L'Heureux's sketch, but my sketch is much cruder.

Figure 9. Path of a tiny stream of water, simulating blood, introduced into the large groove on top of *Kekip* Rock cast.

Figure 10. The water stream of Figure 9 reached one end of the vulva groove on the bottom of *Kekip* Rock cast, then dripped onto the bench (from the Goddess Moon onto Mother Earth).

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