



LOWER PECOS PREHISTORY: THE VIEW FROM THE CAVES

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INTRODUCTION

The Lower Pecos River region is one of the few areas of Texas where early history and prehistory are largely reconstructed from the archeology of caves and rock shelters. Prehistoric people lived in rock shelters, buried their dead in caves, and left an artistic record of their worldview in both. The region can claim one of the longest and most detailed records of human lifeways in Texas and, for that matter, North America, in part thanks to the arid climate and in part due to the environment afforded their remains by rock shelters and caves. The story begins with the Paleoindians, the first people to enter the region, ca. 12,000 years ago, and ends in the 20th century, when the last of the poor but ambitious settlers set up camp in the same sites their native predecessors had used for thousands of years.

CHRONOLOGY

The broad six-part cultural sequence usually used in Texas consists of Paleoindian; Early, Middle and Late Archaic; Late Prehistoric; and Historic periods (Hester, 1989). In the Lower Pecos region, scores of archeological excavations and hundreds of radiocarbon dates have contributed to a more detailed 12-part chronology (Dibble, n.d., cited in Prewitt, 1983, and Turpin, 1991a), that subdivides the traditional Paleoindian period into three subperiods, the Archaic into six and the Late Prehistoric into two. Environmental history follows yet another temporal scheme (Bryant, 1969), one that will be subsumed in this discussion by the framework provided by archeology.

Paleoindian Period

Paleoindian lifeways are known from only two sites in the Lower Pecos region—Bonfire Shelter (Dibble and Lorrain, 1968; Dibble 1970; Bement, 1986) and Cueva Quebrada (Lundelius, 1984)— and both tell the tale of big game hunters who exploited the soon-to-be-extinct fauna of the last Ice Age. Cueva Quebrada, a

small cave adjacent to a large occupied rock shelter, produced the broken and burned bones of extinct species of horse, camel, bison and bear in company with flint flakes and tools in strata radiocarbon-dated to the range between 14,500 and 12,100 years ago (Collins, 1976; Lundelius, 1984; Toomey, this volume).

Bonfire Shelter, a much larger rock shelter now obscured behind house-size roof fall, was intermittently used as a kill site, first for elephants, bison, and horse probably trapped in its interior, and later as a bison jump, the animals driven over the cliff above, hurling to their deaths on the rock pile below (Dibble and Lorrain, 1968; Bement, 1986). The lower bone bed, composed of the skeletal remains of a diverse number of species, was radiocarbon-dated to about 12,400 years before present (BP) and, with the Cueva Quebrada material, contributes the earliest evidence of human occupation in the region.

A second bone bed at Bonfire Shelter is composed of the remains of an estimated 120 *Bison antiquus*, victims of three separate mass kills by people who also left behind Folsom and Plainview dart points, hallmarks of the Paleoindian Period. Radiocarbon dating of charcoal from small hearths in the bone bed bracketed these events between 9700 and 10,700 years ago, during

a cool, humid late glacial climatic period called the Medina stage (Bryant, 1969).

Both Cueva Quebrada and Bonfire Shelter are specialized sites that afford a very narrow perspective on Paleoindian lifeways. The traditional view of these ancient people as nomads who followed the migratory herds is certainly supported by the information at hand but little can be said about the full range of their activities given that no habitation sites have been found. Only one Folsom dart point in a local collection, attributed to Hinds Cave, indicates that Paleoindian people may have occasionally occupied the rock shelters that were to become home to their Archaic successors (Bement and Turpin, 1987).

Late Paleoindian, Pre-Archaic Period

The onslaught of a drying trend that began about 9,500 years ago coincides with the onset of the desert adaptation that came to epitomize Lower Pecos lifeways. In Dibble's chronology (Prewitt, 1983; Turpin, 1991a), this period was called Oriente, and its inception coincided with that of the Stockton Stage, a 5,000-year long period of increasing aridity (Bryant, 1969).

Although the hallmark artifacts are still considered Late Paleoindian, dietary shifts to desert succulents and small game contrast with the big game hunting lifeways of the earlier Paleoindians (Hester, 1983; Brown, 1991). Broad-spectrum, resource-procurement strategies included a well-developed fiber industry, utilizing desert plants for sandals, baskets, mats, and cord.

There are few sites with well-dated deposits attributable to this time period in Lower Pecos prehistory. Baker Cave, situated along the Devils River, might be considered the type site (Hester, 1983; Brown, 1991). The Devils Mouth, an open terrace site now inundated by Lake Amistad, also produced radiocarbon dates that help define the range between 9,500 and 8,800 years ago as transitional between the Paleoindian and Archaic periods (Johnson, 1964; Sorrow, 1968). The main difficulty is that the majority of the cultural deposits of this age are deeply buried beneath the accumulated debris of the later occupations and massive excavations are needed to even obtain a small sample of artifact assemblage.

Early Archaic Period

The Early Archaic period, or Viejo subperiod, is the longest undifferentiated span in the Lower Pecos chronology, probably for the same reasons that the earlier transitional period is vaguely defined—the deposits are deeply buried and difficult to expose except

through major excavation. Still, considerable information has been gathered from sites such as Eagle Cave (Ross, 1965), Hinds Cave (Lord, 1984), Skyline Shelter (Turpin and Bement, 1992), and Baker Cave (Brown, 1991). Projectile point styles, such as Early Barbed, Baker and Bandy—once called Uvalde and Martindale (Turner and Hester, 1985)—are indices of the Early Archaic period, between 8,900 and 5,500 BP.

The exploitation of desert plants increases as the drying trend of the Stockton Stage intensifies. The Early Archaic strata of Hinds Cave reportedly gave evidence of burned rock midden accumulations and prickly pear floors, as well as quantities of perishable items and coprolites (human feces) (Lord, 1984). Williams-Dean's (1978) analysis of one coprolite lens, dating to the end of the Early Archaic period, produced the impression of a successful adaptation to an increasingly arid environment.

One of the most important Early Archaic sites excavated to date is Seminole Sink, a vertical shaft cave across the canyon from the largest shelter in the Lower Pecos region, Fate Bell Shelter (Turpin, 1988). The disarticulated and broken bones of 21 individuals, 11 children and 10 adults, were exhumed from beneath the 1-m-wide opening to the cave where they lay beneath a conical pile of rocks. The cremated remains of an adult male scattered across the top of the cairn radiocarbon dated to 400 BP, verging on historic times, but soil humate dates and one temporally diagnostic dart point placed the main bone concentration in the Early Archaic period. The corpses apparently had been dropped down the shaft, a most expedient burial practice and one with religious connotations beyond simple convenience.

Using an ossuary approach, bioarcheological study of the skeletal remains found that the population was relatively free of disease and trauma, except for dental indications of childhood stress and extreme tooth decay in early adulthood (Rose, et al. 1988). The high incidence of caries and tooth loss has been noted in other skeletal individuals and populations from the Lower Pecos and is attributed to the sugar content of a diet dominated by desert succulents, such as prickly pear (Turpin, Henneberg, and Riskind, 1986; Hartnady, 1985). Overall, however, the Early Archaic people of Seminole Sink seemed well adapted to their environment, especially when compared with agricultural populations.

Geomorphological investigations determined that the vertical shaft opened during a time of severe erosion, estimated to be about 8,000 years ago (Byrd, 1988). This finding correlates with similar evidence from Black Cave where radiocarbon dating of remnant

deposits demonstrated a pre-6,800 BP scouring of the canyon, followed by Early Archaic occupation of the shelter (Turpin, 1982). So far, these two sites stand alone in offering evidence of an extreme erosional event at least 2,000 years prior to the culmination of the Stockton Stage in the Ozona Erosional, at the beginning of the Middle Archaic Period (Bryant, 1969).

Middle Archaic Period

The distinct cultural persona that has come to stand for the Lower Pecos region in the minds of most archeologists actually emerged during the Middle Archaic period, beginning about 5,500 BP and lasting less than 2,500 years (Turpin, 1991a). In fact, the region as a cultural area is generally defined by one of its purely Middle Archaic phenomenon, the florescence of the Pecos River style rock art, a complex polychrome art form that derives directly from the shamanistic religious tradition common to hunting and gathering people (Kirkland and Newcomb, 1967; Zintgraff and Turpin, 1991). The earliest sign of the regionalization process is the distinctive beveled Pandale projectile point with its twisted blade. Later dart point styles bear Lower Pecos place names that reflect their restricted distribution—Langtry, Val Verde, and Arenosa.

The first evidence for mortuary practices that relied upon interment in rock shelter deposits or small horizontal shaft caves are Middle Archaic dart points found intermixed with skeletal material at Skyline Shelter (Turpin, 1992a). Unfortunately, the majority of the bundled burials were apparently laid on the surface of an uninhabitable alcove and covered with rocks where they were vulnerable to a number of post-depositional disturbances that made it impossible to tie the projectile points to any specific individual. Another clue to the antiquity of horizontal shaft cave burials is the rock art often painted around the openings to the chambers (Turpin, 1992b). Although this practice continued for millennia, some of the earliest examples are Pecos River style paintings, now considered a temporal diagnostic of this period.

The Pecos River style pictographs are attributed to the Middle Archaic period on stylistic and theoretical criteria, with some support from experimental radiocarbon dates (Russ, et al. 1990). The central character is a large anthropomorphic figure, usually positioned facing the audience with upraised arms and hands clenching an assortment of weapons, including atlatls (spear throwers), darts, and fending sticks, all known from the archeological deposits. Newcomb (Kirkland and Newcomb, 1967) presented a reasoned argument for calling this figure “shaman.” The shaman

was the religious practitioner in hunting and gathering societies and the welfare of the group was dependent upon his abilities to carry out his duties. His main function was to transcend the everyday world, ascending or descending to spirit worlds where he combated or communed with supernatural beings. He accomplished this in trance and usually in the form of, or accompanied by, spirit animals. Artistically, the easiest way to show transmutation, a fancy word for his assuming animal form, is by half man-half beast figures familiar to us from classical myth (Turpin, 1994).

Thus, some of the strongest evidence for shamanism in Pecos River art is the multitude of animal attributes attached to basically human figures. Cat ears, antler and feather headdresses, wings, clawed hands and feet, hairy torso and appendages, tails, and striped pelts show the shaman in his animal transformation. Commonly, shamans allied with the most powerful animal in their local environment; in the case of the Lower Pecos, that is obviously the mountain lion, colloquially called panther. Panthers are the only animal shown on a par with the shaman although deer may outnumber them in sheer frequency.

The shaman figures are surrounded by miniature replicas of themselves, clouds of feathers, lances, or geometric designs, and enigmatic abstract motifs. There are now perhaps 250 recorded Pecos River style panels, extending at least 90 miles north of the Rio Grande up the Pecos River and 90 miles south into Coahuila as far as the Sierra del Carmen (Turpin, 1991b). Their east-west axis follows the Rio Grande for a straight-line distance of about 75 miles, from just west of Del Rio to west of Langtry, near the Val Verde-Terrell county line. The large ceremonial sites, such as Panther Cave, Rattlesnake Canyon, Fate Bell Shelter, Abrigo Diego, and many others along the Pecos and Devils River were also home to the indigenous people for millennia while some of the smaller sites in the uplands were apparently way stations or not occupied at all. The uniformity in design, style, theme, and technique clearly indicates, however, that all these people were part of a unified belief system with all the implications for shared ideologies, worldviews, economy, and technology.

Middle Archaic deposits have been sampled in many more rockshelters, including such notable sites as Arenosa Shelter (Dibble, 1967), Fate Bell Shelter (Pearce and Jackson, 1933; Parsons, 1965), Eagle Cave (Ross, 1965), Hinds Cave (Lord, 1984), Conejo Shelter (Alexander, 1974), Coontail Spin (Nunley, Duffield and Jelks, 1965), and Skyline Shelter (Turpin and Bement, 1992). This strong representation and an increase in the number of open sites bearing temporally diagnostic

artifacts of Middle Archaic age suggests an increase in population or, more probably, an increase in population density (Marmaduke, 1978; Turpin, 1990a).

One explanation for this apparent demographic change may be environmental. Bryant's (1969) climatic model correlates the Middle Archaic period with a hot, dry interval he called the Ozona Erosional. Disconformities in contiguous strata at Arenosa Shelter (Dibble, 1967) and the Devil's Mouth Site (Johnson, 1964; Sorrow, 1968), coupled with another scouring of Black Cave (Turpin, 1982), provide archeological evidence for this period of environmental stress.

Ethnographic reports describe an efficient, arid land-exploitation strategy that relied upon concentration along the permanent rivers and springs during the dry season and dispersal into the uplands during the rainy season (Griffen, 1969). If drought interfered with this seasonal schedule, the entire economic pattern would change. The larger segments of the population would remain near the water while task groups went out to procure food stuffs for return to the base camp. In some ways, the latter requires more (or different) organizational skills and some sort of ranking of responsibilities. Changes in economic strategies or social organization would also explain the increase in ritual activity that produced the elaborate Pecos River style pictographs (Turpin, 1990a). Ritual was an information system in prehistory that continues to serve that function in a different way, providing us with insights into prehistoric thought patterns and ideas.

Late Archaic Period

Sometime around 3,000 BP, the climatic trend toward aridity was broken by a mesic interlude that prompted the expansion of the Great Plains grasslands, the return of the bison herds to the Lower Pecos, and the arrival of new people, following the migratory beasts south to the Rio Grande. This distinct break in the cultural continuum of the Archaic period prompted Dibble (in Prewitt, 1983) to name this subperiod "Cibola," the Mexican name for bison. After a gap of some 7,000 years, mass kills resumed at Bonfire Shelter between 2,500 and 2,900 years ago (Dibble and Lorrain, 1968; Prewitt, 1983). This time, an estimated 800 animals were killed by hunters bearing broad bladed projectile points named "Castroville," "Montell," and "Marshall," all types more characteristic of Central Texas and the Panhandle than any earlier Lower Pecos styles. The jump technique allows no selectivity in the slaughter so the number killed was often more than could be used. The compacted mass of bone and rotting flesh left over from the butchering process eventually

ignited spontaneously, reducing the pile to a 1-m-thick layer of fragmentary bone and powdery ash, forever eliminating the possibility of detecting separate kill events. It is obvious there were several events, if only because 800 animals could not be fitted into the space afforded by the overhang.

The distribution of these characteristic dart point styles identifies Late Archaic occupations in a number of shelters and open sites. Excavations at Piedra del Diablo, a burned rock midden site, produced numerous dart points of the Marshall type and a radiocarbon date that calibrates to about 3,200 years ago (Prewitt, 1970). A similar relationship between burned rock, Marshall points, bison bone and a radiocarbon date of 3,300 BP was demonstrated at Skyline Shelter, on the Devils River (Turpin and Bement 1992).

By pure coincidence, the same people may well have left their mark at Cueva Quebrada where a rock art panel above the entrance shows a herd of miniature bison racing toward a cleft in the rock that resembles the configuration of Bonfire Shelter (Grieder, 1966; Turpin, 1984). This new art form replaces the sombre monumental shamans of the Pecos River style with groups of miniature stick figures engaged in frenetic group activity. Although cartoon-like in its simplicity, the Red Linear style is more serious in its concern with matters that affect group survival, such as hunting strategies, human reproduction, and ritual activities (Turpin, 1984, 1990b). Processions of headdressed figures march in line across the curvature of shelter walls. Male hunters armed with fending sticks and clubs drive deer and bison into geometric designs that probably stand for traps, nets, or cliff faces. The reliance on handheld weapons and the absence of the bow and arrow help date this style to the Archaic period. Pregnant women, dancing singly or in pairs, sexual intercourse, and birthing scenes suggest that the Red Linear style may have been associated with puberty rites. Several of the sites, and especially those dealing with reproduction, are in obscure locations, distant from densely occupied shelters perhaps because they were intended for only a specific segment of the population. The less intimate scenes often incorporate natural features or elements of the older Pecos River style into their compositions, providing a relative sequence. The depiction of bison suggests that the Red Linear artists were part of the intrusive Plains or Central Texas groups that presumably followed the herds into the Lower Pecos during the Cibola subperiod of the Late Archaic (Turpin, 1984).

Sometime around 2,300 years ago, the Lower Pecos returned to what might be called a generic hunting and gathering lifestyle, defining yet another two subperiods,

the Flanders and the Blue Hills, within the overall Late Archaic period. The lithic industry, dominated by types such as Shumla, then Ensor and Frio, is no longer distinct from that of neighboring cultural areas (Turner and Hester, 1985). Early on, there are some indications that ties with what is now northeastern Mexico were stronger, but within a few hundred years that is also no longer distinguishable.

Although the mortuary practice of bundled burial in rock shelter deposits or small horizontal shaft caves began much earlier (Turpin, 1992a), most of the well-documented examples are Late Archaic in age (Turpin, Henneberg, and Riskind, 1986). Based on the number of bundles excavated from Fate Bell Shelter (Pearce and Jackson, 1933), Moorehead Cave (Maslowski, 1978), Perry Calk site (Collins, 1969), the Shumla caves (Martin, 1933), Conejo Shelter (Alexander, 1974), and many other sites, the bundling process can be summarized. Shortly after death, the corpse was flexed into a fetal position, bound and wrapped in layers of hide and matting, then the entire bundle tied, occasionally with ropes made of human hair. The dry matrix has occasionally worked to partially mummify tissue and hair enabling some reconstruction of their outward appearance (Turpin, Henneberg, and Riskind, 1986, *Bulletin of the Texas Archeological Society* 1988:cover).

Analysis of the mummified stomach contents of one adult male from Mummy Cave (see illustration), who died about 1,150 years ago, showed a most eclectic last meal, consisting of grass, prickly pear, foxtail millet, mouse, gopher, fish, snake, fledgling bird, and, overwhelmingly, grasshopper. As this individual was no longer able to chew because of massive abscesses, it is apparent that someone prepared his food and attended his death with the same care that was given his burial (Turpin, Henneberg, and Riskind, 1986). Another example of altruistic or familial behavior is the survival to young adulthood of people with disabilities, such as spina bifida, that would have impeded their mobility.

Bundled burials provide yet another insight into Lower Pecos thought. Anthropologists have often argued that infants have little social standing in hunting and gathering societies because the high mortality rate makes communal effort on their behalf counterproductive. Thus, their burials are rarely elaborate or accompanied by public ceremony. Infant burials in the Lower Pecos region are among the most elaborate, often containing broken cradleboards, rabbit skin robes, fine matting, and sometimes shell

ornaments. In one case, a cradle was constructed of crossed sticks and the little burial bundle cushioned on a pad of grass. It is perhaps trite to conclude that Lower Pecos parents loved their infant children, regardless of their high mortality.

Cremation was another mortuary practice documented for both adults and children (Pearce and Jackson, 1933; Maslowski, 1978). Apparently, the ashes were retained in leather pouches and buried in rock shelter deposits, much like the bundles described above. A number of reasons for cremation are suggested by ethnographic reports. One hypothesis is that these individuals died far from the preferred burial place so their remains were cremated and brought back for interment. Shamans were reportedly cremated, but it is unlikely that children had achieved such a status at an early age.

Late Prehistoric Period

Traditionally, the Late Prehistoric period is defined by the adoption of the bow and arrow, signalled in the Lower Pecos region by the appearance of smaller projectile points in rock shelter deposits about 900 A.D. or 1,000 years ago. The Spanish word for arrow, "Flecha," was given to this subperiod in the local chronology by Dibble (in Prewitt, 1983). During the early part of this period, little change is noted in the lifeways of the native people beyond this technological shift but information is scant and often unreliable. Rock shelter deposits of this age are sparse and the upper strata are usually churned by relic hunters or animals, so preservation is often poorer than in more protected buried contexts. The earliest radiocarbon date applicable to a stratum with arrow points is A.D. 600 but this level at Arenosa Shelter was mixed and contained artifacts ranging from Late Archaic Ensor dart points to modern trash (Dibble, 1967). Radiocarbon assays from sites in Mexico point to a narrow time range between A.D. 800 and 1300 for the introduction of the bow and arrow (Turpin, 1991a).

At sometime during the Late Prehistoric period, probably about A.D. 1200, a new art style, the Red Monochrome, appears on the walls of high, small unoccupied overhangs or larger sites low in the canyons (Turpin, 1986a). Lifesize human figures and realistic animals are painted, as the name suggests, in red pigment. Men stand facing the viewer, their legs apart and their arms held up as though they were victims of a robbery. Occasionally, they are armed with bows and arrows, attributes that date this style to the Late Prehistoric period. The Red Monochrome style can be differentiated from all the other simple red pictographs

by their artistic conventions. The frontally posed human figures often have rounded protruberances on the sides of their heads, like hair coiled in a bun and fastened over their ears. Single feather headdresses are common. Hands and feet are overly large and emphasized, a concern that extends to showing the tracks trailing behind a realistic turkey at one site. The Red Monochrome menagerie is composed of deer, rabbits, dogs, turtles, mountain lions, and catfish but not in the context of hunting activities. Dogs are consistently shown barking, their ears and tails erect, as if in watchdog mode.

Red Monochrome paintings are few and evenly distributed along the lower reaches of the Pecos and Devils rivers. The larger panels are on bleached surfaces under broad overhangs low in the canyons overlooking permanent water, prompting Kirkland to name this the Flooded Shelter style. Smaller examples, often consisting of but a few figures, are high on the canyon walls under shallow overhangs usually lacking in cultural deposits but with expansive views of the valleys below. The people apparently avoided the rock shelters so recently occupied by their predecessors, perhaps from superstitions about the haunting images of the Pecos River style. The consensus that the Red Monochrome art style is but one of a number of intrusive traits brought into the Lower Pecos region late in prehistory gains credence from a few examples recorded in the Big Bend region. The Red Monochrome people were apparently well-traveled nomads of the Southern Plains but their origins remain problematic.

Yet another new art form, the Bold Line Geometric pictograph style, has been tentatively dated to the Late Prehistoric Period although its abstract designs are more enigmatic than the realistic forms of the Red Monochrome style (Turpin, 1986b). Intersecting straight lines form zigzags, herringbones, lattices, and other geometric combinations, all painted in broad sweeps with bold colors. Blank space becomes a design element in one of the most common patterns, the blanket design. Small, deep red anthropomorphic figures and some quadrupedal insect-like forms are the only motifs that even verge on realism. Geometric designs are difficult to compare across time and space as the elements are common to virtually all prehistoric abstract styles, but the closest parallels within a reasonable distance are found in northeastern Mexico and eastern New Mexico. The Bold Line sites are rare but internally consistent, suggesting their introduction as a fully mature art form rather than internal development.

At about the same time, mortuary practices changed from a preference for bundle interment in rock shelter deposits or small caves to cairn burial on promontories

overlooking the major rivers or canyons (Turpin, 1982). Apparently, shallow graves were scooped into what little dirt is retained on these limestone benches and rocks were piled over the corpse to deter scavengers and mark the location. Few of these sites have been recorded and only one has been excavated to date but the latter yielded two dart points and two arrow points in the heart of the feature (Turpin, 1982). At the largest cairn burial site yet recorded, a small stone circle helps to relate this mortuary practice to a complex of intrusive traits that define the latest period in Lower Pecos prehistory, the Infierno Phase.

These circles of paired stones are usually described as “tipi rings,” the blocks serving to support poles that held a brush or hide superstructure. At the larger sites, the artifact assemblage characteristically consists of small stemmed arrow points, fragments of plain brown pottery, beveled knives, and snub-nosed end scrapers, all typical of Plains Indian bison hunting tool kits (Turpin and Bement, 1987, 1989). Again, site locations reflect a preference for high promontories with sweeping views of the countryside, a predilection that can be attributed to hunting strategies or warfare.

At the time of contact, Spanish accounts document the movement of northern Mexican native groups to the mouth of the Pecos or the Devils River area to hunt bison. Between 1582 and 1882, references to bison and bison hunting suggest yet another mesic interval, similar to the Late Archaic interlude, once again permitted the Plains grassland to recolonize the Lower Pecos, including it within the sea of grasslands that characterized the American frontier (Turpin, 1987a).

Although it is difficult to coordinate the timing of all these new traits, it is apparent that the Late Prehistoric period was a time of considerable flux, probably incited by the movement of people into the region. For the first time in Lower Pecos prehistory, a clear preference for open spaces is expressed in the distribution of occupational sites, burials, and art.

Historic Period

Prehistory came to an end in the Lower Pecos region in 1590 when Gaspar Castaño de Sosa and his followers set out for the Pecos Pueblo from his base in modern-day Monclova, in defiance of an order from the Viceroy of Mexico (Schroeder and Matson, 1965). His motives remain a topic of contention among historians—some see these descendants of Spanish Jews as fleeing from possible persecution by the Inquisition. Others attribute this ill-fated adventure to economic hardships imposed by the ban on slavery, the primary source of labor to work the mines of northern Mexico. Whatever his

reasons, Castaño crossed the Rio Grande near Del Rio, camping in the vicinity of Seminole Canyon with his wagon train, intent on following the Pecos River north to the pueblos. The cremation and shaft burial of an adult male took place at Seminole Sink within a few years of this time. Castaño's knowledge of the terrain and his eventual destination may well have come from earlier slaving expeditions that left no record of their illegal activities. Castaño's journal is of little use in characterizing the native people because he reports no contact until well into the journey. Presumably, the sight, sound, and smell of the Spanish caravan was enough to send the local inhabitants into hiding, especially if they were aware of the consequences of contact with slavers.

Almost a century passed before the Spanish tide again reached across the Rio Grande, this time in the form of missionary zeal. By the 1680s, native people were apparently moving north from Mexico to escape epidemic disease and warfare attendant on Spanish expansion while others were moving south from the Plains in search of settled communities to raid (Turpin, 1989). For the next 200 years, the Lower Pecos was a no-mans land, considered part of the Spanish *despoblado*, or unpopulated area, crossed by warring tribesmen but home to none of them. All we know of this era comes from rare and often obtuse Spanish, Mexican and American documents and a few rock art panels that survived because they had been painted in rock shelters or caves. The only possible camp sites of this era yet found are rings of paired stones that once supported the poles of brush or hide covered huts (Turpin and Bement, 1989). The artifacts are few, in keeping with the mobile lifestyle of these guerrilla warriors.

The 15 rock art panels that reflect contact with European culture can be arranged in a rough chronological sequence based on subject matter and style (Turpin, 1989). At first, the native artists were preoccupied with permanent architecture, domesticated animals, clothing, and other accoutrements, such as facial hair, hats, and pipes. The fascination with horses that begins at this time permeates all the historic period art, but the ethnic identity of the riders changes. The early Spanish Colonial scenes feature domed and two-towered churches, far larger and more magnificent than any edifice the impoverished frontier missions could afford to erect. Thus, the artists were recording what they had seen in places far distant from the Lower Pecos region.

This rather naive curiosity is soon replaced by hostility, missionaries shown pierced by arrows and cowboys obliterated by oversized lances. The arrival

of the Plains Indians, first the Apache, then the Kiowa and Comanche, is signalled by pictographs drawn in the Ceremonial and Early Biographical styles defined and dated to this general period on the Northern Plains. Favored topics are bison hunting and combat, particularly in terms of individual valor. Some of these scenes can be more precisely dated by the depiction of items that were in style for short periods of time, such as soldiers' uniforms, horse battle armor, and flintlock rifles. The last native pictograph in the Lower Pecos River region was presumably painted after 1871 according to the Prussian style helmets worn by the soldiers.

The historic pictographs realistically portray many of the favorite activities of the Plains people—bison hunting and bison dances, horse theft, individual and group combat, and, in scenes reported by early explorers but lost to us, the capture and murder of white settlers. The distribution of these sites also reflects the influence of the horse on native settlement patterns—once they got the horse, the people lived less in caves. Although rock shelter walls are still the favored canvas for their paintings, the sites are on creeks and tributaries, easy of access, close to permanent water holes, and surrounded by grasslands, places where ambush was difficult and escape possible.

Historic American Period

From about 1730, when the Apaches were reported in complete control of the Rio Grande, until 1849, the end of the Mexican war, settlement of the Lower Pecos region and much of neighboring Mexico was impossible. When the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo granted the territory north of the Rio Grande to Texas, the rush to find a route west to Santa Fe and California began in earnest. The famous Texas Ranger, Jack Hays, who led the first expedition to map what was to become known as the Lower Route, expressed his opinion by renaming the San Pedro River, the Devils River. In 1853, Fort Clark was established firmly in the midst of the Comanche Trace, one of the routes predatory raiders took into Mexico. Fort Lancaster and Camp Hudson were similarly placed overlooking favored crossing of the Pecos and Devils rivers. The army was there to protect the newly established mail routes, stage coach lines, and emigrant trails to the west.

The Civil War granted a respite to the native people who were able to resume their annual raids on the settled communities of northern Mexico for a brief period. Soon, however, hostilities escalated until, in 1875, the Mexican government was forced to appeal to Washington, D.C. on behalf of its frontier states.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Army illegally penetrated into northern Mexico on a punitive expedition against Kickapoo raiders who carried on an undeclared war with Texas from strongholds near modern-day Musquiz. A program of total eradication finally succeeded in putting an end to Native American life in the Lower Pecos region just as the coming of the railroad opened the marginal lands of the West for settlement.

Some of the early settlers, poor but ambitious for a better life, took advantage of the natural shelter offered by caves and overhangs (Turpin, 1987b). E. K. Fawcett (see photo above) came to the Devils River as a sheepherder and stayed to build a 24,300-hectare (60,000-acre) ranch, the headquarters of which provided all the services of a small town (Turpin, 1990c). His name and that of his fellow shepherds are painted on the wall of the rock shelter he occupied while he built a small cabin nearby. John and French Ingram, brothers and neighbors on the Pecos River, also began their ranching careers from the security of a rock shelter home. The young Billings family drove a Conestoga wagon from New Mexico to Langtry where they lived in a small rockshelter until an unexpected freeze killed their young stock and they were forced to move to town (Turpin, 1987b).

In one case, a rock shelter hideaway served more nefarious purposes. After he killed a local man in cold blood, Sam Bean hid out in a small cave until his famous father, Judge Roy Bean, had time to intimidate the witnesses and obscure the case against him (Turpin, 1987c). During Prohibition, liquor smuggled in from Mexico was hidden in caves, awaiting pickup and redistribution by bootleggers. Even today, the caves and rockshelters of the Lower Pecos provide cover for illegal aliens who cross the river in search of work. Archeologists of the future will find a strange assortment of twentieth century artifacts, ranging from pop tops to Spanish prayer books for those travelling far from home.

SUMMARY

The archeology of the Lower Pecos Region owes much of its detail and completeness to the obvious preference that the prehistoric people displayed for caves and rock shelters. Through most of prehistory, the natural shelter afforded by these geologic features fulfilled one of their most basic needs—housing. In death, as in life, caves and shelters were easily exploitable burial sites. The rock art for which the region is justly famous has endured over four millenia, in part due to its location in these sites. Beyond practicality, the pictographs and petroglyphs

demonstrate that the Archaic people recognized caves a sacred portals to the supernatural, a feeling recognized by the speleologists of today.

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