

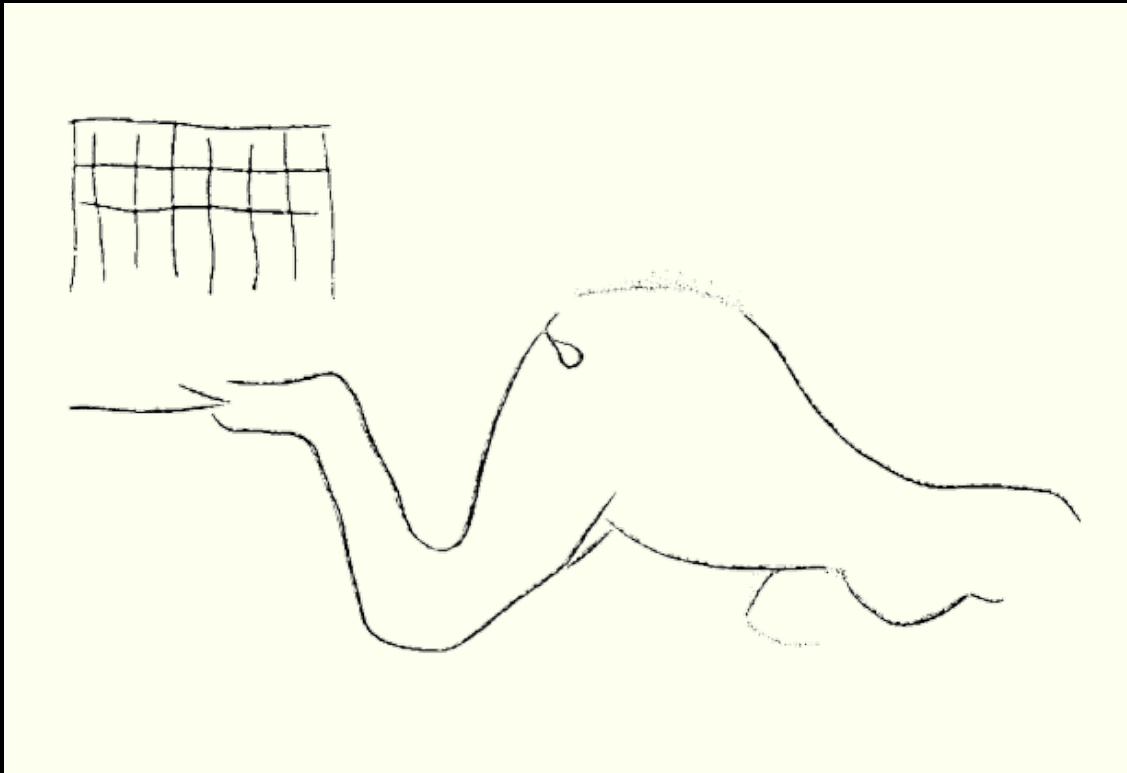
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# EXPRESSION

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THE GRAMMAR OF PRIMARY ART

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# EDITORIAL NOTES

## INTRODUCTION

### THE GRAMMAR OF PRIMARY ART

People mold their own lives and life molds people. So, the human mind is engaged with concerns and interests dictated by their lifestyle. For example, a bison-hunter and an oyster-gatherer do not perform the same activities and do not have the same daily lives and concerns. In art terms, a bison-hunter is unlikely to depict oysters and an oyster-gatherer is unlikely to depict bison. Human beings are affected by their own activities and worries, which are reflected in the features of their art.

Visual art has been a mirror of the minds of its producers since its early expression. Like in the Renaissance or in the age of Impressionism, specific conceptual orientations and ways of life shape the style and typology of art. The same trends of the last millennium are present in the last 50 millennia (Anati, 2020).

Looking at the succession of styles and themes of visual art in the course of such time-range, some common factors emerge on the conceptual structure of graphic production. Whatever its motivation or goal may be, it is an externalization or an expression that comes out of the executor's mind and hand, and is fixed on a base external to the executor's mind, be it a rock, a skin, a piece of wood or a canvas. It is a transfer from a concept to its graphic materialization, comprising location, space, and shape.

The result may be an image, a sign, an association of images and/or signs in a cluster, a sequence, a composition or a scene. Three main factors make the content of visual art: the style, the typology which is the grammar, and the associations between graphemes, which is the syntax.

Style represents the soul, typology the concerns and the associative system of graphemes, that is, the mental processing. All three, style, grammar (typology), and syntax (associative systems between graphemes) are mental expressions of reasoning. And mental reasoning varies according to the conditioning process imposed by daily life and traditions. An oyster-gatherer or a bison-hunter undergo conceptual conditioning

from their traditional activities, and this is reflected in their graphic production.

As emerged from typology, five major classes represent the prehistoric and tribal art production of 1, Archaic Hunters (no bow and arrow); 2, Gatherers (Food-collectors); 3, Evolved Hunters (using bow and arrow); 4, Pastoralists (Animal-raisers); and 5, Farmers (Populations with complex economies). Each of them displays a recurring typological range of subjects. These categories seem to reflect typological features depending on everyday activities, diet, and social and economic structures and concerns\*.

Two of these categories, the oldest, Early Hunters and Gatherers, are present already in the Pleistocene. The others mainly developed in the Holocene, in the last 12,000 years, marking a radical step in the evolution of human conceptual abilities and lifestyle.

Traditional schools of archeology used to consider hunters and gatherers as the same group. There are of course human groups practicing both hunting and gathering. Recent studies have shown, however, substantial differences between the art of societies having hunting as a dominant activity, focussing their concerns on hunted game and practicing a predominantly carnivorous diet, and the art of gatherers or food-collectors, which has other dominant subjects. The latter do not have hunted game as the main theme of their art. Rather they tend to have anthropomorphic images or ideograms as a dominant theme (Anati, 2018). All five categories have three specific types of signs, grammatically defined as pictograms, ideograms, and psychograms. Pictograms (and mythograms) are figures in which one may recognize the shape of real or imaginary things or beings which tend to be the subject or object of concern. Ideograms are repetitive and synthetic signs, usually having male or female values or other conceptual meaning, functioning as adjectives or something like verbs. Psychograms are signs that do not represent objects or symbols, but express sensations and feelings (Anati, 2023).

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\*For detailed analyses see Anati 2003; 2023

Pictograms, ideograms, and psychograms reflect three components of human conceptual processing of reality and imagination, produced by knowledge and beliefs. Pictograms are the visual transfer of appearance, ideograms the visual transfer of conceptual contents, and psychograms the visual transfer of feelings and emotions.

These three kinds of graphemes express the primary cognitive human process as a common basis of art: not only visual art, but also dance and music (and sometimes also diction and poetry). Their interplay determines the theorem of art grammar, the visual transfer of ideas which reflects cognitive characters of the human mind (Anati, 2020). These elementary components of what is currently named prehistoric and tribal art acquire different expressions in different cultural environments.

This issue no. 46 of *EXPRESSION* journal includes a selection of grammatical and syntactic examples of different cultural contexts displaying a provocative phenomenological case. The Discussion Forum presents two instances for debate, a general one on the conceptual roots of visual art and the other on a specific setting.

The question of origin, that is, how and why visual art was born is a much-discussed query and one that demands debate. A short paper on this topic has been added to this introduction. There follows an article on the production of a Chinese symbolic image, a dragon made of shells, in the burial of a human being. What is its conceptual background? What is the meaning of the figure of a dragon, a mythical creature, accompanying a dead body? And what relation can there be between the image and the material used to make it? Why are shells used to create the image of a dragon? How did the human mind conceive of this outcome? The main articles range from the birth of visual art as primary writing, to enigmatic rock art in Albania, to the succession of different styles and patterns in the rock art of Kyrgyzstan in Central Asia, to the function of solar light and shadow in the megalithic monuments of the British Isles.

The Paleolithic origins of writing, by Emmanuel Anati, is an attempt to read the messages hidden behind European Paleolithic art, and to define the role and purpose of a number of Paleolithic documents made by a society of hunter-gatherers. It raises the question

of methodology in approaching primary art and describes a conceptual process of decoding, which provokes a confrontation with traditional methods of dealing with prehistoric art.

New perspectives on rock art in north Albania (pictograms and petroglyphs of Rubik's cave), by Shpend Bengu, present a controversial theme, the rock art of a cave in Albania where both chronology and meaning are open to discussion. What kind of cultural background and beliefs do they represent? How old are these paintings? The author attributes them to the Chalcolithic period, although previous researchers had hypothesized different periods. A puzzling question concerns their meaning, but in any case, the art may be attributed to a complex society engaged in farming and mining metal ores. What meaning did these graphemes have? What function did the cave have when they were produced?

Luc Hermann and co-authors present the rock art site of Kara-Kuush in Kyrgyzstan. A succession of different nomadic pastoralist people, in the course of several millennia left engraved images on the rocks of an area, with the style, grammar, and syntax defining each of the various ethnic groups that produced them. The images describe different social conditions, periods of warfare and periods of peaceful pastoral life, different types of dominant animals in different periods, evidence of migrations and the presence of different ethnic groups. They represent episodes in the history of Central Asia.

Terence Meaden presents another chapter of his remarkable research on new aspects of the megalithic monuments of the British Isles and their hidden meaning which concerns the cultural aspects of the stone circles, following the methods of conceptual anthropology. He elaborates the concepts of the interplay of light and shadows caused by the sun, which during part of the year is shadowed by clouds and rain. Intriguing aspects emerge in this research, illustrating ways of thinking and the transfer of mental processes to stone monuments by a pastoral and early farming society. The grammar of primary art reveals aspects of conceptual trends among different populations, deriving from questions that occupied their minds. Most of them are intellectual or spiritual rather than material concerns. Readers are welcome to share their ideas and provoke debates.

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## A NOTE FOR THE AUTHORS

EXPRESSION is a quarterly journal on conceptual anthropology addressed to readers in over 90 countries. The readers are scholars and students in various fields of the humanities, mainly anthropology, archeology, art, sociology, and psychology, eager to keep alive the multidisciplinary dialogue, to communicate, to learn, and to open up new trends of humanistic studies. This journal offers space for expression and communication to researchers and authors from all over the world. Published papers are intended to be read, not just to be added to a bibliography. They are addressed to cultured and open-minded people.

If you wish to contribute a paper, consider that you are promoting your theme of concern and your ideas, try to make it interesting also to those who are not specialized in your specific research field. You have to talk to all of them, not just to the restricted circle of experts in your particular field. Articles are expected to be stimulating and agreeable to read by a broad audience. The target of EXPRESSION is to promote dialogue, communication, knowledge, and ideas concerning the intellectual and spiritual expressions of different cultures and societies. It is an open forum on conceptual anthropology where over 250 authors from 50 countries are publishing their research and their concepts. Your topic, even if related to a local or circumscribed theme, should awaken the interest of an international and interdisciplinary audience. The visual aspect is important for communication with the readers: images awaken interest and are memorized, enriching the impact of the article. Images and text should complement each other.

Authors should address readers openly, talk to them, be incisive, and avoid long descriptions, catalogues,

and rhetorical arguments. Refrain from unnecessary references, they may indicate the erudition of the author, but do not improve the scientific level of the article. Avoid excessive quotations, they may unveil an inability to express independent ideas. Use your own words and refrain from discursive sentences. Consider that short articles are more read and appreciated than long ones.

The main articles are proposing issues of broad interest. Communications on current topics, debates, and short notes can be included in the 'Discussion Forum' or in the 'Notes and News' sections.

Publication in EXPRESSION quarterly journal does not imply that the publisher and/or the editors agree with the ideas expressed. Authors are responsible for their ideas and for the information and the illustration they present.

Papers are submitted to reviewers, not in order to judge them but to help authors to better communicate with their readers, if needed. Controversial ideas are not censured if they make sense. Progress in research is often caused by debatable ideas. New thoughts and concepts are welcome; they may awaken debate and criticism and keep alive communication. Time will be their judge. If you have something new to say or to display you are welcome.

EXPRESSION is a free journal, independent and not submitted to formal traditional regulations. It offers space for ideas and discoveries, including contentious issues, healthy discussions, and imaginative and creative papers, if they contribute to research, are conceptually reliable, and respect the integrity, ethics, and dignity of authors, colleagues, and readers. For additional information on how to submit a paper, see the 'Notes and News' section.

# DISCUSSION FORUM

The Discussion Forum invites readers to be active protagonists in debates of worldwide interest in Conceptual Anthropology.

## THE CONCEPTUAL ROOTS OF PRIMARY ART

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The conceptual background of graphic expressions, a much-debated topic, is here presented as a short synthesis as a basis for discussion, summarizing in two pages earlier works of a few hundred pages (Anati, 2003, 2023). The most ancient figurative art that we know of was produced in regions as far apart as Africa, Europe, Indonesia, and Australia, among which direct contacts at those times can be excluded.

It is assumed that they all derive from the same conceptual abilities, from common roots and parallel evolutionary process, reaching separately a similar output: that of visual art.

Non-figurative graphic signs and stencils are attested before figurative art became a cultural trend. Whatever survived is on stone. Probably most graphic expressions were on leaves, bark or wood, skins or the human body, and did not last long enough to reach us. Pre-figurative graphic signs are dots, lines, cupules, crossing lines, and combinations of these, and stencils like hand-prints or tool-prints.

They may have been made for practical purposes to memorize or communicate. Some appear to have numeric values, like series of dots or of parallel lines presumably indicating counting; others appear to be ideograms, mostly of repetitive patterns; others again probably were just markings to indicate a site or something else. There may also be signs and marks made for a game or without specific purpose. Marks of this kind have existed for more than 70,000 years in Africa, the Middle East and Europe (Anati, 2003). Later analogous examples are found in other continents.

We postulate that the need to memorize and transmit data is a motivation for graphic signs, preceding the function of the graphic as aesthetic experience. Some human interventions on stone surfaces, like cupules and craters or smoothed grinding surfaces, may have

had just functional roles.

Figurative visual art is a further step, with its earliest evidences going back over 50,000 years in Southeast Asia and Australia, and around 40,000 years in Europe and Africa (Anati, 2023). As a working hypothesis, we presume that these are the time frames in different regions for the appearance of figurative art. The trend likely derives from a common conceptual core that evolved and came to materialize at different times wherever the offspring arrived.

Hypotheses about sporadic finds, such as vaguely anthropomorphic stones claiming to be deliberately shaped figurines in much earlier ages, may require further verification. The production of figurative graphic or plastic art is a cultural feature. And if it is a pattern, it would have multiple expressions. Claims of isolated dubious cases, hundreds of thousands year before the presence of a diffused habit, have to be considered with suspicion. From the synthesis of available data, so far, the cultural pattern of producing figurative art became present in the last 50,000 years.

Prehistoric art is today a main source of information on the interests, concerns, and beliefs of their makers, revealing aspects of ideas and feelings. It contains meanings through metaphorical and allegorical systems, with signs and forms similar to those of surviving hunter-gatherers, since graphic signs are a way to express, fix, memorize, and transmit messages (Anati, 2023). In Australia, as elsewhere, rock-art sites are holy sites to which men returned throughout millennia to perform paintings and engravings with spiritual functions. They have the double role of being sacred and social, a testimony of traditions, sources of identity, and site-reference of territorial belonging.

These are places in which individuals and groups try to communicate with the imaginary and supernatural world, with mythic beings and ancestors, and with the invisible powers of nature, sharing conceptual experiences. They are prehistoric cathedrals. They have the function of socializing clans and tribal groups, sharing traditions, ceremonies, and worship activities. The joint performance of rituals is a corroborating factor

of socialization. The conceptual heritage is a powerful source of social identity and figurative art is its source, archive, and expression. The images and symbols painted or engraved on the rocks are the binding testimony of common beliefs and traditions, meaning identity. Paleolithic parietal monumental art, both in caves and in the open air, and the mobile decorated objects, have different functions. The rock walls of monumental art appear to have mainly a public function, source of commemorations, galleries of myths, and sacred stories, a common heritage of people, clans or tribes, while mobile art seems to have a sense of personal concern. Thus, immobile and mobile art mostly represent two kinds of memories, public and private. The primary function of graphic signs may have been just fixing an external archive of memory, like a pri-

mordial database, but they soon acquired multivalent functions which included, besides being the archives of oral memories, religious roles, and means of social corroboration, making of the sites and their art the source of identity and sacred places of ethnic reference. This is still a pattern for many rock art sites of Australia, South Africa, Arizona, and New Mexico, as elsewhere.

The causes for the making of visual art are the functions and the conceptual core. From cause to effect, the output is preserved on rock surfaces. The task of research is to reconstruct from effect to cause.

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E.A.

# DISCOVERY OF THE FIRST CLAMSHELL MOSAIC DEPICTING A DRAGON IN SOUTHERN CHINA: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT AT THE XUECHENG SITE

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## INTRODUCTION

The development of prehistoric societies in the Lower Yangtze Valley represents an important trajectory of socio-economic change and the advent of social complexity (Renfrew & Liu 2018; Wang & Wu 2021). Unlike other well-known sites in the core area of this region, such as Liangzhu and Lingjiatan, the development of sites in the peripheral regions is poorly understood. To address this lacuna in the research, we initiated systematic excavations in 2021 at the Xuecheng site. The discoveries of a clamshell mosaic in the shape of a “dragon” as well as the cemetery of the site provide valuable information about the distinct characteristics of this community, their way of life,

economy, and belief system. The data we collected so far provides important insights about the mechanism of interactions among humans, culture, and the environment. We believe this was a critical factor in the emergence of social complexity in marginal regions of the Lower Yangtze Valley.

## SITE DESCRIPTION

The Xuecheng site (31°21'N, 118°50'E) is located in Jiangsu province. It is situated 14m asl in the lower Yangtze Valley on the southern shore of the Shijiu Lake (Figure 1). The site is an oval-shaped terrace about 210 meters from North to South and 330 meters from East to West. It was discovered in 1997, and subsequent excavations in 1997 and 2000 unearthed many burials, house structures, human remains, and artifacts (Nanjing Municipal Bureau of Cultural Relics et al. 2000). These findings suggested that Xuecheng is the largest prehistoric site with the largest cemetery in the Guxi River-Shijiu Lake valley. Since 2021, we have conducted careful stratigraphic excavation, dividing the site into two areas: A (100 square meters) and B (50 square meters), each of them further divided into 5x5 meters excavation units. More than 60 prehistoric burials and a clamshell mosaic depicting a dragon were found in Area A. Several postholes and ash pits were found in Area B, suggesting this was part of a domestic structure.

## DWELLING REMAINS

Comparing findings in Areas A and B, there is a clear differentiation between the living area and cemetery in the Xuecheng site. Such clear division between habitation area and cemeteries represents an increase in

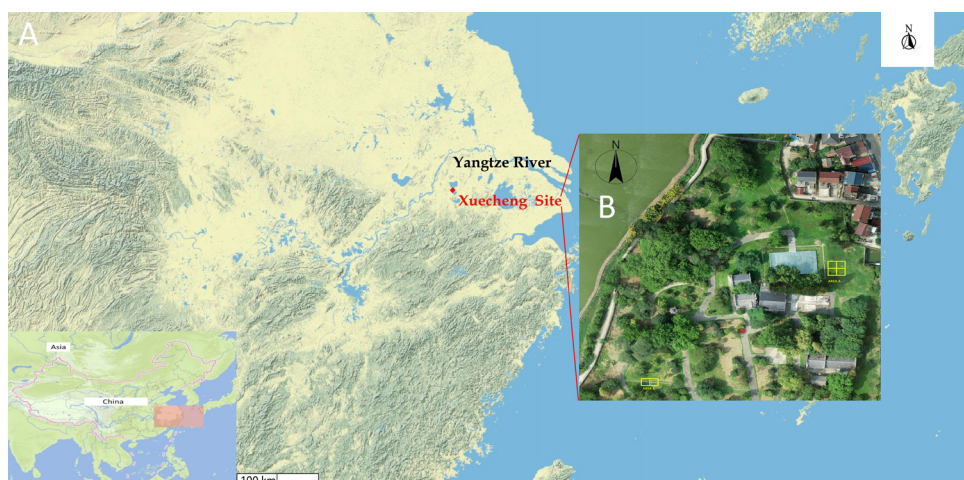


Figure 1. The location and aerial photograph of the Xuecheng site (map by CY, Ng., photograph by F, Xu)



Figure 2. A) Aerial photograph of the cemetery; B) Supine burial; C) Secondary burial (photograph by F, Xu)

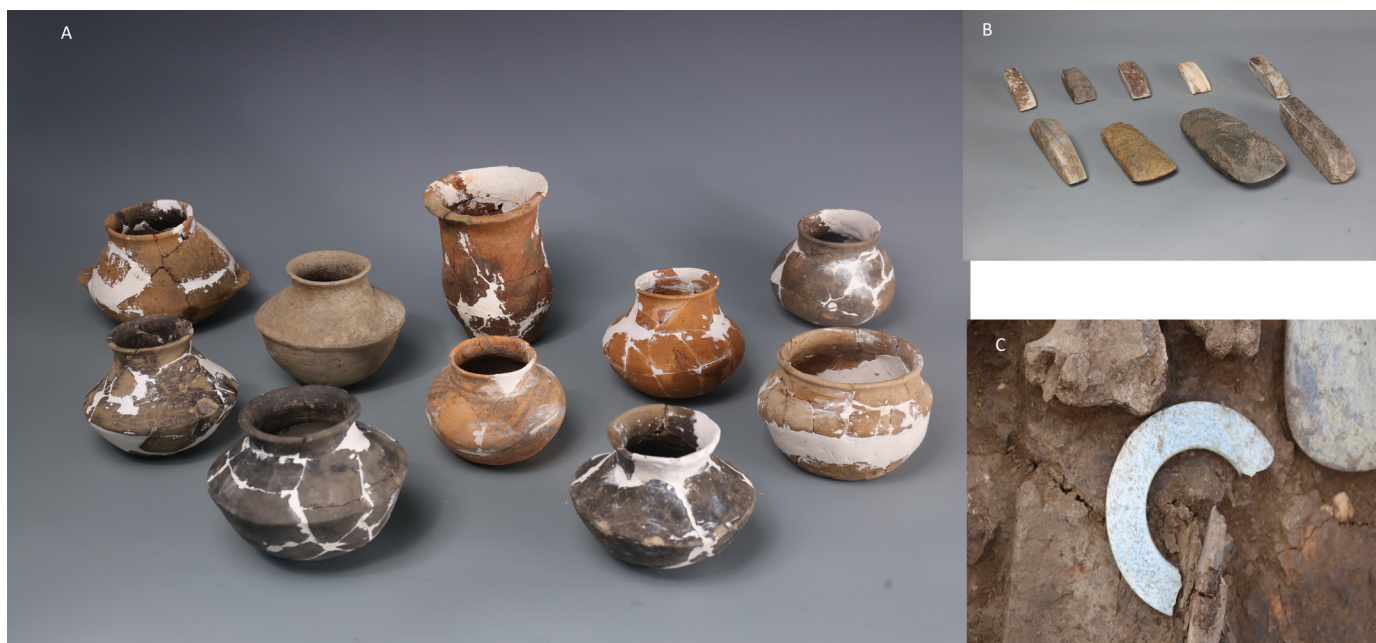


Figure 3. Selected artifacts from Xuecheng: A) Ceramic; B) Stoneware; C) Jade ring (photograph by F, Xu)



Figure 4. A) Aerial photograph of the “dragon” (from south to north); B) Shells from the “dragon”; C) Aerial photograph of the “dragon” (from west to east) (photograph by F. Xu)

site complexity and may suggest the development of complex social norms. Similar patterns seen in early Neolithic villages in North China have been interpreted as functional and symbolic divisions between the realm of the living and the realm of the dead (Peterson & Shelach 2012).

### THE SITE'S CEMETERY

All tombs are single-shaft chambers, with both genders and all ages represented. Most of them are supine burials in an east-west orientation, and only four cases

were secondary burials (Figure 2).

These graves are more or less similar in size and the number and quality of artifacts (pottery, stone tools, jade artifacts, and bone tools) found in them (Figure 3). However, one grave, M65, stands out because it contains a large number of ceramic vessels and stone artifacts. This may indicate that the male buried in the grave had high social status and demonstrates the emergence of incipient social hierarchy.

### REMAINS OF A CLAMSHELL MOSAIC IN THE SHAPE OF A “DRAGON”

The present excavation unearthed the remains of a clamshell mosaic in the shape of a “dragon” in TN10E11 Area A (Figure 4). A shell from the “dragon” gave a date of  $4610 \pm 30$  BP (Beta-610427: 3512-3197 BC at 95.4%; modelled in OxCal v.4.4.4, using IntCal20 calibration curve (Bronk Ramsey 2021; Reimer et al. 2020), dating it to the Songze culture (around 4000-3300 BC). The “dragon” is a prone position in east-southwest orientation, and the total length is 3.34 m. Unfortunately, the neck of the creature is broken by a modern trench, with only a few traces of clamshell remaining. The preliminary archeozoological work identified different types of freshwater shells (such as *Lamprotula mansuyi*, *Unio douglasiae*, etc.) that decorate the “dragon”. All shells come from the local water environment, and the condition of the shells suggests that unconsumed and large shellfish were chosen to make the “dragon”. This is the evidence to prove the importance of the surrounding water environment, not only as the provider of economic resources but also as an inspiration for religious and symbolic motifs.

### CONCLUSION

The key finding from the 2021 excavation is the remains of a clamshell mosaic in the shape of a “dragon”. In fact, dragon-shape remains have been discovered in other regions of China during different periods. Including the discovery at Xuecheng, only two clamshell mosaics depicting a dragon are known from prehistoric China. The one in Xishuipo cemetery is associated with a male adult skeleton (Figure 5, A) that is believed to have revealed religious practice characteristics of shamans (Liu & Chen 2012:197). Compared with

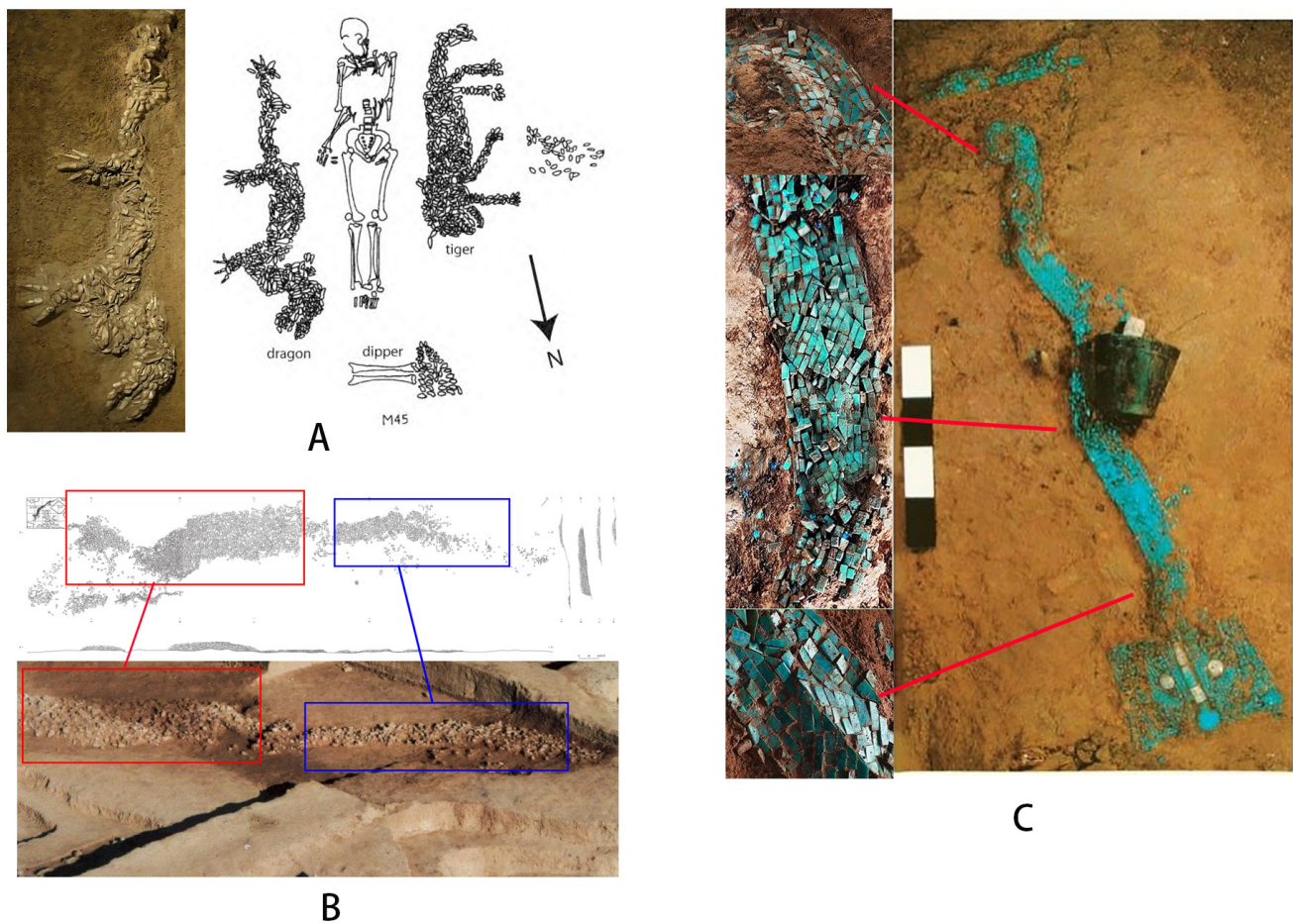


Figure 5. A) Human burial accompanied by shell mosaics from Xishuipo, Henan, Yangshao culture; B) The dragon-like stone pile from Chahai, Northeast China, Xinglongwa culture; C) The turquoise dragon and bronze bell found in burial, Erlitou, Henan

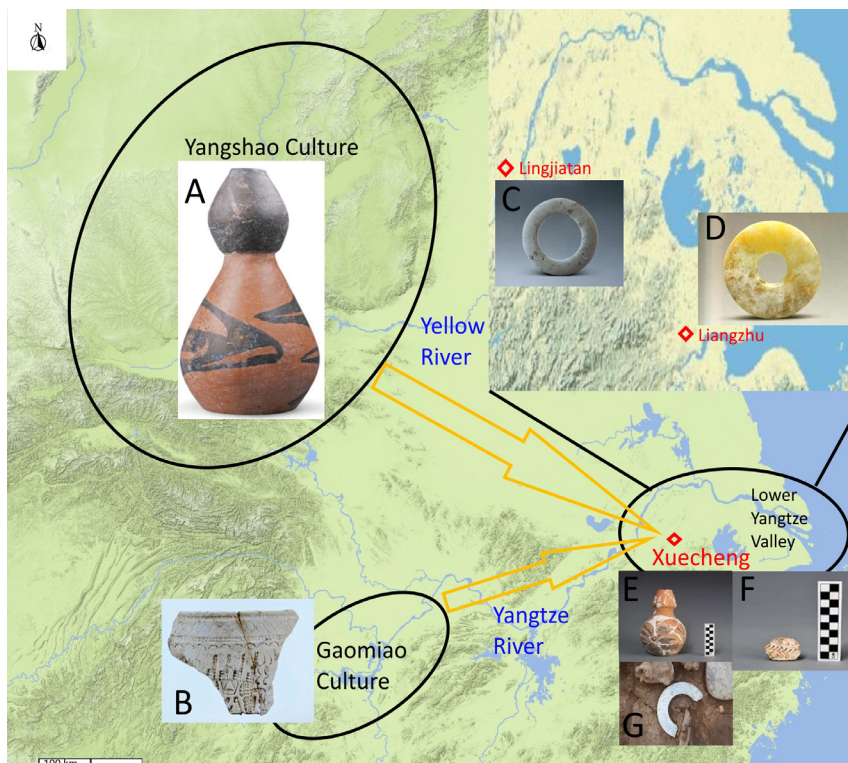


Figure 6. A) Painted pottery bottle (Bottle); B) White pottery (Hunan Provincial Institute of Archaeology 2020); C) Jade bracelet (Anhui Provincial Institute of Archaeology 2006); D) Jade bracelet (Zhejiang Provincial Institute of Archaeology 2006); Selected artifacts from Xuecheng: E) Painted pottery bottle; F) White pottery; G) Jade bracelet (map by CY, Ng., photograph E, F, G by F, Xu)

Xishuipo, Xuecheng inhabitants created the “dragon” out of spiritual and cultural belief and placed it in the center of the cemetery as a landmark, constituting a meaningful funerary space. Preliminary archeozoological and archaeobotanical results revealed a large number of shells and rare crops. Therefore, we reconstruct the subsistence economy of Xuecheng as a combination that highly relied on fishing and collecting aquatic resources alongside the development of rice agriculture fell behind the core of the lower Yangtze Valley. The shape of the Xuecheng “dragon” is like a Chinese Alligator, and Guxi River-Shijiu Lake Valley is the habitat of these animals, therefore we can expect contact between alligators and humans in this region. Thus, we argue that human-environment interaction is not limited to the economy or to social behavior, it should also be examined in the context of incipient spiritual developments.

Constructing the dragon-like stone pile in the central plaza of a site could be pushed back to as early as 8,000 BP in Northeast China. In the Chahai site dating to the Xinglongwa culture, a dragon-like stone pile (Figure 5, B) as well as 55 house structures have been exposed (Tu et al. 2022). During the transitional period from foraging societies to agricultural communities, the dragon-like stone pile, as a public ritual structure, played an important role in integrating the independent households of the Chahai community as a whole (Tu et al. 2022). In the Erlitou site dating to 2,000 BC, which is considered as the earliest state of China, a turquoise dragon is found in an elite tomb (Figure 5, C), unlike the similar remains in Chahai, Xishuipo and Xuecheng, the finding in Erlitou suggests that the turquoise dragon has been the symbol of power and higher social status (Liu & Chen 2012:265).

The project aims to clarify the formation process of the prehistoric Xuecheng community, the development of its habitation, cemeteries, and other activity areas, and to collect samples for multidisciplinary research about the social structure and economic activities of this community. Compared to better-known archaeological cultures in the core regions of the Yangtze basin, such as the Lake Taihu and Lake Chaohu regions, the trajectory of the development of social complexity in Xuecheng is characterized by regional local features and foreign cultural elements (Figure 6). Guxi River-Shijiu Lake Valley is a typical “transition

zone” mentioned in Chinese ancient texts (Ban 1962). It is not surprising though, that even during prehistoric times, “compatibility” and “mixture” are the core characteristics of the Xuecheng site and are clearly reflected in the archaeological remains. For example, among the burial objects found on this site, some painted potteries are typical artifacts of the Yangshao Culture (around 5000-3000BC) of North China, and the white potteries are distinctive of the Gaomiao Culture (around 5000-3300BC) in South China. This suggests a network of cultural exchange that existed more than 5,000 years ago. At the same time, the simple jade bracelets found in the graves of the Xuecheng cemetery represent a long-term tradition of prehistoric societies in the lower Yangtze Valley. This tradition accumulated with the remarkable sophisticated jade pieces of the Liangzhu culture (around 3300-2000BC). The data uncovered by the Xuecheng project brings a lot of new information to study the mechanisms of social interaction and the development of social complexity in the lower Yangtze Valley. We are looking forward to more exciting discoveries in our future work.

## FUNDING STATEMENT

This study was support by Major project of National Social Science Fund of China (No.20&ZD247)

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank Professor Gideon Shelach-Lavi, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He provided us with many valuable comments on the initial draft of our paper.

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## **FORTHCOMING NEW DEBATES**

Readers are proposing themes for debate. When at least three articles are submitted on the same theme, the topic is considered for a forthcoming issue.

1. **OUT OF AFRICA: THE ETERNAL DIASPORA. WHY DID STONE AGE PEOPLE MIGRATE?**
2. **WHY MEGALITHISM: THE LOGIC BEHIND.**
3. **SEAFARING DEPICTIONS: RECORDING MYTHS AND EVENTS** Considering the story of seafaring and its earliest documentation.
4. **MYTHS OF ORIGINS: WHERE DID THE ANCESTORS COME FROM?** Global and local traditions.
5. **VERNACULAR DECORATIVE PATTERNS AND THEIR SOURCES.** Decoration of objects, huts or rock surfaces as the expression of identity.
6. **THE ART OF HUNTERS AND GATHERERS:** Different patterns as expressions of different lifestyles and different resources.
7. **ASIA – AMERICA CONTACTS IN PRE-COLUMBIAN TIMES** Migrations, Seafaring and colonization.
8. **THE ART OF HUNTERS AND THAT OF FOOD COLLECTORS: IS DIET INFLUENCING TYPOLOGY AND STYLE?**
9. **IS HOMO SAPIENS THE INVENTOR OF FIGURATIVE ART?** Is visual art the sign of his presence?

## **PROPOSALS FOR NEW DEBATES**

Proposals for papers and suggestions on these and other issues are welcome.

# THE PALEOLITHIC ORIGINS OF WRITING\*

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## PREMISE

Paleolithic cave art, open-air rock art and decorated objects appear to our contemporary eyes as art masterpieces, an immense cultural heritage. But what did they intend to communicate? Their discovery, description and study has involved scholars for well over a century. The recording, description and first hypotheses of interpretations are mainly due to the fathers of research in prehistoric art, authors of the first overviews, the Abbe' Henri Breuil (1952), Paolo Graziosi (1960) and Andre Leroi-Gourhan (1965).

Deciphering its conceptual contents has engaged researchers producing a rich scientific literature and a variety of theories. Paleolithic art, or rather art of hunter-gatherers of the Pleistocene epoch, is found all over the planet, in five continents.

The "Decoding" research project of Atelier Research Center englobes all the art of non-literate societies, though this article is mainly focusing on European Paleolithic art. It concerns the art of a limited area, produced through over 30,000 years of human conceptual evolution, encompassing different cultural phases.

Despite the tendency of early researchers to see this creativity as art for art sake, it is doubtful that the visual images were produced just to embellish the walls of caves. Another widespread hypothesis is that of religious art, sacred icons and sacred sites, with function of worship and conceptual indoctrination.

Some of the European Paleolithic art was considered to be related to Hunting Magic (Breuil, 1912; 1952: *Alcalde del Rio*, Breuil, Sierra, 1911). Some assemblages of non-figurative markings have been described as calendric recordings (Marshack, 1970; 1972). Over ten different hypotheses have been proposed as purpo-

se and meaning of Paleolithic art, including religious, magic, and other motivations\*\*.

The present text is focusing on the decoding process of Paleolithic art from western Europe. Besides the book which is summarized in this article, specific aspects of the decoding of European Paleolithic art have appeared in various issues of *Expression* journal\*\*\*.

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## THE AVAILABLE DATA

Having a purpose in mind, the problem is how to se-

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\*\*For a description of the various theories see: Anati, 2003, *Aux Origines de l'Art*, the chapter on 'Histoire des interprétations', pp. 44 – 57.

\*\*\* Conceptual anthropology research on decoding prehistoric art, besides European Paleolithic, appeared in *Expression* journal: 2017. Vol.18, pp. 8-20, *Forgotten Myths and Memories: The Art of Early Gatherers from Tanzania to a World Pattern*.

2018. *Expression*, Vol.21. pp. 7-9, *Dominant Themes in the Rock Art of Azerbaijan*

2018. *Expression*, Vol.22, pp. 9-20, *Changing Themes in Valcamonica Rock Art*

2019. *Expression*, Vol.23, pp. 7-23, *The Typology of Rock Art*

2019. *Expression*, Vol.25, pp. 8-19, *Religions in Prehistoric Valcamonica*

2019. *Expression*, Vol.26, pp. 8-18, *Male and Female Variability in the Rock Art of Azerbaijan*

2020. *Expression*, Vol.28, pp. 10-31, *Cultural Diffusion and Cultural Introversion in the Alps. Rock Art as a Source of History*

2021. *Expression*, Vol.33, pp. 10-28, *The Rock Art of Central Arabia*

2022. *Expression*, Vol.37, pp. 11-31, *The Typology of Rock Art*

2023. *Expression*, Vol.42, pp. 11-28, *Arnhem Land Rock Art, A Study in Conceptual Anthropology*

\*\*\*\* Articles in *Expression* journal on specific aspects of decoding European Paleolithic art:

2014. *Expression*, Vol.6, pp. 3-24, *Decoding Prehistoric Art: The Messages behind the Images*.

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\*The present article is a summary and updating of the book, Anati, E., 2015, *Decoding Prehistoric Art and the Origins of Writing*, Capodiponte (Atelier); and 2020, abridged edition of the same, Capodiponte (Atelier).

lect the meaningful data pertinent to the intent. An infinity of information is available on the existing documentation of prehistoric art: description of what is represented, typology, style, definition of how it was made, tools and methods used for producing paintings and engravings, the process of preparing the colors, types of colors of the paintings, their chemical analysis, their grinding methods and the binding systems, the source of the colors (whether the paintings are made of local raw materials or of exotic resour-

2017. *Expression*, Vol.14, pp. 7-10, Travel and Migrations Tales in European Paleolithic Art.

2017. *Expression*, Vol.15, pp. 7-13, Decoding Prehistoric Art: Meaningful Examples of Gender Relations.

2017. *Expression*, Vol.16, pp. 9-23, Decoding Paleolithic Engravings on Bone.

2020. *Expression*, Vol.27, pp. 13-19, Reconsidering the Vulvar Stones of La Ferrassie (Dordogne).

2020. *Expression*, Vol.29, pp. 12-15, Decoding Paleolithic Art and the Origins of Writing.

2023. *Expression*, Vol.39 pp. 19-32, The Conceptual Function of Simple Associations in the European Paleolithic Art.

2024. *Expression*, Vol.40, pp. 13-33, Grammar and Syntax of Primary Art an Enquiry in Conceptual Anthropology.

ces), the kind of surface selected, dating and methods of dating, association of art and material culture, the kind of environment, the position of the artist while executing the work of art, and much more. And then there are analytical studies of typology, style, shapes, size and measurements, similarities and comparisons, typological variations, functions and motivations, and what else. For a defined research, assembling all of them may lead nowhere. The target determines the selection of the pertinent meaningful data.

Research can center on different aspects of prehistoric art. The technical study of the methods and materials used by the producers, conservation and preservation, technical analyses for dating, cultural and touristic developments, decoding of the meaning, and other topics, are different fields demanding different basic data and the right conceptual orientation for each aspect of research.

This article is concerned with the decoding, the analytical process leading to reading the messages expressed by their graphic formulations.

### THE LAUSSEL HIGH RELIEF

An example of Paleolithic art seen as icon aimed at



Fig. 1 a-b. Drawing and photo of the 'Venus of Laussel', Marquay, Dordogne, France. The high-relief is that of a mature woman with a horn in her hand on which are engraved thirteen marks performed with three different tools, respectively in groups of six, four, and three. On the hip of the woman is engraved a bâtonnet sign. On the left side, at the bottom, there are traces of the relief obliterated or damaged, of an animal figure placed vertically. (After Anati, 1989b).

religious worship is the high-relief named Venus of Laussel, representing a mature female with a strange face (partly effaced intentionally?) and a horn in her hand. A forked 'bâtonnet' is engraved on the woman's hip. There are traces of an erased relief of an animal placed vertically on the lower left side.

Presumably the animal was the name or the totem of the mature woman. If intentionally erased, the figure had disturbed whoever decided to cancel it. The same plays for the effaced face. The two main sources of the identity were deleted. Ideological changes take place in the course of time.

The forked 'bâtonnet' on the hip of the woman is probably an adjective. If, as in other cases, this ideogram means wayfarer, it would give the figure the adjective of traveler. The horn should have a key meaning and the numeric marks may define or repeat something as

many times as they are.

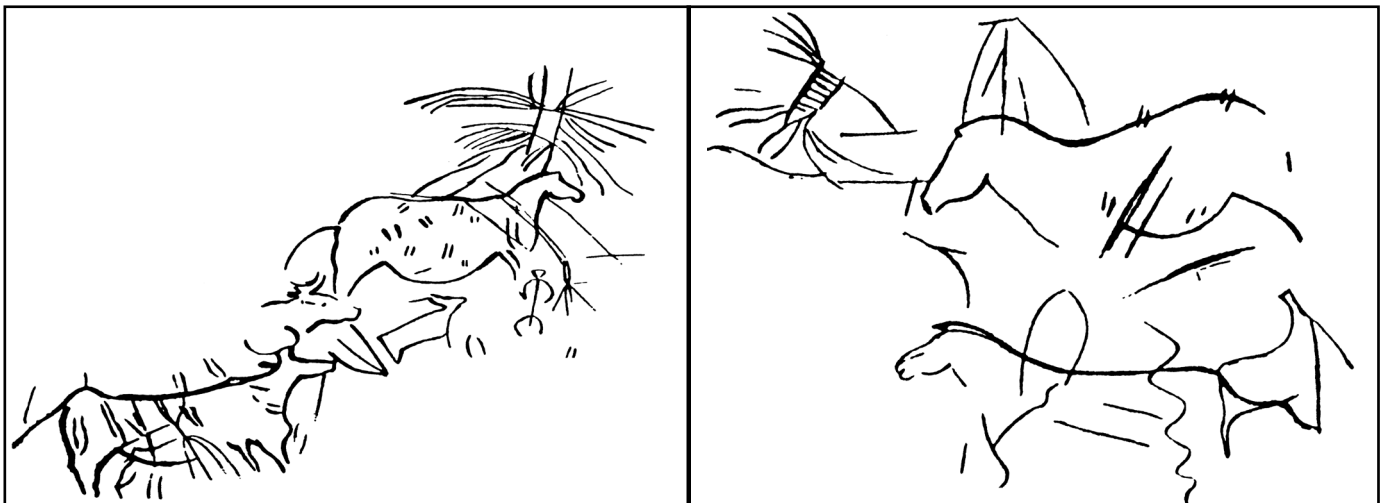
The Laussel Lady has been considered a 'Mother Goddess' by Marija Gimbutas and others (Gimbutas, 1989). It is a probable hypothesis but remains a hypothesis. The high-relief is a graphic unit with various components. The horn, a main element of the relief, the number of lines engraved on it, the bifurcate bâtonnet, the accompanying animal, the peculiar face, should have a meaning. They are indicators of contents which they intend to communicate: they constitute a language to be decoded. Without such elucidations the image has no content. Who is Lady Laussel?

### DEFINING THE GRAPHIC UNIT

The decorated walls of caves may appear as the compilation of a post-modern artist. Even if it looks as a comprehensive single creative work, a painted or en-



Fig. 2.A, B, C. La Pileta cave, Malaga, Spain. A- A large panel with numerous paintings. The total recording displays the accumulation of different phases. (After Breuil et al., 1915).



2 B – C- Detail of sectors of the previous panel. B- Sector Left: the animal group and superpositions including two small figures, a quadruped, an anthropomorphic figure and other signs. Later figures are included in this tracing. C- Sector Right: detail of the right side of previous panel including superposition

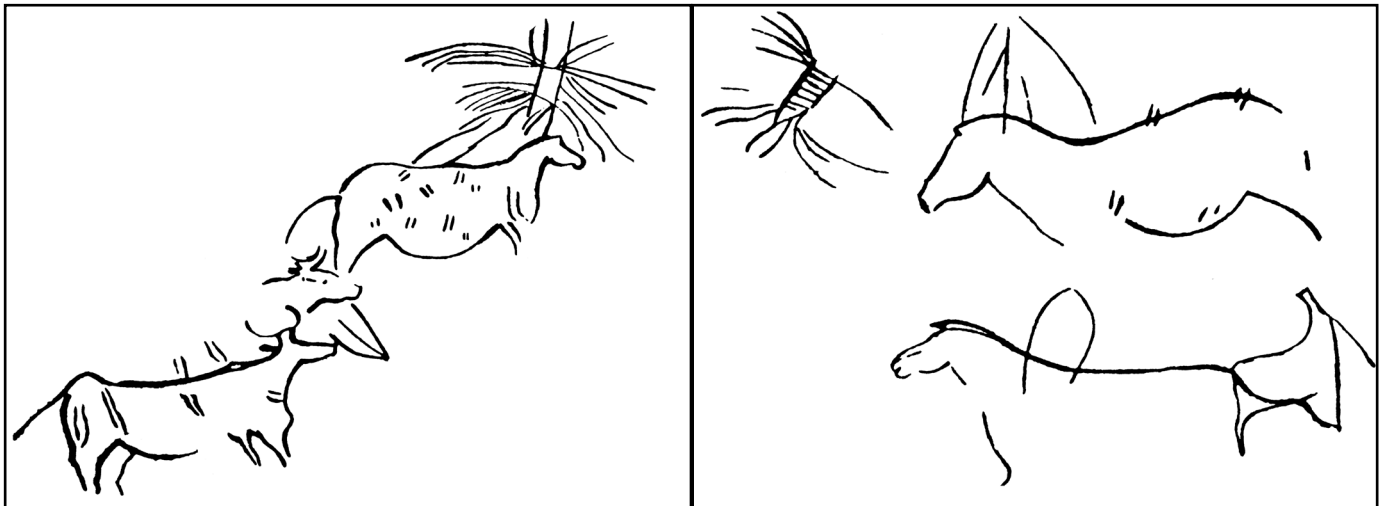
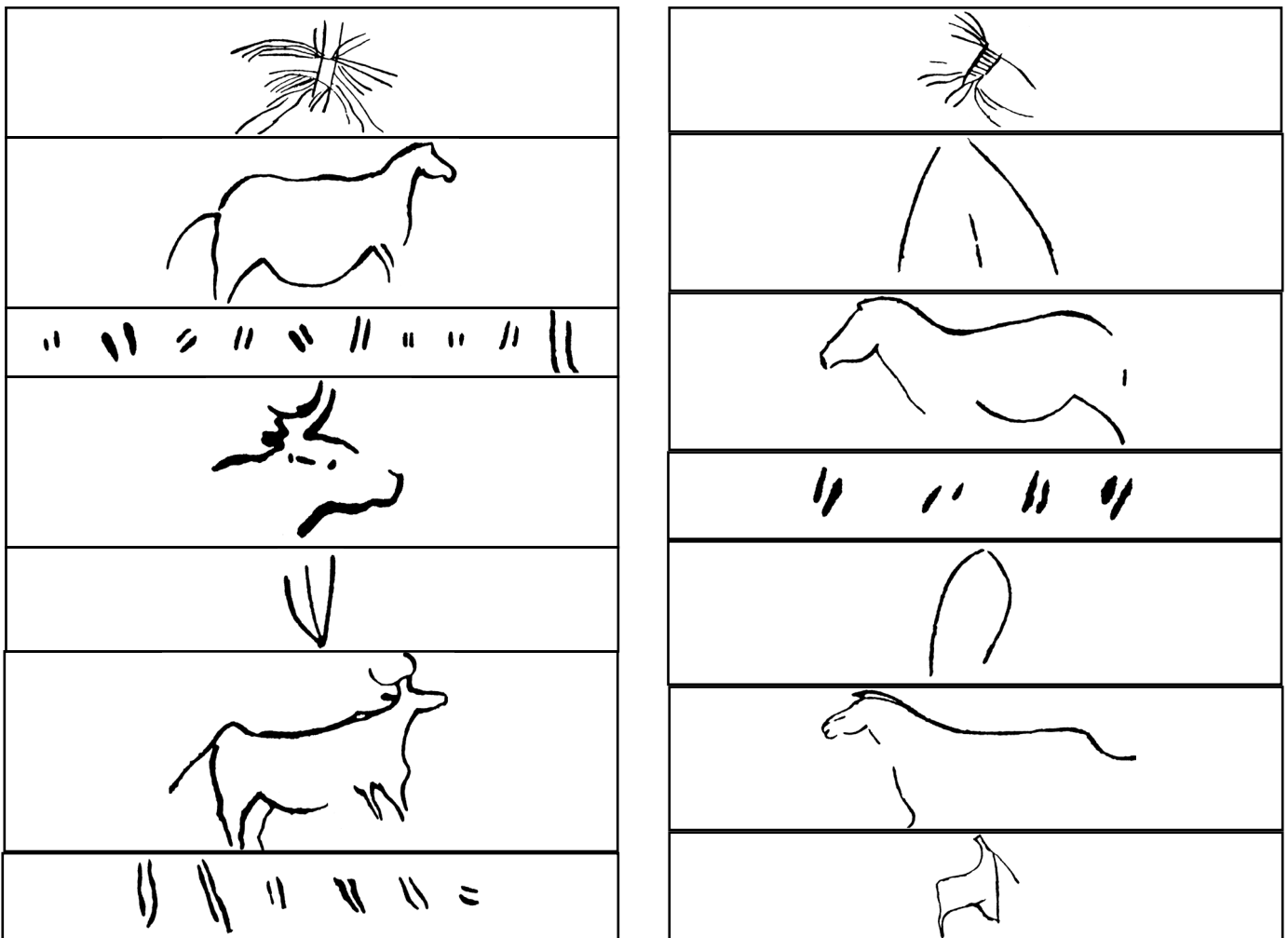


Fig. 3 A-B-C After removing of superpositions. Sector Left includes a bovine and an equine, the head of a bovine between the two and a vulvar sign. In the upper part there is a rectangle emanating lines or rays. Below, the sequence of graphemes from top right to bottom left. Sector Right: association of two horses each having different shapes, a vulvar symbol, conveyed by a “bâtonnet” male symbol. On the body of just one of those equids there are four ideograms of “lips”. On the left side, at the top, the rectangular sign is emanating lines or rays.



3 C- The Sequences of graphemes of the two grips. In the group to the right, the last figure of a schematic animal awakens doubts whether belonging or not to the graphic group.

graved surface is often the result of an accumulation of different hands.

Considering the different styles and typological tendencies, the associative syntax, the superpositions and the degree of conservation, different graphic units can be identified: they are associated graphemes made as an assemblage.

To attempt the decoding of the content, it is necessary first to identify the graphic units, the grouping of the graphemes that have been intentionally associated to each other by their makers. Each graphic unit has to be analyzed individually. This process may lead to trials and errors and repeated attempts may be necessary, but without identifying the correct graphic unit there is no possibility of decoding.

A painted wall from La Pileta cave (Malaga, southern Spain), is taken as example of the process of defining graphic units. The analysis of the painted surface allowed to identify the association of animal figures and other signs, forming two assemblages.

From the initial observation, these two graphic units have some elements in common and others different for each unit. In both, two animal figures are accompanied by symbols and other minor graphemes. In both, a rectangle emanating lines or rays is part of the composition, in both, a sign composed of two small parallel lines (named lips ideogram) is repeated several times on the body of animal figures, in both, a vulvar ideogram is part of the graphic unit.

The two dominant animal figures are an equine and a bovine in one side and in the other, two equines. What are these animals? Are they just horses or bovines or are they totemic symbols or names of groups or moieties?

The vulvar sign is a female symbol. Also, the lips ideogram is presumed to be a female symbol. Being both represented in the same unit, they are likely to indicate different types or aspects of female identity. The vulvar symbol is figured just once in each graphic unit, the lips ideograms appear in different number and are intentionally positioned on top of or related to animal bodies. How to read the graphic units?

Other queries emerge: what is the meaning and function of the rayed rectangle appearing in both units? What do the units intend to convey?

## PICTOGRAMS, IDEOGRAMS AND PSYCHOGRAMS

From the observation of the graphic units, Paleolithic art appears to comprise images and signs having different grammatical characters, they are recurrently associated in the same graphic units. Some are figures, mainly of animals, others are signs or symbols like the lips' ideogram, others again are something else, neither images nor symbols, like the rectangles emanating li-

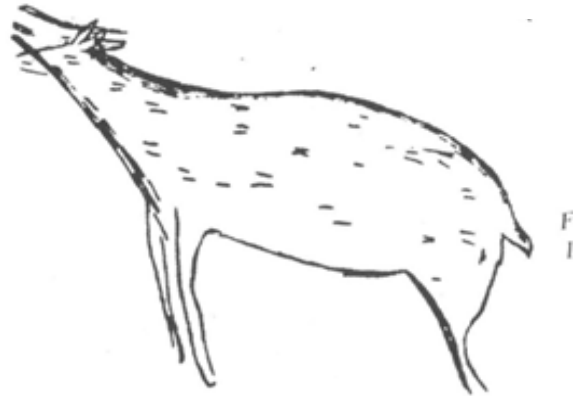


Fig. 5 A. Lips ideograms on animal pictogram. A. Engraved figure of cervine on a stone plaquette from Parpallo cave, Spain. The body of the animal is covered by the lips' ideograms. The animal is likely to represent a totemic identity to whom the ideograms are attributed or addressed. What was the function of the plaquette? (Tracing by Barandiaran, 1972, p. 335).



Fig.5 B. Fragmentary figurine in horn: an animal, likely belonging to a spear-thrower, a hunter's personal object. The three-dimensional pictogram is marked by incised ideograms. From left to right: V-shaped ideogram, five lips, line, two dots, lips on the upper leg, V on the frontal area, superimposing a series of five oblique lines. It is not clear whether all these ideograms are part of a single act of engraving or the result of different engravings. (After Anati, 2003).

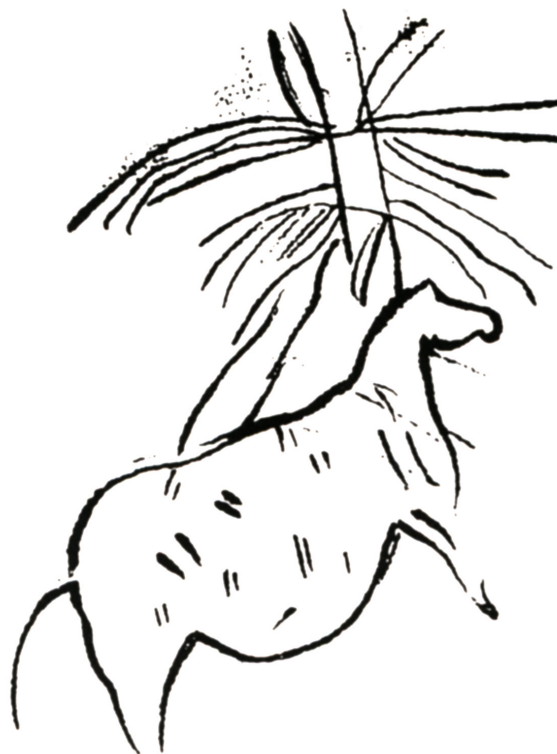
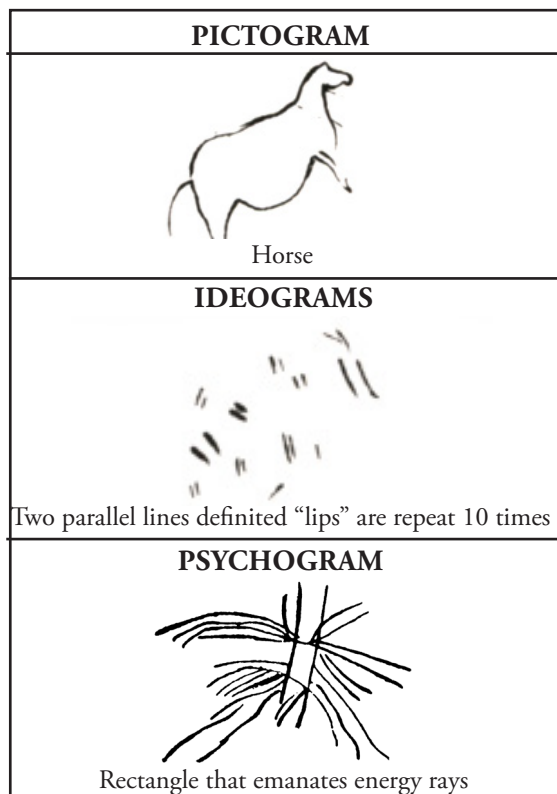


Fig. 4. La Pileta, Spain. Cave painting. The graphic unit displays the elementary components of grammar: pictograms, ideograms and a psychogram. The pictogram is a brown horse, on its body an ideogram made of two parallel lines is repeated ten times. It is defined 'lips' and a meaning of 'female' is attributed to it. These ideograms have been made by different hands and with different color tones: red, brown and black. They are accumulation of the same ideogram on the area defined by the body of the pictogram. Above the horse pictogram, a black psychogram appears: it is a rectangle radiating outward. Different colors may have different meaning. (Tracing by H. Breuil in Breuil et al., 1915).

nes, rays or energy, of the just mentioned graphic units. This pictographic-ideographic way of communication or of recording appears to have a grammatical structure made of three main kinds of graphemes.

Pictograms (and/or mythograms) are figures representing zoomorphic, anthropomorphic, structures and real or imaginary subjects. They are 'images', being subjects or objects, the reading of which may be literal or metaphorical. Ideograms are recurring symbols, like the above-mentioned lips' ideogram. They are synthetic signs, which may have male or female values or other conceptual meaning. Psychograms are neither images nor symbols. After dismissing several other hypotheses, they seem to be visual expressions of sensations and concepts, conveying exclamations or feelings, like: good! Or bad! Pleased and displeased, fear and anger, blessing, good omen and other emotional personal expressions (Anati, 2015).

The graphic unit of fig. 4 appears to have been produced with the participation of several hands, each marking a lips ideogram on top of the horse body. Could this be the registration of a ceremonial act? The psychogram could be sign of good omen or blessing, or magic power, or some other immaterial concept.

The animal body is the subject. The lips ideograms are individual marks of different hands related to the subject.

The idea that these units could be related to initiation rites de passage is a hypothesis. The possible meaning of this unit may vary if the lips ideograms were produced by the fingers of female or of male initiated. A process of actions or events is behind the image. What? What is the meaning of adding lips ideograms on top of the animal figure?

These three kinds of graphemes seem to reflect a primary human cognitive process: pictograms, ideograms and psychograms. The presence of analogous tripartite grammatical association noticed in various types of artistic creativity, visual art, dance and music, determines an elementary grammar of conceptual processes. (For a detailed analysis, see Anati, 2002a, pp. 114-141)

Both oral and written messages are usually composed of a sequence of words or ideas, and the same logic is followed by prehistoric graphic messages, composed of sequences or assemblages of pictograms and ideograms. In some cases, psychograms are contributing to convey emotional or otherwise personal reflections.

Description of facts are not always followed by expressions of feeling. Like more recent writing, graphic units have a variety of themes but each document considered so far has a subject, and describes something specific.

### IS A HORSE JUST A HORSE?

The typology of Paleolithic art awakens elementary questions. Animal figures are often represented in a naturalistic style with many details while human figures are often schematic and sketchy.

The sketchy human figure, without additional details, may just signify 'man' (or woman, a human being). If they are figured holding a stick on their shoulder, the meaning is likely to be 'traveler'. More detailed anthropomorphic figures are often a union of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic features. Again, the totemic identity or the attribute defines the individual.

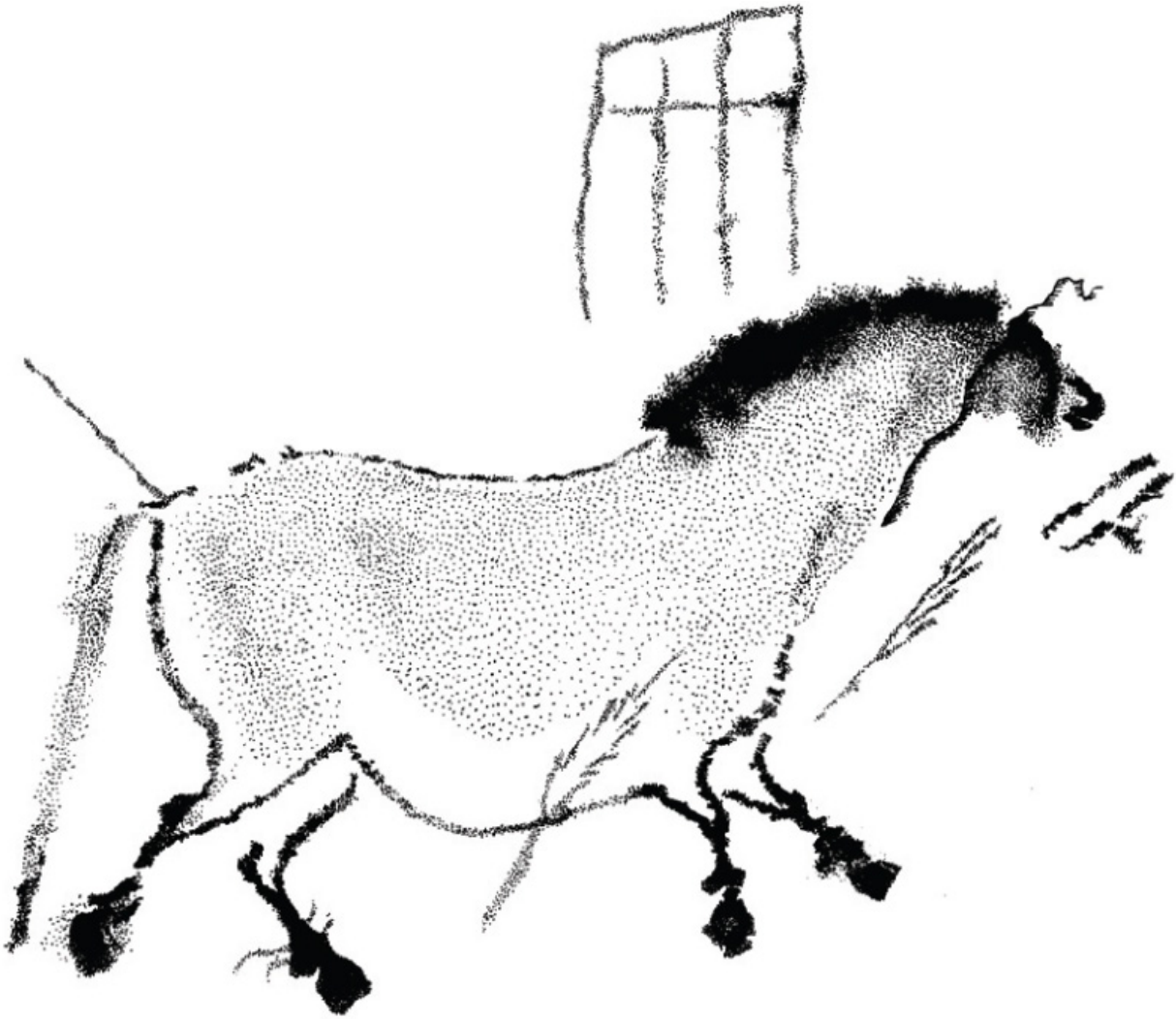
Animal figures are either represented with the entire

body, or just the head. The presence of both in the same graphic units indicates that they represent two different conceptual contents. The hypothesis that heads are sorts of coats-of-arms or totemic identities requires further verification. Both of them appear to have metaphorical meaning.

To the occidental mind a horse is a horse, the question is what is a horse for the mind that immortalized it on the wall of a cave 20,000 years ago. The matter is exemplified by two images from two different localities, one from the Lascaux cave, the other from the cave of Gabillou, in two different styles, one painted and the other engraved, showing the same association of graphemes with a difference: in one case the main subject is a well outlined human female figure, in the other is an elegantly painted horse. The accompanying ideograms and psychograms are similar, the content, is likely to be similar. What is the horse, is it just a horse?



Fig. 6. Anthro-zoomorphic figure with human body and animal head. Gabillou Cave, Dordogne, France. (After Gaussen, 1964) The being seems to communicate (a line from his mouth) to something represented as a geometric rectangular outline. Further to the right, three vertical lines could be a numeric indication. What is the meaning of the rectangle? What is this graphic unit telling us?




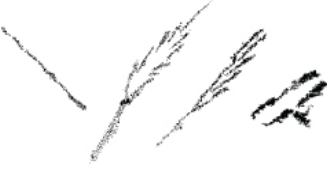

PICTOGRAM	IDEOGRAMS	PSYCHOGRAM
		

Fig.7A. Lascaux Cave, Dordogne, France. Horse painted in yellow ocher with black outline. This pictogram is accompanied by ideograms of “arbolet” (male valence) in yellow and “lips” ideogram (female valence) in black. Above the pictogram there is a reddish brown psychogram composed by a rectangle and four vertical lines or rays. What is the horse and what is the content behind this composition? (After Anati, 2000).

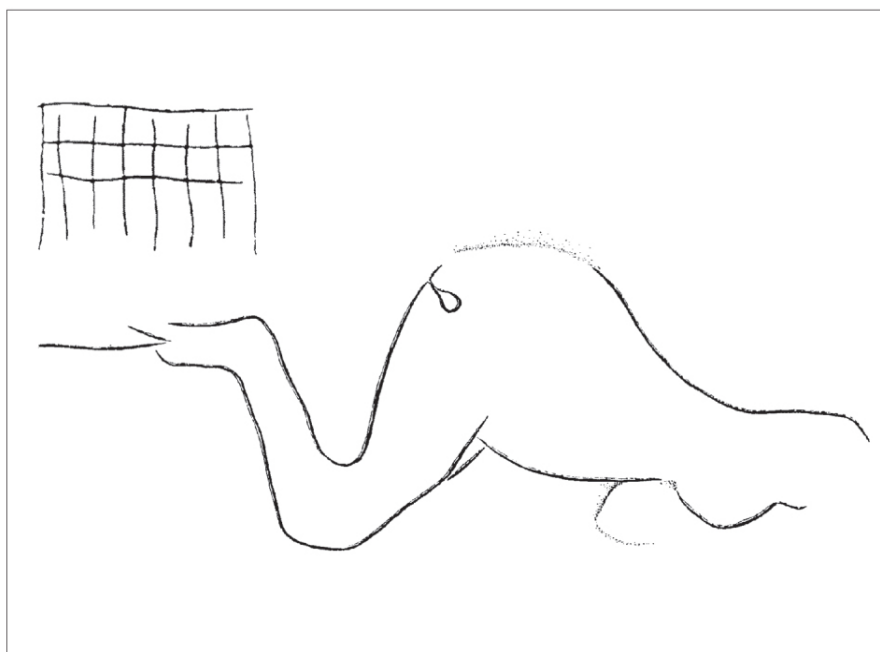


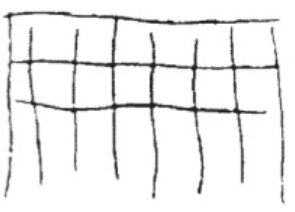


Fig. 7.B Gabillou cave, Sourzac, Dordogne, France. Engraving of a female figure with indication of the vulvar orifice (eye ideogram of female valence). An arrow ideogram (of male valence) reaches a foot of the female pictogram. Above, there is a psychogram formed by a rectangle and vertical lines or rays. Comparing this unit with that of the previous image, both may intend to convey a similar message. On one the pictogram is a woman, on the other a horse. The ideograms and the psychogram are the same. (Tracing by J. Gaussen, 1964, in Anati, 1995, p. 104).

PICTOGRAM	IDEOGRAMS	PSYCHOGRAM
		

## LOOKING FOR THE LOGIC OF PICTOGRAPHIC COMMUNICATION

The decoding of Holocene ideographic documents and post-Paleolithic art has been considered in earlier texts (Anati 1989; 2002a; 2003; 2007c). Using recent tribal art for comparative purposes has opened a window on the landscape of the elementary logical thinking expressed by pictographic communication. The images produce mental associations that vary according to the kind of taming of the mind. The reading may have been obvious 20,000 years ago. One can read it today by entering that kind of logical thinking which may not be the same as that of his ordinary thinking. A serious handicap in research is trusting that your logic is the only possible one.

The pictographic writing of American Indians documented by Garrick Mallery (1889) shows systems of transfer from the idea to the image, which have some analogies with both that of other non-literate peoples and that of early pictographic writings.

The cases presented by Mallery illustrate ways of transfer from the idea to its graphic representation among North American native societies. An example is the message sent by an elder of the Cheyenne tribe to his son.

Their names are marked over their heads. The signs that come out from the father's mouth indicate that the message comes from him. The movement represented of a figure in the direction of the other means meeting. The series of small circles over the line coming out from the mouth of the father towards his son is a numeric reference for something that goes from father to son. According to Mallery, the pictographic

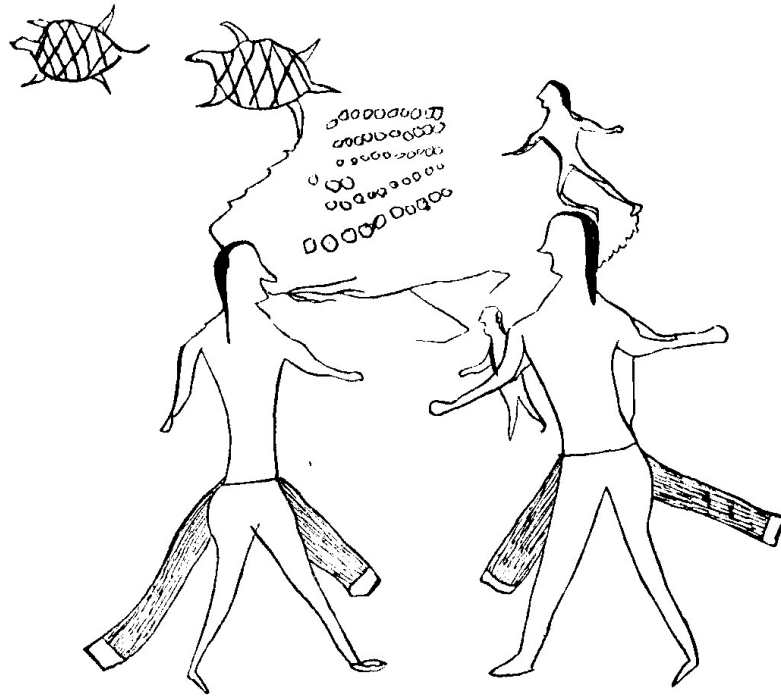


Fig. 8. A message (on paper?) sent by an old man of the Cheyenne tribe to his son. A man named 'Turtle-that-Follows-his-Wife' sends the pictographic message to his son named Little Man. How to read it? See the text for meaning.

message reads: "Old man named 'Turtle-that-Follows-his-Wife', sends to his son named 'Little-Man', 53 coins (dollars?) so that he comes to visit him." In other words, the message is "Come to visit me, I pay your travel costs."

Reading consists in the back-transfer, from the graphics to their conceptual core. Giving names to persons, territories and things is a basic element of definition, among all non-literate societies. The name or the totemic symbol of a subject is a pictogram or ideogram connected to the figure of the subject. Reading is not implicit, because every culture uses its epigraphical lexicon. However, the system has similar metaphorical features, to those that led to the birth of conventional writing in Egypt, Mesopotamia, China or Mexico.

The acquisition of a system, the definition of graphic units, the grammatical and syntactic analysis of the units and the individuation of the three grammatical categories of pictograms, ideograms and psychograms, are the premises to consider as potentially legible, documents even those not yet decoded.

Examples of European Paleolithic art of decoded, undecoded or partially decoded, are described in Anati, 2015. A few examples follow.

## A TALE OF PRAY AND PREDATOR

Several graphic units of western European Paleolithic art have two animal pictograms as dominant images, accompanied by ideograms and psychograms, likely concerning facts, myths or relations between these two figures, whatever they may represent.



Fig. 9. Gourdan, Haute Garonne, France. Engraving on bone showing an antelope and the head of a carnivore. On the body of the antelope appear the two parallel lines, the "lips" ideogram, repeated three times. Attributed to the Magdalenian period, Upper Paleolithic. (Archives Anati).

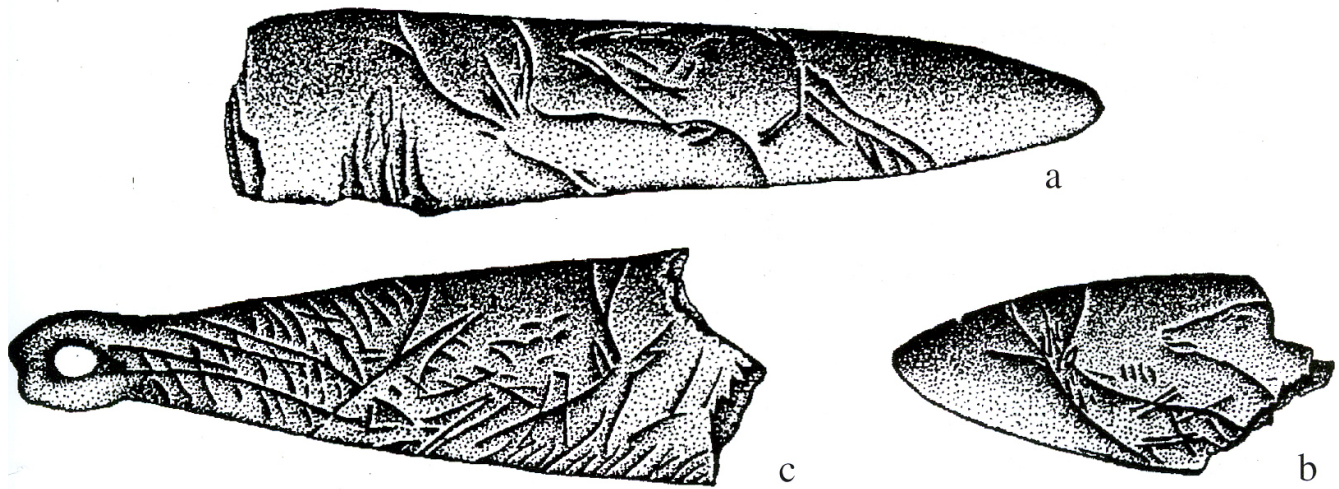


Fig. 10. Repetitive coupling of pictograms on three bone fragments from three different provinces of the Franco-Cantabrian area: a) Mas d'Azil, Ariège, France; b) Lorthet, Hautes-Pyrenees, France; c) El Pendo, Santander, Spain. Attributed to the Magdalenian period, Upper Paleolithic. All three represent the head of a carnivore next to the body of an antelope in semi profile sight. In all three the muzzle of the antelope does not appear. The antelope is marked by the ideogram of two lines, the "lips" ideogram, of female valence. (After Anati, 1989b).

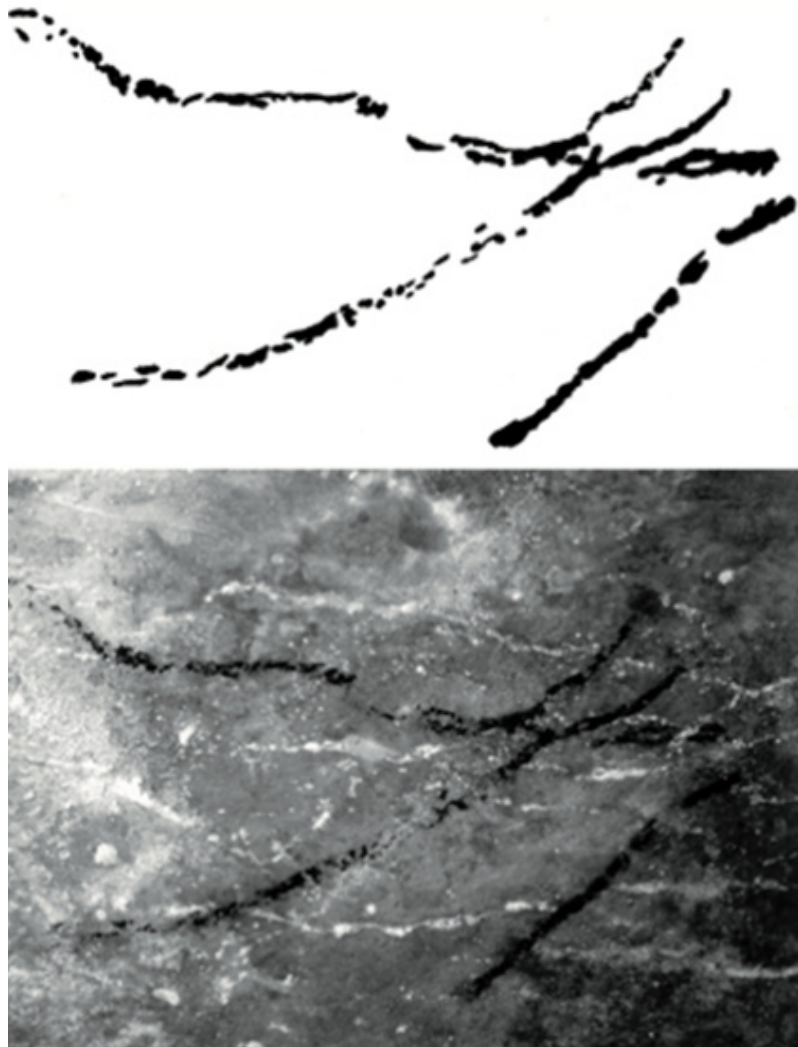


Fig. 11. Tracing and photo of wall painting of the cave of Las Chimeneas, Santander, Spain. Upper Paleolithic. The schematic drawing represents the metaphorical union of an antelope and a carnivore. (Tracing by Anati, photo EUR EA88: IX-29).



Fig. 12. Les Eyzies, Dordogne, France. A decorated bone attributed to the Magdalenian period, Upper Paleolithic (After Anati, 2015c).

A peculiar case is that of two animal figures side by side, the body of a deer or antelope and the head of a wolf or other predatory carnivorous animal, which is sometimes represented with open jaws. Several examples of this kind are recorded both on objects and in rock art in France and Spain.

The two subjects, one full animal and just the head of another animal, are the dominant pictograms, and they are associated with ideograms that vary from case to case. The repetition of this graphic unit indicates that whatever it tells, a myth, a didactic story or else, must have been popular 20,000 years ago in an area on both sides of the Pyrenees range, spanning over 500 km. Ideas and traditions were widespread: a testimony of the range of communication.

A full decoding, that is a reading of the content, would require first to define the meaning of an animal represented by the entire body and that of an animal represented by just its head. Another necessary knowledge would be that of the meaning of the accompanying ideograms.

Following a frequent Paleolithic recurrence, the two animals are likely to be metaphors, of male and female. The tale seems to highlight side by side two animals which traditionally are prey and predator, the one being the food of the other. What does the story intend to convey? A hypothesis has been that of a moralistic tale: despite their different nature, males and females succeed in living side by side. If indeed pray and predator refer to male and female in human society, it may reveal a concept of the social structure and a vision of relations between genders in their social setting.

The allegories of prey and predator may also have dif-

ferent intents. But, if that be the case, why the pray is represented with the full body and the predator with just its head?

### A STORY OF MIGRATION

A popular theme of Paleolithic iconography is travel and/or migration. It is presumed that such graphic units memorize events or myths belonging to the oral tradition, part of the initiation rites de passage and narrated by story-telling, as still occurs in tribal societies.

Stories of migrations, myths of origins, of exodus were probably part of traditional accounts millennia before the compilation of the Old Testament. Several such graphic units referring to travels or migrations have been recorded (Anati, 2015; 2020). Here one of them is described.

The couple of the double fire ideogram in two different positions, should have two different connotations. What is represented behind the travelling group is likely to indicate the place of departure of the travelers. Those represented above their heads are likely to indicate their name. The message comes to read: 'People of Land of Fires, coming from the Land of Fires, go to the Bison-land'.

Can we identify the itinerary described by this document? Tentatively, but with much probability, the land of the bison is where the document was found, their place of arrival, the Dordogne where, indeed, the figure of the bison is dominant in Paleolithic art: this is likely to be the land of the Bison.

The land of Fires, may well be the land that has had this name as far back as memory can go: Azerbaijan, where the surfacing of petroleum, bitumen, and mi-

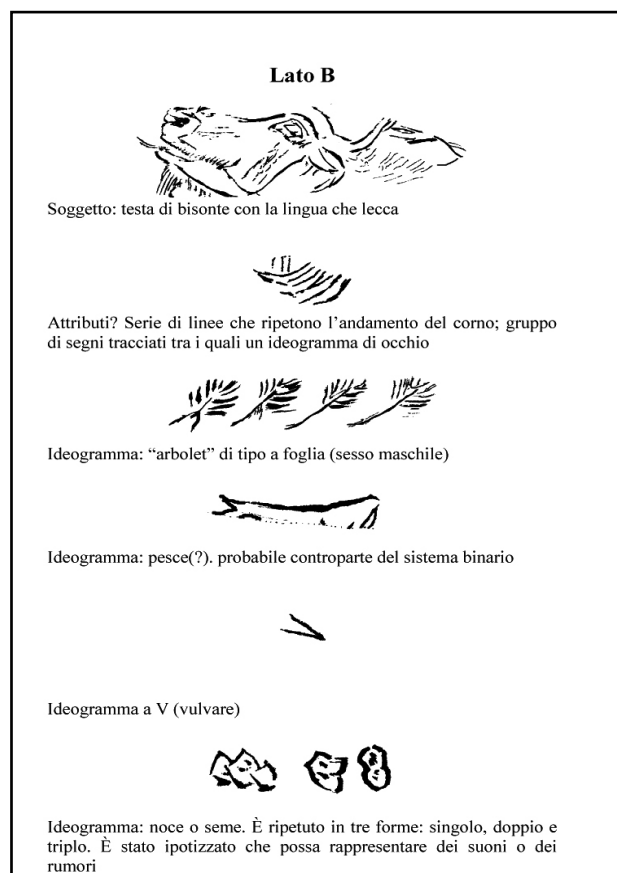
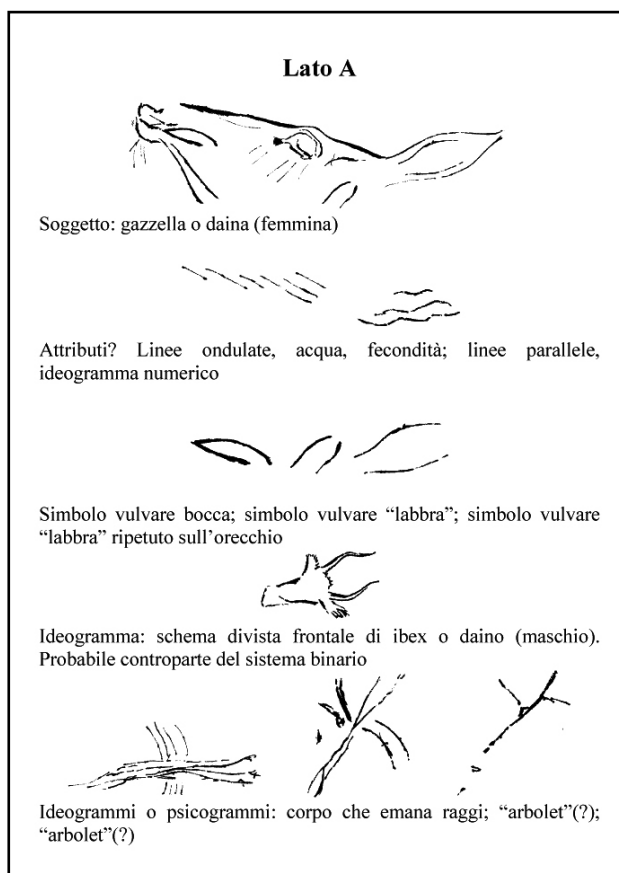
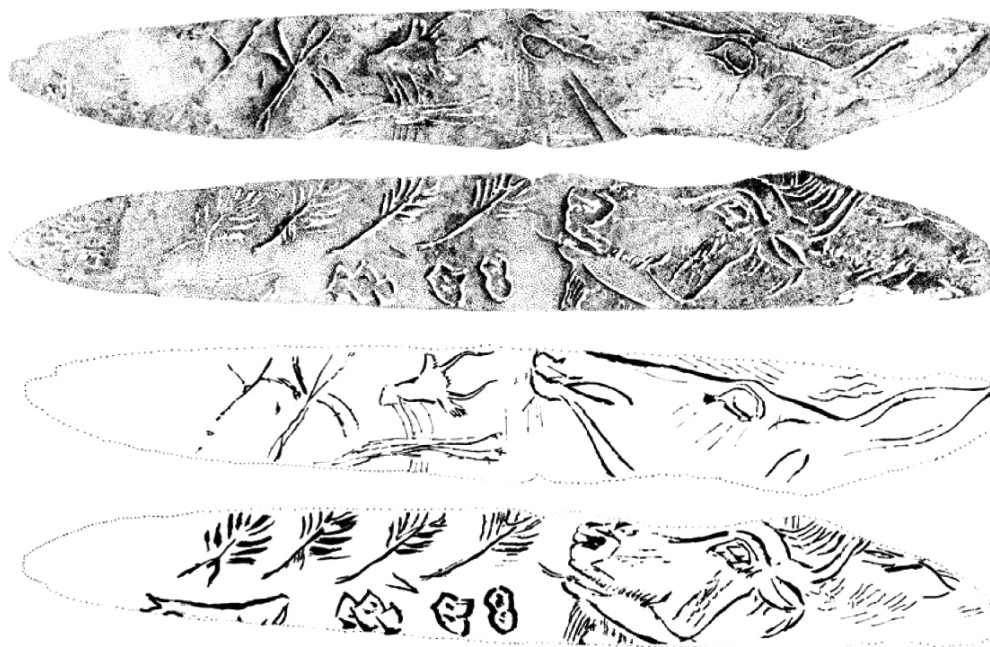


Fig. 13. La Vache, Ariège, France. Tracing and schematic drawing of the two sides of a bone well shaped implement, Upper Paleolithic, Magdalenian. Each side shows a subject, the head of an animal, accompanied by a sequence of symbols. (Archives Anati).

neral gas emanations from the soil, still produce the renowned fire choreography that generated its traditional name. “Eight people of the Land of Fires, coming from the Land of Fires, are traveling to the Land of the Bison”.

If the decoding is correct, it is a unique document about the peopling of western Europe, produced by the direct protagonists: a Paleolithic group coming from the Land of Fires, Azerbaijan, the eastern gate of Europe, migrated to the Franco-Cantabrian region. It appears to be an exceptional historical document of a migration of people coming from the east and reaching western Europe. And it tells us the names these two territories had 20,000 years ago: Dordogne, the Land of the Bison; Azerbaijan, the Land of Fires.

### TRADING IN PALEOLITHIC TIMES

A bone object from the La Vache cave in Ariège, France, assigned to the Magdalenian period, has sequences of signs engraved on both sides. On each side the main subject is an animal head (pictogram), of a gazel-

le on one side and of a bison on the other. According to the orientation of the animal figures, the reading of the sequences of the ideograms goes from right to left. We may guess the meaning of some of these ideograms. Certain of them represent vegetal goods, others carnivorous goods, most of them are likely to concern food. The two identities appear to be the protagonists of an exchange of goods, defined by this document. Comparative analyses seem to indicate that almost every item represented, besides its meaning, has also a gender value, either male or female. It is an expression of the binary concept of reality discussed elsewhere\*. Even without going into a detailed deciphering the specific meaning of each ideogram, the bone appears to describe a transaction, an exchange of items, between Gazelle (person, clan or totem) and Bison (person, clan or totem). Ideograms indicate the goods and their quantities.

\*Anati, 2020a: The Origins of Religion. A study in Conceptual Anthropology. See the sub-chapter on ‘The concept of Binary Elements’, pp.171-173).

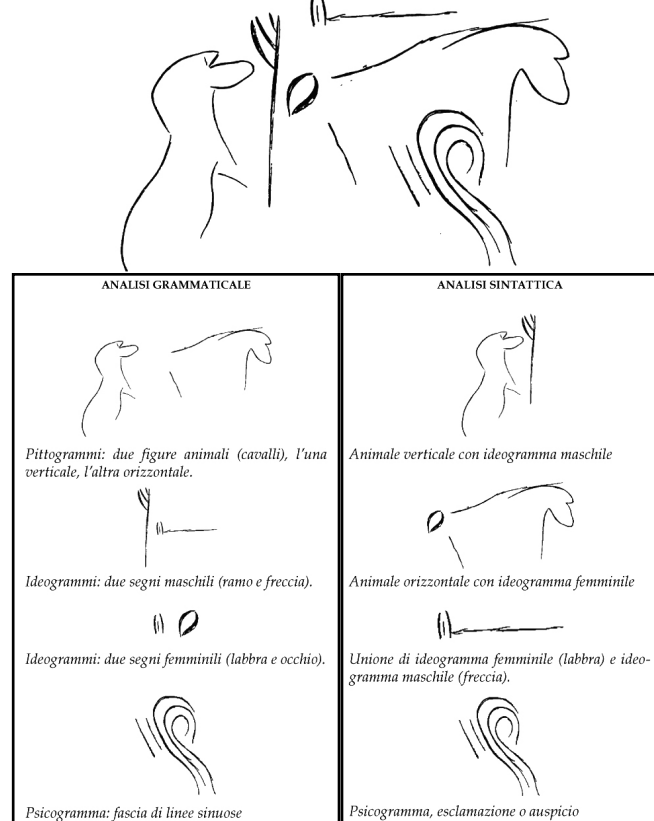


Fig. 14. The engraving in the cave of Altamira, Spain, shows two horses, some ideograms and one psychogram. The dart or spear usually has a male value, like the arbolet ideogram. Vulva and lips ideograms have a female value. A vertical horse is accompanied by a male ideogram, a horizontal horse by a female ideogram. On top of them appears the dart ideogram (male) reaching the lips (female) ideogram. Below the composition a psychogram appears as a sort of exclamation. The document may read: ‘Mr. Vertical Horse met Ms. Horizontal Horse: sexual union, ohh!’ It may simply tell a love story of 20,000 years ago (tracing by Breuil, 1912).

From this small piece of bone, we learn that this kind of trade existed already 20,000 years ago and that a 'written' document formalized the deal. It is surprising to see how similar this document is to analogous trading documents over 15,000 years later, from the Near-eastern beginning of formal writing.

### A 20.000 YEARS OLD LOVE STORY AT ALTAMIRA

Different authors, starting with the Abbé Breuil (1912), have described and reproduced a small engraved graphic unit from the cave of Altamira in Spain. It includes two horses, some ideograms and a psychogram.

A vertical horse is associated with a male ideogram (arbolet) and a horizontal horse with a female ideogram (oval sign). On top of the graphic unit an arrow ideogram (male) joins the lips ideogram (female). The psychogram appears as an exclamation, likely of pleasure or satisfaction or else.

The graphic unit can be read as "Mr. Vertical Horse meets Ms. Horizontal Horse, sexual relations, ohh!" The engraving seems to immortalize a love story. The psychogram conveys feelings or emotions. An ancient custom of immortalizing couple relations seem to be the precursor of persisting hearts crossed by an arrow incised on walls or trees, accompanied by the initials of names.

A puzzling question arises. Who was the maker of this little engraving in a hidden corner of the cave? Could have been the he or the she directly concerned? How will the engravings made today of a heart crossed by an arrow and the initials of two names be interpreted in 20,000 years' time?

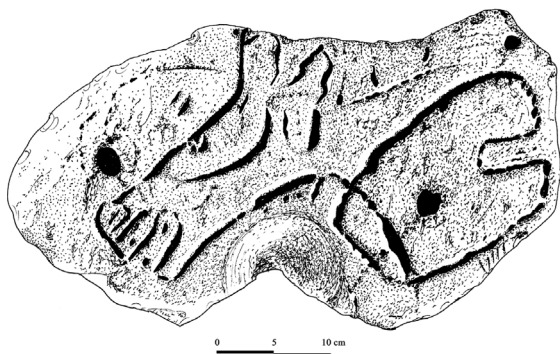


Fig. 15A Abri Cellier, Le Mouster, Dordogne, France (Block 2). Association of animal (horse) with vulvar symbol. (After Anati, 2007b).

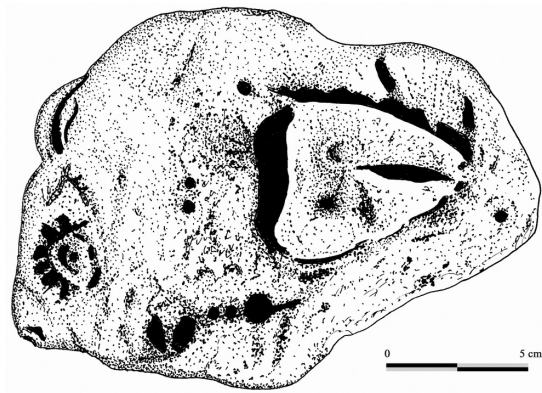


Fig. 15 B . La Ferrassie, Dordogne, France. A stone block reshaped to evoke the body of a bison, is completed with the engravings of the horns and of an eye (left). On the surface were added two vulva ideograms, some cupules, the ideogram cupule-and-bâtonnet, and a sequence of 8 dots, likely to have a numeric value. The surface has signs of scrapings to eliminate previous engravings that left some traces. The same surface was reused more than once. (After Anati, 2007b).

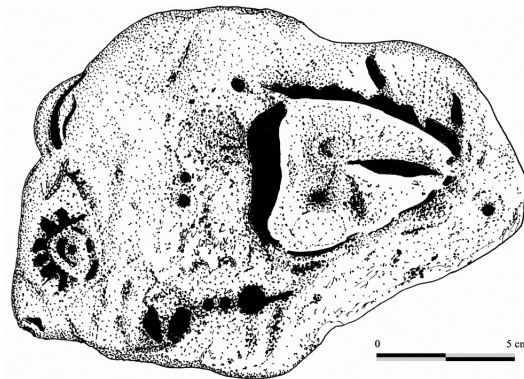


Fig. 15C. Abri Cellier, Le Mouster, Dordogne, France (Block 3). Figures of three vulva ideograms on a stone block shaped to represent an animal form. The muzzle of the animal appears on the right. (After Anati, 2007b).

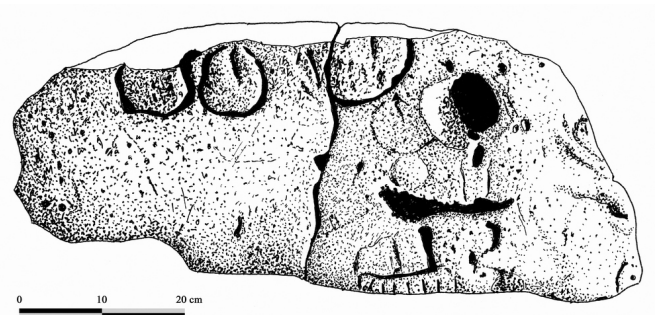


Fig. 15D. La Ferrassie, Dordogne, France (Block 8). Vulvar figure on a stone block having animal shape. The muzzle and the horn of bison (?) appear on the left. (After Anati, 2007b).

## PALEOLITHIC ACTS OF MARRIAGE OR TRADING OF WOMEN?

Twenty rock blocks with peculiar engravings were found in various sites within a diameter of about 25 km in the area of La Ferrassie, Dordogne, France. They are much older of the previous examples, dating back to the beginnings of the Upper Paleolithic, likely about 40,000 years ago. They show repetitive associations of vulva signs and animal figures (Anati 2007b). The constancy of this association in 20 cases, represent vulvas (varying one to four in the different units) associated to the animal image, name or totem of the individual or clan, are synthetic documents recording and memorizing something, agreements or events.

The pictography is schematic: 'horse (horse's clan or Mr. Horse) four vulvae (four women)'. The reading may be: Mr Horse receives (or gives, or has) four women. Again, they are similar to trading documents from the beginning of formal writing. The main difference is that the Near-eastern documents are concerned with wheat or other food products, timber or mining goods whereas in these documents of La Ferrassie group the exchange goods are vulvas: women. And they are thousands of years older. The registration and memorization systems are the same. Here the semiographic writing anticipates the age of phonetic writing.

It is worth noting that the ideogram for woman is neither the face nor the profile of the body, just the sexual organ, an explicit indication of the attributed function. These documents have been defined as 'the most ancient contracts of marriage' (Anati 2008b). Whether indeed they are contracts of marriages or agreements on trading of women, remains an open question. In any case it seems doubtful that the involved women were asked their opinion and their wishes. Like every other document, new glimpses emerge on the way of life and conceptual background of their makers.

## THE ORIGIN OF WRITING AND ITS OVERLOOK

This paper, which is summarizing a more detailed study (Anati, 2015) takes us on a brief tour to the daily activities and concerns of Paleolithic men and women. Images like the Laussel high-relief may well have reli-

gious motivations, to confirm, they should first be decoded. But Paleolithic art is not just an expression of worship, or of hunting magic, or of calendars, and is not just an art for art sake. It embraces an entire world of everyday life, like modern literature.

We learn that Mr. Vertical Horse and Ms. Horizontal Horse had an agreeable joint experience, that a deal on food exchange was carried on between two persons or groups identified by their totemic icons, that some clans had agreements for exchanges of women, that storytellers used to tell about myths or memories of migrations. This pictographic literature provides a new insight into what was considered to be a prehistoric age.

The few examples of graphic units presented in this paper reveal a world of anecdotes, of shared events, deals, legends, myths, and beliefs, a rich literature, tens of thousands of years before the introduction of phonetic writing. Does the beginning of writing go back 5,000 or 40.000 years?

These tales reveal a vivid image of daily life and provide a new look into the roots of the human behavioral patterns. If we can read 40,000 years old messages, is prehistory becoming history? Is the history of humankind becoming ten times longer than before?

We have no knowledge of long narrative sequences, but each document is a narrative, it is writing with sequences of pictograms and ideograms and can transmit facts, stories and feelings.

The decoding of prehistoric art is revealing the ability of peoples from the Paleolithic to communicate information, events, and also feelings and evaluations, through a logical pictographic-ideographic system. The grammatical and syntactic structure of these messages have the same conceptual bases adopted by conventional writing of the last 5,000 years. The concept of writing, of graphic memorization methods permitting communication, was present ages earlier.

The decoding of prehistoric art, besides providing information on the mood, the concerns and the daily life of its time, produces new chapters of human history. Further, it offers new perspectives for semiotics, psychology, linguistics, conceptual anthropology and above all for the understanding of constants of the cognitive system.

Was visual art born as writing? We assume that it was a system of communication, memorization and infor-

mation, well before becoming a conscious aesthetic expression. Did writing produce art and not vice-versa, as sometimes advocated?

Visual art was legible in every language, a utopic graphic communication system. If writing with these features could be developed in broader terms, the entire humankind could communicate without any need for translations.

The limited range of the Paleolithic messages appears to indicate a handicap for the development of a fluent universal semiographic writing readable in any language: could human intelligence overcome the challenge? A universal writing legible in any and every language? Could progress in research turn utopia into a reality? Meanwhile, going back to the more modest targets of the present research, the decoding of Paleolithic writing is progressing.

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# NEW PERSPECTIVES ON ROCK ART IN NORTH ALBANIA

## (PICTOGRAMS AND PETROGLYPHS OF RUBIK'S CAVE)

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### INTRODUCTION

Located in the north-western region of Albania, encompassing an area of 140.5 km<sup>2</sup>, Rubik is a small town situated within the Municipality of Lezha in the Region of Mirdita. Renowned for its abundant mineral resources, Rubik stands as one of the premier mining locales not only within Albania but also across Europe, as its mineral deposits, including rare elements such as copper, silver, and gold, primarily lie close to the surface.

The history of Rubik's mineral wealth traces back to the early 20th century when prospectors first identified its promising resources. By the 1930s, groundwork had been laid for establishing mining operations aimed at extracting and processing these valuable minerals, starting with copper and silver and later expanding to include gold.

In addition to its mineral wealth, the Region of Mirdita is gaining recognition for its burgeoning archaeological significance, particularly evident in the recent discoveries of prehistoric sites and artifacts within its borders. Just 3.5 kilometers west of Rubik, on the outskirts of the village of Bulshiz i Sipërm, lies the Gry-

ka e Gjodhezhës (Gjodhezha Gorge), an area rich in prehistoric remnants. Adjacent to Rubik White Rock stands the historic Castle of Xhodhjeve, while beneath the Gjodhezha Gorge lies Rubik Cave, home to prehistoric pictograms and petroglyphs.

**Historical Context:** The abundance of copper reserves on the surface of Mirdita's land, along with the evident execution techniques seen in the pictograms and petroglyphs of Rubik's Cave, suggests that this mineral wealth has been a draw for human groups not only throughout recorded history but also during the prehistoric Eneolithic or Chalcolithic periods. These groups, by creating pictograms and petroglyphs, have left tangible evidence of their activities in this region. According to oral tradition, a significant aspect of the intangible heritage of this area involves events from millennia past. In what is now the territory of Rubik, tales recount how the reddish dust, emanating from copper ore, wreaked havoc on the lives of inhabitants, decimating livestock and ravaging crops. Legend has it that the deity Robigo (Woodard, 2006) intervened, saving the populace from this "red poison." Even today, each spring, residents commemorate this event

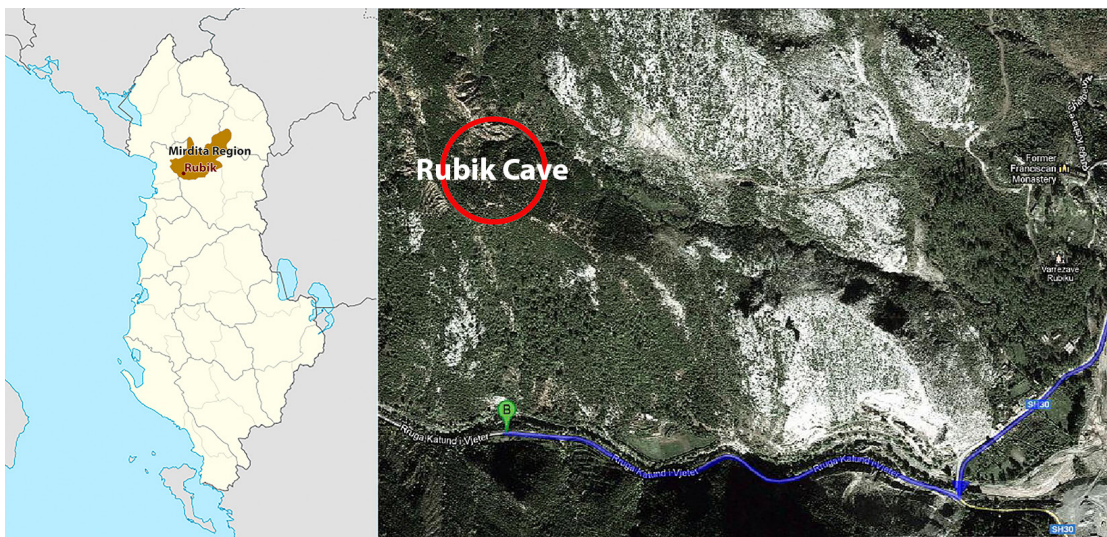


Fig. 1: Coordinates: 41°46' 28" North 19°40'10" East



Fig. 2: Rubik Cave in Gjodhezha Gorge (Photo: Shpend Bengu)

by sacrificing an animal and sharing red wine among themselves in honor of the Robigo Deity. According to lore, it was this ancient pagan god that bestowed the name Rubik upon the place. Professor Shuteriqi research deliberately refers to this locale as Rubig, rather than its current designation Rubik. (Shuteriqi., 1979)

### EXPLORING RUBIK ROCK ART

Professor Mark Tirta is credited with the initial documentation of Rubik's Cave, having first mentioned its existence to Franciscan priest Father Shtjefën Gjeçovi at the onset of the 20th century. This information was conveyed in Tirta's writings on Rubik's Church, situated in proximity to the cave. The first comprehensive scholarly examination of Rubik's Rock Art was conducted by Professor Dhimitër S. Shuteriqi, who characterized the pictograms and petroglyphs as primitive images distinguished by their consistent use of white pigments. Despite this, he dated their creation to the Middle Ages. Subsequent investigations by Professor Myzafer Korkuti yielded a more intricate understanding of the pictorial elements and rock carvings.



### INTERPRETATION AND SIGNIFICANCE

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, various interpretations of Rock Art origins emerged, encompassing themes such as magic, shamanism, religion, materialism, feminism, and even connections to ufology and artificial intelligence. This trend became prominent in the scholarly discourse of the 20th and early 21st centuries, significantly impacting research across multiple scientific disciplines. However, despite extensive exploration, a definitive consensus on the interpretation of prehistoric pictograms and petroglyphs remains elusive, leaving room for diverse interpretations.

The challenge of decoding the meaning of pictographic images, unique to Rock Art, remains a focal point of investigation. Unlike written languages that have undergone decoding processes, deciphering Rock Art poses a distinctive challenge. Moreover, the preservation of Rock Art faces threats from natural elements, industrialization, urban expansion, and vandalism, including the unfortunate neglect that leads to its degradation.

In the case of Rubik Cave Rock Art, significant dam-



Fig. 3: In recent years in the Mirdita region, several sites with Rock Art, have been discovered by explorers, such as in Blinisht, Konaj, Kthellë, Mërkurth, Xhuxhë, etc." (Vlashi, 2022).

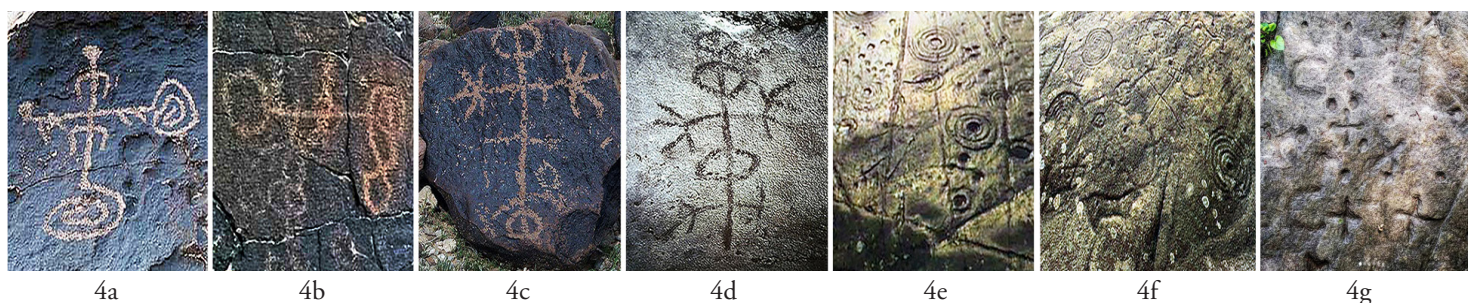


Fig. 4: The similarity of the petroglyphs at certain archaeological sites around the world to those found in Rubik Cave; Fig. 4.a: Southern Utah (Scott, 2020); Fig. 4.b: Lake County, Oregon (Adair, 2019); Fig. 4.c: Near Ajo, Arizona (Grimsley, 2018); Fig. 4.d: Middle Ogooue Valley Congo. (Lanfranchi, 1994); Fig. 4.e: Achnabreck Mid Argyll; Fig. 4.f: Chan de Lagoa Galicia. (Bradley, Rock Art and the Prehistory of Atlantic Europe, 1997); Fig. 4.g: Ticino (Ticino, 2024).

age occurred due to exposure to acid rain generated by an adjacent factory with outdated copper processing methods. The presence of valuable mineral resources, particularly copper, near Rubik's Cave suggests a hypothesis: that these symbols may have served as celestial orientation maps, guiding prehistoric metallurgists during the Eneolithic and Chalcolithic periods. This implies a fusion of art, technology, and survival strategies within these enigmatic signs.

Through interdisciplinary approaches encompassing archaeology, anthropology, astronomy, and more, ongoing research endeavors to unravel the mysteries surrounding Rock Art in general, and specifically that of Rubik Cave. By offering fresh perspectives on the origins and evolution of human civilization, this research aims to shed light on the significance of Rock Art. A comparative examination of Rubik's Cave Rock Art reveals stylistic and formal similarities with other prehistoric sites of the same era. This similarity fuels discussions on the global dissemination of Rock Art and the potential interconnections between ancient human groups.

These researchers grapple with the challenges and endeavors involved in deciphering the meanings behind prehistoric pictographs and petroglyphs, as well as

recognizing their significance in shaping our comprehension of prehistoric cultures and their connection with the natural environment—an aspect not to be underestimated. Professor Shuteriqi was the pioneer in referring to Rubik Cave as a site of “Cave Painting” (rock painting). “At the fortress of Xhodhejve, precisely on a somewhat steep side of the rock upon which the fortification stands, cave drawings are visible.” (Shuteriqi., 1979).

The similarity of the petroglyphs at certain archaeological sites around the world to those found in Rubik Cave.

When discussing Professor Shuteriqi's study of Rubik Cave, it's essential to consider the historical context of the time and the closed dictatorial regime in Albania within which Professor Shuteriqi conducted his research. We must recognize that the limited availability of information and contemporary studies during that era led him to speculate that the art within Rubik Cave might date back to the 12th to 13th centuries AD and possibly possess a magical significance. “We encounter Rock Art (Art of Rocks), primitive images created with white paint (lime?), remarkably enduring, featuring two crosses and two figures wielding a bow and arrow.” (Shuteriqi., 1979)

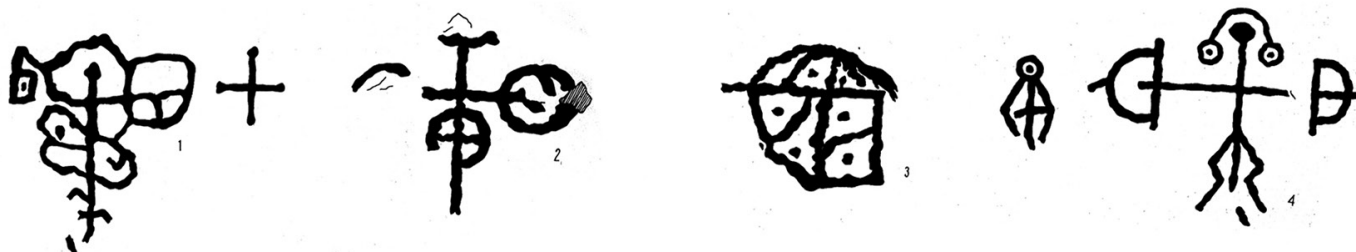


Fig. 5: Drawings of Rock Art in Rubik Cave made by Prof. Dhimitër Shuteriqi in 1979. (Shuteriqi., 1979)

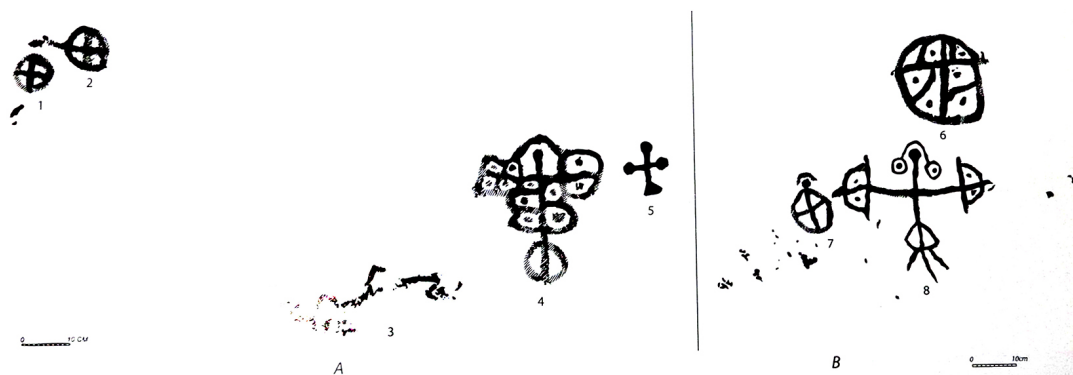


Fig. 6: Drawings of Rock Art in Rubik's Cave made by Prof. Myzafer Korkuti (Korkuti, Qytetërimi Neolitik dhe Eneolitik në Shqipëri, 2010).

Additionally, in 2007, Professor Myzafer Kortuti provided a comprehensive physical description. According to his analysis, certain aspects of the Rock Art of Rubik Cave bear resemblance to those found in the Rock Art of Lepenica Cave. Professor Kortuti suggests that the figures depicted in the Rubik paintings are created with white paint, characterized by lines approximately 2-3 cm wide, applied in a loose and irregular manner. (Korkuti, Qytetërimi Neolitik dhe Eneolitik në Shqipëri, 2010).

Prof. Korkuti, describes a detailed analysis of prehistoric rock art found in Rubik Cave. He highlights the presence of various motifs, including circles, crosses, and anthropomorphic figures, on both the left and right sides of the cave. These figures are characterized by their unique shapes, dimensions, and ornamentation, such as dots and divisions. Despite some damage to certain figures, preservation of others allows for reconstruction based on residual markings.

The study establishes a connection between Rubik's painting and that of Lepenica, attributing similarities in motif depiction. Additionally, it identifies symbolic representations of the sun cult shared with other archaeological findings, suggesting a common cultural

context. Overall, the findings position Rubik's painting within the broader framework of prehistoric art, shedding light on ancient symbolic practices. (Korkuti, Qytetërimi Neolitik dhe Eneolitik në Shqipëri, 2010).

Recent archaeological discoveries, particularly in the Mirdita Region, have provided valuable insights into ancient cultures. These discoveries, alongside the emergence of new interpretive frameworks, offer fresh perspectives on various archaeological sites. Among them, the Rock Art of Rubik Cave, Lepenica Cave, Xhuxha Stone, the Bovilla Canyon, the Cave of Crosses in Vuthaj, the pictograms of Malica, and the petroglyphs of Reçi or Xibri stand out. These sites can now be reinterpreted not only in terms of their significance but also concerning their dating and the techniques used in their creation. The Rock Art found at these sites is believed to originate from the early Eneolithic and Chalcolithic periods, extending to the late Bronze Age.

These findings are indicative of a time when human groups were nomadic, lacking permanent settlements, and instead relied on natural shelters such as caves, which they often adorned with animal skins or local

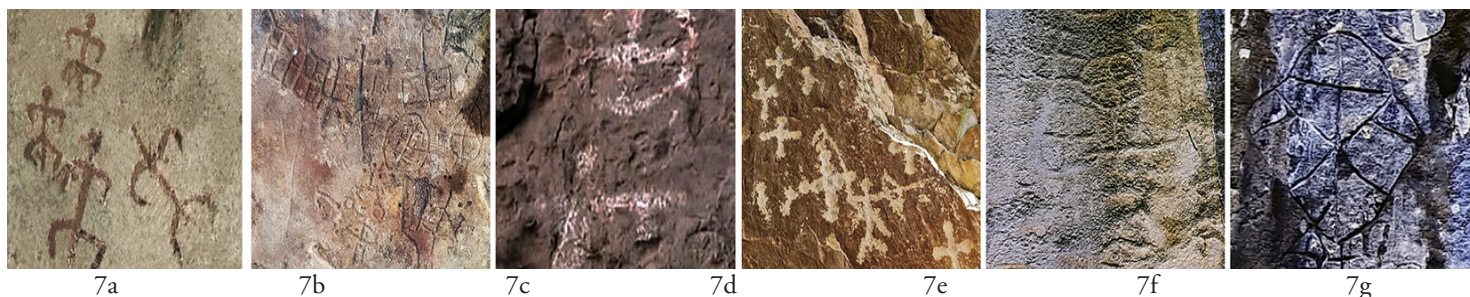


Fig. 7a: Pictograms of Lepenica Cave; Fig. 7b: Petroglyphs of Xhuxha Stone; Fig. 7c: Pictograms of Bovilla Canyon (Photo: Shpend Bengu); Fig. 7d: Petroglyphs of Vuthaj Crosses Cave (Gabriel Grabanica, 2023); Fig. 7e: Petroglyphs of Xibri; Fig. 7g: Petroglyphs of Reçi. (Korkuti, 2008).

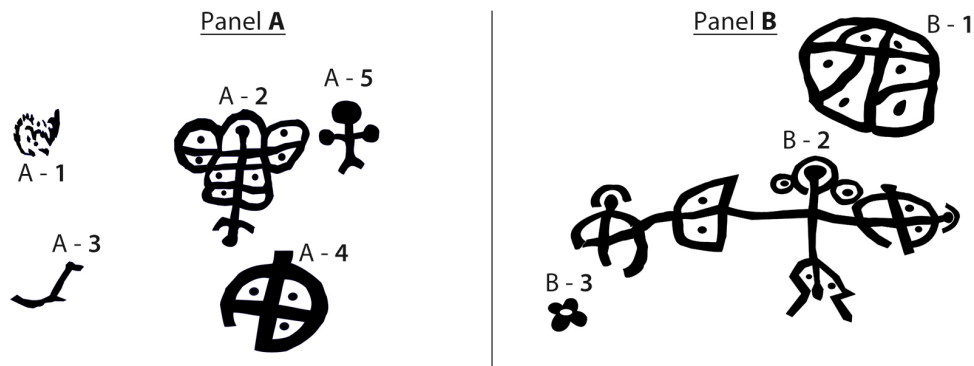


Figure 8: Drawings of Rock Art in Rubik Cave made by Dr. Shpend Bengu. 2013

vegetation during their journeys in search of essential resources for survival.

In the 21st century, the challenge of accurately interpreting the time and context of prehistoric pictograms and petroglyphs persists. While many European scholars confine their analysis to the Copper Age (also known as the Eneolithic or Chalcolithic period) within European borders, often linking these artifacts to the construction of megalithic temples, a broader perspective reveals a more nuanced reality. Examination beyond European boundaries and temporal constraints suggests that these pictograms and petroglyphs were created in an earlier era, exhibiting a nearly uniform global context rather than a strictly local one.

It becomes evident that during the Copper Age, human development surged to new heights. Enhanced fire management facilitated improved food consumption, while the advent of metallurgy revolutionized daily life with the processing and utilization of metals. Symbolically, prehistoric pictographs and petroglyphs

from this period denote a more sophisticated and evolved stage of human civilization.

If we consider the possibility that prehistoric individuals intended to convey messages across generations, we must recognize that their efforts transcend mere burial sites, such as megalithic temples. Instead, they signify something more profound, notably the significance of metal in crafting weapons and essential everyday items crucial for safeguarding and enhancing their livelihoods.

These insights prompt us to reconsider prehistoric humanity's motivations. Despite disparities in beliefs concerning life and death between prehistoric times and modernity, a common thread emerges: an enduring pursuit of survival over existential contemplations. (Bednarik, 2011).

This thesis is reinforced by the presence of hydraulic contexts, as well as the art of cup marks (cup marks) that are found along the road or near caves with Rock Art almost all over the globe. The art of cup marks

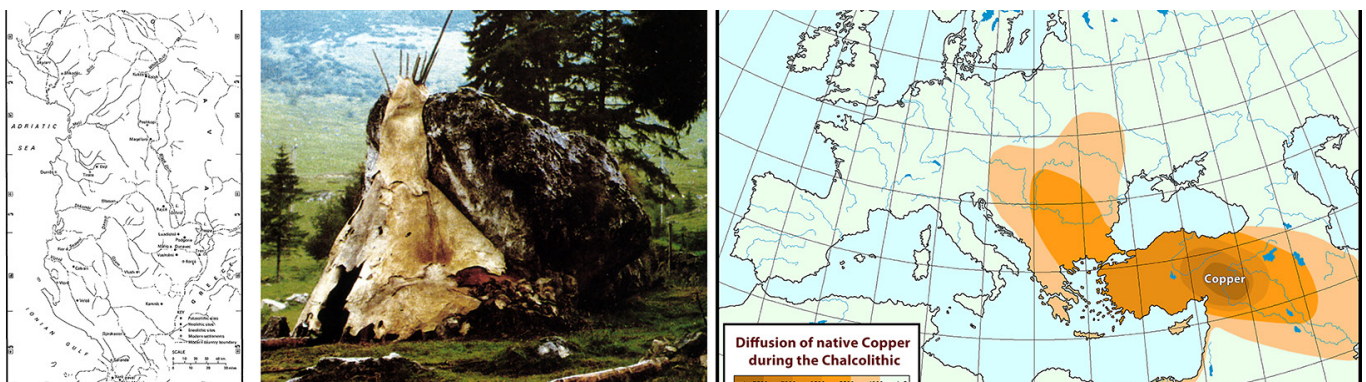


Fig. 9: Map of Paleolithic, Neolithic, and Eneolithic sites in Albania where two of the most important prehistoric sites are missing, that of Lepenica and that of Rubik. (Prendi, 1982).

Fig. 10: Ferrara di Monte Baldo (Verona). The Mesolithic hut was reconstructed during an educational experience of the Archeology and Territory cooperative. (ARCHEO, 1986 ).

Fig. 11: Map of the Diffusion of native Copper during the Chalcolithic (Otte, 2007).



Figure 12: Cave Art composition of Lepenica Cave (Bengu, 2005).

Photo: Shpend Bengu

(cup marks) as well as water sources served as a source of survival and water supply as well as food, since the animals that could be used for food during the migrations of groups of prehistoric hunters and metallurgists, etc., could be found more easily near these sources at different times of the year.

The presence of a water source is 100 meters away from Rubik Cave, and about 2 km away from the Rubik river, as well as a distance of about 1,000 meters from the water source from Lepenica Cave, as well as a distance of 3 kilometers from the Shushica river reinforces the hypothesis of this article.

This finding leads us to think that the symbols of pictograms and petroglyphs in Rock Art may have also served as maps and astronomical calendars that present the position in the sky of the Sun and Moon, planets and stars through which prehistoric human groups were oriented not only during journeys over relatively long distances in search of vital elements but also in their different activities for survival, including magical and shamanic ceremonies of worshiping pagan gods. The frequent presence of some stones in the form of simple parallelepipeds in the shape of an altar, makes us think that these sites may have been used as primitive altars for performing sacrifices during various ceremonies.

#### TECHNIQUES OF EXECUTION AND TIME OF CONSTRUCTION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES OF ROCK ART

##### PICTOGRAMS OF LEPENICA CAVE

The pictograms found in Lepenica Cave exhibit intriguing parallels with those of Rubik Cave, as noted by scholars investigating Rock Art in Albania. While stylistic similarities may exist, the execution techniques starkly differ, thereby influencing not only the function of these archaeological sites but also the

intentions of the human groups utilizing them. Lepenica Cave features pictographs created through the application of red ink, likely derived from abundant ochre minerals or animal blood, although scientific analysis is pending. Notably, the painting technique in Lepenica Cave remains distinct, without overlaps with other methods.

This suggests that despite prolonged use by pastoral communities, such as contemporary livestock farmers, the composition of these pictographs occurred in a singular event. Despite enduring utilization by such groups, who continue to exploit the cave's resources today, the surface's composition remains indicative of a one-time execution.

##### PICTOGRAMS AND PETROGLYPHS OF RUBIK CAVE

Pictograms and petroglyphs found within Rubik Cave reveal intriguing insights. Contrasting the Rubik's Stone pictograms with the Lepenica Stone technique suggests a marked evolution in execution. The former, potentially belonging to the Eneolithic and Chalcolithic periods, showcases a more refined craftsmanship, possibly coinciding with the emergence of metal tools alongside or replacing their stone counterparts. The complexity of Rubik's petroglyphs is further underscored by the presence of complementary symbols, hinting at multiple phases of creation. Technical stratifications observed, depicting a transition from pictographic techniques to petroglyphs, prompt speculation about Rubik Cave's multifaceted role during prehistoric times.

Beyond serving as a repository of mineral-related information, Rubik Cave likely functioned as a sanctuary and shelter, offering protection to its inhabitants amidst the challenges of the prehistoric era.

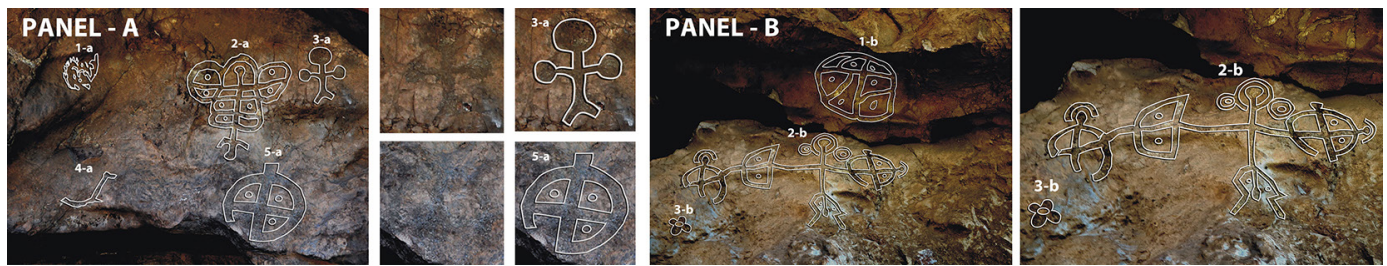


Fig. 13: Cave Art composition of Rubik Cave.

Photo: Shpend Bengu

### First Phase

In the initial phase, realism is evident in the pictographic technique, characterized by the use of blue-tinted paint, likely containing copper oxide. This technique was employed to depict “abstract” pictograms such as the circle with a cross and dots (Panel A, fig. 5-a), a symbol widely recognized as the celestial wheel, prevalent from the Eneolithic and Chalcolithic periods to contemporary times.

### Second Phase

Subsequently, petroglyphs were created within the same context, notably in Rubik’s Cave, where previous studies have interpreted the symbols as anthropomorphic. The execution technique of the petroglyphs in this second phase is believed to have involved carving the rock surface initially, followed by filling these carvings with an incastro with materials, akin to a collage technique. This filling material likely resulted in a light alto relief, imparting a sense of high relief to the image.

Regarding the fill materials, while comprehensive analyses have not yet been conducted, it is conjectured that an amalgam was used, incorporating animal fat to create the desired relief effect. This amalgam may have been mixed with minute quantities of locally sourced mineral dust, primarily copper ore, given its prevalence in the area. Further examination suggests the potential inclusion of gold dust or a similar metal

in trace amounts, particularly considering the abundance of gold ore in the region.

One intriguing aspect prompting speculation about the long-term utilization of this archaeological site is the transition from pictograms to petroglyphs in symbol execution. This shift indicates the initial discovery of copper ore, followed by the discovery of gold and other minerals.

Many scholars, at times, link their efforts to decipher pictographic and petroglyphic imagery with various elements such as magic, shamanism, topology, paganism, religion, and later, astrology, and astronomy. However, these interpretations often overlook the complex interplay of these functions across different temporal and contextual frameworks.

Similarly, it can be inferred that, in the case of the Rock Art of Rubik Cave, we encounter not solely a cosmic map but also a calendar, topological representation, metallurgical record, and informational resource characteristic of mineral-rich regions. Pictograms and petroglyphs exhibit stylistic and topological parallels with other prehistoric sites dating to the Copper Age, found in numerous countries where such cultures flourished.

Symbols like the solar circle, cross, spirals, and anthropomorphic depictions persist as predominant motifs on prehistoric sites, particularly during the Eneolithic and Chalcolithic periods.

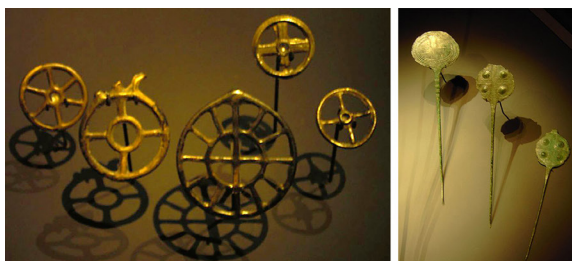


Fig. 14

Figure 14. Bronze pendant 1550-1000 B.C. and bronze fibula 2000-1800 B.C. found in Switzerland.

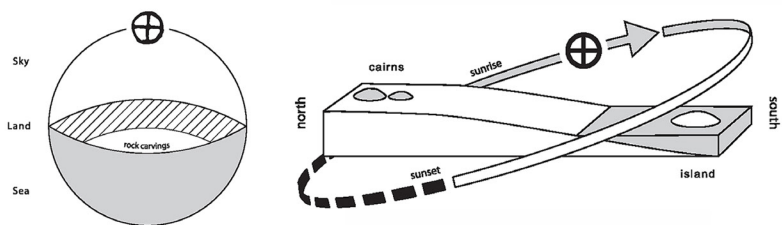


Fig. 15

Figure 15. (Fragment) An interpretation of Rock Art near Högsbyn, Sweden concerning the movement of the sun around the site during the summer season. (Bradley, Image and Audience, 2009.)

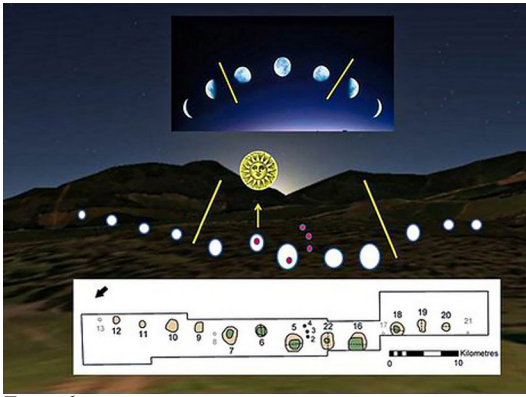


Fig. 16

Figure 15: An illustration of the “Early Mesolithic Calendar”, discovered in July 2013 in Warren Field - Scotland, by a group of researchers from the University of Birmingham, led by Prof. Vince Gaffney, shows how stone territory markings worked around 10,000 years ago. 5,000 years before the invention of units of measurement in Mesopotamia. (Gaffney, 2013).

Figure 16: Pedra dos Mouros Galicia. View from the West and East (Galovart, 2011).

Figure 17: Rock painting in Scotland interpreted by Mann in 1915. (Bradley, Rock Art and the Prehistory of Atlantic Europe, 1997).

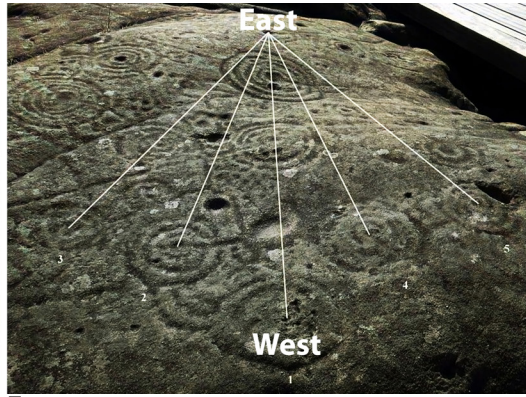


Fig. 17

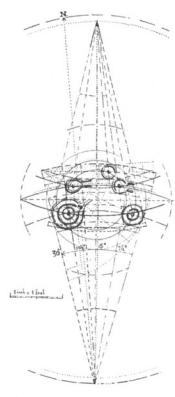


Fig. 18

“When analyzing prehistoric art, it is imperative to approach the studies and interpretations of previous researchers with caution. This is particularly evident in the examination of pictograms and petroglyphs, as seen in the cases of the Lepenica and Rubik pictograms.

In these instances, it is essential to consider not only the analytical method, which dissects symbols individually, but also a syncretic, overarching approach that views pictograms and petroglyphs as cohesive compositions. This broader perspective may provide insight into the contemporary interpretation of Rock Art, which still eludes precise decoding.

Furthermore, the symbolism embedded within petroglyphs presents a challenge to scholars, as various interpretations exist. For instance, while some scholars, such as Breuil, propose anthropomorphic interpretations, others, like Richard Bradley, contend that certain symbols, such as lines associated with circles and spirals, found in prehistoric sites dating back to the Copper Age (7000-600 BC) in Atlantic Europe and elsewhere, may suggest alternative meanings.

Dr. Shannon Fraser (Gaffney, 2013) asserts that this discovery significantly enhances our comprehension of the interplay between terrestrial and celestial realms. Bradley further corroborates the notion that these depictions transcend mere topographical and cosmic representations, positing instead that they were utilized in antiquity for the extraction and refinement of metals. According to Bradley’s analysis, the lines connecting the circles serve as symbolic path-

ways leading to locales of paramount significance for prehistoric societies.

These locations may have served various purposes such as water sources, caves, fertile soil conducive to early agricultural practices, shelters, or areas abundant in minerals. Recent interpretations of prehistoric pictograms and petroglyphs, exemplified by the findings at the prehistoric sites in Europe, have been spearheaded by Professor Emmanuel Anati. Anati suggests that these sites, integral to human existence in certain prehistoric periods, held significance not only locally but also globally (Anati, 2014).

Panel B exhibits a combination of three techniques: painting, engraving, and a filling method known as incastro. Previous analyses have construed this figure as anthropomorphic, featuring two bell-like shapes. Notably, the figure showcases a crossed circle on the right side and a semicircular arc on the left, which seamlessly transitions into another crossed circle.

Despite not being on a circular surface, an examination of the figure’s symmetry suggests that the semicircular shape may have originally been intended as a crossed circle as well. Noteworthy in this petroglyph is the use of the incastro technique, involving minute stone tesserae. Additionally, the vertical line extending from the right crossed circle curves downward upon exiting the circle, while the upper portion of the figure connects with the end of the vertical line depicted in Figure 1-b.

The period during which the pictograms and petroglyphs in Rubik Cave were created coincides with two

monumental milestones in human history: the advent of metallurgy and the emergence of writing during the pre-linguistic phase. These innovations empowered humans with the ability to communicate across temporal and spatial boundaries.

Symbolic shifts in these depictions reflect changes in the priorities and environments of prehistoric communities striving for survival. Unlike standardized symbols, pictographs, and petroglyphs, their meanings vary not only in terms of technical execution but also in the temporal and contextual factors surrounding their creation.

Human groups utilized colors derived from readily available minerals and oxides within their controlled territories to demarcate and identify their lands. Each group employed distinct but often overlapping symbolisms in their depictions, reflecting the activities integral to their lifestyles. For instance, metallurgical communities utilized metal oxides, pastoralists favored red ochre or blood, which oxidizes into iron oxide upon drying, while agricultural communities often employed lime-based whites when delineating their territories.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Rock Art of Rubik Cave stands as a significant archaeological site, offering profound insights into prehistoric art, culture, and societies. Through the study of its pictographs and petroglyphs adorning the cave's rocky surfaces, we glimpse into the lives, beliefs, and rituals of our ancient forebears. Further research and exploration of Rubik Cave Rock Art is imperative to unravel its mysteries and safeguard this invaluable cultural legacy for posterity.

It is paramount to underscore that the Rock Art of Rubik Cave, alongside Lepenica Cave, ranks among Albania's most pivotal historical sites. The pictograms and petroglyphs within these prehistoric caverns constitute cohesive ensembles of ancient Albanian art. Despite their abstract nature devoid of figurative imagery, they share common characteristics in terms of planning, execution methods, and symbolic meanings. Drawing from interpretations presented in Albanian literature on Rubik Cave's Rock Art and contrasting them with international publications on analogous archaeological sites of comparable significance, it becomes evident that such prehistoric sites are exceed-

ingly rare, not only within Albania's cultural heritage but also on a global scale.

A nuanced analysis of the intricate compositions found in Rubik's pictograms and petroglyphs suggests a probable manifestation of the latter stages of a pictographic writing system, eventually supplanted by contemporary scripts. Notably, remnants of the pictographic system persist in various contexts within our modern writings.

The artistry of Rubik Cave stands as a testament to the ingenuity and creativity of our prehistoric ancestors, beckoning us to delve deeper into our shared heritage.

*Note: In 2014, the author of this article spearheaded the decision to designate Rubik Cave as a First Category Cultural Monument within the territory of the Republic of Albania.*

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# THE ROCK ART SITE OF KARA-KUUSH, KYRGYZSTAN

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## I. LOCATION OF THE SITE AND RESEARCH HISTORY

Kara-Kuush is located in the province of Talas in Kyrgyzstan, circa 80 km west of this town, and 5 km south-west of the small village of Bakaiyr (fig.1).

The petroglyphs were executed between 1,420 and 1,475 m a.s.l, disseminated on outcropping rocks of small dimensions (between 1 and 2 m) on three dried hills, covering a surface of 5.3 hectares (fig.2). The hills are located between two large streams which are distant to circa 200 m. In summer, these streams are dry. They get plenty of water in spring, when the snow melts in the mountains, and in fall when it rains.

We did not see any traces of settlements or of kurgans at the foot of the hills. This reason combined with the distance to the streams conducts as to interpret these hills as temporarily dedicated to pastoralism in spring and fall.

The site was discovered by a teacher, Akylbek Davletaliev, in 1996. The site was prospected in 2013 by

Kubat Tabaldiev, Taalai Abdiev and Irina Nevskaya, but the results of this prospection were unfortunately not published.

In May and June 2024, Laurence Delwiche and Gamal Soronkulov from the environmental public foundation Eco-Ayan based in Talas, did two preliminary prospectings of the site in order to prepare a systematic surveying in July 2024 under the supervision of Luc Hermann. On 17 July 2024, the members of Eco-Ayan (G. Soronkulov, A. A. Uulu and L. Delwiche) and Luc Hermann documented the site by fixing the petroglyphs with GPS. On this occasion they re-found a depiction of a Turkic rider (see below III.A.) which was previously found by K. Tabaldiev and his team but never published and whose location was then lost.

## II. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF ROCK ART IN KARA-KUUSH

185 engraved rocks with 1,043 petroglyphs were documented. Furthermore, there were 24 Cyrillic in-



Fig.1: Location of Kara-Kuush (A) and of Zhaltyrak-Tash (B) in the province of Talas, Kyrgyzstan. After © Google Earth Pro 2024.



Fig.2: Hills of Kara-Kuush

scriptions, and 381 anthropic pecked dots. Some of these dots are sketches of unfinished drawings, whereas others could not be interpreted (they were perhaps used to test the quality of the rock before pecking it) (Hermann 2022).

Among the petroglyphs, 945 zoomorphs were counted, as well as 30 anthropomorphs, 75 lines, five unclear signs, one cupmark, one bow and one arrow. Furthermore, three flowers (tulips) were executed between 1975 and 1979.

With 774 depictions, goats (*Capra aegagrus*) dominate the bestiary. Canids (dogs and wolves - 34 drawings), horses (35 petroglyphs, among them 15 with a rider) and camels (31 depictions, two with a rider) are less important. To complete the inventory of the depicted species, four deer and two roe deer, two bulls and probably one feline (a lynx?) were also found. There are probably more canids, horses and felines, because 62 zoomorphs could not be clearly identified and attributed to a specific species. Most of these undetermined animals are either canids/felines or horses.

In the following chapters, we analyse the petroglyphs of each period, but it should be noted that 20 zoomorphs (seven caprids and 13 undetermined animals) could not be attributed to a specific period, even if they were most probably executed in the Late Iron Age or during the Old Turkic period.

The chronological attribution of petroglyphs is a kind

of interpretation based on a stylistic chronology of the rock art of Central Asia as established by many Russian and Kazakh archaeologists (Baipakov *et alii* 2005; Beisenov & Maryashev 2014; Kasanov *et alii* 2017; Molodin *et alii* 2023; Rogozhinskii *et alii* 2004; Rogozhinskii 2011; Samashev 2012; Shvets 2012). The engravings can be dated by stylistic analogies with petroglyphs found on some stone slabs in Bronze Age tombs or with animal depictions on so-called “deer stones” and from jewellery found in Iron Age kurgans, but also with goat depictions on stone slabs from the Turkic times. For this period, the chronology was also established by the presence of tamgas (clan signs) or of runic inscriptions.

Different nomadic groups from Mongolia and Siberia came from the Bronze Age to the 17th century AD through Kazakhstan to Kyrgyzstan (Baipakov *et alii* 2005: 98; Samashev 2013: 18-22; Tabaldiev & Zholdoshov 2003), and sometimes went further to Uzbekistan, Iran and Turkey, and probably also to the Ladakh. For this reason, rock art from the Bronze Age, the Iron Age and the Old Turkic period shows strong similarities in the Russian and Mongolian Altai, in Kazakhstan and in Kyrgyzstan, not only stylistically, but also very often thematically (Shvets 2012). During these periods, settlements were found, showing that these populations settled down for centuries after their arrival in a region (Baipakov *et alii* 2005: 83ff;

Rogozhinskii 2011: 96ff). These societies practised pastoralism since the Bronze Age and there are nowadays still many villages in Kyrgyzstan with an economy based on pastoralism: shepherds and their families live in summer in the pastures in high-mountain and come back to the valleys in fall; in fall and spring, the shepherds go daily with their flocks through steppe hills near their farms.

## II.A. ROCK ART FROM THE BRONZE AGE

196 depictions on 63 rocks were attributed to the Bronze Age, among them 190 zoomorphs, six anthropomorphs (one is a rider on a horse: the man and the animal are counted as only one drawing), and one cupmark. The cupmark was attributed to this period due to its relationship to other Bronze Age depictions on the same panel.

Caprids are the most depicted animals with 160 petroglyphs (84% of the zoomorphs) (fig.3), followed by horses (six drawings), camels and dogs (each four exemplars) (fig.3), and only two bulls (fig.4). Furthermore, there are 14 unidentified animals, even if one of them seems to be feline due to its round ears and is probably a lynx due to its small tail (Hermann & Schnitzler 2020) (fig.5A).

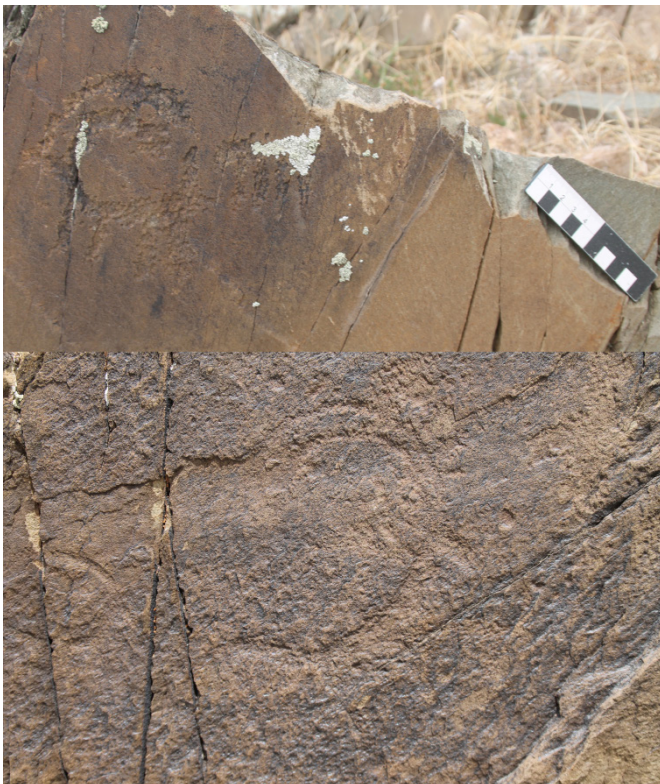


Fig.3: Caprids and dog from the Bronze Age



Fig.4: Bull from the Bronze Age

## II.B. ROCK ART FROM THE IRON AGE

241 petroglyphs depicted on 78 rocks can be attributed to the Iron Age, among them 234 zoomorphs and only one anthropomorph (fig.6).

Caprids are once more the largest depicted group with 211 exemplars (90% of the zoomorphs) (figs.5C, 6). There are also eight canids, three camels and two horses, but ten animals could not be identified.

## II.C. ROCK ART FROM THE OLD TURKIC PERIOD

The Old Turkic period is the main epoch in Kara-Kuu-sh with 530 petroglyphs (51% of the rock engravings) on 135 rocks. Furthermore, there are 172 pecked dots attributed to this time due to their presence on panels with Old Turkic carvings. Some of these dots are like sketches of unfinished zoomorphs.

Zoomorphs were mainly depicted (461 petroglyphs, viz. 87 % of the petroglyphs), among them 362 caprids (79% of the animals) (fig.7), 25 horses (14 with a rider), 23 camels (one with a man holding the animal by a leash (fig.5D) and two with a rider (fig.8)), 22 canids, and six deer or roe deer. Furthermore, 23

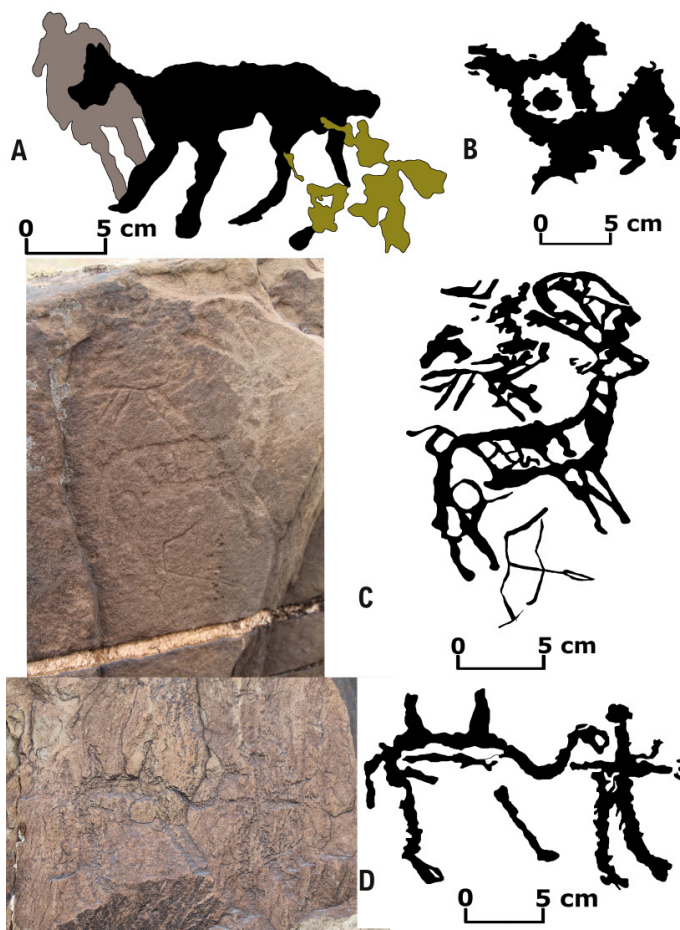


Fig.5: A. Feline (?) from the Bronze Age; B. Unclear sign from the Old Turkic period; C. Caprid from the Iron Age and bow from the Old Turkic period; D. Anthropomorph with camel from the Old Turkic period.

animals could not be further identified, but many of them are most probably canids or horses.

Other depictions are 58 lines, 22 anthropomorphs (including riders on horses and camels), two unclear signs which are not tamgas (fig.5B), and one bow (fig.5C) and one arrow (fig.13) depicted without being in relation to a hunter or a warrior. The absence of tamga (clan sign) is an indicator that no settlement was at the foot of the hills.

Some panels show hunting scenes with the hunter on foot and shooting an arrow at a goat or hunters on a horse with a bow (fig.9). Hunting scenes are usually found at every site in Kyrgyzstan and from each period since the Bronze Age. However, in Kara-Kuu-sh, hunting scenes were only depicted during the Old Turkic period. There were two reasons for hunting: firstly, it was necessary for shepherds to protect their flocks against predators. For this reason, many hunting scenes show goats with an anthropomorph shooting at wolves or felines. Secondly, for the shepherd

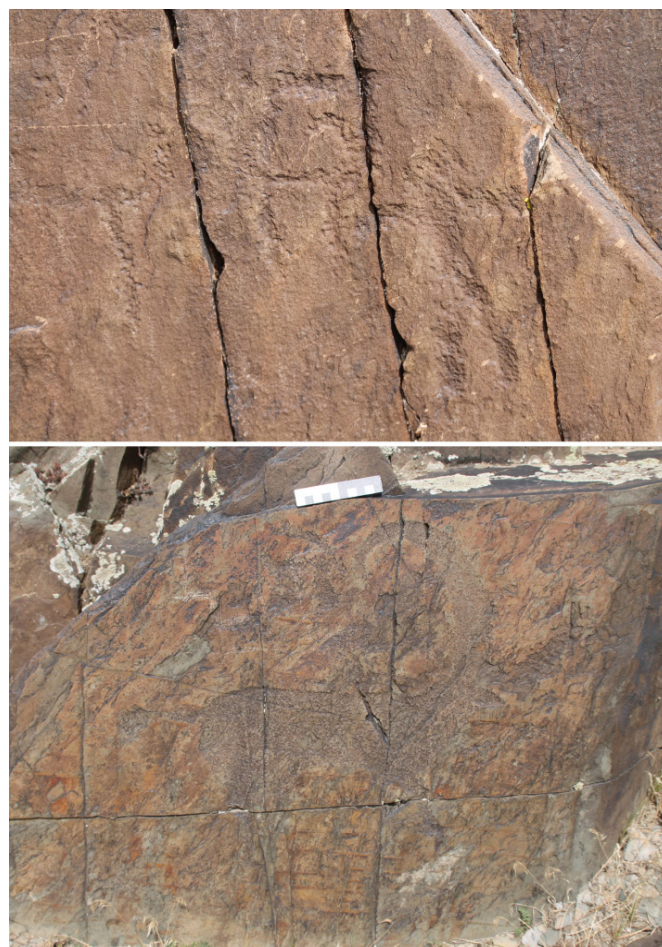


Fig.6: Caprids and anthropomorph from the Iron Age



Fig.7: Caprids from the Old Turkic period



Fig.8: Two camels (above with a rider) from the Old Turkic period

in the mountains, killing a deer or a mountain goat was also a possibility to gain meat without taking an animal of his flock. In rock art symbolic hunting scenes were also probably depicted but it would need a specific analysis on this topic to interpret them.

There is also a battle scene with two riders (fig.10): on the left, the warrior is shooting with a bow, but he also has a sword at his side; the warrior on the right is attacking with a sword or a spear. On their heads, it is not clear if they carry a helmet or if it is a depiction of their long hair in a braid. Battle scenes are present in the rock art of the Bronze Age and of the Old Turkic period in Kyrgyzstan and in Kazakhstan, but almost never during the Iron Age. The presence of these depictions strongly depends on the site: some have no single battle scene (from the Bronze Age and/or from the Old Turkic period, or only a couple of them as for example in Tamgaly in Kazakhstan (Rogozhinskii 2011)), whereas at other sites it is a quite usual themat-

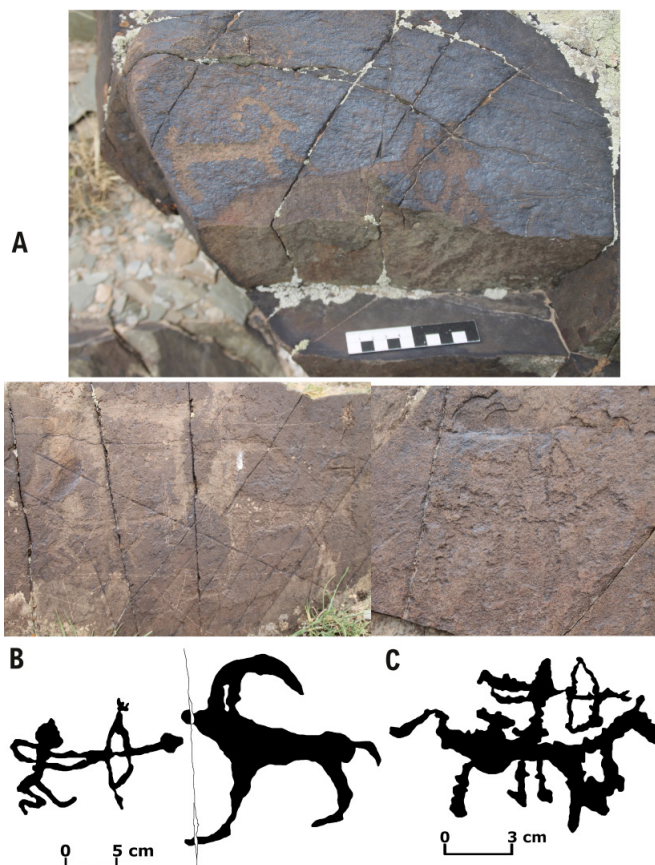


Fig.9: Hunting scenes from the Old Turkic period

tic, as for example in Eshkiolmes in Kazakhstan (Baipakov *et alii* 2005: 96ff) or in the Kenkol valley north of Talas in Kyrgyzstan (Hermann, unpublished). The chronological attribution of battle scenes to the Old Turkic period is mainly based on the use of a specific bow by the warriors, by their helmets or by the presence of clan signs.

#### II.D. ROCK ART FROM THE KYRGYZ ETHNOGRAPHIC PERIOD (18TH-19TH CENTURIES)

Among the 27 petroglyphs of this period executed on 15 rocks, there are 21 caprids, one horse and one undetermined zoomorph. Furthermore, very thin lines were executed on a rock forming a kind of quadrillage. The small number of petroglyphs for this time is similar to other sites in Kyrgyzstan.

#### II.E. ROCK ART FROM THE 20TH CENTURY

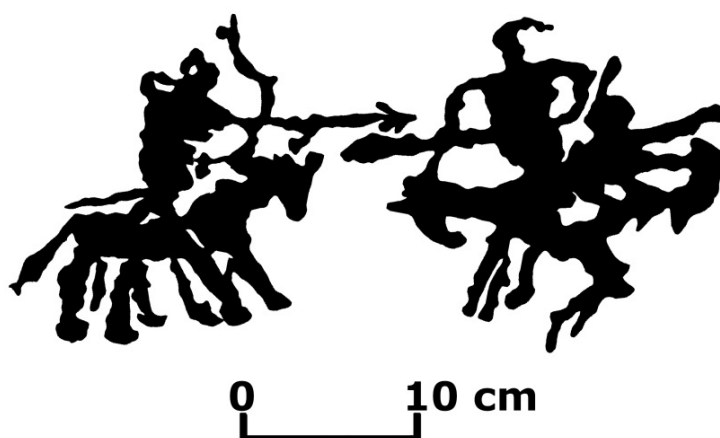


Fig.10: Battle scene with two riders from the Old Turkic period



Fig.11: Tulips from 1975 and 1979



Fig.12: Caprid and horse in graffiti technic, Old Turkic period

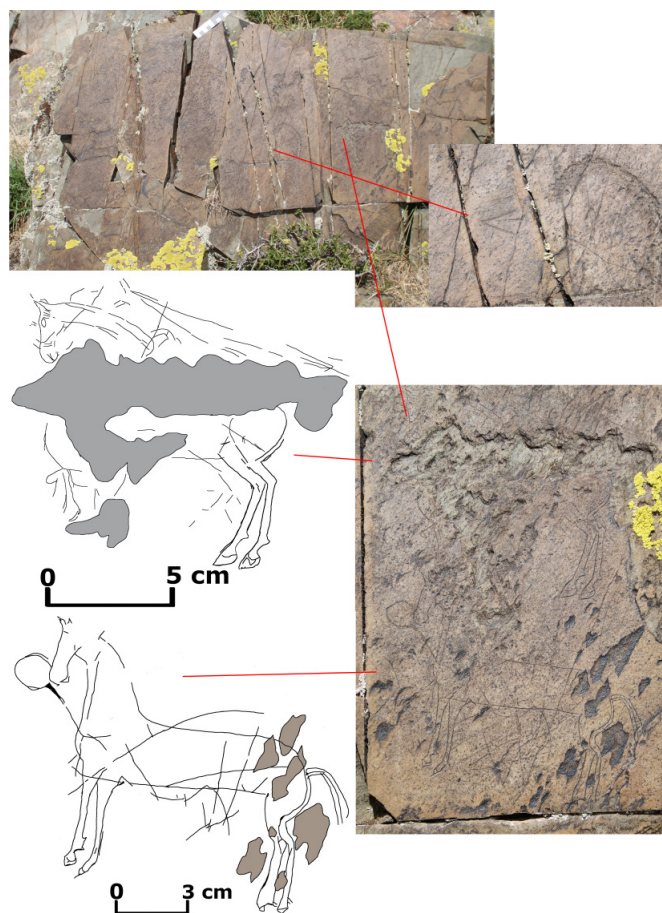


Fig.13: Rock 162 with horses and an arrow in graffiti technic, Old Turkic period



Fig.14: Rock 162 with horse and rider in graffiti technic, Old Turkic period



Fig.15: Horse in graffiti technic from the rock 162, Old Turkic period

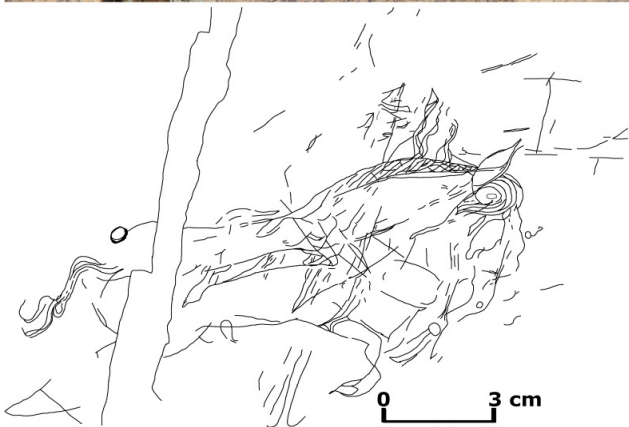


Fig.16: Rider in graffiti technic from the rock 162, Old Turkic period



Fig.17: Rock 162 with a rider in graffiti technic, Old Turkic period

24 Cyrillic inscriptions were done after 1950. These inscriptions correspond to Kyrgyz names, probably of the shepherds using the hills for pastoralism. Furthermore, there are 17 depicted animals: 13 caprids, one camel, one horse and two undetermined zoomorphs. There are also three tulips. Two of them are associated with the dates of 1975 and 1979 (fig.11). These flowers are well visible on the rocks due to their large dimensions (twice circa 60x20 cm and the third one circa 30x70 cm). Tulip is a Kyrgyz national symbol, and therefore it is peculiar that they were depicted during the Soviet period, as if a national conscience was already present at this time by some shepherds and could express itself in regions far from centres of power.

### III. OLD TURKIC GRAFFITI IN KARA-KUUSH

The word “graffiti” for rock art is used by Russian archaeologists to describe rock engravings of small dimensions (usually between 2 and 10 cm) done with very thin lines (for example Kubarev 2014). The lines are not pecked but engraved with a metal tip, such as a knife. These graffiti are very difficult to see and for this reason were often covered by later petroglyphs.

They were found in the Mongolian and Russian Altai (Kubarev *et alii* 2005), in Kazakhstan, especially in Eshkiolmes (Baipakov *et alii* 2005), and in Kyrgyzstan, particularly in Zhaltyrak-Tash (Sher *et alii* 1987) and in Kara-Too (Hermann 2019).

In Kara-Kuush, the technic of graffiti was used during the Old Turkic period for 19 petroglyphs on ten rocks: ten caprids (fig.12), four horses (figs.12 and 13 and see below III.A.), one unclear zoomorph, two riders (see below III.A.), one arrow and one bow (arrow and bow on two different rocks) (figs.5C and 13).

This graffiti technic arises the question of their visibility, as if the artists wanted to keep their engravings for themselves. Or did it need an initiation to see them and to know where they were executed? Or perhaps these carvings had no value for their creator and were only a pastime without the aim to be communicated to other people?

#### III.A. OLD TURKIC GRAFFITI ON THE ROCK 162 IN KARA-KUUSH

A very special panel in Kara-Kuush, on a south-facing rock measuring 100x60 cm, has 19 pecked engravings from the Old Turkic period, all zoomorphic (16 caprids, one camel and two unclear animals) (fig.13).

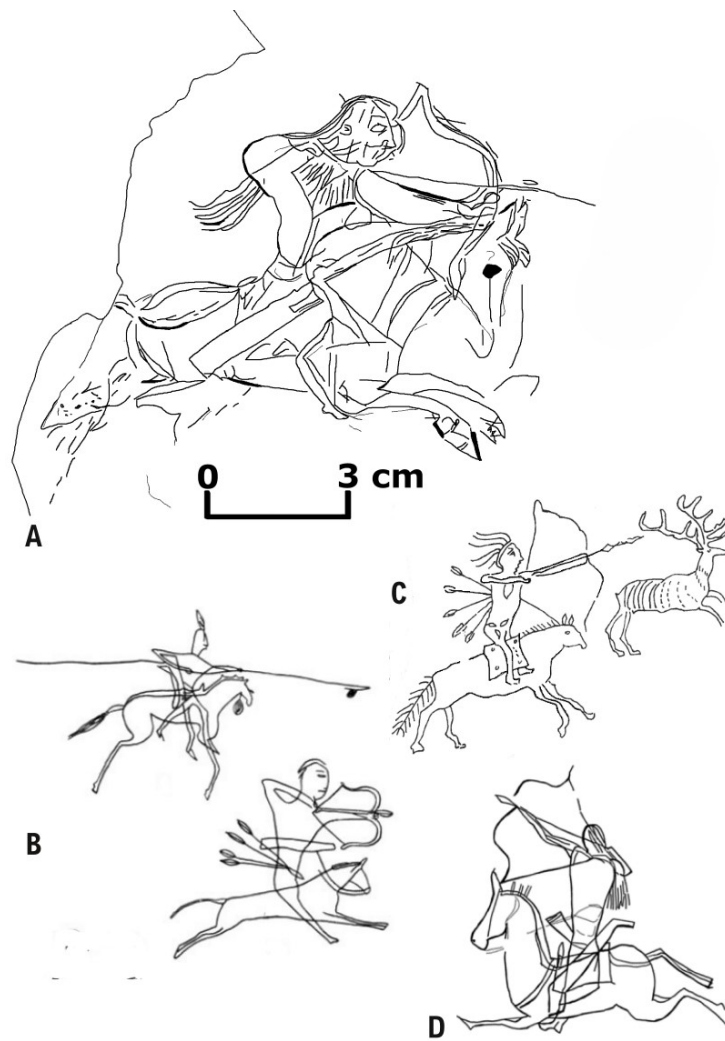


Fig.18: Riders in graffiti technic: A. Kara-Kuush; B. Zhaltyrak-Tash (Kyrgyzstan) after Sher *et alii* 1987: 75; C. Bitshiktu-Bom (Russian Altai) after Erkinova & Kubarev 2004: 93; D. Chaganka (Russian Altai) after Tsheremisin *et alii* 2013: 371, Old Turkic period.

Furthermore, there are six graffiti carvings, depicting a single arrow, three horses and two riders.

The horses are damaged by later petroglyphs and by micro-erosion, probably due to gelifraction. Three horses are very realistic with the depiction of the hooves and of the mane (figs.13, 14, 15). They do not have any bridle or saddle. A fourth horse is unfortunately very damaged and difficult to see (figs.14 and 16). Furthermore, a rock crack divides the animal into two parts. It seems that this horse has a rider, recognizable by the depiction of his right leg and foot. The animal has a stylized mane over which there are lines looking like flames. These are most probably the horse's bridles.

A rider with long hair, shooting an arrow with a bow, was executed in a very realistic manner (figs.17 and 18). He has a quiver on his right side and his clothes are recognizable. No animal was depicted directly on

the right of the rider, so that it is not possible to determine if this man is a hunter or a warrior. The hooves and the mane of the horse are not depicted with many details, and its back legs are not depicted at all or have disappeared due to weather conditions. The front legs show that the horse is in motion.

Few similar riders are known in Russian Altai, such as at the river Chaganka (Tsheremisin *et alii* 2013: 371; Konstantinov *et alii* 2016: 13) (fig.18D), in Dyabak (Konstantinov & Urbushev 2018: 271), in Kalbak-Tash II (Kubarev 2007: 284) or in Bitshiktu-Bom (Erkinova & Kubarev 2004: 93) (fig.18C). Altogether, circa 30 exemplars of such riders are inventoried in this region if we complete previous repertories (Tabaldiev & Zholdoshev 2003: 134; Samashev 2013). In Mongolian Altai, few riders in graffiti technic are known, but without a weapon. One was documented in Baga-Oigur (Kubarev *et alii* 2005: 471), three

in Khar-Salaa (Kubarev 2009: 171), and three in Shivoot-Khairkhan (Kubarev 2009: 269ff). In Kyrgyzstan, only two riders in the same style and technic are known, both in Zhaltyrak-Tash (Sher *et alii* 1987: 75) (fig.18B). Zhaltyrak-Tash is located in the province of Talas, some 80 km south-east of Kara-Kuush (see location on fig.1B). One rider from this site is shooting with a bow, whereas the second carries a flag. Two other riders from the same site are much more basic and cannot be compared to Kara-Kuush. In Kazakhstan, depictions of warriors by foot in the same style and technic are known in Eshkiolmes, but there are no similar engravings of riders (Kasanov *et alii* 2017: 184-185). Some other riders are depicted in the graffiti technic at other sites in the Russian Altai, such as in Zhalgyz-Tobe (Kubarev 2004: 80-81), but they are much more stylized and basic. These graffiti are dated back to the early Turkic period (around 500 AD), whereas the more realistic riders with many details are dated to the second half of the first millennium AD (Konstantinov *et alii* 2016: 8). This rock art subject appears in the Russian or Mongolian Altai and diffused lately to Kyrgyzstan through Kazakhstan with the emigration of Turkic tribes.

The great artistic competence necessary to execute the horses and riders on rock 162 excludes the hypothesis that these engravings had no value for their creators. However, they were partially destroyed a couple of centuries after their execution due to their lack of visibility. The Turkic artists could see well-visible petroglyphs from previous times on the rocks of Kara-Kuush but intentionally chose to carve small pictures as if they wanted to prevent that every person could see them. For this reason, we should think that these graffiti had a personal and secret meaning for their creators. Some authors interpret these riders as a kind of memorial rite for deceased warriors, due to their realistic features, as well as their association in a few cases to a runic epitaph (for example in Kurgak and Adyr-Khan in Russian Altai) (Konstantinov *et alii* 2016: 17). In this case, the graffiti of hunters or warriors in the Old Turkic period would be tied to an ancestor worship ritual. The depiction of three horses in graffiti technic on this panel could also be interpreted as a worship ritual for deceased animals. The horse was (and is still in Kyrgyzstan) an important companion for nomadic people and for shepherds. In the Iron Age and in the Old Tur-

kic period, graves with a horse accompanying the dead warrior are not seldom (Martin & Armand 2012: 89).

## CONCLUSIONS

Many rock art sites from the province of Talas were published in the last years (for example Zhaltyrak-Tash, the Kenkol valley with the sites of Tchatchikei and Tchatchoi, the Karakol valley) but all these sites are located in the eastern part of the province. Kara-Kuush is the first publication of a site from the west of Talas and it gives the first overview of the rock art of this region. Furthermore, the presence of Turkic graffiti shows that the Turkic tribes also used this technic in this part of Kyrgyzstan. Among these graffiti, the depiction of two riders, as well as of three horses on the same panel, is exceptional and is perhaps to be interpreted as a ritual practice for deceased family members and/or for important warriors from the clan.

It is also possible to provide a second explanation of pecked petroglyphs and engravings in graffiti style in the Old Turkic period: on the different sites, pecked petroglyphs mainly depict caprids, sometimes wolves predating goats, whereas graffiti mainly show horses, warriors and battle scenes (Baipakov *et alii* 2005; Samashev 2013). For this reason, the difference in the technics could be interpreted as tied to different populations or social groups: sedentary shepherds depicted their flocks of goats by using the pecking technic, and the nomadic warriors engraved their horses, their portraits or portraits of leaders, as well as battles in which they fought by using the graffiti style.

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Pictures and drawings by **Luc Hermann**.

# CULTURAL ASPECTS OF THE STONE-CIRCLE COMMUNITIES REVEALED BY THE METHODS OF CONCEPTUAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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The prehistoric stone circles of Britain and Ireland have an easy eye-catching circularity that forever fascinates, but the monuments are far from simple configurations. Experienced investigators find that resolving the structural ideas and design-focused reasonings incorporated into these multipurpose sites by the subtle craftwork of the non-literate builders is very rewarding. The stones store a wealth of knowledge introduced for functional and religious purposes by tribal specialists using contemporary concepts, such as their animistic viewpoint and realistic use of symbolism from which practised anthropologists can extract significant facts about beliefs and the traditions of lost cultures. Such work benefits archaeological scholarship which has hitherto been circumscribed for those prehistorians unaware of the subtle insights powered by this conceptual approach to anthropology and archaeology.

When symbols and images are recognised for what they are by knowledgeable analysts, their intrinsic meanings can be efficiently recovered by applying the principles of deductive conceptual anthropology. Both Emmanuel Anati (dozens of papers and books from 1960 onwards, e.g., Anati (1960 to 2023)) and the present author (e.g., Meaden (1992 to 2024b)) have done this for many years. The latter has methodically concentrated on stone circles and other megalithic settings in Britain and Ireland. The former has addressed the vast world of rock art for all time periods. By way of illustration, Anati (2017: vol. 15, 4) asks, "How did human societies think, act, believe, and communicate in different social and cultural settings, in different ages, ever since the earliest conceptual expressions? Each specific case, small or big, is a contribution to the global picture." The eminent Romanian historian of religions Mircea Eliade (1958, 411, 412) understood that to appraise lost religions one must enter the mind of the believer.

Examination of stone circles reveals that many mega-

liths must have been individually selected for shape and height, others modified by steadfast pecking and rubbing, and many of them intelligently positioned in relation to meaningful alignments in the landscape. Crucially, most prehistoric stone circles of Britain and Ireland store sunrise-directional features that are pre-eminently calendrical while also subtly informing about the people's transcendental beliefs in the divinity of the Sun and Earth or Land.

The era in the British Isles when stone circle construction and use were in their glory began in the Late Neolithic and continued through the Copper Age and Early Bronze Age and beyond. Because this was a farming-hunting world of people who lacked literacy, nothing was set down in writing. Contrast this with the rich compositions stored by the contemporary use of hieroglyphics by scribes in Egypt. Nor have helpful legends or worthy epics about these arcadian-type structures survived in Britain. Fortunately, the builders expressed themselves and their needs through the medium of intelligible symbolism, much of which is proving to be decipherable.

Circles of timber were built too, but natural decay has counted against long-term survival for the majority. Thousands of stone circles and timber circles were built, yet only about one thousand stone circles and indications of merely two or three timber circles are known to have survived. All are damaged. The earliest stone circles are over 5000 years old. The finest is the sarsen phase of Stonehenge, a huge wonder of the ancient world. The broadest circles with the biggest stones are at Avebury, 30 km walking distance from Stonehenge, but its stone settings are substantially wrecked, among which only 80 megaliths, fallen or upright from over 600 originally, remain in sight. Many dozens at prehistoric Avebury were destroyed or buried in Medieval and later times by the villagers.

As to successful analyses, the most rewarding stone circles are those in Cork and Kerry in Ireland, Aberde-

enshire in Scotland, West Penwith and Bodmin Moor in West and East Cornwall, and Stonehenge and Avebury in central southern England (Fig. 1).

Little was known about the meanings of stone-circle monuments before the current research began. Idle speculations from the curious have long been commonplace, and antiquarians recklessly dug into a few stone circles in England and Scotland whereas the Irish were more circumspect and usually hesitant to dig or damage, having respect for the deceased inhabitants of an unknown past.

Archaeologists onerously examined a few sites, but were disheartened at finding few clues to help explain purpose and usage. Parker Pearson (2012, 198) underwhelmingly and sombrely wrote: “The overall impression from the findings of every archaeological dig at Stonehenge is that the place was a cemetery and a building site, with chippings, hammerstones and broken flints about underfoot, and not a party venue.” Again (2012, 340) he writes dispiritingly, “Stonehenge was a place for the dead, while Durrington Walls [nearby] was occupied by the living”, and he cites Burl (1987, 172-191) who ill-judgedly makes out that Stonehenge was “a house for the dead”, this being the title of a long chapter in his Stonehenge book.

Archaeoastronomers have studied stone circles unavailingly. After many years of analysis Clive Ruggles mistakenly concluded that for southwest Ireland (1999, 97a) “the builders were not concerned with the rising or setting positions of moon or sun”. His latest book (Ruggles and Chadburn 2024,176) shows no improvement in the understanding of stone circles: “Stonehenge. Was it a sun temple ...? We think not—not in the sense that it was built to worship a sun deity ... Stonehenge was not built as a temple to the sun, but rather to sight the sun.... .... at the solstices.”

### DIVINITY OF THE SUN

By contrast, advances in recent years in understanding Stonehenge and Irish and British stone circles have come from the pioneering approaches of the present author who benefitted from ideas stimulated by cultural and conceptual anthropology. A multitude of measurements and observational analyses now firmly prove that the *planning of British and Irish stone circles had everything to do with the sun*. The priests and farming folk, desperate for success in the fertility of the fields,



Fig. 1. Locations of the principal stone-circle regions discussed in this paper.

livestock and women, gratefully appreciated solar light and heat as endless gifts from the golden orb that was prodigiously deemed to be divine rather than a de facto physical entity or body. Consequently, sunrise every morning would have been metaphysically welcomed for delivering the daylight that the community needed to survive and thrive after the darkness and cold of night. Chief among these events were the summer and winter solstices and other calendrically-dated sunrises that were recognized as supremely sacred festive occasions.

The longstanding adoption by societies of the celestial idol was much the same worldwide insofar as many religious peoples believed in the sun’s divinity to which they built shrines and temples. That being so, what is preternaturally understood by ‘divinity of the sun’? Primarily, it had long seemed apparent that human lives relied on the daily return of the sun from beyond the eastern horizon after its nightly disappearance in the west. Perceptions and expressions in pre-scientific times differed from how we reason today. Christopher Hawkes (1977) perceived that for such communities “... it was the heavenly bodies’ *divinity* [and not natural processes] that gave their light and their regular motion.” The sun was treated as if holy, omnipotent, beneficent and godly, hence *divine*.

Mythical answers sufficed for rustic workers ignorant of science. Awkward questions were routinely met by concocting what seemed to be plausible sagas that be-

came legendry. Spirits, rituals and propitiations were devised to satisfy the expectations of desperate communities who became reliant on them because the proffered connotations blended with their low levels of erudition. In this manner, gender pairing of purposefully-selected and dimorphic shaped stones was the inspiration for the fertility fables considered below.

## THE BEGINNING

The starting point is people, the folk who sourced the stones and chose the sites for emplacement in the landscape. Particular effects in the stones, to do with shape, attitude, character or subtle qualities stemming from in-built directional alignments, if not already present, were incorporated into the stones. For present-day decoders, such figurative enrichment ranks as decipherable evidence, offering clues about the builders' reasonings within their comforting world of distinctive beliefs and traditions. Through rigorous study we can construe objective meanings for most stone circles, many of which, although complex, are provenly correct because of an abundance of individual clues that cross-check and support one another. Although the stone-circle planners were illiterate, they were prescient as to symbols and images, employing select archetypes in ways relevant to their problems of life and labour. Our imperative is to spot the intimated ideas and interpret them. It is a realm with opportunities for specialists in semiotics which is the

study of signs and symbology, their meanings and use. Much of the resulting analysis is indisputable. The lexicographer Dr Samuel Johnson quintessentially wrote in the eighteenth-century, "There is no problem the mind of man can set that the mind of man cannot solve."

The author's initial findings took place from inside Stonehenge in 1985 where an empirical problem was encountered and rationalised. A specific feature of the monument is the external presence, close to the axial direction of midsummer sunrise, of an immense stone—the Heel Stone—standing 80 metres from the centre of the circular settings of the shaped sarsen stones (Fig. 2). In October 1985 the author was inside the *sanctus sanctorum* viewing the tree-lined northeastern sunrise horizon and discerning how summer-solstice sunrise assessments would be critically sensitive to the height of the observer's eye-level above ground while awaiting the first light of day direct from the upper limb of the sun. This sensitivity exists because of the proximity and possible influence of the massive Heel Stone. The matter is relevant not only for present-day observers, but was compellingly important for the prehistoric devotees who revered Stonehenge. A typical observer of the 20th and 21st centuries AD *standing upright* inside Stonehenge on the axis close to the internal Altar Stone sees the upper limb of the summer-solstice sun appearing from over the horizon close to the direction of the apex of the Heel Stone



Fig. 2. In this recent zoomed view of the landscape from an axial standpoint near the Altar Stone (2020), the apex of the external Heel Stone does not surpass the horizon, even if the distant Sidbury Hill was not tree-covered. Author's photograph.

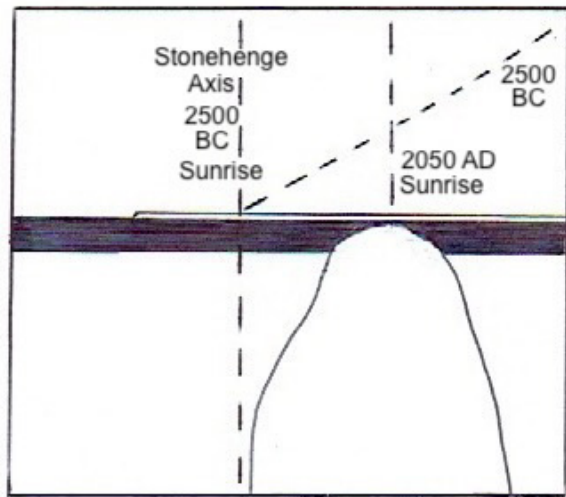


Fig. 3. Positions of the upper limb of the summer-solstice rising sun relative to the distant Sidbury Hill are indicated for 2500 BC and today for an observer of average eye-level who is standing on the Stonehenge axis by the Altar Stone. Since sarsen Stonehenge was built, the point of sunrise has moved an angular distance equivalent to two solar diameters. In this situation the off-axis Heel Stone does not project above the horizon. By not interfering with light from the sun, the Heel Stone, as witnessed thus, plays no role in the spectacle.

(Fig. 2 and Fig. 3) and watches the sun crossing the sky as it moves away to the right (Fig. 4). Because the peak of the Heel Stone is below the horizon in this scenario, it plays no role in this aspect of local sunrise. What then could be the intended purpose of the Heel Stone?

Logical reasoning leads to a defensible answer. The apparent course of the solstitial sun *relative to the Heel*



Fig. 4. The scene on 25 June 2001 after the sun has risen, photographed at eye-level by the author who was standing by the Altar Stone. The apex of the Heel Stone is below the horizon.

*Stone* is noticeably sensitive to the height of the observer's eye-level above the ground for a certain range of eye-level heights. In the lower extreme limit, i.e., when observing from ground level on the axis, the apex of the Heel Stone stands clearly against the sky, *in which case, nowadays, the solstice sun rises out of sight hidden behind the Heel Stone*. In the next photograph (Fig. 5) the camera was held at knee-level which approximates to the thickness, i.e., height, of the broad flat-topped recumbent Altar Stone as when it was positioned on the ground by the builders. The difference of Fig. 5 compared with Figs. 2 to 4 is crucial to an understanding of Stonehenge.

Another matter to bear in mind is the change in sunrise direction during the more than four millennia since



Fig. 5. Photographed along the Stonehenge axis with camera at knee height by the author in October 1985. The farthest trees on Sidbury Hill delay sunrise by over a minute. Contrast with Fig. 2.

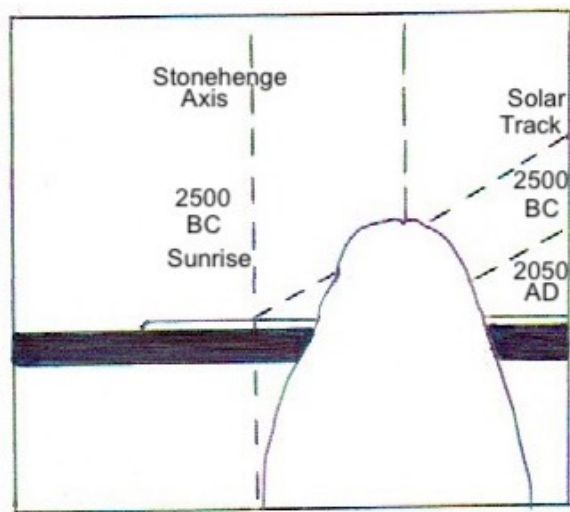


Fig. 6. This is a realistic evocation of the facts of alignment in which the Heel Stone plays a major role. The view of the summer-solstice sunrise is from along the axis relative to ground level or the present height of the top surface of the Altar Stone. In antiquity the sun's upper limb first appeared on the Stonehenge axis and the slanting line for 2500 BC indicates the course of the upper limb of the sun. For several minutes the Heel Stone blocked a sight of the sun for an axial-placed observer inside the monument. Nowadays instead the sun rises out of sight behind the Heel Stone.

Stonehenge was planned. This results from the changing angle of the plane in which planet Earth rotates. The displacement along the horizon amounts to about one degree of arc which is twice the angular width of the sun (Figs. 5 and 6).

Fig. 6 also treats the matter when the view of the solstice sunrise is from the low height of the Altar Stone. In the third millennium BC the builders had arranged the stones such that the axis of the monument was in the direction of the first gleams of the rising sun.



Fig. 7. Stonehenge, 23 June 1988. Author's photograph taken at about thigh-height but deliberately off-axis to reveal the sun which was rising as if eclipsed behind the Heel Stone.

Nowadays when viewed axially from knee-height or from the flat top of the Altar Stone, the sun rises behind the Heel Stone. To obtain Fig. 7 with the sun showing, the author moved off the Stonehenge axis.

This leads to a dependent question: what if, in antiquity, the primary purpose of following-by-eye the course of the rising sun, instead meant *effectively viewing the sun from the level of the Altar Stone* or the ground alongside it? From such levels, the top of the Heel Stone reaches well above the horizon. Indeed, the stone's apex is at a high-enough angle that *the rising sun of the third millennium BC passed behind the stone* (Fig. 7). The shadow of the Heel Stone is then, of course, on the observer's face if the latter is at the level of the Altar Stone. This proves that *the shadow of the Heel Stone reaches into the monument as far as the Altar Stone*.

We now enter a realm of insightful conceptualising that also applies to dozens of stone circles across Britain and Ireland. Such logical thinking treats the stone-circle problem afresh, and as one in which the rising sun passes behind positioned standing stones and casts shadows on to stones waiting on the western perimeter (Meaden 1992; 1997). This concept has never previously been treated in fieldwork or theoretical archaeology by other investigators.

### INTENTIONAL SHADOW-CASTING

The notion of intentional shadow-casting at Stonehenge, in particular at the summer solstice, occurred to the author on 5 October 1985. Photographic proof would be the next step, but this had to wait until a few days before the 1986 summer solstice when successful sun-watching was achieved by standing next to the Heel Stone outside the sarsen rings and seeing the shadow of the stone enter the monument. Unfortunately, in those first minutes on two early-morning visits in June 1986, the sun's rays were too feeble to form a shadow strong enough to be recorded photographically. Better pictures had to wait for a clearer sunrise in a later year (e.g., Fig. 8, on 19 June 1989). Nonetheless, with respect to the watching of *weak* shadows, the human eye could better see what contemporary cameras did not then adequately record. Such are the facts. Eventually, on other occasions photographs much like those in Fig. 8 and 9 were obtained.

So, for any observers in the inner sanctum, the sun gets eclipsed behind the symbolically phallic Heel Sto-



Fig. 8. The phallic-like moving shadow of the Heel Stone entered the monument and is seen here leaving it. Photograph by the author, 19 June 1989.

ne with the apex of its shadow, over 80m long, entering the monument and reaching the recumbent Altar Stone. The crucial cult stones, the Altar Stone and Heel Stone of opposing figurative genders, are visibly united by phallic-like shadow. Might moral insights be discernible in this dimorphic coupling, or is there some other latent purpose not obvious to the modern mind because of its being abstrusely mythical and lost to posterity?

The drama could indeed be watched by priests attending inside Stonehenge. However, recognizing that because of space restrictions, no more than a few privileged observers could enjoy this purposed arrangement from the interior, it is unlikely that the huge monument had been planned for this as a single major reason and no other. Field et al. (2015, 145) imply as much too, but they do not reason what could have been the builders' alternative intentions such as we made back in 1985. The reality is that an interdependent view of the same spectacle was happening *simultaneously outside* the monument. This other view could have been watched by dozens, if not potentially hundreds, of onlookers standing just beyond the perimeter of the circular bank and ditch, as demonstrated and proved by the photographs above (Figs. 8 and 9). For observers external to Stonehenge, after the rising of the sun the shadow of the Heel Stone could be watched strengthening and entering the monument be-

fore withdrawing in detumescence.

Such shadow-theatre was definitely intentional. It still works, and can be seen by present-day witnesses at sunrise in good weather at the summer solstice as well as several days before and after. In the belief dramatics of the Stonehenge spectators, every occurrence would have been a stimulating spiritual experience.

## SUMMARISING

The introduction of Stonehenge fundamentalism in this paper aptly typifies the thinking behind sunrise features of the shadow-casting type. This pioneering work also led to further breakthroughs. In subsequent years the author found that similar basics applied to Avebury and dozens of other stone circles across Britain and Ireland.

Over 50 Cork and Kerry stone circles are analysed in an Irish guide book and gazetteer (Meaden 2024b). Their nature illustrates that at stone circles and shrines in antiquity the sun was everywhere revered. Beyond the seas, solar worship took place in all the inhabited continents of the world (Eliade 1958, 38-123, 239-264). During these pre-scientific millennia, myths were fabricated to meet the questions raised. Convincing fables appeased hardworking, uneducated farmworkers who would relish witnessing dramatic sunrises when forewarned of upcoming festival dates by knowledgeable priests. Myths and superstitions were



Fig. 9. Author's photograph taken in the week before solstice, 14 June 2021. Part of the shadow is inside the middle of the monument in contact with the Altar Stone.

held to be the truth in the absence of scientific explanations, because they appeared to justify so much ... and that is how it can be with religions. For instance, the lightning strikes because the Sky God is upset ... and so on. The tornado from the sky traverses the land of the Earth Mother, marks a path in crops and forest, and the witnessed Sky-Earth union is memorialised by the locals who dig long parallel ditches that we call a *cursus* (Meaden 2007).

The sun was key to all life, and esteemed for its everlasting radiance. Even when obscured by cloud it furnishes the light of day that life requires. It was the coupling of Sun and Earth in a ritual of holy union at stone circles in which dimorphic stone pairs (like the Heel and Altar Stones) served as earthbound proxies that visually reassured the community as to their hopes for fertility success with their cattle, crops and women. This is why investigators of prehistory who hope to evaluate mysteries posed by the ideologies of prehistoric societies need to approach the problems of antiquity in this manner. Archaeology cannot deliver alone. Help needs to be sought from anthropology, especially conceptual socio-anthropology—the branch concerned with the study of human societies, cultures and their refinement with time.

### SEMIOTICS, THE STUDY OF SIGNS AND SYMBOLS

We commence with examples of the most obvious male-gender-indicative stones.

Stones that were deemed to have male characteristics

were set to stand upright and have more or less straight parallel sides, sometimes narrow, sometimes thick. Of surviving megaliths in prehistoric England, the supreme example of male-indicative icons is the straight-sided bluestone at Stonehenge that later was further abraded and shaped to represent a phallus with glans (Figs. 10 and 11). It is in the naos, the *sanctus sanctorum* of the monument (Meaden 2023a,b). It is decisive evidence that Stonehenge was raised as a temple for a fertility religion. Millions of symbolic stone phalli abound in the ancient and modern Hindu-faith Shiavite temples constructed in Asia in recent millennia. At similar locations most such male images are complemented as a matter of course by a carved lithic feminine-yoni. So, too, is the great phallus at Stonehenge because it is accompanied by the female-symbolic Altar Stone set prone before it (Fig. 11). The two stones were the paired cult idols of the inner temple. They express in clear symbolism what contemporary Hindus would say represent beliefs in the sacrality of the life forces.

Several features of big stones, natural or tooled, standing or recumbent, imply femininity. The rounded

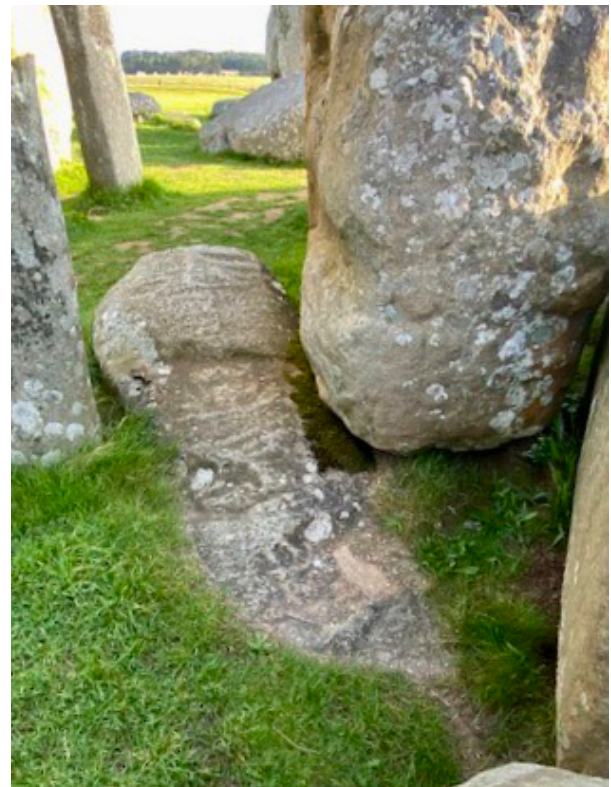


Fig. 10. For over two thousand years at Stonehenge, Stone 67 stood as the tallest bluestone a little over 2.5m high, behind the Altar Stone. Author's photograph 18 September 2025.

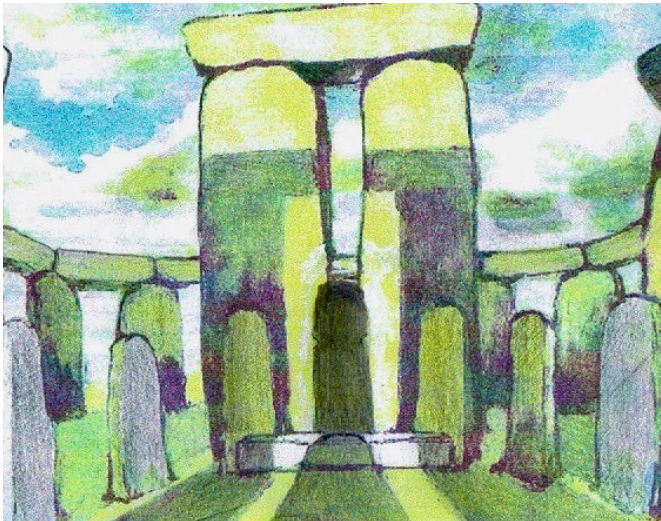


Fig. 11. The Altar Stone is recumbent in front of the great phallic bluestone. In this reconstruction the long shadow of the externally-located Heel Stone is shown in contact with the Altar Stone. This union between representatives of Sky and Earth can only happen in the days close to the summer solstice.

yni shape is characteristic. For Britain and Ireland, megalithic roundness, broadness or squatness typifies megalithic female features, e.g. the shadow-reception stone for the summer-solstice sunrise (Fig. 12) in the southern circle at Avebury (Meaden 1999, 28). Again, suggestively-female are stones set horizontally to lie lengthways, being long and flat-topped as at Lo-anhead of Daviot (Fig. 13) and Easter Aquhorthies in northern Scotland. The stones at each side, like the cove in Avebury, have the classical air of functioning as male iconic guardians.

Also, particular perimeter stones at Newgrange and Knowth (in Ireland) are prominent with meaningful



Fig. 12. At Avebury's South Circle this rounded megalith is the midsummer-sunrise reception stone.

carved artwork fashioned for linkage by phallic shadow on pre-selected calendrical dates. Fig. 14 exemplifies for the March and September quarter dates at Knowth (Meaden 2024, 91-93).

A vertical fissure, whether natural or artificial, is another feature well suited for identifying a female stone; the stone numbered 106 at Avebury is famous for this (Fig. 15) (Meaden 1999, 22-23). Of Beltane calendar date, it was arranged to receive at sunrise the phallic shadow of the five-metre-high Obelisk that centred the South Circle at Neolithic Avebury.

A traditional, female-suggestive form, much used worldwide, is the lozenge outline. Fig. 16 shows how at the winter-solstice sunrise in Aberdeenshire at Easter Aquhorthies a phallic shadow meets the centre-base of a lozenge-type stone.

Lozenge-type stones were often positioned to receive phallic shadows at sunrise on major calendar dates,

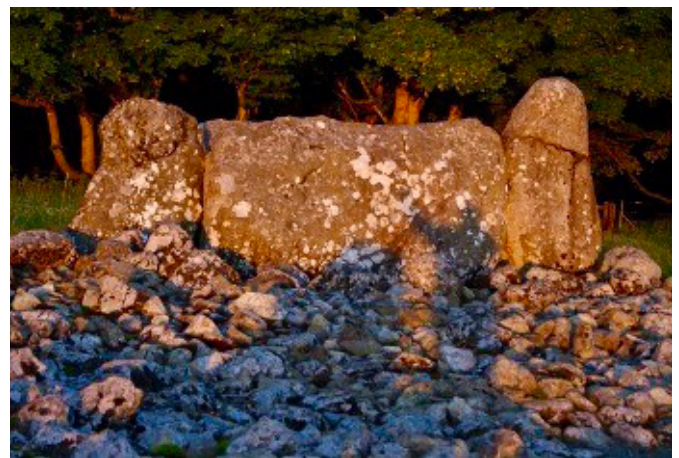


Fig. 13. Sunrise 20 June 2017 at 0326 GMT. The female-suggestive recumbent stone at Loanhead of Daviot is flanked by male-figurative standing stones (a century ago the glans was removed from the eastern male stone (Meaden 2021). The shadow of a phallic stone meets the centre-base of the female stone. The shadow of the author with raised arm shows alongside.

as in Devon, England, at The Hurlers (Fig. 17) and many stone circles elsewhere (Meaden 2024b).

This leads to discussion by Drombeg (Ireland) with its striking male-female stone pairs. The dimorphic positionings are very beautiful and informative, but tell us nothing of the moral compass or sexual ethics of the community. Instead, their coming together, as shown below, speaks volumes for the people's hopes for fertility in their farming-dominant world. Three images pecked on select stones (Stones 9 and 17) at this stone circle elegantly help to explain.



Fig. 14. Knowth. At the quarter-year calendar dates in March and September the shadow of the phallic stone joins the vertical centre lines of the waiting receptive stone. Author's photograph, 2017.



Fig. 15. Avebury, South Circle. The direction of Beltane sunrise (c. 6 May) aligns with the male Obelisk and the feminine feature on Stone 106. Author's photograph, 1996.

and cross-quarter days of the farming calendar. These eight dates were plausibly the ancient holy days and festival occasions for which purpose many solar-planned stone monuments were designed worldwide (Meaden 2020, 2023a, 2024b). They are the subjects of the next sections in which the related polymathic areas of knowledge known as conceptual anthropology, ethnology and semiotics are applied to them.

Ideally conducive to treatment by the principles of conceptual anthropology are the stones of the Irish stone circle at Drombeg (Fig. 18). Shadow events were likely inspirational, each displaying action drama on the annually-recurring quarter dates in March, June, September and December and on the four intermediate cross-quarter dates. Fig. 18 shows the Drombeg stone circle from the north. The plan in Fig. 19 illustrates what happens for the five principal sunrises in the winter half of the calendar. They include, above all, the quarter dates of September and March. The latter are close to the so-called equinoctial dates, the last-mentioned wrongly upheld by some modern commentators as dates of interest in antiquity. However, the skilled calendar-makers could not measure day-lengths accurately enough in order to tell which dates could be regarded as having nights and days of equal length. They did not need to try. When



Fig. 16. At the winter solstice sunrise in 2017, a phallic shadow unites with a well-placed lozenge stone. Easter Aquhorthies (Aberdeenshire, Scotland). Photograph by Austin Kinsley.

Fig. 17. A lozenge stone set due west on the northern circle at The Hurlers, Bodmin Moor, Cornwall. Opposite, due east, is a straight-sided stone, positioned for east-west shadow-casting. Author's photograph, 2019.



Fig. 18. At Drombeg the prominent axial recumbent Stone 9 is a fine female-indicative stone. On the opposite side of the circle are several straight-sided stones of male inclination. Stone 17 bears two carvings. The female-suggestive lozenge-shaped Stone 14 functions enlighteningly with the pillar-shaped Stone 15.

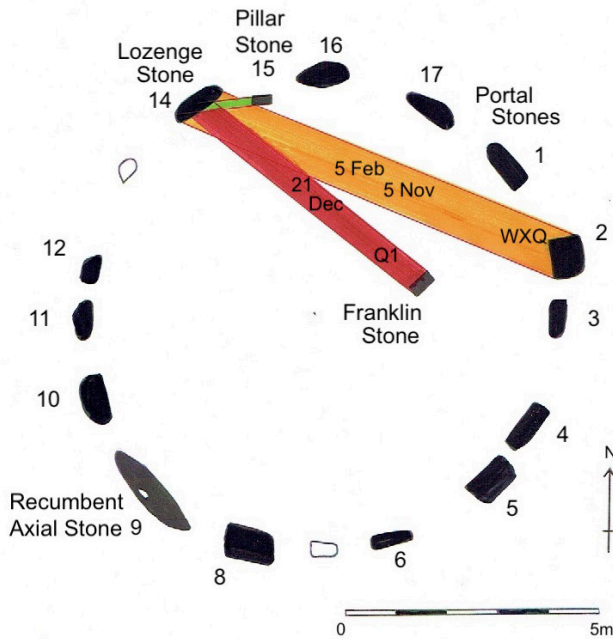


Fig. 19. Drombeg: Plan for the principal calendar dates on day-counting in the winter half of the year.

## THE RISING SUN AND A MULTIPLICITY OF CALENDAR DATES AT DROMBEG IN SOUTHWEST IRELAND

Crucial occasions for devotees of the Sun-God or Sky Father were those of the rising orb on the quarter days



Fig. 20. A unique occasion soon after sunrise at Drombeg Stone Circle when the shadow cast by the pillar Stone 15 falls upon the lozenge Stone 14 for the quarter days in March and September. Photograph by John Davies, September 2016.

day-counting, the March and September quarter dates, Q2 and Q4, occur on Day 92 (March 22), and Day 274 (September 20).

As to sunrise alignments and potential shadow-making with respect to the waiting lozenge stone in the winter half of the year September to March, three perimeter stones in the east-to-southeast account for the five indicated calendar dates (Fig. 19). These include the afore-mentioned second and fourth quarter dates, Q2 and Q4, in March and September (Fig. 20) when the shadow of the pillar Stone 15 meets the central part of the adjacent female lozenge Stone 14 with clearly-intended sexual imagery. From the viewpoint of conceptual anthropology, it is rational to conclude that the stone-circle folk saw this as male-female coition within the scope of a sun-dependent fertility religion. For the cross-quarter dates in February and November the mutual sunrise direction aligns Stone 2 with the lozenge Stone 14. The winter-solstice sunrise is marked by the line to the lozenge from the stone in the central area (i.e., the 'Franklin' Stone, Fig. 19). This stone was described by Franklin (1903) but was missing by the time of Somerville's 1910 visit). Only a single location for it fulfils all the data requirements obtained during recent fieldwork at Drombeg (Meaden 2024b, 66-71). This distinctive location is indicated on both the summer and the winter plans (Figs. 19 and 21).

In the summer half of the calendar year March to September, three different stones sited between northeast and east cast shadows at sunrise on key dates because of placed stones forming intentional stone-to-stone alignments with the point of the rising sun. The target is the central part of the recumbent Stone 9 and its carving of a vulva. Refer to the plan in Fig. 21. The shadow-casting stones are the portal Stone 1 (at the summer solstice, Q3), Stone 2 (6 May and 6 August), and Stone 5 which commences with the upper-limb light of the sun (Fig. 22) passing the angled narrow gap between Stones 4 and 5 (the quarter dates Q2 and Q4 in March and September).

The summer half-year begins with this union at the Q2 March quarter date, involving shadows cast by Stones 4 and 5 and received by the recumbent stone, and ends at the Q4 September quarter date when the alignment is again east-to-west. This photograph (Fig. 22) was taken on 21 September 2012 when the

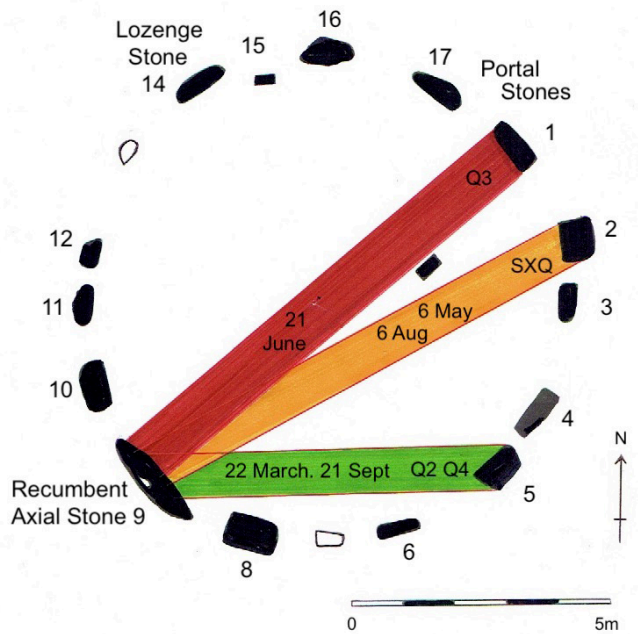


Fig. 21. Drombeg: Plan for principal calendar dates in the summer half of the year.

sunlight through the V-notch, formed between Stones 4 and 5, had just moved away from a carved vulva (Fig. 23) on the top surface of the recumbent stone. This revealing moment was followed by the shadow of Stone 5 in union with the vulva carving and the recumbent stone.

### THREE REVELATORY CARVINGS AT DROMBEG

The three instructive carvings of symbols at Drombeg (Figs. 23-25) are considered from the point of view of the symbology that semiotics can explain.

It is crucial to recognize that the recumbent Stone 9, which, above, was deemed to be female-symbolic *de*

*rerum natura*, has a vulva carved on it (Fig. 23). Also, the portal Stone 17 which is deemed male-symbolic for being tall and straight has a penis-with-testicles carved upon it (Fig. 24). Next to the image near the top of the stone is a carved oval resembling an egg in outline (Fig. 25), discussed below.

#### 1. The female-symbolic carving

To commence, the *sculpted vulva* (Fig. 23) confirms the horizontal recumbent stone at Drombeg as feminine. Other recumbent stones in Ireland, Scotland and England may similarly be identified, and this includes the Altar Stone at Stonehenge.

On the indicated five dates in Fig. 21 (summer solstice, the two summer cross-quarter dates and the March and September quarter dates), for several minutes at and after sunrise this female-symbolic recumbent stone is linked by shadow with perimeter stones in the east. These are male-to-female unions typical of a sun-based fertility religion. Yet, at a higher level of interpretation one can further wonder whether the folk regarded the shadow-casting stones as more significant and cherished than that, viz., that Stones 1, 2 and 5 (Fig. 21) on the eastern perimeter instead of being merely male served as earthfast *surrogates* for the Sun-God/Sky-God/Sky Father, while the recumbent stone with carved vulva represents the terrestrial Mother divinity of Earth and Land. The earthly union in the landscape is then potentially a manifestation of the widely esteemed Marriage of the Gods, the *hieros gamos* (Meaden 2021).

In spring the theme of seasonal renewal dominated



Fig. 22. Photographed by the author shortly after sunrise on 21 September 2012. Briefly the patch of sunlight in the V between the tops of Stones 4 and 5 illuminated the carved vulva, an inventive achievement of the master planners.



Fig. 23. Drombeg, female-symbolic recumbent stone with carved vulva and cup marks.

Fig. 24. Drombeg, male-symbolic portal stone with carved male genitalia.

Fig. 25. Drombeg, an egg-shaped carving adjacent to the male erection. Photo by John Davies.

farming minds. The sun was daily gaining strength as the days lengthened. Spring's renewed vitality is the time of fertility replenishment when trees and flowers burst into life and lambs and calves are born. The seasons progress from February and March to May (Beltane) and the June solstice. Thus, we find at Beltane the Sacred Wedding or Spring Wedding. Vestiges survive to this day in Eurasian countries with traditional early-May festivities.

## 2. The male-symbolic carving

The status of hardy masculinity at this site is revealed, indeed emphasized, by the *carved male genitalia* on the straight-sided portal Stone 17 (Fig. 24). The weather-worn image was first noted by Austin Kinsley on 17 September 2016 (Meaden 2021, v. 31, 48). The prehistoric sculptor, while addressing the divine, was inspiring his compatriots pictorially. Now, his representational image is psychologically communicating with us.

## 3. The egg

The author noticed the outline of the carved *egg-shape* in June 2012 (Fig. 25). It completes and crowns the triple-symbol narrative. In the photograph of 21 June 2019, the rising sun illuminates it well, as it does on the March and September quarter days. As with the carved vulva and phallus, the form of an egg serves as a prime fertility symbol. Symbologist Ad De Vries (1974, 158) explains, "in prehistoric tombs, eggs have been found as symbols of immortality ... laying the egg equals birth of man." Moreover, when present in dual combinations as with "egg and dart" [where

dart euphemizes phallus], De Vries succinctly notes "androgynous: female productiveness plus phallic male generator (cf. the Jewel in the Lotus)". At the solar fertility monument of Drombeg this may have been the meaning expressed by the imaginative sex duality. Furthermore, Barbara Walker (1983, 270) writes that "the Egg was a common Oriental image of creation. Its western version went back to cosmologies of the Tiamat type and to early exchanges between Greece and the East." Symbologist Juan Cirlot (1971, 94) explains at length that some communities may have regarded the egg-shape as symbolizing immortality. Summarising, the egg carving takes the study to a higher realm beyond the mysticism of the divine *hieros gamos*. Its presentation raises questions about ultimate creation, namely, origins and birth, that is to say, queries about the beginnings of the world and life.

## RELIGION AND THE HIEROS GAMOS

It is now appropriate to consider whether the prehistoric mysticism under review may have been meaningful at this higher level of primitive reasoning. Might it evoke myths of origin? Could the mutual bonding of images of opposite gender, particularly at the summer and winter solstices, have been construed by priestly leaders as honoring the primordial epoch of the origin of their world, hence life. Consider the next illustrations of a very fine stone (Figs. 26 and 27) on Harrestone Down, a few kilometres south of Avebury in southern England, discovered by the author in 1996 (Meaden 1999, 109-113).

Predominant in a row of five megaliths (Fig. 26), the



Fig. 26. Symbolic femininity on Harestone Down, south of Avebury, 14 December 1996.

Fig. 27. A deliberate example of conceptually-contrived coition inside the fissure. Author's photographs.

fissured stone radiates feminine sexuality. This fertility perspective, and the proximity of a stone circle and a three-stone cove, signal that the stone row was assembled in the Neolithic or Early Bronze Age. What might the community have conjectured about this feature? Impressively, the people of antiquity cunningly obliged in providing today's anthropology scholars with an answer by creating an artwork for their community. For this, refer to Fig. 27. Penetrating the vulvar-like fissure is a lithic rendering of a phallus—certainly making a persuasively rhetorical statement as to coition. Semiotics suggest prehistoric adoration and worship, much as with the stone pairings at millions of Hindu shrines denoting union between divinities of Sun or Sky and Earth.

Indeed, a Jungian psychologist, Joseph Henderson (1972, 234-236), discerned how the rite of Sacred Marriage between Sun and Earth was archetypal at all levels of experience, saying it resolves the primordial psychological dilemma regarding opposition between Male and Female. He expressed it thus: "Man's knowledge (Logos) encounters woman's relatedness (Eros), and their union is represented as that symbolic ritual of a Sacred Marriage". This is why the sacred union is so coherent and fruitful, because it focusses on perennial fertility aspirations. Expressed as uplifting sexuality it amounts to informing the deities beyond doubt what the people expect, viz. abundant fertility. In Britain and Ireland, the roles were conspicuously simulated by the perception of a Solar divinity coupling with sacrosanct Earth.

## CLOSING REMARKS

As centuries passed, elaborate scenarios would have developed at the sacred sites for all the festive occasions in which proxy stones of differing gender representing Sun and Earth played distinctive roles according to location and time of year. For agricultural societies it was plausibly inevitable that the *hieros gamos* would evolve into and flourish as auspicious rites of autumn, winter solstice and early spring (hence Imbolc and the first lambing) holy days. The summer-solstice and winter-solstice marriages between Sun and Earth being annual events, their timely reoccurrence was further interpretable as recognizing and approving the people's origin myths of their fickle Delphic world.

At particular dates announced by priests, and weather permitting, the ancient peoples gathered to watch the solar orb, deemed to be a celestial *divinity* consummating union with a terrestrial divinity via paired lithic surrogates. The idea of sacred matrimony is why the archetype is so compelling, and why it pervaded religious thinking for agriculturalists of every continent. At some monuments, imaginative choreographies were devised, as demonstrated for the high-status sites of Drombeg, Knowth, Newgrange, Avebury and Stonehenge, in which, during the period of sunrise, an effective theatrical device was presented that united the power of the sun with the dominion of the Earth Mother as if in coition. This was grand staged drama. Whatever the details of the rites, the communities were blending definitive images representing male

and female into a coherent whole, adroitly related to Sun and Earth with attention focussed on the people's perpetual fertility aspirations. Such beliefs continue to this day in Hinduism, Tantra and the ideology of a number of contemporary tribal communities across the world, as in Jharkhand and Bengal where these notions continue to be ceremonially ritualized at festival times. John Gordon Frazer, Mircea Eliade, Subhashis Das and the author give examples in their writings as cited in the present paper's references.

Organized theatre presents life's cycles of drama through the power of religious myth—which was all the more powerful because myth was held by priests and worshippers to be the indisputable truth seeing that it explained their uncertain world to their level of satisfaction.

At Stonehenge the golden orb, at first rising clear of the Heel Stone on midsummer morning and shining through the central trilithon gap of the outer sarsen ring, met its earthfast target icon the Altar Stone, illuminating it before extinguishing eclipse replaced sacred light with shadowed union and cosmic marriage. The misnamed Altar Stone was not only at the Centre of the World, in the usual religious sense, it was at the centre-back of the womb, the inner temple. The Marriage of the Gods was a common expedience in creation myths and in annual rituals that celebrated the renewal of the world. The spectacle may have been reminding the community of its supposed origins at the beginning of time when life began. It was a transitory and deeply moving experience. This would be a supreme example of “the profane being transmuted into the sacred by the dialectics of hierophany”, i.e., by the logic of revelation of the sacred (Mircea Eliade 1958, 466). Just as the Christian faithful can believe wine gets turned into blood, so here a stone was perceived as a deity at least for the duration times of memorials.

Although the non-literate British and Irish of those far-off days left us nothing in writing, we can understand their works and discern something of the spiritual manner in which they appreciated the wonders of Nature and the purpose of Life. We do so by interpreting the symbols that they set in stone and applying the wisdoms afforded by conceptual anthropology. It is as if these distant communities are engaging with us through their stones and imparting a cultic legacy

together with their calendrical knowledge for us to contemplate.

We share their nostalgia. Their monuments to Sun and Earth emerge from the mists of time more imposing than ever. Anthropological methodology of conceptual character rationally exposes aspects of the community's metaphysical world that would otherwise not be readily accessed, if ever reached at all.

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# NOTES AND NEWS

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## NEW BOOKS, NEW TRENDS

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#### **TYPOLGY OF ROCK ART**

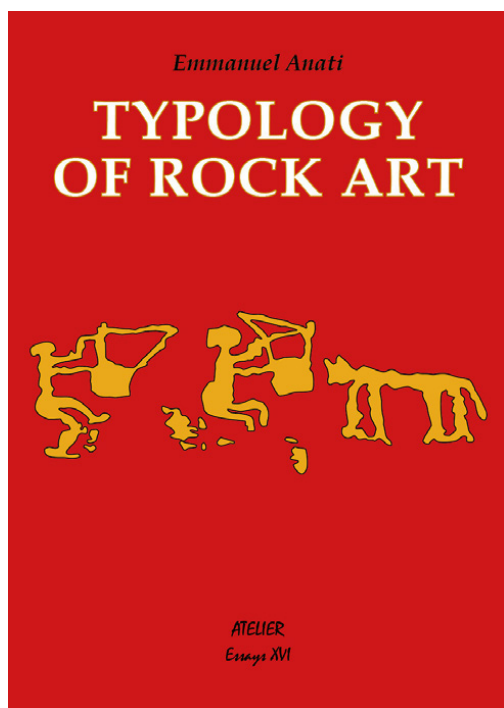
Rock art is a human expression, produced over the millennia, on five continents. In the frame of the UNESCO “World Report on Rock Art: the state of the art” (2008), the author presented a typological structure of rock art, which has since been updated and revised. This text presents an updated version considering the following topics: elementary concepts of typology; definition of rock art site; the grammar of rock art: typology of signs and figures; categories of rock art according to the way of life of their creators: archaic hunter-gatherers, hunters who use bow and arrows, shepherds and animal breeders, complex economy including agriculture, others; syntax: the systems of associations of graphemes, associations, compositions, sequences, scenes, etc.; archetypes and variants; purpose, results and purpose of the typology.

#### **THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PREHISTORIC AND TRIBAL SOCIETIES**

The social roles of women, as those of men, are dependent upon biological, social, economic and cultural factors, and they are not the same among clans of hunters, tribes of rice growers, or complex urban societies. They are not the same in urban Kabul and in urban Las Vegas. Some societies allow more flexibility than others. A collection of papers examining thousands of years and different societies, by authors from various parts of the world, is provoking a healthy reflection on variable realities. The Bronze Age Sacred Sites of Har Karkom

#### **THE BRONZE AGE SACRED SITES OF HAR KARKOM**

The Har Karkom Bronze Age cult sites, found on the mountain and in the surrounding valleys, the types of altars, ritual platforms, private sanctuaries, shrines, temples, anthropomorphic cult-stones, menhirs and standing pillars, tumuli, geoglyphs and rock art, disclose the vast dimensions of rituals, traditions and beliefs of the tribal world in the desert, related to the narrations of the biblical book of Exodus



## Typology of Rock Art

Anati, E. (ed.)

2023, *Typology of Rock Art*

Essay XVI

Capo di Ponte (Atelier), 106 pp., 37 figg. € 20

Rock art is a human expression, produced over the millennia, on five continents. In the frame of the UNESCO “World Report on Rock Art: the state of the art” (2008), the author presented a typological structure of rock art, which has since been updated and revised. This text presents an updated version considering the following topics: elementary concepts of typology; definition of rock art site; the grammar of rock art: typology of signs and figures; categories of rock art according to the way of life of their creators: archaic hunter-gatherers, hunters who use bow and arrows, shepherds and animal breeders, complex economy including agriculture, others; syntax: the systems of associations of graphemes, associations, compositions, sequences, scenes, etc.; archetypes and variants; purpose, results and purpose of the typology.

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# THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PREHISTORIC AND TRIBAL SOCIETIES

General editor  
Emmanuel Anati



ATELIER  
Colloqui

## The Role of Women in Prehistoric and Tribal Societies

Anati, E. (ed.)

2021, The Role of Women in Prehistoric and Tribal Societies,  
Colloqui XXIII

Capo di Ponte (Atelier), 170 pp., 164 figg. € 40

The social roles of women, as those of men, are dependent upon biological, social, economic and cultural factors, and they are not the same among clans of hunters, tribes of rice growers, or complex urban societies. They are not the same in urban Kabul and in urban Las Vegas. Some societies allow more flexibility than others. A collection of papers examining thousands of years and different societies, by authors from various parts of the world, is provoking a healthy reflection on variable realities. The Bronze Age Sacred Sites of Har Karkom

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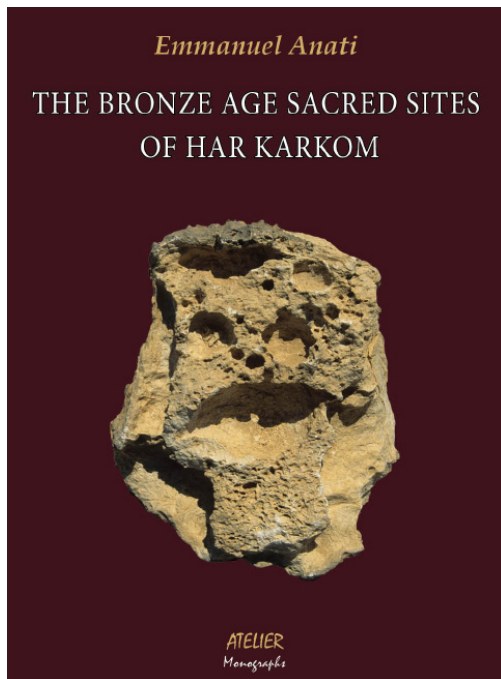
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## The Bronze Age Sacred Sites of Har Karkom

Anati, E.

2022, *The Bronze Age Sacred Sites of Har Karkom*

Monograph XVIII

Capo di Ponte (Atelier), 124 pp., 118 figg. € 20

The Har Karkom Bronze Age cult sites, found on the mountain and in the surrounding valleys, the types of altars, ritual platforms, private sanctuaries, shrines, temples, anthropomorphic cult-stones, menhirs and standing pillars, tumuli, geoglyphs and rock art, disclose the vast dimensions of rituals, traditions and beliefs of the tribal world in the desert, related to the narrations of the biblical book of Exodus

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## DEFINING RESEARCH PURPOSES AND GOALS

Some questions have been posed about the definition of the area of concern of *EXPRESSION* quarterly e-journal. Anthropology and archeology have developed different tendencies, ranging from technical studies mainly related to the natural sciences, to humanistic research focussed on social and cultural themes, conservation and preservation, the rights of ownership of the cultural patrimony, touristic and cultural developments, educational sectors, and other tendencies becoming different disciplines, each demanding specific professional formations, goals, and responsibilities. *EXPRESSION* is the journal of conceptual anthropology. The goal is to contribute to the analysis of archeological and anthropological data aimed at understanding the people that produced them, their motivations and goals, and their material and spiritual lives. Other research tendencies are considered if they can contribute to this goal.

## THE QUESTION OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND FUNDING RESEARCH

Research is run by both people who have jobs in research and people who do research without being paid. Among the people paid to do research, some in fact are paid for teaching. In Europe, as elsewhere, in the fields of archeology and anthropology, very few researchers are really paid for the research they are doing. This situation constitutes a negative impact on the progress of research. Progress in knowledge and discoveries is the core of culture and research should be given more opportunities to better contribute to culture.

Research requires funding and funding implies bureaucratic procedures. People involved in fund raising for research are conditioned to devoting more to funding research than to scientific research.

The whole system is not built for enhancing progress in research, but rather for making research depend upon bureaucratic personnel often unable to seriously evaluate the perspectives of research and the results. Research in the naturalistic fields, which allow people to reach the moon or create lethal nuclear weapons, has immense resources, while humanistic research is in the corner.

Research in the humanistic fields enriches the knowledge of the human species and of each human context, and it contributes to opening minds, healthy interests and social and cultural enrichment. It is a vital part of conceptual welfare, determining the future of human society: It is greatly needed in the present and essential for the future.

Educational institutions, national governments, and international organizations should find a way to devote their

energies to humanistic research, which is no less important than natural sciences and no less meaningful for human welfare. Important progress and achievements in humanistic research are a source of distinction and prestige not only for the research targets, but also for the supporting institutions.

Research and academic institutions should grow their educational and cultural roles and their prestige by giving more space to the role of researchers in the humanities, appointing research professors having research as their main role, and granting support to anthropological and archeological research. The debate should widen general concern and reach those institutions having decision-making capabilities.

## ATELIER RESEARCH CENTER

Atelier Research Center for Conceptual Anthropology is a workshop for research, experiment, and debates on intellectual and spiritual expression: traditions, art, religion, and other social and conceptual aspects of human society. It is a meeting place for human sciences, where artists, philosophers, anthropologists, archeologists, semioticians, psychologists, and students of other disciplines find a common language. Atelier organizes meetings, seminars, and exhibitions; it benefits from a space for exhibitions, a laboratory, and meeting facilities in the Camonica Valley, in the Italian Alps, and a research field base in the Negev Desert. It runs a publishing department producing books and the quarterly journal *EXPRESSION*. It is open to supporters wishing to share knowledge, ideas, and debates. They receive *EXPRESSION* quarterly journal, announcements of research projects, events, new books, activities for apprentices and other communications. Supporters annual subscription is a free donation, decided by each adherent according to his/her possibility and will. Volunteers and apprentices are welcome.

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CISENP is the International Scientific Commission on Research into the Intellectual and Spiritual Expression of Non-literate Peoples. Founded as a commission of UISPP, the International Union of Prehistoric Sciences, its goals expanded beyond prehistory to include other sectors of the humanities, involving archeologists, anthropologists, art historians, historians of religion, psychologists, and so-

ciologists. It is now a free and independent association of conceptual anthropology participating in the editing, publication, and promotion of *EXPRESSION* quarterly journal and other activities of Atelier. Authors publishing in *EXPRESSION*, unless otherwise expressed, are considered to be associates of CISENP. Scholars and students from any country in the world, interested in conceptual anthropology and in the activities carried on by Atelier research center may apply to join CISENP, by email to <atelier.etno@gmail.com>, including CV, list of scientific publications, and other pertinent documents. Associates are scholars and students, they may propose projects and actions, promote meetings and debates, contribute articles and/or editorial work to the *EXPRESSION* journal, and other activities by Atelier. The association is based on active participation. Annual subscription is optional, a free donation, according to the individual possibility and will. The function of associates expires if inactive for over one year.

### **WHAT IS UCA, THE UNION OF CONCEPTUAL ANTHROPOLOGY?**

UCA is the autonomous association between individuals and institutions wishing to maintain active contact, joint projects and discussions on matters of conceptual anthropology. UCA allows groups of researchers from different parts of the world to keep in contact with each other and foster joint projects and debates. For joining, promoting projects, support and cooperation, or for further information, contact atelier.etno@gmail.com.

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Madrid

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Research Center for Conceptual Anthropology

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Dr. Sandra Scham  
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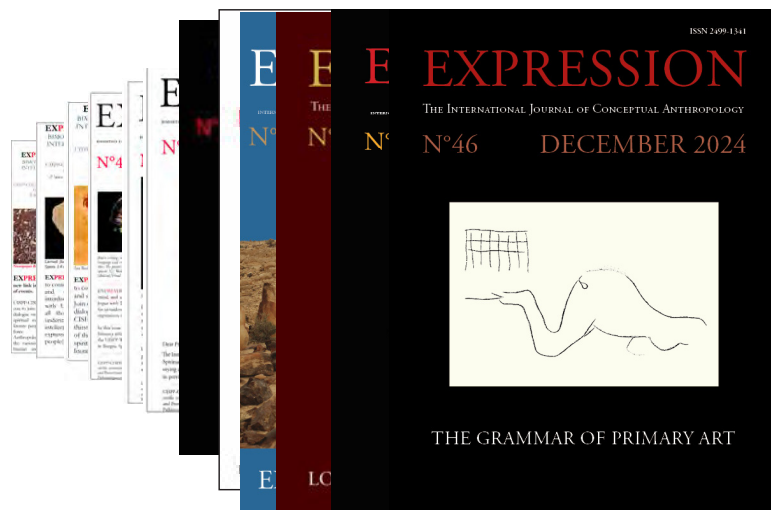
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