

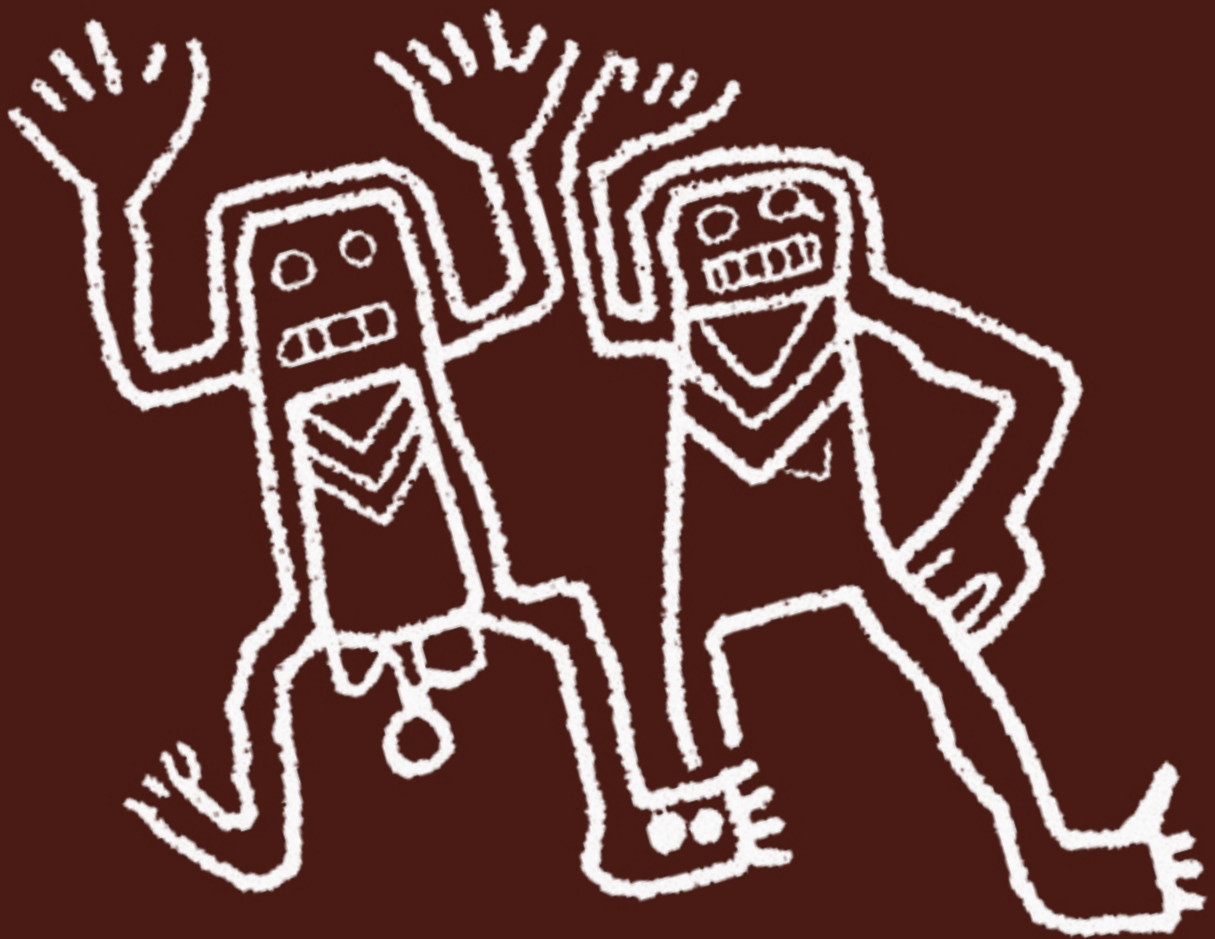
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# EXPRESSION

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**THE SEMIOTIC OF IDEOGRAMS**

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# EDITORIAL

## NOTES

### INTRODUCTION

#### **The semiotic of ideograms**

The use of graphic signs to convey ideas, concepts, and other kinds of information is a globally widespread cultural pattern. Sharing assigned meanings to signs is a basic aspect of the human communication process. This is, however, a recent acquisition in human evolution. According to geological, anthropological, and chronological evaluations, in the at least 3 million years of the presence of the species Homo, the intentional use of graphic signs as a means of communication is present only in the last less than 100,000 years, less than 3% of the time range of humankind. And yet it marks a turning point in its evolution. It affirms the ability to transfer the human memory to an external base, fixing it beyond the temporary physical abilities of the individual's mind. It permits the establishment of a database of external intelligence (EI), a tremendous step in cultural evolution.

A deliberately shaped sign reflects the mind that produces it. The idea precedes its visual form. The visual form is a materialization of the idea. Understanding the elementary function of the sign as a means of marking, memorizing, and communicating is a source for understanding the mental processing of data, which varies according to the way of life, yet remains within the range of basic human logical thinking. Also, it is a core for considering the roots and limits of logical thinking, an essential element not only for art history and linguistics but also for psychology, sociology, and philosophy. And it poses the question of the process of the evolution of human intelligence (HI), which permitted external intelligence (EI).

The conceptual meaning of graphic signs is a major concern of conceptual anthropology. Different kinds of societies have different patterns of graphic expression and communication, but all of them have common conceptual bases within the frames of HI. Intelli-

gence is not uniquely human; every animal has its own kind of intelligence. Nomadic and sedentary human societies tend to have different values and different graphic expressions. Hunter-gatherers have different logical systems of symbolizing from farmers. \*Note.

Note\*As evidenced, for example, by Bantu (farmers) and Sandawe (hunter-gatherers) art in Tanzania (cf. Expression 18).

The large-scale documentation of what is now classified as prehistoric allows us to define the patterns of different human societies and the universally shared patterns. The similarity of graphic shapes is easily remarked, but the similarity of their meaning in different contexts may be more challenging.

Ideograms like the crescent moon, the cross, the swastika, the hammer and sickle and also the simple shape of the heart have specific conceptual meanings in the cultural context in which they were produced: accordingly, the individual brought up in a society practicing these signs knows them. He/she is conscious of the meaning and may have the mental ability to consider them positively or negatively or attribute to them personal or socially shared values. Individuals from a different cultural background or from a different age, where such symbols are not familiar, may not be able to refer to them for their intended meaning. Thus, they are legible metaphors for those who have the appropriate indoctrination. This is obviously valid also for graphic symbols from other cultures and times, that may not automatically disclose their meaning to contemporary European researchers. The semiotic definition of ideograms of different cultures and ages is a structural factor of HI.

Some signs can have different meanings in different human entities, or they may have local dialectal meaning; others may represent similar concepts in different cultures. Around 20 or 25 simple marks have a widespread diffusion and a millenary persistence: point, line, disc, triangle, rectangle, cross, serpentine, zig-zag

form, signs like X, V, S, Z, C, T, M, N, arrow, handprint, footprint, phallic sign, vulvar sign. They are elementary shapes, the ones that engendered proto-alphabetic and alphabetic graphemes from the period of the first formal writing 5,000 years ago, and they have appeared in prehistoric and tribal art down the ages. This limited number of universally diffused simple shapes reflects multimillenary natural selection and provides a base for the concept of elementary forms. Phonetic writing attributed phonetic values to signs, transforming ideograms into phonograms (phonetic grams). Before their phonetic spelling, most of them had ideographic values. But the question arises whether similar signs had similar meaning in different societies. The issue is whether similar signs used in different parts of the world originate from a common conceptual core. Not always, but often, we can deduce variations of the metaphorical significance of similar signs presumably deriving from a primary common prototype.

The present issue of *Expression* journal provides some examples of attempts to decode the symbols, pictograms, ideograms, and psychograms of different societies. They are preceded in the Discussion Forum by a text by Xu Feng on the function of conceptual anthropology seen from China, awakening a debate on methodology. The main articles review different aspects of semiotic decoding from different periods in the last 25,000 years. They represent the continuation from previous issues of research projects in progress. Emmanuel Anati adds another paper in his semiotic studies of European Paleolithic graphic expression. Some puzzling undecoded or partially decoded artefacts are analyzed, proposing a methodological analysis of the deciphering process and stimulating readers to find solutions.

Terence Meaden adds another chapter to his research on the semiotics of light and shadow in the megalithic monuments of the British Isles. He proposes that the monoliths interplay with the changing position of the sun, thus making an invisible aspect of the megaliths visible. The research intends to demonstrate the prehistoric planners' intention that these shadows and

lights have a purpose. This is a new insight into the logical thinking of the megalithic builders. Some revelations may emerge in making visible what appeared to be invisible, that is, the meaning of shadows being an apparently disregarded immaterial aspect of the solidly material and imposing monoliths.

Carol Patterson and Melanie McKay-Cody analyze the meaning of rock art representing topographic features of the territory and its meaning in Utah, US. The picture-writing engraved on the rock surfaces reveals a logical thinking shared by the native population as a clear method of communication. An analphabetical writing readable by any spoken language provides an example of EI, transmitted by the action of men on rock surfaces, an external holder of information produced by human minds.

Maarten van Hoek considers an aspect of South American rock art, the intriguing images of female individuals in an area of southern Peru. Some of them represent mythical beings, others, apparently, humans. The images were engraved on the rocks for some purpose intended to convey meaning. The presenting of the raw material of the images is a basic aspect of progress in the understanding of what the makers intended to obtain or express. Why were they produced? What was the sense and function of these images? What is their meaning and what is the role of the sites where they were represented? Sanctuaries? Archives? Artists' ateliers? Or other functions?

The issue includes, as usual, short notes and news and the alphabetic index of authors of *Expression* journal as a means to follow the different research projects and ideas expressed in previous issues.

*Expression* is a corpus of research in conceptual anthropology, growing with each issue, where previous issues remain active and present. It represents a history in progress of conceptual anthropology, open and available to whoever is interested in this field, in every country and to every human society. The semiotic of elementary signs is not a goal in itself, but a window on the roots of logical thinking and cultural evolution: a conceptual landscape EI unveils on HI.

E.A.

## A NOTE FOR THE AUTHORS

EXPRESSION is a quarterly journal on conceptual anthropology diffused 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 with a critical mind. 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 have published 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. EXPRESSION is a free journal, independent and not submitted to formal traditional regulations. It offers space for ideas and discoveries, including debatable 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. Additional information on how to submit a paper is found in the 'Notes and News' section.



**Front page image:** See article by Maarten van Hock (Fig. 18. Petroglyphs on Panel AP3-069A at Alto de Pitis. Drawing by Maarten van Hoek.

# DISCUSSION FORUM

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

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## ACADEMIC LANDSCAPE

### CONCEPTUAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE EXPRESSION JOURNAL

Xu Feng | Nanjing Normal University, China

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Prof. Emmanuel Anati is the director of Atelier, the prehistoric studies center in Italy's Camonica Valley and a former president of the International Rock Art Committee. Now over 90 years old, I have never met him personally, but his great reputation preceded him long ago and was known to me. More than twenty years ago, I first read about Prof. Anati in the afterword of Mr. Tang Huisheng's Qinghai Petroglyphs. Anati left a deep impression on me with his pun on intellectual "cook", meaning both "cooking" ideas and "writing". I didn't imagine back in college that I would also be engaged in "cooking" in the future. I am interested in both kinds of cooking, as they represent creativity and expression.

I got to know Anati further through his work *World Rock Art: The Primordial Language*. This seminal book in the field of rock art research perceives rock art as a form of primordial language, asserting that rock art possesses its own intrinsic grammar and syntax. His theory of syntax integrates the study of syntactic structures with human cognitive processes, exploring how these structures reflect patterns of human cognition and experiential frameworks. I remember reading the book years ago, while jotting down notes in the most basic kind of notebook. During that time, I was particularly interested in exploring the meanings hidden behind images and patterns, but I also became aware of the difficulties involved in this work.

After my initial encounter with his study, I only

skimmed other aspects of his work. My exploration of rock art has been set aside as well. Although rock art is fascinating and interesting, working on it is not easy. Dating is a challenge; the limited imagery can lead to over-interpretation of meanings. As a result, rock art research often seems to lie at the margins of both archaeology and art history. Sociologist Michael Mann has even proposed the concept of "interstitial development"! To survive in this gap is also to innovate within it, as the theoretical developments in this field over the decades prove! Rock art research, much like the labyrinthine patterns found in rock art itself, is filled with contradictions: it is both alluring and perplexing. However, throughout my reading, I have still occasionally encountered rock art research. I have studied articles by rock art scholars such as J.D. Lewis-Williams, David S. Whitley, and Jean Clottes. I have explored Lewis-Williams' investigation of the mind in caves and Neolithic thought, as well as Whitley's work on the Coso Range. I have witnessed the landscapes of rock art and have kept a close eye on the developments and hot topics in rock art research. On the contrary, the works of Anati, the very top rock art scholar I encountered, had not crossed my path for a long time. Or rather, I had not deliberately sought to read them. That changed with the emergence of "Expression."

"Expression" is a professional journal founded in collaboration between his prehistoric studies center of Italy's Camonica Valley and the International Scientific

Council, focusing on research into the cognitive and spiritual expressions of prehistoric non-literate tribal humanity. Anati established the journal in 2013, and its subtitle is “The International Journal of Conceptual Anthropology.”

When I see the term “conceptual anthropology”, I cannot help but recall the wish of Chinese archaeologist Yu Weichao. In 1999, Mr. Yu expressed a desire to establish a magazine called “Humanity and Culture”. Mr. Wang Renxiang, another Chinese archaeologist, once wrote about this aspiration, describing it as an unfinished grand ambition. What would be the topic of this magazine? Yu stated: “What is the focus? I am considering integrating history, archaeology, and anthropology to create a magazine called ‘Humanity and Culture’. If successful, it would resemble the French *Annales* School, making history a human science.”

In my humble opinion, the mission of “Expression” is remarkably similar to Yu Weichao’s envisioned “Humanity and Culture”, especially in its spirit. The purpose of this magazine is to promote dialogue, knowledge, and ideas regarding the intellectual and spiritual expressions of non-literate societies. It serves as an open forum for conceptual anthropology, featuring the research and viewpoints of over 250 authors from 50 different countries. Topics covered include anthropology, archaeology, art, sociology, mythology, rock art and psychology, among others. Each issue is generally divided into sections: discussions, main articles, and the notes and news.

What is “conceptual anthropology”? According to Anati’s explanation, conceptual anthropology is a discipline that analyzes and interprets art, beliefs, traditions, and other intellectual and spiritual expressions. Its aim is to understand the process of conceptualization that defines individual and social attitudes and behaviors. There are different levels of understanding human behavior, and it is this layered understanding that determines our ability to evaluate, communicate, manage, and respond. Conceptual anthropology defines behavioral and conceptual syntheses of reality, deepening their psychological and social significance. For the study of the past, it processes and analyzes the data produced by history and archaeology. Conceptual anthropology uses the results of archaeological and historical data to extract the social, psychological, and conceptual implications that establish the identity

of people and society and reveal the matrices of their behavior. In simpler terms, conceptual anthropology seeks the spirit of culture.

The purpose of conceptual anthropology finds expression through the journal “Expression”. This publication is managed by the ATELIER team, which refers to a workshop for research, experimentation, invention, and creation. Anati is the central artisan in this academic workshop. My connection to this journal began with submitting and publishing articles. My first English paper published in “Expression” was in 2022 Issue 38, titled “Construction of Sacred Space: Definition, Type, and Function”. It is a theoretical article discussing the concept, types, and functions of sacred space. The theme aligns perfectly with the journal’s focus. Anati introduced the article in the editorial remarks, stating, “One article discusses sacred areas in ancient China and other parts of the world. They are material expressions of beliefs.”

After that, ATELIER sends each issue of “Expression” via email, and my colleagues in the domestic rock art community share it in a timely manner. “Expression” is published quarterly, and each issue contains a limited number of articles, as ATELIER is not a large organization and the editor-in-chief is of advanced age. The fact that he can still manage and oversee a publication is already quite admirable. Each issue introduces prehistoric art from around the world, including contributions from the UK, South Africa, Australia, China, and more. Readers can immerse themselves in a diverse landscape of prehistoric art and belief systems. From the rock art of the Negev Desert to Stonehenge in England; from the rain-making rituals and rock art of the San people in South Africa to the hunting art found in caves in Indonesia that dates back 50,000 years, each issue explores different themes, all related to the expressions of human intellect and spirit. Themes such as “Order and Logic”, “The Origins of Philosophy” and “The Origins of Religion” are common. Anati typically provides a theoretical elaboration on these topics, demonstrating considerable insight and theoretical depth, which is very enriching.

Recently, my colleague and I completed a paper titled “Discovery of the First Clamshell Mosaic Depicting a Dragon in Southern China: A Multidisciplinary Archaeological Project at the Xuecheng Site”, which was published in December 2024 Issue 46 of “Expres-

sion.” This is my second English paper published in this journal, and its theme aligns with the journal’s purpose. The dragon imagery found in the archaeological discovery is a form of concrete visual art. Similar artifacts emerged around 5,000 years ago from the material culture of prehistoric China, forming a distinct pattern of belief. Humans in different regions share both similar and local-specific modes of expression. They possess the same cognitive abilities and have common roots and parallel evolutionary processes, ultimately achieving similar outputs: visual art.

The journal “Expression” is a stunning academic landscape with each issue resembling a beautifully crafted dish. As the chief editor of the magazine, Anati is both knowledgeable and highly creative in his conceptual thinking. His writings not only provide a narrative of the materials but also delve into metaphysical ideas that elevate the understanding of these materials; many of his expressions are truly quotable. Here are two excerpts!

He discusses how myths originate:

“The creation of myths proves to be a constant of the cognitive process of all human societies. Parameters of this process are examined: the origin of a distant memory, the itineraries of idealization, sublimation and structuring. Similar myths from different cultures reveal recurring conceptual criteria. From the beginning man feeds the myth and the myth feeds man. Myths feed myths.”

He talks about the spirits in stones:

“Menhirs, or standing stones, decorated or not, appear to be the expression of a conceptual movement aimed at the cult of ancestral spirits, that dominated religious

thinking for millennia. These prehistoric monuments, spread over most of Eurasia, are witnesses of the first great universal religion of which we have traces.”

Reading Anati’s writings, I can sense his talent, inspiration, and vigorous creativity in the fields of art, belief, and religious studies. Looking through the research results released by ATELIER, the catalog of achievements has already stretched over ninety books since the beginning of the 21st century. Some may question: with so many works, it is simply overwhelming; what about the quality? I believe this really requires a specific analysis of each case. We should be pleased to have such a diligent and prolific creator in our times. In the film industry, figures like Ridley Scott, Bernardo Bertolucci, Woody Allen, and Zhang Yimou are all known for being both highly productive and of high quality. Even if a minority of the works are not up to par, the overall standard remains. Anati is a master in the same vein.

Moreover, it is particularly commendable that each issue of “Expression” can be considered a showcase of visual art. The artists in this workshop are truly masters of color. Red, yellow, blue, black, white—they create a vibrant spectrum; with rock art, stone carvings, canvases, and bronze works, the materials are rich and varied. If beginners in archaeology, anthropology, and art have the chance to encounter these works, I believe they will certainly be captivated.

Anati, along with his countless academic works, has become a prominent part of the academic landscape. I am glad that our era has such a landscape—broad, profound, and captivating.

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# FORTHCOMING NEW DEBATES AND MAIN ARTICLES

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?** Just for hunting and food collecting? Other primates did not expand their territory to the same extent. Curiosity? Sense of discovery? Colonization of the territory?
2. **WHY MEGALITHISM: THE LOGIC BEHIND.** Why relocating and positioning cycloptic stones? What did the monuments mean? How did it start? Why did it stop?
3. **SEAFARING DEPICTIONS: RECORDING MYTHS AND EVENTS** Considering the story of seafaring and its earliest documentation. What pushed prehistoric people to explore behind the horizon?
4. **MYTHS OF ORIGINS: WHERE DID THE ANCESTORS COME FROM?** Global and local traditions. Looking for the roots: why?
5. **VERNACULAR DECORATIVE PATTERNS AND THEIR SOURCES.** Decoration of objects, huts or rock surfaces as the expression of identity. The power of traditions.
6. **THE ART OF HUNTERS AND GATHERERS:** Different patterns as expressions of different lifestyles and different resources. Purposes and functions.
7. **ASIA – AMERICA CONTACTS IN PRE-COLUMBIAN TIMES.** Migrations, Seafaring and colonization. Patterns of colonization of the territory.
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.

# PALEOLITHIC GRAPHIC EXPRESSIONS: THE CHALLENGING SEMIOTICS

*Emmanuel Anati*

Atelier Research Center for Conceptual Anthropology (Italy)

## **Preamble**

The use of graphic signs to convey ideas, concepts, emotions and other kinds of realities and information, is a global cultural pattern. It is an externalization shared by every human society, reflecting the minds of the makers. Communication can be addressed to other people, to ancestors, spirits and divinities, and also to oneself. It is a way of fixing and recording graphically something transferred from the direct memory of the being, the creation of a primary database archive. Reading the messages left behind by people of a different epoch and cultural background is a challenging endeavor, which is progressing step by step, as is proposed in the present paper.

The practice of defining the contents and purposes of prehistoric art is common for native societies, being a source of ties with the ancestors who left their conceptual heritage in rock art and art objects (Mallery, 1889). In a modern academic context, the first consistent attempts to understand the meaning and purpose of the art of European hunter-gatherers have been carried out by the fathers of prehistoric research, like Henri Breuil (1912, 1952), Paolo Graziosi (1960), André Leroi-Gourhan (1965), Alexander Marshack (1970, 1972a, 1972b), and others. Their achievements have been summarized in Anati, 1989, 2003. Rhetorical and theoretical disquisitions have given birth to theories, awakening a growing interest in the meaning of both parietal and mobile Paleolithic art. The concept of grammar and syntax of prehistoric art has opened up new horizons in the interpreting process. After elaborating upon basic research in the typological variabilities of the grammar structure of primary graphic expressions (Anati, 1997, 2000), the progress of our research in decoding prehistoric art has developed with the new orientations of conceptual anthropology elaborated in the book *Decoding Prehistoric Art and the Origins of Writing* (Anati, 2015), and in articles in *Expression* journal. Both the book and these

articles provide a corpus of prehistoric graphic documentation useful for comparative studies and methodology.\*

Out of hundreds of Paleolithic graphic documents, usually defined as works of art, only a few have been exhaustively decoded. Immense research work still remains to be done. Here we make another small step in the research in progress by analyzing a number of such objects.

## **The Conceptual Process**

In previous studies we presented examples of tentative decoding of Paleolithic works of art, which in fact are historical documents from a prehistoric age. In the present paper we discuss some unsolved cases, which appear to have the potential for decipherment. The question is: what is their meaning and function, why were they produced.

---

\* Previous articles by Anati on decoding Paleolithic European art in *Expression* journal:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Vol. 46, pp. 2-3, *The Grammar of Primary Art*

Vol. 46, pp. 5-6, *The Conceptual Roots of Primary Art*

Vol. 46, pp. 14-30, *The Paleolithic Origins of Writing*

The objects considered in the present paper come from what is defined as the Franco-Cantabrian region of southern France and north-western Spain. They are part of the Paleolithic collection of the Musée des Antiquités Nationales, Saint-Germain-en-Laye. They belong to the evolved phases of the Upper Paleolithic, which is defined as Late Gravettian, Magdalenian, and other categories of the conventional terminology. Most of them do not have a precise chronological determination. Currently, they are considered to go back between 25,000 and 14,000 years.

This period of about 10,000 years was a sort of prehistoric Renaissance of intense artistic and conceptual creativity by an affluent society of hunter-gatherers, at the western end of the Euro-Asiatic continent. People reached this area bordered by the ocean, where they could not proceed any further. The region was rich in bison and other hunting game and offered plenty of resources for material living, which favored intellectual and spiritual development (Anati, 2007).

What was recovered of the graphic creativity of this age survived because it was made on or of durable materials, stone, and bones, horns and antlers, which fossilized in the course of time. Most of the artistic creativity of that time, like that of more recent hunter-gatherers, is presumed to have been on wood, bark, skins, and other perishable materials and have been lost forever. The surviving items are a precious heritage that must be decoded and understood as testimony of a stage in the conceptual evolution of humankind.

The question is not just of reading this or that document. The decoding of each additional document is a step toward finding a system of reconstructing a way of thinking, expression and communication at the roots of culture. It means rediscovering the people of a past age, at the roots of our way of being and thinking: recovering chapters of our forgotten history (Anati, 2002a, b).

Besides the values of aesthetics and symbolism and their role in the history of art, the main relevance of primary graphic expressions consists in their being an exceptional source for getting at the conceptual, spiritual, and emotional mental processes of the ancestors of modern society. Their graphic expressions are the material mirror of their minds. Can we reconstruct the logic of their minds from the visual remains?

This research is in progress and the following examples

expose elements of the analytical processing of some unsolved cases in the recovery of a primary way of transfer from thinking to its visual expression.

### **A feline figurine from Isturitz**

A small figurine of a feline on antler from Isturitz (Basses-Pyrénées, France) displays four different human actions: 1, the selection of the raw material and the production of the figurine; 2, the engraving on it of two arbolet ideograms; 3, the making of a series of perforations; and 4, the intentional breaking of the head and likely also of the missing tail of the image. The semiotic analysis concerns each one of these actions: what was the meaning and purpose of producing the figurine, what was the significance of the arbolet ideograms, what was the function of the perforations, and what was the reason for breaking the head.

It is supposed that the feline figure was produced on purpose, and had a meaning for its maker, not necessarily identical to what it can represent for the museum or the art collector. What did this animal figure mean to its maker? Is that feline just a feline, or a symbol, a name, a totem, an idea, a reference?

The object just by itself can hardly define its function without comparative insight. The function may vary according to the conceptual values attributed by the maker, as an expression of art for art's sake, a totemic icon, a symbol, a magic talisman, a divinity, a toy, a means of witchcraft, for example. It is likely however, that making the effort to shape and engrave an image must have had a motive.

The arbolet ideograms are common in other objects. Two widespread ideograms, the bâtonnet (without branches or with small branches) and the arbolet (with developed branches), are considered to be male symbols. The function of marking this figurine twice is not explicit. Further, has their positioning on the legs a meaning?

The perforations: what is their meaning and function? Their age is uncertain: when were they performed? By the maker of the figurine or later, by somebody else? In any case they are drilled, penetrating the internal part of the figurine. Why? Were they done for some functional or aesthetic purpose, or to neutralize the power of the figurine, or for letting some of its power or spirit be liberated and leave the material body? The



Fig. 1. Feline figurine in antler with engraved motifs and perforations, from Isturitz, Basses-Pyrénées, France. (Size length 9.5 cm).

challenge is reading the concepts behind the material output.

The tail is missing. The head is broken. From the signs left, it seems that the damage on the head was done on purpose. If the identity of the animal was disturbing, would it not be enough to throw it away? Why would somebody take the pains to delete its muzzle? What is the logical thinking behind this act?

Like most prehistoric works of art, this object has a history to be reconstructed, to identify its meaning and the conceptual processes of the producers of the final results that have reached us.

### **The Massat horn**

A perforated horn from Massat (Ariège, France) has a sequence of four engraved graphemes on one side, two of which are repeated on the other side.

The engravings represent the head of a bear with a semi-open mouth, facing a ramified branch, a sign defined as an arbolet ideogram, considered to have a male value. Two other graphemes are on the same

surface, which are repeated on the other side of the object, an oval symbol (eye ideogram) considered to have a female value, and a line or spear, likely a male symbol. The bear head is the pictogram, the object or subject of reference. The other graphemes are ideograms. The four graphemes appear to have been conceived and positioned as a sequence.\*

Are the engravings related to the function of the object? What did they do with the object? The composition of the four elements is presumed to have a meaning and to have been produced for some purpose: was it materially functional or magic, or ritual, or something else?

The bear head is present also elsewhere, as in the next described object; here it is related to an arbo-

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\* A recurring pattern in these categories of Paleolithic objects seems to indicate that rounded shapes tend to have female values and linear shapes male values.

let ideogram apparently penetrating its mouth. The eye ideogram is currently considered to be a female symbol, while the line, or spear, reaching the point of the object, is likely to be a male symbol. The two explicit signs of female eye ideogram and male spear ideogram could be an explanation of the arbolet male ideogram penetrating the mouth of the bear head. But this would not explain the meaning of the sequence, or the function of the object.

The engravings associating the arbolet and the mouth of the bear head can symbolize sexual penetration. What is the meaning of the bear head? Has it a female or male value? And what was the function of the object: magic or ritual tool, amulet, or with some practical function? What did they do with it?

The raw material of a horn and its shape were selected and engraved. The very shape and the raw material of

the object could have a meaning or a function or both. After the first question, on the meaning of the engravings, the second question is why: why the selected shape, why the specific engravings. Was it an object of daily use? Was it a personal object, or the utensil of a medicine-man, or one used by an individual or by the community? The idea that it might have been a functional tool used in the puberty defloration rites of girls, like practices among some Australian Aborigines, is open to debate (Anati, 2011, p. 66). In such a case, the care for the decoration with appropriate iconography would imply the importance of the rite and its social role. The bear head would probably represent the female vulva in a specific situation or context defined as “the mouth of the bear”. (Virgin? Coming of age? Bloody? Dangerous? Tabu?).



Fig. 2. The engraved horn from Massat (Ariège, France). The head of a bear with the semi-open mouth is facing a ramified branch, an ideogram defined as an arbolet, considered to be a male symbol. Two other graphemes appear on the same surface which are repeated on the other side of the object, an oval symbol (eye ideogram) considered to be a female symbol, and a line or spear, likely to be a male symbol. The very shape of the object could also have a meaning. The composition is likely to have a sexual content. The bear head is the pictogram, the object or subject of reference, so what does it represent? (size 14.5 cm. Drawing from Anati, 1989).

### An engraved antler from La Madeleine

The engravings on reindeer antler from La Madeleine (Dordogne, France) are organized in a sequence of connected graphemes. The composition has at the center what seems to be two phallus figures oriented in opposite directions, one bigger than the other. On the left the smaller phallus penetrates an orifice, which may represent a vulva; on the right the larger phallus faces the mouth of a bear's head. At the left, the last grapheme is that of an oval shape or a vulvar ideogram

(presumed of female value), and the right side ends with a fishbone or arbolet.

The main subjects appear to be the bear's head pictogram and the larger phallus facing it. The composition appears to concern sexual relations.

The two phallus figures oriented in opposite directions may indicate two alternatives of acts or relationship. Again, as in the previous case, the bear's head is a dominant pictogram, likely the subject or object of the story represented by the sequence of graphemes. Defining the meaning of the bear's head would allow



Ideogram	Pictogram	Pictogram	Pictogram	Ideogram	Pictogram	Ideogram

Fig. 3. Engraving on antler from La Madeleine (Dordogne, France). Photo, tracing, outline and the sequence of graphemes. The composition has at the center what seems to be two phallus figures oriented in opposite directions. On the left the phallus penetrates an orifice, likely representing a vulva; on the right the larger phallus faces the mouth of a bear's head. At the left, the last visible grapheme is that of an oval shape or vulvar ideogram (of female value), the right side ends with a fishbone or 'arbolet' (ideogram of male value). The various elements are identified as pictograms and ideograms in their sequence from right to left. The main subject appears to be the pictogram "bear's head". What did this composition intend to record or convey? What the function or the use of the object could have been? (Size 16.5 cm; source Anati, 2007).

the reading of this composition and of other documents where the bear's head appears in an analogous context. What does the bear's head represent? What did this composition intend to record or convey? And what were its function and purpose?

### **The engraved bone from Raymondén**

The engraved bone from Raymondén (Dordogne, France), is a fragment of story-telling involving people on both sides of an indented line, shaped like a sequence of spear-heads, running from the missing part of the object to a bison's head. Beyond the bison's head the front legs of the bison are represented in the posture of moving. What can all that mean?

At least one of the schematic human figures holds a bâtonnet on the shoulder, a sign, as also in other engraved objects, indicating traveling. The schematic human figures could be travelers or migrants and the bâtonnet on the shoulder indicates in which direction the holder is moving, which is in the direction of the bison's head.

The line is made of a sequence of spear-head patterns, probably indicating the direction, to reach the bison's head or the locality or country named Bison's head. The pair of front legs of the bison, in the posture of motion, again, are likely to indicate the concept of

moving and the travel direction.

The tentative reading considers the engraving as a narrative of travel or migration by a group of people, from somewhere possibly indicated in the missing part of the object, toward the land defined as Bison's head. This seems to be another story-telling document on travel or migration, like several others described in *Expression* vol. 14.

The main question remains, what was the function of such a document, why was it produced and, for what and for whom.

### **An engraved bone from La Madeleine**

An engraving on bone from La Madeleine (Dordogne, France), has one part of the surface clearly readable and a part canceled or hardly readable. It describes a sequence of a group of parallel lines, three groups respectively of eight, nine, and seven horizontal lines crossed by a serpent with the tail as an arbolet ideogram. The central figure is that of a human figure accompanied by two figures of horse's heads. The preliminary interpretation considers it a document telling the story about the walking human figure.

The person is holding a bâtonnet on his shoulder. This bâtonnet, sometimes bifurcated or having a varieties of ends, held on the shoulder, is common in individu-



Fig. 4. Fragment of engraved bone from Raymondén (Dordogne, France). Several schematic human figures are positioned on both sides of an indented line made of a sequence of spear-heads, likely indicating a direction. The line reaches a bison's head. The pair of front legs of the bison, again has a motion posture and is likely to indicate the direction. The tentative reading considers the engraving as documenting travel or migration by a group of people to reach the place or area defined as Bison's head. (Size 8.5 cm; image from Graziosi, 1960).

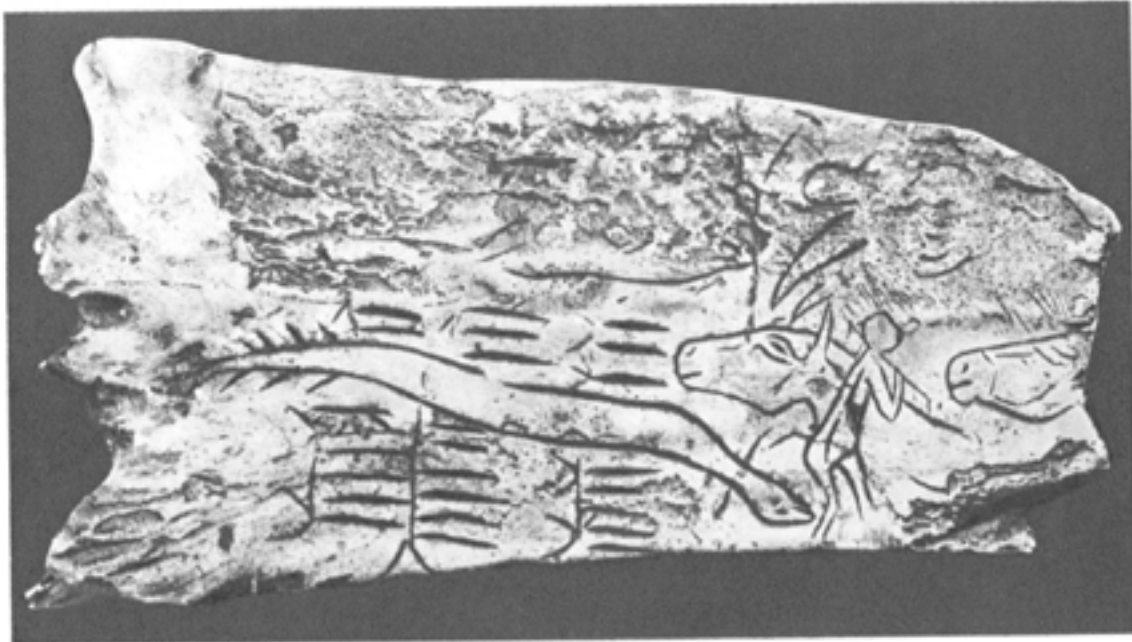


Fig. 5. Photo, plastic imprint, and tracing of engraved bone from La Madeleine (Dordogne, France). It represents an anthropomorphic figure in the walking position holding a bâtonnet on his shoulder. The bâtonnet is common in this art and when hold on the shoulder is considered to be an indication of a person traveling (i.e., the traveler). The person is positioned on top of a horse's head, which is likely to indicate his identity, and he heads toward another similar horse's head. The document appears to be the recording of a story or a myth of travel or migration (Size 15.5 cm. The tracing is by Breuil, 1952).



als and groups of moving figures and is considered to indicate walking or traveling. Following what emerged from other similar documents, the animal head related to the human figure is likely to indicate his identity, either the name of the individual or his clan or tribe, or his totemic identity. This figure is a traveler, and the engraving provides his name and where he is going. He is bound to the image of a horse's head and moves toward another horse's head, which could therefore read: 'Mr. Horsehead is going to the land of Horsehead.' He is probably going back to his homeland.

A tentative reading considers the engraved area behind his back as the place where he is coming from, marked by a snake with a tail in the shape of an arbolet. The image could indicate the name Male Snake, probably the name of a territory represented by the series of horizontal lines. The reading would therefore be the territories of the Male Snake.

This engraving is probably a commemoration of a story of travel, maybe the evocation of a myth or an event. The reading seems to be implicit: 'The man (or the group) whose name, symbol or totem is Horsehead, goes (or returns) to his territory, to the Land of Horsehead, leaving behind the territories of the Male Snake.' It sounds like the synthesis of a story or myth of migration: going back to the land of origins after a stay in the land of the male serpent. Probably these stories were narrated orally, as still happens in the tribal world and other traditional societies.

Stories of travel and migration are present in several engravings of objects of the same period and probably were a popular theme of Paleolithic iconography and story-telling. These documents are likely to have a didactic purpose connected with initiation. It is supposed that they are commemorations of events or myths, part of the oral tradition that had to be taught and transmitted to the younger generations, or just the themes of story-tellers. Stories of migrations, myths of origins, and legends of exodus toward a promised land were probably part of traditional accounts millennia before the compilation of the Old Testament.

The object represents the synthesis of a story, a reminder of an event, perhaps accompanied by songs and related poetry, as in similar images and traditions documented in historic times by, among others, Eskimo art and way of life. During the long winter nights, inside the igloo, old people tell stories, myths, and

memories, while engraving or sculpting them on objects.

Besides the decoding of the content of the monument, what research should try to unearth is the way of life, the intimacy of the human context in which such graphic documents were born.

### **The context**

These examples are added to those of previous papers, forming a first corpus of documents providing hints for decoding an immense archive on the history of a prehistoric age. European Paleolithic art provides a fundamental documentation of the acquisition of the faculties of the visual transfer of data and concepts. It is the externalization of a Pleistocene hunter-gatherer society, displaying a level of conceptual evolution preceding the development of farming and a complex economy, previous to the presence of domestic animals and cooking pots, and standardized writing. It is a proto-writing, marking a determining stage at the roots of culture. And its decoding provides an exceptional source of the elementary roots of mental cognitive processing. Each decorated object or rock surface is a document, a tessera of a vast mosaic that should acquire a comprehensive meaning well beyond the meaning of each single document.

With these examples of decoding attempts we have outlined some aspects of the challenging project of tracing the semiotic logical system of primary conceptual reasoning. The deliberate graphic externalization practiced in the last less than 100,000 years marks a significant step in the four million years of the evolution of the human species.

Explicit major steps in the formation of what is currently defined as culture can be identified by the ability of producing tools to help the functions of the hand, traced back some two and a half million years, or by the mastering of fire, recorded about one million years ago, which was vital to the expansion of humankind beyond previous climatic limits and to widen dietary resources. They are outstanding technical achievements. The advent of graphic expression is again a major step in human cultural evolution. It is a cognitive achievement, granting new space to the memory of the human individual and unit, and new abilities of communication.

Sharing assigned meaning to signs is a basic aspect of

both human conceptual faculties and the ability to visually communicate. The intentional use of graphic signs as a means of interaction marks a turning point in intellectual evolution. It affirms the human ability to transfer memory into an external base, and it means memorizing, fixing beyond the temporary physical abilities of the individual's memory. Defining the mental processing in these early phases of graphic memorization unveils a basic element in conceptual development. It is a primary aspect of faculties that revolutionized means of communication and interaction.

The deliberately shaped sign reflects the mind that produced it. Understanding the elementary function of the sign a means of marking, memorizing, and communicating is a source for perceiving the human mental processing of data. Also, it is a core element in the cognition of the roots of logical thinking, an essential element not only for anthropology, art history, and linguistics, but also for psychology, sociology, and philosophy, and primarily for tracing the cultural evolution of humankind.

### **Conclusions**

The decoding of European Paleolithic graphic documents, currently defined as mobiliary art, is a unique means of entering into the mental dynamic of people living tens of thousands of years ago, revealing their needs and human relations, including gender relations, their everyday concerns, and the history, myths and values they transmitted from generation to generation.

These objects were conceived and produced for some reason and with some purpose. The enquiry tries first to clarify what they intended to memorize and report. And then, identify their function and use. It is a gate to the intimate life and way of thinking of their makers.

Research which has already lasted several years has allowed us to propose the reading of a number of the available documents. In the present article a few examples have been examined of still missing a full de-

coding of their contents, but with elements providing hints. Their decoding is so far half way.

They unveil the difficulties of this challenging task: making historical documents out of graphic expression belonging to a society communicating in an unknown language, at the roots of human civilization.

Each graphic production, in mobile art as in immobile rock art and parietal art, was produced for some purpose. Its reading is the first step in going further, unveiling why it was produced, its function, which may be practical or conceptual, religious, magic, commemorative or educational or something else. It can be a means of socially binding or the tool of some shaman or medicine-man. Each document has its own meaning and purpose, as part of a vast multi-millenary archive.

The first step is decoding, reading the content, without which further progress has only limited possibilities. Each document presents questions of meaning and purpose: decoding its content, understanding to whom it was addressed and what was its purpose, to open up a window on the cultural, social, economic, conceptual, and psychological context in which it was produced.

Defining the meaning of the grapheme (grammar) and the association between the graphemes (syntax) should result in the material decoding of the document: the gate to the understanding of the conceptual background.

Besides reading the graphemes and understanding the meaning of the document, the questions to be solved are defining the

function and purpose of the document: why was it made, for what purpose and what was its use, contemplative, functional, religious, magic, toy, story-telling, or something else.

All that should contribute to the understanding and recording of the conceptual background and the logical mental dynamics of their makers and to the implications of what they reveal about the customs, traditions, beliefs, and way of thinking of the makers.

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# THE STONE CIRCLE AT EASTER AQUHORTHIES, SCOTLAND, AND ITS MISSING SUMMER-SOLSTICE STONE

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## Introduction

Easter Aquhorthies is a granite stone circle of Neolithic date with 12 circumferential stones. Biggest is a massive recumbent stone abutted by a tall megalith at each end (Fig. 1). This well-maintained site near Inverurie, Aberdeenshire, in northeast Scotland is in the care of Historic Environment Scotland. Latitude 57.668° N, longitude 2.421° W; altitude 178m; national grid reference NJ 732 208.

The author surveyed the stone positions on 17 June 2017 with Mr. Austin Kinsley. The circle diameter varies between 18.4 and 18.1 metres. Positional analysis of paired stones relative to sunrise azimuths on the eastern horizon showed that the monument exhibits calendrical dates by alignment for three of the four traditional agricultural quarter days of the year. The general findings

had been similar at nearby Loanhead of Daviot (Meaden 2022), despite the horizon altitude heights being quite different, suggesting that a day-counting calendar was covertly present and incorporated into pre-decided alignments when both stone circles were planned over 4500 years ago. Unexpectedly at Easter Aquhorthies the stone pairing that would denote the 21-June quarter date of the summer solstice is absent. The circumstances responsible for this are explained in this paper and suggest that the stone whose purpose was marking this crucial sunrise alignment in antiquity had been removed in historic times. Trials were undertaken from which it was concluded that the missing stone had originally functioned at a particular location either on the perimeter or inside the ring of stones between the middle of the recumbent stone and the point on the horizon of sunrise at the



Fig. 1. Easter Aquhorthies at the start of surveying, 17 June 2017: The recumbent stone and attendant standing stones. In front are stones introduced to help prevent the leaning recumbent stone from falling forwards.

summer solstice. What is more, the dimorphic stone pairs responsible for the other quarter dates (those of March, September and the winter solstice) are subsequently shown to be accompanied by watchable, photographable shadow-casting at their respective sunrises.

In this paper the recumbent stone is numbered Stone II and the eastern and western flanking stones are called Stones I and III. Stone numbering continues clockwise round the circle as traditionally done in scholarly papers of the stone circles of England and Ireland.

Unusually, two massive blocks of granite stone lie on the ground against the interior side of the recumbent stone (Fig. 1). The perimeter standing stones are inside and partly on a bank supported by a circular stone wall. Whoever was responsible for repairing and maintaining the wall—its purpose, at least in recent centuries, to keep cattle away—could possibly be accountable for positioning the granite stones that help support the forward leaning recumbent stone.

### Earlier relevant work

Fig. 2 compares the location of this circle in Scotland with southwest Ireland where there are numerous axial recumbent stone circles of similar constructional interest.

Assessments by this author of stone positions in stone circles in Scotland, Ireland and England have demonstrated that the elements of a prehistoric calendar were current in the Late Neolithic in Scotland and Ireland in the Bronze Age. Calendrical confirmation for Scotland was made at Loanhead of Daviot which is only a few kilometres from Easter Aquhorthies (Meaden 2022). For southwest Ireland research carried out between 2012 and 2024 on 60 stone circles in the counties of Cork and Kerry (Meaden 2024a) tell a similar story, as, also, the damaged sites of the Avebury Cove and Avebury South Circle (Meaden 1999) and Stonehenge (2016; 2017) in England. At Stonehenge the site's long recumbent stone which is misnamed the Altar Stone lies in



Fig. 2. Showing the location of the recumbent stone circle at Easter Aquhorthies in northeast Scotland relative to the sites of the recumbent stone circles of Cork and Kerry in Ireland.

the middle of the circles.

The aims and methodology applied at Easter Aquhorthies are outlined in the publication about Loanhead of Daviot (Meaden 2022).

A comprehensive site survey was done by the author and Austin Kinsley on 17 June 2017 (Fig. 3). The first sunrise watch took place the next morning from 03 to 06 GMT. Photographic research was done on several days in June 2017, December 2017 and March 2018, and by the late Peter Cork of Inverurie deputizing for the author in June, September and November 2018. The



Fig. 3. The southern stones of Easter Aquhorthies stone circle at the end of the day's surveying, 17 June 2017. Stone 11 is nearest the camera. Photograph by Austin Kinsley.

principal feature and focus of attention is the 13-tonne prostrate stone with flanking stones 2.5m high at the south-southwest, just inside the circle perimeter. This recumbent stone is about 3.8m long and almost 1.7m high. Its functional importance which makes it a primary focal stone is explained by the practical observational research reported in this paper. It was soon noted that, when an observer sits in front of the middle of the recumbent stone, the megaliths numbered 10, 11 and 12 on the eastern circumference stand high, well proud of the horizon. This meant they were potentially able to cast shadows at sunrise during the summer period from March to September to reach the front of the recumbent stone. Compass readings indicated that significant alignments could be present and the first test would be in the fine weather forecast for dawn and sunrise next morning, 18 June 2017.

An unusual feature on the inside face of the recumbent stone towards its middle is a longitudinal shallow groove or hollow about a metre long that might connote a carved vulva (Fig. 1) which, unusually if so, is angled to the vertical. An explanation presents itself when later in this paper we address what was seen and filmed in the week of midsummer sunrise when a replica for a missing stone elsewhere was arranged.

Next to consider are the potential festival dates of the winter six months, September to March. At least one other perimeter stone in the west must necessarily have been optimally positioned to serve as a focal stone in relation to the winter solstice sunrise to align with one or more megaliths in the east where the sun rises. Conspicuous in this respect on the western perimeter is an eye-catching stone that could have served the Late Neolithic planners as a definitive secondary megalithic focus. It is lozenge-shaped.

### Plan of the stones and consequential predictions



Fig. 4. Author's survey of the 12 circumferential stones of Easter Aquhorthies. 20 June 2017. The plan shows alignments for the quarter dates in the winter half of the year. Besides the middle region of the recumbent stone, the primary target involves Stone 6 (lozenge-shaped) in relation to Stone 12. Shadow throws from Stone 12 to the recumbent and to Stone 6 were later verified for the relevant dates.

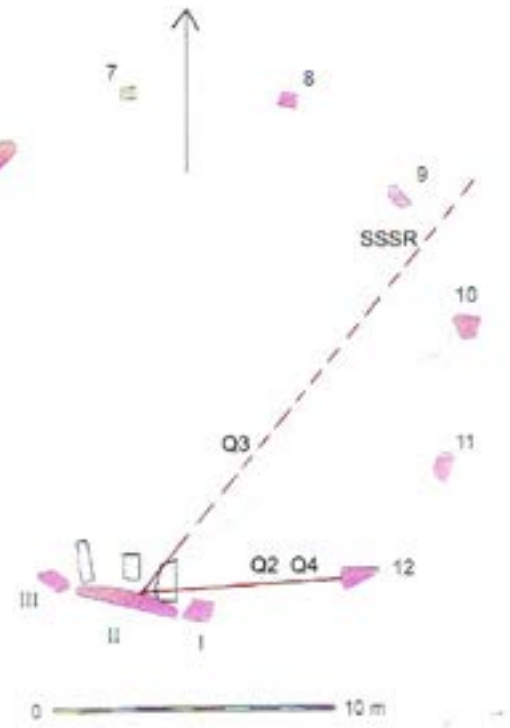


Fig. 5. Alignment and shadow-casting only confirmed for Stone 12 with respect to the middle of the recumbent stone. Crucial is an absence of any stone serving for a summer solstice sunrise with respect to the recumbent stone, so a proxy was experimentally arranged.

Table 1 gives azimuths for sunrises for the eight deduced agricultural festival days of the ancient prehistoric calendar. Note that from northeast to southeast the hills are so distant as to delay sunrises but little.

TABLE 1. Directions of first-gleam sunrises in 2018 for the city

Day Number on a 365-day calendar	Modern calendar date	Azimuth Degrees East of North	GMT Time first gleams at Aberdeen	Ancient Festivals
Day 1	21 December	135°	8.46	Midwinter solstice and first quarter festival Q1
Day 47	5 February	119°	8.00	Imbolc/ start of spring WXQ
Day 92	22 March	88°	6.05	Midspring or second quarter festival Q2
Day 137	6 May	57°	4.08	May Day / Beltane SXQ
Day 183	21 June	41°	3.12	Midsummer solstice or third quarter festival Q3
Day 229	6 August	57°	4.16	Lughnasadh SXQ
Day 275	21 September	88°	5.50	Mid-autumn or fourth quarter festival Q4
Day 320	5 November	118°	7.28	Samhain/start of winter WXQ
Day 365	20 December	135°	8.45	Eve of midwinter solstice

of Aberdeen, not far from Easter Aquhorthies, but at sea level using [www.timeanddate.com/astronomy/about-sun-calculator.html](http://www.timeanddate.com/astronomy/about-sun-calculator.html) by H.M. Nautical Almanac Office. Times and directions of sunrise at individual stone circles depend on their altitudes and the elevations of the relevant horizons.

### The recumbent stone, its flanking pillars and the propping support stones

Refer to Figures 1 and 6 and the plan in Fig. 4 above.



Fig. 6. The principal great iconic stones of Easter Aquhorthies. In front are stones positioned to prevent the collapse of the recumbent stone which is forward leaning. The inclined long shallow hollow near the middle of the recumbent stone shows only faintly in this photograph.

In addition to the recumbent stone (Stone II) and flanking pillar-stones (Stones I and III) there are massive blocks of stone on the inside of the recumbent stone that were likely positioned in modern times to help stabilise the recumbent stone which is leaning forwards and would likely have fallen but for the support it receives (Figs. 1 and 6). The more westerly of these granite blocks is a basalt whinstone, distinctive from the other megaliths, whereas the eastern support stone, is of the same mineral as the recumbent and standing stones of the perimeter. Either stone could have been brought from some distance for this buttressing purpose although one of them might have functioned somewhere on site as part of the original planned monument. The perimeter stones stand on a slight bank buttressed by a



Figure 7. The male-symbolic flanker Stone III with Stones 9, 10 and 11 in view in the east beyond.

**The winter solstice sunrise, Q1, relative to the lozenge-shaped Stone 6**



Figure 8. Shadow from Stone 12 to Stone 6 on 17 December 2017. The lozenge stone, symbolically typically feminine, is set partly in a bank. Photograph by Austin Kinsley

stone-wall. Whoever was responsible for maintaining the wall—probably to keep cattle out—is likely responsible for positioning the granite stones that serve to bolster the recumbent stone.

As previously observed and recorded elsewhere for Ireland and Northeast Scotland, the shape attribute of the recumbent stone, lying prone between two ostensibly male companions or ‘guardian’ stones (Fig. 7 shows the western flanker with its implied masculinity), implies femininity accentuated by the possible image of a vulva shallowly hollowed near its middle. This recalls the explicit vulva carving [with a cup mark for vagina] on the upper surface of the recumbent stone at Drombeg and deemed to be a declaration of femininity [and perhaps divinity] to respectful worshippers (Meaden 2024: 35-37).

Another grand icon among female-symbolic stones at Easter Aquhorthies is a fine upstanding lozenge-shaped stone (Stone 6), very similar in outline to the famous one at Drombeg in Ireland (Meaden 2024: 35-37, 249, 252).

With the survey completed at Easter Aquhorthies and stone shapes considered in case of retrievable meanings, it was possible to make predictions in advance of site visits at sunrise. One should know that at Loanhead of Daviot, as at Drombeg when the recumbent stone is positioned in the south or south-west, no December shadows at sunrise can ever reach the recumbent stone. To achieve a union between stones by shadow in winter a second functionally-sited female-symbolic stone is needed for shadow reception. At Loanhead of Daviot the other stone had been selectively attacked by somebody over a hundred years ago and broken off leaving only a stump (Coles 1901-02). At Easter Aquhorthies the corresponding stone is a femininely-symbolic lozenge shaped stone..

The familiar dates of the major four traditional agricultural festivals are now considered in turn, starting with the winter solstice. Of all the widely recognised sunrise directions the winter and summer solstices held the greatest attention for the faithful. Mr. Austin Kinsley was at Easter Aquhorthies for the sunrise of 17 December 2017 and took the instructive photograph in Fig. 8, while the author was attending sunrise several kilometres away at Loanhead of Daviot (Meaden 2022). 21 December is the first quarter day of the 365-day calendar-year, the day of the winter solstice. The difference between sunrise azimuths on the 17th and 21st are trivial in this context.

The order of events began with the sun illuminating the stone. Over the next few minutes, the shadow cast by Stone 12 reached Stone 6 moving towards its base, as the photograph in Fig. 8 indicates. This action, in which the target was the centre base of the recipient stone, was similar at Loanhead of Daviot (Meaden 2022). The first prediction at Easter Aquhorthies had succeeded in the same fashion as at Loanhead of Daviot.

**The quarter dates of 22 March and 20 September, Q2 and Q4**

The author next predicted from the survey that at the mid-year quarter dates on 22 March (Q2) and 20 September (Q4) the effective shadow-casting stone would still be the male-symbolic Stone 12, but with the difference that the recipient stone for the cast shadows would be the centre of the grand recumbent stone where the possible vulva is present (refer to the plan in Fig. 4), and it so proved



### Sunrise on 20 September 2018, Q4

The photograph of Fig. 9, taken a few minutes after sunrise, shows the shadow of Stone 12 meeting the centre of the leaning recumbent stone. A little earlier the shadow would have made contact with the front of the recumbent even if the latter was standing upright. Note by the way that the sunrise azimuth at this site is nearer 87 degrees east of north, not 90.

### Results for the summer-solstice sunrise Q3 at Easter Aquhorthies

The third quarter day, Q3, of the calendar is 21 June, the summer solstice. Previously, following the survey, stone-to-stone alignments had been found for three of the eight calendar dates as noted in Table 1. Those for the other quarter dates, viz., the winter solstice and the March and September dates, had been predicted and were confirmed by photographing the complementary shadow casting. This time the nature of the prediction is very different for the fourth quarter date, the summer solstice Q3.

Following the survey, it was foreseeable that no shadow could be cast at or near sunrise upon the most likely target—the recumbent stone—by any existing perimeter stone at the midsummer solstice.

As with the longitudinal recumbent stones that have been described elsewhere (e.g., Stonehenge, Drombeg, Loanhead of Daviot) the Easter Aquhorthies recumbent stone expresses the feminine principle through its reclining shape and prone attitude. Drombeg's equally fine recumbent stone also carries a telling vulvar carving, as does, perhaps, the recumbent at Easter Aquhorthies. Whether or not the latter is accidental or deliberate the prehistoric community were likely aware of it because it is there.

Although no shadow from a current standing stone at Easter Aquhorthies reaches the recumbent, if there was a pillar stone positioned on the line of the midsummer sunrise near the recumbent or on the perimeter, then it would produce such a shadow. Remarkably, a candidate stone lies at the stone circle now. It is one of the stones in front of the tilted recumbent stone and tasked with helping to support it.

Images taken on 18 June 2017 by the author are reproduced in



Figure 9. On 20 September 2018 at 05.57 GMT the shadow of Stone 12 is shown traversing the partly obstructing support stone and falling upon the slanting carved feature in the middle of the recumbent stone. Credit the late Peter Cork.



Fig. 10. The sunlit oblique carving on the recumbent stone soon after sunrise at 0405 GMT on 18 June 2017. The author's shadow is also on the recumbent stone. The red line marks the position and length of the groove.

Fig. 11. Close-up of the angled groove.

Figs. 10 and 11. The red line is added to indicate the precise location of the hollowed groove that occupies a less hard part of the façade of the recumbent stone by avoiding the central whitish spotty region close by. Most notable is the absence of shadow at sunrise from any extant standing stone.

### Facts concerning the support stones

It is plausible that on some occasion in recent centuries a well-wisher (the land owner is likely) aimed to support the leaning recumbent stone to prevent it from collapsing by setting rocks against it. This may have been done at a time of repairing the protective stone wall around the circle (Fig. 13). It seems that the first one or two stones were insufficient so a bigger one was added. The support stones are shown in Figs. 1, 6 and 12. Three are drawn on the plans in Figs. 4 and 5. Two are very big which archaeologist Fred Coles (1900: 225-229) called Stones S and T.



Fig. 12. Two candidates for the missing summer-solstice stone currently lie in front of the leaning recumbent stone. March 2018. Credit, the late Pete Cork.



Fig. 13. Showing the well-maintained wall that surrounds the stones and inside bank at Easter Aquhorthies. 25 March 2018. Credit, the late Pete Cork.

The positions and shapes of the biggest support stones may be understood from studying photographs as in Figure 14 and 15. Different in character, they are similar in length. One is geologically identical to the circle's circumferential stones (Fig. 14). The other (Fig. 15) is a dark basalt and very distinctive. The likely candidate stone is the one in Fig. 14 which has probably been shaped.

**Considering the missing summer-solstice stone**

1. Seeing that the eastern support stone is of the same granite as all the standing stones at Easter Aquhorthies, did it in prehistory

stand as a functioning summer-solstice stone, positioned on the line from the recumbent's carving to where the midsummer sun rises? An interior position for the key summer-solstice sunrise shadow-casting stone might have been selected on this line in order to emphasise the importance of this event. It is rather short, so an interior position at least halfway from the perimeter to the recumbent might be best if male-female coition at the possible vulvar carving was the third-millennium intention.

2. On the other hand was a basalt stone selected to serve as a modest pillar stone, chosen for its distinctiveness, the piece of whinstone in Fig. 15?

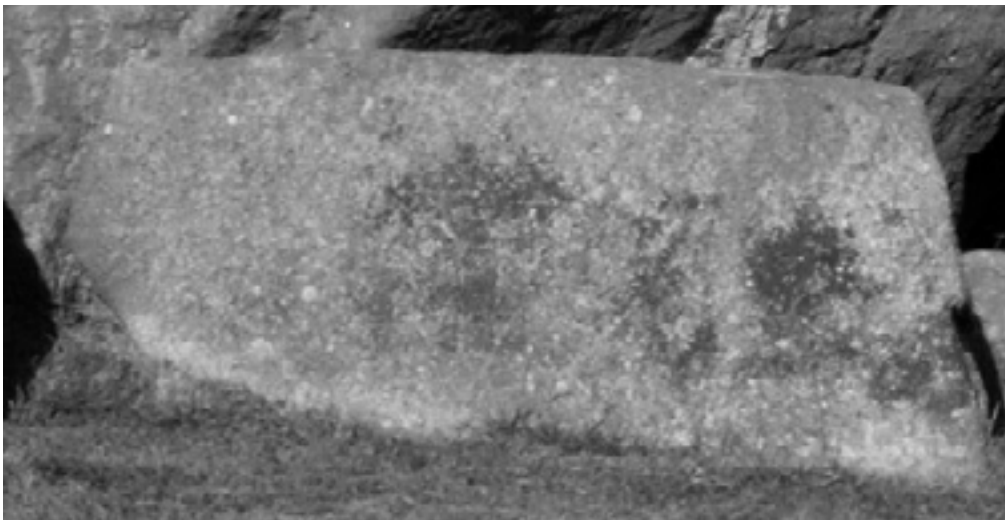


Figure 14 . The (left) eastern support stone. Compare the different mineral quality of the biggest flat-lying support stones.

Figure 15. The western veined support megalith is whinstone rock.

## Experimental testing with a proxy for the missing stone



Fig. 16. Sunrise on 22 June 2018. The cardboard substitute for the missing stone is set on the perimeter and its shadow reached the recumbent stone. The broad shadow from left to right across the foreground of the picture is that of the nuisance bank to the north.



Fig. 17. Sunrise 22 June 2018 at 03.32 GMT by Pete Cork. A little earlier, but for the interfering shadow of the bank, the shadow would have been precisely on the vulva carving inclined to conform with angled shadow.

Whether the groove is purposefully hollowed or natural might at first be thought to be uncertain, but what matters to us as investigators is that it is there. If we can see it, then the ancients over 4500 years ago knew of it too. Hence, we have another example of male-female figurative coupling by shadow which is so typical of a fertility religion involving sun worship. Note that the shadow of the proxy stone is angled to the vertical, just as the groove is. Indeed, they are obviously parallel in the photograph. Moreover, but for the intrusion of the unplanned unwanted shadow from the northeastern part of the probably not original bank, the shadow of the proxy summer-solstice stone would have neatly covered the groove, angle for angle, a couple of minutes earlier.

### **Discussion and concluding remarks**

The new survey at Easter Aquhorthies led to predictions about regular events that could take place at sunrise on the four quarterly dates that would have mattered to the ancient inhabitants of north-east Scotland, as already proved for Loanhead of Daviot (Meaden 2022).

The primary facts of discovery are that planned, watchable connections between aligned pairs of stones take place at or soon after sunrise for particular dates of the year. The connections are achieved at Easter Aquhorthies by shadow casting of preselected stones on to one or other of two particular waiting megaliths for three of the calendrical quarter dates at sunrise, not all four. This indicates that the additional stone necessary to complete the sunrise drama for the summer solstice is missing

In the first minutes after sunrise as the sun moves, the shadows move. Each shadow-receiving target stone of interest—which of the two depends on whether it is winter or summer—progressively gets to be illuminated by sunshine of increasing strength. The consequence is meaningful, monumental, cosmic drama.

The occasions include traditional farming festivals that have come down to us in modern times. It is remarkable that the most important date of the year, the summer solstice festival, cannot today be identified thus because any such necessary stone absent. A likely explanation is that such a stone used to be on the line between the mid-point of the recumbent stone and the point of midsummer sunrise on the distant hilly horizon for the appropriate century of the Late Neolithic Age at this site. Its location was more likely inside the circle than on the ring of stones between Stones 9 and 10 (refer to the plan in Fig. 5).

One reason for suspecting that the location might be isolated

inside the stone circle and not circumferential is that distinctive positioning was likely a device to accentuate the deemed higher importance of the event compared with other festival dates. A similar situation has been tested and proved for Drombeg and Gorteanish in County Cork, Ireland, from which internal stones representing a solstice have been wantonly removed (Meaden 2024: 250-251, 326-329).

At Easter Aquhorthies it has not been proved that the dates of the four cross-quarter dates (in February, May, August and November) are present at times very soon at or very soon after sunrise. However, relevant dates are present rather later, as for instance between the tall narrow Stone 9 and Stone 5 for 6 May and 6 August.

The discoveries reported here resulted only because of the methodology applied, namely a combination of archaeoastronomy, calendrical interpretation and conceptual anthropology.

It is stressed that the only way for researchers to test the sunrise situations is to be present on site on days of clear sunrise from dawn onwards to check what actually happens on every one of the significant occasions. Studying plans of stone positions without being on site is inadequate if not hopeless because the presence or absence of hills and mountains play a role in this subject too.

For various reasons linked to dimorphic stone alignments at sunrise, it is proposed that the myth of Divine Marriage—the revered Marriage of the Gods—was known for Neolithic and Early Bronze Age preliterate times in Ireland and Britain (Meaden 2021) and that it operated in conjunction with a sunrise calendar for all four quarter dates at Easter Aquhorthies and for all eight traditional agricultural festival dates at many other sites including Loanhead of Daviot. Prehistoric spectators seeking reassurance about the fertility of their crops, animals and women could witness the cosmic drama. Fortunately, too, several millennia later, visitors to these monuments can still watch the same unfolding action through the motion of sunlight and shadow.

### **Acknowledgements**

The late Peter Cork of Inverurie, Aberdeenshire, helped with photography on several occasions, obtaining the photographs used in Figs. 9, 12, 13, 16 and 17. Austin Kinsley helped with the survey and he photographed for the author at Easter Aquhorthies in the snow on 16 December 2017 (Fig. 8). Fig. 3 was his as well.

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# INTERPRETING UTE PETROGLYPHS USING INDIAN SIGN LANGUAGE

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## Abstract

Four historic Ute petroglyph panels in southwest Utah are discussed in terms of the interconnection between rock writing and Indian Sign Language. These sites are on the traditional lands of Ute bands during the historical period AD 1800-1930s.

Despite the variety of scholarly publications by archaeologists on southwestern petroglyphs, very few have given recognition for the key role tribal sign language plays in conveying meaning. To test this theory, each panel undergoes a semiotic analysis, linking graphic forms to meanings found in ethnographic literature and Ute Sign Language. Supporting evidence is found onsite with natural and archaeological features that are symbolized in the petroglyphs.

Native people use relational thinking to understand landscapes and convey information in their petroglyphs for survival. These examples provide the locational information of a water catchment basin, a possible elk wintering ground for hunters, and a warning of a vicious bear attack on a horse.

The Utes were proficient in Indian Sign Language and codified graphic signs to represent gestures in their picture writing. The frequency and consistency of these gesture-sign symbols, along with the spatial syntax provide a test for the similarity in meaning and relation to the landscape.

This research is in collaboration with an Indian Sign Language specialist and a pictography scholar, with additional support from Clifford Duncan and Larry Cesspooch of the Northern Ute tribe, who contributed their knowledge to this study.

## Introduction

The long-held debate over whether petroglyphs called ‘rock art’ is an art, as the Western civilization argues, or ‘picture writing,’ as authors who studied gestural language (aka Hand Talk) of the Native people have defined it. For the last two centuries, Garrick Mallery, William Tomkins, and LaVan Martineau have provided evidence to support the claim that Indian petroglyphs are more than just art and designs of idle natives, but a type of picture writing, that can be interpreted if one is somewhat proficient with Indian Sign Language. The use of sign language among tribes at the time of contact is well documented. Sign language is not based on any one of the hundreds of spoken languages that are mutually unintelligible. Indian Sign Language was the default for communication between groups engaging in cross-cultural social and political conversations.

In the classical definition of a painting, art is interpreted by decoding the particular forms and colors in an organized composition of pictorial signs. The meaning of which is dependent

upon the cultural context found in spoken languages. Ute Indian pictography is not dependent upon spoken language for interpretation. The cultural context is found in what Martineau (1973), calls ‘gesture language’, using gesture signs that refer to body postures, arm-hand gestures and spatial positioning that signal the temporal and spatial context. McKay-Cody contends that with each of these examples, the whole petroglyph panel is a morphological description from start to end. It is the morphology that tells direction. This is distinctly different from the pragmatic, semantic, and phonological aspects of spoken language, which deal with meaning, use, and sound, respectively. These four examples of Ute picture writing in rock panels reveal morphological descriptions effectively.

To test this theory, the graphic forms in each panel are evaluated using structural analysis, first introduced by Leroi-Gourhan (1965) and modified by Conkey’s ‘semantic free deconstruction of visual compositions revealing binary relationships of referential meanings’ (Conkey 2001). Gesture signs are meaningful elements within a matrix of hermeneutic associations, as Martineau et al. 1981 and Patterson 2004 set forth.

The definition of sign language means that it has full grammar, having all the signs composing a complete sentence. Gesture language is signs that tend to be composed of a subject and verb with basic grammar but not a sign language. McKay Cody (2019) states that the Utes, through intergenerational transmission, uses the Great Basin Indian Sign Language (GBISL), which is a variety of North American Indian Sign Language. For this paper, the lowercase is used for sign language in general that is associated with a spoken language. Sign Language is a title used to describe tribal specific sign language, as with the Ute Great Basin Sign Language, documented by linguists, such as herself. She also argues that the Ute developed a syncretic language in picture writing. Syncretism is a form of homophony when two words (graphemes) with the same form have different meanings. The spatial syntax provides the context for a different meaning. An example is the grapheme for LOOK plus a directional, which may point down, out, up or away, depending upon the orientation of the form.



Relational thinking is the way Native people understand the landscape and transmit their observations in the petroglyphs to inform others. Informational displays on the rocks and cliffs are of special importance to nomadic tribal people passing through a desert environment. Locator symbols using simple body postures

and graphic signs associated with gesture signs are often found near springs, while others may warn of falling rocks, flash flood events, or impassable box canyons. Ute Indians were especially prolific at placing locator symbols on boulders at the head of canyons and along waterways that indicated the conditions ahead for travelers. While working with Ute colleagues on the Southern and Northern Ute reservations, we found many petroglyphs with gesture signs depicted in the rock images. (See Patterson 2012, 2016).

A semiotic analysis presented here helps the reader understand how the sign gestures we have found are broken down into compositional ‘units of meaning’. These graphic-units-of-meaning are called graphemes, like words that are not dependent upon a spoken language. If two or more graphemes are linked together, they are called grapho-morphemes, a phrase. The gestures displayed by anthropomorphic figures are signs associated with units of kinetic motion called kinemes. They are like a verb that supplies the idea of motion and are called grapho-kinemes. When the graphemes and kinemes are linked together, like a sentence with a noun and verb, it is called a syntagm. Ferdinand de Saussure (1916/1983) defines syntagms as “Sign units that are linked together.” and a “chain of units” makes a sequential narrative. They are “combinations supported by linearity”. The sentence is the ideal type of syntagm.”

Thus, by using semiotic analysis, it is hoped that one will gain a better understanding of how the Utes communicated information using picture writing at these selected sites.

The first example is a composition with a narrative theme composed of five syntagms describing how to find a place for ‘getting a drink of water.’ A second example has the same gesture

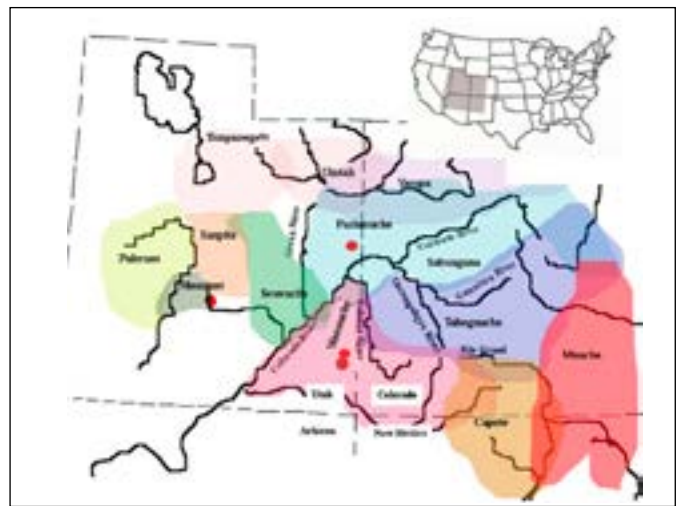


Figure 1 AB. is a general map of Ute bands at the time of contact. Ute band borders were fluid, and members of different bands could travel freely across tribal territories through the seasons and ceremonial cycles. These four sites are located within traditional Ute band territories. The first example is a petroglyph panel on a large monolithic outcrop that stands solitary in a large open field. The petroglyph is visible from a distance to the now-existing road. In earlier centuries, it would have attracted the attention of any traveler crossing through the valley. The glyphs are clear and bright against the dark sandstone and are not more than three hundred years old, circa (1700-1900). The Ute Indians lived in this area until it was later taken over by pioneer settlers, ranchers and finally, oil and gas exploration companies. The region is very dry, limiting the support of cattle raising and game animal habitat.



sign for 'drink water.' The third example is a composition of independent graphemes and grapho-kinemes conveying the location of an elk habitat area within view of the panel. The fourth example is a complex composition of three syntagms with graphemes and grapho-kinemes that describe a bear attack on a horse.

The study area is illustrated in Figure 1.

Many of the gesture signs represented in this petroglyph, are

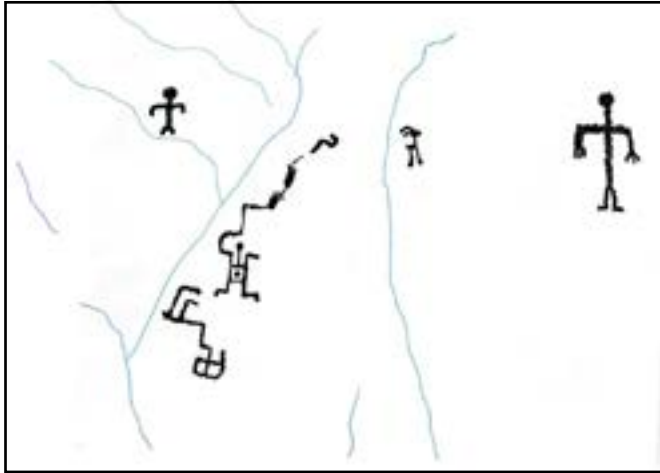


Figure 2. Photograph and drawing of the Ute petroglyph panel. The blue lines trace the cracks in the rock that mimic the surrounding land formations and provides the location of the water basin. The Ute petroglyph panel is situated adjacent to a large water wash that comes down from a high escarpment. An ancient Pueblo village with two remaining room blocks is located south of the panel. A relational aerial view shows the locations of the elements identified in the petroglyph, Figure 3.

of common knowledge among the Ute people, as expressed by Clifford Duncan, Northern Ute elder (Patterson 2019). An independent investigation of this panel was conducted by Melanie McKay-Cody using her own method of recording the gesture signs she identified. The following is a semiotic analysis organizing the composition of the Ute petroglyph panel into three syntagms, defined as 'linked-units-of-meaning.' They are labeled in Figure 4.

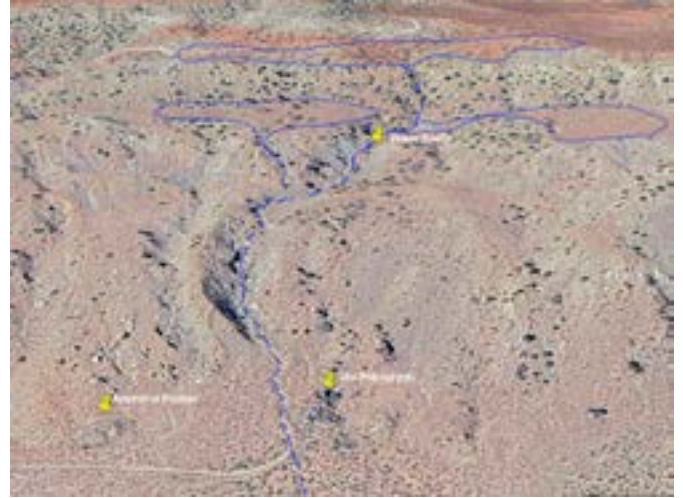


Figure 3. The location of the petroglyph panel is in the center. The prehistoric pueblo room blocks are on the left, and the stone-lined water basin is above in the center. The blue lines mark the water flow down from the catchment areas on top of the escarpment.

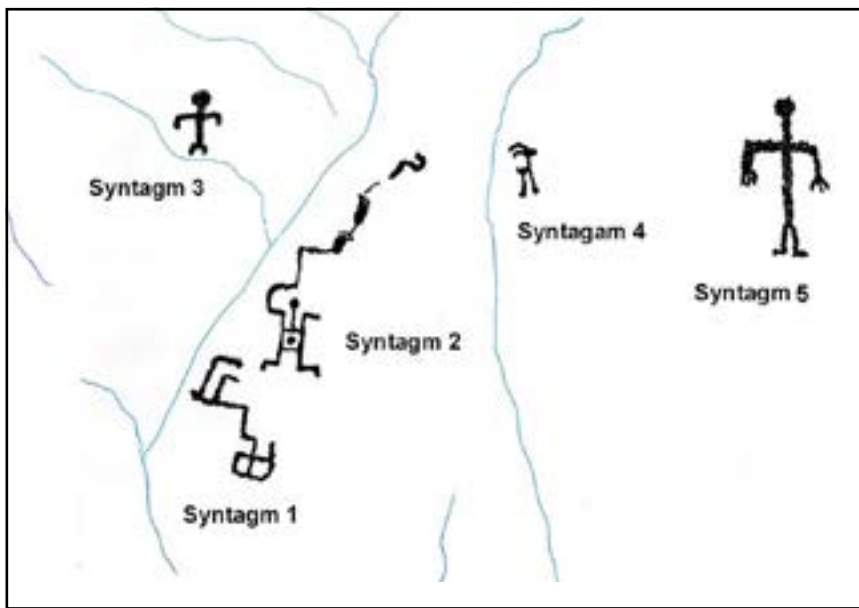


Figure 4. Ute petroglyph panel is organized into five syntagms, defined by linked graphemes that create a phrase of meaning. The blue lines trace the rock features that mimic the physical land features shown on the photograph on the right. The water course runs down from the catchment basin and past the front of this panel. The spatial position of each petroglyph supplies the spatial context for the interpretation of this panel.

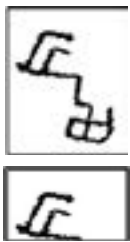




McKay-Cody writes: for the sign language signs, whether it is ASL, or PISL, or any other sign language, we (hand signers) do not use suffixes like -ing or -ed; it is not part of our language. Of course, they are spoken and written up that way in English, but they are not used in many Native American languages, including Ute. The English words “rolling” and “over” in the fourth-panel example combine the two words with a + symbol in between the two words, i.e., ROLL + OVER, which represents two signs, but becomes one sign in sign language, which is known as a compound sign. The CAPITALIZED words represent tribal signs, and the lowercase letters represent the direction of movement the sign indicates. The meaning of the graphic symbols reproduced in the petroglyphs, are italicized, and given citations.

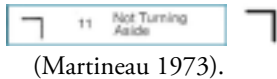
**Semiotic Analysis**

Syntagm 1 is composed of three graphemes. At the bottom are two squares joined together, emblematic of Pueblo room blocks. This motif has a physical equivalent of a Pueblo ruin that is 100 yards due south from the panel. (A photograph of the Pueblo ruin appears in Figure 6 below).



**Syntagm 1:**  
**Grapho-Kineme 1:** two parallel lines bent at right angles.  
 Literal Meaning: NOT+ TURN +ASIDE-directional.  
 Extended Meaning: go straight twice, meaning over two ridges.

Documentation: From Martineau 1973 Chart 8, the meaning is not turning aside.

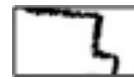


Opposite:  TURN + SIDE-directional.

Variants:  CLOSE + UP DISTANT.

Opposition: The curved angle rather than straight represents the opposite meaning as veering aside. In other words, not turning aside means going straight.

Documentation: Martineau (1982, 60) explains that a straight line to indicate “straight ahead” cannot be used because one finger pointing up in Sign Language means ‘STANDING’ or ‘PERSON.’






**Grapheme 2:**

TRAIL + TERRACE + SLOPE.

Literal meaning: trail leading up a terraced slope.

Documentation: Martineau (1973).

Variations:  steps up.  step down, behind.

 terrace, cloud, altar, or mountain.

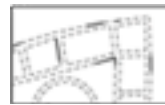


**Grapheme 3:**

TWO + ROOM.

Literal meaning: a place, room.

Extended meaning: two rooms of an Ancestral Pueblo house.



Documentation: room blocks represent an Ancestral Pueblo dwelling that frequency occurs throughout the area. There is one located just south of the petroglyph panel (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Pueblo (circa PII-III room blocks). The petroglyph monolith is the dark rock in the center background directly above the Pueblo ruin in the foreground

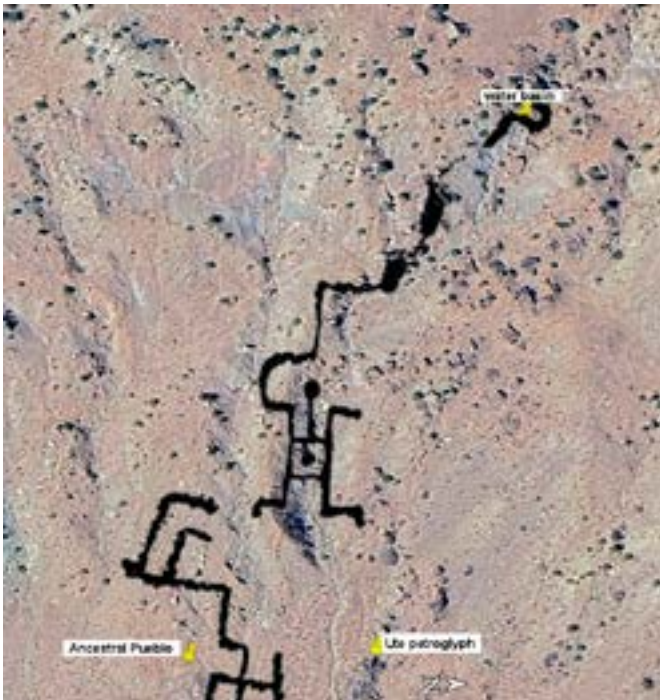
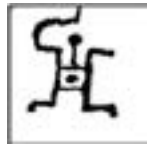


Figure 6 is the petroglyph motif, overlaying the landscape to illustrate their relationship to each other. The Ancestral Pueblo room blocks orient the location of the trail on the landscape. The superimposed drawing approximates the location of the Pueblo ruin and the trail leading up the hill following the contours of the water wash to a water basin. The sturdy rock cairn is built to



**Grapheme 2:**

is composed of several graphemes and the grapho-kineme for the gesture sign, KNEEL+ DOWN-directional and PLACE.



**Grapho-morpheme 1:**

Figure 6 is a Google arial photo oriented to the west. The Ute petroglyph is to the north, the Pueblo ruin is directly south, and the water basin is to the northwest. The location of the Pueblo ruin is the first syntagm as one reads from left to right.

Figure 7 is a photograph of the stone basin that fills with water. The upper right is a close-up of a stone cairn that has been placed on top of a boulder overlooking the pool. The lower right is a closeup of the bluish bedrock of limestone and bentonite clay that seals up the bottom. Water is retained in this basin for weeks after a rain event.





Grapho-kineme: long neck STRETCH.  
 Literal meaning: stretching the neck to see.  
 Extended meaning: something of interest up high.



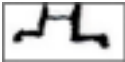
Grapho-kineme: REACH + OUT-directional.  
 Literal meaning: reaching out.



Grapheme: a curved line attached to one arm.  
 Grapho-kineme: AROUND + GO-directional.

Literal meaning: gesturing to GO + UP and AROUND + UP.

Grapho-kineme: KNEES + BEND -directional.



Literal meaning: kneel down.  
 Extended meaning: to bend down on the knees.



Grapho-morpheme 2: a combination of here + place, (Martineau, 1973).

The dot combined with the square and incorporated in the stomach area, suggests something to be ingested.

Sign language sign: SIT/HERE (Tomkins 1969), Martineau, here (1973).

Literal meaning: sit here in this place. (/ is used for a sign that can mean either word. There is no such sign SIT + HERE; it is the same sign but with different words. DRINK / WATER (same sign, different words).



Grapho-morpheme: (symbol combination) TRAIL+FOOTPRINT.  
 Literal meaning: walk up the trail.



Grapho-kineme: DRINK / WATER  
 Literal meaning: drink water.  
 Martineau (1973).

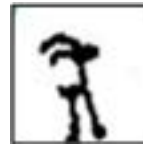
Documentation; As one climbs up the ridges and crosses over to the right, one comes to a deep gully cut by flash flood events. The downcutting from erosion suggests that a lot of water flows down during a flash flood event. There are a series of sandstone boulders that box in a small basin that are obviously filled with water.



### Syntagm 3

Grapho-kineme; COMING + OUT.

Discussion; the spatial syntax shows this grapheme high up on the wall, that mimics the escarpment located above the water wash basin.



### Syntagm 4

Grapho-kineme, horns on a head. GOOD JOURNEY + HEAD-directional (nose pointing right).

Grapheme, a shortened body + two legs.

Spatial syntax; it is placed up high on the panel.

Literal translation: up high, is easy walking, to the right.



### A Good Journey

Discussion: The horned biped is a sign vehicle to indicate movement or travel. The open horns indicate the movement is an open way in the direction the nose is pointing. If the two horns are filled in, then the way ahead is blocked. Martineau (1973), explains three different configurations of the horns



Melanie pointing out the footprints that are walking up the trail.



Melanie demonstrating the gesture sign for DRINK/WATER

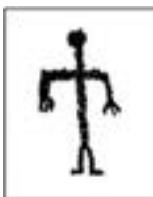
A journey, an open way, a blocked way.



The Utes have always used the horned quadruped to show direction, making it clear that they are not referring to a mountain sheep. Furthermore, when they only show two legs instead of four legs on an animal, their message is about a person (with two legs), not a sheep..



Figure 8. Animal abbreviations are used in Ute pictography whenever the author wants to show what direction the human is moving. A), is a Mexican (identified by his hat), from Leonards Basin. B), soldiers gesturing bad, with their arms, conducting a forced march of the Ute families out of Colorado in 1881, from Dominguez Canyon. C), a pictogram for negation, from Tomkins (1967) illustrating the downward thrust of the arm gesture. D), a Mexican who's horse is rearing up in fright, depicted in an historic panel showing the Utes in a rampage, shooting Mexican employes of Fort Uncompahgre in 1848, from Leonards Basin. E), "is an iron horse rolled over, from the wreck of the train engine Consolidation," Ute reservation, (Martineau 1973).



### Syntagm 5



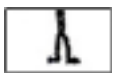
Grapho-kineme: HEAD + NECK + STRETCH.

Grapheme: ARMS + TWO + FINGER-directional (pointing downward).



Grapho-kineme : COME + OUT.

Grapheme: STAND UP.



Literal meaning: The head with a long neck indicates looking up high. The arms bent at the elbows downward indicate a movement coming out downward. The feet placed horizontally and pointing in opposite directions indicate standing in one place (not traveling). The phrase would be something like attention please, for what is presented here.

Extended meaning: come over and look at the information here.

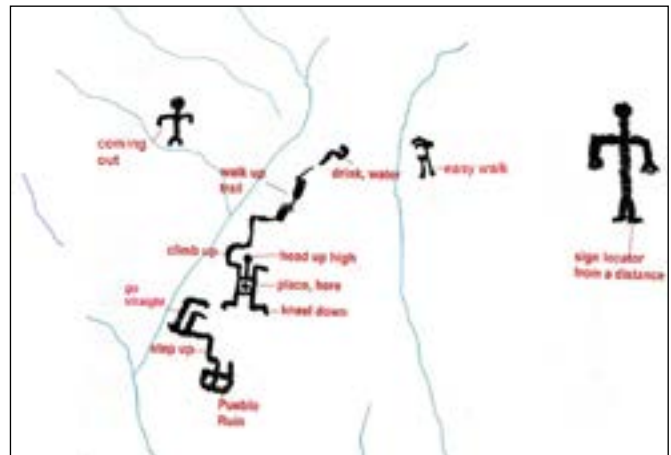


Figure 9. Annotated drawing of the panel with proposed meanings based on the known pictography and gesture signs.

### Summary

The symbol association of sign language signs with petroglyph symbols is common knowledge among the Ute people. Those identified in this panel include COME OUT, PUEBLO + ROOM, TRAIL, FOOTPRINT, KNEEL/ DOWN, PLACE, HERE and DRINK/WATER. Syntagm 1 identifies the Ancestral Pueblo room blocks, from which a person can hike up to the water basin. The grapho-morpheme of syntagm 2, is a whole sentence, that incorporates the square with a dot inside meaning here in this place. The arms become a line for a trail, that goes around and adds foot prints that lead to the cupped hand, a symbol associated with drinking water. Syntagm 3 is another anthropomorph positioned up high on the rock face that mimics the escarpment behind. The arm gestures represent the sign language sign COME + OUT. Syntagm 4 combines the horns that mean strong and two legs (biped) for a human to walk and the spatial syntax for up high, to reinforce the context that something important is up on the escarpment. Syntagm 5 is a large anthropomorph used as a locator to attract the attention of by passers. A second example clearly shows the Ute gesture sign for DRINK/WATER on a petroglyph located about two miles from the Price River that also uses the symbol SPRING and HERE.



Figure 10. A photograph and drawing of a boulder with the DRINK/WATER sign. The features of the rock face are drawn in thin lines. They often mimic important features in the landscape. (Photo by Steve Acerson)

The boulder has the DRINK/WATER sign,  along with two graphemes:  SPRING + HERE . 

The curl is a common sign for RISE + UP, associated with a SPRING. The drink/water sign provides the context of water rising up. Behind the boulder, one can see the high ridgeline of the canyon beyond. The placement of the sign SPRING and HERE on the boulder is the spatial context that may supply the infor-

mation needed to ‘get a drink.’

The third example, Figure 11, is Ute picture writing found about a mile away from the first example. This Ute petroglyph is located across the river from a large meadow surrounded by cliffs on one side and borders the river on the other. The spatial position of each of these graphic elements mirrors the land features in view from this panel. The Sign Language signs are easy to pick out in this panel. Figure 11.



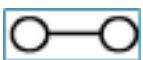
Figure 11. A Ute petroglyph of a narrative theme. Each graphic element is free-standing and not linked together. Only the spatial syntax provides the context in this panel.

**Semiotic Analysis**

This example of Ute picture writing has six graphemes and none of them are linked together to form a syntagm. They are autonomous, and their meaning can only be derived by the relationality of the landscape features.



**Grapheme 1**



TWO HEADS TALKING (Martineau 1973).



Literal meaning: Two round circles with a vertical line connecting them represent two heads talking. Mallery, Tompkins, Seton, and Martineau all agree that the circles represent HEADs, and the line connecting them represents TALK. The horizontal line connecting the two heads is represented by the finger movement toward the head (talk to me) or away from the head (talking to you). Notice the hand gesture is horizontal.

It is a common sign and found in many other Ute petroglyph sites in western Colorado. The vertical line is normally centered on each circle, or ‘talking head.’ However, this image has the line centered



on the left circle and is misaligned on the right circle. The spatial position of horizontal line touches the lower portion of the second circle, or head. It likely represents the side of the head (talking), like the Sign Language sign of placing the hand on the side of the mouth to WHISPER. Or be SILENT.



More support for this interpretation appears later in this report as the context with other elements in the panel and landscape is revealed.

Gesture signs for whisper (Seton, 1918), and ‘silent’ by (Tomkins 1929).



**Grapho-kineme 2**

arm gesture indicating: COME + OUT.



**Grapheme 3:**

an image placed in context with the river symbol.

Literal meaning: unknown.



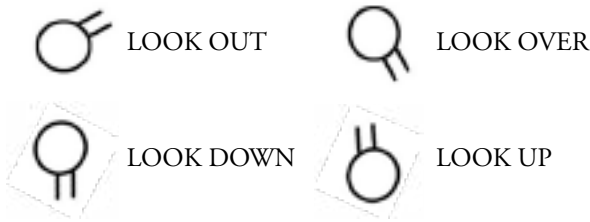
**Grapheme 4:**

HEAD + TWO + FINGER- directional. an Indian Sign Language sign: LOOK.

Litteral meaning: look down (Seton 1918).

Other examples of LOOK are interchangeable in hand movement depending on the context of the narrative and where the eyes are gazing.

Examples:



**Grapheme 5:** possibly the outline of the river.

Literal meaning: river (Tomkins 1969).

Extended meaning: curve-in-the-river.



**Grapheme 6:** ELK.

Literal meaning: Elk, the animal, or Elk

People, a Ute band name.

Sign Language sign ELK, (Seton 1918).

Google Maps provides the relational context for elements and their spatial arrangements. The outline of grapheme 3 is superimposed over the land features which include the rocky cliffs and location of the spring. There is evidence of Ute occupation at the far end of the meadow, with more Ute petroglyphs up on the cliff side shown in Figure 12.

The short line extensions, seem to end at a spring and another at a trail crossing the river on the left. On the right, these extensions lead to the remains of a Ute camp situated below some petroglyphs along the cliff behind. Other lines seem to mimic existing trails now used as access roads. If elk habitually wintered here, the trail to the spring would be well-worn, along with the river crossings and access to this sheltered basin from other directions. Figure 13, shows the overlay of the RIVER sign on the profile

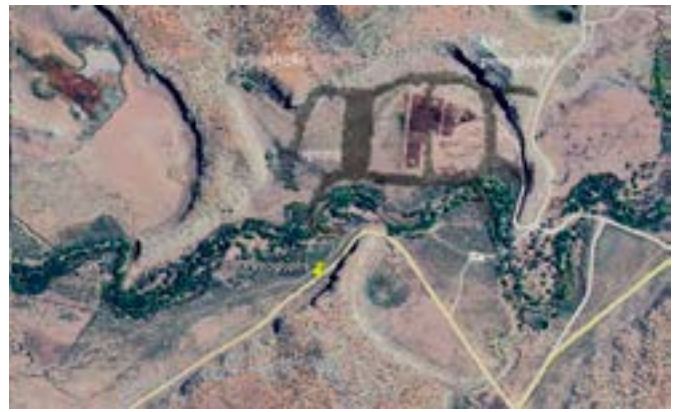


Figure 12 is the aerial view of the river and meadow located across from the Ute petroglyph panel. The large, flat, fish-shaped basin is adjacent to the river. In the center are large square cattle holding pens of a ranch. The sinuous river marks the location of the gray shape drawing on the landscape. It is bracketed by rocky cliffs with petroglyphs on either side. The petroglyph mimics the features of the meadow with trails leading to points of interest.

of the river. One can see that it matches easily and provides the spatial context for the location of the unidentified Grapheme 3.

**Summary and discussion:**

The relationship of the RIVER sign below the map-like motif of unknown identity is an example of how the spatial arrangement of seemingly autonomous signs can be identified when compared with the spatial features in the landscape. The superimposition of the traced panel over a Google Earth map provides onsite verification. The gesture signs of TALK/WHISPER and LOOK DOWN provide a spatial reference to the location of interest, while the elk motif is the subject to the theme involving a game animal habitat. The unidentified motif has appendages that may point to the location of the spring and access trails are important details to know for a hunter. The warning to be quiet or whisper is required because the elk habitat is within earshot of this panel. In summary, the panel may be an instructional narrative for Ute hunters to better understand the habits of elk that congregate in the meadow across the river.



Figure 13. River profile with a red outline of the RIVER sign superimposed in an almost perfect replica of curves in the river profile.

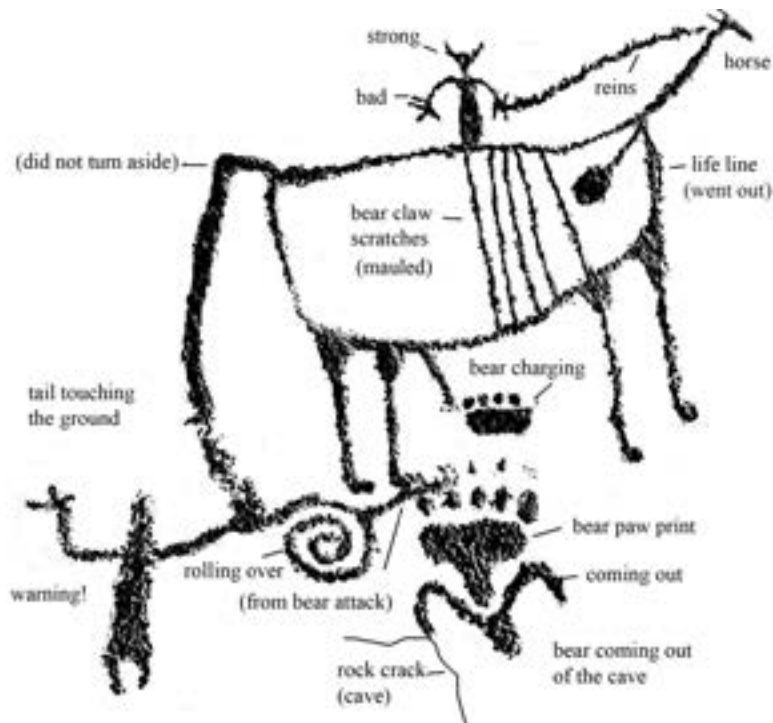


Figure 14. Photograph of a Ute petroglyph panel with bear tracks and horse circa 1840-1900) located on Ute traditional land. Annotated drawing of the panel. (Photo by Darlene Kerner)

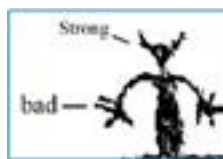
**Bear Attack**

The fourth example is a Ute panel located deep inside the Northern Ute Reservation that was occupied 1890-present. The Utes were well-versed in Indian Sign Language (McKay Cody). This panel shows a very large horse with four long vertical strips on its body and a long neck with a very small head. On its back is an anthropomorph with horns. One hand holds the reins, and the other is gesturing.

The 'bear attack' panel is an animated narrative displaying the action Sign Language signs of motion and iconic graphemes that identify a bear and a male horse with deep claw scratches. The bear paw motif is shown twice with varying size and position that provides spatial and temporal context. The panel reads from left to right but in conjunction with the right side.

**Semiotic Analysis:**

The following analysis explains all of the graphemes that are found in this one complex syntagm. It is a morphological description of what happened with a bear and a horse using Sign Language signs, iconic signs and spatial positioning to tell the story. The anthropomorphic gestures identified are kinemes, equivalent to many of the gesture signs signs described by Seton (1918). The graphemes are commonly found at many other sites throughout the Ute traditional territory.



**Grapho-morphem 1:** is a small anthropomorph with buffalo horns.



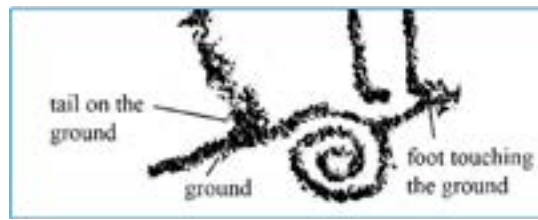
Pictogram, and Sign Language sign for STRONG (Tomkins, 1969).



Grapho-Kineme: BAD, the arm and hand gesture shown in the petroglyph are compared with the drawing (Seton, 1918) and pictogram for NEGATION, (Tompkins 1969). More elements are linked together and continue the narrative.



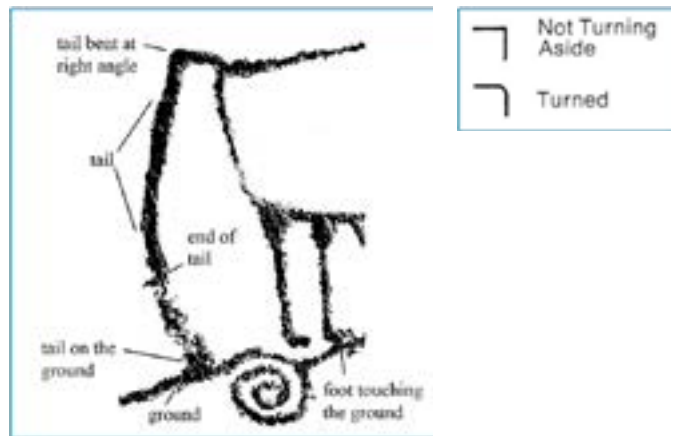
Grapho-kineme: WARNING, one arm raised and one finger up, (Seton 1918).



Grapho-kineme: ROLL + OVER, pictogram (Martineau 1973).

“The spiral represents the idea of rolling over since it is placed between the horse’s legs. In sign language, a horizontal spiral, as opposed to an upward or downward spiral, represents rolling over.” (Martineau 1973)

A similar use of the Indian Sign Language sign ROLL+ OVER is found in the Ute petroglyph describing the train wreck of the Consolidation No. 10 carrying Gilsonite from a mine near the Northern Ute reservation. A train engine was called an “Iron Horse” and was represented by the abbreviated horse and rider, that drove off the tracks and rolled over. (Martineau 1973).



Grapho-kineme: BENT TAIL of the horse. The right angle of the tail indicates that the horse did not turn aside. (Martineau: 1973).

Literal translation: the horse was unable to get away (by turning aside).

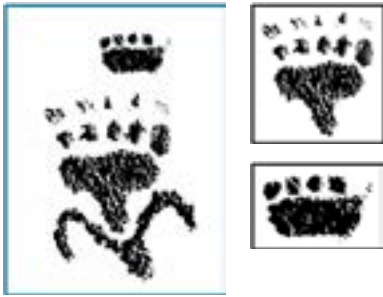
The tail is fully pecked but continues with scattered pecking that links it to the ground line, which is attached to the “ROLL + OVER” symbol and continues on to the horse’s foot touching the ground. This spatial syntax links up the horse with the ground and with rolling over (on the ground).

Literal translation: The horse rolled over on the ground

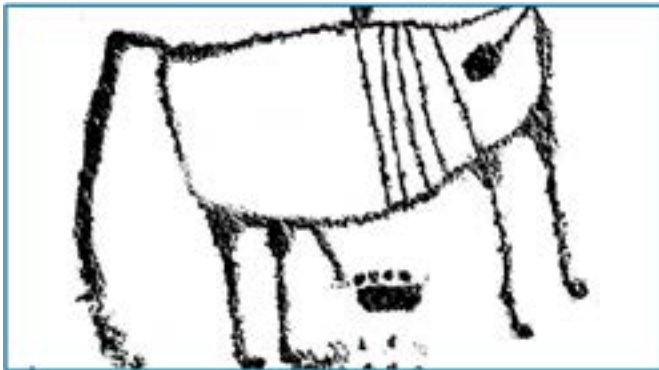


Grapho-kinemes: COMING OUT

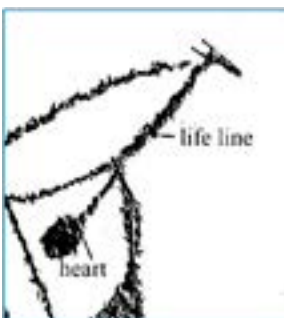




Graphemes: two bear paw images, one larger, one small. Spatial syntax showing the larger print in the foreground, and smaller print showing distance further away as it charges towards the horse.



Literal translation: a bear emerged out and charged up to the horse.  
 The long vertical lines represent the deep claw marks from the bear, across the side of the horse.  
 Literal translation: The five claw marks of the bear down the side of the horse.



Grapho-kineme: 'LIFELINE TO HEART,' of the horse. The life-line leading going down to the heart indicates that life from the heart went out.  
 Discussion: The heart line or spirit line is a common motif shown on animals in pottery and paintings of spiritual nature.  
 Extended meaning: Strong warning. A bear emerged and charged the horse. The bear rolled it over and mauled it to death.

**Discussion:**

The tail of the horse is bent at a right angle, incorporating the symbol for NOT TURN+ASIDE. The tail ends with scattered pecking marks that join it to the horizontal line representing the ground. This line leads into a curl that is the symbol for ROLLING+OVER.

The horse has a very large belly and tiny head, as it would appear as it turned away from the viewer at ground level looking up at it. It creates an illusion of spatial reference, as if the horse was knocked over on the ground.

There are five long vertical lines that represent deep wounds from the claws of the bear.

Below, and on the left, is a human stick figure with one arm up with flayed fingers gesturing a WARNING, for all to see what happened here. The other arm leads across to the ROLLING+OVER symbol below the horse's tail. The line continues, touching the bear's paw. Together, it infers that the horse was rolled over by the bear. The claw marks drawn across the body of the horse and the spirit line from the horse's heart suggest that it has died.

In Summary, the morphological narrative suggests "Warning!. A bear came out and charged my horse, knocking him over and killing him."

**Conclusion**

The Ute petroglyph panels are interpreted through relational thinking, using landscape features and knowledge of Indian Sign Language. The landscape features offer locational context needed to interpret the message. The DRINK-WATER panel locates the water basin in relation to the Ancestral Pueblo room block ruin, which is located at the top of the ridge. Combined with the depiction of FOOTPRINTS on top of a TRAIL symbol, going upward coincides with the steep climb to the water basin itself. The DRINK+ WATER sign from Montezuma Creek is also found further north near the Price River. The rock incorporation of cracks and the spatial arrangement of the elements on the boulder are related to the surrounding landscape features and act as a locator of the approximate elevation of a SPRING to get a drink of water.

The Ute ELK hunting panel uses the RIVER symbol to place the information in context with the landscape features that are within view from the panel. Ute symbols based on Ute gesture signs give it movement, using TALK and COMING OUT, LOOK DOWN, and a 'map of the meadow.' The stylized elk is the subject, which may represent a herd of elk that overwinters at this site.

The Bear Attack is a narrative panel with many graphemes linked together and read simultaneously. It is a fine example of more complex Ute picture writing. The narrative can be understood by referencing Indian Sign Language, which provides the motion of the actors, horse and bear, in this panel. Other complex narrative panels using picture writings of historic Ute events are found

in the published literature by McKay-Cody, (2019), Patterson (2012) and Martineau (1973).

This paper provides a systematic process with multiple lines of support to demonstrate the close relationship between American Indian Sign Language and picture writing. Although Mallery (1880, 1893) concluded this relationship and published his books on Indian Sign Language and Indian Picture Writing over 150 years ago, it has only been Martineau (1973) who has published more conclusive evidence of Indian Sign Language as

the “key” to understanding petroglyphs as Indian picture writing. The four Ute rock writing examples illustrate morphological descriptions, with the entire rock panel serving as a continuous morphological narrative, guided by directional cues. It is hoped that a semiotic analysis of each example, helps the readers to understand the lines of evidence to support the proposed meanings for the various glyphs. This analysis demonstrates the ingenious system of picture writing that the Utes developed throughout their traditional homelands.

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# REEVALUATING THE ROLE OF FEMALES IN THE ANCIENT MAJES PEOPLES OF SOUTHERN PERU: A ROCK ART APPROACH

*Maarten van Hoek (Netherlands)*

## Introduction

Thousands of anthropomorphic rock art images have so far been recorded at numerous spots in the Desert Andes; the extremely dry coastal strip of the Atacama Desert in Chile and Peru. In most cases those figures are sexless and depicted without gender-revealing objects. Therefore, such figures may be either male or female. Yet it is a matter of bias when those sexless images are uncritically accepted to represent males, suggesting a male supremacy.

This is certainly not always the case in every society, as is evidenced by the two evidently female figures stitched on Karwa Textiles (items dating around 700 B.C and excavated at a Paracas necropolis in coastal southern Peru). Importantly, both figures are said to represent female representations of the purported Andean “Staff God”, because both figures display a “vagina dentata” and (possibly!) breasts (Blower: 1995: Figs 17 and 18). Moreover, the “vagina dentata” is -according to Blower (1995)- related to the highly valued Spondylus Shell. He also argues (1995: Fig. 13) that the Spondylus -symbolizing femininity- was held by the “Smiling God” from Chavín de Huantár (northern Peru; around B.C. 500) in the left hand (which he considered to be female), while the Strombus Shell -symbolizing masculinity- was held in the right (male) hand.

It thus seems that objects (like shells), body-parts (even hands) and landscape elements (like the male river fertilizing female

Pachamama) may be gender-related in Andean worldview. Likewise, the Quena, the Andean flute, seems to (understandably) symbolize male sex, as is (also explicably) the bow-and-arrow (Van Hoek 2012). Therefore, several sexless images in Desert Andes rock art can easily be identified as male. However, identifying anthropomorphic MRAS images as females is more difficult, as female gender-related objects are unknown in the MRAS.

## The MRAS

In this study I will mainly discuss images recorded at rock art sites in the Majes Rock Art Sphere (MRAS). The “MRAS” may be read as “Majes Rock Art Sphere”, the extremely dry coastal area in the west of the Department of Arequipa, which ranges from the Vitor-Chili Drainage in the east to and inclusive of the Caravelí Drainage in the west (the locations of eight MRAS sites are shown in Fig. 1; Quichihuasi falls outside the MRAS). It can also be read as Majes Rock Art Style (referring to the many shared images in the MRAS). The successive Majes Rock Art Styles range from approximately 500 B.C. to A.D. 1500.

The MRAS houses the biggest collection of rock art images in the Desert Andes. Anthropomorphic figures also occur abundantly in the MRAS. Therefore, only a selection of images will be presented here (many others are illustrated and described in Van Hoek 2012). After having discussed several specific rock art images, it may be necessary to reevaluate the role of females in the ancient peoples once residing in the six drainages of the MRAS.



Fig. 1. Map of the Study Area with the locations of a selection of rock art sites roughly indicated. 1. Quichihuasi; 2. Culebrillas; 3. La Pampilla; 4. Quilcapampa and La Tuna; 5. Alto de Pitis; 6. Toro Muerto; 7. Illomas; 8. Chillihuay; 9 Río Caravelí. The circles indicate three of the volcanos (Sacred Mountains) in the area. Map by Maarten van Hoek, based on OpenStreetMap-Contributors (<https://www.maps-for-free.com/>).

Possibly a more important role for women in the ancient Majes Peoples can be established.

### Female Genitalia - the Semi-Circle

There are several cases where rock art images (almost certainly) symbolize a female figure. One literally clear-cut case is found on an almost inaccessible, vertical outcrop panel at Rosario; an extensive rock art site in the extreme north of Chile (Fig. 2). It not only features a clearly female figure (which is evidenced by the semi-circle between the legs, clearly symbolizing the female genitalia), female sex is also confirmed by association, because of her position next to a clearly male figure (Fig. 3).

### Female Genitalia - Labia Symbols



Fig. 2. The rock art site of Rosario, Chile, looking south. The dot indicates the location of the petroglyphs illustrated in Fig. 3. Photograph by Maarten van Hoek.

Fig. 3. Petroglyphs at Rosario, Chile. Photograph and drawing by Maarten van Hoek.

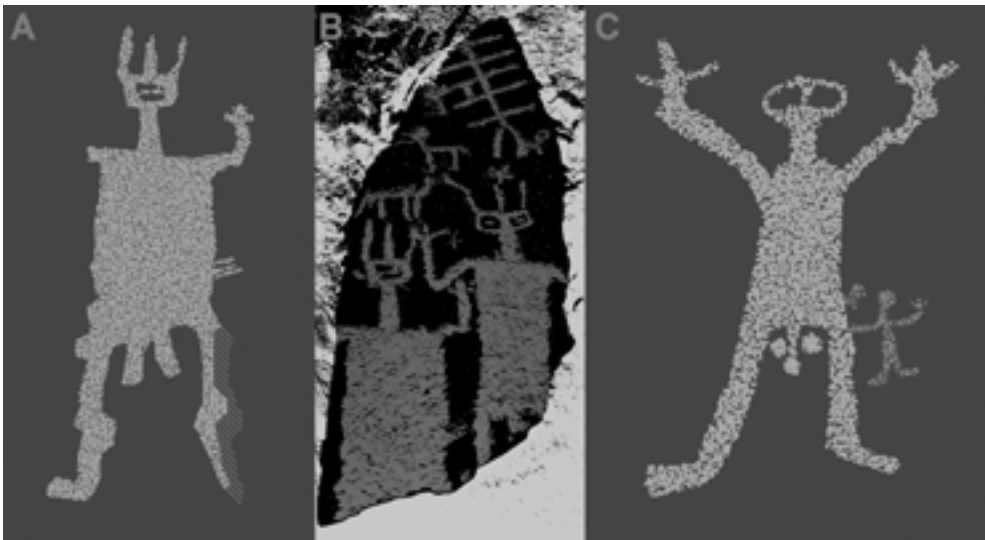


Fig. 4. Damaged petroglyph on a panel from La Pampilla, Vitor Valley. B: The same panel but even more damaged recently, showing associated images. C: Male figure on another panel at La Pampilla. Drawings by Maarten van Hoek; A and C based on photographs by Ellior Malcon Vizcarra Velarde; B: based on a photograph by Rafa Mercado.

Another indication of female sex may be the presence of two short, parallel or slightly splayed lines that are attached to the genital area; the labia. In the MRAS several anthropomorphic figures with (purported!) labia-elements have been reported, like the one on a boulder at La Pampilla in the Vitor Valley (Fig. 4A; 4B shows the recent, damaged situation). At the same site is also a clearly male figure: Fig. 4C).

Another example, a rather faint, yet relevant petroglyph portraying a female figure on much vandalized Panel 044 in Sector 3 of the Río Caravelí Site (Van Hoek 2022a), represents a frontally depicted anthropomorph that has two short, diagonal lines emerging (off-center) from the genital area. More enigmatic are the two small semi-circles attached to the side of the body. Do they symbolize the breasts? The figure may even be an unfinished





Fig. 5. Anthropomorph on Panel 2/3-038 at the Río Caravelí Site. Drawing by Maarten van Hoek, based on a photograph by Cesar Augusto Perez Zuñiga.

“Carcancha” (an important icon that I will discuss further on), judged by the pose of the figure and especially because of the large, outlined hands with digits, shaped like (inverted) “Trophy” Heads (Fig. 5).

Also, a group of three vertically arranged, parallel lines might indicate femininity, like in a petroglyph at Chillihuay (Fig. 6A), an important rock art site in the MRAS. The three lines could

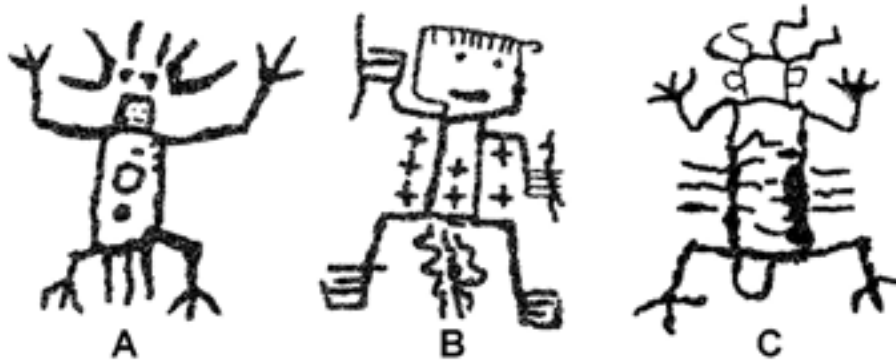


Fig. 6. Anthropomorphs at Chillihuay, Ocoña Drainage. Sketches by Maarten van Hoek, based on photographs in: Chumpitaz Llerena and Rodríguez Cerrón (2020).



Fig. 7. Petroglyphs on Panel TM-Da-047A at Toro Muerto, Majes Valley. Photograph by Maarten van Hoek.



Fig. 8. Petroglyph on Panel TM-Da-047A at Toro Muerto, Majes Valley. Photograph and drawing by Maarten van Hoek.

either depict female genitalia (including the two labia), or perhaps a menstrual flow. The “abstract” motifs on the body could also symbolize (the wish for) pregnancy. Other enigmatic, yet still possibly female-related appendages occur, like the ladder-like design in another anthropomorph at Chillihuay (Fig. 15B). The example in Fig. 6B has three, rather long undulating lines emerging from the genital area. These lines most likely do not symbolize labia, but instead I would like to tentatively suggest that the lines embody the menstrual flow of a female. The figure (holding an object in each hand) has two crosses on the body, which is flanked by similar crosses.

Another example -where the labia seem to have been combined with a vulva symbol- is found on Panel TM-Da-047A at Toro Muerto (Fig. 7). This figure (Fig. 8) is interesting as it seems that the circular vulva-element (with two parallel labia-lines attached) has been superimposed onto the lower abdomen of the figure (the whole genital motif seems to have been more crudely hacked than the rest of the anthropomorph).

#### Female Genitalia - More Vulva Symbols

There are more rock art elements that even more convincingly symbolize feminine vulva-symbols (sometimes combined with labia-elements). In some cases, the vulva-symbol is rather complex, like in the petroglyph of a possibly Paracas-Style anthro-



Fig. 9. The rock art site of Illomas, Manga Drainage, looking west from the rock art site of Cuesta de la Pachana. Photograph courtesy of and © by Justin Jennings and the Upper Manga Archaeological Survey Project; University of Toronto, Department of Anthropology, Royal Ontario Museum, Canada.

pomorphic figure on Boulder PAJ-008 at Illomas; an important rock art site at an altitude of 2140 m (Fig. 9). It has a centrally placed line, flanked by two lines that seem to enclose the central line, the whole emerging from the genital area, while on the lowest part of the abdomen a semi-circle seems to further enhance the feminine character of the figure (Fig. 10). This last detail (the semi-circle) went unnoticed by earlier investigators (Paz de No-boa 1940: Croquis 10; Van Hoek 2012: Fig. 90; both authors presenting an otherwise inaccurate drawing).

However, labelling a rock art image is often a matter of interpretation. For instance, despite the -in my opinion- rather convincing female genitalia depicted in Fig. 10, Tacca Quispe (2008: foto 132) labels the figure as a male. Therefore, I would like to emphasize here that -in general- I am offering the interested reader only (my) often subjective interpretations, because there is not a single shred of informed knowledge regarding each individual image of the MRAS. All we have are the prehistoric images and our modern ways of interpretation (which may thus be incorrect).

At Toro Muerto there are more apparently female figures that show a vulva. For instance, the faceless example on Panel TM-Cb-023A (Fig. 11) has a rectangular vulva-symbol (with a verti-



Fig. 10. Petroglyph on Boulder PAJ-008 at Illomas, Manga Drainage. Drawing by Maarten van Hoek, based on a photograph by Justin Jennings.

cal dot in its center) placed between the legs. The phytomorphic (thus possibly also fertility-related) isolated anthropomorph on Boulder TM-Bs-003 has an elongated, outlined (thus open) vulva-symbol that is placed across the genital area (Fig. 12A). Finally, even natural holes may have been intentionally incorporated into a rock art image to symbolize vulva-symbols, as is the case with two petroglyphs on Boulder TM-Cd-015 at Toro Muerto (Fig. 13).

The anthropomorph on Boulder TM-Cd-018 might even have two vulva-symbols (Fig. 12B). One vulva is placed on the lower abdomen. Interestingly, the vulva also has two short, parallel vertically arranged lines, which most likely depict the labia. The second symbol is found in an isolated position lower down the figure (between the knees?) and consists of a -shaped element with a dot above it. Having two sexual organs in one figure is not unique (yet still most exceptional). One attached and one isolated (severed?) organ have also been recorded in a male “Carcancha” on Panel AP3-052 at Alto de Pitis, opposite Toro Muerto

(Van Hoek 2012: Fig. 321).

Further west, at Chillihuay (Fig. 14), are some more interesting examples, like the distorted anthropomorph showing labia on Panel CHY-B-006 (Fig. 15A). On Panel CHY-D-024 is an anthropomorphic figure with a circle plus two labia-elements placed at the genital area between the squatting legs that touch each other (Van Hoek 2012: Fig. 89). One panel at Chillihuay bears at least three exceptional anthropomorphic figures, all three possibly female, including a figure with a ladder-element emerging from the genital area (giving birth?) (Fig. 15B), while on the same panel may be a petroglyph of a possibly female figure also depicted when giving birth; the semi-circles possibly symbolizing breasts (Van Hoek 2012: Fig. 267).

The anthropomorph on Boulder TM-Cd-018 might even have two vulva-symbols (Fig. 12B). One vulva is placed on the lower abdomen. Interestingly, the vulva also has two short, parallel vertically arranged lines, which most likely depict the labia. The second symbol is found in an isolated position lower down the



Fig. 11. Panel TM-Cb-023A at Toro Muerto. Photograph and drawing by Maarten van Hoek.

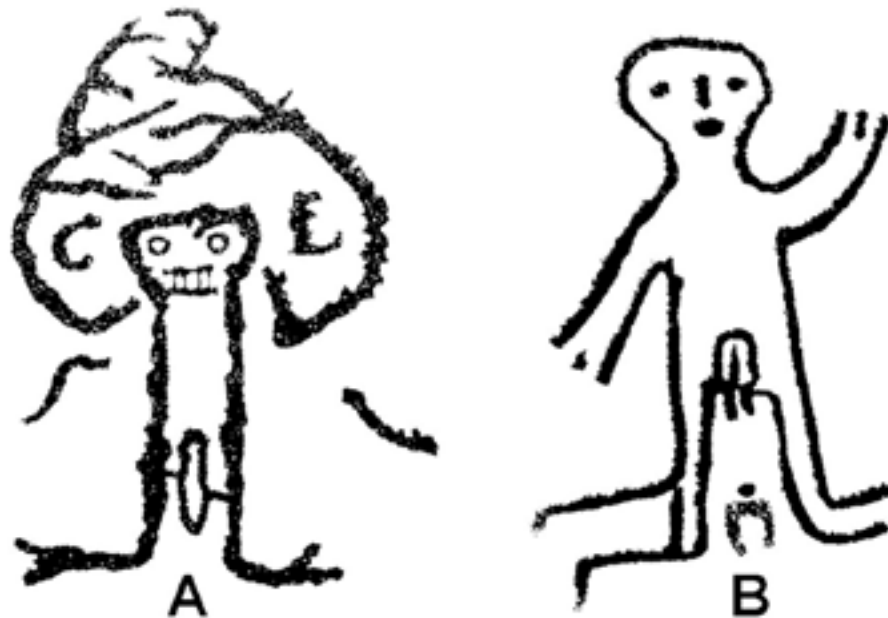


Fig. 12. A: Boulder TM-Bs-003 (a single petroglyph); B: Boulder TM-Cd-018 (also a single petroglyph), both at Toro Muerto. Drawings by Maarten van Hoek.



Fig. 13. Panel TM-Cd-015 at Toro Muerto. Photograph and drawing by Maarten van Hoek.



figure (between the knees?) and consists of a -shaped element with a dot above it. Having two sexual organs in one figure is not unique (yet still most exceptional). One attached and one isolated (severed?) organ have also been recorded in a male “Carcancha” on Panel AP3-052 at Alto de Pitis, opposite Toro Muerto (Van Hoek 2012: Fig. 321).

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**Female Deities**

In the introduction I already pointed out that even the male Andean “Staff God” has its female equivalents. At least two convincingly female “Staff Goddesses” have been depicted on textiles excavated at Karwa in the Paracas Heartland. It now is a fact



Fig. 14. Panel CHY-B-006 at Chillihuay. Framed are the images seen in Fig. 15A. Photograph courtesy of Rainer Hostnig, Cusco, Peru.



Fig. 15. A: Petroglyphs on Panel CHY-B-006 at Chillihuay. Note the MSC-Style (dating around 500 to 1 B.C.) agnatic mouth with large fang and two floating eyes. Drawing by Maarten van Hoek, based on photographs by Rainer Hostnig, Cusco, Peru. B: Petroglyph (one of many) on a panel at Chillihuay. Drawing by Maarten van Hoek, based on a photograph by Carlos Trujillo Vera.

that the Paracas Culture (roughly 1000 to 0 B.C.) influenced the rock art of Arequipa to a certain extent (Van Hoek 2018a; Jennings, Van Hoek et al. 2019), and thus also imagery of female deities (or just the concept of female gods) may -via diffusion- have emerged in the (still completely unknown!) pantheon of the ancient Majes Peoples. Of course, this hypothesis is very difficult to prove when it is only based on rock art imagery.

However, one petroglyph in the MRAS may offer evidence for female dominance in this respect. It is found on Boulder AP3-059 at Alto de Pitis (Fig. 16). The petroglyph shows a frontally depicted figure with a laterally depicted feline-looking head, featuring an MSC-Style (Formative Period) eccentric eye. In one hand it holds an object; possibly an atlatl. Importantly, also the purported Andean “Staff God” has often been depicted carrying an atlatl. Also, the feline-looking head on top of an apparent

human-like body might indicate that we are dealing with a deity here. It also has two square (fertility?) symbols on its thorax, but -more importantly- it has two distinct labia-looking lines between its splayed legs. It is now significant that archaeologist Cardona Rosas (2002: 69) states that the figure represents a Wari God, without -nevertheless- offering any proof and without mentioning the apparent feminine character. It is completely uncertain if indeed the figure symbolizes a Wari God. It is perhaps better interpreted as a Deity “borrowed” from the Paracas Culture (roughly 1000 to 0 B.C.), rather than Wari (roughly from A.D. 600 to 1000).

#### **Female “Carcanchas”**

There is an important group of MRAS images that more convincingly demonstrates that females may have played a more important role in the worldview of the ancient Majes Peoples than previously acknowledged. It concerns the “Carcanchas”, a term



Fig. 16. Boulder AP3-059 at Alto de Pitis (two felines have been omitted). Drawing by Maarten van Hoek.



Fig. 17. Boulder AP3-069 at Alto de Pitis, looking NNW towards Apu Coropuna; the Sacred Mountain of the region. Photograph by Maarten van Hoek.

which I earlier introduced to describe a most exclusive anthropomorphic personage in the MRAS. Importantly, the “Carcancha” icon is found as a petroglyph in every major drainage of the MRAS, but there is a significant “overkill” of “Carcancha” petroglyphs at Alto de Pitis in the Majes Valley. The possible reason for this excess was fully explained by me earlier (Van Hoek 2013). Importantly, a “Carcancha” is a rock art image of an anthropomorph that combines properties of a deceased person and properties of a living person. The death-symbolism of the “Carcancha” is evidenced by its skeletal appearance, showing a rib-cage (sometimes with a sternum), the often grinning mouth exposing teeth, and the often most noticeable and exaggerated skeletal

knee -and elbow- joints. Also characteristic are the often exaggeratedly large and outlined hands (see Fig. 5) and/or feet. Yet the “Carcancha” simultaneously shows properties of a living person, indicated by the often-dynamic posture, like the “surrendering” or the “saluting” position of the arms, and -in rare cases- by the (male) sexual organs, pointing to fertility. Still, I argue that -also in rare cases- some “Carcanchas” obviously depict females. Consequently, apparently sexless “Carcanchas” may well be female (or male).

Indeed, an intriguing set of two “Carcanchas” is found on Boulder AP3-069 at Alto de Pitis, from which a full view of Apu Coropuna is discernable (Fig. 17). One figure (80 cm in height) clearly displays its male sexual organs, while the other “Carcancha” is obviously sexless (Fig. 18). Still this graphically sexless figure may thus represent a female “Carcancha”, despite the lack of any physical evidence and the lack of informed knowledge. However, underwriting indications that this sexless image may still depict a female “Carcancha”, are found at other sites in Arequipa.

The first convincing example I would like to present, is found on Boulder TM-Bb-001 at Toro Muerto. It depicts an obvious skeleton-anthropomorph with two distinct parallel and vertically arranged lines attached to the genital area (Fig. 19). These two lines most likely depict the labia of the -in my opinion- female “Carcancha”.

But there are also doubtful examples and misinterpretations. An anthropomorphic petroglyph recorded at Quilcapampa in the Sihuas Valley by Stephen Berquist, was identified by me as possibly a female “Carcancha” (Van Hoek 2021a: Fig. 49). It concerns a faint, squatting figure with an (indistinct) box-like

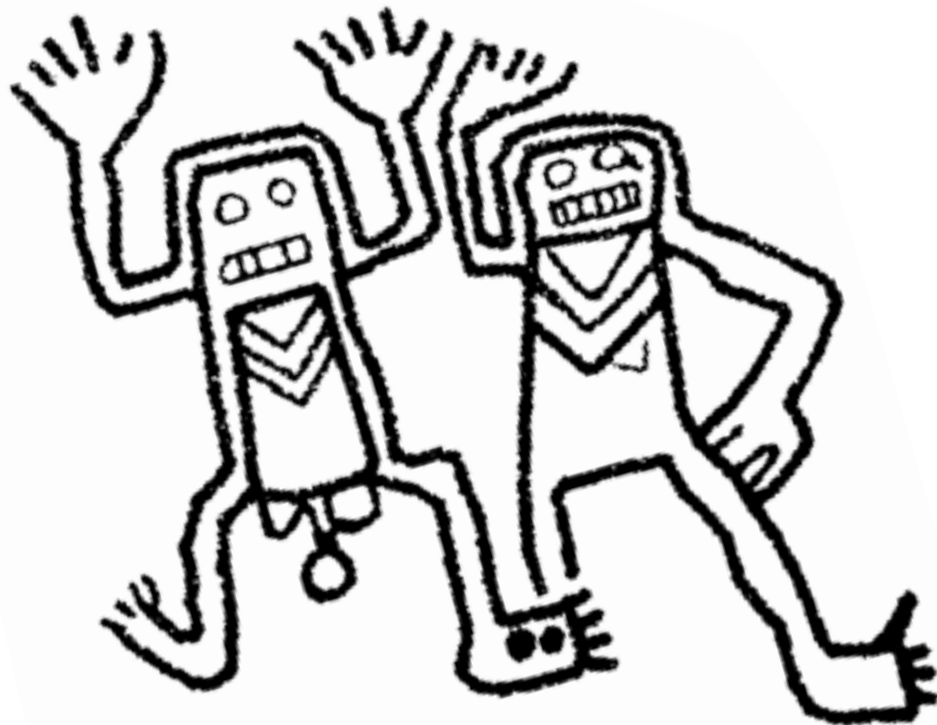


Fig. 18. Petroglyphs on Panel AP3-069A at Alto de Pitis. Drawing by Maarten van Hoek.

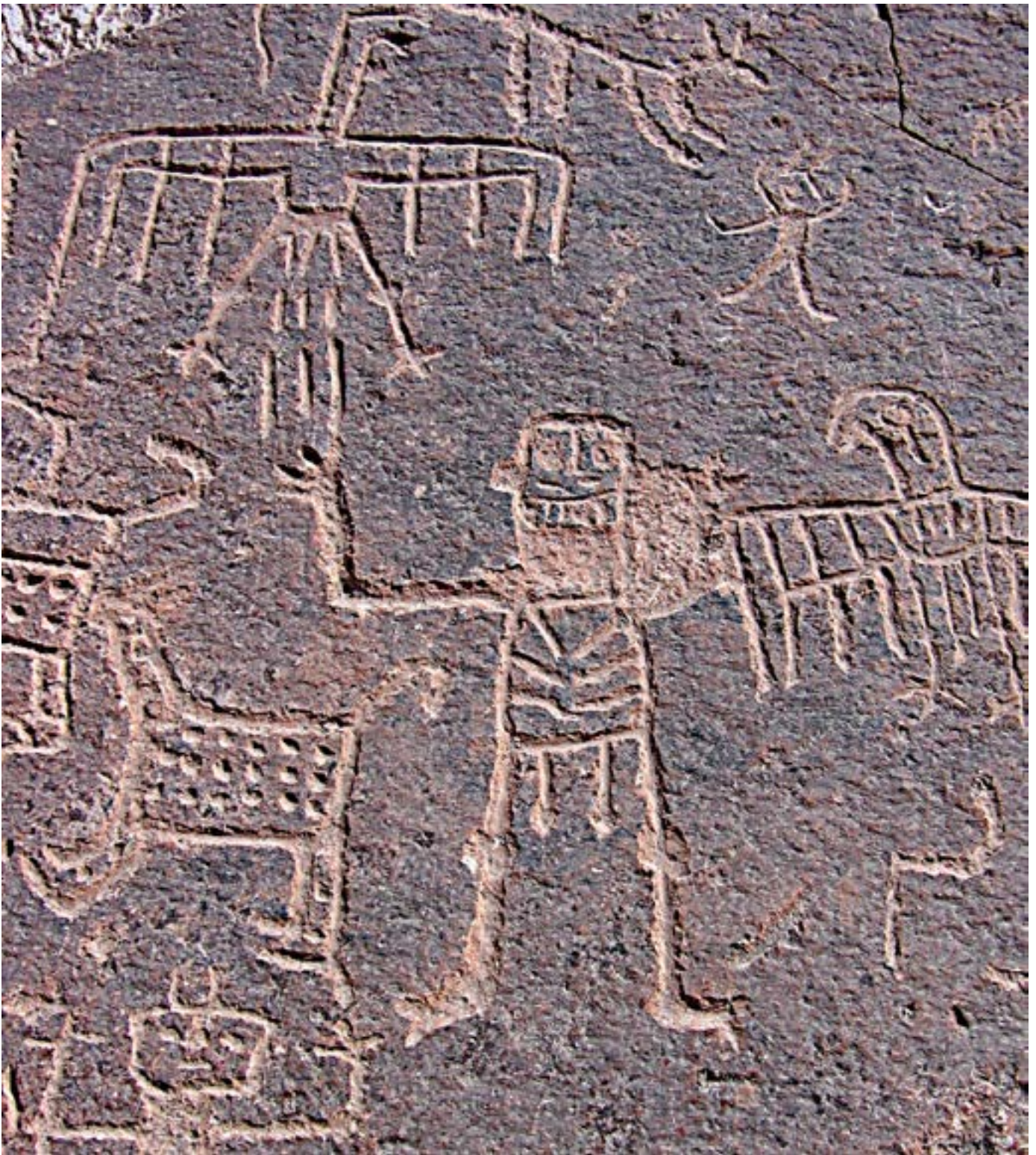


Fig. 19. Detail from Boulder TM-Bb-001 at Toro Muerto; the largest decorated boulder at this site, having numerous petroglyphs. Note the possible association between the “Carcancha” and the “Rain Bird” (expressing fertility?). Photograph by Maarten van Hoek.

element at the genital area, which may represent the vulva. An otherwise clearly male “Carcancha” is found at the rock art site of Culebrillas in the Vitor Drainage. High up the vertical cliffs of a slot-canyon (Fig. 20) is a scene of a “Carcancha” approached by two camelids (Fig. 21). The “Carcancha” depicts a “turtle-like” anthropomorph with pronounced male genitals. Earlier this personage was misinterpreted by me as a female figure (Van Hoek

2012: Fig. 316), based on an indistinct photo.

Another possible example is the petroglyph on Boulder TUN-001 at La Tuna in Sihuas (Fig. 22). It is definitely a “Carcancha”, but the (possible!) vulva, subjectively colored-in by me in red (Fig. 22) is somewhat ambiguous (Van Hoek 2022b). The same goes for a petroglyph on Panel CHY-D-015 at Chillihuay. It is a face-less biomorphic figure (a zoomorph or an anthropomorph?)



Fig. 20. Part of the cliff in the narrow slot-canyon of Culebrillas. The dot marks the position of the petroglyphs illustrated in Fig. 21. Photograph by Maarten van Hoek.



Fig. 21. Part of the petroglyph scene on a panel at Culebrillas. Photograph and drawing by Maarten van Hoek.



Fig. 22. The rock art site of La Tuna in the Sihuas Valley, and the “Carcancha” on Boulder TUN-001. Photograph and drawing by Maarten van Hoek.



Fig. 23. Petroglyphs on a boulder at Quebrada de Quichihuasi, Yarabamba. Drawing by Maarten van Hoek, based on a photograph by Ismael Begazo Quenaya.

that has horizontal lines (ribs?) inside and outside the body (see Fig. 6C). It may be a “Carcancha”, and if so, it may also be a female example because of the semi-circle placed off-center between the legs. Also at Chillihuay, on Panel CHY-D-002A, is a complex “Carcancha” that has a box-like element between the legs from which three short lines emerge (Van Hoek 2012: Fig. 88). It probably also is a female figure.

A much more convincing female “Carcancha” petroglyph has been recorded by Ismael Begazo Quenaya at a site near the confluence of Quebrada de Quichihuasi and Quebrada de Despachana in the Yarabamba District of Arequipa (108 km ESE of Alto de Pitis and 147 km ESE of Illomas; outside the MRAS). This example (Fig. 23) shows a rectangular feature (with an internal vertical line) on the lower part of the abdomen, interpreted by me as a vulva-symbol. Importantly, this figure is also associated with two snake-like images, each pointing the head towards the armpits of the “Carcancha”. Snakes may be regarded as (male) fertility symbols and in this case, they may enhance the fertility-aspect of the female.

#### The Female with Double Symbolism

The “Carcanchas” discussed above seem to offer evidence that also sexless “Carcanchas” may well be female. There is, however, another petroglyph that is even more informative. It concerns the image of an anthropomorph that forms a unique combination of a “Carcancha” and a “Trophy” Head Carrier. This -so far only- example is found on Boulder PAJ-143 at the extensive site of Illomas (see Fig. 9), 40 km NW of Alto de Pitis. It concerns the central figure in a row of no less than three “Carcanchas” (Fig. 24), first reported by Tacca Quispe (2008: Foto 160) and discussed later by me (Jennings, Van Hoek et al. 2019). Tacca Quispe (2008: Foto 159) and Jennings and I acknowledged the “Trophy” Head, but did not discuss the important gender-aspect

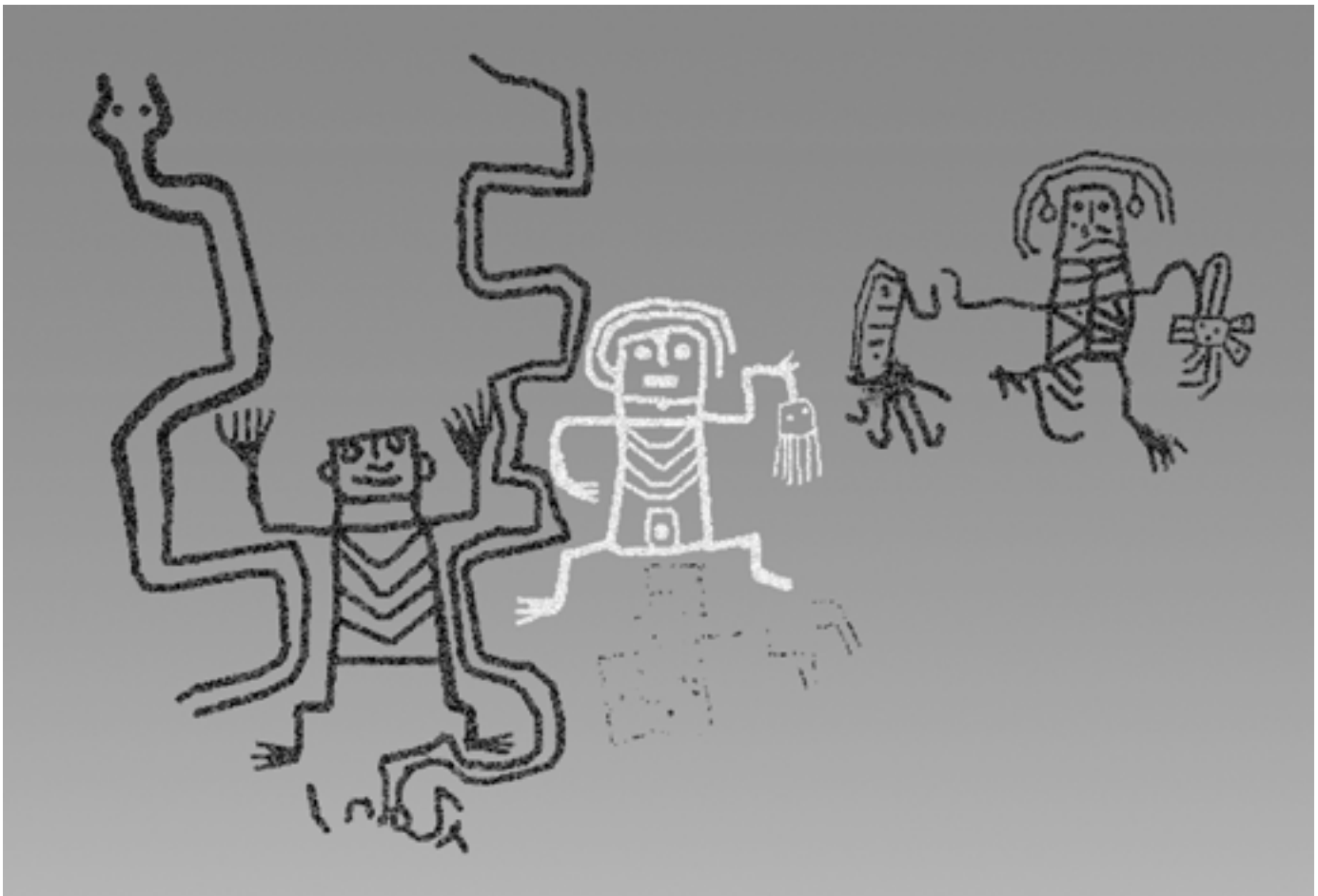


Fig. 24. The “Carcanchas” on Boulder PAJ-143 at Illomas. Drawing by Maarten van Hoek, based on photos by Tacca Quispe (2008).

of this figure.

Indeed, the anthropomorph on Boulder PAJ-143 is probably unique in several aspects. First of all, it definitely concerns a “Carcancha”, and secondly it carries a “Trophy” Head; the whole figure depicting a combination that is in itself extremely rare in the MRAS. In this context it is also important to mention here that both the “Carcancha” and the “Trophy” Head are life-death related symbols. Thirdly, the fully frontally depicted figure is positioned in an obviously squatting pose, while on the lower abdomen a small rectangle (with central dot) apparently symbolizes the female genitalia. Therefore, it almost certainly depicts a female “Carcancha” that is carrying a “Trophy” Head; a truly unique configuration. This may prove that a sexless “Carcancha” may well be a female and -equally importantly- that also sexless “Trophy” Head Carriers may be female. This thus also goes for -for instance- the sexless “Carcancha”/“Trophy” Head Carrier recorded at Quebrada de Pampa Blanca (Fig. 25), a site about 4 km north of Toro Muerto. It may also depict a female (or a male).

It may also be significant that the three “Carcanchas” on Boulder PAJ-143 are accompanied by two large snake-like figures. The intimate association of this scene with snakes (male fertilizing symbols) may enhance the femininity of possibly all three “Carcanchas” on this panel. In the same line, another petroglyph -on Boulder PAJ-140 at Illomas (Tacca Quispe 2008: Figs 146



Fig. 25. The “Carcancha”/“Trophy” Head Carrier on a panel, together with numerous other petroglyphs (not shown), including a possibly Formative Period feline (Van Hoek 2020), at site of Quebrada de Pampa Blanca, north of Toro Muerto, Majes drainage. Drawing by Maarten van Hoek, based on a photo by James Posso Sánchez.

and 179)- apparently depicts a female anthropomorphic figure, as it also displays a small rectangle and central dot on the lower abdomen. Importantly the probable vulva symbol is directly approached by the head of a snake-like creature, while a much larger snake is seen to the right. A similar scene is seen at Toro Muerto (Van Hoek 2012: Fig. 3; see also Fig. 156).

### Female Mediators

The idea that sexless Trophy Head Carriers and sexless “Carcanchas” may (all?) be female, has -in my opinion- far-reaching implications. It may be necessary to revise our perception of the role of women in the ancient Majes Worldview. To start with, Andean (rock art) images of warriors are generally accepted to be male, with which I agree. Yet, it seems as if previous studies dealing with rock art of the MRAS silently accept that sexless anthropomorphs are male or indeed just sexless.

But now that sexless “Trophy” Head Carriers may well be female, it means that the conflict theory, which is based on male militarism, is questioned. This conflict theory is mainly defended by bio-archaeologists Scaffidi and Tung (2020) and by Zborover et al. (2023: 115). Zborover et al. suggest that some of the petroglyphs at Chillihuay -including the “Trophy” Heads- may have had the function to memorialize or honor militaristic themes. Their theory was questioned by me (Van Hoek 2024). I still claim that a “Trophy” Head (Carrier) petroglyph is the result of spiritual ceremonies; not of only (mundane) conflicts (which may nevertheless have occurred in the MRAS).

Although I accept their (bio)archaeological expertise and analyses, I do not agree with their rock art related conclusions (like the incorrect inclusive claim that scenes at the petroglyphs of Toro Muerto express an obsession with violence [2020: 7]). Moreover, the two rock art illustrations published as evidence by Scaffidi

and Tung (2020: Fig. 3) are incorrect and cannot be used to base any hypothesis upon (Van Hoek 2021b: Figs 8 and 9 [my error: instead of TM-Da-032 read: AP3-065A]).

There are now four strands of indications that contradict the idea that conflicts have been depicted in the MRAS. First of all, evidence for a militaristic theme in the MRAS is lacking completely. Only a minimum of -so far (writing 2025)- five petroglyphs (out of the many ten-thousands of rock art images) show anthropomorphic figures obviously carrying weapons (all other “objects” carried by anthropomorphs in the MRAS are problematic). And even those five figures may have had a different function. They may have meant to depict hunters, or even emblematic guardians (like I suggested for the menacing petroglyphs of the “Lord” and the “Warrior” at Chillihuay).

Secondly, not a single scene in the MRAS unambiguously shows a conflict or confrontation between (armed) anthropomorphic figures. There are no rock art images of a fight, not even a ritual fight (like the “tinku”). Moreover, none of the anthropomorphic figures in the MRAS is carrying a shield, which would be a much better conflict-indicator than a spear or bow-and-arrow (also used in hunting). The “shield” suggested by Scaffidi and Tung to have been depicted in an anthropomorphic petroglyph on Panel AP3-065A at Alto de Pitis (2020: 8; Fig. 3), does not exist (Van Hoek 2021b).

I know of only one petroglyph (on Boulder TM-NNx-003 at Sector-X - Toro Muerto; Van Hoek 2022c: Fig. 8) of a sexless anthropomorph that might “carry” a shield-like object, but the figure does not hold a weapon (Fig. 26). Importantly, Tung writes (2007: 952) that shields were not recovered from any of the Beringa and La Real sites, two important excavation sites in the Majes Valley associated with “Trophy” Heads. Also at the heavily looted Uraca tombs in Majes, no actual shields were found, but



Fig. 26. The purported “shield-carrier” on Boulder TM-NNx-003 at Sector-X at Toro Muerto. Drawing by Maarten van Hoek, based on the photo by James Posso Sánchez.



several “Trophy” Heads (Scaffidi 2018).

Thirdly, what is also often ignored is the important fact that relatively many zoomorphs (at least one monkey [Van Hoek 2024: Fig. 10B], several felines [see also Smith 2012: 48], camelids, and especially raptors) have been depicted in the MRAS carrying a “Trophy” Head. Obviously these zoomorphic “Trophy” Head Carriers have nothing to do with weapons or conflicts. Instead, they perfectly fit into the Andean worldview that certain animals have the ability to convey the souls of deceased persons (naturally deceased locals, or foreign persons [hostages?] killed ritually or in conflict) to a Sacred Spot, preferably a high spot (Smith 2012) like the Sacred Mountain of Apu Coropuna, a massive volcano that is visible from Alto de Pitis (see Fig. 17).

It was important for ancient societies (and it still is) that such a Sacred Spot is indestructible, immortal, and that is what Apu Coropuna definitely is. Coropuna is permanently present and easily accessible for the souls of the deceased. Probably for the same reason the Inca ritually killed a young girl (a female!) on top of Apu Ampato; another Sacred Volcano in the MRAS, in order to ensure fertility and rebirth, thus not as a result of a conflict.

In Andean worldview especially birds are considered to be messengers to the gods, but certain animals, especially raptors also have the spiritual ability to convey the souls of the deceased to a Sacred Spot to join their ancestors. In his lengthy essay about the Tiwanaku Step Mountain Motif Scott Smith offers many convincing instances where birds are said to be able to travel between the earthly and other-worldly realms (Smith 2012: 32). Thus, it is highly likely that birds (and also felines [Scott 2012: 48]) are mediators between realms and thus are also able to spiritually convey the souls of the deceased to the summit of a Sacred Mountain. Scott does not associate “Trophy” Heads with conflicts. Instead, the essentially sacrificial “Trophy” Head is a symbol for fertility (Smith 2012: 40).

This concept is reflected in the MRAS by several bird petroglyphs that are carrying a “Trophy” Head. More tellingly, one petroglyph of a “Trophy” Head at Alto de Pitis has even intentionally been altered into a bird image, graphically confirming the concept of the supernatural flight of a bird carrying a “Trophy” Head, a soul, towards Apu Coropuna (Van Hoek 2018b).

Another parallel is seen in ancient Egypt. Deceased pharaohs (and later also other [elite] persons) transformed into birds in order to carry their “souls” to their heaven; the everlasting skies. Ancient Egyptians assumed that an individual consisted of two components: the “ka”; the body, and the “ba”, which (although it concerns a much more complex concept) can simply be translated by “the soul”. Importantly, the supernatural flight of the “ba” of a deceased person is often depicted as a bird with a human head.

The final strand of evidence debunking the conflict theory is offered by the rock art images of female “Carcanchas” and especially of the female “Carcancha” carrying a “Trophy” Head presented in this study. Assuming that warriors in Andean groups

are indeed male, what then are female “Trophy” Head Carriers and female “Carcanchas” doing in the rock art imagery of the MRAS? In my opinion those unarmed female figures have nothing to do with conflicts. Instead, those figures prove that females have played a more important role in the worldview of the Majes Peoples, suggesting that also certain (high-status?) women were selected to assist deceased individuals in their spiritual flight to the Sacred Mountains of the MRAS. Concluding, also females functioned as mediators, able to convey the souls of the deceased to their Sacred Mountains.

Yet, it still remains an enigma why so very few rock art images in the MRAS depict or symbolize female (elite?) persons or deities. Could this dearth be a matter of taboo, or are certain rock art images executed as signs of protest, intentionally ignoring a taboo? Taboo would explain the -in general- large gap that exists between rock art imagery and all other art expressions in the Andean world. Such a large gap also exists between the artefacts and body remains excavated in the archeological digs in the MRAS, and the images recorded at “neighboring” rock art sites, thus debunking the conflict theory.

### Conclusions

Importantly, this study offers several examples of informative rock art images that are obviously female. Although most MRAS petroglyphs depicting the “Carcancha” are sexless, it proves that in very rare cases rock art images of the “Carcancha” may be regarded to represent female figures. This means that, instead of uncritically accepting that sexless “Carcanchas” are sexless or male, any sexless “Carcancha” may well be female (like the sexless “Carcancha” in Fig. 8).

Moreover, the unique “Carcancha” on Boulder PAJ-143 at Illo-mas (yellow in Fig. 24) proves that also “Trophy” Head Carriers recorded in the MRAS may involve female figures. This new approach may change the perception of the role of women in the MRAS, which may have been more important. Based on certain petroglyphs in the MRAS it becomes more and more acceptable that a small number of selected women may have had a higher status and were chosen to serve as specialized mediators during death-life related rituals. It is now up to professional archaeologists to try -via further excavations in the MRAS- to construct a more complete picture of the role of females in Majes groups.

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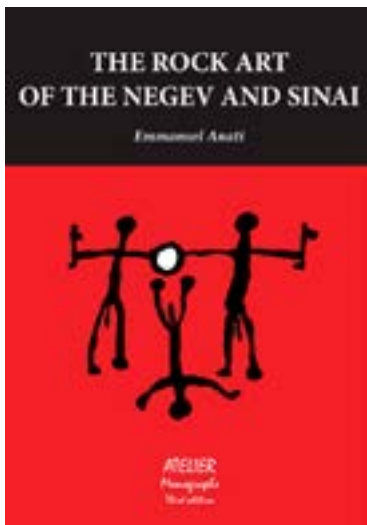
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**THE ROCK ART OF THE NEGEV AND SINAI:** The present volume analyzes a new theme of archeology and anthropology - the rock art of the Negev and Sinai, hereby presenting for the first time a general analysis in English. It elaborates on articles and a book written in the last 60 years, to produce a synthesis and an overview. The book is made up of two parts. The first is about the methods of research and the results thus obtained. The second is a record of the activities and events documented by the different periods of rock art, piecing together the previously unwritten history of people living in the now desert region of the Negev and Sinai throughout the ages.

**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 ORIGINS OF RELIGION:** How and when did religions originate? The study of prehistoric art is revolutionizing our knowledge of prehistoric religions. Rock art sites have been places of worship and tribal identity for millennia, serving as archives of myths, beliefs and rites, all of which evolved, diversified and acquired regional and ethnic features. Visual art, however, is not the earliest evidence of the presence of religion. Archeological discoveries of burial customs and burial goods accompanying the dead in their journey to the other world, and newly discovered prehistoric shrines, reveal concepts and beliefs going back even before the origins of art. When and how were the first religious concepts and rituals conceived? And how did religions acquire their present characteristics? As presented in this book, the evolution of archeological and anthropological evidence and analysis contribute a new look to the origins and history of religion.



## **The rock art of the Negev and Sinai**

Anati, E.

2015, *The rock Art of the Negev and Sinai*,

Monographs IV

Capo di Ponte (Atelier), 248 pp. 196 figg. € 20

The present volume analyzes a new theme of archeology and anthropology - the rock art of the Negev and Sinai, hereby presenting for the first time a general analysis in English. It elaborates on articles and a book written in the last 60 years, to produce a synthesis and an overview. The book is made up of two parts. The first is about the methods of research and the results thus obtained. The second is a record of the activities and events documented by the different periods of rock art, piecing together the previously unwritten history of people living in the now desert region of the Negev and Sinai throughout the ages..

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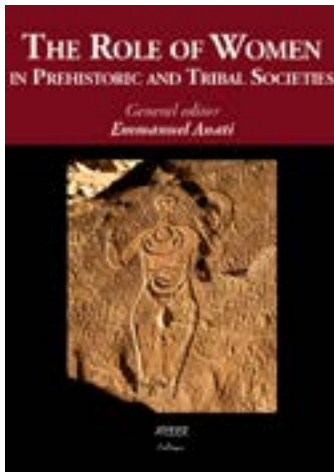
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Anati, E. (ed.)

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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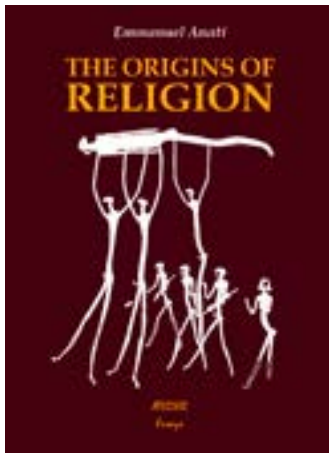
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## The Origins of Religion

Anati, E.

2023, The Origins of Religion, Second English Edition

Essays VI

Capo di Ponte (Atelier), 238 pp. 54 figg. € 20

How and when did religions originate? The study of prehistoric art is revolutionizing our knowledge of prehistoric religions. Rock art sites have been places of worship and tribal identity for millennia, serving as archives of myths, beliefs and rites, all of which evolved, diversified and acquired regional and ethnic features. Visual art, however, is not the earliest evidence of the presence of religion. Archeological discoveries of burial customs and burial goods accompanying the dead in their journey to the other world, and newly discovered prehistoric shrines, reveal concepts and beliefs going back even before the origins of art. When and how were the first religious concepts and rituals conceived? And how did religions acquire their present characteristics? As presented in this book, the evolution of archeological and anthropological evidence and analysis contribute a new look to the origins and history of religion.

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Illustrations should have the resolution of 300 dpi, with a base of 14 cm. They should have explanatory captions, including source when relevant. Illustrations should be presented separately from the text and have exhaustive captions. Both text and illustration should be free from copyright and any other obligation, and preferably not yet published elsewhere. Authors are fully responsible for the submitted text and illustrations.

## SHORT COMMENTS BY READERS

### On abstracts and key-words: should they be compulsory?

*I have a proposal to help the journal rise to the highest standards when comparisons are being made with others. Every paper needs an abstract together with five or six keywords.*

*This is to help the modern phenomenon of the internet, known as www search engines, achieve their potential for free advertising of, above all, a paper's original content, since originality is the most important thing about a paper.*

*What I suggest is that from now on an abstract is to be a prerequisite for publication.*

*Terence Meaden,  
St. Peter's College, Oxford University,  
Oxford (UK)*

### Editorial reply

Many thanks for your awareness and involvement, and for your appreciated and wise proposal. The idea of including abstracts, which are short summaries of the articles, came up for discussion recently and different opinions emerged. It has been claimed that abstracts banalize the text and make readers believe they understand the message and the spirit of the article by just looking at the abstract. That would cause a percentage of readers to read the summary and not the text, as happens with some scientific journals. And one may wonder if a text of 10 pages is enhanced by summarizing it in 10 lines. Discussions are means of communicating ideas, feelings, beliefs, beyond dry words. Articles are published in order to be read, not just to be preserved in archives or mentioned in bibliographies. They are intended to contribute to the progress of scientific research. Syntheses can turn to be like slogans, useful for hurried evaluations. But abstracts may also awaken the interest and invite to reading the article. It depends on how they are conceived. And this is a crucial point.

Some have claimed that keywords are short-cuts which risk reducing the value of concepts and messages. Others consider them useful to indicate what sort of things are found in the text. In any case, in the age of AI, they may soon become obsolete. But so-far they are useful for thematic research.

This ongoing debate did not lead as yet to conclusions. Of course, nothing is perfect and Expression journal can be improved. We should think again about favoring customs that reflect an unpleasant trend of our contemporary culture: to summarize and limit reasoning. But let us leave the question open to further discussion.

Until a decision is taken, summaries and key words are

welcome, but remain optional. Authors may wish to have them and, in such case, they are published. The editors consider them positively.

At present, authors are free to decide to include, or not, an abstract of their text and, of course, readers are free to decide whether to read an article or not.

Your proposal is a welcome and useful contribution to the ongoing debate on a relevant issue: what should be a prerequisite and what should be left to the author's decision.

*The editorial team*

---

### On readers opinions

*EXPRESSION is a very interesting and innovative journal  
Maria Joaquina Coelho Soares*

*School of Arts and Humanities,  
University of Lisbon, Portugal*

---

*I love Expression, I find the articles fascinating as such a diverse study of anthropology.*

*Mary Ann Guggemos  
Spring City, Tennessee, USA*

---

*I congratulate EXPRESSION on the new issue's interesting themes.*

*Emna Ghith  
The University of Sousse, Tunisia.*

---

*I am happy that Expression brings me a lot of information.*

*Francis Auvray  
AARS, Paris, France*

---

*Expression is a very valuable journal*

*Robert K. Hitchcock  
Department of Anthropology  
University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA*

### Editorial reply

We are grateful to the readers and fellow anthropologists expressing their evaluations of the journal. Suggestions for new ideas and themes to be faced and proposals of new articles are welcome. Our goal is promoting ideas and research in conceptual anthropology and contributing to their diffusion. Thanks for giving the editorial team a much-appreciated support.

*The editorial team*



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