

EDITORIAL

WORLD ARCHIVES OF ROCK ART (WARA): AN INTERNATIONAL PROJECT FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF RESEARCH

The origins of art, its earliest developments and creations, are aspects of culture and identity that concern the entire humanity as well as each single individual. The understanding of motivations and universal patterns bring us back to the very roots of our way of being, to archetypal reactions to environment and to our elementary needs of communication.

It is therefore surprising that studies in rock art are mostly concerned with local or regional themes. To the best of our knowledge the Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici is the only existing institute that has developed world wide concern in this discipline. The archives reflect such trend; they include a specialized library of 25,000 volumes, scientific reports which cover sites from some 100 countries, collections of photographs with over 100,000 slides and negatives, thousands of tracings and graphics, and are recognized as the world largest center of resources in this field.

Ancient rock art survives on every continent. Images painted or engraved on rock surfaces in caves and in the open, cover a time span of almost 40,000 years. These marks, symbols and figures constitute the main record we have of the cultural and intellectual history of man before the advent of writing. They reveal prehistoric man's creative expressions, economic and social activities, ideas, beliefs, needs, ambitions and fears. The making of rock art is an immense, world-wide phenomenon occurring in more than 150 countries over millennia.

The World Archives of Rock Art (WARA) are a unique source of information and are used for comprehensive and comparative studies, to draw up record files and analytical works. However, lack of funds has so far delayed a much needed systematic indexing and classification. Data should be computerized and rendered more accessible to the increasing number of interested scholars and institutions.

A certain proportion of the Centro's archival documents, some of which are over 20 years old, are in need of conservation. Color slides are deteriorating, thus losing

their usefulness as records of rock paintings; but the funds necessary to copy them are not yet available.

These documents are at times unique records of rock art sites which are undergoing deterioration, erosion or exfoliation at this very moment, or which are already irremediably damaged. In some cases, this documentation may remain the only record of such patrimony. The threat implied by deterioration is easily recognized when one considers the dimensions and the uniqueness of the documentation. Art objects may be preserved in museums and in collections but rock art has to remain forever in the same spot where it was created by prehistoric man, and the very location of rock art makes it extremely vulnerable. Conservation and protection of existing documentation appears to be a most urgent task.

The heritage of rock art has a value for humanity in several distinct ways. As the narrative of human history, its images illustrate situations and transformations of man's culture, from the early hunters armed with spears and stones, to advanced hunters with their bows and arrows, to pastoralists, agriculturalists and metal-users, up to the first encounters with literate civilizations. At every stage, the rock engravings and paintings present the self-images these people had, their own depictions of themselves and their world. In this way they provide perceptive insight into intimate and little-explored aspects of the history of mankind.

Rock paintings and engravings are invaluable as documentary records created on the spot. One may stand exactly where a prehistoric hunter stood, below the rock surface where he painted in ochre or clay, and, like him, look out across the plain below, watch over the landscape he watched over. Rock art is, by its very nature, set in a specific location in an environment, and conveys a unique sense of special relationship between man and the natural surroundings.

Furthermore, rock art constitutes the first chapter in the history of art and as such is of immense value in the study of human creative impulses, search for expression and communication, early beliefs, religious concepts and aesthetics. Only recently we start understanding that rock art is a fundamental source for historical reconstruction both at a global level and for

regional and ethnic studies. The research of today is producing the culture of tomorrow. The outcome can be foreseen.

The World Archives of Rock Art are not perceived as an aim in themselves. It is of course very important to have, at least in one place, world-wide records on the earliest expressions of human intellectuality and creativity. However, the archives are much more than just a documentation center; they are an exceptional resource for broad analytical studies and for developing new horizons in the History of Art and the Humanities.

The BCSP makes current use of the Archives, its illustrations, informations and bibliographic references are in the Archives. In the last issue a "State of Research" was published. It could have never been produced without the existing documentation. But the resource should see a wider outlet. Monographic volumes, series of slides, corpses of exceptionnal rock art zones, could eventually contribute to render this invaluable patrimony accessible to all.

A few scholars and volunteers from various parts of the world are contributing to research and analysis while doctoral theses are undertaken each year on specific aspects of the existing documentation.

The project was started two years ago with support from UNESCO. This international organization, by its initial funding, ment to stimulate potential sponsors to contribute.

The purpose is to use the immense archives on prehistoric art existing at the Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici, to produce a truly international data bank on the earliest artistic expressions of mankind. When did man start producing art and why? What can we learn from the earliest art on our own elementary cultural, intellectual and aesthetic habits? Why do we need art? What is art? These are some of many queries that find answers in the WARA Project.

However, much more needs to be done. The Archives must be reorganized and computerized with a clear view of the contributions they can provide to the human cultural heritage. The project is a service to culture at large and requires a major financial effort; we would be very grateful to whoever can help us in this endeavour, either by personal contribution (the entity of which is left to one's own judgement), or by speaking to potential donors, or both.

EDITORIALE

ARCHIVIO MONDIALE DELL'ARTE RUPESTRE (WARA): UN PROGETTO INTERNAZIONALE PER IL PROGRESSO DELLA RICERCA

Come già abbiamo annunciato in B.C. Notizie (Vol. I, n. 1, 1984) l'archivio dell'Arte Rupestre sta sviluppando una banca di dati sulle più antiche espressioni artistiche dell'umanità. Nuovo materiale affluisce da varie parti del mondo mentre la consistenza della documentazione esistente lo rende la principale fonte d'informazione al mondo per questo tema. Le collezioni fotografiche comprendono oltre centomila diapositive e negativi; una biblioteca specializzata con circa 25.000 titoli, migliaia di rilievi, planimetrie e grafici, rapporti da oltre 100 Paesi, costituiscono un patrimonio culturale inestimabile.

L'arte rupestre è presente in tutti i continenti e gli esemplari più antichi risalgono a circa 40.000 anni. Tramite le immagini prodotte dai diretti protagonisti si riscopre la storia dell'Homo Sapiens fin dal suo emergere. Affiorano le grandi avventure intellettuali e psicologiche che hanno portato l'umanità alla sua attuale intelligenza. Si acquisiscono così conoscenze di nuova portata sulle caratteristiche fondamentali dell'essere umano. Quando e perchè ebbe inizio la capacità e l'esigenza di produrre arte? Cosa possiamo apprendere dalle più antiche creazioni artistiche sulle abitudini culturali, intellettuali ed estetiche della nostra specie? Perchè abbiamo bisogno di arte? Cosa è l'arte? Cosa si deduce dai paradigmi ripetitivi dell'espressione artistica? Queste sono alcune delle domande a cui il progetto WARA propone risposte.

Il progetto fu iniziato due anni or sono grazie ad un finanziamento dell'UNESCO. Il rapporto mondiale su "Lo stato della ricerca", pubblicato nel BCSP 21 è un primo risultato di questo progetto. Nel finanziarne l'avviamento, l'UNESCO ha inteso sollecitare potenziali sponsors e ad essi facciamo appello.

I dati vanno riorganizzati, computerizzati e resi accessibili al pubblico anche tramite pubblicazioni. Il progetto è un servizio alla cultura e richiede un grosso impegno finanziario. Saremmo grati a chi potrà aiutarci in questo compito, sia con contributi personali, sia sollecitando potenziali sponsors, sia l'uno e l'altro