

L'antropomorfo schematico in alcune raffigurazioni indigene sudamericane

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Summary

The article considers some artistic expressions of South America in which one finds the motif of schematic human figure, also called “praying man”. The author analyses the production of some precolumbian societies, and some artefacts concerning Chili’s mapuche culture. It is possible that this motif is an independent creation belonging to specific contexts and the different meanings that can be attributed to it are strictly associated with the cultures that produced these artefacts.

Résumé

L’article analyse des manifestations artistiques du Sud Amérique dans lesquelles on peut rencontrer le sujet appelé “orant”, une figure humaine schématique. L’auteur présente des exemples qui appartiennent aux cultures précolombienne et des objets de la culture mapuche du Chili. Il est possible d’affirmer que ce sujet a été créé d’une façon indépendante pour chaque lieu et population. Les nombreux significés que l’orant contient sont profondément liés à la culture qui les a produits.

Premessa

La stilizzazione schematica della figura dell’antropomorfo – definita *orante* laddove presenta gli arti inferiori divaricati e gli arti superiori levati in alto, esprimendo una postura che è genericamente ascrivibile ad un gesto di preghiera – pone interessanti problematiche sia sul piano dell’analisi iconografica, sia su quello ermeneutico, legato al tentativo di ricostruzione di un quadro di significati possibili. In questa sede viene proposta una breve rassegna di reperti archeologici e di manufatti etnografici prodotti da popolazioni indigene americane, nel tentativo di illustrare la ricchezza di contesti e di probabili destinazioni d’uso di opere che presentano la raffigurazione dell’antropomorfo schematico. Naturalmente, laddove si tratti di reperti rinvenuti fortuitamente da scavi archeologici o, peggio ancora, finiti nelle mani di collezionisti privati i cui fini spesso non coincidono con quelli degli studiosi, non è semplice ricostruire quel contesto che renderebbe maggiormente comprensibile il tema iconografico in questione. Tuttavia esistono manufatti afferenti a popoli indigeni che mantengono tuttora viva la loro cultura tradizionale e fortunatamente non hanno ancora obliterato la memoria che li lega alla produzione e al senso di quei simboli che caratterizzano il proprio stile “etnico”. È questo il caso, ad esempio, della cultura mapuche del Cile che, malgrado le repentine trasformazioni avvenute a seguito dell’imposizione di modelli occidentali, rimane tuttora ancorata al proprio patrimonio artistico e rituale.

La possibilità di incontrare i significati profondi di simboli che appartengono a culture viventi, così come di interrogare direttamente coloro che sono in grado di decodificarne il senso all’interno di un sistema culturale condiviso, non può sicuramente diventare un metodo per disvelare altre manifestazioni di cui abbiamo irrimediabilmente perso i contenuti. Questo sarebbe senz’altro un pessimo uso del comparativismo etnografico. Il fatto che ci si trovi di fronte a grafemi che sono stati ripetuti nei contesti più svariati, come nel caso dell’antropomorfo schematico, non autorizza lo studioso a proporre improbabili traslitterazioni di senso da una cultura ad un’altra. Tantopiù alla luce di un dibattito antropologico che ormai da tempo pone in maniera problematica le relazioni tra forme e significati *emici*, vale a dire quei contenuti che gli appartenenti ad una cultura attribuiscono ai propri tratti culturali, talvolta in opposizione a quelli di un popolo vicino¹.

La particolare natura grafica del cosiddetto *orante*, che si presenta estremamente semplice e al contempo capace di condensare svariate possibilità di significazione da cultura a cultura, impone la massima cauta interpretativa, tantopiù motivata dal fatto che all’interno dello sterminato repertorio artistico delle culture



precolombiane ed “etnografiche” sudamericane questa raffigurazione copre un *excursus* temporale notevolmente ampio. La grande eterogeneità diacronica e spaziale deporrebbe a favore dell’invenzione grafica indipendente², non essendo per ora ipotizzabile un centro originario di diffusione, presumibilmente responsabile dello sviluppo di questa raffigurazione presso altri contesti.

Culture precolombiane

Una delle prime attestazioni archeologiche in cui compare la rappresentazione dell’antropomorfo schematico è costituita da un tessuto policromo della cultura Paracas, una popolazione preincaica localizzata nel sud dell’Area Andina, il cui orizzonte cronologico abbraccia un periodo compreso tra l’800 a.C. e il 100 d.C. La tipica postura dell’*orante* (braccia rivolte verso il cielo e gambe divaricate) è arricchita da un ricco repertorio iconografico: il busto è adornato da un mantello corto decorato, all’altezza del pube compare un gonnellino, mentre due appendici corniformi ne adornano il capo. Dai gomiti della figura promano verso il basso due serpentiformi, e anche il fallo sembra richiamare il motivo del serpente. In questo reperto tessile l’antropomorfo è ripetuto in serie e costituisce un eccellente esemplare delle numerose teorie di antropomorfi presenti su indumenti, cinture e bordure tipiche di questa cultura, la cui arte tessile costituisce una delle punte della sua notevole produzione artistica.

Un secondo manufatto senz’altro degno di nota proviene dal Salvador (fig. 1). Si tratta di un’urna alla quale è stata applicata una figura plastica che presenta un busto a stelo, gli arti ortogonali divaricati e posizionati in maniera speculare tra loro, una testa sferica in cui compaiono l’indicazione degli occhi e della bocca. Quest’opera è stata datata al periodo III delle culture precolombiane del Salvador, vale a dire tra il 550 e il 950 d.C., e stilisticamente si avvicina alle raffigurazioni schematiche presenti in ambito balcanico almeno a partire dal Neolitico. Purtroppo resta sconosciuta la sua destinazione d’uso e soprattutto se si sia trattato di un vaso adibito alle comuni funzioni domestiche o piuttosto ad un utilizzo rituale circoscritto a particolari momenti della vita pubblica. Tuttavia è ipotizzabile che la figura possa incarnare una sorta di spirito posto a protezione del contenuto, piuttosto che rappresentare una funzione meramente decorativa.

Tornando all’ambito preincaico, coeve all’urna appena citata si distinguono due vasi antropomorfi appartenenti alla cultura Huari (Aimi, 2004), anch’essa stanziata a sud dell’Area Andina e influenzata nelle sue fasi iniziali dalla maggiormente nota cultura Nasca (AA.VV., 1997, p. 60). Entrambi i vasi (figg. 2, 3), evidentemente realizzati dallo stesso artista, sono stati attribuiti ad un periodo compreso tra il 500 e il 900 d.C.. Distinguibili tra loro soltanto per alcuni dettagli dell’elaborata decorazione policroma, queste opere rappresentano un guerriero adornato da pitture facciali, che indossa un copricapo semisferico e un lungo *uncu*³. Il particolare maggiormente interessante rispetto al tema in questione è costituito dalle decorazioni dipinte sugli scudi: si tratta di una figura antropomorfa nella tipica postura da *orante*, il cui corpo è presumibilmente coperto da pitture. La ieratica staticità di questo soggetto, che ha un suo doppio appena accennato nella porzione di spazio sottostante allo scudo, contrasta notevolmente con le altre rappresentazioni antropomorfe presenti sulle decorazioni dell’*uncu*, che si caratterizzano al contrario per una spiccata dinamicità. Anche in questo caso la posizione centrale dell’*orante* lascerebbe presupporre un significato preciso all’interno della composizione: lo scudo, strumento di difesa del guerriero per eccellenza, è stato decorato da un’immagine apotropaica, probabilmente destinata alla protezione dai dardi nemici.

I mapuche del Cile

Un eccezionale caso etnografico in cui è possibile ricostruire dal vivo i significati connessi alla produzione di simboli, in particolare di quello preso in esame, è costituito dai mapuche del Cile, che storicamente hanno abitato la regione dell’Araucanía.

Attualmente questa popolazione vive una situazione di sospensione tra i grandi centri urbani e il tradizionale *modus vivendi* in piccoli villaggi dove ancora si pratica l’allevamento e un’agricoltura di sussistenza a scala familiare. Malgrado la maggior parte dei mapuche abbia progressivamente abbandonato i propri territori per cercare un lavoro nelle città cilene, andando così ad infoltire le schiere del proletariato precario e mal pagato delle moderne megalopoli, la rivendicazione della propria appartenenza culturale è fortemente condivisa e resiste ai tentativi di acculturazione. La condizione di cittadino, aliena alla vita tradizionale di un popolo fieramente legato al proprio territorio e ai propri costumi, ha saputo trovare negli ultimi decenni una sorta di equilibrio tra le pressioni normalizzanti operate dalla cultura ufficiale e le tradizionali forme rituali. A tal proposito è singolare sottolineare come Santiago del Cile sia attualmente il luogo del paese dove vengono officiati il maggior numero di *ngillatun*, i rituali di rogazione durante i quali la comunità rivolge le proprie preghiere per propiziarsi un futuro prospero.

Nel caso dei mapuche, il profondo orgoglio per i propri valori, così come la coscienza di una forte alterità



dal resto della popolazione, hanno fatto sì che il tradizionale patrimonio di miti, riti e simboli non andasse sgretolandosi al contatto con la cultura dominante, come nel caso della maggior parte delle popolazioni native americane. Fra i tratti culturali maggiormente interessati da una sostanziale persistenza delle proprie forme si pone senza dubbio il *machitun*, che designa tutti quegli aspetti della guarigione individuale che si svolgono ad opera dello sciamano, chiamato per l'appunto *machi*. Il suo ruolo sociale è tuttora ancora molto importante sia all'interno delle comunità rurali che nei gruppi urbanizzati. Sostanzialmente le funzioni dello sciamano mapuche risiedono nella capacità di propiziare a sé gli spiriti, di combattere le malattie e le forze del male che ne sono responsabili, ma è anche colui che conosce esotericamente i codici segreti e le norme che sorreggono il gruppo sociale. Oltre al padroneggiamento degli aspetti spirituali, egli è colui che detiene la conoscenza empirica delle erbe e dei rimedi naturali che vengono utilizzati durante i rituali di guarigione⁴.

Come attestato dalla vasta letteratura etnografica che si è occupata del fenomeno dello sciamanesimo, anche la *machi*⁵ si serve di una grande quantità di strumenti che hanno il potere di favorire il viaggio estatico e di condurre a buon fine il ritorno nel mondo degli uomini. Oltre alla scala sciamanica (*rewe*) e al tamburo (*kultrung*), un'importante ruolo è costituito dai gioielli in argento che sono confezionati da abili artigiani battendo e modellando le monete coniate dallo stato cileno. Si tratta di gioielli che generalmente vengono utilizzati per adornare il capo (*trarilonko*) e per essere allacciati al collo come pettorali (*sekill* e *trapelacucha*)⁶; vi sono anche spilloni di varie tipologie che vengono usati per chiudere il vestito della *machi*. Tra questi ve ne sono alcuni che presentano un pendaglio decorato con un antropomorfo schematico nella posizione dell'*orante* (fig. 4). In questo caso questo simbolo ha il potere di accrescere le forze della *machi* durante lo sforzo che opera per mettersi in comunicazione con gli spiriti ultraterreni.

Non si conosce con esattezza quando sia iniziata la produzione mapuche di oggetti lavorati utilizzando il metallo. Alcuni cronisti spagnoli menzionano l'uso di indossare gioielli in argento a partire dal XVI secolo, ma non vi sono testimonianze archeologiche che rendano evidente una precedente diffusione dei metalli tra i mapuche dell'epoca, con l'eccezione di alcuni corredi funerari preispanici in cui appaiono sporadicamente alcuni anelli di rame. Una vera e propria esplosione di questa produzione si registrò soltanto a partire dalla metà del XVIII sec., favorita dagli scambi commerciali che in gran parte erano costituiti dal commercio di bestiame. Tuttavia l'apice della produzione in argento risale al secolo successivo, quando le grandi quantità di argento accumulate vennero utilizzate principalmente per realizzare gioielli (Bengoa, 1985, p. 49). È dunque ipotizzabile che nella grande maggioranza dei casi il patrimonio iconografico e decorativo che appare sui gioielli (tra cui l'*orante*) siano stati elaborati in questo periodo, e comunque non precedentemente al XVIII sec.; ragion per cui prende consistenza l'ipotesi che il motivo dell'*orante* sia stato elaborato a partire da una creazione propria, piuttosto tardiva rispetto ad altri simboli attestati dai ritrovamenti archeologici.

Una testimonianza indiretta della fortuna di questo simbolo è costituita da una coppia di fotografie (figg. 5, 6) che vennero scattate presumibilmente negli ultimi anni del XIX sec. dal fotografo cileno di origine francese Gustavo Milet. In queste immagini due donne che tradiscono evidentemente la loro origine europea sono state vestite con abiti tipici mapuche e indossano una collana con il pendaglio decorato da un *orante*. Quasi certamente le "modelle" ritratte in questa occasione acquistarono questi gioielli dopo il 1880, vale a dire successivamente alla definitiva sconfitta militare dei mapuche nella guerra contro lo stato cileno, avvenimento che determinò un rapidissimo impoverimento della popolazione nativa e la conseguente vendita di tutto ciò che potesse fruttare qualche soldo.

In ultimo vale la pena citare un altro manufatto in cui compare, in una variante maggiormente elaborata dal punto di vista grafico, un antropomorfo con braccia e gambe divaricate. Si tratta di una decorazione tessile che presenta una teoria di antropomorfi (fig. 7) dove il capo è stato realizzato con una forma triangolare e una sorta di cresta sulla sommità. Questa striscia viene tuttora utilizzata sia dalle donne comuni che dalle sciamane per cingere i fianchi. Alla domanda rivolta ad una giovane mapuche su quale fosse il significato di questo grafema, mi è stato risposto che rappresenterebbe sia la potenza della testa, l'organo che nelle tradizioni sciamaniche designa la parte corporea che si distacca per raggiungere il regno ultraterreno, sia le radici che legano gli uomini alla propria terra. La raffigurazione è dunque leggibile in maniera reversibile, dall'alto verso il basso e viceversa. Questa opposizione alto-basso designa funzioni semantiche differenti tra loro e al contempo unificate nello stesso simbolo, depositario di quell'unione tra volta celeste e terra, tra regno del cielo e regno degli uomini, che indubbiamente costituisce un motivo ricorrente nelle ideologie amerindiane.

Conclusioni

L'analisi di alcuni manufatti in cui compare il motivo dell'*orante* offre l'opportunità di apprezzare come



questo simbolo sia potuto comparire indipendentemente sia in società precolombiane sia in popolazioni native tuttora vive da un punto di vista culturale.

Quella che ai nostri occhi può essere letta come un'estrema schematizzazione grafica del corpo umano, talvolta priva di dettagli anatomici e di proporzionalità plastica, ha costituito una forma capace di catalizzare differenti significati, ognuno dei quali profondamente radicato all'interno di una cultura di appartenenza. Probabilmente la ragione di questa schematicità è da considerarsi in sé come *causa* della potenza evocatrice di senso, come volontà di realizzazione degli artisti che l'hanno prodotta, e certamente non come *effetto* di un presunto quanto improbabile arcaismo grafico, tecnicamente incapace di una rappresentazione maggiormente "naturalistica" della figura umana.

Note

¹ Una magistrale analisi al riguardo è quella che Claude Lévi-Strauss propone a proposito delle maschere dei popoli della Columbia Britannica: "...passando da un gruppo all'altro, quando si mantiene la forma plastica si inverte la funzione semantica. Per contro, quando si mantiene la funzione semantica, s'inverte la forma plastica". C. LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1985, p. 63 e *passim*.

² Per quel che riguarda il dibattito archeologico concernente la diffusione dell'orante neolitico europeo, una tesi analoga è stata sostenuta da M. Rossi e A. Gattiglia: "...occorrerà ammettere che l'orante è una forma tanto semplice da poter nascere indipendentemente in situazioni culturali complessivamente molto differenti". M. ROSSI, A. GATTIGLIA, 1989, p. 101.

³ Indumento maschile simile a una camicia a maniche corte priva di bottoni.

⁴ Un'interessante descrizione di tutti questi aspetti è contenuta in CITARELLA L. (a cura di), 2000, soprattutto nel capitolo VII, *La machi en el contexto social mapuche*, pp.197-226.

⁵ Il termine *machi* è generalmente utilizzato al femminile poiché attualmente la maggior parte delle persone che praticano lo sciamanesimo sono donne.

⁶ L'utilizzo di questi gioielli non è tuttavia di esclusivo appannaggio della *machi*: tutte le donne li utilizzano in particolari circostanze. La loro tipologia così come il posizionamento sono rigidamente regolamentati da funzioni semantiche che palesano lo *status* delle donne che li indossano.

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Didascalie delle immagini

Fig. 1. Urna con figura ad orante applicata (Salvador). Altezza vaso 17,4 cm; 550-950 d.C. Museo Numismatico, Etnografico e Archeologico di Torino, collezione Bottero (disegno D. Abenante)

Figg. 2, 3. Cultura Huari (Perù). Vasi antropomorfi; sugli scudi sono raffigurate figure nella posizione dell'orante. Altezze vasi: 24 cm. e 20 cm.; 500-900 d.C. Castello Sforzesco, Milano, collezione Federico Balzarotti. Da AIMI, 2004 (disegni D. Abenante)

Fig. 4. Cultura mapuche (Cile). Spillone con pendaglio in argento che presenta l'immagine dell'orante, XIX sec. Museo Regional de La Araucanía, Temuco, Cile (foto D. Abenante)

Figg. 5, 6. Donne travestite da mapuche che indossano gioielli con orante (part.). Museo Histórico Nacional, Santiago, Cile (foto Gustavo Milet , fine XIX sec.)

Fig. 7. Cultura mapuche (Cile). Cinture ricamate con motivi antropomorfi (part.), XIX sec. Museo Regional de La Araucanía, Temuco, Cile (foto D. Abenante)





Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6





Fig. 7



Protomi antropomorfe del Neolitico antico apulo-lucano: aspetti e problemi interpretativi

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Riassunto

Questo intervento si colloca nell'ambito di uno studio attualmente in corso che si propone, nonostante lo stato lacunoso della documentazione archeologica del Neolitico antico apulo-lucano, di fornire una più ampia definizione delle linee principali di sviluppo storico delle comunità locali, in particolare attraverso l'osservazione delle caratteristiche tecno-tipologiche ed ornamentali delle protomi antropomorfe.

In Italia sud-orientale, in particolare nei contesti apulo-lucani, sono stati effettuati nuovi rinvenimenti relativi al motivo antropomorfo, anche se il loro numero è ancora esiguo in rapporto alle più imponenti produzioni balcaniche e centro-europee. Si tratta di una situazione che dipende in gran parte dallo stato della ricerca archeologica, spesso limitata a indagini preliminari.

In base alla classificazione tipologica di seguito riportata, [1] si intende proporre una lettura analitica volta a sviluppare nuovi aspetti ermeneutici relativi al linguaggio simbolico del motivo antropomorfo nel territorio in esame.

Per il motivo con "volto indeterminato" si riporta il frammento proveniente da Cimino (Coppola 1981b: 88; Gorgoglione 1986b: 102; Fedele 1992: 48) con listello raffigurante il naso, da cui si sviluppano due listelli obliqui, e occhi circolari a rilievo; il frammento di Monte Aquilone, dalla capanna W (Manfredini 1972: fig. 37; Coppola 2001: fig. 18:12), su orlo appiattito di recipiente ovoidale di grandi dimensioni, in impasto compatto, dipinto sull'orlo con banda rossa verticale, con occhi a lunghe incisioni appena oblique e naso emergente; il frammento di Terragne (Manduria, Taranto) (Gorgoglione et al. 1995: fig. 3:6; Coppola 2001: fig. 18:15), che presenta un motivo antropomorfo sotto l'orlo di dolio in impasto depurato con occhi difformi, bocca delineata da un'impressione profonda, pittura in rosso sulla superficie interna.

Una serie di frammenti ceramici presenta protomi antropomorfe con "volto e motivi decorativi simmetrici" come l'esemplare proveniente dal villaggio del Guadone (Tinè, Bernabò Brea 1980: figg. 8:f; 11:a; Coppola 2001: fig. 18:16), con volto su frammento di orlo, occhi indicati da due forellini e bocca da una tacca orizzontale e coppie orizzontali di segmenti a tremolo ai lati del viso; il frammento da Murgia Timone (Lo Porto 1978: fig. 8; Coppola 2001: fig. 18:21) con protome antropomorfa su collo di vaso a fiasco compresa tra due triangoli pendenti graffiti a tratteggio lineare interno e larga fascia sottostante con fitto tratteggio verticale; il frammento da Terragne (Gorgoglione et al. 1995: fig. 11:5; Coppola 2001: fig. 18:25) con protome sotto collo di vaso a fiasco in argilla depurata rosata a superfici marrone-rossastre con graffito caratterizzante gli occhi mediante cerchi e gruppi simmetrici di tre segmenti obliqui partenti dal naso.

Motivi antropomorfi che presentano "volto con schemi ripetuti" provengono da Grotta delle Veneri, di cui si riportano due esemplari e da Capanna Longo, Leporano.

Il primo motivo antropomorfo da Grotta delle Veneri (Ventura 1997: 202:4; Coppola 2001: fig. 19:3) presenta il volto sotto l'orlo piatto di un frammento in impasto giallo con occhi circolari e bocca impressi; dai lati della bocca partono fasce angolari con linee incise, mentre sotto si sviluppa una fascia verticale con tacche fitte interne contornata da apici di triangoli a linee oblique incise.

Il secondo motivo antropomorfo (Ventura 1997: 220:53; Coppola 2001: fig. 19:4) riporta il volto sotto l'orlo piatto di un frammento in impasto rosato con occhi circolari ottenuti da punzonature e bocca da una profonda incisione orizzontale. Dal margine inferiore centrale del mento si sviluppano linee verticali, oblique ai lati del mento, mentre il volto è contornato sui due lati da fasce simili verticali che partono dall'orlo e si interrompono sulle fasce oblique.

La protome proveniente da Capanna Longo (Cremonesi 1979: fig. 232; Coppola 2001: fig. 19:5) costituisce un motivo antropomorfo alquanto singolare con volto sotto l'orlo, bocca intermedia ed occhi circolari incavati, compresi in una fascia orizzontale di rombi graffiti a graticcio. Al disotto vi è un rettangolo da cui



si sviluppano obliquamente bande contrapposte di piccoli rettangoli e bande di triangoli, a graticcio interno, che rappresentano un'articolata schematizzazione antropomorfa.

Tra i motivi antropomorfi con "volto incorniciato" in decorazione si ricordano i due esemplari da Rendina, periodo III (Melfi, Potenza) e da Madonna delle Grazie, San Lorenzo (Rutigliano, Bari).

Il primo motivo da Rendina, periodo III (Cipolloni Sampò 1977-1982: fig. 60; Coppola 2001: fig. 19:11), presenta il volto sull'orlo di dolio cilindrico in impasto fine, depurato rosso scuro, formato da due fori ovali per gli occhi e dal naso; sugli occhi compaiono lunghe ciglia a listello rilevato dentellato arcuate; un listello simile, posto al disotto del naso, presenta una lunga e profonda incisione centrale, forse per indicare la bocca.

Il secondo motivo antropomorfo (Cipolloni Sampò 1977-1982: fig. 64; Coppola 2001: fig. 19:12) riporta il volto sotto l'orlo di collo distinto, cilindrico, a profilo imbutiforme, in ceramica depurata; il volto ha naso modellato, lunghe sopracciglia a segmenti orizzontali incisi e bocca simile, occhi con accenno di palpebre ottenute con impressioni. Due serie di impressioni, una sull'orlo, l'altra al disotto della bocca, incorniciano il volto che lateralmente è marginato da impressioni lenticolari.

La protome da Madonna delle Grazie, San Lorenzo (Damato 1994: fig. 65; Coppola 2001: fig. 19:13) presenta volto su collo di vaso a fiasco in impasto rosato, compatto, a superfici levigate grigie; le sopracciglia sono rese con due lunghe incisioni, gli occhi con larghe e profonde tacche orizzontali, come la bocca, il naso è ben modellato con due fori ad indicare le narici; ai lati fasce verticali di segmenti orizzontali impressi cardiaci.

Tra i motivi antropomorfi con "volto a rilievo plastico" si riportano l'esemplare da Pozzo delle Capre (Russi 1967; Geniola 1979: fig. 122; Coppola 2001: fig. 19:14) con volto sotto l'orlo, occhi resi da due fori tondi e bocca aperta con caratterizzazione delle labbra e la protome da Masseria La Quercia (Jones 1987: fig. 94:c; Coppola 2001: fig. 19:15) con volto a rilievo plastico schematizzato con occhi circolari, bocca leggermente aperta ed accenno di mento.

Nota

(1) I riferimenti bibliografici, riportati nel riassunto in forma abbreviata, come anche le tavole dei materiali, saranno presentati nel testo definitivo.



Monsters on the rocks: iconographies of transformation at Camonica Valley

Miranda ALDHOUSE-GREEN

Abstract

This paper takes as its focus the repeated phenomenon of half-human, half-animal imagery on the rocks of Val Camonica. The creature most frequently selected for such iconography is the stag, and it is clear from the frequency of this animal as a motif in rock-art that deer, particularly alpha-males, possessed a particularly important symbolic role for the Camunians of the Bronze- and Iron Ages. The exaggerated antlers on many of these creatures indicate that meaning was concentrated within this motif. The transitional, monstrous images of stag-humans take two main forms: one comprises a centaur-like blend of human and animal; the other – more frequent – motif is the depiction of people with antlers. If one relates the latter imagery to cognate iconography within the contemporary repertoire of image-makers in other parts of western Europe, particularly in the later Iron Age, and it is possible to suggest that such shape-shifting beings *might* may represent something other than the representation of monstrous hybrids but, instead, may have depicted ceremonial, even shamanic practices.

‘Now the ontological equivalence of humans and animals, as organism-persons and as fellow participants in a life-process, carries a corollary of capital importance. It is that both can have points of view. In other words, for both the world exists as a meaningful place, constituted in relation to the purposes and capabilities of action of the being in question’

(Ingold 2000, 51)

Introduction

The predominance of deer-images on the Camonican rocks is presumably related to the importance of the valley as a natural corridor for the movement of game and its role as a hunting resource. Richard Bradley (2001, 261-263) comments that therianthropes are especially associated with hunting societies, whilst agricultural communities perceive a greater disjunction between humans and animals, perhaps ‘because the nature of domestication denies equivalence and places humans at the apex of hierarchy’ (Aldhouse-Green 2004, 174). Camonica Valley was undoubtedly a *locus sanctissimus*, and the images on the rocks, some of which were painted (Scarre 1998, 145-157), carried great significance for those who carved and used them. The treatment of deer-motifs is itself worthy of interest: they often appear in herds and, more importantly, the stags are clearly depicted to show off their virility and their fitness as alpha-males, those animals who are successful during the rut and are responsible for reproduction and the growth of the herd. Many stags are portrayed with enormously exaggerated antlers (Anati 1965, 215), and the fourteen tines on certain individuals confirm their supreme status as leading males. The significance of stags for the Camunians is reinforced by the presence of a number of images representing a blend of human and cervid characteristics. These take two forms: in one (**Fig. 1**), the creature is centaur-like, with the body of a stag but with a legless human sprouting from its back (Anati 1965, 171; Priuli 1996, 77, fig. 133); in the other one (**Figs. 2, 3**), antlers sprout from the head of a standing male human (Priuli 1996, 29, fig. 51; 78-79, figs. 134, 136, 137). Several issues arise from the study of these images: the link between human males and alpha-male stags is crucial to their understanding. More abstruse and tenuous is the question of monstrosity and shape-shifting. We may be witnessing either depiction of ‘genuine’ half-human, half-animal creatures that, perhaps (on analogy with the role of monsters in classical mythology) relate to expressions of liminality, risk and ‘otherness’ or these hybrids (particularly those belonging to the second group) could be interpreted as depictions of people dressing up in animal costume, specifically wearing antlers, presumably for ceremonial purposes. Allied to both these ideas is the nodal motif of the stag. Deer, particularly red deer, may have been perceived as liminal creatures, symbolic of belonging both to the settled, cultivated world and that of



wilderness. There is evidence, for example from Neolithic and Iron Age British sites, that deer were special: they were sometimes tolerated close to settlement sites, even though their presence threatened crops; and the treatment of their antlers suggests that they were viewed as set apart, in terms of the symbolism of material culture, and possibly as foci for ritual activity. Examples of this specialness can be identified in the singling out of antler combs for decoration in Wessex Iron Age assemblages (Hill 1995, 108), and the careful curation of red-deer antlers on Neolithic and Iron Age Orcadian settlement sites (Sharples 2000; Parker Pearson & Sharples 1999, 21; Parker Pearson *et al.* 1999, 149-52; Jones 1998, 301-24).

From Centaurs to shamans

The presence of two forms of hybrid stag-human imagery at Camonica Valley leads to the speculation that we might be witnessing two different stages in the blending of animal and human and to the notion of sequential development, perhaps from antlered anthropomorphic image to the expression of a more intense relationship between the two species. This is a difficult argument to sustain with any degree of conviction for such precise dating of the Camonica iconography is impossible and, furthermore, the stag/human images in the Valley are scattered over several sites. In my *An Archaeology of Images* (2004, 174), I wondered whether what we may be witnessing is the exploration of different, though related, metaphysical and metaphoric connections between human and animal, order and wilderness, predator and prey and herder and herded, analogous to northern reindeer herding societies (Aronsson 1991; Loring 1997).

Monsters, surreal beings whose personae are locked into both the real and the unreal, belong to landscapes of the mind, to dreams (and nightmares) and to worlds where the barriers between separate types of being are broken down. By their very nature, hybrids cross boundaries and are thus appropriate vehicles for playing out relationships between two states of being, whether these two states are simply those of human and animal, different kinds of beast, or represent the metonyms of transference between the domain of people and the spirits.

In Classical mythology, monsters are associated with guardianship of thresholds but are also prevalent on the edges of the known world (King 1995). The monsters of ancient Greek myths have been interpreted by Michael Shanks (1999, 99, 102) as evocative of risk and tension: in his study of the iconography painted on Korinthian ceramics, he argues that animal/human images not only transgress borders but, by the incongruous mixture of elements, they also serve to deny order and difference and, instead, to present ideas of chaotic equivalence which is always at war with itself and so engenders violence, instability and volatility in which each part strives for supremacy in a state of constant oscillation of empowerment. Good examples of how this might have worked can be seen in studies of two high-profile Classical monsters: the sphinx and the centaur. Henrietta McCall (1995) has presented convincing arguments for associations between the sphinx and danger; while centaurs – in general – are treated in mythic narrative as immoderate and lacking self control (Dubois 1982, 29; Green 1997, 906; Homer *Iliad* I, 263; *Odyssey* XXI, 303).

It is worth applying the models of monstrosity proposed for some Classical examples to the centaur-like therianthropes at Camonica (**Fig. 1**). Firstly, we should pose the question as to whether the Camonican artists might have been influenced by contemporary motifs and themes which could be found on Greek vases, for example, where centaurs and other monsters abound. Secondly, is there a sense in which the balance of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic elements at Camonica informs our thinking about relationships between deer and people? Those cases where there is virtual equivalence in the weighting of human and beast, as in the Camonican 'centaurs', may be interpreted either as an acknowledgement of the empowerment of animals, thus an equal relationship between humans and animals, and or a recognition of the risks associated with hunting. It is possible to make broad analogies between this western Alpine prehistoric art-tradition and that exhibited in 'modern' non-western imagery, notably that of the South African San people, where rock iconography presents therianthropic motifs of people and antelopes (particularly elands) with a balance between human and animal elements (Lewis-Williams 1995, 3-23, fig. 8; Jolly 2002, 85-103). For the San, such equivalence reflects the economic and spiritual importance of the eland, an animal inextricably associated with the identity and fortunes of its hunters and venerators.

If we apply such a model to Camonica Valley, it may be possible to read into its 'centaurs' a combination of risk and respect, along with additional *tropes* whose detail must escape us. Stags are inherently dangerous; their sexual and aggressive displays in the form of size, strength and antler-spread make them forceful symbols of virility and peril 'The fighting success of stags determines their mating success, since only stags that can defend harems successfully father many calves' (Clutton-Brock & McIntyre 1999, 22). Their artistic representation, as equivalent to male humans, serves to empower stags still further and, at the same



time, to project such empowerment to men as warriors and potent males. The balanced blend of visual imagery, between animal and human, may also act as a metonym for the ambiguous, ambivalent relationship between hunted and hunter, with respect, veneration and killing all mapped into the iconography of the stag-man therianthrope. But there is another possible aspect to the interpretation of these centaur-like creatures at Camonica Valley: in the merged iconography, humans can be perceived to retain control for they are depicted riding the stag, as though it were a horse, and thus manipulate the wild (Ingold 1986, 103).

The second group from *Camonica Valley* is different in that, by contrast with the equivalence of the 'centaur' images, they comprise depictions of people wearing antlers, in otherwise entirely human guise (**Figs. 2, 3**). I suggest that the difference between the two groups may lie, at least in part, in divergent attitudes to animals and the perception of an asymmetrical, discrepant relationship between people and stags. On these unbalanced images there is an overt assumption of human predominance. But there are wider issues to consider. On the one hand, the Camonican images do not stand alone but arguably fall into a well-recognised group of Iron Age and Roman-period images recorded in Britain and Gaul; on the other, the wearing of antlers by humans might represent not monstrosity but the wearing of animal costume, presumably for ceremonial purposes. We shall see that there is further evidence from Camonica to support the latter notion.

The depiction of antlered humans, at Camonica and elsewhere in western European imagery within later prehistory, has been the subject of a paper published in the *TRAC* volume for 2000 (Aldhouse-Green 2001a, 80-93). Outside Camonica the evidence for pre-Roman Iron Age antlered imagery is limited and this is partly why the Camunian material is so important, but it can be identified on certain key artefacts, most notably on the Danish silver cult-cauldron from Gundestrup in Jutland (**Fig. 4**) (Olmsted 1979, pl. 2A; Taylor 1992, 66-71; Kaul 1991, 21, pl. 15) and on a late Iron Age silver coin from the British Midlands (Boon 1976) (**Fig. 5**). An aberrant type, also of late Iron Age date, is the copper-alloy figurine of an antlerless male (**Fig. 6**), with a torc and cervid hooves, from Bouray (Essonne) in eastern Gaul (Pobé & Roubier 1961, pl. 11; Joffroy 1979, no. 78; Aldhouse-Green 2004, fig. 7.8). There is a substantial assemblage of antlered human iconography from Roman Gaul (**Fig. 7**), with one or two British outliers (Lambrechts 1942, 21-32; Aldhouse-Green 2001a) although, interestingly enough, the great majority of such images depict these figures in a seated, 'yogic' position, analogous to the position on the Gundestrup Cauldron's image. (Indeed, the Camonican group is idiosyncratic in its depiction of antlered humans as standing figures.)

It is possible to read these images in several ways. It may be that they are monsters and represent a genuine blend of human and animal figures, such as has been suggested for the Camunian 'centaurs'. But there is an alternative interpretation, namely that the antlered human therianthropes depict people dressed up in animal costume. If it is valid to link the North Italian rock iconography to that of Iron Age and Roman-period Gaul (and Britain), then certain features of the latter cause us to reflect upon this model. We should draw attention to the group of figures – from Autun in Burgundy (**Fig. 7**) and Sommerécourt in eastern Gaul (Deyts 1992, 45; Espérandieu 1915, no. 4839), one of copper-alloy, the other of stone – wherein the antlers appear to have been detachable extensions, for their heads are perforated by two holes, suggesting that antlers (perhaps even made of antler) were present or absent depending on the season, in reflection of the annual routine of antler-shedding by stags. It is worth looking again at the silver coin from Britain (**Fig. 5**), for here the antlered head appears to be wearing a headgear; there is a distinct band across the forehead and, indeed, one can identify a wheel-shaped motif between the antlers that accords closely to the kind of sacred headgear found at the Wanborough Roman temple in south-east England (Surrey Archaeological Society 1988, 16; O'Connell & Bird 1994, Fig. 23; Green 1991, 102). We know, too, of the occurrence of sets of real red-deer antlers attached to perforated frontal bones, as if worn by people, for instance from a late Iron Age temple at Digeon (Somme) (Meniel 1987, 101-143) and from a Romano-British pit at Hook's Cross (Hertfordshire) in south-east England (Tony Rook pers. comm.; Aldhouse-Green 2001b, fig. 15) (**Fig. 8**). Another curious phenomenon that may support the hypothesis that antlered beings might represent people in animal-regalia is the presence of Gallo-Roman figurines of *women* wearing red-deer antlers, a type of image that thus presents not only trans-species but also trans-gender boundary-transgression (Boucher 1976, nos. 317-318; Deyts 1992, 40) (**Fig. 9**). These figures have all the trappings of the traditional shaman, the sacred man or woman within a community who liaises with the spirit-world and effects transference thereto by means of transformation (between human and animal or between male and female) between both physical and spiritual states of being (Vitebsky 1995; Green 1998, 219-240; Jacobs *et al.* 1997; Aldhouse-Green & Aldhouse-Green 2004).



Sacred transformation & two-spirit people

If we are postulating that the antlered beings on the rocks of Camonica Valley might be interpreted as humans in animal dress, then it is necessary to try and identify other examples of such boundary-crossing, even shamanic, behaviour among the Camunian repertoire of representation. Scrutiny of the carvings demonstrates just such motifs and one group, at Val d'Assa, is striking in its display of 'bird-men' (Priuli 1996, 126-127, fig. 210, 211) (Figs. 10, 11), with feather-cloaks and beaks. Elsewhere, several figures are presented with hairy, pelt-like garments: a particular scene (Anati 1965, 185) shows two such beings engaged in what may be a sacrificial ceremony. Therefore it may be that the antlered human creations on the Camunian rocks fit into a wider schema of ritual species transgression. Bird-people are recorded not only at Camonica but also in Scandinavian Bronze Age rock-art, where beaked and winged humans are recurrent motifs (Coles 1999, 180, fig. 7; Coles 2000, 51, pl. 63; Bertilsson 1987, fig. 52.8). Authors such as Piers Vitebsky (1995) and Neil Price (2001, 3) discuss bird-costume within the specific context of shamanic flight between worlds during trance-induced out-of-body experience.

Conclusion

The device of visual shape-shifting, in order to create an image of transference or transformation, is well-known in traditional societies in which particular members of their communities were/are identified as having powers to 'go between' worlds and communicate with spirit-forces. In a sense, the question of whether the transformative beings on the Camunian rocks represent genuine monsters, people dressed up as animals or beings in the process of shape-shifting, skin-turning and transformation between one state and another, is based upon a false premise. In ritual contexts where such transgressions are enacted, the holy person becomes the animal or other gender represented by his or her clothing and behaviour, so that the act of donning the visual panoply of something else acts as a catalyst for becoming that other. In describing the ritual activities of the Kwakiutl communities of Vancouver Island, Dale Indians (. 2000, 110) speaks of the transformative powers of the 'Thunderbird' costume. I am suggesting that this kind of framework is one that may have relevance to the Camunian monsters on the rocks. The antlered beings, in particular, belong to a matrix of veneration for stags, wilderness and the sanctity of the hunt, where the human and wild animal populations coalesced in a continuum of existence and symbolism. The half-human creatures in the Camunian rock-art may, indeed, have been religious practitioners whose special, 'two-spirit' status was exhibited by their animal persona. Alternatively, they may simply have been local 'big men' whose hyper-masculinity was projected in terms of stag-imagery and the ambiguities of people who acknowledged and respected the power of an animal which they represented a worthy target for the hunt and which led herds whose fortunes and prosperity were closely interwoven with those of the humans who shared their physical and spiritual landscapes.

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Captions for Figures

Fig. 1. 'Centaur-man' image: depiction of a stag being ridden by a human whose body merges with that of its mount; from Camonica Valley (after Anati 1965). Illustrator Paul Jenkins.

Fig. 2. Human image wearing antlers and torcs, and carrying daggers; from Camonica Valley (after Priuli 1988). Illustrator Anne Leaver

Fig. 3. Human image wearing antlers; from Camonica Valley (after Anati 1965). Illustrator Anne Leaver.

Fig. 4. Seated, antlered human image depicted on the late Iron Age Danish Gundestrup Cauldron (after Kaul 1991). Illustrator Anne Leaver.

Fig. 5. Antlered human head on the obverse of a silver Iron Age coin, dated c. AD 10-20, from the British Midlands (after Boon 1976). Illustrator Anne Leaver.

Fig. 6. Late Iron Age copper-alloy figure of seated man with deer-hooves; from Bouray (Essonne), France (after Pobé & Roubier 1961). Illustrator Paul Jenkins.

Fig. 7. Gallo-Roman copper-alloy figurine of a triple-headed man with holes in the principal head for the insertion of antlers; from Savigny (Autun), Burgundy (after Deyts 1992). Illustrator Paul Jenkins.

Fig. 8. Pair of red-deer antlers, the frontal bones pierced for attachment as headdress; from Hook's Cross, Hertfordshire, England. Illustrator Anne Leaver.

Fig. 9. Gallo-Roman copper alloy figurine of a woman wearing antlers; unprovenanced within Gaul (after Boucher 1976). Illustrator Anne Leaver.

Fig. 10. 'Bird-man' from Camonica Valley (after Priuli 1996). Illustrator Anne Leaver.

Fig. 11. 'Bird-man' from Camonica Valley (after Priuli 1996). Illustrator Anne Leaver.





Fig. 1

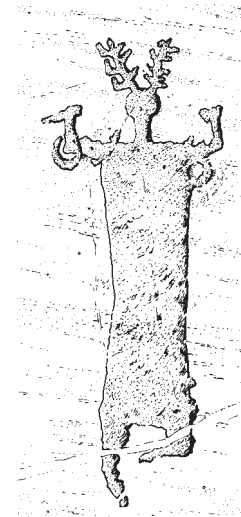


Fig. 2

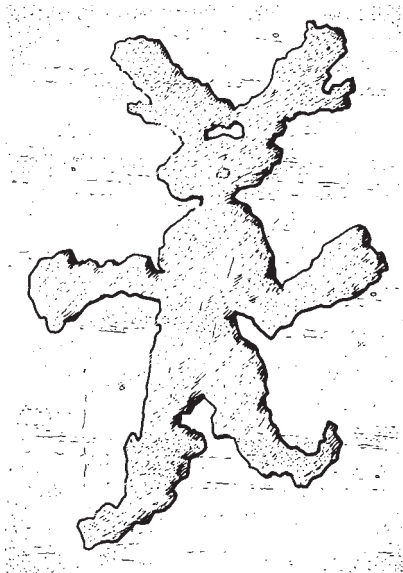


Fig. 3

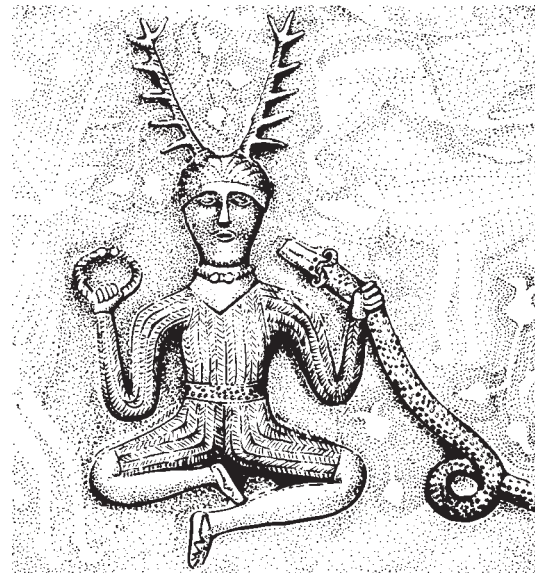


Fig. 4



Fig. 5

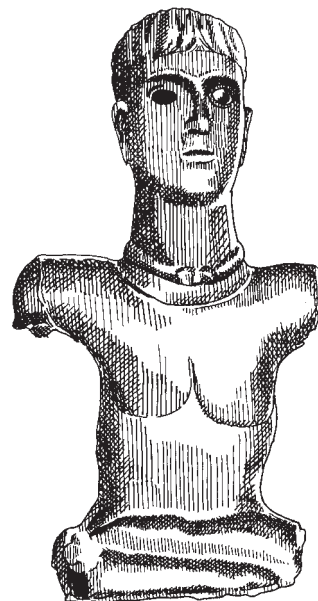


Fig. 6





Fig. 7

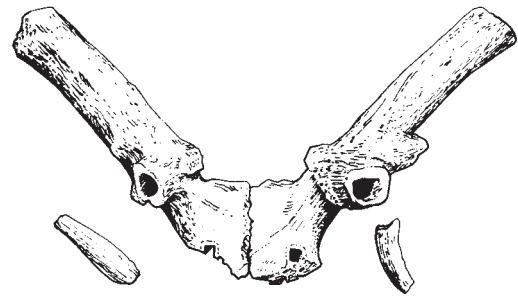


Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Rock art in Macedonia

Dusko ALEKSOVSKI, Saska ALEKSOVSKA

Rock art is all that our ancestors passed onto us as a message using stone and rock in painted or carved form, as well as in the form of various types of sculptures. Rock art is an important medium for the world cultural, historical, linguistic, ethnographical and religious/philosophical heritage.

The discovery of a number of prehistoric caves with several cultural layers signifying existence of our prehistorical ancestors over a long period of time was a key factor that compelled us to realise that in Macedonia as well, there had to be a very early manifestation of rock art even in prehistory. Numerous prehistoric artefacts from the Neolithic also indicate that the extremely rich Neolithic culture in Macedonia had to be preceded by a prehistorical culture in all of its forms. I was therefore very happy indeed when during my journey through Macedonia I discovered rock carvings of many periods and stylistic forms.

The cup marks (recessed, hollowed hemispheres) are the most frequent rock carvings in Macedonia. These carvings represent the first spiritual manifestation of prehistoric human beings who first observed the natural hollows for which they had no explanation of how they originated. Later on they observed the stars twinkling like little lamps in the sky and concluded that they were the souls of all people that are born on the earth, whereas the falling meteors were stars that faded out after someone dies.

After the cup marks the prehistoric ancestor started carvings net carvings COSA SONO?. These carvings also originated by means of observation of the hollows of this type carved by the nature. This type of carvings were discovered in large concentrations in the region of Mas d'Azil in France. Sometimes they have a very complex form and sometimes are relatively simple and resemble letters from contemporary alphabets. The cup marks and net carvings are followed by cross-shaped carvings COSA SONO? as the third type produced by our ancestors. In some places these carvings are so frequent that they determined the name of the locality: Krstat Kamen (Stone of Crosses), Krstato Mesto (Place of Crosses) and the like. The swastika as a type of cross is also found engraved on Macedonian stones and rocks, ceramics from the iron age as well as ancient mosaics.

At the present we are unable to say which of the deities are associated with fertility, birth and the like. These kind of idol forms are analogous to the idol forms discovered in the Camonica Valley in Italy. Future research may reveal the origins of these carved idol forms. In the locality Orlov Kamen, near the village of Trnovets (Kratovo region), I discovered an idol form which could be interpreted as a god of fertility, judging by the two bullhorns. Above this deity there is its name carved out that begins with the letters KOK....., while the last letters cannot be identified. This is the first time in Macedonia, and in the world for that matter, that the name of a deity is found to begin with the letter K. That probably means that in Macedonia one worshiped deities that were not known in neighbouring regions, which would confirm the fact that rock art is also a basis for the religious heritage of world civilisation. Rock carvings representing the sun are numerous. I discovered the most impressive carved sun symbol in the villages of Rujintze and Maldo, near Nagorichane (Kumanovo region). I discovered the most impressive carvings complex of arc-form type (in the form of bow) COSA SONO? in the locality Pishan Kamen, near the village of Zheleznitza (Kratovo region) in the context of cup marks, cross-shaped forms and deities.

One should mention the complex of Chamot, near the village of Smolare, where on a very small area I discovered miniature rock carvings of many kinds: cup marks, cross-shaped carvings, retikuli, COSA SONO? Idol forms, geometrical shapes, and several types of arc-shaped (form of a bow) carvings. It is very surprising that all these carvings were made with precise thin lines as if they were created in a period when the rock was in a different physical state. This complex gives the impression of having been a "prehistoric university", a place where experienced artists were teaching others how to create various types of carvings. In an area of only 5 square meters one finds about 4,500 miniature carvings. The discovery of the carvings made by means of knocking on the rock – or *piktažha*, speaking in technical terms – was the last piece in that puzzle called rock art in Macedonia. I discovered this additional kind of carvings along the river Pena (Tetovo region), which in itself represents a true museum under the sky. The forms of these carvings are various: ordinary lines, animals and geometrical shapes.



Le site de Youf Eheket: art rupestre et monuments funéraires

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Introduction

L'Ahaggar comprend de nombreux sites archéologiques d'inégales importances; Youf Eheket fait partie de ceux qui se trouvent en bordure sud du massif de l'Ahaggar. Ce site, situé dans le Tassili Ouan Ahaggar, offre différents aspects archéologiques. Les gisements de surfaces sont nombreux, tout comme les pièces lithiques qui datent du paléolithique ou du néolithique.

Nous avons souligné l'ensemble du patrimoine préhistorique et plus particulièrement l'art rupestre et les monuments funéraires. Le peu de figurations relevées fait du site de Youf Eheket un centre d'art rupestre peu important, mais la présence de ces quelques figures rentre dans la problématique liée au peuplement ancien de cette région. Ce peuplement est sans aucun doute lié aux nombreuses architectures funéraires et cultuelles qui se trouvent à proximité des roches gravées.

Le territoire de ce patrimoine archéologique est difficile à délimiter. Les mêmes figures ou les mêmes types de tumulus se retrouvent partout dans le Sahara central. La répartition régionale des monuments funéraires traduit une territorialité, donc des implantations particulières. Pour faciliter la recherche nous avons dû limiter notre terrain au seul site de Youf Eheket. Notre mission s'est réalisée grâce aux moyens du CNRPAH¹ et de l'OPNA² dont le personnel a été d'une grande efficacité.

1. Le cadre géographique

Le site de Youf Ahaket est situé dans le massif du Hoggar (fig. 1), à l'est de Tamanrasset (200 km). Il est traversé par l'Oued de Ti-n-Tarabine. La zone est assez plate; les rares reliefs se trouvent à quelques kms au nord (fameux pic des Aiguilles). La région se trouve sur une voie de passage qui mène vers le nord (Tassili des Ajjers) et vers le sud-est (l'Air au Niger).

La région de Youf Eheket (fig. 2) est formidable par les nombreux cirques parfois complètement ensablés et les nombreuses chaâbas boisées (accacias et autres plantes endémiques).

Cette région, qui se situe à une altitude moyenne, bénéficie d'un climat doux en hiver et chaud et pluvieux en été (pluies de la mousson). L'oued de Ti-n-Tarabine peut connaître des crues en temps de fortes pluies.

2. Les conséquences du climat sur la roche

Les changements brusques entre une saison chaude et froide, entre la chaleur du jour et le gel de la nuit, dévoilent les traces de l'éclatement de la roche. Cette altération est accélérée par la présence de l'homme. L'utilisation à outrance de véhicules à énergie polluante aggrave une situation déjà bien altérée par le piétinement et la dégradation volontaire des hommes.

Les massifs gréseux subissent une désagrégation granulaire des surfaces et les pétroglyphes gravés sur leurs parois deviennent illisibles.

3. Historique des découvertes

La région a longtemps été parcourue par les différentes équipes de prospecteurs du siècle dernier. Elle est également très fréquentée par les touristes. Henri Lhote³ a publié les quelques figures visibles. Il situe le site au lieu dit «Oued Ouf Ahakit» (cf. feuille 1/200 000° Azrou n-Fad). Il cite le prospecteur Claude Millet qui a investi la basse vallée de l'oued Ti-n-Tarabine et qui lui a remis des photographies de figures gravées sur la roche. Henri Lhote publie les relevés des gravures à partir des calques faits sur les photographies.



La région fait partie d'un projet que développe une équipe de chercheurs du CNRPAH (A. Heddouche, S. Iddir et I. Amara) sur les monuments protohistoriques de l'Ahaggar dans leur contexte chrono-culturel. Des fouilles ont déjà concerné plusieurs architectures funéraires ; celles de Youf Eheket intéressaient tout particulièrement les constructions funéraires dites du Post- Néolithique.

Nous avons décidé de reprendre les travaux de Henri Lhote ainsi que la prospection de toute la zone de Youf Eheket. De nouvelles fresques ont été découvertes, en plus de celles publiées par Henri Lhote. Nous avons découpé la région en quatre zones d'inégales importances afin d'en faciliter l'étude.

4. Les Architectures funéraires

Tout comme l'art rupestre, les monuments protohistoriques qu'ils soient funéraires ou cultuels sont très nombreux et variés dans l'Ahaggar. Leur étude est d'un grand intérêt pour la connaissance des pratiques et des rites funéraires des groupes culturels qui les ont édifiés.

La distribution géographique est de son côté un précieux indicateur de leurs territoires et susceptible de mieux nous renseigner sur les éventuels rapports ou liens entre les auteurs des peintures et gravures rupestres et les constructeurs des monuments funéraires. Cette relation a été, rappelons le, établie à Iwelen dans le massif de l'Air (Niger) entre un tumulus à cratère, un gisement archéologique et un site rupestre se rapportant à la période dite libyco- berbère.

Le programme de recherche en cours consacré aux monuments protohistoriques de l'Ahaggar dans leur contexte chrono-culturel est assez particulier puisqu'il couvre un vaste territoire et toute la période holocène. Le recensement des architectures funéraires et cultuelles a permis la localisation de concentrations de monuments funéraires dont l'exploitation passait nécessairement par les fouilles archéologiques.

Dans le cas présent, nous présentons le site de Youf Eheket (Tassilis Ouan Ahaggar septentrionaux) où nous avons eu l'opportunité d'observer un site rupestre se rapportant à la période caballine dans un contexte de monuments funéraires du post- Néolithique (tumulus à cratère, bazinas, monuments à antennes).

Nous n'avons pas effectué le décompte exact de toutes les constructions funéraires du secteur de Youf Eheket mais elles semblent plus fréquentes à proximité du site rupestre signalé où elles sont regroupées. Plusieurs types de monuments funéraires sont recensés⁴ et certaines de ces architectures ont fait l'objet de fouilles.

4.1. TYPE « MONUMENT EN CROISSANT » (Fig. 1 et 2)

Ce type de monuments rapportés au Néolithique - puisqu'ils apparaissent dans le nord du Niger vers 3300 av. J. – C. - se rencontrent essentiellement dans l'Ahaggar méridional où ils couvrent un vaste territoire dont la limite septentrionale semble être le 22° N alors que la limite orientale reste imprécise. Dans le cas présent, la construction est constituée de bras ouverts vers l'Est dont la longueur atteint 5 m ; la partie centrale soigneusement édifiée et qui est renflée couvre une surface de 4 m EO pour 6 m NS et s'élève à 1,45 m. L'inhumation se fait dans une chambre soigneusement aménagée (0,45 m x 0,60 m) à 2 m de profondeur dans laquelle repose un individu probablement de sexe masculin en bon état de conservation, en décubitus latéral droit fléchi selon un axe nord- sud, tête vers l'Est. La fouille n'a livré aucun mobilier archéologique.

4.2. TYPE « PLATE- FORME » (Fig. 3)

Cette forme, également d'âge néolithique appartient à une vaste famille car elle se rencontre un peu partout dans le Sahara, mais semble originaire de l'Ahaggar. La construction de Youf Eheket qui a été fouillée est de forme subcirculaire (7,50 m NS x 7 m EO) constituée d'une surface couverte par un amoncellement de pierres et ceinturée par un muret de 0,70 m de hauteur.

Le corps repose sur le côté droit en attitude fléchie (position dite repliée) selon un axe nord- sud dans une fosse de 0,75 m x 1 m à une profondeur de 0,45 m . Les premières observations anthropologiques effectuées sur le bassin, le crâne laissent penser à un sujet adulte de sexe masculin. Comme pour le tumulus en croissant, la fouille n'a livré aucun élément archéologique.



4.3. TYPE « BAZINA » (Fig. 4 et 5)

Les bazinas sont les monuments les plus connus et les plus nombreux et couvrent tout le pays; ce qui a fait dire à G. Camps que cette architecture serait la vraie sépulture berbère. Cette forme simple devient parfois complexe - bazina à degrés – qui elle-même montre une évolution des annexes cultuelles (rajout d'antennes, de niches à offrandes aboutissant à une chapelle). Au Sahara, ces constructions présentent des éléments cultuels extérieurs encore plus complexes (multiplication d'aménagements frontaux) que nous avons pu observer près du village de Tarhenent (Atakor) et à Iglen (Abalessa).

La bazina du site de Youf Ekeket se trouve à proximité de la station rupestre «caballine» où sont également construits un tumulus à cratère et de nombreuses constructions ouvertes en arc de cercle «tentes de Fatima».

Il s'agit d'une construction constituée par une première assise de blocs formant une véritable plateforme couverte d'un amoncellement de pierres mesurant 6 m EO x 6,90 m NS ; sa hauteur apparente est de 0,20 m sur laquelle est construit un muret (deuxième assise) d'une hauteur de 0,80 m formant un cratère de 3,40 m NS pour 2,85 m EO. On a peut-être ici le passage de la construction plateforme à l'édification de la bazina à cratère, hypothèse qu'il faudra confirmer par d'autres observations et la datation radiométrique qui sera obtenue sur les ossements prélevés.

La fouille montre que la partie centrale (cratère) est formée essentiellement de gravas entremêlés à de nombreux tessons de poteries lisses (poterie peut être tournée) qui proviennent certainement du site archéologique de proximité où on retrouve ce même matériel archéologique.

Le corps dans un très bon état de conservation et en parfaite connexion anatomique repose en décubitus latéral semi- fléchi selon un axe nord- sud, tête dirigée vers l'Est, dans une fosse (1,60 m x 1,10 m) recouverte par un ensemble de dalles, creusée dans la première assise. Plus étonnante encore est la parfaite conservation de la dentition mais surtout dans ce cas précis la présence de chevelure qui fera l'objet d'analyses en laboratoire.

4.4. TYPE «TUMULUS À CRATÈRE» (Fig. 6 et 7)

Les tumulus à cratère sont des constructions fréquentes ici ou là au Sahara et se caractérisent par une dépression sommitale en forme de cuvette. Ils sont devenus importants avec les fouilles d'Iwelen qui ont permis de les mettre en relation avec un site d'habitat et un art rupestre rapporté à l'épisode des chars de la période libyco- berbère.

Une construction de ce type se trouvant près du tumulus en croissance a été fouillée; celle située près de la bazina précédemment décrite, sera étudiée après l'établissement de la chronologie. La fouille de ce tumulus à cratère qui a un diamètre de 7,6 m ; une hauteur de 1,2 m et un cratère qui mesure 1,5 m NS pour 1,7 m EO pour une profondeur de 0,15 m montre un système disposé en encorbellement protégeant un corps, certainement d'un adulte, qui repose en décubitus latéral droit fléchi, selon un axe nord-sud (tête à 120°). Aucun mobilier archéologique n'a été trouvé.

Cette difficulté de rapports entre les monuments funéraires et les représentations rupestres se complique avec un autre problème aussi irritant que pose le Néolithique de l'Ahaggar : à ce jour, on n'est pas parvenu à établir une quelconque relation entre les cultures matérielles et l'art rupestre. Une voie d'approche peut être fournie par l'inventaire systématique des stations rupestres et des monuments funéraires ainsi que par l'étude des nombreux gisements archéologiques en relation avec les œuvres d'art. Cette voie d'approche est appréhendée par J.P. Maître (1966) qui écrit « Toutefois, une voie d'approche nous est peut-être fournie par l'Adrar Tin – Terin et Teferit-tan- Elafer. Leurs parois en effet sont ornées de petites peintures rouges de bovidés, chevaux et tiffinagh, et, dans les deux cas, les foyers sont scellés d'une couche de fumier fossile recouverte de tessons de poterie et d'éclats de taille. On peut donc imaginer que ces peintures et cette industrie, immédiatement postérieure au dépôt de fumier ou contemporaine de son amoncellement relèvent d'un seul ensemble. C'est l'une des rares hypothèses que l'on puisse actuellement formuler... ».

Quoi qu'il en soit, il reste bien certain que les traces des relations entre les monuments protohistoriques et les représentations rupestres passent impérativement par la multiplication des fouilles de monuments funéraires notamment au niveau des «foyers rupestres». C'est par exemple dans le Fadnoun (Tassili des Ajjers) où l'on connaît le nombre le plus important de monuments dits en trou de serrure ou à couloir et enclos qui seraient d'après les datations obtenues dans la partie nigérienne de la Taffassasset l'œuvre de pasteurs figurés dans les peintures d'époque bovidienne du Tassili des Ajjers que les recherches doivent être essentiellement axées.



5. Les Stations Rupestres

La distribution des stations rupestres est inégale. Nous avons remarqué qu'il existait d'importantes zones de concentration de cet art et d'autres où les figurations sont faiblement représentées, voire parfois isolées.

Le site de Youf Eheket semble ne pas être un grand centre d'art rupestre mais la présence de figures de la grande faune (*syncerus antiquus complexus*, grand bovin, rhinocéros et éléphant) confirme l'ancienneté de la pratique de l'art gravé ou peint dans la région (une figure très effacée à l'ocre rouge a été identifiée non loin du *syncerus antiquus complexus*).

Les figures anciennes comme le *syncerus antiquus complexus*, l'éléphant et le gros bovidé cohabitent avec un ensemble de bovidés que H. Lhote (1985) rattache au bovidien tardif, mais l'essentiel de cet art rupestre appartient à la période récente (étages caballin et camelin). Les figurations représentent de petits chevaux et des guerriers à pied ou à cheval, armés de lances et de boucliers ronds. Il y a également des girafes, des dromadaires, des inscriptions alphabétiques et de nombreuses autruches.

5.1. Les figurations rupestres

Pour retrouver, facilement chaque gravure, nous avons découpé le site de Youf Eheket en zones. La zone 1 regroupe les figures de la grande faune et quelques petites figures de la période récente. On remarque quelques monuments funéraires. Il s'agit le plus souvent de formes simples mais où l'on note cependant la présence d'une grande plate-forme. Plus loin et vers le sud, on retrouve la zone 2 qui représente la station la plus visitée par les touristes. Il s'agit d'une grande dalle horizontale gravée où sont représentées des figures d'âges différents. Les figures « caballines/alphabétiques » sont plus nombreuses. Au sud-ouest de la grande dalle, on retrouve la zone 3. Elle renferme de nombreuses figures qui sont dans un état de dégradation très avancé. Nous avons remarqué la présence d'un éléphant, de bovidés, d'une grande figure géométrique visible de loin, des cavaliers, des dromadaires, des girafes, des inscriptions alphabétiques et d'autres petites figures. Les monuments funéraires sont peu nombreux. Vers le nord et face à la zone 3, nous avons la zone 4. Elle est riche en figures rupestres majoritairement d'un âge plus récent. Il s'agit des phases « caballine » (fig. 22) et « cameline » (fig.26) alphabétiques. Elle présente quelques figures du guerrier libyque dans un environnement funéraire. Dans cette zone, les monuments funéraires sont nombreux et variés. Nous avons plusieurs formes dont certaines ont fait l'objet de fouilles.

5.2. Techniques de réalisation des figurations

Le graveur donne forme au sujet gravé par un trait piqueté qui subit, pour les figures anciennes, un polissage ou un martèlement pour les figures récentes « libyco-berbères ». Nous avons aussi remarqué la présence d'une autre technique qui consiste à polir entièrement le corps de la figure (fig. 20). Quelques rares figures sont incisées. Ces dernières ont le trait régulier et fin.

Les figures une fois réalisées sont soumises au processus de patinisation. Chaque figure garde ses propres caractéristiques, à savoir la profondeur du trait, la largeur, l'organisation ou non des cupules. Les figures anciennes, comme le *syncerus antiquus complexus* (fig. 11) ou l'éléphant (fig. 16), ont le trait poli, large et profond. Ensuite la figure se patine. Ces figures, peu nombreuses, sont de grande dimension. Les figures de la période bovidienne ont le trait piqueté et peu large. La dimension de la figure se réduit. La technique de polissage du trait est abandonnée. Cette fois la figure, en majorité bovine, subit un polissage total ou partiel du corps. Les figures ont le trait du contour piqueté et régulier. Les cupules sont profondes et nombreuses. Enfin les figures récentes celles que nous classons dans « la protohistoire » sont petites et martelées. Les figures sont, pour quelques-unes naturalistes, schématiques et parfois géométriques. Les inscriptions alphabétiques s'inscrivent dans cette dernière rubrique. Le trait est martelé et les cupules sont désorganisées. La fraîcheur du trait donne une indication sur l'âge de ces figures. Elles se différencient des figures anciennes par les thèmes majeurs qui sont le cheval, le dromadaire et les caractères d'écritures. La technique du trait présente plusieurs variétés. Le trait est piqueté, parfois martelé et rarement incisé. La patine reste claire et souvent absente. La taille des figures se réduit considérablement et cette réduction se conclut par les inscriptions alphabétiques.

5.3. La représentation des figurations par zone

Le site de Youf Eheket représente peu de figurations inégalement réparties. La zone 1 est pauvre et les



figures sont de différentes périodes. La zone 2 regroupe les figures sur la grande dalle qui jouxte l'oued et H. Lhote en a publié quelques unes. Vers le sud-ouest, la zone 3 présente un grand nombre de figures de différentes périodes. Vers le nord, la zone 4 regroupe un ensemble de figures homogènes qui peu être daté de la période libyco-berbère.

5.3.1 Les figures animales

Les figures de la zone 1 (fig.10) sont gravées sur la face interne d'une dalle qui surplomb l'abri. On découvre, depuis la droite du panneau, un grand *syncerus antiquus complexus* au contour poli reconnaissable au volume de ses cornes (fig.11). Derrière le *syncerus antiquus complexus* se trouve une grande girafe très érodée et dessous, un petit bovidé au trait piqueté. Derrière la girafe et sous le grand éléphant (fig.12) se trouve un autre petit bovidé. Le grand éléphant est pourvu d'une trompe et de défenses. Il a le contour large, poli et profond. L'éléphant est surchargé d'un grand bovidé qui a la queue surchargée par un petit bovidé suivi d'un autre derrière. On remarque d'autres figures indéterminées sur le même panneau.

Face au panneau, on découvre d'autres figures de style naturaliste (fig.13). Il s'agit de gravures d'éléphants sans défenses. Sur la paroi verticale du même abri, on remarque un grand rhinocéros au trait piqueté. Il est surchargé au niveau de l'épaule par une girafe au trait martelé. Sous le rhinocéros, deux girafes et deux autruches de style schématique sont martelées. On remarque enfin sur une dalle horizontale un cavalier libyco-berbère au trait martelé et de style schématique. Il nous rappelle de près ceux observés dans les différents sites du Sahara central et même de l'Atlas saharien. Nous avons relevé la présence de nombreux monuments funéraires à proximité de ces figures.

La grande dalle (zone 2) regroupe de nombreuses petites figures bovines au trait piqueté. Les figures ont la même couleur de patine que la dalle. Nous avons remarqué un cheval monté. Le trait est martelé (fig. 14). La figure est en présence d'une inscription alphabétique et des contours de sandales.

La zone 3 (fig.15) regroupe un grand éléphant très abîmé au contour large et poli ; le corps est compartimenté (fig. 16). On a relevé de nombreux bovins au trait piqueté (fig.18-19), des chevaux (certains montés), des dromadaires très érodés (fig. 26), quelques antilopes et de nombreuses autruches (fig.17-19).

La zone 4 présente quelques figures du bovidien tardif. Il s'agit principalement de quelques bovidés, de girafes, antilopes et autruches qui occupent différents panneaux. Les figures au trait piqueté sont mal conservées. A cet ensemble s'associe d'autres figures d'âge plus récent représentées par quelques girafes de style schématique et au trait martelé. Les petites autruches sont schématiques et nombreuses. Le cheval est représenté monté par un personnage souvent armé. Le mouflon est peu représenté. Il est souvent associé à des autruches et des chiens dans des scènes de chasse.

5.3.2. Les personnages

Les personnages sont rares. Ils sont surtout représentés durant les périodes récentes. Il s'agit principalement de guerriers libyco-berbères, de cavaliers et de rares chameliers.

La zone 1 offre un cavalier avec sa monture très schématisé. Nous avons déjà rencontré ce style de figures dans l'Atlas saharien (Amara, 2003).

La zone 2 en donne le plus bel exemple. Il est peu schématisé. La monture est reconnaissable ainsi que le cavalier (fig.14). D'autres figures de style très schématique sont relevées. Les quelques cavaliers et chameliers de la zone 3 sont très schématisés. La figure est totalement martelée. Les guerriers sont représentés armés d'un javelot, le corps est bitriangulaire et droit (fig. 21). Quelques fois, la tête du personnage est ornée de plumes d'autruches. A leurs côtés, on remarque un cheval et souvent une inscription alphabétique.

5.3.3. Les inscriptions alphabétiques

Les figures à caractères alphabétiques apparaissent dans un contexte caballin ou camelin. Le site de Youf Eheké semble respecter cette logique. La majorité des caractères alphabétiques sont gravés à proximité des hommes en armes, à cheval ou à dromadaire. L'inscription est faite de quelques lettres. Elle est parfois gravée de bas vers le haut ou en ligne horizontale, et sur des supports verticaux ou horizontaux. L'important réside dans l'accompagnement de ces thèmes stéréotypés d'hommes en arme ou en monture (fig. 23). Le trait est toujours martelé et rarement incisé. La dimension de chaque caractère est de taille très réduite.



5.4. Les associations des figurations

Nous avons plusieurs types d'associations de figurations que l'on retrouve fréquemment dans l'art rupestre saharien. Quelle est la signification de ces figures ? L'association la plus significative et répétitive est celle du personnage, armé ou pas, avec le cheval ou le dromadaire. Il est souvent associé à des scènes de chasses au mouflon et à l'autruches.

A Youf Ehekhet, nous avons ce type d'association. L'homme, avec l'arrivée du cheval et celle du dromadaire plus tardivement, change de statut. Il découvre l'intérêt de cet animal nouveau. Il nous fait remarquer son utilité. L'arme est un élément rénové avec l'introduction du métal. Il est de fait un indice chronologique. Il démontre ce que l'homme devient avec la maîtrise de toutes ces nouveautés.

En plus du métal, du cheval et du dromadaire, on remarque la présence d'un nouveau thème indissociable du « guerrier libyque ». Il s'agit de la représentation d'une nouvelle forme géométrique. Ces formes géométriques sont alphabétiques. Elles signifient quelque chose que nous ne savons pas pour l'instant interpréter, mais certaines formes plus récentes appelées « tiffinagh » sont lisibles.

La zone 4⁵ offre deux grands panneaux qui représentent des scènes de chasses aux mouflons. Le premier panneau (fig.24) se trouve sur le niveau supérieur du site. Il porte de nombreuses autruches qui occupent toute la longueur du panneau. Il y a 3 mouflons en haut à gauche, 1 chien en bas à gauche, 3 cavaliers derrière un troupeau d'autruches, un personnage devant accompagné d'un chien. Au milieu du panneau se trouve deux guerriers armés de boucliers ronds et de javelots en positions symétriques. A la droite de ces guerriers, on remarque des chevaux et plus loin à droite, d'autres personnages armés de javelots. Enfin, quelques figures d'autruches très effacées.

Ce panneau apporte des précisions sur la manière dont s'organisent les protohistoriques. Nous avons une grande scène de chasse au mouflon ou le cheval, le chien et l'autruche jouent un rôle important pour approcher l'animal chassé. Certaines autruches, celles qui se trouvent à gauche et près des mouflons, nous offrent des indices sur la manière de chasser de ces hommes. Nous avons ici, peut-être, des autruches anthropomorphisées. Les personnages bitriangulaires apparaissent à travers la forme bitriangulaire du corps de l'autruche. Est-ce que l'homme utilise un masque en forme d'autruche pour s'approcher des mouflons ? Est-ce que l'homme se mêle au troupeau des autruches pour attraper le mouflon ? L'art saharien est connu pour ses représentations de personnages masqués (Tassili, Messak, etc.).

Le second panneau (fig.25), niveau inférieur, offre une scène de chasse représentée sur deux surfaces qui forment un angle. A droite, on remarque des chevaux, des personnages armés accompagnés de trois inscriptions alphabétiques. A gauche de ces figures, on distingue une antilope, des chiens, plus bas, qui cernent un mouflon. Plus bas et à gauche, des cavaliers semblent chasser du mouflon et des autruches. Sur l'autre panneau qui fait l'angle, on distingue la suite de la scène de chasse.

A proximité de ces deux panneaux, nous avons relevé la figure d'un guerrier libyque armé d'un javelot (fig.20). La figure semble plus ancienne que celles des deux panneaux. Elle est du même style des personnages du second panneau (fig.25). Elle est réalisée sur une dalle horizontale qui lie les deux panneaux. La figure est creusé dans la roche, puis polie. Ce procédé est peut-être le facteur qui rend la figure visible au moment du lever ou du coucher du soleil. Le style de la gravure est proche de celles signalées dans l'Aïr⁶.

6. Attribution chronologique des figurations

Les figurations appartiennent à différentes périodes. Il y a celles qui s'inscrivent directement dans la préhistoire et celles qui sont manifestement plus récentes donc « protohistoriques ».

Les figures anciennes sont peu nombreuses. Elles se résument à quelques figures de *syncerus antiquus complexus*, d'éléphants, de girafes et autres formes géométriques. Elles peuvent être d'âge néolithique. Ce que laisse supposer certains auteurs comme H. Lhote (1985) qui rapprochent les rares figures du *syncerus antiquus complexus* du Sahara de la période des « Têtes rondes ». Nous n'avons pas, pour l'instant, d'indice chronologique fiable. L'approche chronologique est basée sur le style et le trait.

Ces figures se concentrent sur principalement deux zones. Il y a d'abord les figures signalées par H. Lhote, puis les autres peu importantes gravées face à la grande dalle. Ces figures de grande faune sont accompagnées de figures plus récentes pouvant être du bovidien tardif⁷.

Les figures les plus nombreuses appartiennent à la « protohistoire ». Elles représentent principalement des caballins, des camelins, des cavaliers, des inscriptions, des girafes et surtout de nombreuses autruches. Le cheval, puis le dromadaire semblent jouer un rôle important dans la vie de ces protohistoriques.

La période récente connaît la présence d'étagements successifs qui peuvent se chevaucher. Nous avons l'étagé des guerriers libyco-berbères avec ses armes (fig. 24). Ensuite, le groupe des cavaliers, puis le groupe



des caballins alphabétiques. Enfin, nous avons le dernier groupe signifié par le camelin et les tfinagh. Ce découpage démontre le rapprochement chronologique des groupes entre eux. L'observation du style, du trait et du thème laisse supposer l'arrivée successive ou le chevauchement de ces petits instants qui marquent la période récente ou l'étage libyco-berbère appelé aussi phase caballine et cameline. Cette activité artistique est accompagnée d'une préoccupation funéraire. Le rapport entre les sépultures et l'art rupestre est d'actualité après les travaux de F. Paris dans le nord du Niger. Les monuments funéraires sont nombreux sur le site de Youf Eheket. Ils offrent les mêmes types que ceux signalés dans les autres régions de l'Ahaggar ou dans l'Aïr.

7. Lien entre art rupestre et monuments funéraires

Il est fréquent que des monuments funéraires cohabitent avec les sites d'art rupestre. F. Paris (1992), dans ses travaux dans l'Aïr, a réussi à mettre en relation un site rupestre avec une construction funéraire. Il s'agit de quelques objets métalliques découverts dans le site d'Iwalen. Les mêmes constructions funéraires sont présentes sur le site de Youf Eheket.

F. Paris (1992) donne quelques datations suites aux travaux effectués au Nord du Niger⁸. Youf Eheket offre le même environnement archéologique. Sur ce site, nous avons procédé à la fouille de quelques types. Nous pouvons tenter de relier certaines constructions funéraires à des formes d'art rupestre. Dans ce cas il s'agit bien du type « Tumulus à cratère » et du type « Bazina » datés du II^e millénaire av. J.-C et les figures « Libyco-berbères ».

A Youf Eheket, au delà de la pauvreté en matériel archéologique, nous avons pu démontrer que les corps sont dans un état de conservation qui peut permettre les différentes analyses auxquelles nous procéderons prochainement.

Le site de Youf Eheket montre des signes d'occupation qui remonteraient au paléolithique. C'est un site où cohabitent des gisements de surface du paléolithique et du néolithique, des monuments funéraires et de l'art rupestre. Si on compare notre site avec Iwelen, fouillé et étudié par F. Paris, nous arriverons peut-être à avoir les mêmes indices. Les plates-formes et les tumulus en croissant seront datés du néolithique et sont généralement antérieurs à 1900 B.C. Cette date marque la phase post-néolithique qui voit l'apparition des tumulus à cratère. Cette phase correspond à la période caballine. Le rapprochement est fait sur la base d'une comparaison de pointes métalliques découvertes dans ces sépultures. Leur forme se rapproche de celle des pointes de lances des guerriers libyco-berbères.

Les corps des sépultures fouillées donnent les premières indications sur le type humain. Nous avons observé l'absence de prognathisme, la faible ouverture au niveau nasal, d'un crâne gracile, d'un squelette long et moins robuste. Il s'agit vraisemblablement de population de type méditerranéen⁹.

8. Attribution culturelle des figurations

Ces figures symbolisent le lien qu'entretenait l'homme avec la nature. Les premières sont magnifiées et leurs dimensions parfois exagérées. Elles expriment le souci de l'homme devant la complexité de l'environnement minéral et naturel qui l'entoure. Ces figures peuvent nous renseigner sur le vécu de l'homme. Elles suivent l'évolution que subit l'homme tout au long de l'Holocène.

Durant la protohistoire, la métallurgie est l'un des éléments les plus innovateur pour la compréhension de ces sociétés anciennes. Cette nouvelle technologie est présente à travers les figurations d'armes. Il s'agit principalement de lances, de javelots et de boucliers ronds.

Ces objets, prédilection de l'homme de cette période est présent sur l'ensemble du territoire nord africain et principalement dans cette région du sud-est de l'Ahaggar. La technologie métallurgique coïncide avec l'arrivée du cheval, du dromadaire et des premiers caractères alphabétiques dans la vie des hommes.

Le « libyco-berbère », à travers le cheval et du dromadaire par la suite, découvre un nouveau moyen de locomotion facilitant la mobilité et surtout la maîtrise de l'immensité de l'espace environnant. Ces innovations interviennent dans un environnement encore fidèle aux traditions néolithiques, qui se sont maintenu encore longtemps.

Le dromadaire, élément indicateur du bouleversement écologique de la région du Sahara, est peu représenté à Youf Eheket. La métallurgie, le cheval, le dromadaire et les caractères alphabétiques sont un marqueur culturel qui définit l'auteur de cet art.



9. L'art rupestre de Youf Ahaket: un langage symbolique

Les thèmes récurrents, un style « commun » pour chacune des phases, un même mode d'exécution des figures sont autant d'indices permettant de comprendre une forme de communication ancienne des différents groupes culturels.

L'homme s'exprime sur les surfaces planes des roches qui l'entourent. Mais ces documents archéologiques restent difficiles à interpréter sans tenir compte des pratiques anciennes de la région.

Les figures néolithiques expriment surtout la maîtrise par l'homme de son environnement animal, comme en témoignent la répétition de certains thèmes, surtout bovins. Les figures plus récentes marquent un tournant dans la lecture que nous pouvons en faire aujourd'hui. Ces figures sont annonciatrices de nouveautés technologiques acquises par l'homme et qu'il veut mettre en relief.

La domestication de l'animal montre la manière dont l'homme a résolu la question de sa survie. La maîtrise des nouvelles techniques comme la métallurgie et l'équitation lui ouvrent de nouveaux espaces.

Cet art rupestre ou ces monuments funéraires sont, peut-être, un moyen pour l'homme de baliser son territoire. Cet homme s'approprie les espaces parcourus, laisse ses traces dans tout le Sahara central à travers la gravure et la peinture rupestre, et les nombreuses sépultures.

Conclusion

L'essentiel de l'art rupestre de Youf Ehekhet appartient à la période dite Libyco-berbère. Quelques rares représentations appartiennent à l'époque naturaliste avec une grande représentation d'un *syncerus antiquus complexus* et quelques figures du bovidien tardif. Les monuments funéraires offrent une grande variété de type se rapportant à différents âges. Nous avons relevés les figures de l'ensemble du site et fouillés quelques structures funéraires.

L'état de conservation des restes osseux des sépultures fouillées nous permettra d'effectuer des datations radiométriques pour établir une chronologie. Il permet également de faire les premières observations anthropologiques de terrain et de poursuivre les études spécialisées d'anthropologie physique pour identifier les groupes paléanthropologiques.

Les observations faites montrent que la recherche est prometteuse dans la relation art rupestre-monuments funéraires. Les constructions funéraires de type tumulus à cratère et bazina semblent être en rapport avec les figures « libyco-berbères ». La relation entre l'art rupestre et les sépultures protohistoriques passent impérativement par la fouille.

Le programme de recherche que c'est tracé notre centre de recherche sur le fin des temps préhistoriques dans l'Ahaggar apportera plus de précisions sur les fonctionnements et l'évolution de ce peuplement.

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Cartes de la région

Fig. 1. La situation du site de Youf Ehekhet dans l'Ahaggar (schéma d'après I. Amara)



Fig. 2. Carte schématique du site de Youf Eheket avec les différentes zones (I. Amara)

Les photographies des différentes sépultures fouillées lors de la mission (zone 4).

Fig. 3 : Tumulus en croissant bras ouvert vers l'Est (Ph. A. Heddouche, 2004)

Fig. 4 : Inhumation tumulus en croissant (Ph. A. Heddouche, 2004)

Fig. 5 : Inhumation Plate-forme (Ph. A. Heddouche, 2004)

Fig. 6: Bazina (Ph. A. Heddouche, 2004)

Fig. 7 : Inhumation Bazina (Ph. A. Heddouche, 2004)

Fig. 8 : Tumulus à cratère (Ph. A. Heddouche, 2004)

Fig. 9 : Inhumation Tumulus à cratère (Ph. A. Heddouche, 2004)

Les figures de la zone 1

Fig. 10. La zone 1. Les figures se trouvent sur la face interne du gros bloc, à droite, et sur la face verticale à gauche. Les grosses devant l'entrée, gauche, portent les figures d'éléphants et plus loin les figures libyco-berbères (Ph. I. Amara, 2004)

Fig. 11. Le *syncerus antiquus complexus* de style naturaliste. La figure se trouve devant l'éléphant (fig. 12), (Ph. I. Amara, 2004)

Fig. 12. L'éléphant de style naturaliste. On remarque le corps décoré du bovidé qui surcharge l'éléphant. Le trait est poli (Ph. I. Amara, 2004).

Fig. 13. Sur le panneau verticale, on remarque ce gros bovidé de style naturaliste très érodé. Les cornes, la tête et une partie du corps sont encore visible (Ph. I. Amara, 2004).

Figure de la zone 2

Fig. 14. Figure de cavalier accompagné d'une inscription alphabétique et de contours de sandales. L'ensemble est martelé (Ph. I. Amara, 2004).

Les figures de la zone 3

Fig. 15. Vue de la partie Est de la zone 3. Les nombreux blocs portent les gravures (Ph. I. Amara, 2004).

Fig. 16. Eléphant au contour poli et large est située sur une hauteur et est visible de loin pour un œil habitué. D'autres figures sont associées à l'éléphant (Ph. I. Amara, 2004).

Fig. 17. Figures schématiques d'un félin à droite et d'autruches à gauche. Les figures se trouvent plus bas de la fig. 16 (Ph. I. Amara, 2004).

Fig. 18. Un groupe de bovidé de la phase tardive. Ce style est largement représenté dans les environs et dans d'autres sites du Sahara central (Ph. I. Amara, 2004).

Fig. 19. Figures récentes. Au milieu, un bovidé au piquetage fin. Tout autour, des autruches et des cavaliers (Ph. I. Amara, 2004).

Les figures de la zone 4

Fig. 20. Guerrier libyque gravé sur un plan horizontal et peu visible (Ph. I. Amara, 2004).

Fig. 21. Figure de guerrier libyque armé. La main droite porte les javelines et la main gauche tient la lunge qui le lie au cheval. La tête du personnage porte une décoration (Ph. I. Amara, 2004).

Fig. 22. Figure élégante d'un petit equus caballus. Une figure parmi d'autres de style naturaliste. La preuve que la période récente ne présente pas seulement des figures schématiques et géométriques (Ph. I. Amara, 2004).

Fig. 23. Figure de cavalier d'un âge récent. Notez bien le lien qui peu exister entre la forme bitriangulaire



observé sur le corps du cavalier, la position de ses bras et la forme de sa tête (Ph. I. Amara, 2004).

Fig. 24. Un détail de la partie centrale du grand panneau du niveau supérieur. Remarquer la symétrie des guerriers. S'agit-il d'une scène de combat ou d'initiation ? Les antilopes, les autruches au décor géométrique sur le corps rappelle celui de la figure 23 (voir dans le texte plus haut, p. 7), (Ph. A. Heddouche, 2004)

Fig. 25. Détail de la partie centrale du panneau du niveau inférieur. Scène de chasse au mouflon. Le grand personnage armé semble plus ancien et ressemble à la fig. 20 (Ph. A. Heddouche, 2004).

Fig. 26. Un troupeau de dromadaires. Il s'agit du deuxième ensemble, le premier se situe dans la zone 3. Vers le haut à gauche on remarque un équidé (Ph. I. Amara, 2004).

Note

¹ Les premiers résultats de la mission du CNRPAH de janvier 2004.

² Nous avons été accompagné par l'architecte, Amerzagh Hamoud, et les chauffeurs de l'Office du Parc National de l'Ahaggar.

³ Lhote n'a pas visité le site en question. Les relevés sur calques sont réalisés par son collaborateur P. Colombel à partir des photographies remises par C. Millet. Il a signalé un nombre réduit de figures (1 bubale, 1 éléphant, 7 bovidés, 4 girafes, 2 cavaliers, un petit chien, 2 personnages, 1 inscription tifinagh, 1 motif spiralé. Ce fut le cas pour de nombreux sites publiés par Lhote.

⁴ Le décompte provisoire comprend : 9 tumulii simples, 3 bazinas, 4 tumulii à cratère, 2 plates formes, 2 monuments à antennes, 1 tumulus en croissant et un ensemble de structures ouvertes en arc de cercle et aménagement frontal appelés « Tentes de Fatima ».

⁵ D'autres figures regroupées ou isolées sont aussi présentes dans cette zones.

⁶ Le guerrier est armé d'une lance et d'un bouclier rond. La tête est ronde. Les bras en éventail. La main droite tient une lance et la gauche est armée d'un bouclier rond et d'un javelot.

⁷ Nous avons remarqué pour ce type de figures la présence d'une peinture complètement effacée et qui représente un bovidé sans cornes.

⁸ Tous ces types datés se retrouvent à Youf Eheket. Le «Tumulus à couloir» est apparu vers le Ve millénaire. La « Plate-forme », le «Tumulus en croissant», le «Tumulus simple» apparaissent vers le IV^e millénaire.

⁹ Nous attendons les résultats définitifs pour nous prononcer sur toutes ces questions. Mais les premières observations sur le site laissent supposer que nous avons affaire à des populations blanches.



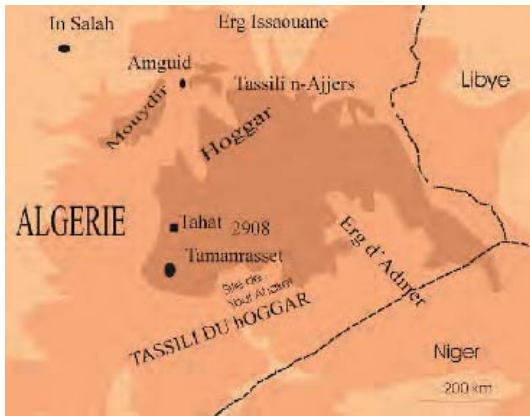


Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6





Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12





Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18





Fig. 19



Fig. 20



Fig. 21



Fig. 22

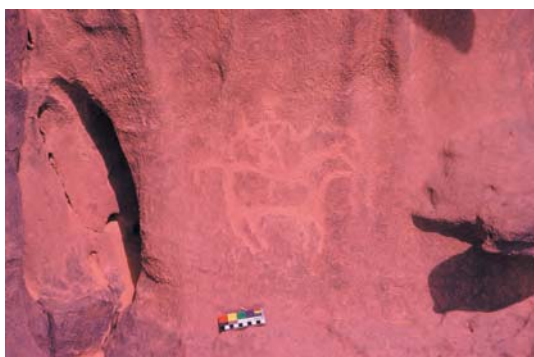


Fig. 23



Fig. 24



Fig. 25



Fig. 26



Per una lettura biblico-tradizionale dei simboli della mano e delle mani dipinte o incise su rocce

Antonio AMMASSARI

Riassunto

Mani benedicensi e mani oranti o offerenti, mani maledicensi, segni di possesso e di autolimitazione, mani in relazione a torme di animali feroci e selvaggi, non sempre riconducibili ad attività venatorie o sciamaniche o magiche. Animali simboli eventualmente della potenza sovrumana della natura e della divinità suprema. Più tardi mani conesse agli spiriti, rappresentati dalle maschere. Lettura tradizionale, perché ispirata per esempio dalla famosa stele della balaustra di Tell Amarna, in Egitto dove i 14 raggi discendenti del dio Sole, Aton, terminano nelle mani, due delle quali largiscono il segno del dono della vita (ankh) al Faraone e a sua moglie. Reciprocamente il Faraone Akn-en-Aton e Nefert-iti con le mani e le braccia levate in alto offrono ognuno vasselli di oblazioni. Questo gesto è lo stesso stilizzato nei geroglifici per rendere lode a Dio. Nelle iscrizioni oracolari cinesi la formula Shou You ha valori analoghi a quelli della tradizione egiziana. Infine la Bibbia ricorda efficacemente l'importanza della Mano del Signore nelle vicende degli uomini.

In questa prospettiva si potrebbero citare e rileggere le mani su rocce in Argentina, Patagonia, Santa Barjita Bajia, Rio Pinturas; in Francia le mani nelle grotte Rouffignac, Lascaux, Cosque e Chauvet, dove le rappresentazioni di uomini e donne sono quasi assenti paragonate a quelle esuberanti di umanità di Tassili, in Africa. In Cina nella valle del fiume Zuojiang-Zhuang, del Guanxi ritorna l'immagine degli oranti a mani e braccia elevate. Nel nord a Kurug-Tag nei monti Lang shan e nei monti Altay ritornano le mani singole della tradizione più antica verosimilmente arrivate attraverso le strade del nord-Europa e della Siberia.



Introducing the World Archives of Rock Art (WARA): 50.000 years of visual arts

Emmanuel ANATI

Abstract

This paper illustrates the motivations and the aims for undertaking a large-scale project on a world inventory of prehistoric and tribal art. Art is a world wide phenomenon, which is part of the behavioural system of Homo sapiens. The study in this field was so far focused on descriptions of local patterns. The proposed world data base project will allow an understanding of the universal patterns of prehistoric art and the significance of local or ethnic patterns. It will provide an international resource to reconstruct the history of mankind of the last 50.000 years. From the preliminary work carried on so far several important paradigms emerge already on behaviour, cultural trends and cognitive processes. They allow us to predict the output and the possible uses of the project.

Riassunto

Questa comunicazione illustra le motivazioni per un inventario mondiale dell'arte preistorica e tribale. L'arte è un fenomeno globale che riflette il sistema comportamentale dell'Homo sapiens. Gli studi del settore erano finora interessati principalmente alla definizione di modelli locali. La banca dati mondiale del progetto WARA permetterà di esaminare e comprendere i modelli universali dell'arte preistorica e tribale ed il significato di caratteristiche locali o etniche. Questa banca dati costituirà una risorsa internazionale per ricostruire la storia dell'uomo e delle avventure del suo intelletto negli ultimi 50.000 anni. Dal lavoro preliminare già svolto emergono alcuni importanti paradigmi sul comportamento, le tendenze culturali ed i processi cognitivi riflessi dall'arte visuale. Da ciò si può valutare le prospettive ed i possibili usi del progetto.

Introduction

How can we explain the production of art? For at least 50,000 years, humans have sought and struggled to find effective means of visual communication. Most of that time period, which predates «modern» pictographic or alphabetic writing, is considered prehistory. Visual art and writing, that made «history» possible, can be traced back to their origins through the signs and figures left by preliterate peoples. These creative manifestations, painted and engraved on rock surfaces and in caves throughout the world, have left a legacy of humankind's conceptual journey.

Man marked the territory with the expressions of his mind, soul and heart. Prehistoric art, as a visual narrative of culture, demonstrates the common heritage of all humanity. From early hunters and gatherers, to evolved hunters, to farmers, metal workers, and proto-literate populations, preoccupations of daily life were depicted in rock paintings and engravings. They reveal individual and social needs, as well as conceptual and communicative motivations at different stages of development. Insight into aspects of humanity such as knowledge, art, imagination, and religion can be sought and gained through the study of rock art. Why did humans feel the need to mark such record of their thoughts and emotion?

The works of art left behind by man may be on portable objects and on non portable supports such as rock surfaces. Out of the prehistoric works of art recorded thus far, there are more than 100,000 objects: figurines, plaquettes, engraved bones, decorated horns and other items. These artefacts are preserved all over the world in museums, galleries, and collections. But the world's major «art gallery» is rock art, which remains in situ in many regions across the globe. About 70,000 sites of rock paintings and engravings are known throughout the world, with an estimated 45 million images and signs on record. Nearly one tenth of this patrimony is in Europe. The major areas of concentration are in the Southern Hemisphere, in Southern



Africa and in Australia. The Americas, Asia and the Pacific are also extremely rich in rock art sites. Considering potential discovery in unexplored areas, the total number of rock art images that still survive in the world may well be much higher.

Major rock art sites are found in over 160 countries and constitute an immense patrimony, which is far from being fully recorded and thoroughly inventoried. Only a fraction of the world's rock art has been adequately studied. It is imperative that this essential source of information is preserved and understood. Research, documentation, and conservation should progress with a global scope; knowledge of the value and significance of this heritage should be made accessible at large. What can we learn out of this immense archive of our past?

Rock art constitutes the bulk of evidence of the cultural and intellectual history of humankind before the advent of written communication, the early playing ground of our mind. For the use of administrations, governments, and international organisations, and certainly for general and historical awareness, a discovery of primordial messages and themes is essential. For recognising the common way of thinking of mankind – an increasingly urgent task – this project has to be carried out world wide.

The immense heritage of prehistoric art is vulnerable to natural processes of wear, obliteration and destruction, which are further accelerated by human acts. Every day bits and pieces of rock surfaces are falling apart. Development projects, road construction, home building, and agriculture can hardly be stopped, but measures need to be taken to document and record rock art in its current state to assure that its testimony will remain for future generations.

Taking steps toward the accumulation of information, a database has been established for rock art and related research. The project of World Archives of Rock Art (WARA) has indeed started. It consists of a compilation of resources at the Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici in Capo di Ponte (Brescia, Italy) with over 200,000 slides, numerous photographs, tracings, recordings, reports, and surveys of rock art sites in five continents. Intended to serve as a source for research, documentation, conservation, comparative and analytical studies, education, and cultural programs, the WARA project is currently aiming at computerising the archives.

When we speak of prehistoric art we usually refer to visual art, though we know that music, dance, poetry, and other products of artistic creativity must have existed as well, like diverse forms of art coexist today among all the peoples on Earth. Even the remains of visual art which have lasted until our time must be only a fraction of what made up the original production. Visual art sometimes provides visual information on the other arts as well.

As absurd as it may first seem, the prime material used in the Stone Age all over the globe, except the Arctic regions, was wood. Apart from the objects in stone, horn, bone, or ivory, which were fashioned out of material that has withstood the ages, how many objects in wood, organic fibres, tree bark, animal skin, or other perishable materials once existed that now have perished forever?

Visual art and writing

Behavioural patterns of Homo sapiens

After a period of gestation in Africa and possibly also in the Near East, early ancestors of contemporary man spread across the planet, while acquiring an increasingly complex system of vocalisations and sound symbols we call speech. All modern humans have issued from these first Homo sapiens. Early vocal, gestural, and other momentary expressions were by their very nature not preserved through time, but some of the graphic messages of early Homo sapiens have reached us. While art objects have been unearthed in archaeological sites, the bulk of prehistoric creative expressions are preserved in the form of rock art. Its study and evaluation provides unique insight into man's intellectual life during the last 50,000 years, and reveals his imagination, his cognitive perceptions and conceptual journey.

The human beings with full sapiens physical features may well have developed around 100.000 years ago but, so far, there is no evidence of a full scale use of visual art until 50.000 years ago. The consistency throughout the world of the same basic repertory of symbols and images exhibited in the early phases of rock art testifies to the common origin of Homo sapiens and of his uniquely human intellect. The common essence of humankind is becoming of paramount importance in these times when diversity is used to justify violence. Ironically, rock art may turn out to hold the key of a critical understanding of early expressions of antagonism, violence and war.

The production of art, rock art included, seems to be a basic attribute of Homo sapiens. Our common direct ancestor is believed to have its roots in a «primary homeland» in Africa – some say in Asia, or both – from



which all present-day mankind has branched; in Europe, America, and Oceania no evidence exists for the presence of previous hominids from whom *Homo sapiens* may have emerged. During a gradual trend of migrations and diffusions, early groups of *Homo sapiens* carried to nearly every continent their ability to produce tools, their traditions of food collecting (hunting and gathering), their social and conceptual patterns, their primordial language(s), and their ability to produce art. According to modern research, the great age of migrations is likely to have taken place between 70,000 and 30,000 years ago, by which time *Homo sapiens* had largely acquired its modern characteristics. The world distribution of rock art is likely to coincide with the world distribution of *Homo sapiens*; traces of early man's art and imagination can be found along his paths all over the earth.

Early prehistoric men already operated within a framework of mental mechanisms of association, symbolism, and abstraction, which still today are defining characteristics of our species. In comparison to the preceding hominids, using these cognitive skills was not only an evolution, but also a true revolution: a leap forward that once taken has made us forever a very different Primate. The formation of our identity as *Homo sapiens* implies the acquisition of a complex package of specific and specialised attributes, such as the universal human ability of seeing, feeling, talking and listening with awareness and cognition, in a manner exclusive to sapiens. It also implies the adoption of a specific set of cerebral processes, which we define as «logic». The occurrence of so many coincidences in the course of an uneven and fast-paced biocultural evolution could have occurred but once in the course of the natural history of social mammals. We are now confronted with the theory of a single place of origin, where *Homo sapiens* had his formative age and whence he spread over the rest of the world. The early patterns, styles, and themes of rock art would help us solving this issue.

The emergence of our cultural roots from primordial artistic expressions has a dramatic impact on society and modern man. In rock art we recognise elements that are acutely relevant today. The visual language of the archaic hunters was and is a universal language, one which possesses not only representational systems and stylistic patterns that are startlingly similar in various parts of the world, but also presents figurative and symbolic associations derived from a common logic. Fundamental artistic consistencies bear witness to parallel modes of thinking and expression among peoples around the earth, though they adapted to different environments and culturally exploited different resources.

Man is likely to have learned from nature his first graphic approach. What were man's first encounters with marks? The footprints of another man or animal in the sand, the scratches left by a bear's claws on the walls of a cave, the small mound of earth piled outside the burrow of a hare, the black smudges of ash which indicate the remains of a fire, the sparse clues which mark the location of an abandoned camp, the carcass of an animal which is a sign of action by man or another predatory animal, or a hundred other signs, held and still hold a precise significance for peoples living in and with their environment. We would say today that these are symbols that man learned to read, provided him with information and inspired his artistic creativity.

For Palaeolithic man, however, the idea of «symbol» or any term describing such a phenomenon probably held no meaning. This word is unknown even in the languages of most contemporary hunter-gatherers. A footprint was a footprint, containing its own reality; it was the track of someone or something that passed by. By its form and its freshness, the hunter could guess immediately who passed by and how long ago the print was made. If the mark was the means by which one came to know a certain reality, then it also became a reality that could then be communicated. Thus his own footprints, as well as those of others, served to relay information, just as would his hand prints and other signs.

There are at least two phases to be discerned in this process: the first involves that passage from understanding the significance of a footprint or sign as the evidence of some event, to the action of consciously making a footprint or the sign in order to transmit a message. The second phase involves the further step of using a mark shaped by nature, such as a footprint, to reproduce the same mark on a rock, which then becomes an imitation of nature, an invented sign, and a means of communication. Analogous phases can also be imagined for other forms of artistic creation, such as dance and music, from following nature to imitating nature.

To understand the dynamics of these phases and the forces that fuelled them would open the way for us to understand the origins of art. We would then see how arbitrary are the distinctions often made between various styles, for example between naturalistic and abstract art. They simply define our own ability, or disability, to read the message. Most likely the concept of «abstract» did not exist for prehistoric man. On the other hand, even the most naturalistic art is a form of abstraction since it constitutes the transfiguration of a reality by depicting only a part of a whole, whether that be visual or audible, symbolic or conceptual.



That which we define as «abstract» is often the result of synthesis, the reading of which depends on our receptive and associative capacity.

We know that humans of the Old Stone Age left imprints and made marks in the mud and sand as many populations still do today. Traces of such practices have been discovered in deep caves. In the open these works were quickly destroyed by rain, snow, or wind. Men and women of many contemporary cultures paint their bodies and decorate the walls of their huts; because of the temporal nature of this art, very little evidence of these practices remains from prehistory. Modern understanding of prehistoric art activities depends therefore on limited sources of information.

The ethnological comparisons between prehistoric hunting peoples and present day hunting tribes can show us a range of possible explanations, but since there is not a verifiable pattern of behaviour in the context of artistic creativity between the two groups, we cannot make exact analogies. In fact, contemporary groups show the rich variety of lifestyles and artistic manifestations of hunting and gathering groups, but they are not carbon copies of prehistoric clans.

Acquiring a world view

Human culture spread and developed in different environments; the contexts in which artistic expression took place were correspondingly diverse. It is perhaps surprising, then, to recognise the striking similarities that can be found in rock art around the globe. In ancient times as today, the artist did not represent everything he saw or knew, but instead made specific choices. Although subject matter varies considerably from one age to another, it is always rather circumscribed within each age or cultural pattern. Thus the frequency and assemblage of subjects allow us to construct a rudimentary hierarchy of the artist's values. The gamut of subject matter is always well-defined and consistent within specific cultural and tribal patterns. Specific impulses to paint, draw, or engrave in a certain way have always existed, and both subject matter and style are reflections of deeply-rooted motivations that are specific not only to a time or a place, but to humanity.

Local circumscribed inventories of special areas of prehistoric art cannot provide a world view on patterns and paradigms. A global view on art can be achieved only by the resource of a global data base. It is surprising that such a fundamental cultural and scientific project had never been attempted before.

The elements that contributed to the shaping of conceptual and linguistic differentiation are the same that directed artistic expressions: climate, diet, natural resources, landscape, unpredictable events and life experience. It may be hypothesised that diverse systems of mental development, dictated by variations in context, became part of culturally transmitted traditions and contributed to the differentiation of the human mind. At the base of conceptual processes a common matrix continues to function today, though it persisted on a much broader scale until that time – relatively recent in the history of humankind – when man made his first attempts at cultivating and producing food. Just as substantial differences are not evident in the first visual language, it is presumable that they were not crucial in the spoken language. The first Homo sapiens groups in Africa or the Near East, and those that made the first migrations elsewhere are likely to have spoken the same language, the «mother tongue» that was shared by the earliest ancestors of present day humankind. Like the development of trends and styles in the visual art, language may have developed dialects that gradually became languages and further evolved dialects that became languages and so forth. Not only in the use of repetitive signs and symbols, but also in the choice of sites for rock art, and in the choice of surface, colours, and themes, numerous similarities make us realise that all these preferences stem from a universal language. A world archive of prehistoric art is the channel to further elaborate and specify this issue. Logic and artistic expressions would have conformed to universal patterns, and the spoken language would have been part of a common human way of relating to one another and to nature.

Results from joint research of anthropologists and geneticists suggest that other issues may have followed the same trend as in the case of the «mother tongue,» from which all languages spoken by modern man developed. The same can also be hypothesised for other aspects of art creativity such as music. Sounds, like graphic forms, create immediate, primal, and intense associations that have the power to restore and reaffirm a hidden memory; certain sequences or associations of sounds would have formed a basic musical language. As we see, the scope of a world data base on visual art goes far beyond specific concerns for aesthetic and graphics.

The «language» of man's first music must have had universal paradigms, which remain basically intact today, though transformed by accumulation. It suffices to think of the global diffusion of certain musical instruments such as the churinga, the megaphone, the flute, the drum, the castanets, or the musical bow, for us to recognise that in the realm of music, like in that of visual art, Homo sapiens was the custodian



of specific mental solutions and sets of traditions. Considering the human music – different from that of birds or wolves – in which the double games of rhythm and melody intertwine, we acknowledge that these universal canons lead us back to a common matrix, a kind of neurological imperative for language and music.

The Tower of Babel in which we live today, with different languages and mentalities, with such diversified expressions of visual art, music, and dance, seems to be a relatively recent phenomenon. It probably developed with the cultural and artistic differentiation that took place in the Late Pleistocene, between 15 and 30 thousand years ago, when regionalised cultural characteristics were formed, coinciding with the time in which human groups specialised and diversified their systems of hunting, fishing, gathering, and food production.

The world archives of rock art will help in defining if there are world trends in such patterns of culture. When assemblages can be identified chronologically, each one represents a different stage in the cultural sequence; hence, through subject matter and associations, rock art can reveal many aspects of human life. The depiction of the species of animal hunted and of the food gathered tells us much about the ecosystem in which man lived. The depiction of tools, weapons, and other objects reveal his technical abilities. The illustration of myths and beliefs outlines essential aspects of our intellectual roots and displays the existential relationship between Man, Nature, and the Supernatural.

The technical aspects of culture seem to progress in a more or less coherent evolution. New inventions and innovations result from experiences, which motivate subsequent progress and constitute the base of each step in the evolutionary sequence. It is questionable, however, whether such logical evolution occurs in the artistic expression as well. Current cultural standards influence the evaluation and appreciation of art and creativity. Aesthetics change from culture to culture and from person to person according to fluctuations in style and taste.

Because it falls well before the advent of writing, rock art constitutes a major testimony of early man's expression of himself and of his worldview. While even the most ancient script is just over 5,000 years old, rock art provides a record of the way man deliberately expressed himself many thousands of years earlier. Despite its value as a source of cultural, social and historical information, in most regions of the world this expression of human creativity has been sorely neglected. Moreover, for one reason or another much of the knowledge of regional scholars does not become available to the rest of the world.

In order to establish a more co-operative and receptive forum for thought, it is vital that researchers share their knowledge on the state of art studies and be better informed on the progress of research in other areas. The initial operations of a world archive have revealed that one of the most effective functions of such an institution is to provide a physical and conceptual venue for comparative studies, which suddenly help solve local problems as well as those concerning universal trends and patterns.

To look for the origins of art means searching for ourselves: who we are and where we come from. Forms, colours, rhythms, sounds, and movements are all messages we seek to decipher in order to understand ourselves. They are the raw material of our psychic heritage. The search is our lifeblood, for without it we would not be what we are. Before man, nature in all its guises has produced forms, colours, sounds, and movements, without which the senses of man would not function as they do today. The search for origins is therefore not just an intellectual game. Rather it is a necessity, and has stood as such for thousands of years, from the time we gained, rightly or wrongly, the appellation of sapiens.

Searching for roots

The environmental setting of art

Human beings are unique among the Primates in that they are the only species to produce art. Humans possess a universal pattern for emotions and needs beyond the three elementary, fundamental needs. Food, sex, and territory motivate a significant proportion of modern human activity, and the same three needs are the major preoccupations revealed by visual art from millennia past. However, we may question whether the very act of creating art, is in strict relation to these needs. Aesthetics, ethics, and human relations do not directly provide for the three main necessities, but they have always been essential ingredients of Homo sapiens' way of life.

Alertness to the surrounding world, as well as internal necessities, involves both recognition and integration of sensitivity, sensibility, and sensuality. One of the major difficulties of research in prehistoric and tribal art is that of recording such essential aspects and defining their paradigms. To be aware of art is to navigate into the human intellect, to sense the functions of its mechanisms, to penetrate the spirit of our species and



find out its logic.

By producing art, man is questing after the completion of nature. Visual art is a search to delve more deeply into the external world. All expressions of art in all periods are in some way interpretations of humans and their environment. But why is understanding nature such a dominant preoccupation? Humans are part of nature and inescapably intertwined with the entirety of it. Art, among other things, is the testimony of man's earliest attempts toward understanding or interpreting, completing or imitating nature.

Many areas the world over appear to have been revered spaces where people went for artistic rituals, or social activities, of which little evidence remains today except rock art. By painting and engraving on stone, human societies left their marks on the territory, shaped spaces, and moulded the landscape. Apparently the use of rock surfaces for producing art is itself an archetype, which was performed wherever *Homo sapiens* was present. Many places around the world where rock art is still practised are considered sacred, and some are also secret, accessible only to the initiated. Many prehistoric rock art sites were created in distant places for some social or spiritual reason.

For example, Har Karkom in the Negev Desert (Israel), a holy place and a sacred mountain in the Bronze Age, with shrines and altars, displays the richest concentration of rock art in the entire Sinai Peninsula. Here we know that Neolithic and Bronze Age rock art was produced in a place already sacred, since the mountain has remains of what appears to be a sanctuary of the Palaeolithic Age. Other examples can be found in the highlands of Malawi, where the Nyau society produces rock art in sacred caves in which ancestral spirits are said to live. Palaeolithic sanctuary caves of Western Europe are likely to have been both sacred and secret, and the same is true for many Australian Stone Age art sites, which have been used by Aborigines until historic times.

The evidence from many other cases of sacred sites suggests that the environmental setting of rock art seems to fit the «revelation pattern.» A common denominator to many faiths seems to confirm the Biblical concept that «the prophet comes from the desert,» which is expressed differently in various environments. Medicine men in parts of Africa retreat for long periods in sacred caves; shamans in Siberia choose to remain isolated for months at a time in the icy tundra. In many cultures, the preparation for initiation into adulthood demands isolation away from the clan and from populated areas. Christian hermits deliberately choose lonely places for their devotional activities. Buddha went to the mountain to meditate. Repeatedly the revelations of myth and scripture are described as occurring in deserts. Islam was born in a desert oasis; Judaism was born on a desert mountain. Most of the major rock art sites in the world are located in far away, isolated deserts, mountains, and bush area, where living resources are scanty and the density of population has always been sparse.

Comparative studies on a world range seem to reveal unexpected patterns that concern various aspects of the intellectual life of man and its links with the environment. The interpretation of rock art related to individual regions would allow us to understand local trends, but it is necessary to explore beyond the hills for capturing those common trends that unify humankind.

Geography and ecosystem

The dimension of the documentation is growing constantly. To undertake experimental and phenomenological studies it is useful to select a number of major rock art sites from different parts of the world.

A large percentage of the 150 major known areas with rock art are in what are now deserts or semi-desert areas. In the present environmental situation, these areas may be defined as peripheral or isolated zones. Around the world rock art appears in places distant from heavily populated areas, from centres of «civilisation». This seems to be a recurring pattern in «major sites», from the Dahthami Wells in Central Arabia to Tromso in Arctic Norway; from the Acacus in the Libyan Sahara to Ayers Rock in Central Australia; from the Kalahari Desert in southern Africa to San Ignazio in Baja California, Mexico; from Valcamonica in the Italian Alps to the Middle Yenisei River in Siberia; from Rio Pinturas in Argentinean Patagonia to Har Karkom in the Israeli Negev Desert. Most of the major concentrations of rock art turn out to be located in poorly populated regions with poor resources. This fact should have an explanation. One reason, but not the principal one, may be that rock art could not be preserved in heavily populated areas. The question is not solved by such assumption. The «revelation pattern» apparently requests isolation and silence.

In contrast, current data indicate that in areas covered by large tropical forests, rock art is scarce. We have little evidence of such images in the Brazilian Amazonian forest, in the Congo River basin and other west-central African countries, or in south-eastern Asia. The examples of rock art known in these tropical forest regions are usually relatively recent. It is likely that people dedicated to producing art on wood or other



vegetal support tend to produce mobile art rather than more durable rock art. This however does not explain the preference of desert areas for the major sites of rock art.

As the product of pre-literate societies, rock art is generally discontinued when communities acquire a «written» form of communication. The cultures from which these artistic expressions emerged were largely fixed in hunting and gathering as means of subsistence, and today hunting and gathering populations are nearing extinction. They are confined to the most inhospitable parts of the world, such as the deserts and bush lands of Australia and Southern Africa, the Congo basin, Southeast Asia, or the Arctic tundra of Lapland, Kamchatka, Alaska, and the great Canadian North. They occupy territories that constitute more than 20% of the Earth's land surface, yet they make up less than 1% of its population.

Only 500 years ago, at the time when America was reached by Columbus, 70% of the earth's surface was populated by hunting and gathering people, who then accounted for more than 20% of the world population. 14,000 years ago, at the end of the Pleistocene, the entire population of the Earth pursued these means of subsistence, which were then gradually replaced by economies based on food production. Only in the last 14,000 years, of the 100,000 years of their existence, humans have used other ways of survival and were not dependent on hunting and gathering.

Tribal societies' output of visual art from all of these ages is recorded around the world in millions of figures, in thousands of zones, on all inhabited continents. Major concentrations of rock art are found more or less evenly distributed on the inhabited land. According to present reports, however, the Southern Hemisphere, Australia, South Africa and South America have the greatest concentrations of rock art in the world. It is noteworthy that the Southern Hemisphere, which is today considered poor and backward, displays a prehistoric artistic creativity far higher than that of the affluent Northern Hemisphere. Should we consider new definitions for culture?

From the data available today, over 75% of all known rock art was produced by hunting and gathering societies while less than 25% is the work of pastoralists and agriculturalists. Being by far the major remaining evidence of communication and creativity among early Homo sapiens, rock art is an invaluable source for the study of cognitive development. Within the range of time since the emergence of Homo sapiens, it is the main archive of mankind. It is somehow surprising that this immense cultural and historical resource did not receive as yet the consideration it deserves.

Chronology

The information available today is not yet definitive, as shown by the data themselves. The wish to know when is a major human curiosity and further studies are needed on a world basis to understand the cultural meaning of the beginning of art in various parts of the world. Is it always related to the arrival of Homo sapiens?

Some technical data may contribute to a general framework, although, as we know, new discoveries may modify them, as it currently happens.

Recent research seems to indicate that the beginning of rock art on every continent goes back farther in time than was believed just a few years ago. In Africa, major concentrations of the earliest art horizons come from Tanzania and Namibia, both in mountainous, rather marginal areas of late Pleistocene human movements. Among the oldest art dated so far is that of the Apollo 11 cave in Namibia, where painted, sometimes polychrome, animal figures on stone slabs were found at archaeological levels defined by W.E. Wendt as «Middle Stone Age,» dated by three C-14 tests (not calibrated) to 28,400, 26,700 and 26,300 BP (Wendt, 1976). This indicates a real age of over 30,000 years. In Tanzania, the earliest rock art in the Kondo and Singida districts may be older. In one of the painted rock shelters, colouring materials with marks of utilisation were found in archaeological levels dated by C-14 to over 40,000 years BP. A sequence of different styles of Early Hunters' rock paintings are likely to have started earlier than any other rock art dated so far in Africa and may be well over 40,000 years old (cf. BCSP, vol. 21, 1984).

In northern Africa, the earliest dates to which rock art is presently attributed are much later than in southern Africa. Early Hunters' art from the Acacus range in Libya, according to F. Mori, are dated back to the late Pleistocene, before 12,000 BP (Mori, 1970; 1991). Similar stylistic assemblages are known from the Tassili n'Ajjer in Algeria and from the Ennedi in Chad. A climatic explanation is usually suggested for this late arrival of art-making people in northern Africa. A dry age appears to have characterised the final Pleistocene, from around 24,000 to 14,000 BP. This may have retarded the arrival of Homo sapiens groups.

A stimulating aspect of the comparative study of rock art is the determination of which man-made marks in the environment are identifiable as deliberate attempts at communication. Some graphic markings found in Europe have been attributed to the Mousterian period and are considered a «pre-figurative» stage attributed



to Neanderthal Man. This hypothesis is much debated, but should it prove to be correct, the earliest graphic markings in Europe would turn out to be older than 40,000 BP. So far, no figurative images have been demonstrated to exist at that stage in the area. Other early graphic signs are found in contexts that are dated between 40,000 and 35,000 years BP and seem to coincide with the first presence of Homo sapiens on the continent.

The beautiful polychrome paintings from the caves of Altamira and Lascaux were produced much later, in the Magdalenian period, after 20,000 BP. True to the trend of creating art in remote places, the major concentrations of Palaeolithic cave art in Europe are located in the «dead end» area that faces the Atlantic Ocean. In the Franco-Cantabrian region, in fact, man is likely to have moved about much less than in Eastern Europe, the Balkans, or the Mediterranean, where people reached Europe from Asia and where civilisations later flourished.

The Caucasus remains an open question. Several rock art sites in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan are related to pastoral and early agricultural group but only one major site is known at present of Early Hunters and Gatherers, that is Gobustan in Azerbaijan. A large number of rock shelters and small caves display a consistent sequence of styles of rock engravings. There are periods when the subject matter were animals, and others when the theme was the human figure, with preferred male or female subjects in different phases. Most of this sequence was sealed, in one cave, by archaeological layers over 11,000 years old. Early figurines of steatopigic females appear to belong to one of the earliest phases and are likely to go back to the early phases of the Upper Palaeolithic. The beginning of the Gobustan rock art is tentatively attributed to around 30,000 BP but it might be earlier (Gobustan, 2001)

In the Near East several attempts have been made to attribute art creativity to pre-sapiens beings. Two small objects used by hominids but not necessarily having artistic intents, have awakened some interest in the professional literature. An analogous question arises about the so-called Palaeolithic Sanctuary at Har Karkom in the Negev Desert. A group of flint boulders having vague anthropomorphic natural shapes have been brought together by human beings; one may ask if the choice of natural forms, which were organised in a kind of instalment, may be defined as art or not. The flint implements that are found in this site belong to the Karkomian culture, which is characterised by a flint industry showing Lervalloisian traditions of the late Middle Palaeolithic, along with blades which are currently considered as belonging to an early phase of the Upper Palaeolithic. It is believed to be a rather unique transitional phase and is tentatively dated between 40,000 and 30,000 years ago.

All that we know about rock art in the Middle East is considered to be much later. The large animal outlines in a style typical of the Early Hunters are known from the site of Kilwa, near the border between Jordan and Saudi Arabia, from Har Karkom in the Southern Negev, from one site in the Central Negev and from the site of Dahthami Wells in Central Arabia. In all these sites the kind of rock art is believed to belong to the end of the Pleistocene or to the very beginning of the Holocene.

In the Near East the earliest clues for dating are from Central Arabia (Dahthami Wells) and are likely to belong to the end of the Pleistocene, between 14,000 and 10,000 BC (Anati, 1970).

In Central Asia and the Far East, chronological data so far are more limited than elsewhere. Mobiliary art from Malta (Siberia) and other sites in the Baikal region of Central Siberia has been dated by C-14 (not calibrated) to ca. 34,800 BP (Abramova, BCSP 25-26 1990, p. 81). Using this element as a comparative support, A. P. Okladnikov has proposed a Pleistocene date for ancient rock art sites of similar styles in various parts of central Siberia. These datings are controversial, but Early Hunters' rock engravings are widespread in Siberia and some of them may well go back to the Pleistocene.

In India, in Madhya Pradesh, at Bhimbetka, and elsewhere, V. S. Wakankar detected a series of rock paintings from the Stone Age that he attributed to the Pleistocene. Decorated ostrich eggshells from the same region have been dated by C-14 to 25,000 BP. Several sites of Early Hunters' rock paintings are likely to belong to the Pleistocene. Much earlier dates recently proposed need to be verified. It is however unlikely that India, or any other region of the world, may have visual art before the arrival of Homo sapiens. Some attempts to demonstrate the contrary did not provide convincing results.

In Australia the concepts of distance and isolation are confirmed. Although man must have arrived to the continent from the north and populated that area before expanding southward, some of the earliest known rock art is found in the most far-flung regions of the south and west. In a dead end facing the Indian Ocean at Koonalda Cave, graphic markings have been dated by indirect C-14 to ca. 20,000 BP. Recent considerations propose dates older than 50,000 years for Northern Australian engravings by relying upon C-14 dating. Such dates are not impossible but remain controversial and need to be verified.

In the Americas, the earliest art dated so far comes from the southern continent where in the Piauí State,



Brazil, anthropic layers, connected with rock art and including fragments of painted rock surfaces, have been dated by C-14 to ca. 17,000 BP. Recently much earlier dates have been proposed for rock art in Brazil, but so far they do not seem to be reliable. In the far south of Argentina, at Rio Pinturas in the province of Santa Cruz, C-14 dating have again enabled researchers to locate early representational assemblages as far back as 12,000 BP. Nothing as early has been dated so far in northern and central America, although stylistically the Early Hunters' rock art assemblages in Baja California, Mexico, and in the western States of the United States, may well turn out to be of a comparable early date or earlier.

This brief summary of the earliest dates of rock art postulated so far in different continents indicates that the earliest known art may go back to dates between 40,000 and 50,000 BP in Africa, Asia, and Australia. In Europe the earliest dates fall between 35,000 and 40,000 years BP. In the Americas, the earliest available dates are about 17,000 BP, but we may consider it likely that art should have been introduced by early waves of human migration through the Bering straight as early as 33,000 years BP.

The recurrent ecological and social environments for early rock art, in desert or mountain regions and on the peripheries of densely populated areas, still demand an explanation. There is no doubt, however, that man arrived to these areas with the intellectual capacities for producing art, and developed his artistic vocation being these settings particularly suitable for artistic creation.

Early man apparently viewed art as an integral and essential part of his daily life. On every inhabited continent human groups painted and engraved rock art; indeed, in every part of the world, rock appears to have been among the most ancient and most enduring «canvases» used by man. The ephemeral arts of sand drawings and body paintings faded off quickly, collections of stones and assemblages of organic materials disappeared, and only shadows of these creations remain for us to imagine, from references to them in rock art itself or from distantly related artistic activities of the present. Visual art, and possibly music and dance, may have been invented by humans earlier than the inception of rock art. Indirect traces of music and dance in rock art depictions and remains of musical instruments leave tantalising suggestions as to the first material forms of artistic creativity.

Through the first attempts at expression and communication, the human mind demonstrated both its diversity and its consistency. Rock art constitutes by far the most important record we possess of human history before the invention of writing. It provides invaluable material for the study of human beings' cognitive development, as it represents a largely overlooked wealth of information about the origins of human expression. The diverse array of images, symbols, and marks that make up rock art are precious remains from humanity's early endeavours in communication. The continuing comparative study of prehistoric rock art will contribute to the understanding of the logical processes that underlie the genesis of art, writing, and modern communication.

Looking for logic

Universal factors

Our ancestor early sapiens was characterised by the neurological capacity of creating an ideology, whose basic matrix is still present at the core of modern man's conceptual cognition. This framework included a capacity for synthesis and abstraction which, among other things, led man to produce art and abstract thought, and to develop an articulate and complex language.

The hunting way of life provided subsistence for hominids for over two million years and left profound marks on the subsequent intellectual evolution of Homo sapiens. The fundamental human capacity of establishing mental associations and «logic» relations evolved throughout the ages in which the human species acquired its unique neurological make-up and parallel social concomitants. In fact, these millennia were characterised by hunting bands that shared activities and refined communication. This way of life reached a high level efficiency in the last 100,000 years with the diffusion of our direct forefather, Homo sapiens. He developed a high technological level and quite refined mental abilities and was capable of producing efficient implements.

In many cases, precise technical methods appear to have been used for painting, engraving, pecking, graffiti, or relief work. Certain rock art techniques are broadly repeated throughout the world, which do not seem to reflect processes of acculturation or diffusion. In some cases it seems to be simply the result of a given technological level or way of thinking or both. A few basic colours are used in rock paintings all over the world, red being by far the most common in all continents.

A thorough analysis of the essential elements of rock art on a world level is necessary to determine the universal factors and distinguish them from local factors. The adopted criteria must be globally accessible



and therefore suitably simple. Five elements have been taken into consideration: subject matter; types of associations, compositions, and scenes; stylistic trends; technical patterns; patterns of location.

Certain elements of style and content have been shown to be constant world wide, and five main categories of rock art with universal characteristics have been defined.

A. Archaic Hunters: The art of hunting populations who do not use the bow and arrow. Figures and signs are associated, but true descriptive scenes are practically absent. Animals are the main figurative subjects. These are often depicted in a realistic or naturalistic style. Anthropomorphic images are rare and usually have some zoomorphic feature.

B. Early Gatherers: The art of populations who rely primarily on a food collecting economy. They tend to represent vegetal food sources. Anthropomorphic images are common and often form surrealistic scenes or sequence of figures. Edible animal figures are much less frequent than in the art of hunters.

C. Evolved Hunters: The art of hunting populations who use the bow and arrow includes descriptive and anecdotal scenes, mainly describing hunting and social events.

D. Pastoralists/Animal Breeders: The art of populations whose main economic activity is rearing of livestock tends to focus on domestic animals and descriptions of daily life.

E. Complex Economy: The art of populations with diversified economies, including farming activities, is characterised by mythological scenes, representation of human-like divinities or spirits, and repetitive schematic groupings of signs.

These subdivisions are necessarily schematic. Transitional phases and groups with mixed characteristics do exist; within each category there are considerable variations. Nevertheless at the present state of research, and given the immensity of the material so far recorded, it is becoming necessary to create general lines of analysis on thematic and style that go beyond the limits of regional analyses. The methodology requires further elaboration, but even now it is producing results: a preliminary order has been established for several of the larger geographical groups. These groups include rich concentrations in Central Tanzania, Madhya Pradesh in India, Central Arabia, Valcamonica and the Alpine Area, the Negev and Sinai deserts, Seminole Canyon in Texas, and the Kimberley in Australia.

Widely-based criteria of thematic and typology have led to the identification of recurrent elements. These include the nature of associations and the presence of scenes; figurative, schematic and abstract styles; importance given to some wild or domestic animals; and the presence or absence of certain symbols that act as «fossil guides.» This has brought forth the hypothesis that universal reflections conditioned by way of life influence behaviour, thought, ideology, associative processes, and, consequently, artistic manifestations.

Grammar and syntax of art

For nearly all rock art there is a limited typological range of subjects. Constant throughout the five categories of rock art, three types of signs, grammatically different from each other, can be identified. These three types recur not only in rock art but also in mobiliary art. We have called them pictograms, ideograms, and psychograms:

Pictograms (and their variations of mythograms) are figures in which we may identify forms of real or imaginary objects, animal and human images. Four main themes cover most pictograms: anthropomorphic; zoomorphic; topographic and tectiforms; implements and weapons. Only rarely and only in specific contexts do other themes, such as vegetation, landscapes, or realistic portraits, occur.

Ideograms are synthetic signs and symbols such as tree-shapes, phallic and vulvar signs, discs, crosses, stars, or groups of dots and lines. Their repetitiveness in similar associations seems to have been understandable and symbolic of conventional concepts. Ideograms are signs that convey ideas in ancient writings and in many groups of rock paintings from painter to viewer, or from writer to reader. We have recognised three main types of ideograms: anatomic (such as vulvar signs, phallic signs, hand prints or footprints); conceptual (such as cross or disk); numerical (such as groups of dots, series of lines). These terms are invented and used for the benefit of present day research and communication needs; they do not necessarily imply the original significance of ideograms.

Psychogram is the third grammatical type of sign. It is not recognisable as, and does not seem to represent, either an object or a symbol. Sometimes they would seem to reflect a sudden flow of adrenaline. Psychograms can be strokes or violent outputs of energy that perhaps express sensations, exclamations, concerns, wishes, or even more subtle mental states. Psychograms are more abstract than symbolic ideograms; in fact they function like certain archetypal signs that our conscious memory is no longer able to define but which release associative and cognitive processes. Their meanings lies more in subconscious resonance than in



intellectual definitions, and as a result psychograms are most remarkable for their immediacy.

Preliminary studies in quantitative analysis shows drastic relative differences between numbers of pictograms, ideograms, and psychograms in different periods, world areas and cultural groups. In the Early Hunters' assemblages, an even balance between the three types of graphemes is more or less constant around the world, with almost equal proportions between pictograms and ideograms and the sporadic presence of psychograms. When scenes become the main type of syntactic association, psychograms tend to disappear. In the Evolved Hunters and in the Pastoral groups, there is usually a predominance of pictograms. In the Gatherers' groups, ideograms usually prevail, while in groups with complex economies, the possible variations have a larger range, from assemblages with a high majority of pictograms to assemblages with a high majority of ideograms. Throughout the range one can distinguish assemblages with or without psychograms.

Associated ideograms are often found next to or involved with pictograms. The figures and their associations have been studied and discussed by several scholars, and various theories have been suggested for their meanings (H. Breuil, 1952; A. Leroi-Gourhan, 1982; A. Lommel, 1970; G. G. Luquet, 1926; A. Marshack, 1972). Some general agreement exists on the fact that while pictograms are the subject, ideograms give sense to the message, like verbs or attributes. But the language of rock art, and more generally of prehistoric art, quite often is metaphoric, as is true of art and ideology in all times. Common patterns, types of association, repetition of subject matter, and use of similar ideograms reveal common denominators in the conceptual background of the early intellectual phases of *Homo sapiens*. This universal trend indicates the presence of a basic need for expression and for a common framework of typology and sequences.

The study of patterns in the grammar and syntax of prehistoric art needs a broad and well planned world documentation. It is particularly important that the documentation shows complete assemblages. Single figures like single words do not allow the interpretation of cognitive process.

Examples from historical paintings can demonstrate the differences and relationships between pictograms and ideograms. In the Annunciation scene by Renaissance painter Frà Angelico, it is not enough to say that a dove is depicted near a lady with a sort of halo around her head. With the knowledge of Christian symbolism and the cultural background of the artist, the dove takes on a metaphoric meaning. In order to understand that it represents the Holy Ghost, as the viewers were expected to do, awareness of Christian catechism is assumed. Similarly, the dove of Picasso is not merely a dove, but a pictogram combined with the ideogram, the olive branch, that we recognise as a symbol for peace only because we are initiated to the meaning of the image. In most religions, deities have their own ideograms, like the cross for the Christian religion. The meaning of the cross is acquired as a consequence of culture. Its Christian meaning could not be understood by a Batwa Pygmy, who knows nothing about Christianity.

Other examples could be cited, such as the eagle in Roman times. In a few thousand years *Homo supersapiens* may recognise the eagle even if it will be an extinct animal and may say: «Yes, the bird represented does seem to be an eagle» But what does this eagle mean? Sometimes, when the pictogram is accompanied by four ideograms that modern viewers read as SPQR, an idea of the figure's conceptual content may emerge as a sort of symbol of the Senate and the People of Rome.

Thus, the pictograms of the hunters frequently accompanied by their ideograms must have been clearly legible to anyone familiar with their conceptual content. Today there has been a breach in the direct tradition of depicting and deciphering. Because contemporary viewers are no longer able to make the immediate connection between ancient ideograms and their meanings, we rely on archaeologists to assemble the components and enable us to understand the content.

Most of the ideograms used for millennia by prehistoric groups are later found as characters in the first writings in various parts of the world: in China, the Near East and Central America. In the cases in which the meanings of the ideogram can be traced back to a single common core, a universal pattern is established. The world comparative analysis may lead research toward broader horizons. For the time being a few signs have been identified as having the same meaning in more than three different areas of the world. The rectangle, or square, means land, site or territory in most early scripts as well as in many examples of rock art. Similarly, two or more wavy lines mean water or liquid; they may mean also fertility or plenty. The rayed disk means sun, light, or day; the non-rayed disk, in several cases, means sky or air. In some early ideographic scripts from different continents, and in rock art from mixed economy groups, the triangle with a point turned downward signifies the pubic triangle: female, sex, fertility, or birth. Many examples show that in the rock art of human groups with complex economies of Europe, the Near East, and North Africa, the dot near an anthropomorphic being is a verb of action, like «to do.» If it is near the foot of a person it may mean «to go» or «to walk;» near the penis or the vulva, «to have intercourse;» near a bow and arrow,



«to shoot;» near the head, «to think.» A similar significance of the «accompanying dot» seems to emerge from the rock engravings of the Helan Shan in northern China.

In the rock art of the Plain Indians, in New Mexico and Arizona, a line near the foot of a human figure is read as the direction of a trail. Similar lines appear to have the same significance in the rock engravings of later periods in the Near East. The problem presented to researchers now is to determine whether these symbols can be traced back to a common archetype. Even more tantalising is the idea that many more such simple signs, spread over pre-literate rock art around the world, may turn out to have similar meanings and to be the core of a pre-literate ideographic proto-writing. In fact the beginning of writing may be much earlier than believed so far.

Paradigms and sequences

In each one of categories of rock art mentioned above, comparative studies seem to demonstrate that paradigms exist that are repeated world wide. One of them is the choice of location – cave, shelter, or open air rock surface – and another one is the preferred degree of inclination of the surface. Every assemblage of rock art appears to reflect choices of the maker concerning the place, the inclination of support and the selection of the surface to decorate, according to recurring criteria. Usually one type of choice is prevailing over the others. It is therefore useful to establish a standard definition of typology that allows comparative studies.

The chosen surfaces have preferential characteristics of colour and form that seem to mean that the «support» (or background) has been taken into account by the artist.

Subjects represented in rock art indicate the range of interests expressed throughout the ages. It is significant that the quantitative proportion of the four main themes of pictograms mentioned above varies from period to period: anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, objects, and structures. In some contexts, the anthropomorphic beings are the overwhelming majority, while elsewhere they may be practically absent. The same is true of zoomorphic figures, topographic images, and representations of implements. In the rich sequence of Valcamonica (Italy), the relative percentage of the four themes varies drastically from period to period. The same is true for the sequence of the Seminole Canyon in Texas, for the Yenisei sequence in Siberia and for the Tassili sequence in Algerian Sahara. These differences in subject matter appear to have recurring rules world wide.

Sequences with certain constant features have emerged in the Sahara, Tanzania, the Nile Valley, the Near East, Madhya Pradesh in India, Russian Central Asia and elsewhere. The five categories already mentioned - Archaic Hunters, Early Gatherers, Evolved Hunters, Animal Breeders and Complex Economy groups - are usually present in the same chronological order. In Australia, however, no Pastoralist/Animal Breeders rock art has been found. The Australian sequence is mainly composed of the Archaic Hunters and of Early Gatherers, and in sporadic areas in the north, of Evolved Hunters. The Complex Economy category is represented in only a few recent cases, as a post-contact phenomenon. Northern Australia is one of the areas where remarkable typological differences exist, and have frequently been ignored, between art of hunting people mainly relying on animal proteins and art of food gatherers.

In South Africa the main rock art zones comprise a sequence with little evidence of Archaic Hunters; they appear farther north in Namibia, Zimbabwe and Tanzania. A few schematic incisions dated over 70,000 years at Blomhofs Cave are at the moment an isolated and problematic case. The greatest artistic activity of this zone, probably the richest in rock art thus far known in the world, is classified at present as the work of the Evolved Hunters starting from about 13,000 years ago. They maintained the same visual language with only minor modifications until the present century. Pastoralists/Animal Breeders and Complex Economy groups are also present. Rock art shows the existence of these Pastoralist and Early Farming populations while in most of the territory the Evolved Hunters' way of life persisted (J.D. Lewis-Williams, 1983).

In the rock art of all continents, landscapes and images of plants are extremely rare: either completely absent or indicative of some particular characteristic. The Tanzanian rock art sequence spans over 40,000 years and is considered one of the longest continuous sequence in the world, yet all the images representing the vegetal world are concentrated in one phase, tentatively dated to the end of the Pleistocene and the beginning of the Holocene (ca. 12,000-8,000 BC). During this period of «Archaic Hunters», we come upon a short parenthesis of a vegetarian culture whose economy was based on the gathering of fruits and berries. A wealth of vegetal representations are concentrated in this phase, while they are practically absent in all other periods. Zoomorphic and anthropomorphic images are depicted as monsters; humans have zoomorphic features and animals have anthropomorphic features. From the data at our disposal this appears to be a phase of gathering populations rather than hunting, in the midst of a Hunting and Gathering period



(E. Anati, 1986).

Analogous creative episodes occur elsewhere. In the Central Sahara the same type of rock art seems to reflect a population whose lifestyle depended largely on gathering and who quite probably made extensive usage of drugs. A similar phenomenon is recognised along the Pecos River and in the Seminole Canyon in Texas. In both cases this phase is chronologically located between the Archaic and the Evolved Hunters, although the absolute dating varies from one area to the other.

In Near Eastern deserts, rock art shows sporadic examples related to a Complex Economy, that is to say of Food Producers and Agriculturalists, most surprisingly evidenced by pictures of plough in the Negev Desert. This was a brief episode some 1750 years ago, during the Roman period when colonizers were subsidised by a central government. The stratigraphy of overlapping and superimposition shows that the artists both before and after were Pastoralists. In itself, the existence of a few drawings indicating a complex economy does not conclusively mean the beginning of a new era. Rock art indeed provides segments of history, although history is certainly not always as simple and linear as we would like it to be. The proposed WARA data base will help us in reconstructing human cultural adventures in different parts of the world. But in order to detect patterns, the basic data must be memorised and elaborated with criteria that will allow this kind of research.

Visual language

Patterns of the cognitive system

The use of a world data base for comparative analysis would provide far reaching results for the understanding of early human history. Some basic concepts about the functions of the cognitive system are already emerging. An overview of available data indicates the presence of world trends in the choice of the visual language. We have evidence that, in the absence of any possible cultural transfer between the populations in question, similar artistic outputs and visual patterns were produced. These commonalities cannot, therefore, have been the result of external influence or acculturation in all cases. We may thus hypothesise that a certain convergence exists in the creative expressions of humans. These paradigms bring us into contact with our own cognitive system and open the way to a fresh understanding of elementary associative processes.

The art of ancient Homo sapiens is the mirror of mind and spirit, and constitutes a precious record of man's conceptual and psychological matrix. In this art we are face-to-face with archetypes and paradigms that are typical of our species and that have been present deep within us for ages. Good quality information about rock art should become available and be understandable, comparable and debatable. It may become a resource for comparative culture, research and knowledge for everybody.

From an analysis of the typology of figures and signs, patterns emerge which constitute the «grammar» of rock art, as if the images were words in sentences. Isolated marks are extremely rare, as isolated words are rare in written texts. In rock art groups of images reflect systems of associations that we might refer to as syntax. They are sentences composed of groupings or sequences of graphemes, like in today's spoken and written languages. The constant associations go even beyond the limits of linguistics. Essentially, through rock art we may come to recognise some of the fundamental elements of man's cognitive dynamics. It seems that there are no isolated figures and that a fundamental aspect of the documentation consists in defining the context and outline logic associations. The base for the analysis is the assemblage of graphemes that were made together.

A comprehensive viewing of rock art is not always an easy task because superimposition, composite associations and cognitive accumulation have come about in the course of time. Sometimes the process is extremely complex and the accumulation processes require professional analysis. Looking at a panel we may find that there were only three figures originally, two animals, one in front of the other, and an accompanying ideogram; after some generations another figure was added; then two thousand years later another four marks were made. The primordial association should be singled out, the repetitive elements verified, and analogies and comparisons studied in order to evaluate whether the superimposition is fortuitous or intentional. Usually the artist was conscious of the previous figures he was overlapping.

In many instances accumulations of marks appear to be intentional even if they were executed in different periods. Others appear not to be intentional or at least are unrecognisable to us as such. In both cases, however, we frequently discover that a kind of language is expressed by these signs. Sometimes previous graphemes may have been considered as part of the support, like the natural shapes of the rock. These may have been used or not in the association of graphemes of the superimposed depictions. In various contexts around the world and in different types of social and economic setting, the accumulation of graphemes



appears to be connected to the mental process of associations.

Artists—hunters, gatherers, or otherwise—made precise choices in terms of the themes they chose to represent. In Europe, Asia, Africa, the Americas, and Australia a similar range of figures may be found represented in rock art, while certain aspects of the environment, economy and social life consistently do not enter into the artist's thematic range.

In various parts of the world, extremely schematic groups of paintings and engravings may initially seem to have no representational meaning. Upon closer study, however, marks with numerical value, repetitive associations of dots and lines, and network motifs actually show that they follow conceptual rules. In Europe, various groups of Mesolithic art, the La Cocina type in Spain, Azilian art in France, Magelmoisian art in Germany and Scandinavia, and the Romanellian art in Italy, are very close to assemblages encountered in Turkey and the Near East, North Africa, Malawi and Zambia in Southern Africa, along the Murray river in Southern Australia, and in various Polynesian Islands. The dating of these similar graphic expressions may be thousands of years apart from each other.

These groups produced either mobiliary art or rock art, or both. Many of these groups have two main recurrent features: specific associations of lines and dots that are repeated using similar associative syntaxes in various parts of the world, and constant proximity to escargotières or shell mounds. Thanks to comparative analysis, it was possible to determine a common denominator in similar graphic assemblages from different parts of the world at different periods. These are sites where human groups camped and where heaps of shells and other molluscs remains are found, revealing an economy based on the collection of river or marsh food.

Thus, significantly, it appears that a specific graphic style reflects a way of life with more or less uniform consistency, at different ages in various parts of the world. We tend to find this type of art by rivers, lakes, marshes, and the seashore. It would appear to reflect a gathering mentality rather than a hunting mentality, centred on gathering molluscs as a means of survival. Such activity seems to have aroused a particular interest in arithmetic and a tendency to schematise, in contrast to the spirit of observing large animals in great detail that appears in most Archaic Hunting populations.

Another example of themes of preference can be found in the art of hunting populations, to which life-size or larger representations of animals are almost exclusive. Among pastoralists, large size animal images are found only in certain zones that are now deserts, especially in Arabia and the Sahara where breeders practised hunting as well. Large animal representations are extremely rare in the rock art of Early Collectors and of Complex Economy populations. On the other hand, in other phases of both Archaic and Evolved Hunters' art, medium-sized or even miniature animal representations are found. An interesting phenomenon has been noted both in Africa and in Australia: when large animals are prevalent, human figures are rare, and when the animals are smaller the percentage of anthropomorphic figures is usually higher.

In all complexes primary and secondary subjects are usually found: an initial dominant choice and minor, complementary themes. There are repetitive elements, ideograms and pictograms, which appear to accompany the dominant figures. It is frequently stated that the animal is the most commonly represented figure in European Palaeolithic art and that throughout the world animals are the main feature of Archaic Hunters' art. Contrary to what is normally believed, however, isolated animal figures practically do not exist; animals are almost always accompanied by ideograms. Frequently animals occupy the largest space on the painted surface simply due to their size, but ideograms vary in number and usually exceed the number of animal figures with which they are associated.

Animals, like other figures in both prehistoric and tribal art, often appear to have a totemic meaning as a metaphoric representation of tribal groups or of individuals. They also may represent qualities or attributes. A group of American Indians made image-based references to their chief Black Bison by depicting with charcoal black the animal of his name rather than his profile; others used to indicate a liar by representing a snake with a forked tongue. In modern language qualities and attributes are represented by animals: a man may be referred to as a pig, shark, monkey, snake, or chicken, or a woman might be identified as a gazelle, cat, bird, bitch, or rat.

Myths all over the world have always included animals: the deer as messenger from the underworld and the dove as messenger from the sky, the scorpion as source of evil and the snake as a tempter have been represented in Europe for centuries. The frog as a symbol of courage in China, or the elk as a symbol of plenty in Siberia, are symbols likely to go back to prehistoric origins. Such metaphors are used by people from different regions, diverse cultures and varying languages all over the world. They likely represent primordial trends of associative processes.

As was already brought to evidence by A. Laming (1962) and A. Leroi-Gourhan (1965), in the Upper



Palaeolithic cave art of Western Europe animal figures of different species are often associated with each other. Two animal species, the bison and the horse, are represented together, usually one in front of the other, as a main theme much more frequently than groupings of other wild animals. The repetition of this pattern would seem to imply something quite specific in the language of visual associations. In the Gobustan area of Azerbaijan, the rock engravings of Archaic Hunters display the horse and the ox facing each other in the same way.

In Tanzania, Archaic Hunters' art contains representations of the elephant and the giraffe that play roles similar to those of the horse and the bison in Western Europe, and the horse and the ox in Azerbaijan, in terms of associations and frequency of representation compared to other animals. That is, they are frequently associated with each other and are by far the most commonly represented animals (E. Anati 1986). Quite probably they played the same role within the conceptuality of the Tanzanian Archaic Hunters, as the horse and the bison did in the Franco-Cantabrian mentality in western Europe and the horse and ox did in Azerbaijan. Comparative analysis provides here the premises for yet another paradigm: in the art of hunters the presence of paired dominant animal species shows significant dialectic relationships.

With regard to the meaning of such associations A. Laming and A. Leroi-Gourhan proposed a possible connection between the concept of male-female interplay, with one of the animals representing the man or male attributes and the other, the woman or female attributes. Another hypothesis interpreted the animal figures as totemic images representing clans or tribes. Their associations might have assumed, in such case, the role of commemoration of pacts of agreement or of expressions of antagonism. While other theories have been proposed, no final conclusions have been reached. It is not unlikely that the pairings reflect metaphors of binary relations. Whatever the specific significance, there can be little doubt that the European association of horse/bison shows grammatical and syntactic parallels to the African association of elephant/giraffe, and therefore it is possible that they also reflect conceptual analogies.

From these examples we may gather the idea of how a world archive can help in comparative analysis. Such paradigms seem to reveal the existence of «logic constants,» a detailed analysis of which on a world scale could lead to advanced research in cognitive patterns. It is particularly relevant to develop a systematic analysis that defines the type of relationship between one grapheme and another - associations, compositions and scenes - in any given context in order to provide indications on the way of thinking and conceptual dynamics reflected by the associations.

In the art of the Evolved Hunters, scenes showing hunting, dancing, other social events, or warfare are common. In the art of the Archaic Hunters, on the other hand, real descriptive scenes do not seem to appear, either in Europe or elsewhere. Associations in sequence do exist in Archaic Hunters' art, however, and they may represent «metaphoric scenes.» Their conceptual structure is, in any case, the mirror of a mental process, which was modified with the development of technological abilities. The art of hunters using the bow and arrow usually has a different syntactical structure than that of hunters that do not use the bow and arrow. This intriguing psychological phenomenon holds true for rock art on all continents.

Conclusions

Through the ancient expressions of the human mind, recorded on rock surface, a wide range of submerged memories come back to consciousness, reviving stored chapters of our intellectual heritage. The historical relevance of rock art is monumental; as a sort of pictographic writing, it constitutes humanity's largest and most significant archive of a 50,000 year-old history, up until the advent of conventional modern writing. Almost daily new discoveries keep adding to the prehistoric record.

Food, sex and territory appear to have been, in all contexts at all times, the main concerns of the human species and the concerns most frequently expressed in rock art (E. Anati, 1992). A series of elements in the comparative study of rock art is being set out.

The clearest evidence for the presence of universal paradigms lies in the ideograms, which are found as constants throughout the world. Vulvar, phallic, cruciform, stick-like, eye-like ideograms, cup and ring marks, hand prints, foot prints and animal tracks are being found in the rock art of all continents.

The art of the Archaic Hunters appears to have broad universal characteristics in terms of the subject matter, associations, and stylistic trends. The art of gatherers is mainly found in some limited areas and in specific time-range around the world, and reflects universal patterns. The art of the Evolved Hunters has many more local features and local stylistic characters. The real Babel Tower comes into being when the hunting and gathering way of life is replaced by that of food production. As we know, this happened at various dates around the world and in different cultures. In parts of the Near East, domestication of nature and complex economies developed 10,000 years ago, and in some corners of the world this same innovation is occurring



as late as this century.

Art, like most other aspects of culture, became increasingly provincial and more conditioned by surrounding influences with the development of sedentary societies. On the whole, however, many common denominators persisted. The most obvious commonality is the very fact of producing rock art. Beyond that, as we have seen, are analogous typologies, subject choices, types of associations, constant uses of certain colours, and repeated preference for certain kinds of rock surfaces. In addition to these basic elements, details, embellishments, and the different stylistic approaches are used by varying local traditions.

Hominids had been evolving for 4 million years, but art only appeared with *Homo sapiens* and proved to be an exquisitely human expression. The «creation» of art was a revolution. The emergence of our identity as *Homo sapiens* presupposes the acquisition of a set of specialised functions and particular attributes, of being able to see, hear, and feel with a lucidity quite specific to the species *sapiens*. Such abilities imply the same capacities of synthesis and abstraction, which led to graphic communication, which eventually emerged as writing.

The visual language of early hunters is a universal language since, quite apart from systems of representation and styles that are often very similar in different parts of the world, it also displays combinations of figures and symbols that derive from the same logic, suggesting a similar way of thinking and of self-expression on a world scale. The careful study of this art, and the global phenomenon of rock art as a whole, reveal the early conceptual processes of the human mind. The ancient imagery of rock art shares with modern humanity the visions of our ancestors.

Why did humans have the need to record their own thoughts and emotive stimulation? No doubt this is part of the nature of *Homo sapiens*, like socialisation, the sense of aesthetic, love, ambition, and solidarity. Was early man conscious of the fact that by so doing he was preserving an immense heritage for future generation? Was he aware of his enormous bequest to the story of mankind? Probably not.

A world inventory of rock art will be a major contribution to world cultural heritage, and may become a major source of research for scholars of many disciplines, from sociologists to psychologist, from art historians to philosophers. It would also become a source of inspiration for aesthetics, graphics, fashion and many other fields. But beyond all that it would be a major resource for a comprehensive, evidence-based, reliable and inspiring history of mankind.

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Archeologia Rupestre nelle Alpi occidentali e piemontesi: novità e stato della ricerca

Andrea ARCÀ

Premessa - La ricerca

La capacità di comprendere in maniera appropriata i reperti di archeologia rupestre è strettamente legata alla qualità ed alla quantità di informazioni disponibili. Nell'ultimo trentennio del XX secolo si è assistito in territorio piemontese alla scoperta di nuove zone istoriate e ad una serie di campagne di ricerca che hanno permesso l'allargamento delle conoscenze e l'applicazione di opportune metodologie di indagine. Una veloce panoramica individua in aree quali la valle dell'Albedosa, la valle Po, la val Pellice, la valle di Susa, la Bessa, la val Cenischia e la val Vigizzo le zone in cui si sono avuti nuovi rinvenimenti o nuove campagne di documentazione. Fra gli altri, il volume "Immagini dalla Preistoria", pubblicato nel 1995 in occasione della XXXVII riunione scientifica del I.I.P.P I, ha presentato un panorama aggiornato della situazione. Primario impulso agli studi è stato dato dalla Soprintendenza Archeologica del Piemonte, che ha promosso in prima persona campagne di ricerca in vari complessi di incisioni e pitture rupestri. Tali impulso si è giovato di una situazione attiva sul territorio, dove da tempo operano ricercatori ed enti interessati a completare nel miglior modo possibile il quadro delle conoscenze. Notevole l'intervento di Associazioni di ricerca, fra i quali vanno citati il Gruppo Ricerche Cultura Montana Montana di Torino (GRCM), dal 1976 operativo in Valsusa (catalogo delle incisioni rupestri della Bassa Valle di Susa, La Pietra e il Segno 1990) e in Piemonte, che ha condotto attività di ricerca ed esperienze didattiche con il patrocinio della Regione Piemonte e del Comune di Torino; il Museo Civico di Cuneo, che mantiene contatti di ricerca con l'area del Monte Bego e promuove la documentazione nelle valli cuneesi, e infine il Centro Studi e Museo di Arte Preistorica di Pinerolo, che ha organizzato l'importante convegno mondiale dell'IFRAO nel 1995 e che promuove pubblicazioni specifiche del settore.

Attiva a livello documentazione professionale è la cooperativa Archeologica Le Orme dell'Uomo (<http://www.rupestre.net>), con base in Valcamonica e specializzata in archeologia rupestre, che ha compiuto varie campagne nel territorio piemontese (Valle dell'Albedosa, Valle Po, Valsusa, Valcenischia, Val Vigizzo). In questo modo le Alpi piemontesi (e le Alpi occidentali in generale con l'importante materiale del versante francese, Parco Archeologico di Aussois in particolare) presentano una situazione ricca di elementi cronologici e stilistici peculiari, quali le pitture rupestri neolitiche di stile schematico (il punto più orientale di un'area mediterranea che comprende la penisola iberica e la Provenza) o le figure di armi e di armati dell'età del Ferro (le composizioni di asce della fine dell'età del Ferro di Mompantero sono le uniche al di fuori della Valcamonica), di notevole valore archeologico, nonché una situazione di ricerca attiva, alla quale contribuiscono oltre agli enti citati numerosi ricercatori singoli, tra i quali una personale citazione va a Livio Mano del Museo civico di Cuneo e ad Alberto Santacroce di Torino.

Sequenza cronologica – Il Neolitico

Pur escludendo l'area del Monte Bego, la cui consistenza ne consiglia un trattamento separato, un esame particolareggiato dell'area alpina occidentale è in grado di dimostrare l'ampia escursione cronologica del materiale iconografico rupestre. Le fasi più antiche sono rappresentate dalle pitture; la chiara rassomiglianza con l'arte schematica iberica e della Provenza suggerisce un'attribuzione neo-eneolitica, confermata dai confronti con pitture di Les Oullas (Ubaye, F) sottoposte a pugnali di tipo remedelliano. In territorio piemontese due sono i siti principali: il riparo della Rocca di Cavour e quello della Balma 'd Mondon in Val Pellice. In entrambi i siti è stata aggiornata la documentazione. Le pitture della Rocca di Cavour sono state scoperte nel 1979 da F. Zavattaro. Sono state studiate dal CeSMAP (che ha compiuto, in particolare tramite M. Cinquetti, opera di survey e di scavo archeologico) e più recentemente da F. M. Gambari, che ne ha evidenziato la proposta cronologia. Nel 1997 su incarico della Soprintendenza



Archeologica è stato eseguito un nuovo rilievo da parte delle Orme dell'Uomo, sulla base delle foto originali fatte all'atto della scoperta (la superficie era stata in seguito danneggiata da un chiodo da roccia) trattate a esasperazione cromatica digitale. In seguito a tale trattamento è stata confermata la presenza di un segno a W rovesciata sulle "testa" della figura (forse antropomorfa) schematica e messe in luce le due appendici ziz-zaganti che da essa discendono. Si ipotizza un probabile rimescolamento cromatico delle figure ab antiquo, con la possibile presenza di almeno due fasi pittoriche, pur ravvicinate. Le pitture Val Pellice sono state scoperte nel 1992 da R. Rivoiro. Nel 2000 è stato realizzato dallo scrivente un rilievo fotografico vettoriale, utilizzando ancora una volta la tecnica dell'esasperazione cromatica (contrasto e sostituzione di colore), che ha chiaramente evidenziato accanto alle griglie la serie di figurine antropomorfe in fila, nonché le figure a spiga rovesciata.

Da rimarcare come in tutti i siti con pitture schematiche (oltre alle due già citate vanno aggiunti Ponte Raut, Bessans e St. Jean d'Arvey, nonché Essartènes nella vicina Provenza) siano presenti elementi (griglie, reticolati, rettangoli ed allineamenti di pallini) che fanno parte della serie delle figure topografiche, la cui cronologia neolitica-eneolitica (1° stile dell'arte rupestre camuna) è attestata dalle sovrapposizioni sia in Valcamonica che al Monte Bego.

Sequenza cronologica: l'età del Rame

Il sito di Les Oullas, nell'alta valle dell'Ubaye, presenta una lunga serie di pitture e incisioni rupestri che si sovrappongono quasi senza interruzione di continuità lungo un vastissimo arco di tempo, dal Neolitico all'epoca moderna. Presentato da A. Muller nel 1991 al colloquio di Tenda, è stato in seguito riesaminato nel 1994 dal Gruppo Ricerche Cultura Montana, che ha eseguito un rilievo più dettagliato (esposto al Museo di Antichità di Torino) e che ha messo in luce la cronologia Calcolitica dei pugnali incisi, chiaramente di tipo remedelliano (lama triangolare, spalla diritta e codolo semilunato). Ai pugnali si associa una grande figura antropomorfa con le braccia aperte, mentre ad essi si sottopone una pittura rossa schematica, che proprio grazie a tale sottoposizione può essere attribuita al Neolitico.

In territorio piemontese vi sono due complessi incisi che presentano una concentrazione di figure antropomorfe schematiche: la Pera dij Cros in Valchiusella e la Roca la Casna al Monte Bracco. La prima è stata scoperta nel 1970 da R. Petitti, la seconda negli anni '80 da A. Cavallera. Nelle immediate vicinanze è presente ceramica del Bronzo Antico (M. Cinquetti, C. Davite). Entrambe sono state di recente rilevate e documentate da Le Orme dell'Uomo. Sulla Pera dij Cros sono presenti figure sia maschili che femminili. Anche sulla Roca La Casna, dove le figure sono molto consunte (in alcuni casi però reincise recentemente), vi sono figure femminili, con i seni resi con 2 pallini ai lati del busto. E' questo uno stile chiaramente preistorico, che si ritrova anche in alcune figure della Valgrana. La comparazione con gli antropomorfi schematici camuni suggerisce due possibilità cronologiche:

- 1) età del Rame, considerando la somiglianza con gli antropomorfi dello stile IIIA1 camuno (periodo remedelliano);
- 2) età del Bronzo Recente-Finale, considerando il parallelo con gli oranti a gambe a triangolo e braccia alzate della Valcamonica e della Valtellina (vedi Tabella riassuntiva delle figure antropomorfe schematiche dell'arco alpino occidentale).

Sequenza cronologica: l'età del Bronzo

L'elemento più caratteristico (e del tutto peculiare in tutto l'arco alpino, salvo isolati confronti con Sonico in Valcamonica e con Carschenna in Svizzera) è costituito dalle figure meandro-spiraliche, la cui distribuzione si concentra in Valsusa e in Alta Moriana. Si tratta di incisioni picchiettate che privilegiano le superfici esposte dei calcescisti (calcari filladici, rocce di debole metamorfismo con componenti silicee e calcitiche). Si tratta per lo più di meandri e spirali avviluppati, estesi fino quasi a voler riempire tutta la superficie disponibile.

In Italia il sito principale è Mompantero, scoperto dai coniugi Tonini di Susa alla fine degli anni '80, situato a 700-1000 m di quota sull'indritto del Rocciamelone. E' stato documentato, ancora su incarico della Soprintendenza Archeologica del Piemonte, nel 1994 e 1996 in due successive campagne da parte de Le Orme dell'Uomo. In Francia i siti sono più estesi (e le superfici incise più numerose): Aussois, Lanslebourg, Lanslevillard, con le incisioni che vanno dai 1400 ai 2400 m di quota. Tali figure e composizioni sono curiosamente identiche a quelle della lontana Isla La Palma (Canarie), che, vista la difficoltà nell'ipotizzare una qualche relazione culturale, ha come possibile unico punto in comune



l'economia pastorale montana.

La cronologia, visti i non molti riferimenti disponibili e lo schematismo dei segni, è problematica. Esistono però i termini ante quem: a Mompantero e ad Aussois le figure a spirale e a meandro sono sottoposte ad asce della fine dell'Età del Ferro. Sono possibili paragoni stilistici sia con l'arte megalitica (siti irlandesi di Knowth e Boyne valley - Neolitico), che con complessi camuni dell'età del Bronzo (Sonico) e del Ferro (Zurla). Ad Aussois i meandri sono connessi con figure topografiche dell'Età del Ferro. Si può quindi affermare una sicura preistoricità di tali segni, e propendere per una transizione II-I millennio a.C., età del Bronzo medio recente - prima età del Ferro, senza però escludere ipotesi più antiche, che potrebbero retrodatare l'intero complesso anche di duemila anni, cioè fino a cavallo tra il IV e il III millennio.

Sequenza cronologica: l'età del Ferro

Il sito più importante è sicuramente quello di Aussois, in Alta Moriana: scoperto negli anni '70, è stato studiato e pubblicato da F. Ballet e P. Raffaelli della Conservation Departementale du Patrimoine di Chambéry. Dal 2001 vi è stato istituito un Parco Archeologico, con pannelli illustrativi e pedane atte a facilitare salvaguardandole la visione ravvicinata delle superfici incise. Notevoli le scene di caccia e di duello dell'età del Ferro, particolarmente vicine a quelle camune in quanto a tematica. Nel versante italiano vanno citati i siti di Mompantero (Valsusa) e della Valcenischia, dal primo dei quali provengono tre pannelli recanti pitture rupestri dell'età del Ferro (scoperta Fossati - Arcà 1991), dove sono raffigurati guerrieri, arcieri e cavalieri acrobatici, alcuni dei quali mostrano corpo bitriangolare (confronti con lo stile geometrico e con la ceramica pseudo-ionica di La Pègue del VI-V sec. AC). Notevole la sequenza di 20 asce, sia a lama arcuata che a lama diritta, appartenenti alla tarda età del Ferro in base al confronto con le asce tipo Ornavasso (I AC - I DC). E' questa l'unica area al di fuori della Valcamonica a presentare un complesso di figure di asce dell'età del Ferro. Il sito della Valcenischia è stato scoperto nel 1993 dal Gruppo Ricerche Cultura Montana (G. M. Cametti, P. Meirano e A. Arcà) e documentato insieme a Le Orme dell'Uomo tramite l'esecuzione, di schede, rilievi e calchi, questi ultimi conservati presso il Museo Etnografico di Novalesa. Peculiari le figure di guerrieri a corpo quadrato, chiaramente assimilabili a quelli dell'ultimo stile dell'età del Ferro della Valcamonica (periodo romano). Le figure di armati di spada sembrano quasi proporre un qualche collegamento con la danza armata degli Spadonari che ogni anno a fine inverno si svolge nei sottostanti paesi di Venaus e Giaglione. Sempre pertinente all'età del Ferro è la Roccia degli Stambecchi in alta Moriana (area del Moncenisio), scoperta nel 1989 dal Gruppo Ricerche Cultura Montana (G. M. Cametti, P. Meirano e A. Arcà) e in seguito rilevata dagli stessi scopritori. Ad una scena di caccia allo stambecco (cacciatori, cani e stambecchi) della media età del Ferro si sovrappone un'iscrizione latina del I sec. DC, probabilmente lasciata da un ufficiale romano incaricato di riscuotere la Quadragesima Galliarum al Moncenisio. Nell'iscrizione si descrive Lucius Mettius (forse il superiore di colui che lasciò il graffito) in atteggiamento sconveniente con gli animali raffigurati (qui amat platinum). Sembra essere l'iscrizione latina più alta di quota di tutte le Alpi (2,350 m).

Didattica e Internet

Il Gruppo Ricerche Cultura Montana e lo scrivente si sono impegnati negli ultimi anni a portare avanti un'attività didattica di promozione dell'archeologia rupestre. Scuole elementari e medie inferiori sono state impegnate nei progetti patrocinati dalla Città di Torino e dalla Regione Piemonte e dalla Provincia di Torino. Si è trattato di esperienze di documentazione archeologica (schedatura e fotografia di siti di arte rupestre, in particolare di rocce coppellate), interpretativa (motivazione e significato delle incisioni) e ambientale che hanno riguardato le aree della collina morenica di Rivoli, del Musiné e della Val Vigizzo. Tutto il materiale elaborato è consultabile on-line all'indirizzo <http://www.webscuola.net> (sezione archeologica). Da rimarcare la potenzialità documentativa offerta dalle reti informatiche, in particolare da Internet, dove un significativo gruppo di petroglifi piemontesi sono inseriti in database online liberamente consultabili, quali quelli del progetto EuroPreArt (progetto Comunità Europea, Programma Education and Culture 2000, <http://www.europreart.net>) e del progetto ARchivio online (patrocinio Regione Piemonte, <http://www.rupestre.net/archiv>), quest'ultimo realizzato dal Gruppo Ricerche Cultura Montana per presentare alcuni aspetti della cultura alpina, compresa l'arte rupestre.

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Didascalie

Fig. 1. Rocca di Cavour, esasperazione cromatica digitale (su foto originale Zavattaro)

Fig. 2. Rocca di Cavour, rilievo Soprintendenza Archeologica del Piemonte – Orme dell'Uomo

Fig. 3. Balma 'd Mondon, il riparo sottoroccia (foto A. Arcà, Orme dell'Uomo)

Fig. 4. Balma 'd Mondon, rilievo fotografico (foto e rilievo A. Arcà, Orme dell'Uomo)

Fig. 5. Les Oullas, pittura rupestre sottoposta a pugnali di tipo remedeliano (foto e rilievo Gruppo Ricerche Cultura Montana)

Fig. 6. Pera dij Cros, figure antropomorfe schematiche femminili (foto A. Arcà – Orme dell'Uomo)

Fig. 7. Tavola delle figure Antropomorfe Schematiche dell'Arco Alpino Occidentale

Fig. 8. Mompantero, meandriiformi (foto A. Arcà – Orme dell'Uomo)

Fig. 9. Confronto tra figure meandriiformi della Valle di Susa e dell'Alta Moriana (foto A. Arcà – Orme dell'Uomo)

Fig. 10. Figure meandriiformi sottoposte a palette della prima età del Ferro (Sonico, Valcamonica, rilievo A. Priuli) e associate a figure animali dell'età del Ferro (Zurla, Valcamonica)

Fig. 11. Aussois, scena di caccia allo stambecco (foto A. Arcà – Orme dell'Uomo)

Fig. 12. Parco di Aussois, pannello esplicativo nel percorso Archeologico (foto A. Arcà – Orme dell'Uomo)

Fig. 13. Mompantero, pitture rupestri della media età del Ferro (foto e rilievi Orme dell'Uomo – Soprintendenza Archeologica del Piemonte)

Fig. 14. Mompantero, tabella sinottica delle figure di asce della fine dell'età del Ferro (foto e rilievi Orme dell'Uomo – Soprintendenza Archeologica del Piemonte)

Fig. 15. Confronto fra le figure di asce con lama semilunata della Valcamonica e le asce di Ornavasso

Fig. 16. Confronto tra il guerriero a corpo quadrato della Valcenischia e l'analoga figura della fine dell'età del Ferro di Paspardo in Valcamonica (foto A. Arcà – Orme dell'Uomo)

Fig. 17. Zona del Moncenisio, la Roccia degli Stambecchi (rilievo GRCM, con interpretazione epigrafica G. Mennella)

Fig. 18. Archivio Online, www.rupestre.net/archiv , database online di arte rupestre piemontese a cura del GRCM





Fig. 1



Fig. 2

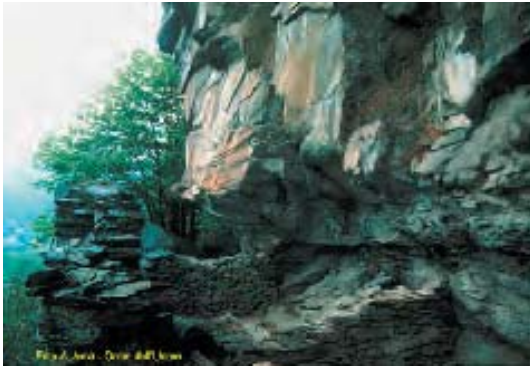


Fig. 3

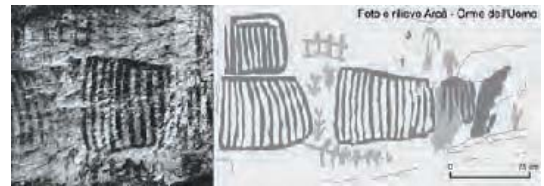


Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



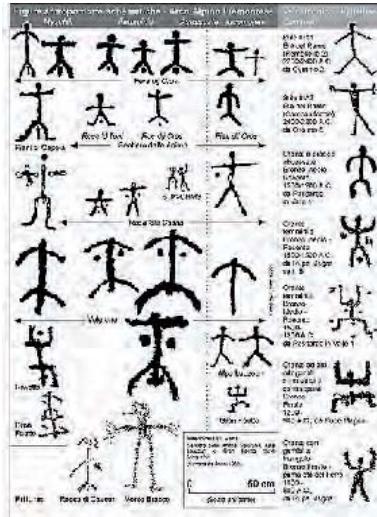


Fig. 7

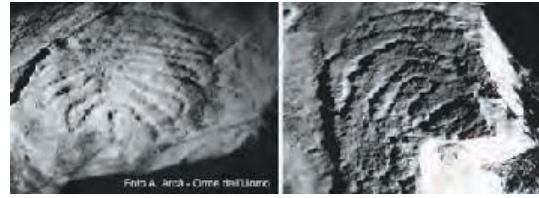


Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



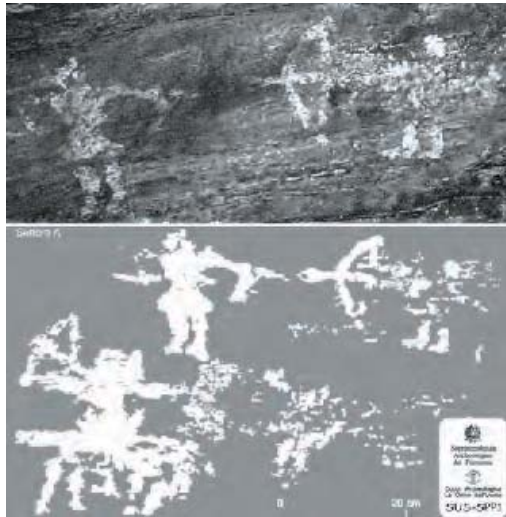


Fig. 13



Fig. 14

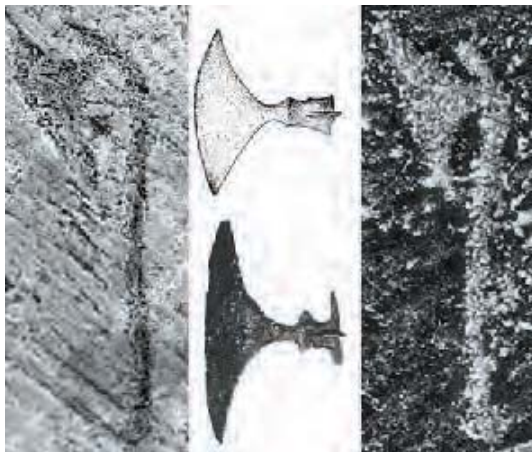


Fig. 15

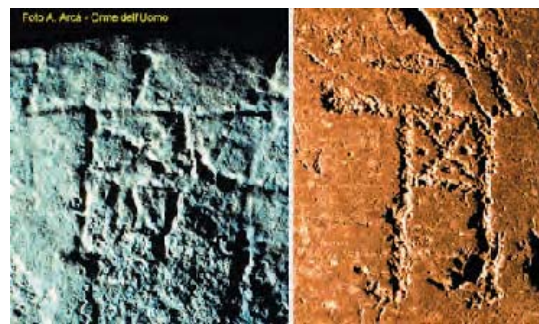


Fig. 16

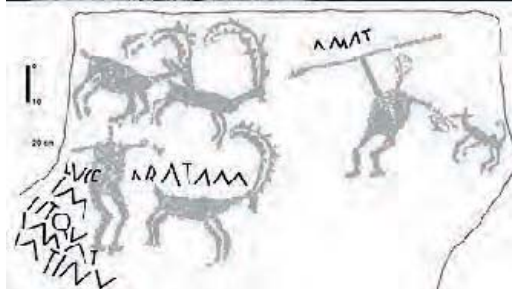


Fig. 17

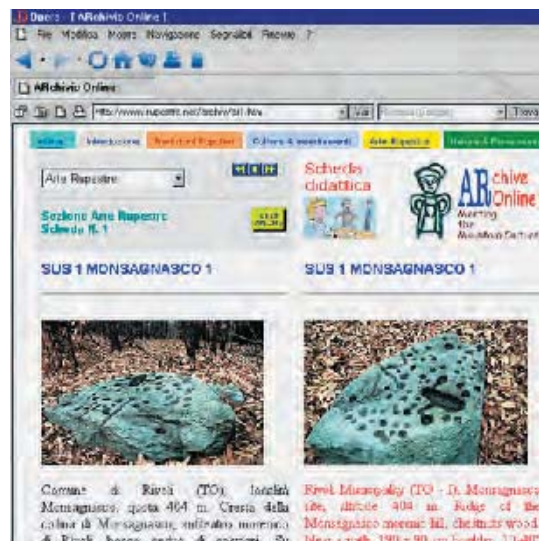


Fig. 18

