

# C3

## *MENS SIMBOLICA* (SYMBOLIC MIND): QUESTIONS ON THE MYTHIC-SYMBOLIC PROCESS, FROM PREHISTORY TO THE PRESENT DAY

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The Session focuses on the symbolic investigation in the frame of the prehistoric and ethnographic aspects of rock art. There will be contributions both on the universal subjects, defined as archetypes, paying attention to the widespread iconographic convergences, and on the individual cultures with derived diffusion phenomena.

In line with several similar circumstances, the approach will be interdisciplinary: based on the archaeological evidence, comparisons will be presented with historical-religious, ethnographic, psychoanalytic and, in general, anthropological and phenomenological perspective.

## The Sword in the Ripple. Water, Weapons, and Warriors

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**Keywords:** warriors, weapons, swords, snakes, water, Beowulf

What was the experience like for the first humans to ever wield a sword? The Chanson de Guillaume recounts the story of Rainouart, a gigantic human being who, after breaking his wooden mace, marvels at his sword's perfection.

In addition to archaeological evidence, swords' exquisite features are detailed in Anglo-Saxon epic poetry and chansons de geste, telling of intertwined metal strips and serpentine designs. Thus snakes become symbols of swords' venomous killing power. In Valcamonica (Italy), certain rock engravings portray men with swords, together with snakes. These warriors are escorted to the afterlife by wild waterfowl that act like psychopomps, sometimes even being depicted as the burial boat protomes themselves. Swords have even been found in swamp burial sites. In literature, Beowulf tells of Scyld's magnificent burial boat upon which his swords are to pass over into the realms of the dead with him. Water and swords are the main features of the mortal duel between Grendel's mother and Beowulf. In a battle beneath the surface of a lake, the hero grasps a supernatural sword and does the deed. This otherworldly, underwater sword that belongs to a predestined hero recalls King Arthur's Excalibur protected by the Lady of the Lake.



Fig.1 - Campanine r.62, Riserva naturale incisioni rupestri di Ceto, Cimbergo e Paspardo. (photo Dip. VC CCSP)  
Fig.2 - Seradina I r.12c, Capo di Ponte. (photo CCSP)

## From landscape to mindscape: Valcamonica rock art as a dynamic entity of cultural expression

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**Keywords:** landscape, mindscape, rock morphology, imitation, inspiration

Rock art is a form of human-driven landscape change, with multiple levels of impact; however, the natural context (from the macro to the micro scale) has always played a fundamental role on human behavioural patterns, as seen from archaeological investigations.

This contribution focuses on the interaction between rock art in Valcamonica and the surrounding landscape in a diachronic perspective, by investigating the iconographic syntax in relation to the morphology of the rock surfaces and considering the role of inspiration and imitation in the figurative choices of human groups and individuals from proto-historic times to the present day.

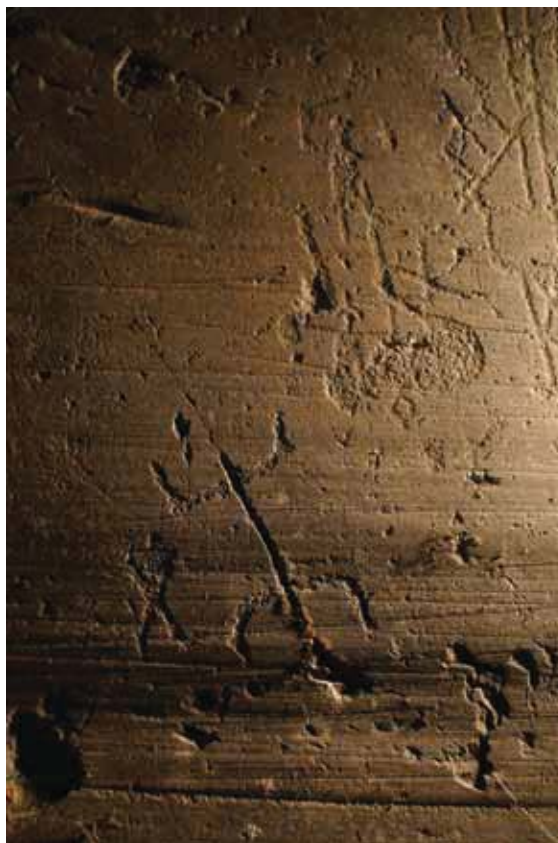
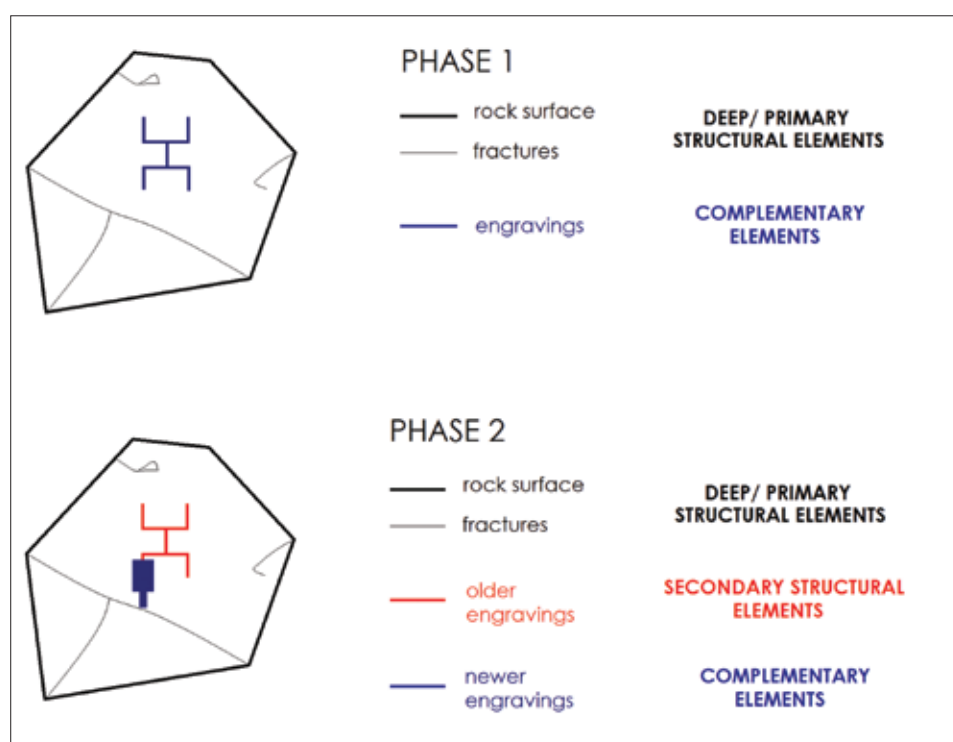


Fig. 1 - Campanine r. 50 B, Riserva naturale incisioni rupestri di Ceto, Cimbergo e Paspardo. (photo Dip. VC CCSP)

Fig. 2 - Exemplification of the relationship between structural elements and rock engravings in a diachronic perspective.



## The compulsion to repeat in prehistoric cults of the dead

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**Keywords:** secondary burial,  
cult of the dead, shamanic  
practices

Burial consists of putting a corpse in a pit dug into the ground, which is the most widespread practice and one of the oldest. During the Upper Palaeolithic, there is abundant documentation of the cult of the dead, with tombs dug into the ground where the corpse, generally supine, was accompanied by funerary trappings. Secondary burial (inhumation preceded by a first deposition or exposure, until the body decayed) was common during the Neolithic, but certainly preceded by shamanic practices of a much earlier age, presumably of Neanderthal origin. Moreover, many traces of exhumation and subsequent manipulation of mortal remains have been found, above all, of skulls and other bones.

The author assumes that these repeated series of shamanic or religious practices are connected with repetition processes of compulsion indispensable for the act of mourning, as is also evidenced by the associated repetitive symbology in some rock art. This behaviour would have its roots in animal phylogeny, where, in many species (e.g., elephants) the group would return after a few days to “revisit” the dead after having first covered the body with grass and branches.

## Composite creatures of the Upper Palaeolithic: an animated metamorphosis of the imaginary?

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**Keywords:** prehistory, prehistoric art, prehistoric archaeology

Fig.1 - "The panel of women - bison", Magdalenian, Pech-Merle Cave, Lot, France. (photo Gabriella Brusa-Zappellini)

Fig.2 - Hanging Rock of the Venus, Aurignacian, Chauvet-Pont-d'Arc Cave, Ardèche, France. (grafical representation Gabriella Brusa-Zappellini)

In the Upper Palaeolithic, the representation of movement has been a recurrent kinetic strategy. Recent studies in the French area have highlighted a large number of zoomorphic figures, animated through specific graphic conventions, that not only tend to reflect specific attitudes and behavioural postures which can be observed on an ethological level, but also extend their influence to the sequential output of "in action" processes. These analyses are anchored to a "pre-iconographic" approach that – by identifying the narrative pattern of a non-mythological character in the parietal apparatus, but of an ethological one instead – is significantly contributing to the development of prehistoric research. To overstep this level is certainly a risk. If the ethnographic comparative method can be a valid interpretative tool, it is extremely fragile if compared to the stronger ethological analysis. Taking the necessary precautions, this paper intends to suggest an "iconographic-iconological" path. Is it possible to extend the hypothesis of "simultaneous animation" to some therianthrope figures? Numerous hypotheses have been made about the meaning of "hybrid" creatures. In very rare cases, it may concern the graphic representation of the different phases of a transformational process. Could it be a strategy of the imaginary that "life forms" of decorated caves identify the origin of the eternal regeneration of life?



## Jebel Ideid, Har Karkom: the mount of multitudes - the holy paths

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**Keywords:** Chalcolithic,  
Bronze Age, holy paths, rock  
art, pilgrimage

Har Karkom has proved to be dense with proofs of presence over time, in contrast with its current desert condition. Its Arab denomination means “Mount of celebrations”, which accounts for its role in the religious beliefs of prehistory. During late Chalcolithic and Early Bronze age (BAC), the human activity in the area was favoured by a much more humid climate than at present, which enabled livelihood activities such as hunting, livestock breeding, and cultivation.

Worship sites, funerary tumuli, altars and geoglyphs on the plateau date to the BAC period, as do dwelling sites in the surrounding valleys and a great quantity of over 40,000 rock engravings spread out over the northern half of the plateau.

The author and his team investigated paths climbing to the plateau, so adding new elements to an extensive corpus of data. Cult structures and rock art, mostly belonging to the BAC period, characterise three paths that ascend the mountain: two to the northwest and northeast, the other to the southeast. These “holy paths” were likely routes of pilgrimage to the mountain top and further support the holiness of the mountain during the period under consideration.



Fig.1 - Har Karkom (Negev). (photo S. Castelletti)

Fig.2 - Har Karkom (Negev). (photo S. Castelletti)

## **Cultural context and significance of Eastern Polynesia and Easter Island's rock art**

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**Keywords:** Eastern Polynesia,  
Rapa Nui, petroglyphs,  
archeology, iconography,  
cognition, cultural change

Rock art (pictographs and petroglyphs) are amongst one of the most numerous archaeological features recorded throughout the archaeological landscape of countless Polynesian islands. They are the residue, often extremely fragmentary, of human activity. In turn, as a cultural object, they are the material expression of a concurrent series of alternative actions, and these choices are the reflection of patterned behavior. The purpose of this study is thus the reflection of activity that we suppose recoverable and intelligible. We discuss the iconographic analysis (Leroi-Gourhan, 1975, Echo, 1978, 1985) of a sample of rock art, in its archaeological context, critical in its structural interpretation, which offers significant correlations with patterns of relevance in the reconstruction of the sociopolitical and religious evolution of Polynesian Pre-European culture. We examine a subject of considerable discussion in contemporary archeology: Is the 'recovery of the mind' or reconstruction of past cognitive patterns - an attainable archaeological goal? We will use the rich ethnographic tradition of phylogenetically related cultures in Polynesia to develop interpretations of the meaning of Polynesian rock art.

## Pictorial figures, rhetorical figures - some directly interpreted Saharan rock art figures

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**Keywords:** rhetorical figures,  
iconic metaphors

Typologies of weapons, tools, cattle yokes and jewellery within rock art are well known cultural indicators used by archaeologists, palaeontologists, and other scholars. Contextually, the physical characteristics of the cattle represented convey valuable information to palaeozoologists. Nowadays, these can be interpreted without distortions as priceless examples of records produced by non-writing societies. Little attention has been paid to potential rhetorical figures within Saharan rock art. Usually called METAPHORS or ALLEGORIES, they are present even in our daily lives and profoundly influence our conversations as well as historical predictions that have come about. The same evaluations apply to rhetorical figures in contemporary art and non-contemporary paintings. The hypothesis putting forward in this paper is that some Saharan rock art examples can be read and interpreted by means of rhetorical analysis, potentially pointing to the values and convictions within human groups. Such values and convictions directly and accurately inform the observer with the correct rhetorical interpretation key. Some of the present societies in the region encompassing today's Sahara may have preserved parts of the antique rhetoric of the human dwellers.





## Mythological scenes in the rock art of Mount Ughtasar, Armenia

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**Keywords:** hunting scenes,  
rock art, ibex, leopard, archer

The author studied the rock engravings of Mount Ughtasar in Armenia during a fieldtrip to the site in 2011. A joint Armenian-British expedition is presently investigating Mount Ughtasar. The aim of this paper is to compare the mythological scenes represented in the rock art of Mount Ughtasar with those of Har Karkom, a holy mountain of the Bronze Age in the southern Negev of Israel.

The most frequent animal figures represented at Ughtasar are ibexes, deer, leopards and snakes. Scenes mostly include ibexes hunted by archers assisted by dogs; other scenes represent anthropomorphic figures with swords fending off attacks by leopards. The name Ughtasar means "mount of pilgrimages", which implies the site has been visited in ancient times for cult purposes. Thus, the scenes in Ughtasar rock art are most likely related to the description of myths, as were most of the scenes engraved at Har Karkom during the Bronze Age.

A further analysis is directed to the stylistic comparison of deer and leopard figures.



Fig.1 - Ughtasar petroglyphs, Armenia.  
(photo Maria L. De Santis)

Fig.2 - Ughtasar petroglyphs, Armenia.  
(photo Maria L. De Santis)

## **Symbolmania: rethinking the automatic attribution of symbolic intent and meaning to any and all rock art markings**

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cognitive modernity, abstract  
marks, geometric marks,  
mark-making**

It has been an axiom in rock art studies that all human-made marks on rock are symbolic. Symbolicity (the capacity to symbolize) has been thought to be clear evidence of cognitive or behavioural modernity (the possession of language, art, and religion). This assumption seemed obvious when applied to Upper Palaeolithic representations of animals or humans, and when earlier markings – all non-representational – were discovered in South Africa (from 65 to 100 kya), the symbol category was broadened. After European Neanderthal sites (39 to 47 kya) and especially *Homo erectus* sites in Europe (375 kya) and Java (430-540 kya) were found, the automatic attribution of symbolicity or evidence for abstract thinking became more difficult to assign and maintain. It is time to re-examine the once self-evident meanings and relationships of “symbol”, “art”, and “modern cognition” in rock art studies. Rather than being an all-or-none capacity, I suggest that there is a “spectrum of symbol”, and further propose that an emphasis on cognition (as a sign of modernity) overlooks other brain capacities that have been and still are important to the human mind and its penchant for making marks.

## Resignifications and interpretations of footprint style rock art in Paraguay

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interpretation, resignification,  
footprint style, Paraguay

Estilo de pisadas (footprint style) refers to the interpretation or assimilation a repertory of motifs primarily composed of different animal tracks. Osvaldo Menghin coined the term when he classified the rock art of Patagonia (Argentina) in 1957. Previously, various historiography sources refer to the interpretation of this rock art by indigenous people, as well as references to symbolic resignifications. Rock engravings identified in Paraguay have a preponderant iconography of animal and human footprints, vulvas and abstract signs, which forms part of the so-called footprint style also found in Argentina, Brazil and Bolivia. Some rock shelters are guarded by the Paï Tavyterâ Guarani people that associate this cultural heritage with a transcendent symbolic discourse, thus re-signifying this rock art in a different culture from those who created it.



Fig. 1. Paï Tavyterâ tekoaruvicha at the Itaguy Guasu shelter. (photo Museum of Altamira)

## Recurrent images of vulva-like figures in rock art: Carnarvon Gorge, Australia and the Americas

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**Keywords:** petroglyph, engraving, Carnarvon Gorge, vulva-like, fertility

The existence of vulva-like depictions in Europe, the Americas, Melanesia, the Pacific Islands and Oceania are indicative of an archetypal use of a motif. This does not suggest an equal ontological view or socio-cultural role of the symbol. The symbol itself, in being representational of a vulva, may point towards an associated fertility use. The motifs' temporal and physical distribution in many countries around the world indicates its socio-ritualistic importance with at least some shared elements of creation and use. This paper focuses on the representations of vulva-like figures from two sites in Carnarvon Gorge, Queensland, Australia, as a basis for contrast and comparison. The quantitative and relational aspects of the vulva-like engraved images found at the Art Gallery and Cathedral Cave rock art sites within the gorge offer new insights into the vulva-like figure's use in the area and overseas. Given the area benefits from contemporary Indigenous connections to its sites some elements of interpretation can be obtained that feed into the site's use and importance, both in the past and now.



Fig.1 - Art Gallery site, Carnarvon Gorge, Australia (photo Marisa Giorgi)  
Fig.2 - American vulva-like figures, Mono County, California (photo courtesy of Courtney Smith)

## The philosopher's eye and the mind in the cave

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**Keywords:** ancient mind, cave art, cognitive archaeology, phenomenology, symbolic expression

The art of the Upper Palaeolithic caves is a priceless information source because the background where the images were painted and carved has been left on the rock walls; however, in our semiotic investigations we tend to forget that we are dealing with artefacts made by cultures that are completely different, while we are fatally driven to apply our categories and our meaning structures—space, time, logic—to the symbolic expressions of this astonishing figurative production. Thus, in the effort of comparison and interpretation of the images set down on the walls of Palaeolithic caves, we need to perform a philosophical preparatory procedure, to bracket our common notions of a perspective space, an irreversible historical time and logic of formal identity. Equally, we have to leave the idea that a prehistoric consciousness—the mind in the cave—should be enquired by applying the paradigm of our mind and the parameters of our psychoanalysis. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to show how the suspension of our ontological categories and our models of thought performed by phenomenological hermeneutics could help us to mould new conceptual tools to employ in the analysis of prehistoric figurative heritage.

## Assessing behavioural response to zoomorphic imagery: the socio-ecology of cognitive biases

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**Keywords:** behavioural response, zoomorphic imagery, socio-ecology, cognitive biases

The use of figurative imagery as a communication medium on both portable and non-portable surfaces is observed cross-culturally and through time. Zoomorphic images are but one of a vast array of morphological distinct depictions that can be used, both in isolation and in complexly configured modes of communication, to exploit the sensory responses of viewers. While contemporary observations of zoomorphic petroglyphs and pictographs elicit varied interpretations and assignments of meaning relative to broader re-constructions of past socio-cultural systems, it is often assumed that the images reflected the creator's intimate knowledge of behaviour and habitat of the subject. Communicating with creative imagery the behavioural characteristics of a species is, in contemporary and recent historic times, made often in the absence of interaction or proximity with the subject while meaning and significance of the imagery is supported within a socio-cultural history and setting. This paper explores varied social conditions, ranging from intra-and inter-group cooperation to competition, within which images depicted of particular species communicate information to targeted observers. I assess the extent to which the use of zoomorphic imagery, in settings prehistoric through the contemporary socio-culturally integrated milieu, is intentionally employed in an attempt to influence or manipulate the behaviour of others.

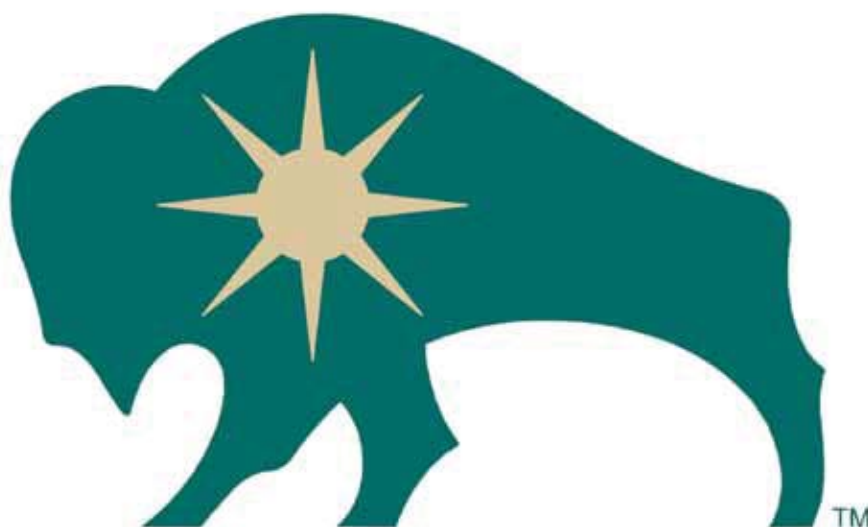


Fig. 1 - Registered trademark - D.A. Davidson & Co

Fig. 2 - Dinosaur National Monument, Utah. (photo R. Hartley)

## From prehistory to snake charmers of Cocullo: the symbol of the snake in rock art and European traditions

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**Keywords:** snake, symbol, Cocullo, Nag Panchami, apotropaic, Valcamonica, Valtellina

This paper aims to provide an interpretative key on a historical-religious basis of the symbol of the snake in the European collective imagination. This creature, by its ambiguous nature, has always given rise to controversial feelings; striking fear and a sense of danger, but at the same time, curiosity and fascination with its ambivalence, as well as, the idea of health, a capacity for renewal and strength. Christian culture has always expressed a negative image of the reptile, far different from that of the oldest traditions. Nevertheless, remnants of ancient cults can be found in festivals, such as, that of San Domenico of Cocullo in Abruzzo (analogous to Nag Panchami in India) and therefore, still exert their influence. The snake is, in these rituals, a positive and apotropaic emblem. In ancient cultures such as the Egyptian, Middle Eastern and Greco-Roman, the serpent shares common symbolic values, which are both negative and predominantly positive. Also, within European Rock Art, in particular the Camuno-Tellina, Atlantic and Scandinavian, it also seems to denote this double symbolism that characterizes the millennial history of this enigmatic “being”.



Fig.1 - Naquane R.35, Capo di Ponte (Valcamonica BS). (photo U. Sansoni)

Fig.2 - Cocullo (AQ), St. Domenico and the “serpari”. ([www.6aprile.it](http://www.6aprile.it))

**When art speaks  
to us of worlds-  
other and moves in  
the other-worlds.  
Metamorphosis and  
figures in motion.  
Between Grotta  
dei Cervi (Italy)  
to Chauvet Cave  
(France) and more**

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**Keywords:** Deer Cave, Badisco,  
Chauvet, hypersensory, spirit,  
kinetic art, metamorphosis,  
myth

The art of Grotta dei Cervi in Porto Badisco is an essence of mental journeys, myth genesis and holiness. It narrates of hypersensory experiences that take far from daily real life and lead to a dimension "other" where it is possible not only to relive the myth, but also to generate it. This is what artists painted on the swaying walls of Grotta dei Cervi six thousand years ago. They painted what they experienced in their brain and body, and above all in their spirit. This resulted in a strange art, abstract and sub-geometrical. Its semiotics contains graphic procedures which at first glance seem unintelligible, as this art is so rich in metamorphosis and figures in motion. The author sees the same metamorphic, kinetic and symbolic processes that can be found in other geographical and chronological contexts, from prehistory to proto-history. This paper reports some examples.



Fig.1 - Grotta dei Cervi (Deer Cave),  
Porto Badisco, Foggia, Italy. (in P.  
Graziosi, 1973)  
Fig.2 - Cala dei Genovesi, Levanzo,  
Italy. (in S. Tusa, 2004)



## **Feminine symbols: Ataegina an Iberian case**

This paper presents lines of research for aspects that seem particularly relevant to Ataegina, a peninsular deity. This divinity appears, in many respects, as an exceptional case of the indigenous Iberian religion: namely, in the variants of her nomenclature, geographical extension and iconography. This contribution also considers the case of her cult in Merida, related to Proserpina. This cult functioned as a private worship and was connected with the Mérida elites and their appropriation of *Lucus Feroniae*. We also glimpse into the feminine Iberian imagery of the deity, including rock art representations, until the Roman times.

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**Keywords:** peninsular divinity,  
innominate divinity, Ataegina

## Rain dances in Negev rock art

The ibex image and ibex hunting were connected to the moon cult spread all over the Near East during Bronze Age. Dance scenes are not as numerous as hunting scenes; nonetheless, they may be interpreted as expressions of the same religious ideas and magic rituals. A very dynamic scene from Har Harash (Figure 1) includes five human figures dancing around an ibex while a sixth one is seated and plays the drum. Another human figure under the ibex image is a later addition. Comparison is made with dancing scenes in honour of the ibex in Kurdistan rock art, and with magic rituals still in use in the early 20th Century AD in South Arabia.

A scene from Har Karkom (Figure 2) presents two anthropomorphic figures dancing with a long object in their hands. To the right of the dancers, a stick followed by dots and a bull figure. In a later period, other ideograms were placed around the Bronze Age scene.

Both the ibex and the bull likely conceal the moon god, and moon worshipping in ancient times was associated with life and fertility. The scenes may be interpreted as rain dances, magic rituals to propitiate rain.

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**Keywords:** Negev, moon cult,  
rain dance, ibex, bull



Fig. 1 - Har Harash (Negev): scene of dance around the ibex. (courtesy of E. Anati)

Fig. 2 - Har Karkom (Negev): scene of dance. (drawing F. Mailland)

## The tree in rock art: symbolic interaction and ethnographic ritual

There are rock art sites in Brazil with scenes of anthropomorphs surrounding a shape resembling a tree (arboriform); evidently, the scenes depict some kind of rite. The sites are linked to a cultural tradition in north east Brazil called Tradição Nordeste that dates to 12 000 B.P. There are other sites without anthropomorphs, only arboriforms surrounded by unrecognisable images. Both cases are thought provoking and reflect the symbolic depth of these tree-like depictions and how they could relate to material or spiritual matters. Nowadays, indigenous people, from the Amazon to the arid North-east, use powerful plants in rituals. In the north, the well-known Ayuascha plant is used in shamanist rituals and in the north east countryside, the Jurema plant is used in a ritual called the Torém dance where the participants dance in a circle singing ritual songs to invoke “Jurema” strength. Thus, ethnographic information provided by indigenous people in Brazil throws light on prehistoric arboriform imagery.

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## Investigating past belief of place through the archaeological context of Māori rock art

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**Key words:** Māori, archaeological context, New Zealand, belief of place

With over 700 sites Māori have one the largest bodies of rock art in Polynesia. New Zealand was first settled from central East Polynesia about 700 years ago. Given this shallow archaeological time-depth together with surviving Māori traditional knowledge systems, histories and language, New Zealand could provide a good case study for the archaeological study of past beliefs through rock art research. An examination of the archaeological context of rock art at two of New Zealand's most notable rock art areas involved re-evaluation of imagery and test excavations at rock shelters, and reviews of the surrounding archaeological, historical and land use histories. An improved understanding of the formational processes behind the surviving archaeological record allowed assessment of the contexts of rock art and the extent to which its spatial arrangement can demonstrate how past belief may have contributed to that formation. In a few cases ancestral representations can be suggested and a regard for tapu (sacredness) demonstrated. More generally, however, preservation issues limited archaeological demonstration of such factors. This identifies the current logistical constraints in Māori rock art research, how some of those may be overcome, and the kind of window into past thinking that it might offer.



Fig.1 - 'Taniwha' (monster), black drawing.

Fig.2 - 'Tiki' (anthropomorph), ochre.

## Semiotic interpretation of the rock art of the Cueva del Ratón in Baja California sur, Mexico

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**Keywords:** rock art, rock shelters, Peninsula of Baja California, ideology, semiotics

This work examines a series of cave paintings found in hundreds of rock shelters in the Sierra de San Francisco in the central part of the Peninsula of Baja California, Mexico. These belong to the Great Mural tradition that mainly consists of human and animal figures painted in red, black, white and yellow. Analysis focused on those of Cueva del Ratón. A well-founded understanding of the archaeology of the peninsula depends on the study of its cave art, hence our interest in the links that exist between the ideology and the symbolic culture of the groups of hunter-gatherers of this region and specifically the role played by cave art as a cultural material. The semiotic interpretation of these manifestations will allow us to establish that the artistic creation is a system in which there is a relationship between those who made the paintings (the artists) and society. Morphological compositions are described from the images, the role that they represent in the pictorial group by their position, location and distribution in the panels and the importance of the pictorial techniques used in order to try to explain them.



Fig.1 - Cueva del Ratón, Baja California sur, Mexico. (photo Valerie Magar)  
Fig.2 - Cueva del Ratón, Baja California sur, Mexico. (photo Valerie Magar)

## Medieval graffiti on Portuguese churches and castles

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**Keywords:** rock art, crosses, engravings, labyrinth, patterns, protection

Both the inner and outer walls of medieval churches and other buildings, such as castles and towers, were often used to convey rather encrypted messages that were added to the more straightforward ones, like those contained in dedication or devotional inscriptions or epigraphs.

These elements of 'rock art' were often related to the cult itself, like the crosses that spanned along the perimeter of the buildings, marking liturgical paths (Fig. 1, church of the Saviour of Bravães), or engraved near the entrances, to somehow 'protect' – in an apotropaic sense – the 'passage' (Fig. 2, castle of Longroiva); however, these were not the only examples found engraved into the depth of the stone ashlars that formed the structure of most medieval religious and fortified buildings. Some of them, as we will try to demonstrate, had a more cryptic intention, dealing with labyrinth-like and never-ending patterns such as the labyrinth itself or the Solomon's' knots that seem related to a sense of eternity associated with the Christian faith and cult. Others had a plainer meaning and purpose, perhaps not free of spiritual connotation, like the geometric games such as the Nine Men's Morris, playing for the triumph but also, like in the flight from the labyrinth, for salvation.



Fig.1 - Bravães. (photo Jorge Rodrigues)

Fig.2 - Longroiva. (photo Jorge Rodrigues)

## The spiral in Africa, a symbol of continuity between prehistory and present

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**Keywords:** spiral, Sahara,  
Africa, symbol, rock art,  
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The spiral, a very well visible element in nature, is part of a small group of abstract symbols found universally, evinced in every great cultural system from the Neolithic period to today.

The paper focuses on the occurrence in Africa with particular attention to the macro Saharan region and Gulf of Guinea, where they are more cogently expressed. The Saharan prehistoric rock art shows, at the moment, an expressive record with 344 images, most attributed to the Neolithic period pastoral phase, with examples of horse and camel periods. More than 200 examples are in wadi Djerat (Illizi, Algeria), the specific area dedicated to that symbol, followed by other areas in Algeria, Niger, Libya, Chad, Mali, Morocco and Western Sahara, so forming a strong symbolic context. Here the spiral, rarely alone, is normally in syntactic dialogue with discs, concentric circles and semicircles, snake-form lines and quadrangular shapes, and in frequent association with bovines and wild animals, and at times, also anthropomorphs. They are prevalently found around and within feminine figures, possibly indicating a relation with maternity, pregnancy and procreation, as general meaning of the cyclic development of life.



Fig.1 - Tin Teriert, Northern Tassili,  
Algeria. (photo Oriana dal Bosco)  
Fig.2 - Fulani Village, Ivory Coast.  
(photo Umberto Sansoni)

## Zoomorphic figures on central Alpine Chalcolithic statuary of the 3rd Millennium BCE

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**Keywords:** Chalcolithic,  
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deer, boar, ibex

The consistency with which zoomorphic figures appear on central Alpine statuary is quite unique to Europe. Deer, ibex, bucks, boar and bovids (in rare instances canines, and one example of a bird) dot a great number of stelae, engraved stones in Valcamonica and Valtellina in Italy, specifically those which bear prevalently or wholly masculine symbolism. Traditionally, such figures have been considered as overlain, a redundant integration into the whole structure composed of the sun, weapons (axes, halberds and daggers), ploughs, and fringed rectangles.

Our present work partially negates this functionalist hypothesis, in particular when considering the symbolic pigeonholing of some compositions with deer, ibex and boar. Our research starts by analysing the arrangement of zoomorphic figure patterns on the engraved side of the stones, their alignment, engraving phases, and their spatial association with other figures. We then focus on the specific iconographic value within its respective context, comparing it to rock art found at other European sites and in Central Asia. Finally, we turn our attention to a general framework for symbolic value attributed to various animals by ancient Indo-European cultures. From this, an extraordinary network of possible symbolic significance emerges both at the local level and from a wider cultural perspective.

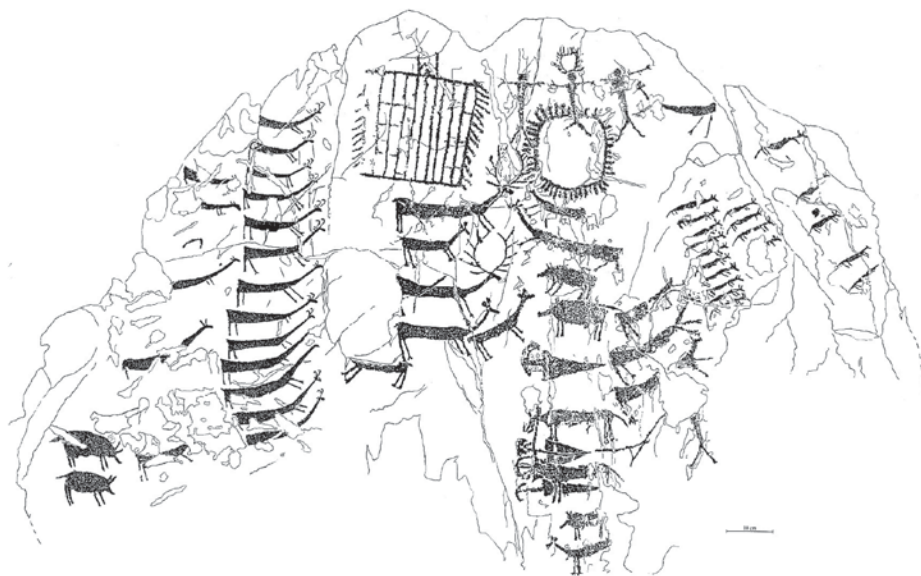


Fig.1 - Cemmo Boulder 1, Capo di Ponte (Valcamonica). (tracing Coop. Le Orme dell'Uomo)

Fig. 2: Cemmo Boulder 1, Capo di Ponte (Valcamonica). (photo U. Sansoni)



## Symbol and stone: the significance of megalithic art for Neolithic coastal societies in Europe

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**Keywords:** symbol, megalithic  
art, Neolithic, coastal  
societies, Europe

This paper presents selected outcomes of a comparative study of the megalithic art in Europe in order to analyse and explain how inter-cultural exchange between prehistoric societies (around 4500–2500 cal. BC) shaped megalithic art, and to theorize and interpret the significance and function of these images. Most of the some 35 000 existing European megaliths, which include megalithic tombs, standing stones, stone circles, alignments, and megalithic buildings or temples, were constructed during the Neolithic and the Copper Ages and are located in coastal areas. Paintings and engravings are found on several hundreds of these megaliths, especially those from Brittany, Andalusia, Portugal, Galicia, Catalonia, Sardinia, the Maltese archipelago, Ireland and Scotland; some combine to form complex symbolic systems. Strikingly, identical motifs and symbol groups can be found separated by long distances. The transfer of symbol packages between the regions indicates cultural interactions in all its variety from travels to population migrations, the transmission of a similar cosmological worldview and a shared symbolic identity. Beside the far sub-regional view, it is necessary to investigate the megalithic art in a stylistic and semiotic approach in order to discuss the significance of megalithic art for the local communities and their memory and ritual culture.



Fig.1 - Dolmen de Soto,  
Andalusia, Spain. (photo  
Bettina Schulz Paulsson)

Fig.2. - Mane Lud, Brittany,  
France. (photo Bettina Schulz  
Paulsson)

## The tablet of Shamash and the principles of natural philosophy

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**Keywords:** Tablet of Shamash, visual motif, ancient artefact, principles of Natural Philosophy and Metaphysics

The article reveals cognitive content of the ancient Babylonian tablet, depicting Shamash in novel frameworks. It portrays the high level of cognition of our ancestors, their artistic and visual thinking, profound understanding of the principles of Natural Philosophy and Metaphysics. The tablet of Shamash shows the paradigms of knowledge, intercultural communication of old civilizations, remaining faithful to the unified teaching. The authors have identified that the fragments from the ornamental motif of Noah's Krater are better preserved on the pieces of Hayk's Krater. Resettling in the land of Torgom, Hayk builds the dwelling of God (temple of knowledge). He fights the tyrant Bel on this very land and defeats him; later he buries his kinsman with honour at the crater of a volcanic mountain in the vicinity of Lake Van, emphasizing the renaissance of the teaching of his father, namely, the values and traditions of Noah. Analysis of the main motif of the depictions on the Tablet of Shamash (found in Babylon), shows the Tablet of Shamash preserved the sacred values of Hayk's temple of knowledge.



Fig.1 - Tablet of Shamash, Neo-Babylonian period, 626-539 BC. (image AN433185001 from the British Museum free image service)

## The motif of the depiction of Cadmus fighting the dragon on the Greek krater has ancient Armenian roots

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**Keywords:** main motif, mythology, the principles of Natural Philosophy and Metaphysics, the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the tree of life

The antique Greek vase (350–340 BC), excavated in Sant'Agata de'Goti (Paestum) depicts Cadmus fighting the dragon. Through the comprehensive analysis of the plot, depicted on the "krater", we can detect new content, identify and reveal common features and correlations between the key heroes (Vahagn the Dragonslayer and Cadmus, the grandson of legendary Hayk) of Ancient Greek and Old Armenian mythologies.

The author implements a novel approach to interpret the given data. This approach implies not only its description in the view of the mentioned disciplines, but also reveals its correlation and interconnection with the allied subjects within the universal scientific paradigm of systematic approach. This in turn links them to themes found on other mediums such as rock art. The compositional structure, style and main motifs of the depiction are perceived not as an invariable fact, but as a transitive relation, accompanied by several transformations in the expression plane (sometimes in the content plane) and or in the stylized marking of the cognitive modality of the depiction under the study.



Fig.1 - The antique vase depicting Cadmus, Louvre Museum. (Catalogue No. Louvre Ca1860)

Fig.2 - Cadmus and the dragon, Louvre Museum. (photo Achilles Troilos, Catalogue No. Louvre E669)