

The aesthetic and semiotic research of rock art

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Ideazione ed esecuzione del segno: riflessioni su processo creativo e componente estetico-figurativa tra Preistoria ed età Moderna

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ABSTRACT

The manifestations of man's creativity on the rock have been investigated by rock archeology. The signs cataloged in various areas of the world carry with them, depending on the interpretation, various messages of different nature. This study analyzes the figurative and technical components of rock representations, without addressing archaeological and dating issues. The method of analysis and the technical terms are typical of the history of art. The methodological choice allows to analyze, in an aseptic way, the graphic sign from the semiotic point of view. The article analyzes some figurative expressions on rock, proposes reflections and formulates questions related to the creative process of prehistoric, protohistoric and Common era: did the performer of the rock engraving develop a personal taste? was the concept of 'beauty' present among the users? Can a stylistic school be identified? What was (if there was) the learning process of the technique to engrave on rocks?

RIASSUNTO

Le manifestazioni della creatività dell'uomo sulla roccia sono state indagate dall'archeologia rupestre. I segni catalogati in varie aree del mondo portano con sé, a seconda della interpretazione, vari messaggi di diversa natura. Il presente studio analizza le componenti figurativa e tecnica delle raffigurazioni su roccia, senza affrontare questioni archeologiche e di datazione. Il metodo di analisi e i termini tecnici sono propri della disciplina della storia dell'arte. La scelta metodologica permette di analizzare, in modo asettico, il segno grafico dal punto di vista semiotico. L'articolo analizza alcune espressioni figurative su roccia, propone delle riflessioni e formula quesiti riferiti al processo creativo dell'uomo preistorico, protostorico e di epoca cristiana: l'esecutore delle incisioni su roccia ha sviluppato un gusto personale? era presente il concetto di 'bello' tra i fruitori? Si può individuare una scuola stilistica? Quale era (se esistente) l'iter di apprendimento della tecnica per incidere sulle rocce?

1. PREMESSA

Lo studio dei segni sulla pietra è materia di indagine specifica dell'archeologia rupestre che dalla seconda metà dello scorso secolo ha messo a punto una serie di metodologie specifiche di analisi, rilievo, catalogazione, studio anche in relazione alla cultura materiale. A questa disciplina si sono associate l'iconografia, la sociologia, la psicologia, la storia delle religioni, la topografia. Queste sono solo alcune specializzazioni che si sono applicate allo studio del patrimonio del Sito Unesco "Arte Rupestre della Valle Camonica" e di altri importanti siti distribuiti nel mondo. Per buona parte dell'articolo tenterò il più possibile di non usare la definizione "arte rupestre" a favore di altri termini, più asettici, che non implicano la parola arte in quanto già di per sé una categoria predefinita. Questa scelta è obbligata per affrancare il presente articolo dal condizionamento preconetto di Arte, così da trattare liberamente l'argomento portandolo nell'ambito della semiotica. Si prenderanno in esame il segno grafico e l'iconografia specifica delle incisioni rupestri secondo i parametri estetici, performativi e tecnici della Storia dell'Arte tentando di applicare il metodo di studio che si adotterebbe per una scultura o un dipinto di epoca Moderna.

Una delle prerogative che ha differenziato il genere umano rispetto al resto del regno animale è la capacità di produrre oggetti e, più precisamente, sperimentare modalità espressive, tra cui quelle materiali connotate, in alcuni casi, da elementi di innovazione, dalla invenzione di forme e segni spesso associati a concetti semplici o complessi, dalla capacità di modificare la materia a fine estetico. Non si intende esclusivamente la produzione figurativa, ma anche quella musicale, della danza e poetico-vocale.

Di queste 'discipline artistiche' è noto come il supporto sia decisivo per la conservazione o meno dell'espressione dell'uomo; fanno eccezione le pitture rupestri il cui degrado del pigmento si manifesta anche se realizzate su materiale litico. La manifestazione della creatività umana lasciata sulle rocce dalla Preistoria all'era contemporanea – per cui non è chiaro in quale settore delle discipline artistiche propriamente dette sarebbe idealmente inserita –, rispetto alle altre 'muse', è giunta fino a noi, solcando i millenni, proprio per il supporto litico su cui è stata realizzata. È già stato in più sedi documentato come la medesima espressione figurativa umana era verosimilmente presente anche su altri supporti che, per la loro natura, si sono deteriorati. Si pensi al legno, alle pelli, a segni tracciati sulla sabbia

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se non su delle foglie: per questi supporti 'deboli' vi sono esempi del loro utilizzo in fortuiti contesti di ritrovamento, o alcuni esempi più recenti che sono utili anche per testimoniare il loro impiego fino allo scorso millennio¹.

La presente riflessione – che è a introduzione della sessione "The aesthetic and semiotic research of rock art" del Valcamonica Symposium 2021 – vuole stimolare alcune questioni riferite alla produzione dei segni incisi su roccia in relazione al concetto di estetica, senza voler essere necessariamente esaustiva e omnicomprensiva del fenomeno nelle varie sfaccettature.

2. IL BISOGNO DI CREATIVITÀ

Uno dei bisogni, che non potremmo con gli schemi della antropologia definire primario, è fare arte o, più in generale, dare spazio a qualche forma di espressione della creatività al di là del *medium* utilizzato. Ciò è facilmente osservabile nei piccoli d'uomo i quali, già in età prescolare, si cimentano tracciando con dei colori segni su fogli o qualsiasi altra superficie disponibile. Si tratta del cosiddetto pregrafismo, per cui vi è una folta trattazione scientifica da parte della psicologia infantile. Il dato dimostra come fin dai primi anni di vita l'uomo trovi soddisfazione, e forse piacere, nel lasciare dei segni di diversa natura. Ma se oggi la creatività non è certamente un bisogno primario, bensì è inserita nelle espressioni della cultura umana, in passato il tempo dedicato ad essa era assai prezioso in quanto era sottratto ai bisogni primari. Noi possiamo permetterci di dedicare del tempo per leggere, scrivere, scolpire, seguire un film o assistere a una *performance* teatrale perché abbiamo già assolto tutti i bisogni primari; questi momenti e le azioni svolte rientrano nella sfera dell'intrattenimento, della fruizione artistica, della produzione creativa se non addirittura tra gli *hobbies*. Nelle società preistoriche l'approvvigionamento del cibo, la ricerca di ripari, la protezione dei piccoli erano attività che occupavano parte della giornata dei nostri progenitori. È verosimile che avessero anche del tempo da dedicare all'ozio e, quindi, non ai bisogni primari. L'arte preistorica, invece, è da considerare, se valutata in termini di tempo e sforzi ad essa dedicati, un bene importante, seppur non indispensabile se misurata con il nostro metro di giudizio. Questo 'sforzo' sociale è l'indizio indiretto dell'importanza di produrre, disporre e godere, nel senso di generare benessere², di manifestazioni della creatività umana oggi, convenzionalmente, definite artistiche.

3. ANALISI STILISTICO-FORMALE DELLE INCISIONI RUPESTRI PER FINALITÀ ATTRIBUTIVE

Per anni i ricercatori del settore, oggetto del presente studio, si sono definiti studiosi di "arte rupestre";

più recentemente si è parlato di archeologia rupestre quasi, forse, per allontanare la disciplina dal contesto dell'estetica e ricondurla in un ambito più asettico e scientifico. In effetti il termine "arte rupestre" implica già un riconoscimento del fenomeno artistico, da qui il dubbio se inserire in tale categoria anche le cospicue isolate. Ma al di là della distinzione lessicale data alla disciplina di studio, e all'annosa questione di cosa è o non è Arte³, ciò che preme sottolineare è il valore estetico dei segni. Vi sono ambiti nello studio delle manifestazioni della creatività dell'uomo, preistorica e storica, per i quali sarà difficile se non impossibile giungere a formulare una risposta certa e scientificamente condivisa a vari quesiti. Uno di questi, che esula dalla sfera esclusivamente scientifico-archeologica, è il concetto di 'gusto' che la società produttrice e fruitrice delle incisioni rupestri riversava nei segni incisi sulle rocce. È un argomento interessante, curioso e a tratti affascinante, ma tutt'altro che semplice da affrontare scientificamente, in quanto manca qualsiasi documentazione diretta che testimoni la modalità di percezione dell'arte rupestre da parte della società che l'ha prodotta. In assenza di dati certi è onestamente impossibile fondare uno studio rigoroso; si può elaborare qualche teoria, ma priva del rigore metodologico che dovrebbe essere a fondamento della ricerca. Un'altra questione è il dubbio se sia lecito applicare alle manifestazioni sulla roccia il metodo di studio, di ordine stilistico e attributivo, proprio della storia dell'arte. Un tentativo in tal senso è stato proposto da Angelo Fossati proponendo, per alcune raffigurazioni su roccia, l'attribuzione a un maestro o a una scuola. Lo studioso ha ritenuto di riconoscere il medesimo incisore-esecutore in una serie di espressioni su roccia definendolo in modo generico "Maestro di Paspardo"⁴. La storia dell'arte è disseminata da ignoti pittori e scultori, genericamente identificati non con un nome e un cognome, bensì con una località dove hanno operato. Una estensione simile è stata appunto usata anche da Fossati per questo ignoto 'artista' per cui l'archeologo crede di averne riconosciuto l'opera in alcune figure incise sulle rocce a Paspardo: in tal modo si pensa di poter individuare la "mano" dell'ignoto incisore e quindi – aggiungo – la distintiva cifra stilistica che lo differenzerebbe dagli altri incisori. In questo passaggio ho applicato un lessico propriamente da storico dell'arte e, così, lo sono l'approccio e il metodo di studio introdotti. Per cui alcune incisioni, che avrebbero tra loro delle corrispondenze tali da farle 'attribuire' a uno stesso individuo, si potrebbero ricondurre, proprio in virtù di un tratto distintivo, ad un medesimo incisore. Lo stesso metodo è utilizzato nel campo della storia dell'arte per attribuire un'opera ad un artista in mancanza di documenti scritti, testimonianze orali o la firma dello stesso. Non

¹ BARROS DOS SANTOS 2015; HAMEAU 2020.

² GARIGLIO, LYSEK 2011, p. 181, ipotizzano che "manifestazioni di creatività benessere possano essere esistite nella preistoria e che l'arte rupestre potrebbe essere stata anch'essa, in certe occasioni, una riproduzione di esperienze di benessere, ricombinate con vissuti aggressivo-sessuali rimossi".

³ Lo stesso Emmanuel ANATI (1992, p. 88) segnala che per tentare di rispondere alla questione si dovrebbe utilizzare un intero volume.

⁴ FOSSATI 2007, pp. 25-28; DE MARINIS, FOSSATI 2012, p. 31.

so quanto questo metodo di attribuzione – che sottostà alla capacità, in parte innata in parte acquisita sul campo – da parte dello studioso di riconoscere la mano di un artista in diverse incisioni, anche collocate su rocce diverse, sia scientificamente accettabile. Se, tuttavia, si analizza l'arte rupestre come le altre manifestazioni della creatività umana è lecito, allora, poter adottare anche, e non solo, questo strumento di indagine: è l'apporto estetico allo studio archeologico.

È indubbio che tra i vari segni incisi sulle rocce, anche tra loro prossimi, ve ne siano alcuni che rispetto ad altri sono classificati come 'brutti', usando quindi una categoria estetica caricata di un giudizio negativo soggettivo. Questo approccio, peraltro spontaneo e presente anche nel semplice e non edotto visitatore dei parchi rupestri, sembra nell'immediato poco utile al dibattito scientifico, il quale dovrebbe limitarsi al rilevamento, documentazione fotografica, georeferenziazione, attribuzione cronologica, registrazione di dimensioni, contesto d'area e di roccia, solo per citare alcuni filoni di ricerca. Tuttavia, anche questa osservazione non può essere trascurata, perché, seppur rischiosa in quanto inficiabile da una lettura troppo soggettiva, diventa un dato aggiuntivo di ordine estetico e di ordine tecnico-esecutivo. Si pensi alla roccia 1 di Naquane (Parco Nazionale delle Incisioni Rupestri, Capo di Ponte) dove convivono dei quadrupedi resi con 'tratti veloci', essenziali, tecnicamente efficaci. Alla sensibilità di uno storico dell'arte, questi elementi farebbero pensare di essere in presenza di un artista dotato di conoscenza tecnico-esecutiva nell'uso dello strumento per l'incisione, dotato di una abilità nel disegno e un estro nella scelta e nella resa dei tratti salienti del soggetto per restituire all'osservatore l'immediata idea del tipo di animale, movimento e temperamento. Al contrario, il canide distante pochi decimetri sarebbe senza dubbio assegnato a un incisore privo delle qualità di cui sopra perciò definito mediocre per il risultato. Come si è visto è indubbio che anche le incisioni rupestri siano catalogabili con le classificazioni proprie degli storici dell'arte. Tale classificazione, inoltre, è d'aiuto anche agli archeologi quale dato aggiuntivo utile per una visione d'insieme del soggetto raffigurato. Sono quindi concorde che sia adottabile, anche per l'archeologia rupestre, la metodologia dell'analisi estetico-esecutiva, propria della storia dell'arte, per l'attribuzione delle opere, seppur tale operazione nell'ambito delle incisioni su roccia risulti assai più complessa e insidiosa. Lo stesso metodo è applicabile anche in senso inverso, ovvero per escludere che due incisioni siano state eseguite dallo stesso individuo, perché il confronto ne evidenzia il diverso livello qualitativo. L'osservazione risulterebbe assai utile per il dibattito scientifico: l'analisi contribuirebbe, infatti, alla verifica stilistica tra due incisioni, anche fisicamente tra loro vicine sulla roccia, raffiguranti lo stesso soggetto. Riconoscere lo scarto stilistico, ovvero l'individuazione di due distinte 'mani' esecutrici, supporterebbe le tesi che sostengono

la possibilità di trovare sulle rocce i medesimi soggetti tra loro vicini e simili, ma realizzati in tempi diversi e da persone diverse.

Non ho volutamente usato finora la parola e affrontare la questione di stile⁵. È noto come nella *Cronologia dell'arte [rupestre] camuna*, proposta da Anati, la prima colonna di classificazione generale riporta la dicitura "Stile", da cui il I, II, III e IV, a loro volta suddivisi al proprio interno con le lettere dell'alfabeto a indicare una ulteriore scansione. Senza voler entrare nell'annosa discussione della revisione o accettazione *in toto* della Tabella cronologica di Anati, questione non di mia competenza, mi sembra che sia ammissibile prendere in considerazione l'ipotesi che un medesimo stile si possa ripresentare a distanza di diversi millenni. Ciò non vuole scardinare la consolidata scuola attributiva. Tuttavia, se si pensa al *revival* di stili che, con scansioni temporali diverse durante i secoli, si verifica nell'ambito della storia dell'arte dal V secolo a.C. fino al XX secolo, non escluderei a priori che una analoga situazione di 'ritorno' di stile si verifichi anche per i soggetti dell'arte rupestre. Mi riferisco, ad esempio, ma non solo, ad alcuni *Oranti* i quali, per la loro natura fisica, funzionale e concettuale, possono ripresentarsi in millenni diversi pressoché simili; ciò che li distinguerebbe, casomai, sarebbe l'abilità propria dell'esecutore materiale. È bene segnalare che per l'archeologia rupestre non è sempre semplice e sicuro adottare un metodo di analisi puramente stilistico. Una immagine sulla roccia, per la natura materiale del supporto, ha già in origine dei limiti fisici che non permettono di rendere alcuni elementi che sono, invece, tipici della pittura o del disegno. Si pensi alle ombre, alla tridimensionalità, alle sfumature, ai dettagli miniaturistici. A tutto ciò si aggiunga – e credo che sia una condizione che limita notevolmente la componente estetica – l'assenza di pigmento. Non è qui la sede per affrontare la questione della colorazione delle incisioni rupestri. Ritengo, tuttavia, verosimile che ciò che noi oggi vediamo e studiamo, altro non sia che il solco dove posizionare il pigmento. Se così fosse la nostra visione sarebbe assai limitata così pure la valutazione estetica e la comprensione. Quanto qui osservato pone l'attenzione sul rischio che grava oggi sulla visione puramente artistica del fenomeno delle incisioni rupestri. Vorrei sottolineare, però, che non si tratta solo di una questione estetica. La perdita della pigmentazione, ad esempio, non consente di avere informazioni che sarebbero, credo, utili se non fondamentali per capire alcune scene. A tal proposito si consideri una scena corale di battaglia, quale ad esempio quella della roccia 1 di Naquane: se i guerrieri avessero due colori diversi, ci dovremmo chiedere le motivazioni di tale scelta cromatica da cui scaturirebbero tutta una serie di considerazioni e teorie utili per una più esaustiva comprensione del 'racconto'. Due colori diversi dei guerrieri obbligherebbero a porsi dei quesiti e a formulare varie spiegazioni:

⁵ Per una visione della questione e dell'impiego del concetto di stile per lo studio dell'arte rupestre si rinvia a ANATI 1978; 1982; DE MARINIS, FOSSATI 2012.

due fazioni tra loro in lotta, due gradi di importanza gerarchico-militare, oppure due diversi ruoli nella battaglia, età, clan. Da queste semplici considerazioni si nota quanto il colore, oltre che un interesse estetico, abbia con sé delle implicazioni sostanziali per capire le raffigurazioni rupestri e il gruppo sociale che le ha prodotte.

4. ESTETICA TRA PASSATO E PRESENTE

Rivolgo ora l'attenzione a un tema più umanistico, che incontra interesse anche al di fuori della cerchia degli archeologi, investendo più direttamente il terreno dell'osservatore / fruitore medio dell'arte rupestre: si tratta del concetto di estetica o, più semplicemente, di gusto.

Il dato archeologico è per sua natura, ed è giusto che sia così, asettico, il più possibilmente oggettivo, epurato da qualsiasi visione precostituita. Ciò serve all'archeologia per rispondere ai quesiti fondamentali della disciplina quali datazione, funzione, origine, produzione, tecnica. Con questi dati convivono, come faccia della stessa medaglia, elementi quali il livello qualitativo dell'oggetto indagato, l'abilità dell'esecutore e con essa il gusto e l'estro creativo, ovvero tutti elementi che riconducono alla sfera più della produzione artistica. Ritengo che oggi, come in passato, il fruitore dei segni sulle rocce non possa rimanere impassibile. Certo è che il retroterra culturale di ogni individuo può fare la differenza nella percezione e comprensione dei segni: di norma si individua e si comprende più facilmente ciò che già si conosce. Ne consegue di fatto che la nostra percezione dei segni sulla roccia è inficiata, condizionata e forse fuorviata dal nostro attuale 'bagaglio semiotico'. Cosa diversa avveniva nella mente dell'uomo preistorico, il quale era in grado di comprendere in modo immediato - e forse associare, tradurre in un concetto - gli ideogrammi perché deteneva il 'repertorio semiotico' indispensabile alla decifrazione. Fatta questa precisazione, ciò che invece ritengo senza tempo e senza distinzioni culturali è la sensibilità innata nel genere umano che gli consente di essere attratto, provare curiosità, percepire l'esistenza di un recondito messaggio, sviluppare sensazioni di piacere da un segno. È l'esperienza estetica: cattura l'attenzione, istilla nella mente, in modo indefinibile e inaspettato, emozioni e stati d'animo plurimi⁶, ancor prima che si formi un pensiero speculativo razionale di decifrazione del segno. Di fatto, di fronte a una incisione rupestre ci soffermiamo anche, e forse innanzitutto, per il piacere che ci offre la visione del soggetto raffigurato, il quale al nostro occhio appare semplicemente 'bello', senza alcuna spiegazione razionale. Il soggetto che percepiamo come 'bello' porta in sé, per il nostro sentire, una valenza aggiuntiva al concetto che potenzialmente esprimerebbe: colpiti e affascinati dalla componente estetica ne veniamo poi stimolati a livello cognitivo per tentare di sviluppare spiegazioni che diano un senso e un significato al soggetto. Noi giudichiamo bello

un individuo a prima vista, senza chiederci il perché di tale affermazione, lo stesso avviene per un paesaggio, un'opera d'arte. Perciò è verosimile che tale processo sia avvenuto anche nell'uomo preistorico, perché è difficile pensare che il frequentatore (inventore, incisore, fruitore) dei siti con incisioni rupestri non abbia sviluppato un giudizio estetico sui soggetti visti sulle rocce.

Vi sono alcuni quesiti che da tempo mi ero posto discutendo con gli specialisti di archeologia rupestre durante vari incontri come il presente Simposio. Si tratta nella sostanza di dubbi di ordine più speculativo che spero siano da spunto di riflessione anche per i colleghi di altre discipline qui rappresentate. È lecito chiamare artista colui che ha inciso le rocce? Egli era consapevole delle proprie abilità tecnico-estetiche e si confrontava con altri colleghi per valutare gli esiti del proprio prodotto? Realizzava dei 'bozzetti preparatori' su altri supporti (fogliame, sabbia, legno, pelli), con prove, studio e pentimenti per poi trasporre l'immagine sulla roccia? Possiamo pensare che l'inventore e l'incisore delle immagini sulla roccia fossero due personalità distinte? Le domande qui elencate sono le medesime che ci si pone di fronte a un'opera d'arte dell'era cristiana. Nell'archeologia rupestre ritengo sia difficile fornire delle risposte scientifiche e convincenti. Ciò nonostante, è forse concesso tentare di rispondere anche solo in parte ai dubbi sopra esposti, proponendo alcune riflessioni, anziché delle vere soluzioni, che in parte trovano un labile sostegno nella metodologia dello studio stilistico-comparativo proprio della storia dell'arte.

Per proporre un'opinione rispetto al primo quesito è doveroso precisare che la produzione di una incisione rupestre è un'azione dal punto di vista tecnico non semplice. Il dato oggettivo è dedotto da più elementi: vi sono stati degli sperimentatori che si sono cimentati nell'incisione su roccia ottenendo risultati figurativi e tecnici non soddisfacenti, avendo incontrato come controparte non poche difficoltà; si è visto, ancora, che alcune figure realizzate in epoca storica, a parziale imitazione di quelle più antiche, sono stilisticamente inaccettabili e tecnicamente mediocri seppur realizzate, forse credendo di ottenere un migliore risultato, mediante mezzi più semplici, con strumenti in metallo e non litici come, invece, avveniva nella Preistoria. Da queste osservazioni si deduce che ottenere una incisione rupestre avente un buon risultato estetico e tecnico non è un'operazione semplice e alla portata di tutti. Le medesime considerazioni sono riferibili anche agli artisti di epoca Moderna: il prodotto di una creazione artistica è frutto di abilità tecnica e gusto estetico, oggi come nella Preistoria.

Non è, e non sarà possibile conoscere il livello di gradimento raggiunto da un incisore preistorico da parte del gruppo sociale destinatario del suo prodotto finito. Allo stesso modo non vi sono indizi per affermare se tra gli esecutori ve ne fossero alcuni più rinomati e apprezzati rispetto ad altri. Resta pure da capire se

⁶ Nel capitolo *Gradevolezza estetica di alcune figure di animali*, GARIGLIO, LYSEK 2011, p. 183, ritengono che "certe pitture provocano in noi un'emozione artistica che ci dà uno stato di benessere e ci appaga".

l'esecutore materiale dell'incisione fosse percepito dal resto della popolazione come un artista, ma ancor prima si dovrebbe capire cosa e come fosse unanimemente intesa l'arte per le società pre-letterate. Argomenti, questi, assai complessi e che abbisognerebbero di una trattazione più ampia in termini di spazio e con il coinvolgimento di più discipline. Si pensi solo alla associazione arte rupestre e religione (con tutte le declinazioni e digressioni), binomio assai impiegato e sostenuto – fin troppo inflazionato? – da molti studiosi, ma non da tutti⁷, per definire e spiegare, in alcuni casi forse oltremodo entusiasmante e riduttivo, molte scene raffigurate sulle rocce. Certo è che se l'esecutore di segni incisi sulle rocce era visto come un eletto tra il gruppo sociale, destinatario non tanto di un ruolo creativo-artistico, quanto di un compito specifico e attivo vocato alla produzione di segni caricati di una valenza trascendentale, allora, dovremmo abbandonare i nostri schemi valutativi troppo influenzati dalla sensibilità estetica odierna. Cionondimeno, ritengo che anche se si accettasse la tesi che assegna ai segni incisi sulle rocce un ruolo funzionale nella sfera del sacro, la componente estetica possa comunque convivere. Ancora oggi, così come almeno negli ultimi due millenni, la produzione di oggetti, immagini, architetture, sculture funzionali all'ambito del sacro e del funerario hanno sempre tenuto in considerazione e fatto abbondante uso della componente estetica. Del resto, le più grandi manifestazioni di arte fino all'Ottocento si trovano nel contesto della religione e, nello specifico, nel culto dei defunti. In linea con quanto abbiamo visto negli ultimi millenni, credo sia lecito ipotizzare che pure le incisioni rupestri abbiano, oltre che una probabile componente funzionale, un'attenzione figurativa. In conclusione, penso sia verosimile che il fruitore coevo alla esecuzione delle immagini incise su roccia fosse attento, con un certo livello di gradimento, anche alla componente estetica. Quanto detto non è certamente dimostrabile, ma trova in parte fondamento nella sensibilità dell'*Homo Sapiens* 'attuale', il quale è attratto da elementi che hanno al loro interno un equilibrato dosaggio di forma, colore, proporzione, cura dei dettagli, invenzione creativa. Dinnanzi a singole incisioni su roccia come a composizioni complesse della Preistoria, ancora oggi tentiamo, in modo talvolta involontario, di: dare un senso estetico, dettato dal confronto qualitativo tra una figura e l'altra, cercare il punto di vista ideale per la lettura, trovare un equilibrio formale, riconoscerne i segni del nostro 'bagaglio semiotico', nel tentativo, del tutto legittimo, di associare immagini ad immagini e a concetti, individuare la tecnica artistica, ipotizzare l'autore e, infine, comprenderne il significato, la committenza, e la funzione assegnata alle immagini dalla società che le ha volute e prodotte. La serie di quesiti che si pone lo studioso di archeologia è la stessa che alimenta la curiosità del visitatore dei parchi archeologici, ma sono pure presenti nello studio della storia dell'arte. È quindi verosimile che le incisioni ru-

pestri, per qualsiasi funzione siano state eseguite, furono guardate dai nostri antenati anche con lo sguardo sensibile alla estetica.

Precisato quanto sia difficoltoso scavare la roccia, definendo i contorni di una figura, ritengo che l'esecutore di incisioni rupestri avesse la necessità di imparare. Senza definire se vi fosse una scuola o una autoformazione, è probabile che l'imitazione, quale metodo impiegato in molte manifestazioni umane, abbia svolto un ruolo fondamentale. In questa fase, oltre alla pratica della incisione direttamente su pietra, l'apprendista incisore avrebbe dovuto cimentarsi su altri due fronti: lo 'studio' dei segni, ovvero l'iconografia del repertorio che avrebbe poi dovuto impiegare nella sua attività; la pratica del disegno. Se per la prima attività la conoscenza può essere appresa a livello teorico, per la seconda, viceversa, è d'obbligo sperimentare sul campo per acquisire una abilità manuale operativa. È quindi ipotizzabile che le rocce, destinate ad ospitare le incisioni, non fossero impiegate come palestra per gli esercizi dei neo-incisori; tuttavia, fino ad ora, non sono neanche stati individuati siti rupestri per i quali ipotizzare che le raffigurazioni ivi realizzate fossero delle prove. Dove e come si svolgessero le probabili sperimentazioni su roccia non è comprensibile e manco ipotizzabile. Gli archeologi non hanno individuato, né supposto, luoghi e rocce in cui si sarebbe sperimentata la tecnica della incisione. Ciò obbliga a formulare almeno tre spiegazioni: le rocce sono state distrutte dopo le prove; i siti sono tuttora celati e in attesa di essere scoperti; le prove erano realizzate su massi più piccoli che per la loro natura si sono irrimediabilmente dispersi. Per quanto riguarda l'altro aspetto, ossia quello del 'disegno', dello sviluppo della capacità di ritrarre soggetti nelle svariate diversificazioni, ritengo che le 'esercitazioni' si svolgessero su supporti più duttili (come le pelli, il legno, le foglie) che per loro natura sono anche quelli, in genere, facilmente deteriorabili. Ipotizzo che l'incisore si servisse di un disegno eseguito su supporto deperibile da 'trasferire' poi sulla roccia. In tale senso si noti come nell'ipotetica ricostruzione del processo creativo ho elencato le tappe che tutt'oggi percorre un artista contemporaneo di stampo accademico. Mi riferisco, in particolare, al praticantato presso un altro artista definito quale maestro da cui apprendere tecnica, stile, dominio della materia, creatività, iconografia e, perché no, imitarlo. Ritengo che proprio l'imitazione, ancor più nell'uomo preistorico, fosse un elemento nodale per l'apprendimento, cosa che per la verità è tuttora praticato nelle scuole d'arte. Più arduo è poter ipotizzare anche per le incisioni rupestri se vi fosse l'inventore e l'esecutore di una immagine. Tale diversificazione avviene, ad esempio, nelle stampe litografiche in cui un artista può creare l'iconografia e un altro maestro occuparsi della esecuzione su legno per eseguire copie su carta. La suddivisione dei compiti è forse utile per analizzare la teoria che collocherebbe il gesto di incidere su roccia, e per estensione

⁷ È recente il prezioso contributo al dibattito fornito da Giuliano CHIAPPARINI 2021, cui va il merito di aver sondato la storiografia inerente alla questione precisando alcuni concetti anche grazie alla disciplina specifica della storia delle religioni.

l'esecutore, nella sfera del sacro. Accettando questa interpretazione si dovrebbe considerare di fondere nel medesimo individuo due componenti che oggi, perlomeno per i nostri schemi sociali e professionali, difficilmente si trovano in un uomo: mi riferisco alla professione di artista-esecutore e di sacerdote- ispiratore. Lascio agli studiosi di archeologia rupestre sviluppare questa tesi interpretativa che distinguerebbe 'inventore' da 'esecutore' nell'atto della produzione di una figura su roccia. L'inventore, a sua volta, può essere inteso anche come committente, ovvero colui che vuole e ha bisogno di una immagine in un punto della roccia, per cui si rivolge all'esecutore materiale che è dotato di abilità tecnica e conoscenza iconografica tali da soddisfare il primo. Sintetizzando ai minimi termini, si pensi che quanto qui proposto è ciò che accade da sempre in molte manifestazioni artistiche, laiche e religiose, a varie latitudini del pianeta. È pur vero che in alcune culture, specialmente antiche, il creatore di un manufatto, oggetto di devozione, è pure dotato, oltre che di competenze artistiche, di qualità soprannaturali: si pensi anche nell'ambito del cristianesimo dove esistono le varie Madonne dipinte da san Luca evangelista, il quale è sia artista-pittore sia individuo venerabile per il suo stato di grazia. L'immagine cristiana è oggetto di devozione perché raffigura la Vergine, come altre nel mondo, ma ancor più perché è stata realizzata da un santo. Nel medesimo orizzonte culturale si pone la venerata immagine della *Madonna Acheropita*,

una icona bizantina (*ante* VIII secolo) conservata nella Cattedrale di Maria Santissima Achiropita di Rossano Calabro, per cui la tradizione vorrebbe addirittura che non fosse stata dipinta da mano umana, bensì divina. Questa non è l'unica immagine che nel tempo è stata caricata da una simile valenza. Gli esempi dimostrano come l'azione creativa, per la maggior parte delle raffigurazioni, doveva necessariamente essere svolta da un individuo non comune. Ritengo quindi probabile che pure nelle credenze dell'era precristiana vi fosse un sentire analogo; non importa poi se nei fatti l'esecuzione materiale fosse affidata a un individuo comune, dotato però di abilità tecnico-artistiche. Riassumendo, credo verosimile che vi fosse il 'mito' di una produzione soprannaturale delle incisioni, ma poi, nei fatti, vi fosse un gruppo di incisori specializzati nella esecuzione. Anche in epoca Moderna, l'agiografia cristiana ci documenta la produzione di incisioni rupestri con l'imposizione delle mani di tre individui dotati di poteri soprannaturali lasciate sul masso della chiesa delle Sante a Capo di Ponte. A distanza di tempo da un mio studio sul fenomeno⁸, sono convinto che le sei mani sul masso siano state eseguite sul finire del Medioevo. Il caso delle Sante di Capo di Ponte segue lo stesso *iter* che forse governava anche le incisioni più antiche: l'immagine è stata realizzata da un esecutore materiale in grado di operare su roccia, ma per i devoti capontini le impronte incise sul masso sono manifestazione soprannaturale, testimonianza della ierofania.

⁸ TROLETTI 2010; 2011.

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Rock art and language (in a nutshell)

James Dodd *

SUMMARY

This contribution addresses particular aspects of the complex debate concerning the contentious link between rock art and language. As current scholarship in the fields of archaeology, linguistics and epigraphy are reconsidering the role and extent of visual communication within prehistoric societies, it is arguable that the abstract definition of language, and the sender: message: receiver (SMR) model of communication associated with it, proposed in 1945 by mathematician, electrical engineer, cryptographer, and founder of the field of information theory, Claude Shannon (1916-2001), provides a useful framework for the scientific study of rock art. Using Shannon's propositions as the basis for a data model, rather than a theoretical one, opens up a range of analytical possibilities, which are not dependant on rock art having functioned as a means of communication in prehistory.

If we are prepared to accept Shannon's definition of language, the SMR model, and consider rock art from an informatic perspective, it is arguable that all the basic properties of a communication system are present. Fundamental to the functioning of such a model are the existence of mappings between the images and some underlying significance, be it trivial or complex. The situation in practice can be understood with reference to ethnography and the recently published typology constructed by Morin, Kelly and Winters (2020), which distinguishes between four types of codes according to their speech-boundedness and information carrying capacity. Links between rock art and oral performance are often connected to practices of orality, especially for the transfer of information beyond human memory.

Keywords: rock art, language, graphic communication systems, methodology

RÉSUMÉ

Cette contribution adresse un aspect dans le débat sur les connexions entre les gravures rupestre et langue. Recherche en ce moment dans l'archéologie, linguistique et l'épigraphie reconsidère le rôle et le degré de la communication dans les sociétés préhistoriques. Le modèle de communication du mathématicien, ingénieur électrique, cryptographe, et le fondant de la théorie de l'information, Claude Shannon (1916-2001), est peut-être une cadre utile pour les études scientifiques d'les gravures rupestres. Si les propositions de Claude Shannon est utilisé comme un modèle de données, au lieu d'un modèle théorique, cela ouvre plus de possibilités analytiques, par ce que c'est n'est pas dépendant que les images fonctionnées comme un système de communication dans les temps préhistoriques.

Mots-clés : art rupestre, langage, systèmes de communication graphique, méthodologie

1. TOWARDS A MORE NUANCED DEFINITION OF LANGUAGE

One might characterize language as a linear phenomenon of elements separated by pauses, glued together using a syntax. However, languages can take many forms besides those we are most familiar with; speech and writing. A broad division exists between natural and artificial languages. Natural languages can be either oral or graphic, whilst artificial languages can take more abstract form.

1.1 Claude Shannon's definition of language

In the 1940's, mathematician, electrical engineer, cryptographer, and founder of the field of information theory, Claude Shannon, proposed a very abstract definition of language: a statistical phenomenon, whose components are defined according to a set of quantifiable probabilities, determined by the statistical structure of language, including rules of combination and order, i.e. syntax or grammar (SHANNON 1945, p.

11; 1948, p. 11; 1951, p. 50; SHANNON , WEAVER 1949). The definition is bound to the concepts of information and communication. Shannon emphasises that information is not equivalent to meaning. In the context of the topic of rock art and language, this is important, as rock art researchers have argued that rock art must have semantic meaning if linguistic methods are to be used justifiably.

1.2 Shannon's sender:message:receiver (SMR) data model of communication and the study of rock art

Based upon his definition of language, Shannon made a proposal for a generalized data model of a communication system (Fig. 1), which was developed subsequently by the linguist Roman Jakobson (Fig. 2). In Jakobson's development of Shannon's SMR model, messages are communicated in a specific context, in a given media, using a code. In this context, a code is defined as something which stands for something else.

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It is arguable that rock art possesses all the attributes of Shannon and Jakobson's models of communication. Viewed from an abstract perspective, one can view in the images as a code, communication within an anthropogenic, natural and cultural context. The creators of the images can be considered 'senders', and the audience 'receivers'.

1.3 Influence and legacy of Shannon's work

Shannon's ideas have been highly influential and remain relevant to the present day, as scholars in a variety of different fields realized that the generalized principles of linguistic analysis (as understood in the Saussurian perspective) might be applied to the study of all kinds of communication systems or behaviour (GARDIN 1992, p. 89). Arguably one of the most remarkable, if not important, results of Shannon's work was its contribution to the development of the structuralist movement in 1940's wartime New York, with the author's unpublished research having unearthed connections between Shannon and the linguist Roman Jakobson, and, thereby, the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. However, the details of this fascinating story must be told elsewhere.

2. UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN DATA MODELS AND THEORETICAL MODELS

The utility of Shannon's proposals hinges upon an understanding of the difference between data models and theoretical models. As Read (2008, p. 1) states "there is a distinction between the data model derived from patterned observation and the theoretical models which produce patterned observations". In other words, there is distinction between using language as a theoretical explanation for the interpretation, function and use of rock art, and choosing to use Shannon's model, or any other linguistic model of communication, to analyse rock art.

By distinguishing between theoretical and methodological applications of language in the study of rock art, one recognizes that analysis and overall interpretation should be demarcated as far as possible (MEIJER, DODD 2018, p. 290). This allows the potential insights offered by linguistics methods to be explored whilst at the same time avoiding problematic assumptions, which include: the images must have meaning, one must be able to read rock art, and that rock art is a form of writing. The connection, or lack of any connection, with writing is particularly controversial. Some scholars have suggested that rock art, and other kinds of prehistoric art, may be a form of proto-writing (ANATI 2017a; 2017b) Others are categoric that rock art is not writing, but may be one of the steps on the way toward writing (PETZINGER 2016). Assumptions such as these can lead to the formation of axioms compromising critical evaluation of the evidence.

Of course, approaching everything from the abstract perspective of a data model is not entirely objective. The selection of samples and the strategies used to organize data during the analytical process is always informed by an element of theory (MOBERG 1976, p. 3).

3. STUDYING ROCK ART AS A COMMUNICATION SYSTEM FROM A STRUCTURALIST PERSPECTIVE

Let us delve a little further into the detail of how one might use Shannon's SMR model, and its derivatives, to investigate the underlying significance of rock art.

3.1 Applying Shannon's definition of language, the SMR model of communication to rock art

An understanding of rock art based on the SMR model of communication might be used to find out something about the underlying significance of the images, whatever that may be, based on the structure of relations between the images and the contexts in which they are found. If we take Shannon's SMR model as a starting point: the images can be seen as a 'message', communicated using a graphic code, whose 'meaning' is unknown and must be recovered using only the details of the images themselves (including their context). At first sight, such a task might seem impossible, but this is not the case: Shannon's theory of communication expects that from the set of all possible messages, only some subset will be considered valid messages (SHANNON 1945, p. 1; 1948, p. 1; WEAVER 1949, p. 7; SANDERSON 2020). In other words, even if the total number of possibilities is astronomically large, only a finite number of possible solutions are actually plausible. The size of each set depends on the specific characteristics of the rock art tradition that is the object of study, which will not be explored here.

A literal transcription is probably beyond our grasp for the rock art produced by non-literate societies during prehistory, where ethnography is unable to provide any kind of direct *a priori* information to assist investigations. However, even if we are unable to understand the contents of any message conveyed by the images, one can still infer something about its contents, as well as other kinds of information, such as how the system functions, based on the external characteristics of the message and any associated context.

3.2 Nordbladh's linguistic data model of rock art

In the 1970's Jarl Nordbladh, a Swedish archaeologist studying Southern Tradition rock carvings (refer SOGNES 2001, pp.12-14 for the spatial and chronological extents of this rock art tradition) at University of Gothenburg, Sweden, proposedly a data model of rock art based on the sender:message:receiver principle as part of his PhD (Fig. 3). It is immediately evident that images, their underlying referents and people, relate to one another in complex ways. There images relate spatially to one another in various ways in terms of where they occur: on the same or another surface. Similar signs and similar combinations thereof are repeated. Relations, or mappings, exist between the images and the underlying significance of the images. In Nordbladh's model, the interlocutors and the audience, (the senders and receivers) both share the same frame of reference, allowing them to understand the meaning of the images. As researchers, we effectively sit in the same position as the intended receiver, but lack knowledge of the necessary underlying informa-

tion (important for reasons which will become clear at the end of the section).

The presence of mappings is crucial if a rock art is to be studied using a data model based on language. Even in rock art traditions such as those of Samburu warriors, Northern Kenya, where a recent study suggests that the images have no meaning in a conventional semantic sense (GOLDHAHN et al. 2020, pp. 8, 14), mappings to some piece of information are nevertheless present (unintentionally). Within the contemporary rock art tradition of the Samburu, the images stand for something: an animal the creator encountered, or a story about a particular event (*ibid*, p. 8). The images are also associated with very specific context, as they are only created during a particular time period of a warrior's life, mostly by male initiates preparing for *rite de passage* ceremonies (*ibid*, p. 5).

3.3 The roots of Nordbladh's approach and his findings

Nordbladh took a structuralist approach to the analysis of rock art, rooted in turn within the work of his supervisor, Professor Carl Axel Moberg, and, thereby, structuralist theory. Structuralism, or structuralist approach, is defined as "any theory or method in which a discipline or field of study is envisaged as comprising elements interrelated in systems and structures at various levels, the structures and the interrelations of their elements being regarded as more significant than the elements considered in isolation" (OED). As mentioned previously, Shannon and key actors in his network were formative in the development of structuralist theory. Moberg was connected to this network, as a result of connections to a number of French scholars, in particular Jean-Claude Gardin, and thereby to the work of Claude Levi-Strauss and André Leroi-Gourhan.

It was perhaps a result of these (probably indirect) connections that Nordbladh arrived at his model. At the time, the work of Leroi-Gourhan (LEROI-GOURHAN 1964-65; 1965) had already demonstrated that regularities could be found in Palaeolithic art: certain figures, and combinations of figures predominate in specific locations within caves. Nordbladh applied the same principles and, similarly, found that what is represented in Southern Tradition rock art is far from random. From study of rock carvings in Kville, Western Sweden, and Uppland, Eastern Sweden, Nordbladh suggested that the figures only demonstrate a finite number of relations with one another. Namely, they are arranged in certain ways, exhibit a variety of different orientations, and can be connected to one another topographically, either directly (superimposition) or indirectly (in terms of their proximity to one another) (NORDBLADH 1981, pp. G38-G39, pp. G78-G79). When Nordbladh considered all classifications of relations together, as combinations, Nordbladh found that specific combinations of the main figure categories (cup-mark, ship, anthropomorph, animal, foot-sole, cross-in-circle) predominated in his Swedish study areas, whilst are others occur more rarely, or are completely absent (NORDBLADH 1980, pp. 62-63

Tables 14 and 15). Importantly, Nordbladh's findings conform to the expectations of Shannon's theory of communication, outlined in the previous subsection (valid messages \subseteq all possible messages). Thus, it would appear, at least in this case, that Southern Tradition rock art, appears to exhibit traits conforming to Shannon's definition of language, thereby supporting the idea of studying rock art as a data model. This conclusion does not mean to imply that rock art is a natural language, although subsequent scholarship may be able to confirm or reject such a notion. Instead, it suggests that it should be possible to study rock art using linguistic methods in order to gain new levels of insight into the underlying significance of the images.

Whilst the exact details of the methodology are too complex to discuss in detail here, one might be able to exploit the structure of the SMR model, as developed by Nordbladh to work backwards from the images to gain greater levels of insight into one or more of: the underlying significance, role and use of the images. Finding an unknown using only observation of the outcomes and/or piecing incomplete fragmentary information together in order to arrive at some kind of conclusion is not a problem exclusively found in rock research, or archaeology. One group facing similar problems can be found in the field of cryptanalysis: "the analysis and decryption of encrypted text or information without prior knowledge" of the procedure for encoding (OED).

4. GRAPHIC CODES: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Let us now move on to consider how Shannon's model, and its derivatives, operative in practice. Our own cultural preconditioning makes it difficult for us to imagine a society without writing (CLARYSSE, VANDORPE 2008, p. 715). Just like language, many kinds of information technologies exist besides those which immediately come to mind; speech and writing. Non-literate societies are far more reliant on oral and visual methods of communication for the transfer and preservation of knowledge (LEROI-GOURHAN 1993, pp. 257-266; COUCH 1989, p. 587). In the case of visual methods, graphic codes are used. Given previous discussions concerning Shannon's definition of language and his SMR data model of communication (including derivatives), it is immediately evident that rock art can be considered a graphic code. However, rock art is just one kind of visual communication.

4.1 Rock art as a graphic communication system

In current literature, a more nuanced understanding of visual communication and what constitutes a graphic code is emerging. Traditionally, the study of graphic codes has been very much focused on the question of what does or does not constitute writing (MIKULSKA 2020, p. 6). In response to this this debate, the term graphic communication system has entered into use, with it being suggested that "we ought to drop the label 'true writing' and maintain a straightforward distinction between glottographic (both phonologically

and nonphonologically based) and semasiographic (non-language-utterance-based) sign system[s]" (URTON 2003, p. 28 in MIKULSKA 2020, p. 8).

4.2 Four types of graphic code: the typology of Morin, Kelly and Winters

Recently, Morin et al (2020) made a proposal for the principal differences between the main kinds of graphic code. With reference to examples from contemporary society and ethnography, Morin et al. propose four main types exist: emblems, specialized notations, speech bound notations and writing. A given system may belong to more than one category simultaneously. For example, consider Australian message sticks (*ibid*, p. 732).

The distinctions between each of the four types hinge upon what Morin et al. term the productivity of the code, and whether or not additional knowledge of language is necessary to use the code. Productivity is related to the idea that codes have an information carrying capacity (*ibid*, p. 729), which is related to the concepts of entropy and redundancy within language – first described and quantified by Shannon (1948; 1951). Entropy is a statistical parameter borrowed from thermodynamics, used to measure the amount of information produced on average for each constituent part of a language, which can, in turn, be used to quantify the information capacity of a system. The concept of redundancy, describes “the amount of constraint imposed on a text in language due to its statistical structure” (SHANNON 1951, p. 50). The overall combined effects of entropy and redundancy are the reason why one can state that only subset of all possible messages can be considered valid messages. Mathematical proofs of this phenomena can be followed in the references (SHANNON 1948, pp. 10-14; WEAVER 1949, p. 12; SHANNON 1951). For our purposes, it is sufficient to state that the characteristics of graphic codes dictate their carrying capacity, which is scalable. Essentially, the number of potential outcomes and whether or not they can be meaningfully combined mean that certain graphic codes are very flexible, whilst others are not. The number of symbols which need to be memorized is also important: more symbols can be very specific semantically, but take longer to learn, and can be cumbersome as a system (ROBINSON 2007, p. 40). One of the reasons writing using an alphabet and the Latin script is so successful is the flexibility of the system to express anything one can describe using words (MORIN et al. 2020, p. 735).

It is easier to see how productivity and speech-boundedness affect graphic codes if we consider each of Morin et al.'s types in more detail in conjunction with some practical examples.

4.3 Emblems

Emblems, such as the international code of signals for ships, traffic signs, family heraldry and clan totems are language independent, but have a low productivity. The meaning of each symbol is often standalone, and the possibility to create a string of information, is

limited (MORIN et al. 2020, p. 733). If we take the example of a Haida totem pole, on the Northwest coast of Canada, each emblem represents the identity of an individual or group (HAMILTON 2015). Several studies worldwide have suggested a totemic significance for certain scenes and traditions in rock art (for example FUGLESTVEDT 2008; 2010).

4.4 Specialized notations

This category of code can be understood independent of language and is highly productive. Examples include mathematical symbols, and Andean Khipu: knotted cords, sometimes coloured, used for the recording of numerical and non-numerical information (URTON 2003; MEDRANO, URTON 2018).

4.5 Speech bound notations

Rock art, as well as many other kinds of prehistoric art found on other media, found worldwide often manifests itself as a speech bound notation (ARSENAULT 2004; ARSENAULT, ZAWADZKA 2013; KEYSER, KLASSEN 2001; MAY et al. 2019). This type of graphic code is language dependant as it requires additional oral elaboration in order to be understood (MORIN et al. 2020, pp. 731, 734). Such codes are form part of a wider suite of oral practices (COUCH 1989, pp. 587-588), collectively referred to as orality (the quality of being verbally communicated (OED)). Speech bound notations frequently function as mnemonics for oral performance involving the recollection of information, which can be of an esoteric character (KELLY 2015, p. 12, pp. 63-69). Knowledge of such information can be subject various levels of control, through secret societies (HAYDEN 2018, pp. 1-26). Sometimes, a person in the community is appointed responsible for memorizing and reciting such information (GREEN, EMIL HER MANY HORSES 2005). Whilst general conventions can exist, speech bound notations are often poorly standardised: due to the individual retaining a certain freedom of expression (MORIN et al. 2020, p. 734).

The graphic communication systems of the indigenous societies of the Northwest Plains of North America of the Late Prehistoric (250 AD-1700 AD), Protohistoric (1700-1840 AD) and Historic (1840-1900) Periods, provide a range of examples of some of the many forms speech bound notations can take, and attest the variety of media they can be found upon. Work by Keyser and Klassen has used historic ethnography and contemporary indigenous knowledge of graphic codes found on perishable media as an analogy for the study of contemporary rock art. (KEYSER, KLASSEN 2001, pp. 32-37). Two, partially chronologically overlapping rock art traditions are found on the Northwest Plains of North America: The Ceremonial and Biographical Traditions. The two traditions differ from one another in terms of their appearance and subject matter. The Ceremonial Tradition predates European contact and is associated with the spirit world, in particular vision quests (KEYSER, KLASSEN 2001, p. 161). Vision quests involve retreating to a specific location in the landscape where spiritual power is believed to be more concentrated in

order to fast and pray (*ibid*, pp. 38, 191). Such places are often situated at dramatic locations in nature, for example, the Hoodoos, at Writing-On-Stone, Alberta, Canada (*ibid*, pp. 36-37).

Where the purpose of the vision quest was a coming of age ritual (usually for young men) the symbol which appeared during the vision became the guardian spirit for that person throughout life, appearing as a mark of identity on personal items such as shields and tipis (*ibid*, pp. 38, 191). Rock art was often created at the sacred place where the vision was received, representing and commemorating the details of the vision. Over time, the images themselves could acquire their own power of their own, indicating a place where spirits dwelled (*ibid*, pp. 38-39).

Biographical tradition rock art begins later than that of the Ceremonial Tradition, and is associated with the profane world, usually recording deeds and events “of another person, or a person and their friends” (KEYSER 2020). One of the interesting features of this graphic communication system is that the same or similar visual conventions are used across a range of different context and media, including: rock art (KEYSER , KLASSEN 2001, Fig. 15.6), robe (GREEN , EMIL HER MANY HORSES 2005) and ledger art (*Plains Indian Ledger Art Project. [online]*). Given that the end of the tradition overlaps with historical accounts, literal transcriptions are available, permitting the detailed analogies between different media, including rock art (KEYSER 1996; KEYSER , KLASSEN 2001, p. 259).

4.6 Writing

In Morin et al.’s typology, writing is seen as a special category of language dependent graphic code, encoding morphemes or phonemes found in natural language in the form of glyphs (e.g. Chinese) or a script (e.g. Latin alphabet) (MORIN et al. 2020, p. 729 after SAMPSON 1985). Morin et al. consider the defining attribute of writing to be its high productivity: great flexibility of expression and high rate of compression, which is in contrast to the more limited information carrying capacity of, say, a speech bound notation (MORIN et al. 2020, pp. 729-730, 735; KELLY et al. 2020, p. 5).

5. CONCLUSION: ROCK ART AND LANGUAGE

It is argued here that the many of the key ideas suggested in the 1940’s by the pioneer of information theory, Claude Shannon, may provide some useful theoretical and methodological perspectives for the study of rock art. By adopting a more abstract view of language, as any stochastic process which produces a series of discreet symbols according to some system of probabilities (SHANNON 1945, p. 11), it is pos-

sible to construct data models based on Shannon’s sender:message:receiver model of communication in order to investigate a specific set of problems within rock art research using linguistic methodologies. These problems pertain to the underlying significance of the images and ascertaining if any rules of combination and order exist governing the use of the system. It is evident that rock art possesses all of the key attributes of Shannon’s definition of language, his theory of communication and sender:message:receiver (SMR) model. In an SMR data model applied to rock art, the images function as a graphic code.

Fundamental to the viewpoints expressed in this contribution is an awareness of the difference between data models and theoretical models, as outlined by Read (2008). The distinction allows researchers to avoid pitfalls associated with a theoretical perspective: where rock art is assumed from the outset to be a language. In a data model, language provides a methodology to analyse the images. Interpretation of the findings is a separate issue.

With reference to developments of Shannon’s model by the linguist Roman Jakobson, and the Swedish archaeologist Jarl Nordbladh, who devised a linguistic data model of rock art based around the sender:message:receiver principle in the 1970’s, it is argued that a structuralist perspective can be used to find out more about the underlying significance of the images, based on study of the relations between the figures and the contexts in which they are found.

In the latter half of the article, we have considered the place of rock art as one of many kinds of graphic code. It is contended that the recently proposed typology outlined by Morin et al. (2020) provides a useful framework for classifying graphic codes and understanding the principal differences. Based on whether or not use of the code depends on knowledge of the language associated with it, and the code’s carrying capacity for information (termed by Morin et al. as productivity), Morin et al. identify four groups: emblems, specialized notations, speech-bound notations and writing. Whilst emblems can be connected to rock art with a totemic significance, speech bound notations function as an information technology connected to orality: acting as mnemonics for the recording, performance and transfer of various kinds of information.

NOTE

This contribution is based on a chapter of the author’s forthcoming PhD thesis (DODD in prep. 2021), where many of the ideas and concepts summarized here are examined in more detail.

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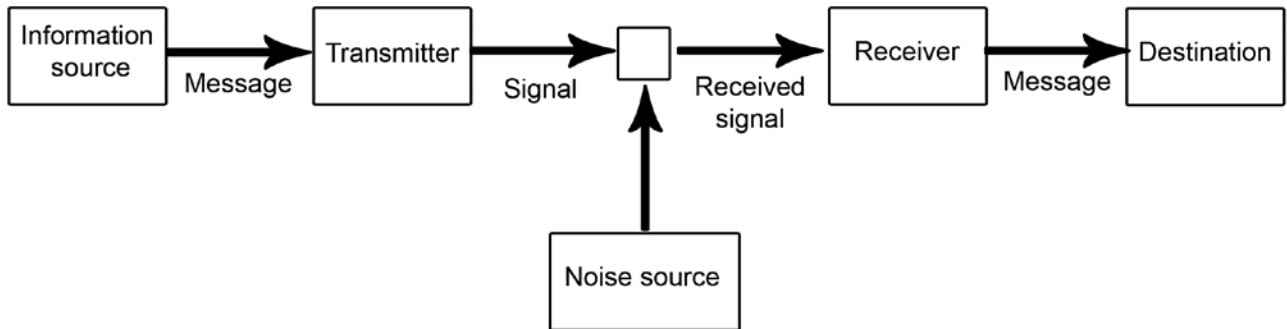


Fig. 1 - Shannon’s “Schematic diagram of a general communication system” (Illustration: author, after SHANNON 1948: FIG. 1)

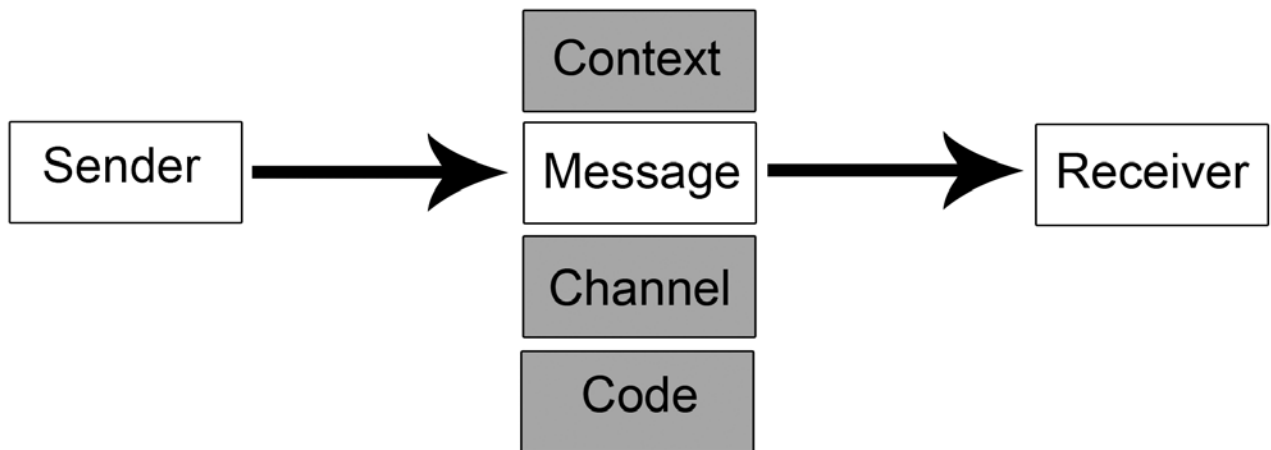


Fig. 2 - Roman Jakobson’s functions of language (JAKOBSON 1960, p. 353). (Illustration: author).

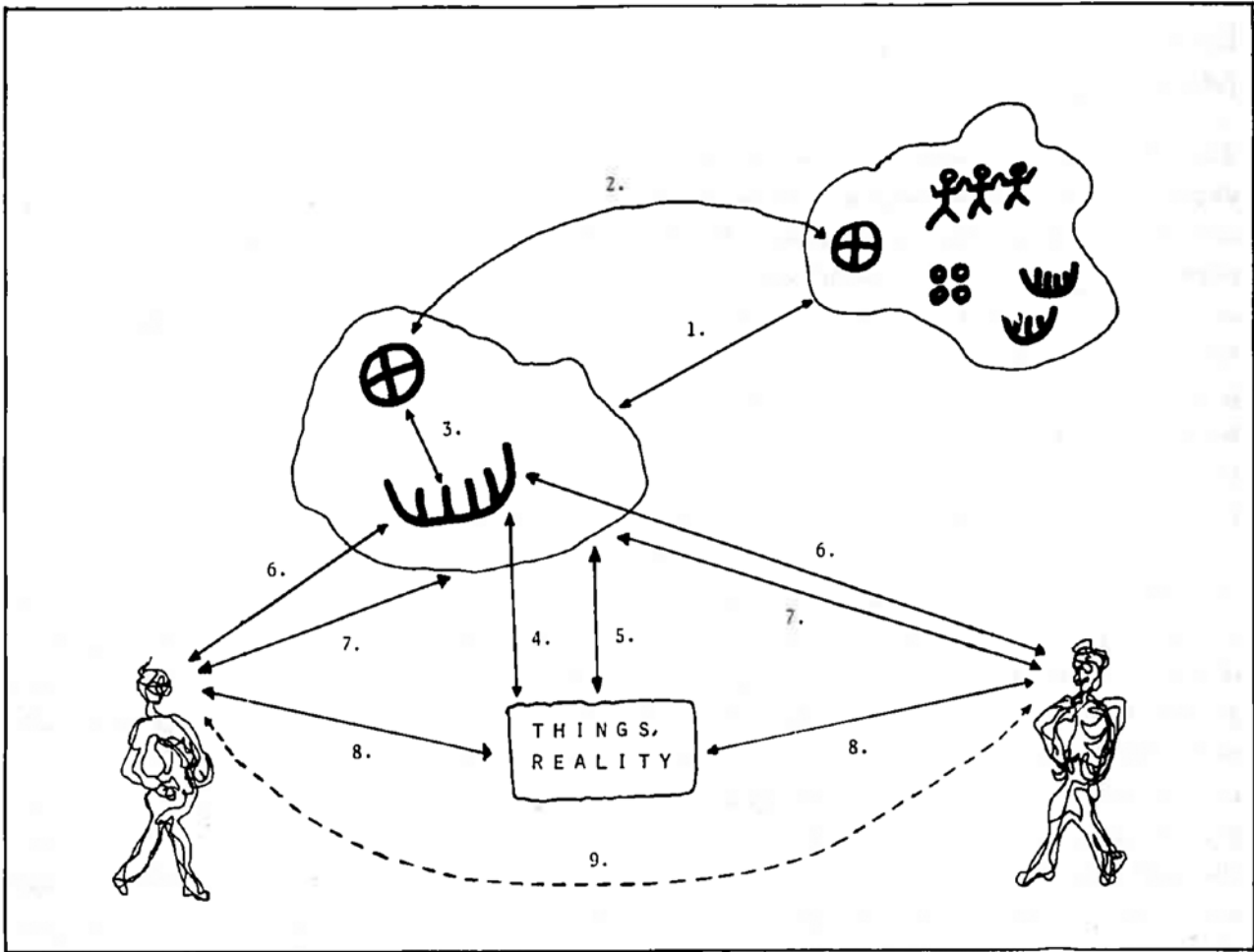


Fig. 2. A simplified linguistic model applied to the petroglyphs.

1–3 Syntactic studies: 1) between picture frames
 2) between signs of different picture frames
 3) between signs inside a single picture frame

4–5 Semantic studies: 4) between sign and thing (= image)
 5) between message-contents and reality

6–8 Pragmatic studies: 6) between user and image
 7) between user and message
 8) between user and reality, inclusive things.

If 1–8, communication, 9, is possible.

Fig. 3 - Nordbladh's simplified linguistic model of rock art as a communication system. (NORDBLADH 1978a, Fig. 2; NORDBLADH 1978b, Fig. 5)



Una mirada desde la estética y la semiótica a las pinturas rupestres de El Idulo, Lonya Grande, Amazonas, Perú

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SUMMARY (THE ROCK ART PAINTINGS OF EL IDULO FROM AN AESTHETIC AND SEMIOTIC PERSPECTIVE)

In this paper we present, analyze and contextualize the rock art paintings located in El Idulo site, Lonya Grande district, Amazonas department-Peru, which are ascribed to the Formative period within the Peruvian archaeological chronology. The communicational and aesthetic experience is expressed both in the intentionality underlying the choice and construction of the site, as well as in the size, design and location of the images that make up the plastic space and integrate the semiotic context. The analysis of the central design enables us to evaluate the aesthetic resolution of the concept of duality, an organizing principle of the Andean belief system, both in El Idulo and in the rock art sites we investigated in the coastal valleys of Chicama, Moche and Virú, as well as in the Cajamarca highlands. To the aesthetic approach we add the semiotic dimension, also by intersecting archaeological and ethnohistorical information. On the other hand, the images surrounding El Idulo and integrating the information system also confirm, expand and make explicit the validity of the concept of duality, as well as that of a mythology of origin, synthesized by a particular sign, which we trace both in the context of the rock art expressions and in the archaeological evidence, in particular, in the objects of power and prestige made of gold.

Key words: Rock art paintings; El Idulo; Lonya Grande; Amazonas; Perú

RESUMEN

En este trabajo presentamos, analizamos y contextualizamos las pinturas rupestres del sitio El Idulo, ubicado en el distrito de Lonya Grande, departamento Amazonas-Perú, y adscriptas al período Formativo dentro de la cronología arqueológica peruana. La experiencia comunicacional y estética está expresada tanto en la intencionalidad subyacente a la elección y construcción del sitio, como en el tamaño, diseño y ubicación de las imágenes que conforman el espacio plástico, e integran el contexto semiótico. El análisis del diseño central habilita que evaluemos la resolución estética del concepto de dualidad, un principio organizador del sistema de creencias andino, tanto en El Idulo como en los sitios de arte rupestre que investigamos en los valles costeros de Chicama, Moche y Virú, así como en la sierra cajamarquina. A la aproximación estética sumamos la dimensión semiótica al intersectar la información arqueológica y etnohistórica. Por otra parte, las imágenes que rodean a El Idulo construyen un sistema de información que confirma, amplía y explicita la vigencia del concepto de dualidad, así como de una mitología de origen, sintetizada por un signo en particular que rastreamos tanto en el arte rupestre, como en contextos arqueológicos, en objetos de poder y prestigio confeccionados en oro, y finalmente en la información etnohistórica

Palabras clave: Pinturas rupestres; El Idulo; Lonya Grande; Amazonas; Perú

INTRODUCCIÓN

Esta investigación se inscribe en el contexto del inventario general del arte rupestre del Departamento Amazonas, estudio promovido por el INAKK, Universidad Nacional Toribio Rodríguez de Mendoza, Amazonas. En este contexto, presentamos y contextualizamos el primer estilo de arte rupestre definido para el período Formativo Final en el distrito de Lonya Grande, Amazonas, destacando que toda la información que brindamos sobre sitios de arte rupestre es de primera mano, sean las pinturas de El Idulo, los grabados rupestres de Zapatalgo y Carachupa en el distrito de Lonya Grande-Amazonas, las pinturas rupestres de El Higuieron I, valle de Chicama-La Libertad, y los grabados rupestres de Las Guitarras y pinturas de Monte Calvario, en Poro Poro, Santa Cruz-Cajamarca.

LA HUMANIZACIÓN DEL ESPACIO EN EL IDULO

El sitio de pinturas rupestres El Idulo (fig 1) está ubicado en las coordenadas UTM 782004/9326194, a una

altitud de 1401 msnm., sin testimonios arqueológicos en superficie. El alero con arte parietal se construyó en la cara este de una elevación, conformada por bloques de rocas sedimentarias superpuestos, paralelos entre sí, que presentan una coloración en variedad de grises. La abertura destaca por una coloración ligeramente rojiza, mide 2.20 m de largo, por 1.50 de profundidad y 1.10 m de alto, distinguiéndose el techo y una plataforma inferior/balcón, que permite el desplazamiento de dos personas adultas. La conformación natural del bloque rocoso, sumado a la intervención realizada, evoca a una imagen antropomorfa (fig 2), lo cual pone en evidencia la intencionalidad en el proceso de elección y trabajo del conjunto. Las expresiones rupestres se plasmaron sobre un escenario destinado y preparado para ser visto, de alta visibilidad, excelente acústica, fácil acceso, y en un contexto paisajístico de escasa pendiente y espacio abierto, lo cual habilitó la congregación de un grupo social amplio, que excedería a la unidad familiar para involucrar a una comunidad

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local, específicamente a un grupo de descendencia o linaje, con las parcialidades hanan y hurin, derecha/izquierda o arriba/abajo representadas, en consonancia con el sistema de creencias andino, que concibe al concepto/ideología de la dualidad como eje básico de referencia, (BURGER y SALAZAR BURGER 1994).

LA CENTRALIDAD DE EL IDULO: DUALIDAD, PETRIFICACIÓN, ANCESTROS MÍTICOS, CAMAQUEN Y ORÁCULO

El espacio plástico presidido por El Idulo corresponde a un sector del soporte rocoso que fue especialmente acondicionado para ese fin, se preparó la superficie rocosa en un proceso que implicó el barrido de pinturas anteriores, algunas observables por la fuga de pigmentos, y otras por fuera del área destacada. El único color empleado en la ejecución de los motivos fue el rojo, que marca un fuerte contraste con la superficie habilitada. El diseño central mide 0.43 m de alto por 0.52 m de ancho máximo, y está construido en lo básico a partir de trazos gruesos de pintura (fig 3). Los mismos destacan una máscara ligeramente cuadrangular, con tres apéndices en forma de plumas, pintados en la porción media del sector derecho; también describen un cuello cuadrangular que se une a la línea que define un cuerpo circular decorado, al que agregaron en el diámetro proximal el diseño de los hombros y miembros superiores, con antebrazos levantados en señal de invocación, manos abiertas exhibiendo espacios ligeramente cuadrangulares en las palmas, y diez dedos. Por último, trazaron extremidades cuadrangulares, de un grosor que duplica el tamaño de los brazos y antebrazos, sin la indicación de rodillas y tobillos, presentando los pies con cinco dedos en posición distorsionada. Esta configuración estética desproporcionada se correlaciona en varios aspectos con la pintura de los chamanes del sitio El Higuerón I (CASTILLO y BARRAU 2012, pp.143-148), valle de Chicama (fig 4).

Al emplear la técnica negativa en el diseño de la máscara y parte del cuerpo del chamán, integraron a la roca en la definición del motivo, proceso que documentamos en otros casos (CASTILLO y BARRAU 2012, pp.147-148; CASTILLO y BARRAU 2020, p. 311). Se trata de un recurso técnico que pone de manifiesto la vigencia de un sistema de creencias que la información etnohistórica rescata y explica. El mismo alude a la petrificación de divinidades, héroes o ancestros míticos o reales; el alma del difunto se adentraba en la piedra conservando el camaquen o aliento vital, que lo habilitaba a emitir oráculo, constituyendo un objeto de adoración, y una manifestación de sacralización y perpetuación (TAYLOR 2008; ROSTWOROWSKI 2007).

La decoración de la máscara de El Idulo brinda un contexto de significación mayor, al analizar que se trata de un motivo compuesto por dos ofidios de cuerpo geométrico que describen un movimiento en zigzag, uniéndose al centro del espacio plástico a lo largo de una línea imaginaria ligeramente oblicua, que corre a lo largo de parte de los cuerpos y cabezas respectivas, que se proyectan hacia arriba y abajo respectivamente, hasta alcanzar con las bocas abiertas los segmentos mayores del rectángulo que cierra el primer conjun-

to, al que completaron en los sectores distales de cada ofidios, adicionando tres prolongaciones o segmentos paralelos entre sí y al lado antedicho. La línea superior pintada en positivo limitando el rectángulo, separa las representaciones en positivo de las fosas nasales y nariz, al tiempo que corta y limita los sectores superiores de ambos ofidios, conformando así dos espacios rectangulares que configuran los ojos del motivo antropomorfo. Por último, observamos que en la construcción de la figura ofídica en negativo, pintaron dentro del rectángulo y en positivo imágenes triangulares, las que configuran una boca felínica de grandes colmillos. En conclusión, el contraste entre áreas pintadas en positivo y las destacadas por el empleo de la técnica negativa, son aspectos destacados que cobran una relevancia singular al ponderar en el análisis la concepción teórica de Smith (2012), ya que el motivo ofídico en su concepción, desplazamiento y corte superior, representa una metonimia que alude a la montaña sagrada, ojo de agua, manantial o cueva de origen. Además, la línea pintada que cruza el sector superior del motivo en zigzag, separando los segmentos base de las figuras en negativo que conforman los ojos de la máscara, también remiten a dicha metonimia. Por último, la pintura en positivo de la boca felínica de grandes colmillos, constituye tanto el punto de origen imprescindible para la composición del motivo serpentiforme central, como la indudable representación del felino protector y mediador. La cosmovisión mencionada es clara y remite a una mitología de origen, es decir, a la pacarina, y está directamente relacionada con el culto de los ancestros míticos o reales.

Por último, los diez dedos y los espacios cuadrangulares representados en cada mano de El Idulo, expresan claramente el concepto de dualidad, (BURGER y SALAZAR BURGER 1994), ya que aluden, representan o desde lo simbólico "están en el lugar de" la segunda persona del chamán, ayudador o compañero, (ROSTWOROWSKI 2007, pp. 16-17; 21-22; 51; 111-116). Esta evidencia, sumada a lo antedicho sobre la participación de un grupo de descendencia en el sitio, con las mitades hanan y hurin de una comunidad, permite sustentar que identificamos la representación de una diarquía masculina, integrada por dos oficiantes pertenecientes a dichas mitades, representados de frente, en trance de transformación y vuelo chamánico, que en oposición y complementariedad convergen en el tránsito del umbral del cielo, un espacio que sólo las aves podían atravesar (SMITH 2012), en la invocación suprema dirigida a los ancestros míticos o reales. Se trata de una resolución estética innovadora, que si bien se inscribe en la ideología de dualidad, lleva a ampliar el espectro de lo visible y decible, incluso porque el ámbito de la expresión rupestre se extiende por fuera de la imagen de El Idulo, en un sistema que abarca a los espacios hanan y hurin, con la representación del manto de los chamanes y los objetos de poder respectivos.

El cuerpo de El Idulo es de forma circular, torso y abdomen están unidos y adquieren una estructura similar a un plato, otra característica que comparte con las figuras antropomorfas del sitio El Higuerón

I. Además, destacamos que la decoración del mismo muy probablemente se corresponda con la vestimenta de los chamanes, tal como sustentamos para el caso de los oficiantes del sitio mencionado, y el chamán en trance de vuelo (fig 5) del sitio Las Guitarras (BARRAU y CASTILLO 2017, p. 91). Junto al trazo grueso que limita al cuerpo, pintaron una secuencia de serpientes en su mayoría de apariencia fusiforme, de ojos circulares o cuadrangulares, que se encastran conformando un corredor interno al delineado de la figura circular, que de hecho semeja un plato, que guarda una correlación formal y no de estilo, con pectorales de oro pertenecientes a la tradición cultural Cupisnique, procedentes de la costa norte, que exhiben el diseño muy estilizado de un trenzado serpentiforme que rodea el borde de los mismos. A modo de ejemplo, citamos a Lothrop (1951, p. 228; 231) que presenta ejemplares recobrados en Chongoyape, a Onuki e Inokuchi (2011, p. 148) que dan a conocer una pieza recuperada en Kuntur Wasi, y además, al catálogo en línea del Museo Larco, que exhibe al pectoral de oro código de catalogación 100241, que lleva motivos geométricos escalonados con puntos, un ejemplar muy significativo para este estudio, ya que reúne figuras ofídicas que intercalan los puntos/ojos de agua, una presentación que está en consonancia con la posición teórica de Smith (2012).

La secuencia de serpientes está limitada por una línea perimetral que destaca al conjunto, y además, lo separa de la decoración interior, compuesta por motivos no figurativos que guardan una distribución asimétrica en el espacio plástico. A la altura del cuello de la figura pintaron un diseño cuadrangular, dejando abierto el sector medio del lado inferior, a partir del cual trazaron en 90° dos segmentos paralelos con los extremos distales en báculos, bastones o semicírculos divergentes, representando la lengua bifida de un ofidio. Desde lo conceptual esta figura central remite a las nociones de: ojo de montaña/manantial y pacarina de origen/ancestros míticos o reales, es decir, que muy probablemente represente a un pectoral, u objeto de status/poder, básico para comprender la forma en que los diseños pintados describen espacios reales o míticos, que se correlacionarían con los ámbitos de influencia hanan o hurin de los chamanes integrantes de la diarquía tratada. Más aún, al observar en detalle las imágenes pintadas, confirmamos que expresan la ideología indicada, variando solo la forma en que se enlazan unas con otras, hasta converger en un motivo perpendicular al cuerpo, compuesto por dos líneas paralelas con cuatro espacios cuadrangulares pintados en secuencia vertical, una figura que refiere al concepto de oposición/complementariedad de los opuestos representados y los linajes respectivos. Más aún, si en la ecuación sumamos a la secuencia de serpientes perimetrales, y la casuística reunida a través del análisis de los objetos de status/poder que mencionamos en el texto, es plausible considerar que en su conjunto la totalidad de la decoración del cuerpo de los chamanes esté en consonancia y represente el concepto de ojo de montaña/manantial, pacarina de origen y ancestros míticos o reales.

LOS ESPACIO HANAN Y HURIN: LA DATA DE TEXTILES Y ATRIBUTOS DE PODER

La representación del atavío del cuerpo de los chamanes y los atributos de poder respectivos, la extendieron a los espacios hanan y hurin respectivos, completando así el contexto de significación del sistema representado, recurriendo de esta forma a una resolución estética singular, que en parte recuerda el estudio de Kauffmann sobre la sección superior de la estela Raimondi (1983, p. 248), al sustentar que se trataba de la espalda del personaje y representaba a la parte posterior del manto.

En el espacio hurin, a la izquierda del cuerpo descrito (fig 6), diseñaron motivos ofídicos y amarus o serpientes felinizadas. La primera imagen corresponde a tres ejemplares representados de perfil, esquematizados y con anexos formales que aluden a la circulación y distribución de agua, en un contexto que apunta a la metonimia entre las serpientes/ amarus y el agua (BARRAU y CASTILLO 2017, p. 91). Se suceden motivos que destacan bocas de amarus en perfil, con apéndices en forma de bastón o báculos de extremos divergentes, que indican la lengua bifida del animal. Además sumaron figuras serpentiformes en S y escalonadas, algunas con evidencia de repintado. Hacia la izquierda diseñaron el primer signo guía, de gran tamaño en relación al conjunto. A partir de un diseño cuadrangular central, adicionaron cuatro segmentos paralelos a los lados, dejando libres los espacios de los ángulos, que se convierten en los cuellos que conectan con los sectores distales de la figura, en los que pintaron a las cabezas de perfil de cuatro amarus. Las mismas presentan distintas formas y tamaños, incluyendo en la ejecución diseños angulosos, serpentiformes, líneas escalonadas, y los bastones o báculos ya referidos. Por debajo agregaron una imagen de menor tamaño que sigue el mismo patrón, y ya por fuera del espacio plástico tratado, agregaron una figura similar inconclusa.

A la derecha del alero, en el espacio hanan (fig 7 y 8), representaron un gran número de motivos, que si bien exhiben cierta variabilidad, mantienen una significativa unidad de sentido. Es sintomática la ausencia de imágenes antropomorfas o zoomorfas, por fuera de las serpentiformes que dominan el espacio plástico. Junto al antebrazo de El Idulo construyeron al primer "signo guía", seguido por otro de mayor tamaño dispuesto por debajo. Contiguo por la derecha anexaron la figura de un rectángulo perpendicular al espacio plástico, con otro inscripto, que se abre en tres ocasiones para habilitar el diseño de las cabezas en perfil de tres amarus dirigidas hacia dentro de la figura, siguiendo la secuencia izquierda/derecha/izquierda, y separadas por tres círculos concéntricos sobre el lado izquierdo. (fig 9). En el sector medio de dicho lado, y por fuera del rectángulo, agregaron una sucesión de tres amarus muy simplificados, el último solo indicado por los báculos o bastones divergentes. En la comprensión de este signo, recurrimos tanto a la metonimia que establece Hocquenghem (1983, pp. 58-74), entre las serpientes/ amaru y el recurso hídrico, como a la concepción de Smith (2012), visualizando a los círculos concéntricos

como lugares de emergencia o pacarina de origen. Esta base teórica permite reconocer la representación de un sector del espacio, y sistema de control efectivo de un territorio por un grupo de descendencia, que en mayor escala lo encontramos expresado en los grabados rupestres de Carachupa (fig 10), ubicado en el mismo distrito (CASTILLO y BARRAU en prensa). Por otra parte, de las figuras de los amarus tomaron el diseño de los báculos o bastones divergentes para generalizarlos y desagregarlos, construyendo formas semicirculares de expresión naturalista o esquematizada, dirigidos hacia derecha/izquierda, arriba/abajo, en distintas combinaciones o adosados a segmentos serpentiformes, que observamos se multiplican en el sector inferior del espacio plástico, en el cual registramos evidencia del repintado de imágenes. Este conjunto contiene y oculta al único amaru representado de perfil y completo, de cuerpo escalonado y cabeza con un tocado de cuatro triángulos con prolongaciones serpentiformes, que siguiendo la concepción de Smith (2012), sostenemos podría tratarse de una metonimia de la pacarina de origen. Por la derecha y bajo el rectángulo reseñado, agregaron una forma cuadrangular abierta que incluye un conjunto de imágenes serpentiformes angulosas y esquematizadas, que se encastran y extienden hacia la izquierda, apenas por debajo del conjunto referido. Cabe mencionar que en la colección en línea del Museo Larco se aprecian serpientes confeccionadas en oro con agujeros para coserlas a las vestimentas, todas procedentes de la costa norte, códigos de catalogación: ML 100542 a 100550.

EL SIGNO GUÍA, AMARUS, CHAMANES, Y ANCESTROS MÍTICOS

Los signos guía descritos presentan una construcción muy singular, que en lo básico se mantiene constante a lo largo de la muestra estudiada, y se observan muy estilizados en los petroglifos de Zapatalgo (fig 11), ubicados en las proximidades de El Idulo, y en conjunto conllevan una ideología de origen común y distintiva. De hecho, al análisis sumamos pectorales, platos, discos y otros que exhiben un despliegue iconográfico por demás significativo, que conforma una base sólida para intersectarlo con la información etnohistórica disponible.

A partir de un estudio iconográfico, Hocquenghem (1983, p. 58-74), sostiene que tanto las bocas felínicas como los adornos y apéndices serpentiformes son característicos de los seres míticos, que reunirían la fuerza-coraje de los jefes y el poder-saber de los chamanes, representaciones icónicas que aluden al poder que reunían, junto al camaquen o aliento vital, nociones que remiten al concepto de poder inmortal y autoridad absoluta de los ancestros míticos. Además, afirma que existe una relación estrecha entre los objetos alargados y los ancestros míticos, los objetos delgados, largos, que rodean, delimitan, juntan, unen, y que por su forma son considerados serpientes, se asemejan a los ancestros fundadores de linajes, que definen sus descendientes y los reúnen en una sola comunidad unida por lazos de parentesco, y destaca que estos objetos intervienen en todos los ritos que realizan, refuerzan-

do y reafirmando a la comunidad, permitiendo su reproducción a nivel ideológico, en particular durante la estación húmeda, cuando el agua asegura la reproducción de la comunidad a nivel material. Además, entiende que el agua que corre y forma un río, ligada con el dueño del trueno, el relámpago y el arco iris, es una serpiente sustancia vital de los ancestros, agua de vida, regeneración, que se transforma y simboliza la inmortalidad, de forma tal que en el pensamiento simbólico indígena concibe instaurada una relación metonímica entre los ancestros y las serpientes que representaban su inmortalidad.

DESCIFRAR EL CÓDIGO Y ENLAZAR AL SISTEMA REPRESENTADO

Los signos guía de El Idulo guardan correlación formal con objetos de status y poder procedentes de la costa norte, pectorales, medallones, discos, y otros, que presentan agujeros para coserlos a las vestimentas. Los mismos pertenecen a la tradición cultural Cupisnique y comparten un formato circular o cruciforme, con un espacio central de diseño cuadrangular, circular o romboidal, con o sin imágenes inscriptas, que remiten según Smith (2012) a una mitología de origen, en la cual prevalece la idea de pacarina, espacio de emergencia y fertilidad asociada a las fuentes de agua montañosa, conceptualizadas como serpientes-amarus. Respecto a los diseños en el espacio sagrado, en el segundo signo guía del espacio hanan observamos la boca de un amaru de perfil, que siguiendo la posición de Hocquenghem, pone de manifiesto la inmortalidad de los ancestros míticos, una posición teórica que se enlaza perfectamente con lo sostenido por Smith. En las piezas de oro de Kuntur Wasi, destaca un medallón cruciforme de composición más elaborada (ONUKI e INOKUCHI 2011, p. 125), que representa a la pareja mítica en el espacio nodal, y los amarus en los cuatro extremos. En el caso de una pieza circular procedente de Chongoyape (LOTHROP 1951, p. 228, fig. 71), un amaru construido a partir de segmentos serpentiformes ocupa el centro del diseño, aludiendo a la inmortalidad de los ancestros míticos, mientras que sobre el borde exhibe un trenzado perimetral de imágenes ofídicas que refuerzan la idea, apuntando a la reproducción del sistema. Otro medallón de igual procedencia (LOTHROP 1951, p. 230, fig. 72), también cruciforme, exhibe un centro sin decoración, con dos agujeros para coserlos a las vestimentas. Un eje lleva en cada extremo la representación de frente de la cara antropomorfizada de un amaru, separado del espacio central por un segmento perpendicular. Al otro eje lo construyeron a partir de la prolongación de los lados del diseño, en dos bastones o báculos de extremos divergentes y cerrados sobre sí, una metonimia muy estilizada del amaru, compuesto a partir de los cuerpos o de los apéndices de la lengua bifida. Al espacio interno lo ocuparon con dos líneas paralelas a tal motivo, que se unen para conformar parte del cuerpo y cabeza de perfil del amaru. En cuanto al tránsito del umbral del cielo, la última pieza que abordamos es un pectoral publicado por Lavalle (1992, p. 29, fig 11), de forma circular y con un ser mítico inscripto en el espacio central. Esta figura corresponde a

un chamán ejecutado de perfil, en trance y actitud de vuelo, que lleva en la mano derecha un tubo y objeto bicónico, del que surgen representaciones del cactus San Pedro, un fuerte alucinógeno. La otra mano sostiene un motivo ofídico, y se distinguen imágenes similares en el tocado y vestimenta del oficiante. Cuatro segmentos semicirculares conforman el perímetro central, cada uno enlazando el diseño de frente de un amaru ejecutado en forma anatómica. Los cuatro ejemplares están situados en diámetros opuestos, y además, conectados por cuatro segmentos externos, semicirculares y de extremos curvos, que enlazan los ojos de las figuras, es decir, las pacarinas de origen. Los espacios intermedios guardan solución de continuidad en el diseño, ya que agregaron segmentos perpendiculares a los que adosaron dos motivos serpentiformes en forma de bastón o báculo, con extremos distales convergentes y cerrados sobre sí, conformando un área triangular, que lleva la cabeza esquematizada de un ofidio en la porción proximal. En este contexto, destacamos que en solo dos de los segmentos perpendiculares, ubicados en los extremos de un mismo diámetro, adicionaron en la porción distal los diseños de las cabezas en perfil de dos amarus, dirigidas hacia el centro de la figura, dividiendo a la composición en mitades. En síntesis: observamos al oficiante en pleno proceso de transformación y vuelo chamánico, cruzando el umbral de la pacarina de origen, un espacio que sólo las aves podían atravesar (SMITH 2012), para entrar en comunicación con los ancestros míticos o reales, mientras a los lados distinguimos a los cuatro grupos de descendencia divididos en mitades, por el último diseño descripto. Cabe mencionar que en el sector 6 de las pinturas rupestres de Monte Calvario en Poro Poro (CASTILLO y BARRAU 2020, p. 312), por debajo de la pareja mítica se plasmó la imagen de un chamán en trance de transformación

y vuelo chamánico, portando en la mano derecha un objeto similar al descripto (fig 12). La asociación temporal y simbólica entre ambos contextos suma evidencia y sustento a la interpretación que brindamos.

CONCLUSIONES

Alrededor del 800 a.C se produjo un abandono repentino de los sitios de la costa central y norte. Si bien el fechado y el motivo del desplazamiento poblacional todavía es motivo de estudio y controversia, lo real es que las sociedades que integraban la tradición cultural Cupisnique se trasladaron hacia la sierra. Esta cronología se corresponde con la invasión del sitio Kuntur Wasi por sociedades pertenecientes a la tradición mencionada, y en Chavín de Huántar con la construcción del portal negro y blanco, la plaza circular y la galería de las ofrendas, entre el 900-780 cal a.C (SHIBATA 2011). El origen del grupo de descendencia que construyó El Idulo, hunde sus raíces en la tradición mencionada, y la cronología se ubica al inicio del período Formativo Final, durante la fase Bagua II definida por Shady (1987, pp. 468-469).

En síntesis, presentamos un estudio atravesado por una mirada estética, a partir de la ponderación de la conformación antropomorfa del sitio, la preparación y textura del espacio plástico, el contraste con el único color empleado, el repintado de imágenes, la ubicación y relación entre los motivos plasmados, y la definición del estilo rupestre distintivo que caracteriza a la construcción artística. Asimismo el texto conlleva una perspectiva semiótica que bucea en el código representado, y destaca el sistema de signos que construyeron sentido, identidad y subjetividad en la sociedad tratada, y propone una interpretación que intersecta la información arqueológica y etnohistórica, construyendo así una mirada holística superadora.

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Fig. 1 - Sitio de pinturas rupestres El Idulo



Fig. 3 - Representación de El Idulo

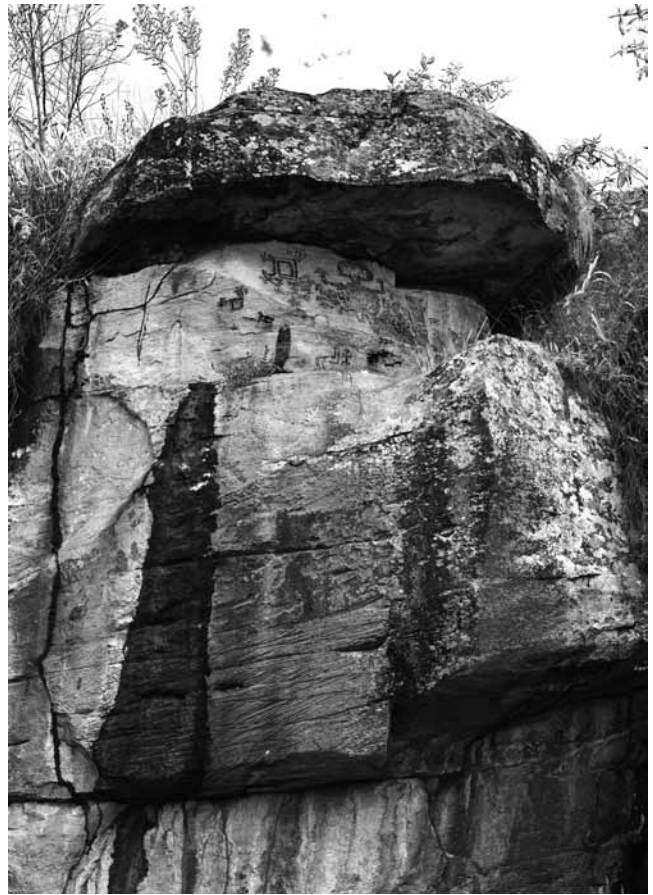


Fig. 2 - Aspecto antropomorfo del soporte rocoso



Fig. 4 - Pinturas rupestres El Higuero I, valle de Chicama



Fig. 5 - Las Guitarras, grabados rupestres en Poro Poro



Fig. 6 - Espacio hurin, véase los signos guía



Fig. 7 - Espacio hanan



Fig. 8 - Espacio hanan, véase los signos guía y la amaru completa



Fig. 9 - Espacio hanan, véase al signo representación del territorio



Fig. 10 - Petroglifos de Carachupa, la representación del territorio



Fig. 11 - Petroglifos de Zapatalgo, véase la estilización del sistema



Fig.12 - Monte Calvario, pintura de chamán en vuelo. Poro Poro



The image of the ibex through 4000 years of art from the Near East to Central Asia: origin and evolution of a myth

Federico Mailland *

SUMMARY

The author reviews the image of the ibex through rock art, vase painting, the decoration of cult objects and funeral objects, seals, over a period of time from 4000 BC to the beginning of the Christian era, in a wide range extending west-east from Egypt and the Near East to Central Asia, and north-south from Mongolia to the Indus Valley and South Arabia. The figure of the ibex alone, in hunting scenes, in dance scenes, in childbirth scenes, in association with celestial elements, two-headed, winged, in chimeric images, is discussed with reference to the interpretation of the cult of the lunar god Sin, or the god Akhtar, and myths of propitiation of rain, as well as myths of fertility. The conclusion is that the image of the ibex represents the totemic animal of a multi-millennial cult, whose origins are unknown, probably associated with the Neolithic revolution and the beginning of agriculture, but which extends from the beginning of the 4th millennium BC from Mesopotamia towards the four cardinal points. This cult evolves into the great religions, with reminiscences up to the contemporary era, and with the persistence of rites now emptied of their original cult significance, but always linked to the agricultural world, rains and fertility.

Keywords: Ibex, Moon god, rain, fertility.

RIASSUNTO (L'IMMAGINE DELLO STAMBECCO ATTRAVERSO 4000 ANNI DI ARTE DAL VICINO ORIENTE ALL'ASIA CENTRALE: ORIGINE ED EVOLUZIONE DI UN MITO)

L'Autore passa in rassegna l'immagine dello stambecco attraverso l'arte rupestre, la pittura vascolare, la decorazione di oggetti di culto e oggetti di corredi funebri, sigilli, in un arco di tempo dal 4000 a.C. fino all'inizio dell'era cristiana, in un ampio areale esteso ovest-est da Egitto e Vicino Oriente all'Asia Centrale, e nord-sud dalla Mongolia alla Valle dell'Indo e al Sud-Arabia. La figura dello stambecco da solo, in scene di caccia, in scene di danza, in scene di parto, in associazione ad elementi celesti, bicefalo, alato, in immagini chimeriche, viene discussa con riferimento all'interpretazione del culto del dio lunare Sin, del dio Akhtar, e di miti di propiziazione della pioggia, e miti di fecondità. La conclusione è che l'immagine dello stambecco rappresenta l'animale totemico di un culto multi-millenario, del quale non si conoscono le origini, probabilmente associate alla rivoluzione neolitica e all'inizio dell'agricoltura, ma che si estende a partire dall'inizio del 4° millennio a.C. dalla Mesopotamia verso i quattro punti cardinali. Questo culto si evolve nelle grandi religioni, con reminiscenze fino all'epoca contemporanea, e con la persistenza di riti ormai svuotati del loro significato culturale originario, ma sempre legati al mondo agricolo, alle piogge e alla fertilità.

Parole chiave: Stambecco, dio lunare, pioggia, fertilità.

The Author reported in a previous paper the high frequency of ibex image in the rock art of Chalcolithic and Bronze Age of Central and Southern Negev, reaching 60-75% of all figures engraved in all periods on the rocks of this region (MAILLAND 2015a). There is a lot of evidence that ibex image is associated with magic and religion and the hypothesis becomes more and more consistent that this figure is the symbol of the lunar deity "Sin", or Nanna, or Akhtar, belonging to a cult expanded from Mesopotamia, where it is attested since 4000 BC, towards the four cardinal points and lasted at least until the beginning of the Christian era. The sacred value of ibex hunting has also been extensively discussed with reference to fertility rites and propitiation of rain. In modern Yemen, a remnant of ibex hunting as a pre-Islamic rite of rain and fertility reserved to kings and dignitaries persisted until the years 30 of the last century (SERJEANT 1976). The conclusion was that the association of ibex and crescent in cult objects and in rock art scenes strengthens the hypothesis that the ibex image in the prehistoric and protohistoric art was related to the pre-Islamic worshipping of the lunar

god in Near East and Central Asia. The present paper provides a review of the ibex image through rock art, vase painting, decoration of cult objects and funeral objects, seals, over a 4,000 years long period in a wide geographic area extending west-east from Egypt and the Near East to Central Asia, and north-south from Mongolia to the Indus Valley and South Arabia. The figure of the ibex alone, in hunting scenes, in dance scenes, in childbirth scenes, in association with celestial elements, two-headed, winged, is discussed with reference to the interpretation of the cult of the lunar god Sin, or the god Akhtar, and myths of propitiation of rain, as well as myths of fertility.

DATING IBEX IMAGES

The dating of rock art always poses problems of certain proofs and even the most sophisticated modern methods leave room for doubts on the interpretation of the age of the representations. The rock art of Negev and Sinai has been classified by Emmanuel Anati¹ in 10 different styles by typology and dating (ANATI 2015). Engravings of different styles on the same rock

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1 Despite the attempts of other Authors to add original elements to the criteria for rock art classification, that of Emmanuel Anati remains a masterful point of reference for all Scholars.

are a common finding. Absolute dating was suggested by figures of tools and weapons, images of extinct animals, the association with datable inscriptions. Stratigraphy of the images, superimposition and different oxidation patina on the same surfaces allowed processing a relative chronology. The ibex images at Har Karkom start in the Chalcolithic period with few exceptions from Neolithic, and continue along the Early Bronze period. During about 1,000 years of rock art, ibex images have been engraved alone or in scenes representing hunting, dance, childbirth, and in association with celestial elements as well. In later periods of rock art at Har Karkom, the images of ibex are found in different contexts and seem having lost their original holy value.

The dating of rock art of other sites is cited as per published papers of other Authors and is not discussed here.

The objects coming from excavations have dating proved by different methods, which are the methods of archaeology, thus dating is more certain. Other objects cited in this paper are including citations of private collections and they are mostly cited as sporadic finds, not in archaeological context, but many had been certified by Prof. Lambert² and dating is reported based on that certification.

VESSEL PAINTING AND THE START OF THE LUNAR CULT

The images of the ibex attested as the most ancient figures date back to the discovery of the beakers of Susa ca. 4000 BC. There are several such beakers in the museums, all coming from the excavations of the prehistoric levels of Susa (later on becoming the Elamite Shushan, modern Shush, Iran). The beakers are thought to have been made during the Susa I period, sometime between 4200 and 3500 BC. The one in Louvre Museum, made of painted ceramic, is a large vessel with its dimensions listed at 28.90 x 16.40 cm. According to the interpretation of the museum, it was a funerary item among the first inhabitants of Susa. They interpreted the bushel as an example of the animal style, defining it as *a decorative approach in art with an emphasis on animal motifs*. Most notably, the ibex is the most important motif dominating the figurative art of the beaker. The ibex is portrayed in a non-naturalistic way, with the use of simple shapes, such as triangles. The horns of the goat arch back over itself, forming a circle over its body. The beaker was discovered during a 1906–1908 excavation of a Susian necropolis led by Jacques de Morgan (ARUZ 2003).

The beakers of Susa have in common the following elements: the large ibex image, with exaggerated horns, and figures of wavy lines symbolizing water and rain (ACKERMAN 1967). Rather than simply a decorative animal motif, the ibex is a symbol of the Moon god Sin, i.e. one of the most important deities of the Near East, a cult started in Mari and Susa (MAILLAND 2015b).

The decoration with ibex motifs and association with comb (symbolizing the rain), snake (symbolizing the water) and disk with dot in the centre (full Moon) is common also in the pottery of the mid-3rd millennium BC from Indus valley. The identification of comb image with symbol of rain was first put by Ackerman (op. cit.) and that of snake with water is a widespread interpretation. In the vessel of Figure 1 (height 11cm) all the cited elements are represented, and the figure of a life-tree completes the painting on the back. Overall, the scene alludes to the myth of the lunar deity, who has the power to make it rain and gives fertility to the earth. The association between ibex image and water in vascular painting is also found in predynastic Egypt: a lot of jars depicted with large rowing boats with ibex-shaped figure-head were found in the site of Naqada (Upper Egypt) and belong to the Naqada II period (mid 4th millennium BC). In Figure 2 are reported two of those jars, kept in Pushkin Museum (Moscow). A correspondence with the large boats of Naqada II jars is found in the relief of Narli (MAILLAND 2004) in Caria (Turkey), attributed to the Minoan period (Figure 3). There are three ships engraved on Narli rock: among them, the largest one is 58 cm long and 50 cm high (including the sail). The figure presents the outline and the ribs, the mast and a rectangular, large sail, depicted in frontal view. A square over the sail has been interpreted as the frame for the ropes. On the stem, there is a large, ibex-shaped figure-head. Stem and stern have a similar height. The engraving of ships on Narli rock corresponds to a shape of the hull and sail that was in use during the Middle and early Late Bronze Age and to a convention that used to represent the sail in frontal view with the hull on side. The engraving is comparable to the fleet fresco from Akrotiri (Santorini, Greece) and allows to draw a conclusion on dating not later than 1500 BC. The ibex-shaped figure-head in Narli ship n° 1 is not comparable with other ship pictures in the Aegean area. It has, however, a further reference in Egypt, in the equipment of Tutankhamon grave. It is a model of ship in alabaster, carrying the cartouches of Tutankhamon and of Queen Ankhesenamun, and belonging to the late XVIII dynasty (XIV century BC). Ibex-shaped figure-heads are also common in ship and boat bronze models of ancient Nuragic Sardinia, dating back to the beginning of the 1st millennium BC (DEPALMAS 2005).

TWIN-HEADED IBEX IMAGE

The first two-headed ibex image came to the attention of the author from a rock engraving found at the HK/4 site of Har Karkom (Figure 4). The engraving is attributed to the RA style III, reference period Chalcolithic. The figure represents a quadruped with a muzzle to the left, and long horns which arrive above the middle of the dorsal line. The animal figure has full pecked body and anatomic particulars including muz-

2 Prof. Wilfred George Lambert was Academic and Professor of Assyriology (1970-1993). He was Consultant of the British Museum and developed a large personal collection of Mesopotamian and other seals.

zle, open mouth and eye clearly distinguishable. What has made the interpretation of this figure uncertain is the second pair of horns which starts from the caudal end, and which almost touches the first pair of horns already described. The caudal end itself may be interpreted as a second snout. The figure was completed by a later addition of a vertical double line, with lighter patina. At first, the figure was interpreted as an animal with exaggerated horns that come to touch the end of the dorsal line. Against this interpretation is the fact that the curved line of the horns is not continuous, but is interrupted above the middle of the dorsal line. Furthermore, while the Bronze Age ibex figures in HK are frequently represented with horns along the entire length of the body, this detail is absent in the RA-III style, which is normally more naturalistic.

The correspondence of this image with objects of power or cult explains the fact that the two-headed ibex actually represents the image of a myth already present in the Chalcolithic period. The most notable object with two-headed ibex was found in the hoard of Nahal Mishmar, now kept in the Israel museum in Jerusalem. The object (Figure 5) is a mace head, or a *sceptre*, or a *standard*, according to the definition of MOOREY 1988. The hoard, consisting of 429 objects, all of them but 13 made of copper, dating back to the second quarter of the IV millennium BC, was found in "the cave of treasure" in 1961 and the two-headed ibex is not the only one figure of ibex in the hoard. Four out of the standards of the hoard "feature the whole body or the horned heads of what are probably types of goat". Ibex muzzle or simply ibex horns are present also in other objects of the hoard, mainly in the so-called crowns, and postulate the hypothesis that the treasure was part of the votive deposit of a temple according to the most accredited theory. The ibex image was associated to the idea of a godhead and the practice of the cult³ (EPSTEIN 1978, p. 32) in Palestine. Of note, "the most persuasive studies of this imagery demonstrate its local origin and its relevance to the socio-economic conditions of Chalcolithic Palestine. This is a key point, of course, in any assessment of the hoard's ultimate origin" (MOOREY 1988, p. 178).

The twin-headed ibex should have been a part of a myth which persisted along the millennia in the Near East. This is a recurring motif, for example, in the figurative art of Luristan bronzes. Luristan bronzes are small cast objects decorated with bronze sculpture from the Early Iron Age (between about 1000 and 650 BC) which have been found in large numbers in Lorestān Province and Kermanshah in western Iran (MUSCARELLA 1989). They include a great number of ornaments, tools, weapons, horse-fittings and a smaller number of vessels. Luristan people should have been Persian, possibly related to the modern Lur people who have given their name to the area. The bronzes tend to be flat and use openwork. They represent the art of a nomadic or transhumant people, for whom all possessions needed to be light and portable, and

necessary objects such as weapons, finials (perhaps for tent-poles), horse-harness fittings, pins, cups and small fittings are highly decorated over their small surface area. Representations of animals are common, especially goats or sheep with large horns, and the forms and styles are distinctive and inventive. An example of a standard flat and openwork, decorated with a two-headed ibex, is displayed in Figure 6. Taking the groups in what is now generally considered to be their broad chronological sequence, the first are the "animal finials", with two rampant confronted animals, generally a pair of large-horned ibex (or goats or mouflon sheep) or felines, facing each other with a central tube or open rings (formed at the junctions of their front and hind feet) between them. Compared to later types, the animals are more naturalistic, especially the ibex group. In some examples the figures are "demons", with human features except for their large horns, as per the definition of MUSCARELLA (op. cit.). Whether the two-headed image was still believed as a myth or just remained as a decorative element in Luristan art, remnant of the art of ancestors, is unclear.

Nonetheless, the element remained for at least another millennium in Persian area and is found even in seals of Sasanid period. The one presented in Figure 7, finely carved in an agate stone and dating to the 1st century BC, presents a two-headed ibex in a naturalistic way, except for the contradiction between the two halves of the animal figure which run in opposite directions. The figure is full of movement, the anatomical details are well defined: the eyes, mouth, ears and hooves of the fantastic animal are clearly visible, and the long curve horns with several growth rings account for an adult male.

WINGED IBEX

The twin-headed ibex is not the only fantastic image of the animal in the protohistoric art. Winged ibex is a very frequent image in Luristan bronzes. The one proposed in Figure 8 is a cheek plaque of a horse bit, from the Cleveland Museum of Art (Ohio). The representation of the winged animal certainly refers to its divine origin and confirms the religious value linked to these images in prehistoric and protohistoric art. The Moon god is a god of the sky and as such is able to fly. In prehistoric art, the representation of the ibex on the rocks of the highest mountains configures the closest place to the sky and, being a mountain animal, ibex is the best candidate to represent the main aspect of the Moon god. Other images of winged ibex are very frequent in Sasanid seals, among which some are presented in Figure 9c, 9d and 9f. Of note, the images d and f represent the crouching animals, also because the representations follow the oval outline of the seal: anatomic particulars are present, the long horns with many growth rings again allude to an adult male. The image of c presents only the muzzle with horns, the neck and the wings finely carved in an extreme synthesis of the winged ibex figure.

3 EPSTEIN 1978, cited by MOOREY 1988.

SPHYNX, ANTHROPO-ZOOMORPHIC FIGURES

The image of the winged ibex is reworked in anthropo-zoomorphic figures. The sphynx displayed in Figure 10 was found during the excavations of the site of Karkemish (Turkey), located on the west bank of Euphrates River. It is a ca. 80cm high basalt slab, finely carved and depicting a sphynx, with the body of a winged ibex, and a man face with beard, turned back. It belongs to the neo-Hittite period of the city, beginning of 1st millennium BC.

Nevertheless, this is not the oldest figure of such a chimeric entity: the seal drawn in Figure 9e, cylinder seal made of red stone from Jemdet Nasr (southern Iraq), dates back to 3,000 BC. The cylinder seal presents the figure of a winged horned ungulate animal with human face. The Moon crescent is depicted over the sphynx and a naturalistic ibex image precedes the sphynx in a sort of procession.

Another anthropo-zoomorphic entity is depicted in the seal of Figure 9a (British Museum). The seal has been carved in an agate stone. The carving represents a winged standing ibex with man face, beard and horns, associated with a crescent and an ankh. The ankh is a symbol of life and prosperity, and was often associated with divine figures in the ancient Egyptian world, but not only. The provenance of this seal is not declared, but the inscription in cuneiform characters suggests that it comes from the same cultural horizon as the previous one.

All the above figures are clear representations of the Moon god Sin, made in a period preceding the iconoclasm.

Another figure is discussed here, a limestone scaraboid stamp seal of the Neo-Babylonian period (7th-6th century BC), for the strong analogy with the previous ones, although in this representation the human and the animal figures are disjoint (Figure 9b). In the scarab, the god Sin is represented as a standing man with a long robe, beard and headdress. He carries a large cornucopia on his shoulder. A prancing ibex, the crescent Moon and two triangles are associated with this figure. Although the meaning of the triangle has not yet been clarified, however this symbol is also associated with the ibex in Har Karkom rock art and is believed to be an attribute of the Moon god, as is the cornucopia in later images, symbol of prosperity and wealth.

INCENSE BURNERS

Incense burners with the image of the ibex in high relief are the most conspicuous archaeological finds that allude to the sacredness of the ibex from Mesopotamia to South-Arabia. The bronze incense burners from Ma'rib (Saba) have already been discussed in a previous paper (MAILLAND 2015b, p.50). Two such objects, one kept in the British Museum and the other in the Metropolitan in New York, likely to have been part of the set of temples dedicated to the Moon, are almost identical and carry the ibex figure in high-relief, associated with the crescent and disk (waxing and full moon) in both censers and in the one of Metropolitan also associated to two snakes on the sides of ibex. The

association to the snake figures is a clear reference to water and is a remnant of the symbolism of the vascular painting of the 4th millennium, where the ibex image is associated with snakes and with comb (the rain). Ibex-snake-comb association is present in the rock art of Mount Ughtasar (Armenia) and ibex-disk association is present at Har Karkom (Figure 11), but also in the Sacred Rock of Haldeikish (Hunza Valley, Pakistan). Ibex-crescent association is also present in the rock art of Afghanistan and of Iranian Kurdistan (MAILLAND 2015b, pp.48-50).

Pottery incense burners with ibex in high relief, belonging to the Hurrian period (1300-1000 BC) were unearthed at Tell Bazmusian (Dukan, Iraqi Kurdistan). Specimens of this type of censer are kept at the Sulaymaniyah Museum and at the Iraq Museum in Baghdad. A wild goat is topped by a 2-3 story house model with a chimney (Figure 12).

Similar such cult objects, carved in limestone, or in sandstone, or in basalt, were found in other sites of the Near East and are kept in British Museum and in Istanbul Museum. All of them carry images of ibex, or of crescent and disk or all symbols together. Of note, one of those incense burners unearthed in south Arabia, and decorated with a bas-relief of prancing ibexes, crescent and disk and a bull muzzle, carries an inscription where the sons of Dusares (Dushara, the Sun god of Nabataeans), invoke the god Akhtar (Moon god) to bring rain, and rain is a symbol of fertility in the agricultural world.

CONCLUSION

The lunar deity in the Mesopotamian and Near East area was always represented as an adult male, either as a human or animal figure. When represented as a human figure, the god is depicted as an adult man with a beard and a couple of horns and the crescent Moon within the frame of horns. When represented as a zoomorphic figure, the lunar god is depicted as a bull mostly in Mesopotamia, Assyria and Akkad, or as an ibex in Mesopotamia, in the rest of the Near East and Central Asia (MAILLAND 2016 p.55). The dimensions of the horns and of the ridges always allude to a male adult animal, either on a ceramic picture, bronze casts or rock engravings. It is rarely represented with a penis. The ibex figure is often associated with the crescent and/or full Moon, the latter being represented as a disc, cross, swastika, disc with a dot in the centre or just a dot. Thus, all combinations of the above symbols are found in the rock art of the Near East and Central Asia.

The representation of the winged animal is certainly later, becoming evident in the art of Iron Age, but of course it refers to the same religious ideas, obviously reworked over the millennia that have passed since the beginning of the lunar cult in the late Neolithic. In the art of the origin, the representations are naturalistic, while later on it starts the idea of the god as a creature with supernatural characteristics: the two-headed ibex, the winged ibex respond to that belief. The representation of anthropo-zoomorphic winged

creatures responds to the same pattern and to a further evolution not so much of religious ideas, as of the way of representing the personification of divinity as a human being. In the Iron Age the representations of the god Sin also begin as a human being, with characters of a person of rank, but no longer with supernatural characteristics such as those described.

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The personification of divinity as a superior human being precedes and introduces the ideas of the Greco-Roman world, which will place the human person at the centre of the universe and consequently represent the divinities as human beings, with all their positive and negative characteristics.



Fig. 1 - Ibex figure in association with comb (rain), snake (water), Moon disk and life tree. (height 11 cm). Indus valley, mid 3rd millennium BC, private collection.



Fig. 2 - Painted jars Naqada II (mid 4th millennium BC). Pushkin museum, Moscow.

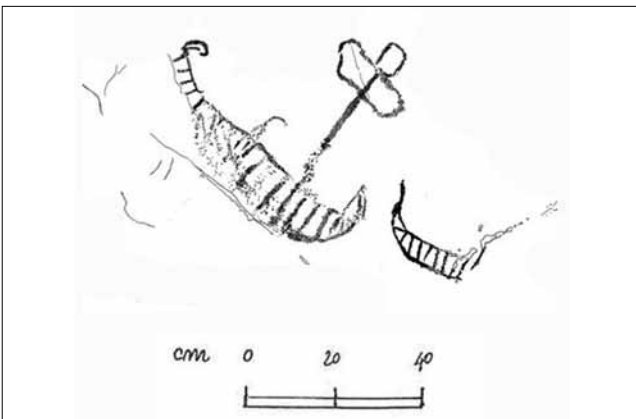


Fig. 3 - Detail of engraving from the rock of Narli: the ships. Mid 2nd millennium BC. (Caria, Turkey) Contact tracing.



Fig. 4 - Two-headed ibex engraving from Har Karkom site HK/4. RA-III, Chalcolithic period. The vertical double line is a later addition.

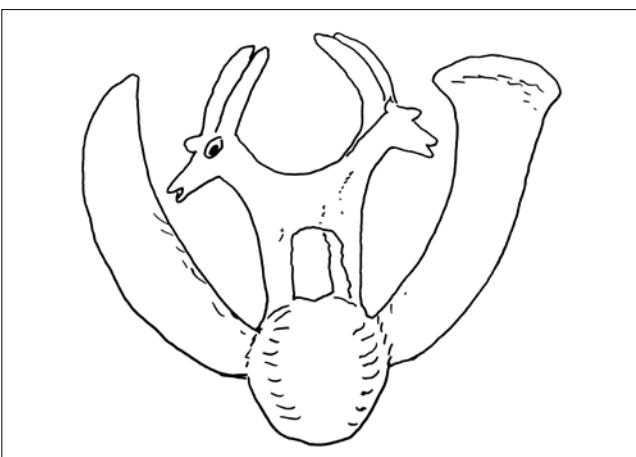


Fig. 5 - Copper standard in shape of mace head (height: 11 cm) from Chalcolithic hoard of Nahal Mishmar cave. (copper lost-wax casting) (2nd quarter 4th millennium BC). Drawing from photo of Israel museum, Jerusalem.

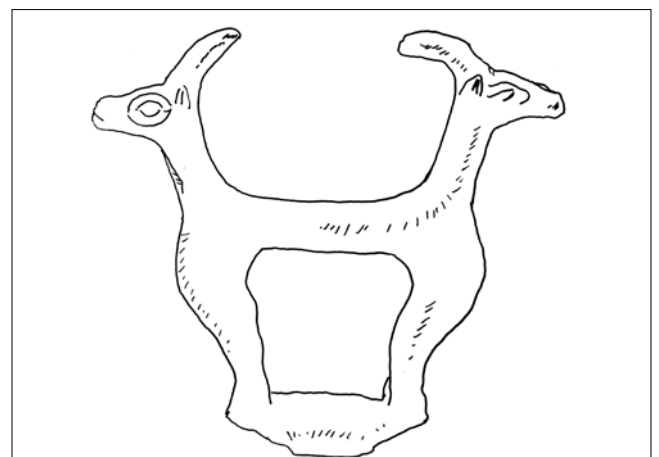


Fig. 6 - Bronze standard in shape of a two-headed ibex (Luristan, beginning of 1st millennium BC). Drawing from photo, private collection.



Fig. 7 - Sasanid agate seal engraved with two-headed ibex. 1st century BC, private collection.



Fig. 8 - Cheek plaque of a horse bit, Luristan bronze (ca 800-600 BC). Drawing from photo, Cleveland Museum of Art (Ohio).



Fig. 9 - Images of god Sin in stamp seals. a, e: anthropozoomorphic image of moon god in shape of ibex with man face, in association with crescent (Jemdet Nasr). b: human figure with cornucopia in association with prancing ibex, triangle and crescent in a neo-Babylonian seal. c, d, f: winged ibex in Sasanid seals.



Fig. 10 - Bas-relief on a basalt slab (height ca. 80cm) depicting a sphinx, with the body of a winged ibex, and a man face with beard (god Sin). Karkemish, (Turkey), neo-Hittite period, beginning of 1st millennium BC. Drawing from photo.



Fig. 11 - Ibex-disk association in Har Karkom rock art. The disk has a different pecking style and lighter patina. The figure in front of ibex is also a later addition.

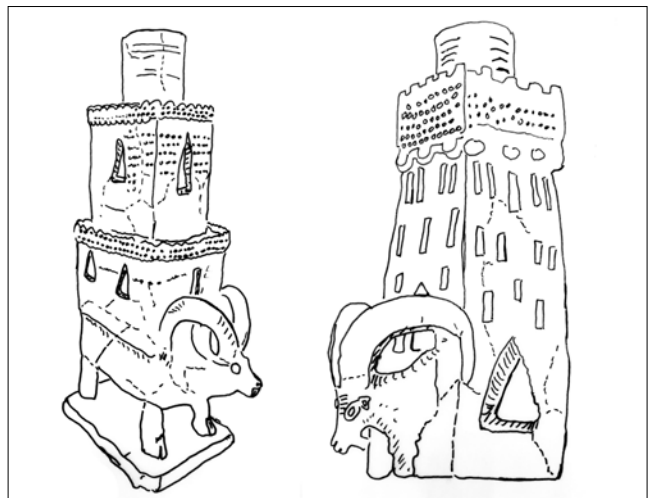


Fig. 12 - Incense burners from Tell Bazmussian (Iraq), Hurrian Period (ca. 1200 BC). Drawing from photo.



Life and Death in the rock art of 'Uvda Valley, Southern Israel

Uzi Avner *

SUMMARY

The lecture presents two related elements from 'Uvda Valley, 40 km north of the Gulf of 'Aqaba. The region is hyper arid, but was densely settled during the 6th-3rd millennia BC by farmers and herders.

One element is a geoglyph, 15x3 m, built next to an open-air sanctuary dated from the mid 6th to the early 2nd millennia BC. The geoglyph contains 15 leopards (most are incomplete), facing east, and one oryx facing west. Analysis of the details, with comparisons to the art of the ancient Near East, leads to the suggestion that the leopards are females, representing life and fertility, while the oryx represents death.

Second is a unique, complex rock engraving, probably similarly sated. Attempt to interpret it begins with its division into four elements. It is suggested that the lower one is a leopard, supporting two women/goddesses, one with the head up ("alive"), one with the head down ("dead"). The fourth is either a baby, sitting on his mother's knees, or a fetus in his mother's womb.

I suggest that both the geoglyph and engraving represent a cyclical perception of life and death, while the common perception in the prehistoric Near East was linear. In did, additional finds from the Negev indicate the desert people actually preceeded those of the fertile lands in philosophical-theological ideas, and even influenced them.

RIASSUNTO (LA VITA E LA MORTE NELL'ARTE RUPESTRE DI 'UVDA VALLEY, SUD ISRAELE)

La relazione prende in esame due elementi, correlati fra loro, entrambi nella Valle dell'Uvda, 40 km a nord del Golfo di Aqaba. La regione è molto arida, ma fu densamente abitata durante il VI-III millennio a.C. da agricoltori e pastori.

Il primo elemento è un geoglifo, 15x3 m, costruito accanto a un santuario all'aperto datato tra la metà del VI e l'inizio del II millennio a.C. Il geoglifo presenta 15 leopardi (la maggior parte sono incompleti), rivolti a est, e un orice rivolto a ovest. L'analisi dei dettagli, con confronti con l'arte antica del Vicino Oriente, porta a suggerire che i leopardi siano femmine, rappresentanti della vita e della fertilità, mentre l'orice rappresenti la morte.

Il secondo è un'incisione rupestre unica e complessa. A fini interpretativi, è stata divisa in 4 elementi: in basso si vede un leopardo, che sostiene due donne/dee, una a testa alta ("viva"), una a testa bassa ("morta"). Il quarto elemento è un bambino, forse seduto sulle ginocchia della madre, forse un feto nel grembo materno.

Suggerisco che sia il geoglifo che l'incisione rappresentino una percezione ciclica della vita e della morte, nonostante la visione comune nel Vicino Oriente preistorico fosse lineare. In effetti, anche altri ritrovamenti dal Negev indicano come il popolo del deserto abbia in realtà preceduto, da un punto di vista filosofico-teologico, le credenze dei popoli delle terre fertili, probabilmente influenzandole.

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Community or representation of self: hands and feet in rock art

Marisa Giorgi *

SUMMARY

Are the existence of hand and feet depictions in rock art around the world indicative of an archetypal use of the motif? This does not suggest an equal ontological view or socio-cultural role of the symbol. Rather, the symbols themselves, in being representational of a hand or foot may point towards an associated use of marking of place or a more personalised or ritualistic role at times termed proprio-performative. 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 feet and hand figures from Carnarvon Gorge, Queensland, Australia, and draws on examples from other areas such as the Americas, as a basis for contrast and comparison. The quantitative and relational aspects of hand and feet engraved images found at rock art sites such as Carnarvon Gorge offer new insights into the hand and feet figure's use in these areas and internationally. Given this area in Australia 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 present. As such, this paper explores the broader question: can ethnographic interpretation from one continent offer insights into sites on another continent with an unrelated cultural expression?

RIASSUNTO (COMUNITÀ O RAPPRESENTAZIONE DI SÉ: MANI E PIEDI NELL'ARTE RUPESTRE)

Le raffigurazioni di mani e piedi sono diffuse nell'arte rupestre di tutto il mondo, possiamo quindi ipotizzare un uso archetipico del motivo? La semplice diffusione non suggerisce una visione ontologica sempre uguale né un significato socio-culturale standard del simbolo. Piuttosto, le impronte, rappresentando una mano o un piede, potrebbero indicare un uso associato di marcatura del luogo o un ruolo più personalizzato o rituale a volte definito proprio-performativo.

La distribuzione temporale e fisica del soggetto in molti paesi del mondo indica la sua importanza socio-ritualistica con almeno alcuni elementi condivisi di creazione e uso. Questo articolo si concentra sulle rappresentazioni di piedi e mani di Carnarvon Gorge, Queensland, Australia, e attinge ad esempi provenienti da località americane, come base di contrasto e confronto. Gli aspetti quantitativi e relazionali delle incisioni di mani e piedi trovate in siti di arte rupestre come Carnarvon Gorge offrono nuove intuizioni sull'uso della figura di mani e piedi in queste aree e a livello internazionale. Questo sito australiano beneficia della presenza indigena contemporanea, quindi le aree rupestri sono ancora vive e frequentate.

Qui, è possibile ottenere alcuni elementi di interpretazione che alimentano l'uso e l'importanza del sito, sia nel passato che nel presente. In quanto tale, questo articolo esplora la domanda più ampia: l'interpretazione etnografica di un continente può offrire spunti su siti di un altro continente con un'espressione culturale non correlata?

INTRODUCTION

Hand and feet motifs are an archetypal form of rock art expression with extensive manifestations around the globe and have a long temporal presence in the history of human expression. They take the form of stencils, engravings, paintings, prints and the physical impressions directly into surfaces that are easily marked, such as finger fluting. We find these motifs in diverse locations around the world including Europe, Australia and the Americas and within a variety of site contexts, both grouped and as singular figures. The meaning of such images has received the attention of various theories (e.g., BAHN 1998; DOBREZ 2013; 2014; LEROI-GOURHAN 1986; MOORE 1979; MORWOOD, WALSH 1979, 1983; WRIGHT 1985). The motifs, in being representational of a hand or foot may point towards an associated use of marking of place or a more personalised or ritualistic role. In the research of these motifs in Carnarvon Gorge, Queensland, Australia, it

is possible to have some insight into their significance through contemporary Indigenous community knowledge as well as archaeological research. The aim of this paper is not to list a descriptive catalogue of forms and permutations aptly covered by authors such as Dobrez (2013) and Morwood (2002) but explore some other aspects of understanding human expression and communication through rock art especially pertaining to Carnarvon Gorge.

Are the existence of hand and feet depictions around the world indicative of an archetypal use of the motif? This does not suggest an equal ontological view or socio-cultural role of the symbol. The symbols themselves, in being representational of a hand or foot may point towards an associated use of marking of place or a more personalised or ritualistic role. The motifs' temporal and physical distribution in many countries around the world indicates its socio-ritualistic importance with at least some shared elements of cre-

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ation and use. This paper focuses on the representations of hand and feet figures from Carnarvon Gorge, Queensland, Australia, and reflects on some sites in Europe and the Americas as a basis for contrast and comparison. The quantitative and relational aspects of hand and feet engraved images found at rock art sites such as Carnarvon Gorge offer new insights into the hand and feet figure's use in these areas and internationally. Can ethnographic interpretation from one continent offer insights into sites on another continent with an unrelated cultural expression?

DEFINITION

Hand stencils, and prints have elements of commonality with those of the human foot created in the same manner as they are direct impressions of the individual. As such the finger fluting can also lie within this category. Hand stencils are also termed negative handprints and those created by printing a handprint onto a surface by applying paint to the underside of the hand are termed positive handprints. Engraved hand and foot motifs and those painted or drawn representations of hands and feet can be considered as representational and have a less direct connection to the individual involved in their creation (DOBREZ 2013, p. 273). This will be further addressed within the discussion. The process of stencilling is generally carried out by mixing pigments such as ochre, clay and charcoal with water and/or saliva in the mouth and spitting or blowing the mixture onto the surface of the rock to create a negative image or outline of body parts or objects. There are some variations in application within some cultural groups involving different admixtures and application processes such as using a tube for spraying. The most common stencil in Australia is the human hand (this is true of many countries around the world).

In regard to the techniques of engraving, direct and indirect pecking also abrasion and scratched (ANATI 2011, ABREU 1990), there is more invested time depending on the hardness of the rock surface. Finger fluting such as those found in Gargas (Aventignan, France, LEROI-GOURHAN 1986) and Rouffignac (DELLUC & DELLUC, 1993; VAN GELDER *et al.* 2010), due to the less individually representational forms these will not be focused on.

The hand and foot images and stencils can range from just the imprint of a few digits to a whole-body stencil (WALSH 1999, pp. 122-123; BAHN 1998). On occasion there may be surface preparation (see Figure 2A, the area underneath the boomerangs was abraded to make it smoother) or noticeable framing through the selection of a particular depression (see Figure 3A). Some hand motifs are decorated, e.g., the Levi range in central Australia (GUNN 1998) and Canyonlands National Park, Utah, USA (See Figure 5A). These different forms of rock art are located on surfaces that range from shelters and caves to open air sites.

AROUND THE GLOBE

The diffusion of hand motifs is dependent not only on

the cultural propensity for image creation but also on the availability of ochres and suitable surfaces. Whether first created through cultural diffusion (DOBREZ 2014, p. 367) or impulsive behaviour, they are found around many regions of the globe.

Some famous sites include the French sites of Rouffignac (Dordogne) Cosquer, dating around 27000+ BP (VAN GELDER 2010), and Chauvais. An example from Portugal for the finger paint imprints or partial hands include Pego da Rainha (Tejo) (ABREU 2008, p. 83) and also Mão do Homem. Spain has some of the oldest stencils at around 37.3 thousand years in El Castillo (PIKE *et al.* 2012).

The Americas have several sites including the famous Cueva de los Manos, Argentina (see figure 4 and GRADIN *et al.* 1976); Several Mayan sites (STRECKER 2013); Vallegrande, Santa Cruz, Bolivia; Trinidad, Baja California Sur, Mexico (SCHAAFSMA 2010); Seminole Canyon Texas, USA; Central Montana (GREER & GREER, 1999, KEYSER 1979, p. 159). And several sites around the world (e.g., North Africa in LE QUELLEC 1993 and India, DUBEY-PATHEK & CLOTTES 2013).

Australia has many areas with both large compositional content and singular examples such as Carnarvon Gorge, the Palace (formally known as Blacks Palace in Central Queensland), Kakadu, Red hand cave New South Wales and in the Kimberley region, Western Australia.

The oldest known hand stencil in the world is currently from Maros (Borneo), with a minimum age of 39.9 kyr, (AUBERT *et al.* 2014, p. 223). Though there is a recent problematic claim of older hand and foot impressions on a rock in Quesang, high on the Tibetan plateau, but lacking in robust dating it may still help to stimulate the debate of what is intentional hand and footprint creation and its potential implications (BENNETT, REYNOLDS 2021).

THE SITE

Carnarvon Gorge, known in Bidjara as Kooramin-danjie (HUGGINS 1995, p. 166), is located in the Southern Central Highlands of Queensland (See figure 1). It has many sites that have both single and compositional hand stencils as well as engraved hands and feet. Culturally Carnarvon Gorge is primarily identified as *country* by the Karingbal and Bidjara Indigenous groups. Other groups such as the Brown River people, the 'Kairi, Nuri, Longabulla, Wadja and the Yiman' (HUGGINS 1994, p.7) also identify with the gorge. Thus, Carnarvon Gorge is viewed as a gathering place for various Indigenous groups. Stencil research has largely been carried out by Quinnell (1971), Morwood (1979), Walsh (1979, 1983, 1988) and Gunn (2006).

DISCUSSION

Handprints as signatures

Handprints have been considered as signatures (DOBREZ 2013, p. 227, Bidjara 2017 pers. comm. May (F 280)) as indicated by the recognition of individuals ethnographically when members of a community recognise individuals related to them or their own prints

within the rock art. Stencilled feet can also act as signatures and appear to be more common in Australia than other parts of the world. During work in the Kimberly Elkin was informed that any member of the tribe could instantly recognise a particular hand stencil's author (MOORE 1977, p. 322).

In regard to left hand stencils, 78% of stencils at Art Gallery are hand stencils (QUINNELL 1976, p. 145) 94% at Cathedral Cave, with a preference for left-handed stencils 70/30 (QUINNELL 1976, p. 146) and 65/35 at Cathedral Cave (QUINNELL 1976, p. 168). As such left hands in both Carnarvon Gorge and internationally have a higher incidence in stencils, e.g., in Gargas (ABREU 2008, p. 71) of 158 hand stencils 86% were left hands and only 13.9% right hands. This is probably due to right-handedness rather than symbolism.

Rock art as a signalling tool of expression

In Carnarvon Gorge a number of single hand stencils are situated on the approach to a site. It has been indicated that many of these have the role of signalling motifs to indicate what sort of site you are approaching so as to understand if certain behaviour or cultural protocols are to be observed such as approaching a burial location (BIDJARA 2017, pers.comm. May (F 280)).

Hard to reach

On occasion the motifs are placed in locations that are difficult to reach, both for the artist and the observer. This may be due to changes in the ground levels, but on many occasions, it is thanks to the ingenuity of the artist in attaining these heights either by climbing or the use of large limbs of trees to reach the areas required (BIDJARA 2017, pers.comm. May (F 280) see figures 6 and 7). Children's stencilled hands and feet are found in Carnarvon Gorge, often at height. Children's hands are also located in Gargas and Rouffignac supporting the idea that children were assisted in the process.

Superimpositions

The superimpositions of hand motifs can either be incidental or for other communicative processes. In Carnarvon Gorge the images of 4 hands with forearms are said to be indicative of the alliances between different language groups using the gorge (BIDJARA 2017, pers. comm. July (C 150)). This thus indicates a use of superimposition to establish cultural connectivity and the sharing of the use of the gorge (see figure 2B). Another example of forearms is also found at Cueva de los Manos.

The extreme palimpsest of layered hands in many sites such as Cueva de los manos, the panel of 200 hands in Canyonlands National Park, Utah, USA, Whitetail Bear site, Montana (KEYSER & KLARKSEN 2001, p. 159) and Cathedral cave in Carnarvon Gorge are suggestive of a long temporal period of creation. Cultural impetus may have also been guided by previous motifs. These diverse sites are also indicative of the widespread phenomena.

Compositional billboards are creations that started as

individual handprints usually over an extended period of time. This is indicative of a continuity of creation and non-static 'art' not predetermined arrangement at early stage. This also indicates a multi-level meaning which includes the individual within the larger compositional form.

It is hard to establish whether stencilled compositional elements are contemporaneous or created at different times. This does not take away from the compositional elements. An example is found in a cascade of red hands around an opening interpreted as a vulva form (see figure 3B) at the Art Gallery site and those around a burial niche set high on the wall of Cathedral Cave (see figure 6A). The compositional hand stencilling at Cueva de las Manos, through its layered effect and size of the composition as well as the use of different coloured ochres, not only indicates a long temporal tradition but one that includes layers of cultural variation in ochre usage. There is clear intent in the association with other images within some compositions, as such there is probable 'coded symbolic meaning in association' (DOBREZ 2013, p. 296).

MISSING DIGITS AND EXTRA DIGITS

Carnarvon Gorge is one of the places that has engraved and stencilled motifs with 6 digits. Ethnographically a propensity for cases of six digits on hands and feet within the community is recorded on a postcard held at the John Oxley section of the State Library of Queensland which shows a community member (living in Springsure but with strong links to the Carnarvon area) with six digits (see negatives 23106 and 107837 John Oxley archives and Kerkhove, 2010, p. 13 who lists four families with a propensity for extra digits). This trait has also been used in Native Title claims in the area which includes stencils with six fingers and therefore suggestive of direct genetic connection to the stencil art and that of descendants with the same trait (GODWIN & L'OSTIE-BROWN 2004, p. 194). Kerkhove's (2010, p. 13) ethnographic research indicates this as a regional art signature for the Bidjara especially in relation to the engraved feet depicting six toes (see Figure 6B).

There are many examples of extra digits or polydactylism in hand stencils and engravings in other countries such as the Chaco Canyon in the USA and all the way down to Argentina (CROWN *et al.* 2016). Some communities have a genetic propensity for this anatomical feature, in other cases it is due to pressures on genetic diversity within the population.

Given that spiritual beings in a number of cultures are on occasion depicted with polydactyl hands, extra digits (see Figure 5B) it is likely that this anatomical anomaly was not necessarily viewed in a negative light. Conversations with the Bidjara community have indicated that from a contemporary view of the rock art these individuals were seen with additional respect (BIDJARA 2017, pers.comm. May (F 280)) and occasionally with extra powers (KERKHOVE 2010, p. 13) and Pueblo ethnographic research by Crown (2016, p. 427) also reflected a higher perception or status of individu-

als with polydactylism. See Figures 8A, B, C, D, and E and 6B for polydactyl forms in Carnarvon Gorge and USA.

There are cases of people missing or having damaged fingers through accident, disease or cultural mutilation (ROTH 1897, p. 184). The removal of digits has occurred culturally in countries such as the USA and Australia. In Australia the practice was regionally variable. Quinnell (1976, p. 146) only found two possible mutilated hands in Carnarvon gorge the rest being hand manipulations. The majority of stencils originally thought to depict missing digits (e.g., SALHY 1969) have achieved this through the bending of fingers. At Maltravieso Ripoll López *et al.* (1999) undertook an exhaustive analysis which definitively concluded that there were no mutilations in the stencilled hands at Maltravieso.

Opinion changed in Australia on the amputation debate given the limited practice of ritual amputation in Australia (DOBREZ 2013, p. 80) though some academics persisted for many years with the mutilation theory (e.g., HOOPER 1980). Such bent finger stencils are also found in Gargas (France) of which 91.9% are missing digits in the stencils (SIMÕES DE ABREU 2008, p. 71). Maltravieso (Spain) and Chauvet (France) have less examples. There are also motifs of unrealistic hands such as in the impressive hand focused engravings in New Mexico (see figure 5B).

Feet

Pecked feet are iconic to the Panaramitee 'tradition' (the term 'tradition' is used in the sense of propensity of symbols) within Australia and represents an early spread of rock art around Australia but are also present in later styles (FRANKLIN 2016). Carnarvon Gorge has a large number of feet engravings (see Figure 10 A and B) compared to other engraved areas of Australia. Some are present extending below the ground level (see Figure 6B) indicating early use of the symbol within the gorge. The foot symbol, especially exhibiting polydactylism, may even translate as a regional marker for the art style of the Bidjara (GODWIN & L'OSTE-BROWN 2004, p. 201).

Stencilled feet are found in Carnarvon (see Figure 3A) and regionally (up to the Palace site, previously known as Blacks Palace). Many of these are children's or toddler's footprints probably requiring the assistance of an adult to execute the motif as often they are situated at chest height. Also, at Baby's Feet Cave in New South Wales, Australia, a pair of stencilled feet is situated at height within a panel of hand stencils. Overseas foot stencils are not as abundant but found in areas such as Patagonia (DOBREZ 2013, p. 299).

Sign or gestural language in hand motifs

The use of modified digit expression in rock art appears to achieve the codification of symbolic meaning (DOBREZ 2013, p. 287). This is supported by the wide use of sign language in Indigenous Australian communication and this possible codification being transferred onto the rock art. Several hand stencils in Carnarvon Gorge have the digits adjusted so as to

distort the stencil created. In some cases, this appears to be carried out so as to imitate certain animals such as emus and in other cases this appears to represent other coded forms of communication. One such series of handprints is located at the Art Gallery site within Carnarvon Gorge. This has been interpreted by one Indigenous representative as representing the death of many children (see Figure 2A, KARINGBAL 2017, pers. comm. March (C 150)). This interpretation has been contested by other Indigenous community member of other language groups, but are viewed as symbolic exchange.

Morwood (2002, p. 166), Leroi-Gourhan (1997) and Walsh (1979, p. 40) were confident that the manipulation of fingers in stencilling was for the purpose of coded information communication such as that evident in the sign language (see figure 9A, ROTH 1987). This was considered both gestural but also imitative such as the bird's head stencil. Recent studies by linguist researchers such as Etxepare (2021) point to sign language as well for the European examples. It is also possible that some subtleties or compositional context are not easily detectable to the viewer today but may have had significance based on the orientation of the hand stencil and possibly even the distention of the fingers.

Many cultures use gestural language in addition to spoken language in different circumstances. Native American tribes have used sign language to assist in communication with different language groups, and they are often used at times when speech is forbidden, such as during silent rituals or periods of mourning and hunting and traditional storytelling (ETXEPARE 2021, p. 1). The use of sign language during hunting or periods of enforced silence was widespread throughout Aboriginal Australia (ROTH 1897).

Significance in obtaining ochres

The research into the use of ochres from different areas is becoming less of a challenge with the use of hand-held XRF (X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy) devices directly on the rock art to identify the chemical signatures of the ochre to match them to ochre sources. The story of a groups of Indigenous people traveling long distances to reach certain culturally significant ochre sources as a form of initiation illustrates the important not only of a motif made with pigment but the pigment source itself.

At sites such as Cueva de las Manos (Argentina) there is such variety as to include red, yellow, white, black, violet, and a less frequent green colour. At Gargas (France) the percentages are as follows: of two hundred and thirty-one hands, 143 (61.9%) are made in black, 80 (34.6%) in red ochre, 5 (2.1%) in brown ochre, 2 (0.8%) in of black and only 1 (80.4%) is white (Simões de Abreu 2008, p. 69). At the Art Gallery in Carnarvon Gorge 70% are red the rest yellow and white and small percentage of black (QUINNELL, p. 148) at Cathedral Cave 88% red then yellow and only 1% white (QUINNELL, p. 168).

Agency of maker and viewer

The agency of the artist and that of the viewer may differ not only at the time of creation but also over time. The use and symbolism may not be static. The framing of hand stencils at Carnarvon Gorge indicate the accentuation through its position on a panel, the shape of the rock and the rock features (see Figure 3A and 6A). This is evident at other sites such as Gargas in a framing niche (HOOPER 1980, GROENEN 1988)

Cultural effacing or damage of hand stencils is reported by Elkin (1952) in southern Arnhem land. It also occurs on other types of motifs and may serve to reduce the power of the figure represented as such possibly the spirit of the author of the hand stencil. Whether hand stencils can be termed 'art' is explored by Forge (1991). Given their use in compositions the aesthetic value is probably secondary to the role in cultural processes.

Modern performative cultural stencilling as continuation of culture and community enabling

The modern performative art creation both on rock and within contemporary expression such as on walls or canvas can be viewed as a continuation of cultural expression (GIORGI & HARDING 2021). This is aptly illustrated by a contemporary artist that has used the cultural expression of stencilling and the act of community involvement in creating hand stencils within his art (see figure 9B). Harding carries this out using culturally safe practices by consulting with elders (GIORGI & HARDING 2021, p. 79). Changing perceptions of rock art can recognise the continuation and contemporaneous relevance of knowledge that prioritises education and the strengthening of cultural bonds to land through the medium of rock art. Contemporary interpretations and connections to the gorge and the rock art sites in question must be acknowledged and validated. Culture continues and cannot be frozen in time.

As such, these art practises that embrace the cultural expression of rock art are strengthening connection to country; reinforcing community connections; creating inter-generational appreciation; creating appreciation by the wider community; embedding respect for elders past, present and future and are a demonstration of opportunities to members of the community. Within some Australian communities there has also been contemporary creation at rock art sites (TAÇON 1989, and pers. comm. 2021 Kuku-yalanji pers. comm. September (G 120)).

Beyond proprio-performative

Beyond the *proprio-performative* (DOBREZ 2013) the hand and footprints appear to often embody elements of community expression and meaning and therefore have a community representational platform as well. Dobrez's brilliant paper (2013, p. 312) on 'Proprio-performatives' discusses hand images as a combination of a sense of 'ownership' with an act of communication. Dobrez argues that a hand stencil can be both a territorial marker as well as a symbol of self. The proprio-

performative being embedded even within possible hand signs. Their primary meaning being the declaration of self, *proprio-performative*, to which further meaning can be attached (DOBREZ 2013, p. 313). Beyond this concept lies the signalling stencilling mentioned above, which perform the task of warning those approaching of certain behavioural protocols due to the site's significance (e.g., area of sepulchre). These signalling stencils are likely to have very low *proprio-performative* impetus given they are driven by a primarily communicative agenda. Whereas a ritualistic or bereavement stencil embeds a direct expression of self in connection to the act.

The large panels or palimpsests of stencils may embody both and offer a strengthening bond to cultural identity and continuation of culture in the visible additions to the whole (see Figure 7). Engraved hands and feet are more representational and less of a direct expression of self and not considered by Dobrez (2013, p. 277) as *proprio-performative*, though the act of engraving can in itself be viewed as performative. As such the engravings, such as those in New Mexico created by Jornada Mogollon people (see Figure 8A) and in Carnarvon Gorge (see Figure 6B) are not considered to be *proprio-performative*.

Meaning

The challenges of evaluating the spatial, temporal and cultural dimensions of the hand and foot rock art expressions in Carnarvon Gorge and extending that more broadly to other cultural manifestations is a complex task. By focusing on some aspects of the expression we can glean some insights into meaning. Moore (1977, pp. 318, 322) listed the uses of stencils as individual signature/marking a visit; memorialization of the dead; to address ancestor spirits; communication with others; a historical record; storytelling or myth recording; Totemic ancestor prints or for sorcery. As such hand and foot motifs could have fallen into one of these categories or multiple categories given that rock art may have multiple uses, multiple levels of understanding and is not temporally static.

The rock art can also be considered a mnemonic form of recall through motif use. By viewing the rock art in context, the culturally associated viewer has triggered recall of individual or community embedded myths, symbolic behaviours, initiations or connections to country.

The act of stencilling according to Schaafsman (2010, p. 29) within Pueblo culture was to receive a blessing such as abundance. This has many crossovers in Australian rock art traditions and the act of securing abundance through rock art creation (KARINGBAL 2017, pers. comm. March (C 150)).

One of the characteristics of stencil use within Carnarvon Gorge and likely a regional style marker is that of the hand and forearm stencils (see Figure 2B) as they appeared at all major sites in Carnarvon Gorge. Franklin (2016, p. 156) aptly explored the regional style changes in Australia and outlined the theory that 'style distinctions could represent boundary emphasising

expression by highlighting cultural distinctions. This contrasted with the more homogeneous Panaramitee 'tradition' for emphasising cultural similarities and thus cohesion of individual groups to wider cultural expression. Given this broader concept, the hand and forearm stencils are regionally distinct and therefore delineating territory within the wider corpus of motifs. As mentioned in the superimpositions section these motifs were used to create cohesion between different language groups, symbolising alliances of groups using the gorge. In a sense rather than delineating territory they widen the inclusion of territorial use. These regional projections of corpuses of motifs can be observed within the Americas as well, such as the regionally distinct handprints with internal decoration from the Canyonlands National Park (see Figure 5A). Taking the etic (outsider's) and an emic (insider's) perspectives together in observing rock art patterns can provide insights into patterns of expression in rock art in various sites internationally. The contemporary cultural insights into rock art meaning are invaluable in such research.

CONCLUSION

With cultural specificity taken into consideration we can still observe what appears to be a diverse use of hand and foot motifs in Carnarvon Gorge and internationally as both the *proprio-performative* and representational of a wider symbolic motif use. The stencil itself appears to reflect *proprio-performative* expression at its initial creation and subsequently form palimpsests and compositional panels with extended and possibly temporally fluid meanings. Some of these have specific cultural meaning such as the connecting forearms. With increases in panel compositions these represent increasingly community focused meaning and less individualistic expression, at times as a tool of signalling and specific communication such as the hand signs with finger manipulations in stencil making.

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Engravings of hands and feet also have a long temporal use like stencils but appear to fill different roles in expression. Unlike the more *proprio-performative* hand stencils, they initially form part of the Panaramitee 'tradition' of creating regional cultural homogeneity and connections and later are an element of the corpus of regional Bidjara motifs.

Comparisons with international hand and foot motif expression, in this case some sites in Europe and the Americas, can offer cross cultural insights into graphic behaviours. By intersecting archaeological and ethno-historical information it is possible to have more robust insights into the rock art meaning. Contemporary Indigenous knowledge and historical ethnographic records are invaluable in understanding meaning and generating patterns of graphic behavior. Temporal distance in the creation of images does not preclude their compositional intent which may continue over time or experience changes in cultural interpretation and use. Contemporary Indigenous use of rock art assists in the continuation of culture without restricting it to a temporally static function.

Further research of sites with hand and foot motifs can extend the understanding of patterns of graphic traditions and the broader question of projecting such patterns onto other cultural expressions internationally. The socio-ritualistic importance of hand and feet motifs have at least some shared elements of creation and use.

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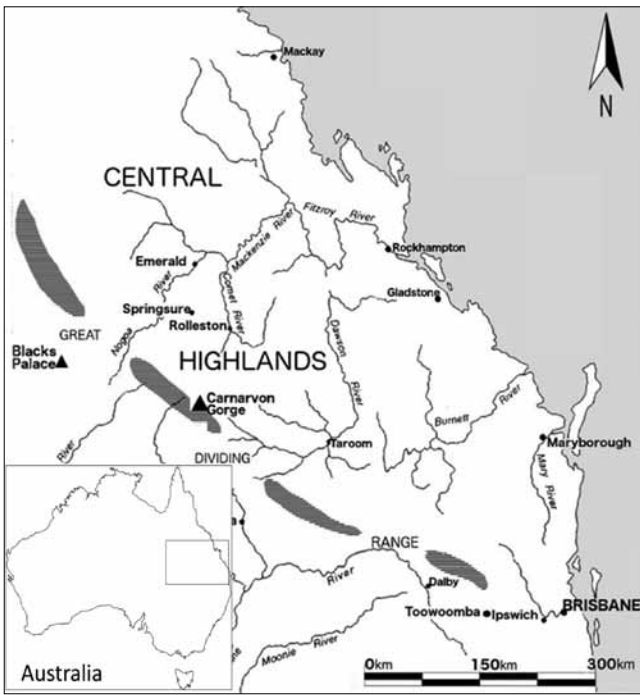


Fig. 1 - Carnarvon Gorge in the Queensland Central Highlands



Fig. 2 - Art Gallery site Carnarvon Gorge. Photo M. Giorgi.



Fig. 3 - Art Gallery site. A, Framed hand stencil in a man-made depression. B, Cascade of red hands below an opening. Photos M. Giorgi.



Fig. 4 - Cueva de los Manos. Photo M. Giorgi.



Fig. 5 - A, Canyonlands National Park, The Needles District. Devils pocket, SOB hill. Photo Keiko Tsukamoto USA. B, Exaggerated hands, possibly 2 with 6 fingers. East of Santa Fe, New Mexico. Photo William Frej.

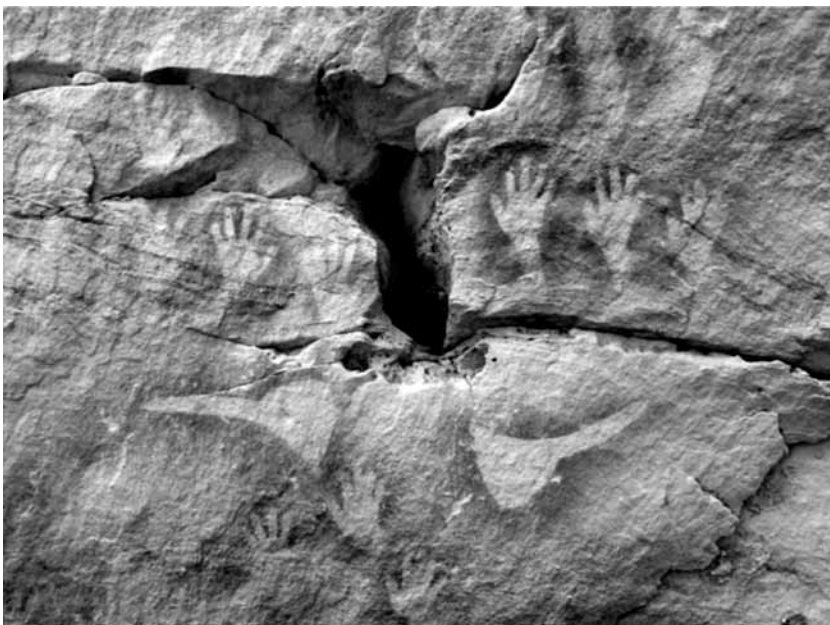


Fig. 6 - Cathedral Cave, Carnarvon Gorge. A, hands surrounding a sepulchre niche high on the wall. B, multiple toes or overlapped feet. Photo M. Giorgi.



Fig. 7 - Cathedral Cave. Photo M. Giorgi

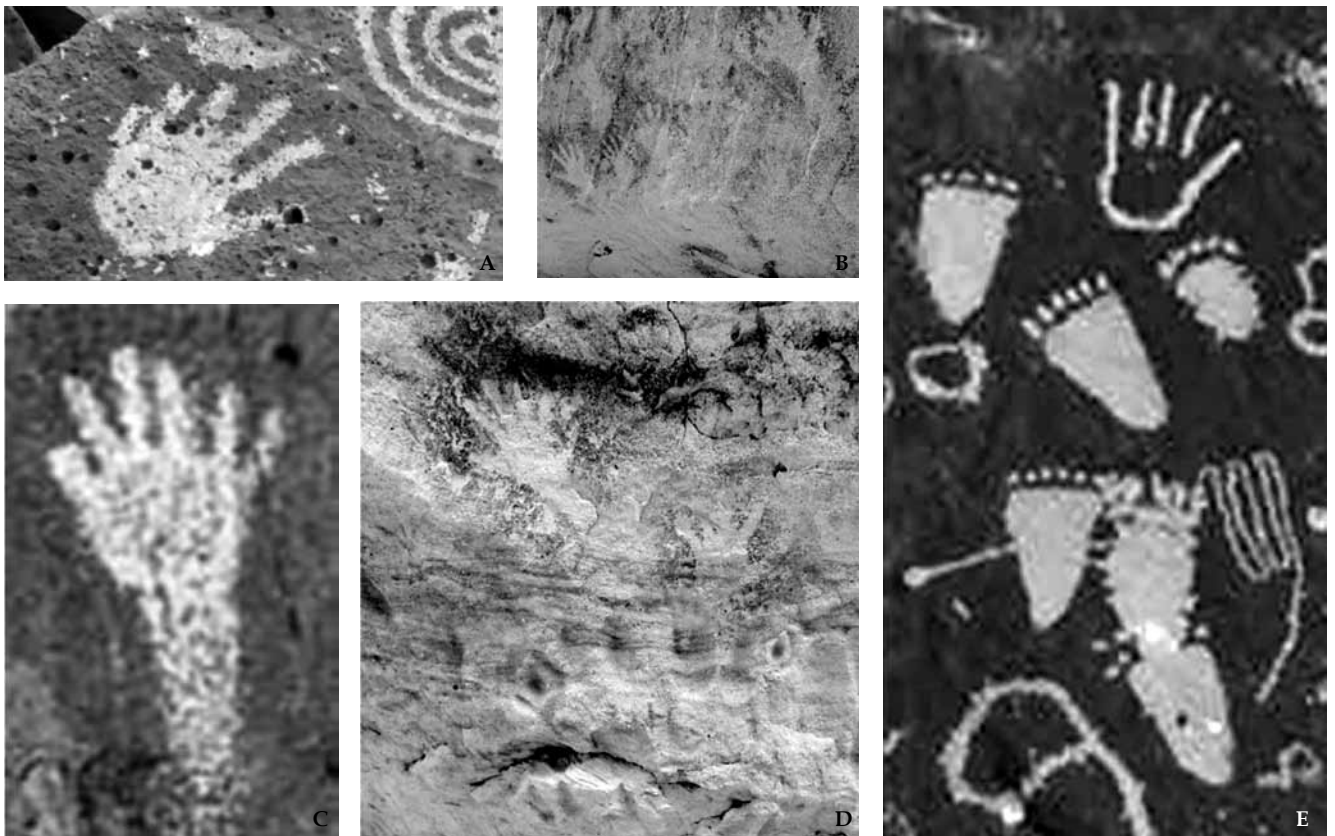


Fig. 8 - A, La Cienega, New Mexico, USA. B and D are Possible six fingered stencils, Carnarvon Gorge. C, Three Rivers, USA. E, Newspaper Rock, Canyonlands National Park in Utah, photo Michael Boyle.

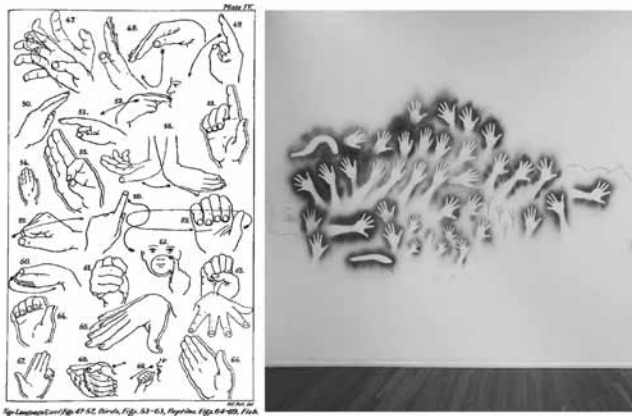


Fig. 9 - A, Samples of gestural signs denoting birds, reptiles and fish, as illustrated by W. E. Roth, Plate IV, *Ethnological Studies among the North-West-Central Queensland Aborigines*, 1897. B, Modern expression of rock art, continuity of culture, 'I refuse you my death', Milani Gallery, Dale Harding.

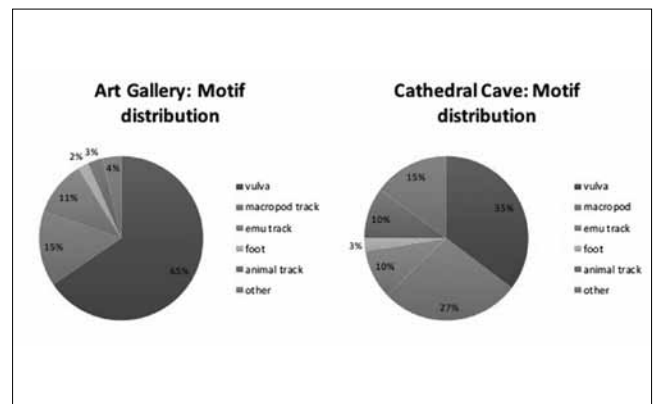


Fig. 10 - A, Motif distribution at the Art Gallery site highlighting the proportion of motifs. B, Motif distribution at Cathedral Cave the site highlighting the proportion of motifs.



Using rock art in modern art: a Siberian perspective

Andrzej Rozwadowski *

SUMMARY

Siberia is the place where prehistoric art, including rock art, has significantly inspired modern artists throughout last two-three decades. This trend began in the late twentieth century, and concerns both indigenous as well as non-indigenous artists. In this paper I focus on the artists from the Altai Republic, the region which is also home to spectacular rock art, which dates to both prehistoric and historic periods. There are several artists in this region who draw on prehistoric arts forms, each seeking different aims. To what extent their reuse of rock art is involved in identity discourse and how rock art images are intertwined in their works? In discussing these questions, the art of two artists, Sergei Dykov and Arzhan Yuteev, will be analysed. The former is already mature artist while the latter is only at the beginning of his career. The paper suggests that the issue of identity is particularly visible in the art of younger artist, yet the question remains: any rock art images may be appropriated to manifest indigenesness? By addressing those questions, the paper draws attention to contemporary significance of rock art, which today attracts attention more than just professional archaeologists.

RIASSUNTO (USO DELL'ARTE RUPESTRE NELL'ARTE MODERNA: UNA PROSPETTIVA SIBERIANA)

In Siberia l'arte preistorica, compresa l'arte rupestre, ha ispirato in modo significativo gli artisti moderni degli ultimi due-tre decenni. Questa tendenza è iniziata alla fine del ventesimo secolo e accomuna sia artisti indigeni che non indigeni. In questo articolo mi concentro sugli artisti della Repubblica dell'Altai, la regione che ospita anche una spettacolare arte rupestre, di epoca preistorica e storica. In questa regione, diversi artisti attingono a forme di arte preistorica, ognuno con obiettivi diversi.

In che misura il riutilizzo dell'arte rupestre è coinvolto nella costruzione di un'identità? In che modo l'iconografia rupestre si intreccia nelle loro opere? Per rispondere a queste domande, verranno presi in esame due artisti, Sergei Dykov e Arzhan Yuteev. Il primo è artista già maturo mentre il secondo è solo all'inizio della sua carriera. L'articolo suggerisce come la questione dell'identità sia particolarmente visibile nell'arte dell'artista più giovane. Ma la domanda rimane: qualsiasi tipo di arte rupestre può essere fatta propria per manifestare l'appartenenza indigena del suo autore? Rispondendo a queste domande, il documento richiama l'attenzione sul significato contemporaneo dell'arte rupestre, che oggi attira l'attenzione non solo degli archeologi professionisti.

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Artisti allo specchio. RUC e l'esperienza di incontro dell'arte contemporanea con le incisioni rupestri

Giulia Mazzolani *

SUMMARY (ARTISTS IN THE MIRROR. THE RUC PROJECT: BETWEEN CONTEMPORARY ART AND ROCK ENGRAVINGS)

This contribution presents the international artist residency project RUC - Rural Residency for Contemporary Arts, and offers a reflection based on the experience of the encounter between contemporary art and rock engravings. The project started in 2018 on an estate carrying the same name and sited on the hill of the Barberino Park, in Valcamonica. RUC promotes the dialogue between its international artists and the local traditions and history. In particular, the focus is on the relationship with the rock engravings that shows its strong fascination and belonging to universal and collective values through the contemporary art making.

RIASSUNTO

Il contributo intende presentare il progetto di residenza per artisti internazionali RUC, Rural Residency for Contemporary Art, e offrire uno spunto di riflessione basato sull'esperienza dell'incontro tra arte contemporanea e arte rupestre. Nato nel 2018 sul podere omonimo sito all'interno del Parco del Barberino, in Valcamonica, RUC promuove il dialogo tra gli artisti internazionali che vi soggiornano e la storia e le tradizioni camune. In particolare, come si può notare in svariati esempi che appartengono all'arte contemporanea, le incisioni rupestri sono per gli artisti di oggi una fonte inesauribile di ispirazione e confronto, che attinge a valori universali e collettivi.

Nel dialetto locale Ruc è un toponimo alquanto diffuso, che indica tutti quei terreni strappati ai boschi dal lavoro dell'uomo attraverso la costruzione di terrazzamenti sorretti da muri a secco. Il podere che ospita il progetto di residenza per artisti internazionali, Rural Residency for Contemporary Art, è proprio uno di questi "Ruc", un'estensione di circa otto ettari, su una collina che abbraccia come un anfiteatro naturale l'abitato di Cividate Camuno all'interno Parco del Barberino.

Se «lo spazio può essere considerato come un linguaggio attraverso il quale ogni civiltà umana riflette su se stessa» (PEZZINI 2021, p. 203), il Parco del Barberino, con la tutela dell'antica area agricola che si estende fino al santuario di Cristo Re, la rupe di Santo Stefano e l'eremo dei Santi Pietro e Paolo, oltre a riconoscere la vocazione di luogo storicamente dedicato dall'uomo al rapporto con la natura attraverso le peculiari coltivazioni della vite e del mais, promuove anche l'individuazione di una civiltà antica, ma ancora feconda.

Anche Ruc, appartenente ai membri della stessa famiglia fin dalla metà del XIX secolo, rappresenta con i suoi vigneti, campi di mais, prati e il suo castagneto da frutto un esempio di questo inscindibile rapporto tra uomo e natura, che qui rivive nella sua dimensione arcaica e magica grazie alla particolare conformazione territoriale di piccola valle privata, accessibile da un solo punto d'entrata e abitata da una minuscola comunità di cinque case interconnesse da prati e sen-

tieri. La profonda dimensione intimistica, agricola e familiare, tramandata di generazione in generazione, si è recentemente arricchita di un ulteriore elemento, senza pur tuttavia tradire la propria vocazione di *hortus conclusus*, collegando la dimensione locale e agricola dell'uomo legato alla terra e al territorio, a quella internazionale e artistica, allacciando dunque due elementi sostanziali e trasversali che costituiscono il binomio fondante in tutte le società e le epoche dell'uomo, quella del fare agricolo-tecnico-organizzativo e quella del creare immateriale-artistico-spirituale.

Il progetto RUC - Rural Residency for Contemporary Art, dedicato ad ospitare artisti internazionali, nasce nel 2018 per offrire loro l'opportunità di vivere e lavorare nutrendo la propria creatività nella quiete e nell'esperienza di uno stile di vita ormai perduto ed estraneo alle nostre città, che, attraverso l'unione con la natura, permetta di attingere a risorse profonde di creatività e spiritualità individuali nonché a un inconscio bagaglio primordiale e collettivo. A tal fine, tra le numerose attività e visite culturali proposte alla scoperta della ricca storia camuna, centrale e fondante è l'incontro degli artisti con le incisioni rupestri. L'artista si trova qui di fronte a una riflessione sull'universalità dell'arte e sul suo ruolo all'interno della società, ed è pervaso dallo stupore nel contemplare quanto una società in cui non era cosa scontata la soddisfazione dei bisogni primari, si fosse tuttavia organizzata al fine di rendere possibile l'espressione artistica, riconoscendone l'innata spiritualità e il valore. Come già ricon-

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osceva Kandinsky «L'arte precede sempre tutte le altre manifestazioni della vita spirituale. Questo ruolo d'avanguardia nella creazione di beni materiali deriva naturalmente dal fatto che, rispetto agli altri fenomeni, essa necessita di maggiore intuizione. [...] Ma come dall'immateriale si genera il materiale, così, col tempo, dall'arte nascono liberamente e ininterrottamente fenomeni e valori materiali» (KANDINSKY 1974, p. 54).

Allo stesso modo, all'interno del progetto di residenza Ruc, si avvicina il fare artistico e il fare sociale. Da una parte la lavorazione della terra e la cura del paesaggio attraverso il giardinaggio, la produzione di vino e ortaggi, dall'altra la produzione artistica e lo scambio delle esperienze. L'opera d'arte nasce dalla congiunzione dell'ambiente esterno con l'interiorità dell'artista. «L'opera d'arte è unione piena, necessaria, inevitabile, inscindibile di elementi interiori ed esteriori, ovvero di forme e contenuti. [...] Nell'arte la forma si determina invariabilmente attraverso un contenuto [...]. La forma è l'espressione materiale di un contenuto astratto» (KANDINSKY 1974, pp. 37-38) e ancora, «la forma in senso stretto non è in ogni caso nulla di più della delimitazione di una superficie dall'altra. È questa la sua definizione sul piano dell'esteriorità. poiché però tutto ciò che è esteriore racchiude in sé, inevitabilmente, anche un'interiorità che viene in luce con maggiore o minor forza, così anche ogni forma ha un contenuto interiore. La forma è dunque l'esteriorizzazione del contenuto interiore» (KANDINSKY 1974, pp. 69-70).

In quanto esteriorizzazione, la forma esiste attraverso il segno che ne è misura e accordo, nonché manifestazione contingente che muta attraverso il tempo e le diverse modalità di espressione.

L'elemento fondante però è universale e trasversale al fare arte e alle epoche come ci ricorda Mario Merz con la sua scultura esposta nel giardino della Collezione Peggy Guggenheim a Venezia, in cui l'autore esprime con il titolo dell'opera questo concetto: *Se la forma scompare la sua radice è eterna* (tubi al neon, 1982-89).

L'artista contemporaneo è vicino all'uomo che incidere le rocce della Valcamonica non solo dunque perché attinge allo stesso bacino sommerso di simboli arcaici e universali, ma perché, allo stesso modo, ricerca una maniera individuale, una cifra personale, un segno, unico e riconoscibile, per dar loro forma e costruire la propria identità.

Numerosi ed emblematici sono gli esempi che affollano il mondo dell'arte contemporanea: da Giuseppe Capogrossi, che alla fine degli anni quaranta inventa il suo segno personale, quasi elemento basilare, cellula o nota musicale di una mappatura interiore, a Carla Accardi, con i suoi segni che si raggruppano in strutture di "spazio continuo" come eventi che si manifestano per principio di necessità, o ancora nella ricerca di Marino Marini per ritrovare una forma assoluta, astratta, sperimentando in maniera ripetitiva pochi soggetti scelti. Incessante appare l'osmosi delle espressioni artistiche contemporanee verso quelle più antiche: ricordiamo la centralità del dialogo coi graffiti preistorici e con l'arte cosiddetta primitiva di Keith Haring

e Jean-Michel Basquiat, o la fascinazione di Jackson Pollock per i segni incontaminati dell'inconscio collettivo in una concezione che vede l'opera d'arte come traccia del corpo in azione, come un elemento naturale sul quale vengono registrati degli eventi, proprio come la roccia registra il passaggio umano conservandone le incisioni. Come non rievocare inoltre il dissacrante e canzonatorio intervento di Banksy del 2005, quando, intrufolatosi al British Museum, riesce ad applicare su una parete espositiva un blocco di calcare da lui decorato con una scena apparentemente "rupestre" di un uomo che spinge un carrello della spesa. Dopo alcuni giorni, scoperta la bizzarra anomalia, la direzione del museo manifesta il giusto approccio a questo intervento acquisendo l'opera di Banksy e spostandola nella collezione di arte contemporanea, dove è tuttora visibile. Inevitabile, in questo contesto, ritornare con la mente alla bellissima installazione di Maurizio Nannucci, che ormai una ventina d'anni fa troneggiava sotto il timpano dell'Altes Museum di Berlino ricordando ai visitatori dei tesori antichi ivi contenuti, nonché a tutti i passanti, che «tutta l'arte è stata contemporanea» (*All Art has been Contemporary*, tubi al neon, 1999, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston).

L'universalità è dunque il valore che più colpisce lo spettatore e l'artista contemporaneo che si trova a confrontarsi con le incisioni rupestri, acquisendo la consapevolezza che è tipico dell'umano costruire l'identità a partire dai segni e che gli uomini delle varie epoche storiche si differenziano tra loro soltanto per le diverse opere d'arte che hanno prodotto.

«Considerate secondo una scala millenaria, le passioni umane si confondono. Il tempo non aggiunge né sottrae nulla agli amori e agli odi provati dagli uomini, alle loro promesse, alle loro lotte e alle loro speranze: in passato e oggi, questi sono sempre gli stessi. Sopprimere a caso dieci o venti secoli di storia non intaccherebbe in modo sensibile la nostra conoscenza della natura umana. La sola perdita insostituibile sarebbe quella delle opere d'arte che questi secoli avranno visto nascere. Gli uomini, infatti, differiscono, e anche esistono, solo attraverso le loro opere. Come la statua di legno che partorì un albero, esse sole recano l'evidenza che nel corso dei tempi fra gli uomini qualcosa è realmente accaduto» (LÉVI-STRAUSS 1997, p. 63).

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Fig. 1 - Villa Amati, sede del progetto RUC – Rural Residency for Contemporary Art



Fig. 2 - RUC, L'anfiteatro naturale e i suoi vigneti



Fig. 3 - Villa Amati e il suo terrazzo sulla valle



Fig. 4 - RUC, Scorcio del podere verso l'eremo di San Pietro



Fig. 5 - Paola Alborghetti, Scialle dipinto a mano, 2020
Fig. 6 - Eckehard Fuchs, Incisioni su legno, 2021

