THE BIRTH OF *MNEMOSYNE*.
THE EMERGENCE OF THE IMAGE OF THE
HUMAN AT THE DAWN OF FOOD PRODUCTION[1]

por

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Abstract: Rock art emerges, some 70 ka ago, as part of a process of anthropic understanding of the territories, framing them within culturally informed landscapes, under specific notions of space, time and cause. The paper starts with a discussion on the relations across memory, perceptions, techniques and oral and written communication. It argues that rock art, as a recording attempt, objectifies processes, i.e., takes them out of the flow of time and freezes them as moments, abstractions. Different functions are accomplished through such a process, from mnemonics to an understanding of time. Rock art may in part be understood as a cluster of mnemonics, rules, beliefs and perceptions, seating at the heart of integrated landscape management, regulating the logistics of human groups through a combination of regulations meant to prevent change (*nomos*) and an understanding of transformative processes (*kairós*). The emergence of the Human image is part of this, as an awakening of self-consciousness through memory in dramatic changing times, moving from a biome centred cosmovision of hunter-gatherer societies (in which the human tends to be peripheric in portrayed landscapes dominated by the zoocenosis) into a whole environment and climate centred cosmovision of early farmers (in which the Human emerges as part of the understanding of the transcendent).

Key words: Rock Art; Memory; Transitions.

Resumo: A arte rupestre emerge há cerca de 70 Ka, como parte de um processo de compreensão antrópica dos territórios, enquadrando-os em paisagens culturalmente informadas, sob noções especí-ficas de espaço, tempo e causa. O artigo começa com uma discussão sobre as relações entre memória, perceções, técnicas e comunicação oral e escrita. Argumenta que a arte rupestre, como uma tentativa de registo, objetiva pro-cessos, isto é, retira-os do fluxo do tempo e congela-os como momentos, abstrações. Diferentes funções são realizadas através desse processo, desde a mnemónica até à compreensão do tempo. A arte rupestre pode em parte ser entendida como um conjunto de mnemónicas, regras, crenças e perceções situando-se no centro da gestão integrada da paisagem, regulando a logística de grupos humanos por meio de uma combinação de regulações destinadas a impedir mudanças (*nomós*) e de uma compreensão dos processos transformadores (*kairós*). O surgimento da imagem humana é parte deste processo, como um despertar da autoconsciência através da memória em tempos dramáticos de mudança, passando de uma cosmovisão centrada no bioma, das sociedades de caçadores-recoletores (nas quais o humano tende a ser periférico em representações de paisagens dominadas pela zoocenose) para uma cosmovisão centrada no conjunto do meio ambiente e do clima dos primeiros agricultores (na qual o Humano surge como parte da compreensão do transcendente).

Palavras-chave: Arte rupestre; Memória; Transições.

Change is the rule of humans' context and also the major trigger for their cultural transformation. It is under such process that one may understand the emergence of the human figure depiction in portable and rock art.

While prehistoric art dates back to over 90.000 years ago, and the earliest rock art from over 70.000 years ago, the first anthropomorphic representations, produced by upper Palaeolithic hunters, date from about 45.000 years ago, in Europe. They do not represent humans, but therianthrops, half human half animal, possibly illustrating transformative characteristics of both and, in any case, calling for an approach to transcendent processes. "Sorcerers" or "Shamans" were identified in the rock art of caves Trois Frères, Chauvet or Gabillou in Europe, but also in Africa and America. Dear (Trois Frères), lion (Hohlenstein-Stadel[3]), antelope (South Africa San art) or snake (New Mexico), are some of the conveyed animals to mix with humans in this process.
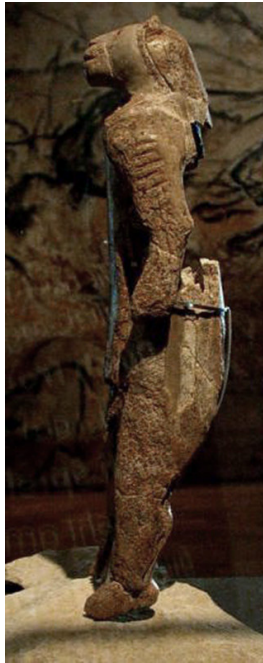

Fig. 1: The "Lion-Man" from Hohlenstein Stadel Cave, Germany. The mask is clearly portrayed. Source: https://free-images.com. See, also, Kind and Ebinger-Rist, *et al*., 2014.

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[3] KIND, C.-J. & EBINGER-RIST, N. *et al*. (2014), *The Smile of the Lion Man. Recent Excavations in Stadel Cave (Baden-Wurttemberg, south-western Germany) and the Restoration of the Famous Upper Palaeolithic Figurine*. «Quatär 61», pp. 129-145.

Representations of humans in the later Paleolithic depict "ghost-shapped" forms, occasionally with feathers in their heads, suggesting the association to rituals and to altered states of consciousness. The palaeolithic cosmovision is, yet, dominated by fauna, and mainly big herbivores, and these early human depictions seem to illustrate the passage between the human and the animal dimensions.

Fig. 2: Bisons panel at Alamira cave, world heritage site, in Spain. Animals are the dominant images for Pleistocene hunter-gatherers. Source of photo: https://www.flickr.com.

In this context, one should understand the emergence of the representation of the human figure within the wider prehistoric societies context. In fact, the emergence of the Human image is a relatively recent feature, which builds from a long term set of cultural interactions, which we may assume will lead to the invention of the Human as an entity. These remotely build from the invention of the notion of symmetry, with the earliest bifaces some 1.7 MA ago, until the growing complexity of modern humans behaviour when producing composite stone and bone tools, burying their dead or carving the first musical instruments[4].

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[4] D'ERRICO, F. & HENSHILWOOD, C. *et al.* (2003), *Archaeological Evidence for the Emergence of Language, Symbolism, and Music — An Alternative Multidisciplinary Perspective.* «Journal of World

Prehistoric Rock Art is a syncretic feature which stands as a material evidence of a crossroad of multiple human processes: cognitive, symbolic, economic, aesthetic, ethic, among others. It is not a standard writing system, but it conveys knowledge through messages; it has a nonlinear structure, but is made of symbols which act as signifiers; and although we cannot access the concepts for which those signifiers may stand for (and, as in language, same signifiers may mean very different things under different contexts), we have methods to assess it from a morpho-typological perspective (using complementary analytical tools, from statistics to experimentation), within its context (to identify possible referents for those signifiers) and through comparative analysis (with other rock art sites and, once chronology is established, with wider cultural sources, namely oral tales)[5].

Certainly its detailed contents are beyond our reach, but one important dimension of rock art is the organisation of collective memories within societies which have no writing systems. Such societies had to condense their accumulate knowledge through several mnemonics strategies: tales, songs, body art, dance… and rock art too. These would convey the understandings of the surrounding world, from environmental changes to human dynamics, from economic seasonality to kinship networking.

Non-literary societies, as later ones, act upon perceived landscapes, i.e., imagined realities that include all which is within their reasoning capacity (thus excluding many other features, either ignoring them or clustering them under a common outcasted sphere: the *forest*, the *shadow*, the *wild*). The perceived landscapes needed to be expanded with more detailed (analytical) and widening (extensive) knowledge, and the capacity to convey such knowledge to later generations became a major competitive advantage.

This dichotomy between the *tamed* (even in later Palaeolithic societies) and the *wild*, is structured by the capacity of humans to control or not those realities, and in the process of controlling emerges the relevance of tools and techniques, as amplifiers of the human body: axes that amplify the cutting capacity of the hand and arm, boats that amplify the swimming capacity of the body, bowls that amplify the carrying capacity of the hands, etc. But tools are, also, condensed products of a series of learned gestures (techniques), often associated to strict performative sequences involving songs, offerings or ceremonies. Techniques are a first relevant mnemonics mechanism. They allow for memorising repetitive efficient gestures, even if they limit, in such process, transformation and innovation.

Prehistory», vol. 17, n.º 1, March, pp. 1-70.
    [5] ANATI, Emmanuel (2008), *Studi per la lettura dell'arte rupestre*. Capo di Ponte, Valcamonica: Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici.

Rock art is often associated to the landscape morphology, as if it irrupted from it (as aborigines from Australia tend to interpret past paintings). As it occurs at a larger scale in non-literary societies[6], dichotomies are structural in rock art: engravings *vs* paintings, valley *vs* hill, orientation *vs* slope, … human *vs* wild, … all these structure ideas, knowledge and tales, enabling the recognition of territories and human groups. The discussion on its meaning (artistic creativity, myth, shamanism, altered states of consciousness…) and function (communication, identity, territorial organization, …) tends to acknowledge its crucial role for the definition of Humankind, from an ethnocentric evolutionary perspective (although the scope of the Ethos may differ, from local discrete cultures to global entities such as the "modern humans"). In this sense, it may also be understood as a dyna-mic tension between the transformative structuring of processes (*kairós*) and the assignment of absolute values to features, freezing their transformative capacity (*nomos*), involving a transcendental transfor-mative driver (*kairós*) and an imanent conservative driver (*nomos*).

The representation of the human figure is preceded by the self-identification of the human as the operator of such dichotomy. This is possibly why art, i.e. the design of non-utilitarian objects (beads, paintings, sculptures, music), finds its root in previous geometric treatment of tools, but emerges only when the economic intensification strategies, moving away from a random broad spectrum economy, start to prevail, some 100 Ka ago.

Fig. 3: Engraved stone from Blombos cave, South Africa. Geometric patters are the earliest forms of art. Source of photo: https://www.donsmaps.com.
See, also, D'ERRICO, F.; HENSHILWOOD, C.; *et al.* (2003).

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[6] LÉVI-STRAUSS, C. (1973), *Structural Anthropology*. Middlesex: Penguin Books.

One could easily recognise in the first schematic and geometric paintings the two-dimensional representations of a longer tradition of the three-dimensional shaping of tools. But the emergence of the human figure is something else: it implies objectifying the human as a segregated entity, and this was possibly a result of the growing contacts of some groups with other human groups, due to growing population density and the shrinking of accessible territories during the Late Pleistocene.

The first representations of the human figure are mostly hand stencils, a sort of "signature" which stands for the collective entity of the group than for any specific human. These date at least from the early Upper Palaeolithic, before 40.000 years ago, and they might even having been produced by Neanderthals, according to most recent datings[7]. Still during the later Upper Paleolithic, emerge anthropomorphic "ghost-shaped" forms[8], possible representations of shamans or alike, such as in the cave of *Trois-Frères*, in France. Earlier, portable art already staged anthropo-zoomorphic figurines, depicting human figures dressed with animal outfits, such as the Lion of Hohlenstein-Stadel. Nevertheless, the Palaeolithic figurative art is focused on the zoocenosis, and the human figure is somewhat marginal to the different composed scenes.

Fig. 4: Anthropomorphic representations from the Foz Côa Upper Paleolithic world heritage site, in Portugal. These representations relate to rituals, possibly also to trances. Modified from Baptista, 2014.

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[7] HOFFMANN, D. L. & STANDISH, C. D. *et al*. (2018), *U-Th dating of carbonate crusts reveals Neandertal origin of Iberian cave art*. «Science», vol. 359, issue 6378, pp. 912-915.

[8] BAPTISTA, A. M. (2014), *O Vale do Côa — Estudo e gestão de um complexo de sítios de arte rupestre Património Mundial*. «Cuadernos de Arte Rupestre», 7, pp. 113-135.

In this sense, the anthropomorphic earlier figures should not be considered "human", since they represent an ethnocentric understanding of the group, which excludes other humans as part of the *wild*. The same can be said concerning the various Palaeolithic female sculptures[9], which again have strong sexual attributes. The emergence of the human image stands for a human divide, still moderate (which also explains why the anthropomorphic images are limited in the Palaeolithic), but one which will grow to become dominant in the Holocene, amidst food production economies and dramatic demographic growth.

Fig. 5: Venus of Willendorf. Source: https://free-images.com.
See, also, SOFFER, Adovasio *et al*., 2000.

Even in hunters' societies in transition into farming, such as in the monumental complex of Göbekli Tepe[10], in Turkey, almost 10.000 years ago, while one can recognise the dawn of complex religious behaviour associated to growing sedentism

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[9] SOFFER, O.; ADOVASIO, J. M. & HYLAND, D. C. (2000), *The "Venus" Figurines. Textiles, Basketry, Gender, and Status in the Upper Paleolithic*. «Current Anthropology», vol. 41, n.º 4, pp. 511-537.

[10] SWEATMAN, M. B. & TSIKRITSIS, D. (2017), *Decoding Göbekli Tepe with Archaeoastronomy: what does the fox say?* «Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry», vol. 17, n.º 1, pp. 233-250.

of these communities, the human image is still rooted in the zoocenosis, and is expressed through therianthrops.

Fig. 6: Bird shapped and other zoomorphic representation at Göbekli Tepe. Monolith 43.
Source of photo: https://commons.wikimedia.org. See also, SWEATMAN and TSIKRITSIS, 2017.

It is with the first farming communities that the human image becomes a central theme, possibly related, also, to the emergence of the first religious processes: the images of the Human are, in this stage, transcendental entities standing for specific attributes, identifying their regulatory competences related to social and natural constraints. They remain, though, as part of an ethnocentric cosmovision: one should be careful when assigning the word "human" to those, since their names would probably rather coincide with the human groups that created them: there is hardly any evidence of a notion of humankind, beyond the cultural boundaries, even if it's also likely that the growing economic interaction of these groups will tend to foster the notion of a common "nature".

None of the Holocene early anthropomorphic images is known by its name. Yet, one may recognise strong similarities across them, starting with schematic depictions, occasionally associated to hunted deer[11] or to ploughing oxen, evolving through warriors or sailors. depicting a bipolar world of the living (marked by confrontation and production) and of the dead (source of empowerment, illustrated through ceramics or stelae)[12].

The earliest schematic Holocene human figures are geometric based, composed by traits. They can be isolated figures, but are mostly organised in groups, or sequences, often suggesting dances, i.e., illustrating collective rituals.
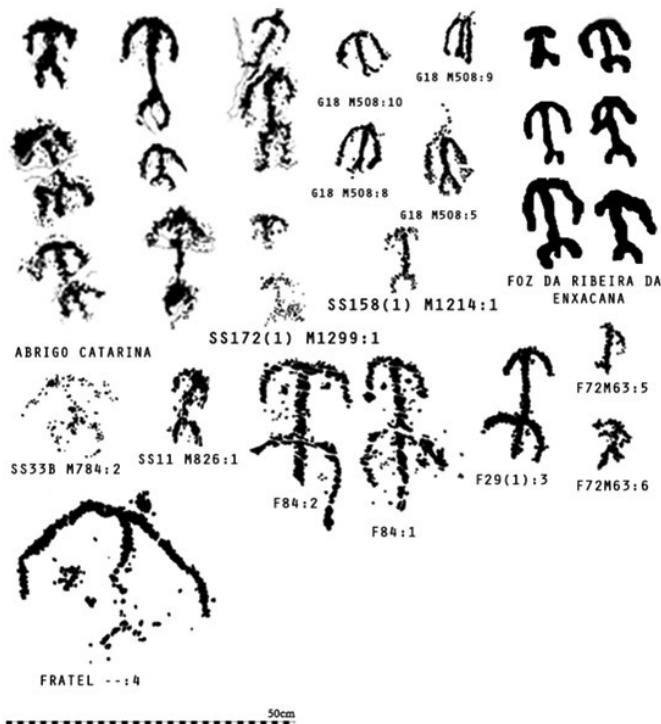

Fig. 7: Schematic anthropomorphic representations from the Neolithic rock art complex of the Tagus valley, Portugal. Source: Sara Garcês (Archive of the Instituto Terra e Memória, Mação, Portugal).

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[11] GARCÊS, S. & OOSTERBEEK, L. (2009), *Cervídeos na arte rupestre do vale do Tejo. Contributo para o estudo da Pré-História recente.* «Zahara» vol. 14, 90-94.

[12] OOSTERBEEK, L. (2001), *Stones, carvings, foragers and farmers in the Southwest of Europe. A view from the inland.* «Prehistoria 2000», 150-168.

One must not explain all prehistoric art through one single common explanation, as Peter Ucko and A. Rosenfeld explained many years ago[13]. Several theories have been proposed to explain prehistoric art and its images (shamanism, art for art, magic hunting, etc.), but some consensus exists on their symbolic relevance and potential association to rituals. The process of constructing the human image becomes more clear in this context, building from everyday life contingencies into abstraction. The transcendental dimension becomes the foundation of the concrete, through reconstructing performative experiences (dancing, hunting, praying, …).

Fig. 8: Anthropomorphic image carrying a dead red deer, from S. Simão, Tagus valley, Portugal. Note that the antler of the deer has been united to design a sun. The human image is of a strong male god or hero. Source: Sara Garcês (Archive of the Instituto Terra e Memória, Mação, Portugal.

One important element to consider is the perspective of the artist when observing Palaeolithic and later hunters, and first farming and later metal producers art. Whereas the former look "around", to check on food availability and often

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[13] UCKO, P. & ROSENFELD, A. (1967), *Palaeolithic cave art*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

representing in profile the hunted animals, the later look "up", to check on weather conditions (the most relevant variable for farming groups). This posture in relation to the environment has relevant implications in the emergence of the human figure. The lateral perspective of the hunters tends to be addressed to tangible realities that can be seen and to which an intention may be assigned (this being at the origins of animism). The vertical perspective, though, requires an acceptance of a will that cannot be assigned to a perceived entity, thus raising the need to imagine its nature: supernatural entities become prominent within a cosmovision which is no longer govern by sight ("in the beginning there was the will of the animal, or the tree") but by pure abstraction ("in the beginning there was the word"). In this sense, the farmers human figure is a projection of human abilities into invisible powerful entities.

Portable art is of particular relevance in this transition process, since it allowed for individual appropriation of specific signifiers, such as the schematic slate plaques that occur in megalithic burials. These encapsulate the attributes of the deceased and act as a second layer of identity and exclusion: only a few would be entitled to use those signifiers, the geometric patterns remaining dominant.

Fig. 9: Slate plaque from Mação, Portugal, depicting a schematic head, with pierced eyes and a definition of the contour of the body from shoulders to belt.
Source: ITM, Museum of Mação collections archive.

The progressive anthropisation of divinities is part of a process of segregation of the timeless sacred space[14] from the secularised daily dynamics. It is the tension between the power of the gods and the terrestrial power of the kings and alike, that will lead to the initial human images of… humans. These are often to be found associated to warfare, if not to other functional activities. This process of building a image of specific humans is not beyond difficulty, since the image and the entity are hardly disentangled: the image "is" the entity, like with icons, and this explains the resistance of many less compless societies to allow for being photographed. The same way illustrating animals starts by empowering human groups over them, the illustration of living humans becomes an expression of the domestication of the human, since it tends to empower some over the others. This process of domestication cannot be separated from the wider domestication process, which for the first time conditioned humans not only to natural cycles imposed on them, but to cultural cycles imposed by them, through their economic strategic choices.

This will entail a second important variation: whereas hunters representations are almost deprived from anthropic attributes (if one exclude possible feathers in some depictions), farmers human (transcendent) images always carry a sign of specific attributes (the Sun, dancing, clothes, weapons, hunted animals, etc.). This is an interesting evidence: the image of the human starts by being the image of a divided humanity (projected in the cosmos). Such process is particularly evident in syncretic figures such as stelae[15], which stand for the dichotomy alive/dead (mostly representing dead characters), for the sexual implications of empowerment (the shape of the stelae being a phallus, but also often including female attributes), and for the importance of inter-cultural conflict (weapons, negating the humanity of the "others").

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[14] ELIADE, Mircea (1981), *O mito do eterno retorno: arquétipos e repetição*. Lisboa: Edições 70.
[15] GUTHERZ, X.; JALLOT, L. & PERNET, L. (2014), *Jean Arnal et le Néolithique en Languedoc. Album de l'exposition*. Montpellier: Agglomération.

Fig. 10: Bronze age stelae from the Gard region, in France. Modified after GUTHERZ *et al*., 2014.

A common thread uniting all the mentioned disparate representations is that they conveyed information on the identity of their producers. Communicating became crucial for humans, to structure hunting strategies, farming activities or kinship relations. Tales and related narratives are known from ethnographic contexts and are still used in contemporary society when attempting to convince others (children or adults) to act in a certain direction. Orality is the core of such communication: there is no drawing, music or smell that can be as powerful as the combination of the words "global warming", once listened to, and then spoken back. Orality offers the possibility of expanding mnemonics, although it has two severe limitations: the limits of individual memory (rhythm and repetition are designed to counter this) and the fast transformation of phonemes (through pronunciation, leading to morphological and then conceptual transformation, thus losing its original meaning and informative function).

This is the source of relevance of rock art depictions of humans and beyond. Several functions are to be assigned to this material expression, from landscape markers to hunting tales or ceremonies. But what we can perceive is the occurrence of narratives (which would be oral) illustrated by images (that freeze those narratives). In this sense, rock art became a useful tool to limit the transformative changing dimension of oral mnemonics (even if images are, of course, highly transformative). Often associated to performances, this early art could become an illustration, an explanation, of core narratives of the human groups producing it, while embedding them in *nature*, thus rescuing it from the *wild* into the *cultural*.

As a novel tool, it would be very limited in the attempts to change it, and this is why early art clusters are so repetitive and conservative (the same also occurs with stylistic early tools design).

These levers are, hence, an integrated tool-kit: memorising through syncretic perceptions that shape the understanding, memorising through gestures that lead to the production of anthropic landscapes, memorising trough spoken sounds that structure narratives, memorising through reproduced images which convey the former and embed it in the *natural* landscape.

The need for memorisation is related to the evolutionary capacity to anticipate. Our species is characterized by a dominant extra-somatic, cultural (i.e. learned, educated), behavior that is largely expressed through anticipation of consequences: humans act to obtain in practice what they foresee, given a remarkable capacity to relate themselves and their surrounding resources (e.g. energy sources, food, other humans, …) not only in space (locating them) but also in time (where they will be or how long it will take to reach them), establishing strategies that rooted in the awareness of cause and consequence flows.

The human image, once understood as part of a wider, environmental, context, would make little sense for societies still striving to establish the field of the tamed as opposed to the wild uncontrolled space. But once this space, the *domus*, starts to be secured, a relatively fast transition will occur, from therianthropes into divinities, from these into heroes, and from heroes into (leading) people. Later farming societies will evolve in the direction of depicting narratives, which might be mythical but growingly become closer to the everyday life of villages, as in the case of Ndalambiri rock art, in Angola[16].

This anticipatory competence is also present in the *Resus* monkey, for instance, but with humans it is taken to a much more complex level. In fact, human behavior is governed by the awareness of potential needs, resources and possibilities (theoretical knowledge) and by the capacity to bridge the gap between needs and resources rendering the possibilities effective (applied knowledge, or logistics). Actions are then determined by foresight: we do what we believe to be necessary to obtain a specific result, be it lunch, writing a book or travelling to the moon. In this exercise, we are thus conditioned by our capacity to imagine possibilities.

The notions of space, time and cause are the structuring cognitive tools in this process, and they are crucial to understand rock art. Out of these, space is

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[16] MARTINS, C. (2016), *Ndalambiri e a Arte Rupestre do Ebo, Kwanza Sul, Angola Tempo, Espaço e Gentes numa Paisagem Cultural*. Vila Real: Universidade de Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro, PhD dissertation.

particularly relevant, since it builds from feeling the physical segregation between what we recognize as our identity (itself an ongoing process) and the other things (what is not "us"); it uses touch, sight, smell, taste and hearing has primary channels of information. It is an abstract notion, though: humans perceive the space, and they shape it in cognitive terms through the actions they perform in and through it; before becoming a complex of landscapes (visual perceptions), the space is a complex of taskscapes (terrains of action). This is why space is crucial for identity building, but also why identity, in the end, cannot be defined beyond alterity (we can only understand the self through the eyes of the other, because the self is a relational construct, not an absolute eternal entity). The earlier images of the human start by being images of the transformation (therianthropes), then images the transcendent (divinities), to only later become images of heroes (still partially transcendent) and, in the end, mythical representations of the self.
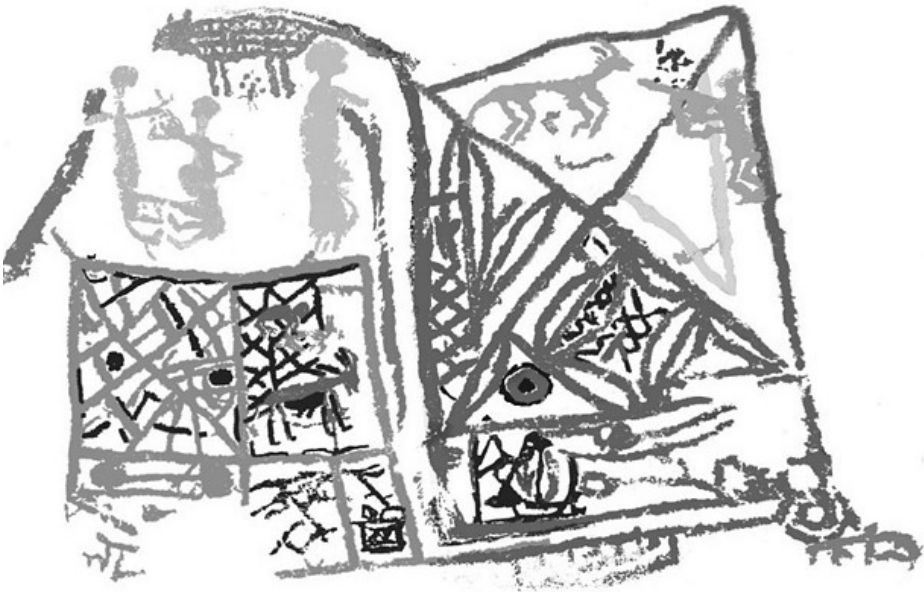

Fig. 11: N'Dalambiri rock shelter in Ebo, Angola. Mythical representation of the control of domestic animals and plants (in cages, bellow) by humans, depicting a dwelling scene with two males and a pregnant female, the whole still being dominated by wild fauna (on top). Source: ITM, Museum of Mação collections archive.

The first level of understanding of objects, characteristics and external processes is thus highly cultural and anthropocentric, attributing human properties to other elements (animism and realism built from it), leading to a causal approach based

on belief (eg. magical explanations). In fact, the simple relation between perceived space and time does not generate rational explanatory sequences, because it simply engenders a transcendent causality, once the notion of space is constructed by the segregation of objects (*"I am not these object"*) in an anthropocentric reasoning (discontinuous and constituted of isolated objects) with time being considered reversible (and interpreted as changing objects according to *"their will"*).

A second level of understanding is generated by gesture and techniques. Once humans experience gestures, they recognize that events can be a (con) sequence of their own activity, thus developing a notion of causal mechanism driven by humans. While external causality is understood as reversible (according to the *"will"* of objects), immanent causality can be understood as irreversible (causes are in principle in the past, even though societies may believe in magical processes at this level). But when such causes are associated with the production of objects, the mastery of a causal sequence of gestures becomes necessarily irreversible (it is not possible to build a sickle without a prior recovery of the required raw materials; it's no longer possible to keep the gallet, when it was cut to produce a biface). Thus, technology is the driving process that builds physical causality and, hence, irreversible time and continuous space.

The notions associated with this cognitive revolution leave no trace in the archaeological record, but two major processes in the construction of these notions are: movement (associated with displacement) and technology (associated with gesture)[17]. Such processes can be evaluated when studying the source of raw materials, for example. The rock art itself is an archaeological product that can be evaluated in terms of materials and techniques. But it sometimes has the particularity of being the result of gestures that do not relate directly to short-term causal sequences (for example during the production of a scraper or even simply scratching a rock without a specific purpose) or to the mediation between needs and resources. In this sense, rock art is in the context of the detachment mentioned above between thought and effective action, as well as the notion of causal sequence.

The human image implies a global understanding of the human, which itself results from a long time process of segregations and later integration. The human image could barely be conceived out of an integrated global sociocultural and economic framework, and this is why, as such, it is a recent phenomenon.

In this process, identity is shaped through the accumulation of specific own knowledges, including artistic gestures, which create a new, anthropic-domestic,

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[17] MITHEN, S. (1999), *The Prehistory of the Mind: the cognitive origins of art, religion and science*. London: Thames and Hudson.

space. Rock art, although not a strict writing system, is therefore a signature within the landscape, and implies the existence of procedures to teach, at least to some, how to decode it. It is, also, a conservationist approach to communication, aiming to reduce flexibility of interpretation by establishing *reading guidelines*, which are lost for us but would be the key to interpret meaning.

This does not mean all rock art had to be about knowledge and mnemonics. Certainly we retrieve contexts which are mere scratches, or learning experiments, or aesthetic pleasure essays. In many cases, though, we face a composition of symbols (naturalistic or abstract) that stand for material or intangible realities (objects) recognised as separated from the subject artists: the rock art objectifies those realities, segregates them from the subject, and in such a process it builds from mental images to objectify landscapes and behavioural patterns, allowing not only to experience them, but to observe and study them at distance.

Recording "things" through engravings or paintings (animals, humans, plants, abstract motives) is an exercise of collective representation of mental images which aim at retrieving an expectation of balance amidst uncertainty (e.g., representing hunted species while they are away), at stressing the uniqueness of the human group amidst environmental diversity (e.g., representing hunting scenes) and at consolidating strict and conservative behaviour (e.g., representing performances). The rock art has, beyond the function of mnemonics, several other, including to describe myths, to accompany rituals, to formalise knowledge or to stress the circularity of time or to consolidate social structure (as may be the case in the Hal-Saflieni hypogeum, in Malta[18]). But all suggest the existence of a "story", a narrative, which may be explanatory, interrogative or even transformative but, in any case, allows for an analytical approach to context, engaging space (land-scapes), time (stories) and cause (scenes). Through the combination of these, rock art could also have a prescriptive role, defining what could be done or not, and how or when it should be done.

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[18] MALLIA, J. (2008), *Case Study 3: Maltese Prehistoric Sites and Collections*. Malta: Heritage Malta, p. 9.

Fig. 12: The "sleeping lady" of the Hal-Saflieni hypogeum, in Malta.
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org. See, also, MALLIA, 2008.

The human image requires the approach to the notion of human as an anthropic, non-ethno-centred, entity. Humanity is the results of a process through which *Homo sapiens* becomes human, itself a consequence of the current process of global transitions and integration, since it poses for the first time in History each individual in front of unlimited Universe. This may foster a Human collective identity, but it also segregates disruption and conflict. The major challenge is to understand that a human image, even when it may be an image of the *ethos*, is not, *per se*, an image of the human. This later one requires a specific philosophical understanding, which is far from being part of a conscious global awareness. Therefore, revisiting past anthropomorphic images, one must avoid taking the shape for a contemporary concept, just as it is fundamental to recognise that such contemporary concept is still in progress.

The human image started to be designed over 7.000 years ago. It is time, possibly, for it to flourish and prevail over the countless images of a segmented humanity.

AKNOWLEDGEMENT

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