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**SCHEMATIC ROCK ART PAINTINGS IN PORTUGAL:  
AN APPROACH TO THE FEMALE UNIVERSE AT LAPA DOS GAIVÕES**

**EL ARTE RUPESTRE ESQUEMÁTICO EN PORTUGAL:  
UNA APROXIMACIÓN AL UNIVERSO FEMENINO DE LAPA DOS GAIVÕES**

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**Resumen**

La pintura rupestre esquemática es un ciclo artístico bien definido en el territorio portugués, con abrigos de norte a sur, con una iconografía, técnicas de ejecución y patrones de implantación muy diversos. Estas manifestaciones de sociedades agropastorales suelen contar escenas o mitografías, relacionadas con aspectos cotidianos, reales o simbólicos. En Lapa dos Gaivões encontramos varios paneles, distribuidos por todas las superficies, con escenas con antropomorfos de gran relevancia. Sin embargo, las características esquemáticas de estas tipologías nos impiden reconocer caracteres formales y anatómicos. La dicotomía mujer-hombre se puede definir a partir de uno de los paneles, donde encontramos la asociación de un antropomorfo con un conjunto de barras, repitiéndose la misma morfología en otras escenas. La relación con el ciclo lunar y el ciclo de la fecundidad femenina nos permite hacer consideraciones sobre la organización económica y social de estas comunidades, y la organización iconográfica no revela la desigualdad sexual siendo femenino y masculino en un mismo nivel de representación.

**Palabras Claves**

Arte esquemático – Antropomorfos – Sexo – Género – Fecundidad

**Abstract**

Schematic Rock Painting is a well-defined rock art cycle in today's Portuguese territory, with shelters from north to south, with a very diverse iconography, execution techniques and implantation patterns. These manifestations of agro-pastoral societies often include scenes or mythographies, related to everyday aspects, real or symbolic. In Lapa dos Gaivões we find several panels, distributed over all surfaces, with scenes with anthropomorphs having great relevance. However, the schematic characteristics of these typologies prevent us from recognizing formal and anatomical characters. The female-male dichotomy can be defined from one of the panels, where we find the association of an anthropomorph with a set of bars, with the same morphology being repeated in other scenes. The relationship with the lunar cycle and the female fertility cycle allows us to make considerations about the economic and social organization of these communities, and the iconographic organization does not reveal sexual inequality being female and male in the same level of representation.

**Schematic rock art paintings in Portugal: an approach to the female Universe at Lapa dos Gaivões pág. 20**

**Keywords**

Schematic rock art – Anthropomorphs – Sex – Gender – Fertility

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## 1. Schematic rock art painting in Portugal – a brief approach

In the present territory of Portugal, we find several artistic cycles with a long chronological-cultural span, throughout the entire territory, particularly on the banks of the major rivers and in the hinterland. Different rock art groups were defined in the post-Palaeolithic period, ranging from the beginning of the Neolithic to the beginning of the Bronze Age (7500 – 4000 BP), namely the Atlantic Art, the Megalithic Art, the schematic Rock Art Engravings from Vale do Tejo, Vale do Côa, and Vale do Guadiana, and the sites with Schematic Painting. The latter can be found from Trás-os-Montes to the Alentejo, at rock-shelters with different sizes, or outdoor rock panels. They have a widely diversified iconography that fits the broad cycle of peninsular Schematic Art. According to one of the most recent updates, 69 sites with Schematic Rupestrian Painting exist in Portugal<sup>1</sup>.

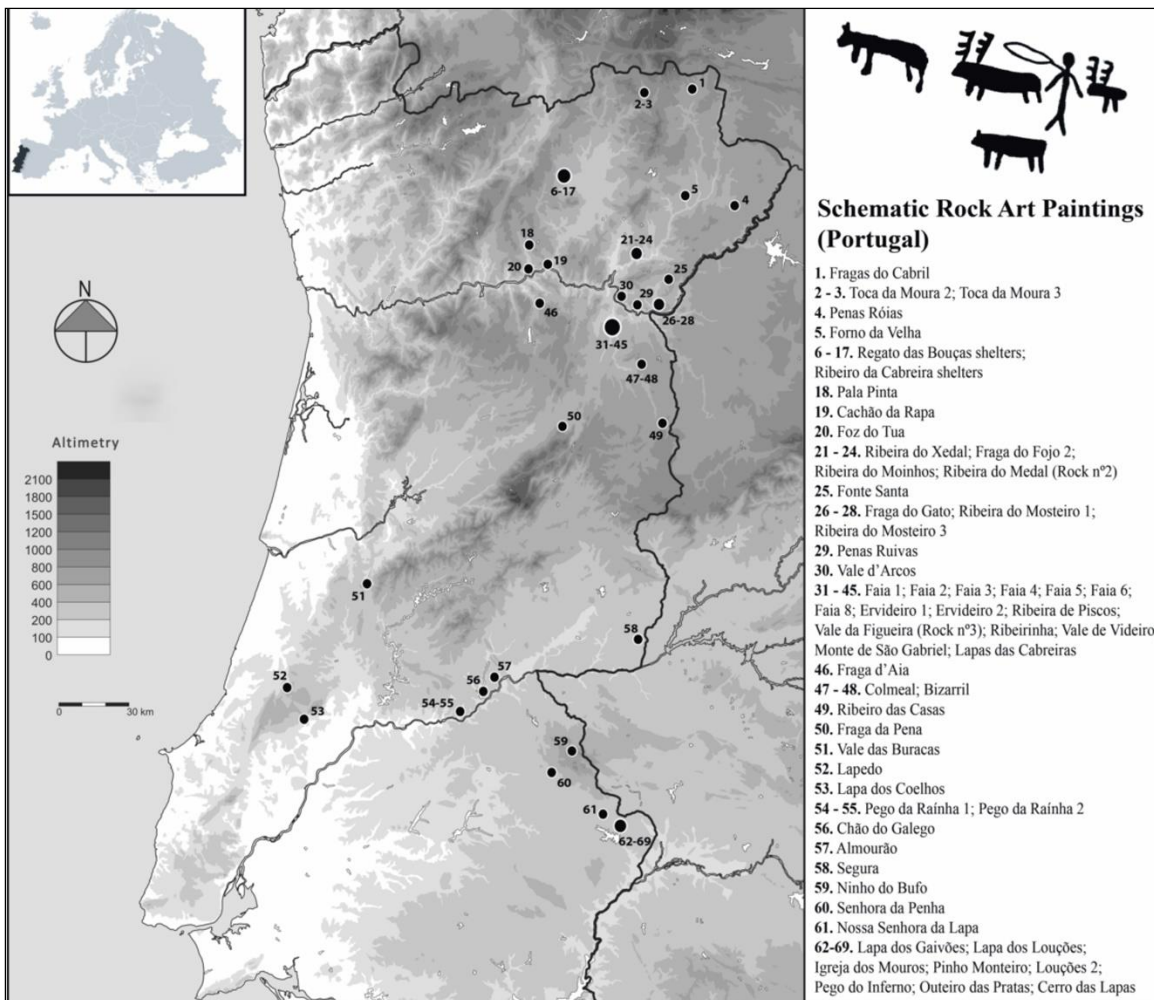


Figure 1  
Schematic Rock Art Paintings distribution in Portugal  
(adapted from Martins, 2016 – Cartographic source: Boaventura, 2009 – modified)

<sup>1</sup> A. Martins, Abrigos de Arte Esquemática Pintada do Centro de Portugal: mundo simbólico e antropização da paisagem. Lisboa: Associação dos Arqueólogos Portugueses (Monografias AAP, 3), 2016. <https://www.museuarqueologicodocarmo.pt/monografia3.html>

Some are grouped in rock-shelter clusters (e.g. Serra de São Mamede, or the shelters of Serra de Passos), while the others are found in locations with a specific geological and geomorphological profile, preferably along waterways. Unfortunately, preservation conditions are generally quite poor, therefore making it difficult to identify the iconographic repertoire and understand the dissemination of this artistic cycle. In the last decade, important studies on post-Palaeolithic cycles have adopted an exhaustive approach, providing a socio-cultural interpretation of these artistic manifestations, and proposing timeframes<sup>2</sup>. Direct dating of pigments being impossible, we propose to adopt a chronological segmentation into two major phases: 1) Pre-Schematic Art – corresponds to the beginning of the Holocene, where iconography still bears traces of the Palaeolithic imagery, although anthropomorphic representations acquire a new role, lasting until a time of social complexification and profound socio-cultural changes, and 2) the effective consolidation of agropastoral societies (late Neolithic and Chalcolithic – 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> millennia b. C.). In this second phase, called Ideographic Schematic Art, representations acquire a highly schematic level and become ideograms recognized by the community, corresponding to a conceptual and symbolic change in society<sup>3</sup>.

In this paper, we discuss a scene found at Lapa dos Gaivões, which may represent a specific knowledge of these agropastoral communities – in their daily life and possibly in a symbolic/ritual dimension. Its iconography – along with its typology, association, and interpretation, dates it from second chronological phase, i.e. the late 4<sup>th</sup> millennium and the entire 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium b. C., corresponding to a symbolic manifestation of agropastoral communities and the first metallurgical communities.

## 2. Lapa dos Gaivões

### 2. 1. The history of a site

At the quartzite foothill of Serra dos Louções, which crosses the village of Esperança (Arronches, Portalegre), we find three rock-shelters with schematic paintings: Lapa dos Gaivões, Lapa dos Louções, and Igreja dos Mouros. A couple of hundred meters away, we find the Abrigo Pinho Monteiro rock-shelter, in the so-called Serra do Cavaleiro. Together, they form the important rock-shelter cluster with Schematic Painting of upper Alentejo. Other small rock-shelters with schematic paintings were identified in recent years but, unfortunately, they have not been published as monographs<sup>4</sup>.

Lapa dos Gaivões was identified by the Extremadura professor and sculptor Aurélio Cabrera y Gallardo, possibly in 1914, who reported it to the geologist Eduardo Hernández-

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<sup>2</sup> S. Figueiredo, *A arte esquemática no Nordeste Transmontano: contextos e linguagens*, Lisboa: Associação dos Arqueólogos Portugueses (Monografias AAP, 5) 2016. <https://www.museuarqueologicodocarmo.pt/monografia5.html>; Garcês, S., *Cervídeos: Símbolos e Sociedade nos Primórdios da Agricultura no vale do Tejo*, Lisboa: Associação dos Arqueólogos Portugueses (Monografias AAP, 10), 2019. <https://www.museuarqueologicodocarmo.pt/monografia10.html>; Gomes, M. Varella - *Arte Rupestre do Vale do Tejo – Um Ciclo Artístico-Cultural Pré e Proto-Histórico*, Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 3 vols, (Dissertação de Doutoramento, texto policopiado) (2010).

<sup>3</sup> A. Martins, *Abrigos de Arte Esquemática Pintada do Centro de Portugal...*

<sup>4</sup> J. de Oliveira, J. de y C. Oliveira, “Trabalhos Arqueológicos nos abrigos com arte rupestre da Serra de S. Mamede”, *Actas del VII Encuentro de Arqueología del Suroeste Peninsular*, Ayuntamiento de Arcoche, (2015): 199-218.



Pacheco y Esteban. It was published in 1916 on a preliminary note accompanied by two drawings and a photograph of the rock-shelter, called Abrigo de Valdejunco<sup>5</sup>.

However, the first study that gave a detailed description of the shelter and its paintings was made by the renowned pre-historian Henri Breuil, as part of his monumental work “Les Peintures Rupestres Schématiques de la Péninsule Ibérique”, divided into four volumes, published between 1933 e 1935<sup>6</sup>. The Abrigo de Valdejunco rock-shelter was described in Vol. II. In 1916 the French researcher made a two-month expedition to Extremadura and visited Abrigo de Valdejunco on June 14<sup>7</sup>. During this visit, he surveyed the existing paintings and published an article the following year<sup>8</sup>. Later on, he wrote the aforementioned chapter<sup>9</sup>, in which he describes, in detail, the motifs found in the rock-shelter, dividing them in seven chromatic phases, and presenting an image of the panels in the end. The visit of Breuil to Abrigo de Valdejunco aroused the interest of Portuguese researchers in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, leading to some references<sup>10</sup> and even more detailed studies on the existing paintings, such as the ones published by R. de Serpa Pinto<sup>11</sup> or Santos Júnior<sup>12</sup>.

In 1960, O. da Veiga Ferreira and L. Albuquerque e Castro<sup>13</sup> worked at the site, surveying the entire quartzite crest, identifying a new rock-shelter, and confirming the existence of paintings on a previously examined shelter. These researchers studied these two new archaeological sites, naming them Lapa dos Louções and Igreja dos Mouros, and renaming the Abrigo de Valdejunco as Lapa dos Gaivões<sup>14</sup>. Here, they made new archaeological works, and surveyed the paintings. The name Lapa dos Gaivões was chosen because common swifts [gaivões] built their nests in the rock-shelter and some painted figures resembled birds in full-fledged flight<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> E. Hernández-Pacheco y A. Cabrera, “Pinturas Prehistoricas y dólmenes de la Région de Albuquerque (Extremadura)”, Boletín de la Real Sociedad Espanola de Historia Natural, Tomo XVI, Nota num 8. (Madrid: Comisión de Investigaciones Paleontológicas y Prehistóricas, 1916); R. de S. Pinto, “O Abrigo Pré-histórico de Valdejunco (Esperança)”, Trabalhos da Sociedade Portuguesa de Antropologia e Etnologia, num 5 fasc. III (1932): 245-246.

<sup>6</sup> H. Breuil, Les Peintures Rupestres Schématiques de la Péninsule Ibérique, Vol. I – Au Nord du Tage, París: Imprimerie de Lagny, 1933a; H. Breuil, Les Peintures Rupestres Schématiques de la Péninsule Ibérique, Vol. II –Bassin du Guadiana, París: Imprimerie de Lagny, 1933b; H. Breuil, Les Peintures Rupestres Schématiques de la Péninsule Ibérique, Vol. III –Sierra Morena, París: Imprimerie de Lagny, 1933c; H. Breuil, Les Peintures Rupestres Schématiques de la Péninsule Ibérique, Vol. IV –Sud-Est et Est de l’Espagne, París: Imprimerie de Lagny, 1935.

<sup>7</sup> H. Breuil, Les Peintures Rupestres Schématiques de la Péninsule Ibérique, Vol. I...

<sup>8</sup> H. Breuil, “La roche peinte de Valdejunco à la Esperança, près de Arronches (Portalegre)”, Terra Portuguesa, 13-14, Fevereiro-Março, Lisboa (1917): 17-26.

<sup>9</sup> H. Breuil, Les Peintures Rupestres Schématiques de la Péninsule Ibérique, Vol. II..., 1933b, 162-166.

<sup>10</sup> V. Correia, “Pinturas Rupestres da Senhora da Esperança (Arronches)”, Terra Portuguesa, num 5, ano I, Lisboa, (Junho 1916): 158; V. Correia, “Arte Pré-histórica”, Terra Portuguesa, num 12, 13 e 14 – Janeiro a Março, (1917).

<sup>11</sup> R. de S. Pinto, “O Abrigo Pré-histórico de Valdejunco...”

<sup>12</sup> J. Santos Júnior, Arte Rupestre, Comunicação apresentada ao I Congresso do Mundo Português, Porto, 1942.

<sup>13</sup> L. de A. Castro y O. da V. Ferreira, “As pinturas rupestres Esquemáticas da Serra dos Louções”, Conímbriga, Vols. II-III, Universidade de Coimbra, (1960-1961): 1-20.

<sup>14</sup> L. de A. Castro y O. da V. Ferreira, “As pinturas rupestres Esquemáticas...”

<sup>15</sup> L. de A. Castro; O. da V. Ferreira, “As pinturas rupestres Esquemáticas...”

Lapa dos Gaivões was classified as a National Monument in 1970 (Decreto 251/70, DR 129, June 3), under the name Abrigo das Pinturas de Vale de Junco, belonging to the Natural Park of Serra de São Mamede. In the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup>, the Serra de São Mamede rock-shelters with rupestrian paintings are mentioned in several publications. Reference is made mainly in syntheses on Portugal's rock art, or in geographic and chronological syntheses, as well as in essays by local researchers<sup>16</sup>, in which the authors transcribe the existing descriptions of the motifs found in each rock-shelter. In 2009, the four rock-shelters that form the Arronches group were incorporated in an academic research project – “Abrigos com arte esquemática do Centro de Portugal: mundo simbólico e antropização da paisagem”. The whole study was reviewed and updated, and subsequently published in full<sup>17</sup>.

## 2. 2. The rock-shelter

Lapa dos Gaivões is a large-dimension rock-shelter located on the South face of Serra dos Louções, at a lower area of the slope. It is a broad joint, with an approximately rectangular contour, which carves the abrupt quartzite wall. The registered panels are distributed through the entire rock-shelter, i.e. its interior, ceiling, and exterior area. Approximately 13-meter long, with a maximum depth of 5 meters, its height is quite irregular, reaching 3 meters in its outermost zone and 0.5 meters in the interior.



Figure 2  
Lapa dos Gaivões rock shelter

<sup>16</sup> M. F. Dos Santos, *Pré-história de Portugal*, Biblioteca das Civilizações Primitivas, Editorial Verbo, 1972, 116; V. O. Jorge, “Arte Rupestre em Portugal”, *Trabalhos de Antropologia e Etnologia*, vol. 26, fasc. 1-4, (1986): 27-50; J. de Oliveira; A. Bairinhas; C. Balesteros, “Inventário dos vestígios arqueológicos do Parque Natural da Serra de São Mamede”, *Ibn Maruan – Revista Cultural do Concelho de Marvão*, nº 6, Câmara Municipal de Marvão, Edições Colibri, (1996): 43-61; A. Peixoto, “A Lapa dos Gaivões – Arronches”, *Ibn Maruan – Revista Cultural do Concelho de Marvão*, nº 7, Câmara Municipal de Marvão, (1997): 265-291; M. I. Pestana, “Arte Rupestre da freguesia da Esperança (concelho de Arronches)”, *Primeiras Jornadas de Arqueologia do Nordeste Alentejano 85 – actas*, (1987): 17-24.

<sup>17</sup> A. Martins, *Abrigos de Arte Esquemática Pintada do Centro de Portugal...*

The rock-shelter's base is irregular, slightly inclined, with a few large stone blocks that may have fallen from the back wall. Its sub-rectangular configuration, variable in height, creates many niches, and more or less pronounced flat and smooth surfaces, which served as different compartments of the scenic space.

The shelter's location, at a lower area of the slope, limits its visibility, which is more reduced to the East and South, due to a small elevation, and broad to the Southwest. The morphology of the archaeological site impedes a direct observation to the West, where the two other rock-shelters of Serra dos Louções are located. Climbing laterally up to the top of the quartzite massif, we find a different situation, with a broad visual field to the South and the East, i.e. the plains of the Alentejo, as well as the entire Serra dos Louções.

The panels on the exterior surface can be spotted at medium range, while the ones in the ceiling can only be seen from inside the shelter. The painted surfaces are well-preserved, with no abundant presence of vegetable micro-colonizing organisms.

Some panels bear clear marks of vandalism: gaps in the substrate and fractures on the rock, as well as the impact of bonfires lit inside the rock-shelter. Despite the relatively good state of preservation of the surfaces, the exterior panels are exposed to meteoric agents; water circulation is frequent during winter and there is even a small spring in the shelter's most interior niche, which remains wet all-year round.

The slight inclination of the rock face, in the outermost area of the shelter, would enable the presence of several dozen people, but this number would decrease to around 10 to 20 nearer the registered panels. The ceiling panels could be observed only by two or three people at the same time, while at least 20 people could remain seated inside the shelter and therefore protected.

### 2. 3. Description of the iconographic content

The iconographic repertoire of Lapa dos Gaivões is found on different surfaces of the shelter, the back wall, and the ceiling. It is formed by ten panels with schematic painted representations. Panels 1, 2, 6, 7, and 8 are perfectly visible from outside the shelter, and panels 6 and 7 are visible from a medium range. In contrast, panel 5, despite its privileged location, is not immediately visible due to its poor state of preservation. The remaining panels are located on the ceiling (3, 4, 10) or on a side surface (9), rendering its immediate visualization difficult. Sixty-four motifs have been found in this shelter, corresponding to 291 figures, with a prevalence of dots (168) and bars (72). Twenty-six anthropomorphic and nine zoomorphic motifs also stand out in the iconographic repertoire. Less frequent are the geometric motifs (5), undetermined (5), tendentially circular motifs (3), tectiforms (2), and with a single occurrence, miscellaneous motifs, in this case a possible idoliform (motif 35).

#### 2.3.1. Panel 6

Panel 6 is located on the outside wall of the shelter, in a vertical arrangement, with a sub-rectangular shape and a smooth and moderately regular surface (Figures 3 and 4).

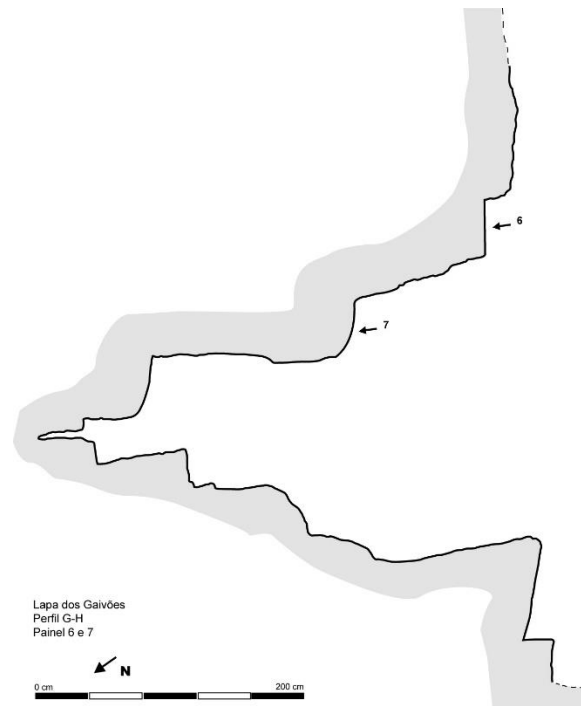


Figure 3  
Location of panels 6 and 7



Figure 4  
Panel 6 with the two schematic motifs

Its delimitation followed the form of the surface itself which corresponds to an area of the shelter's outside wall defined by fractures, forming an interior surface protected by a small ledge. It is 0.85-meter long, 0.45-meter wide, and it stands 2.20 meters above the

shelter's floor. Facing South, it has a broad visual field to the outer part of the shelter, but only panel 7 is directly visible. Coloration is light and heterogeneous, and its light-grey and reddish areas, resulting from the presence of iron oxide, are contoured by a vertical fracture that subdivides the panel. This panel's iconographic repertoire is composed of two schematic motifs.

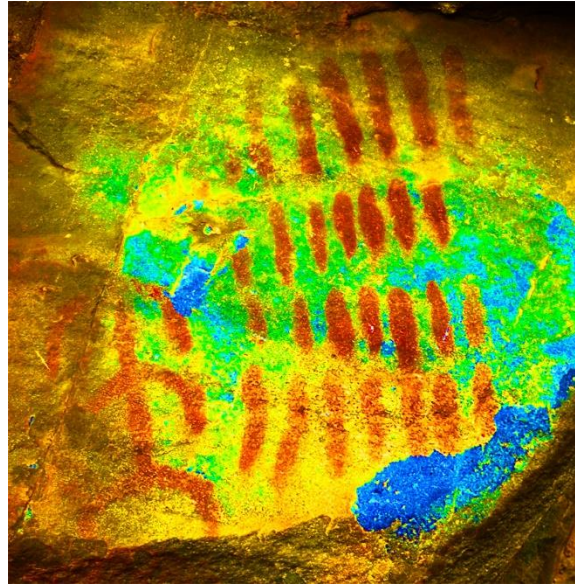


Figure 5  
Panel 6 (DStretch image)

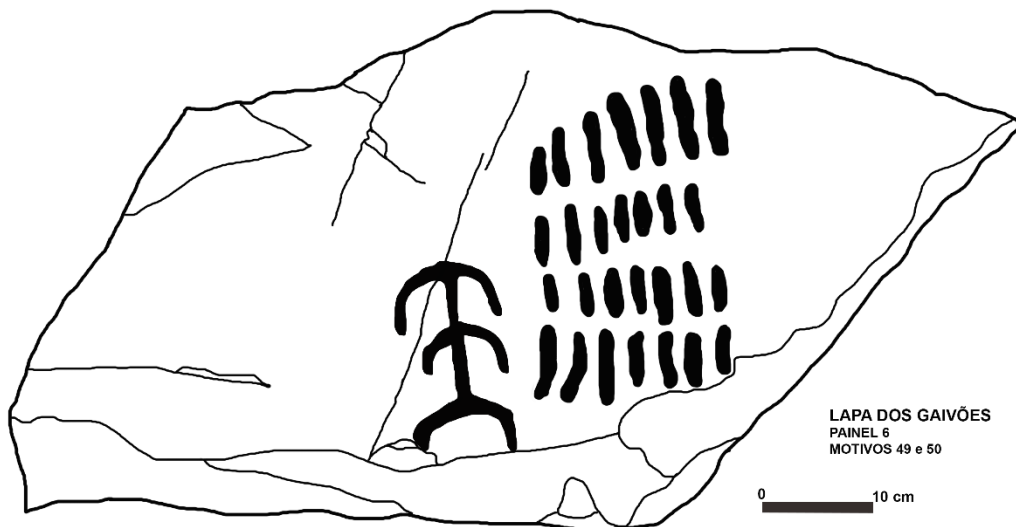


Figure 6  
Panel 6 – motifs 49 and 50

Motif 49. Typology-wise, morphology is characterized as an anthropomorphic figure, with a vertical arrangement. It is formed by a vertical central line with a sharply curved line in the upper extremity. In the middle of the vertical line, we find two more lateral lines, also curved downwards, and two other curved lines in the lower extremity, one for each side. The head is anatomically recognizable, formed by the curved line, a feature that may correspond to some type of adornment or hair. The upper limbs emerge from the torso and are shaped as arcs on the sides of the body. Lower limbs are arched and slightly bent, and seem to represent the knees, leaving the extremities at the edge of the panel. Therefore, this is an anthropomorph with downward-facing open arms, half-bent open legs, and does not present any sort of anatomical detail of sexual nature. It is located on the left side of motif 50, in the left area of the panel, and is partially crossed by a fracture in the rock surface. It is 17-cm long and 8-cm wide at the lower limbs. The line is about 1.5 cm thick, presenting clearly defined and moderately regular contours. It is well preserved. The red pigment is uniformly distributed through the figure, and fingers may have been used to paint (Figure 7).



Figure 7  
Panel 6 – motif 49

Motif 50. This rectangular set of 28 vertically-arranged bars has regular well-defined contours. The bars are aligned, grouped into four horizontal parallel rows, each with seven bars, with different dimensions. The bars of the upper row are larger, about-6 cm long, while the others are 3-to-4 cm long and 1 cm wide. Bars are aligned in each set, both horizontally and vertically, separated by approximately 1.5 cm. Located on the panel's right surface, they are well preserved, enabling us to state that the method used for applying the red pigment was finger painting (Figure 8).

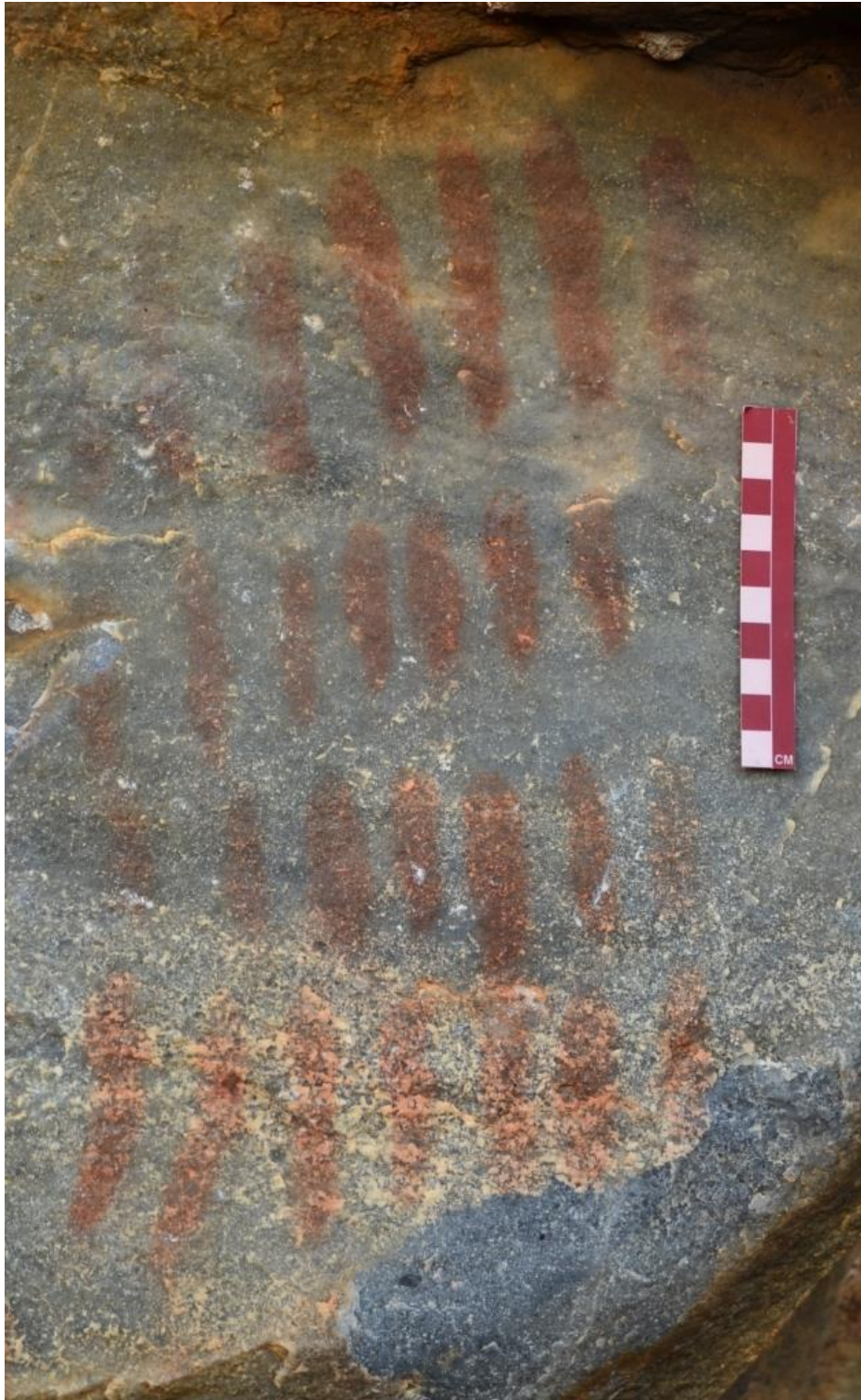


Figure 8  
Panel 6 – motif 50

### 3. Iconography and interpretation – the story told at Lapa dos Gaivões

In this panel of Lapa dos Gaivões we find two different associated motifs representing an idea that must be conveyed to the community. We can initially interpret this conveyance of a notion by analysing each motif, and then relating it and integrating it with the remaining iconography of this shelter. It is part of a global speech of anthropization of that natural element as vehicle for the transfer of knowledge to the community.

Quantitatively speaking, bars are probably the most frequently represented motif in Iberian sites with Schematic Rock Art Painting. They may appear isolated or, more often, in sets that sometimes group dozens of figures. They can be associated with other motifs – e.g. anthropomorphs, zoomorphs or dots, or be part of scenes.

A variety of interpretations can be given for these motifs, from rather schematic representations of anthropomorphs to numbering systems – possibly symbolizing the number of people who attended the shelter<sup>18</sup>, the social or ritual composition of the community, or even some specific type of accounting<sup>19</sup>. These motifs may also correspond to the peak of abstraction of a certain typology, not necessarily anthropomorphic, that lost all its formal features<sup>20</sup>.

Bar arrangement is either vertical, horizontal, or tilted – to the left or to the right. In most cases, these motifs were painted with the fingers. This is evidenced by the round contours and thickness of the line itself – never less than 1-cm thick. This technique necessarily required dipping the finger, or fingers, into a semi-liquid or creamy pigment to homogeneously enveloping the entire fingertip with a thick layer and evenly applying the pigment on the surface. Such direct contact with the medium, the vehicle of transfer, and the final objective, i.e. the pigment, the surface, and the motif, may have symbolic or ritual implications which, unfortunately for us, are totally unknown.

Anthropomorphic motifs surely are the most frequently discussed typologies of Schematic Rock Art Painting and those raising more controversy and debate. Their association with the human figure implies the recognition of anatomical features, such as the head, the torso, and the limbs, represented in stylised, highly schematic ways. Countless variants include multiple details, sometimes hard to define and systematize, and typologies are questionable, especially the most schematic. Interpretation-related questions must also be answered. Do these morphologies really correspond to human representations? Are these specific people, members of the community, or self-portraits? Or do they represent external, mythicized, or symbolic entities? We can hardly find concrete answers for certain questions, but the worldwide figurative recurrence of this morphology and its human-like shapes allow us to interpret them as anthropomorphic representations.

<sup>18</sup> H. Breuil, *Les Peintures Rupestres Schématiques de la Péninsule Ibérique*, Vol. I...; P. Acosta, *La Pintura rupestre Esquemática en España. Memorias del Seminario de Prehistoria y Arqueología*. (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1968), 115; R. de Balbín Behrmann; M. Fernández-Miranda; A. Moure Romanillo, “El Abrigo con pinturas esquemática de Hoyo de Pela (Navalvillar de Pela, Badajoz)”. *Boletín del Seminario de Estudios de Arte y Arqueología*, num 43 (1977), 21.

<sup>19</sup> M<sup>a</sup>. I. Martínez Perelló, “Arte Rupestre en Badajoz. Un nuevo abrigo con pinturas esquemáticas: El morro del Valle de la Venta (Cabeza del Buey)”, *Revista de Estudios Extremeños*, tomo XLIX, num 2 (1993), 320.

<sup>20</sup> H. Collado Giraldo, “Sistematización cronológica de la pintura rupestre esquemática en la provincia de Badajoz: Los abrigos de la Sierra de Magacela”, *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma, Série I, Prehistoria y Arqueología*, num 8 (1995): 174.



P. Acosta<sup>21</sup> proposed the first broad typological systematization of different anthropomorphic figurations, which has been used in studies on Iberian schematic art. This description of formal features enables a distinction between motifs, creating patterns or recurrences that correspond to different entities.

Anthropomorphic representations may appear isolated or in groups, revealing some type of interconnection, creating scenes or more elaborate compositions. Pairs of anthropomorphs are frequent and may be interpreted as participants in nuptial or sexual initiation ceremonies<sup>22</sup>. Scenes with different anthropomorphs may be interpreted as dances, hunting scenes, fights among humans, scenes of animal domestication and representations of agricultural work<sup>23</sup>.

Sex differentiation is possible due to the representation of anatomical details, such as penises, usually revealed by an extension of the figure's central line to the area below. Female representations are harder to define, since they present no obvious morphological features, such as breasts. Some researchers consider as feminine the motifs with two zigzag lines at the body's extremity – as if they were open legs, thus possibly representing a child birth scene<sup>24</sup>, or the representation of the double triangle, as found in Cueva de Nerja<sup>25</sup>, creating a double triangular shape also found in movable items – the so-called Almeriense idols. In contrast with rupestrian representations of a highly schematic typology, we find in Iberia many clay or bone statues that clearly belong to the female sex, by representing breasts or the triangular-shaped pubis. In Portugal, special reference should be made to the statues of Pedra de Ouro or Vila Nova de São Pedro<sup>26</sup>.

Schematic Painting also raises many difficulties, in so far as sex identification is concerned. Phallus-bearing motifs may be considered masculine, but the vast majority remains in a grey area. This undefined character can be overcome through formal recurrences, or motif associations.

Anthropomorphs sometimes present many details, such as personal adornments, clothes, or weapons. These interpretations must be double-checked, as the representation of fine traits or stylistically intricate motifs is often impeded by the technical execution.

Twenty-six anthropomorphic representations were found at Lapa dos Gaivões, in nine out of ten panels, whether isolated or in scenes. These correspond to different

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<sup>21</sup> P. Acosta, *La Pintura rupestre Esquemática en España...*; P. Acosta, "Técnicas, estilo, temática y tipología en la pintura rupestre esquemática hispana", *Zéphyrus*, num XXXVI (1983): 13-25.

<sup>22</sup> P. Acosta, *La Pintura rupestre Esquemática en España...*

<sup>23</sup> P. Acosta, *La Pintura rupestre Esquemática en España...*; J. Becares Pérez, "Hacia nuevas técnicas de trabajo en el estudio de la pintura rupestre esquemática", *Zéphyrus*, num XXXVI Salamanca (1983): 137-148.

<sup>24</sup> P. Cantalejo Duarte et alii, "Sobre los antropomorfos esquemáticos en Málaga: reflejo de unos grupos sociales que mantuvieron un arte subjetivo", *Actas del II Congreso de Arte Rupestre esquemático en la Península Ibérica - 2010*, Ayuntamiento de Veléz-Blanco, (2013): 69; J. L. Sanchidrián Torti, "Cueva de la Pileta. Arte rupestre postpaleolítico", *Revista de Arqueología*, 117, (1991), 10-18.

<sup>25</sup> Sanchidrián Torti, J. L. "Ídolos femeninos esquemáticos de la Cueva de Nerja", *Zéphyrus*, num XXXIV-XXXV, (1982), 103-106.

<sup>26</sup> M. Varela Gomes, "O sagrado em Vila Nova de São Pedro...", 2005; A. Paço, "Figurinha de barro da Pedra de Ouro", *Congresso do Mundo Português*, Lisboa, (1940): 219-232.

typologies, but figures with upper and lower limbs shaped as arcs are prevalent; the upper limbs may be facing up, in a position comparable to the so-called “praying man,” or facing down.

Different motifs (15, 30, 49, 51, 53, 56, 60, and 62) share formal similarities. They consist of several pairs of semi-circular lines which correspond to the representation of the upper and lower limbs, but also of the top extremity. Some do not have representations of the lower limbs (30 and 56). The upper semi-circular line may correspond to some sort of hat, or headdress, or may represent hair. Given the absence of sexual differentiation (namely ithyphallic characteristics), we interpret these motifs as female depictions.

In contrast with the latter, many anthropomorphs can be identified as male (42, 43, 57, and 63), with a frontal phallus depiction. Motif 57 also shows a bifurcation at the upper extremity, and this detail may correspond to a representation of some type of adornment, such as hair or a hat/horn helmet. The presence of this adornment is also visible in figures 52 and 61, which bear no ithyphallic characteristics but can also be considered masculine by comparison with the previous ones<sup>27</sup>.

Panel 6 has a small iconographic repertoire, occupying its right extremity – which none the less presents a central fracture. Red pigment is identical in both motifs, revealing that they may have been executed at the same time. Considering the execution field, the executant was approximately 1.70 to 1.80 meters tall – or he painted on top of a support.

This anthropomorphic figure stands by the side of 28 vertical bars, disposed in four rows, each with seven aligned bars. May this composition correspond to a lunar calendar? Perhaps the anthropomorphic representation is a female, as it bears no phallus and the upper curved line may be interpreted as adornments, or long hair falling to the side.

In this case, each bar would correspond to one day, and the change of row would correspond to a new lunar phase, a thematic intimately connected to the female universe, and ultimately to the reproduction of the human species. An alternative explanation is that it may be a different counting system, each bar taking a different meaning, maybe collective, with the anthropomorph acting as its regulation entity.

As regards the female sex representation assigned to motif 49, we find a connection with panel 7, also located on an outside surface, and presenting a monothematic iconographic repertoire, composed of three anthropomorphic motifs (51, 52 and 53) (Figure 9).

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<sup>27</sup> A. Martins, A. Abrigos de Arte Esquemática Pintada do Centro de Portugal...

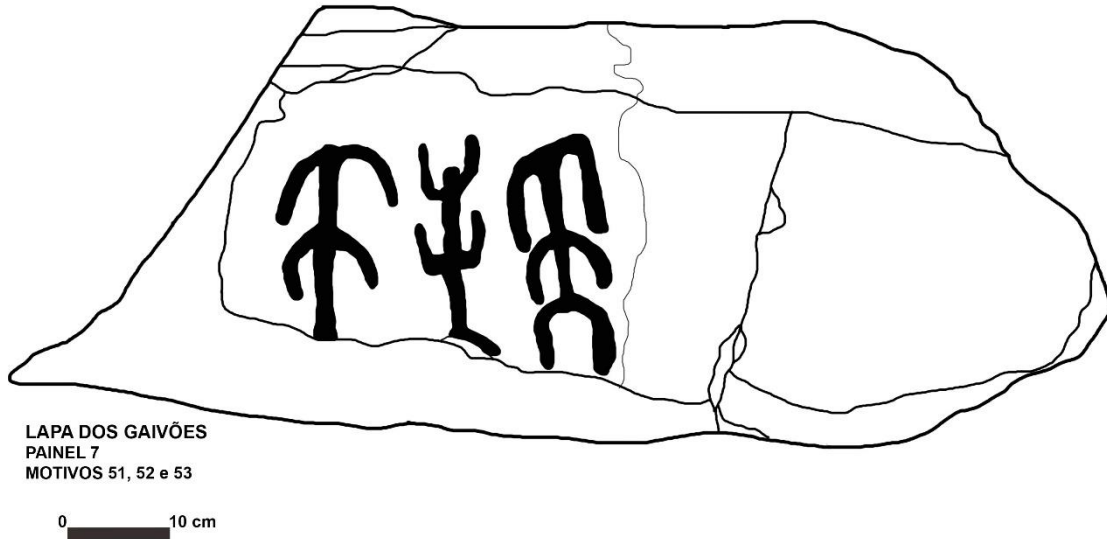


Figure 9  
Panel 7 – motifs 51, 52 and 53

These three motifs show an identical wine-red pigment and were possibly painted at the same time, with the executant standing. Motifs 51 and 53 may also be interpreted as female, showing possible representations of hair or down-facing headdresses, as well as arched upper and lower limbs. They sharply contrast with the central figure (52), which has up-facing arms, in a pray position, and presents a head adornment (helmet, hat) or a hairdo representation. Could this be a male representation, albeit without sexual differentiation? Could this triad be related to the motifs on panel 6? (Figure 10).



Figure 10  
Panel 6 and panel 7

The association of anthropomorphic figures with bars also appears on panel 9, in which it has been possible to identify two phases of execution and addition to the iconographic repertoire (Figure 11)

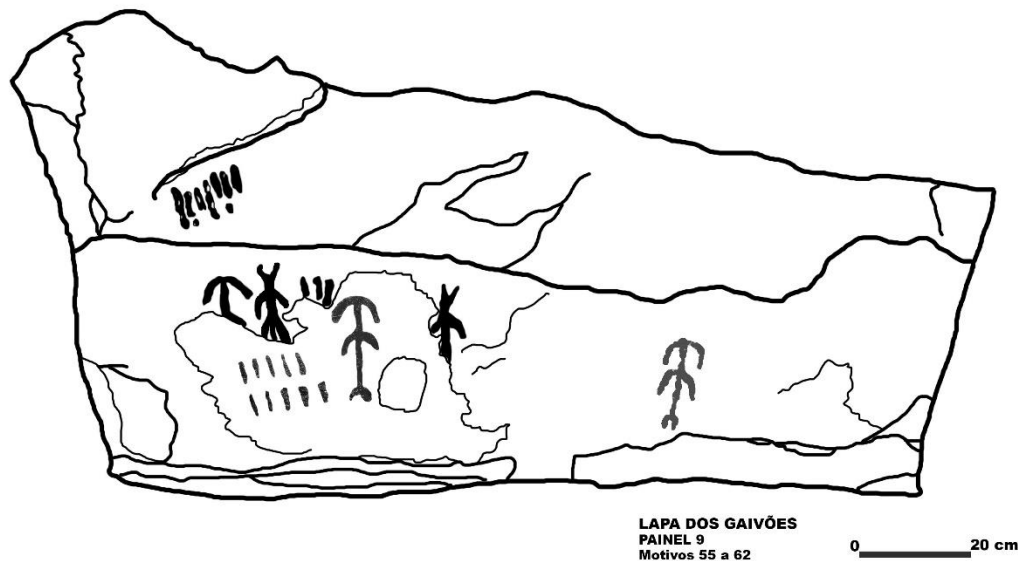


Figure 11  
Panel 9

This panel is located at the shelter's far-right area, on an outside surface, with no type of protection, which impacts on the preservation state of the iconographic repertoire. Initially, motifs 55, 56, 57, 58 and 61 were painted in wine-red: three anthropomorphic motifs (56, 57 and 61) and a set of bars (55). Motif 58, located by the side of anthropomorph 57, could also correspond to another morphology of this type, but the separation of the surface on the lower area caused a partial destruction of this motif, as well as of the bottom of motifs 56 and 61. The set of bars (59) and anthropomorphic figure (60) were painted over this more recent surface with a light orange pigment, filling the scenic space.

We propose that the panel was organized into three levels. The top level is composed of the seven vertical bars (55) represented on the upper area of the first two anthropomorphs (56 and 57), plus anthropomorph 61. These motifs can be interpreted as one female representation and two male representations; anthropomorph 57 has an extended central line, representing the virile sex, and the poor preservation of anthropomorph 61 does not allow for its sexual identification. The surface is chipped between motifs 57 and 61, cutting the scene and creating the second section, in a lower level, on which another bar cluster and one anthropomorph were painted. A set of 10 bars (59), in two rows of five bars each, next to an anthropomorph (60) characterised as female, like those described above, were painted over this smooth light-coloured surface. These two motifs have a light-orange coloration and are hardly recognizable, although dating from a more recent timeframe. This later addition possibly aimed to fill the absence of the motifs that had previously existed on this surface – which, for some reason, maybe natural, detached itself from the shelter's wall, partially destroying the identified panel. On the third level, we find the last anthropomorphic motif (62), located at the panel's right extremity, on a very oxidized surface that hinders its proper visualization. In this figure, considered feminine, the lower limbs, small-sized when compared to other anatomical parts, outstand.

We find iconographic parallels to these anthropomorph typologies, for example at the Abrigo 25 rock-shelter of Sierra de San Serván (Badajoz), with an interesting set of anthropomorphs identical to those interpreted as female at Lapa dos Gaivões<sup>28</sup>. This composition presents a set of aligned anthropomorphs, one of which connected to another anthropomorphic figure with a horn-shaped head adornment, identical to the motif association found in panels 7 and 9 of Lapa dos Gaivões.

In the large scenic space of Lapa dos Gaivões, panels 6, 7, and 9, are the true stage front, occupying the foreground and automatically offering the spectator a privileged view, as soon as he/she arrives at the shelter. These stories would be told and learned by the community.

#### **4. The female universe and women representations in Iberian post-Palaeolithic rock art**

Schematic itself is an intrinsic, semantically explicit, feature of Schematic Rock Art Painting. Its figures are simplified and linear, with no anatomical details, and extremely hard to identify in terms of sex or species. The schematic style consists preferably of ideograms – figurations with a doubtful meaning, maybe impossible to identify, expressing narratives that prevent us from clearly recognizing them due to our socio-cultural and contextual distance. Naturalistic figures of other art cycles are frequently interpreted according to our contemporary perception of the representation, considering the anatomical details of animals or the sexual features of anthropomorphic figures that enable a definition of species and sex. This recognition creates a pre-established notion that can be use as starting point for interpretation, a situation rarely applicable to schematic art. The undetermined formal identity of the motifs, and their meaning, prevents the adoption of interpretative concepts, and efforts are often belittled by their degree of uncertainty. The search for patterns, for formal and typological recurrences, and for motif associations gives rise to interpretative approaches that are conditioned by regional differences, specific to each of the many different centres with schematic paintings in Iberia.

Schematic features enables their identification as anthropomorphic representations – a line representing the body, the distinction (or not) of the upper extremity as the head, upper and lower limbs represented by other lines, parallel to the central one, and sometimes details such as hands and fingers or toes. Sexual differentiation is possible in those cases featuring an appendix protruding from the central line that represents the body/torso, separated by the line representing the lower limbs. Frontal representation of these figures prevents us from stating that the penis is erect. Depending on the occasion, it has a more or less elongated form, but most of the time its size is exaggerate, compared to the anatomic proportion of the figure. As regards female representations, the absence of anatomical features related to the female sex, such as breasts or broader hips, prevents the obvious identification.

These formal and typological obstacles are present in schematic art, but we do not find them in Levantine Art – another important Iberian art cycle that has been intensely

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<sup>28</sup> M. Ortiz Macías, “Pintura Rupestre Esquemática Al sur de la Comarca de Mérida”, Colección Arte-Arqueología, num 17, (Badajoz: Diputacion de Badajoz - Departamento de Publicaciones, 1997); M. Ortiz Macías; E. Caballero, “Pinturas rupestres esquemáticas: Escenas y composiciones. Arroyo de San Serván, Mérida y Zaraza de Alange (Badajoz)”, Revista de Estudios Extremeños, tomo XLVI - num 1 (1990): 87-111.

studied by many researchers over the last 100 years<sup>29</sup>. Naturalistic or sub-naturalistic features of the representations enable the identification of several species in zoomorphs, as well as the sexual identification of many anthropomorphic figures, by means of either anatomical details or socio-cultural features, such as adornments or artefacts used in different activities. This narrative dynamic art, naturalistic in character due to both its iconographic typology and execution method, enables a conveyance of the narratives – thus easily understood and apprehended by the contemporary cultural and conceptual universe.

In the Schematic Painting of Iberia, the issue of the sexual characterization of anthropomorphic motifs has not been addressed due to the above mentioned specificity. It has none the less been intensely developed in Levantine Art over the last few decades, with monographs<sup>30</sup> and studies focusing on gender issues and the social role of the representations<sup>31</sup>. The features enabling this sexual differentiation of women are the representations of breasts, prominent hips, the shape and distribution of muscles and fat on the body, hair/headresses, and long pieces of clothing interpreted as skirts. They are associated with production activities (recollection, agriculture), family activities (related to children), or activities interpreted as dances or rituals. Special reference should be made to the presence of pair representations – two anthropomorphic female figures together, sometimes even with joined arms, or even the representation of a pair composed of a woman and a smaller figure, possibly a child<sup>32</sup>. Many researchers interpreted them as secondary characters on the male narrative of Levantine Art, which features many

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<sup>29</sup> A. Beltrán Martínez, A., *Arte Rupestre Levantino. Monografías arqueológicas*, IV, 1968; M. Díaz-Andreu, “Cien años en los estudios de pintura rupestre pos-paleolítica en la investigación española”, *The Levantine Question – El problema “levantino”*. En J. J. García Arranz, H. Collado Giraldo, G. Nash (eds), *Archaeolingua*, (2012): 23-53; M. S. Hernández Pérez, “Artes esquemáticos en la Península Ibérica - el paradigma de la pintura esquemática”. *Actas del Congreso de Arte Rupestre Esquemático en la Península Ibérica, Comarca de Los Veléz*, (2006): 13-31; M. S. Hernández Pérez, “Arte Rupestre Postpaleolítico en el Arco Mediterráneo de la Península Ibérica. Balance de 10 años de descubrimientos y estudios”. En J. A. López Mira, R. Martínez Valle, C. Matamoros de Villa (eds.), *El Arte rupestre del Arco Mediterráneo de la Península Ibérica - 10 años en la Lista del Patrimonio Mundial de la UNESCO- Actas del IV Congreso*, Valencia: Generalitat Valenciana, (2009): 59-79; V. Villaverde et alii, “Qué entendemos por arte levantino?”, *The Levantine Question – El problema “levantino”*. En J. J. García Arranz, H. Collado Giraldo, G. Nash (eds), *Archaeolingua*, (2012): 81-115.

<sup>30</sup> T. Escoriza Mateu, *La representación del cuerpo femenino. Mujeres y Arte Rupestre Levantino del Arco Mediterráneo de la Península Ibérica*, BAR International Series 1082, Oxford: Archaeopress, 2002; M. Lillo Bernabeu, *La imagen de la mujer en el arte prehistórico del arco mediterráneo de la Península Ibérica*, Alicante: Universidad de Alicante, 2014. Tesis doctoral.

<sup>31</sup> M<sup>a</sup>. Á. Querol, “Mujeres y construcción de la prehistoria: un mundo de suposiciones”, *Las mujeres en la prehistoria*, Valencia: Museu de Prehistoria de Valencia, 2006: 27-36; T. Escoriza Mateu, “Mujeres, vida social y violencia. Política e ideología en el arte rupestre Levantino”, *CYPSELA*, num 16, (2006): 19-36; R. Martínez Valle; M. P. Guillem, Calatayud, “Donde están las mujeres una aproximación a la distribución de las figuras femeninas de estilo levantino en el Parque Cultural Valltorta-Gassulla”, *Las Mujeres en la prehistoria*, Valencia: Museu de Prehistoria de Valencia, 2006: 51-62; M. Sánchez Romero, *Maternidad y Prehistoria: prácticas de reproducción, relación y socialización*, *Las Mujeres en la prehistoria*, Valencia: Museu de Prehistoria de Valencia, 2006: 119-137.

<sup>32</sup> Bea, M., “Representaciones infantiles en el arte levantino”, *Niños en la Antigüedad: estudios sobre la infancia en el Mediterráneo antiguo*, Zaragoza: Universidad de Zaragoza, 2012: 31-55; T. Martínez Rubio; V. Villaverde Bonilla, “Pinturas rupestres de la Cueva del Cerro (Millares, Valencia): una nueva documentación, una nueva lectura”, *Archivo de Prehistoria Levantina*, Vol: XXVII (2008): 161-179.

hunting scenes and fights between anthropomorphs<sup>33</sup>. Many such figures have the representation of a phallus, and may thus be considered male, but many others are neutral figures with no explicit sexual character, but nevertheless are classified as masculine due to their context. These are warriors, archers, hunters, always male and not female, even when they are asexual representations. The only figures that are considered female are those with the abovementioned anatomical features. It is a violent narrative, of hunting and confrontation between men, but for some female researchers the greater violence is silent and oppressive: of concealment, annulation, and cancellation of the female social collective<sup>34</sup>. This intentional omission casts the feminine to a secondary and marginal position, while men are the main characters. The use of gender Western stereotypes means that men are accepted as predominant, strong, active from a political and economic point of view, while women remain maternal, passive, and secondary beings in the socio-economic activities. The artists executing these artistic manifestations were considered also men<sup>35</sup>. Levantine art seems to have a clear control over the female collective, which is evident in the scarce representation of women and the absence (except in doubtful cases)<sup>36</sup> of representations of that single activity men cannot perform: biological child-birth and breastfeeding<sup>37</sup>. Acceptance of gender duality – feminine vs. masculine, which considers gender a universal concept, should not be so categorical when applied to pre-historic communities. The role played by each individual in society led to the creation of gender, meaning that gender is a symbolic creation with a socio-cultural role that distinguishes something that is biologically determined – i.e. sex (and we must also consider the non-identifications of sex). Therefore, it is extremely difficult to apply these notions to pre-historic communities, as we know so little about their social and economic organization, and female and male roles were possibly complementary, not obeying a gender hierarchy. The androcentric and paternalistic view imposed on Western society led researchers to consciously, or unconsciously, assume that female subordination was universal and timeless, applying these concepts to pre-history. Many ethnographic cases show us that women have recognition and social prestige in their societies or groups<sup>38</sup>, suggesting that this theme must be approached in different ways.

## 5. Lapa dos Gaivões – fertility, lunar cycle, and feminine universe

These three panels of Lapa dos Gaivões (6, 7 and 9) enable us to explicitly examine the feminine-masculine dichotomy. The natural element – i.e. the quartzite shelter, became a canvas on which scenes composed of several elements, some of which recognizable, were painted in previously selected places. The colour of the surface itself, as well as its irregularities, were already part of the conceptual composition before the execution and led to the adaptation of the iconographic repertoire.

<sup>33</sup> A. Beltrán, *Arte Rupestre Levantino...*

<sup>34</sup> T. Escoriza Mateu, T., *La representación del cuerpo femenino...*; T. Escoriza Mateu, “Mujeres, vida social y violencia...”

<sup>35</sup> M. Díaz-Andreu, “Iberian post-paleolithic art and gender: discussing human representations in Levantine art”, *Journal of Iberian Archaeology*, Vol: 0 ADECAP, (1998): 33-52.

<sup>36</sup> T. Escoriza Mateu, T., *La representación del cuerpo femenino...*

<sup>37</sup> E. Sanahuja, *Cuerpos sexuados, objetos y prehistoria. Feminismos Cátedra* 69, 2002; M. Sánchez Romero, *Maternidad y Prehistoria: prácticas de reproducción...*

<sup>38</sup> Y. A. Cabré, “Las Mujeres desde la antropología: una revisión desde la producción etnográfica”, *Las Mujeres en la prehistoria*. Valencia: Museu de Prehistoria de Valencia, (2006): 151-162.

The scene represented in panel 6, associating an anthropomorphic motif interpreted as feminine with 28 bars disposed in four rows with seven elements each, refers to the lunar cycle – that changes every seven days (Figure 12), and women’s menstrual-reproductive cycle. It may be a visual reminder of lunar phases, seasonal events, or social activities, working as a chronogram, a specific marking of the days, i.e. a calendar.



Figure 12  
Moon Phases (<http://wallpapersafari.com/wMFYLGc>)

References exist to Chalcolithic lunar calendars, identified at archaeological sites in Central Europe and the Danube<sup>39</sup>, made of different materials – ceramics or stone, bearing marks that are interpreted as days or sets of days related to the lunar cycle. The association of these pictograms with feminine items – such as women statuettes, is directly connected to the birth-and-fecundity control enabled by this time counting system, the only usable by checking the phases of the moon. Although certain animals can synchronize their reproductive cycle with the lunar phases<sup>40</sup>, it is not easy for women to achieve this intentionally. Thus, we have a calendar with one line corresponding to one day, in which the cadence of seven days is achieved by observing the transformation of the only element that changes on the short-term (each 24 hours, day and night). Just like the moon, women also

<sup>39</sup> M. Merlini, “Lunar Menstrual Chronograms from the Danube Civilization to procreate a Child of the Moon”, *From Symbols to Signs, Ethnoreligion Series I*, Muzeul Bucovinei Suceava, (2015): 133-200; O. Rak, *MOON OVER VELIŠTAK - Interpreting the structure and meaning of symbolic motifs of the oldest lunar calendar inscribed on a prehistoric ceramic vessel from Velištak, Croatia, Zadarskasmotra*, 2018.

<sup>40</sup> M. Merlini, “Lunar Menstrual Chronograms from the Danube Civilization to procreate a Child of the Moon”, *From Symbols to Signs, Ethnoreligion Series I*, Muzeul Bucovinei Suceava, (2015): 133-200.



undergo great changes during a month, related to biological factors – i.e. the menstrual cycle, and these changes are not only physical, but often behavioural, and could impact on the group’s activities and its social and even economic organization. We may even hypothesize that this was the representation of a puberty ritual, since ethnographic parallels inform us that, in many communities, the appearing of menstruation is the event that marks the feminine puberty ritual, marking the transition to adulthood – with ceremonies directly related to the execution of rock art, or directly connected to it<sup>41</sup>.

Even today, traditional sowing takes in account the phases of the moon. Seeds were planted in the soil during the crescent moon, a symbol of growth and fertility, which would produce more abundant harvests. The full moon, as symbol of passion, fertility, sexual pleasure or enchantment, is still present in collective imagination and in different aspects of the daily life, as well as in popular literature, in influences on child birth, and even in the expression that represents the day of sexual surrender and passion – the honey moon. This association with 28 bars thus symbolizes an astronomic knowledge related to the cyclical phases of the moon, enabling a time counting system and the creation of a calendar which is also used to determine fertility and breeding, namely the fertile period and the gestation period (Figure 13).



Figure 13  
Lapa dos Gaivões motifs and lunar phases

<sup>41</sup> K. A. Hays-Gilpin, *Ambiguous Images – Gender and Rock Art*, Gender and Archaeology Series, Vol. 7 AltaMira Press, 2004.

The feminine-masculine dichotomy is expressed in panels 7 and 9, showing a sexual alternation that does not reveal gender inequality, but a merely anatomical differentiation, evidenced by iconographic features. This equalitarian organization is also present in the linear organization of the three panels, where we find the scenes on the same horizontal plane of the shelter itself, with no hierarchisation, enabling its visualization at the same optical level.

## 6. Final remarks: context and time

Lapa dos Gaivões fits the second phase established for Schematic Rupestrian Painting in the Portuguese territory<sup>42</sup>. This phase is called “ideographic schematic art”, as its motifs are totally schematic, with few identifiable formal features, showing great typological and thematic diversity.

This new conceptual approach reflects the consolidation of these communities’ sedentarization, between the late 4<sup>th</sup> millennium and the late 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC.

It thus reveals a mythography with feminine and masculine elements and tells us a story, which, unfortunately, we can only partially understand. Through the association of motifs, we propose a relationship between feminine and masculine, and hence identify the sex of these schematic figures. The man-woman alternation reveals gender equality, and the association with a lunar cycle shows the knowledge and importance of natural elements for these communities. Domestication of the land is also made through the understanding and apprehension of natural phenomena and its application on the daily communitarian life, giving these communities a more effective control over crops and the size of the group itself. Issues related to fertility, women, animals, and fields would certainly be quite valued and important, since the maintenance of the group and its growth depended on it. At a time of economic, technical, and cultural changes, the existence of places where rituals or ceremonies (of different types) could be performed strengthened the cohesion of a group sharing the same symbolic and conceptual universe. Shelters with rock art, namely the large ones, such as Lapa dos Gaivões, would serve as places to gather the community, where different stories were told through pictograms and ideograms, the elements of the archaeological record that we can still access today.

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<sup>42</sup> A. Martins, A. *Abrigos de Arte Esquemática Pintada do Centro de Portugal...*, 2016.

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Breuil, H. *Les Peintures Rupestres Schématiques de la Péninsule Ibérique, Vol. II – Bassin du Guadiana*, Paris: Imprimerie de Lagny. 1933b.

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