ISSN 2499-1341

# EXPRESSION

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CONCEPTUAL ANTHROPOLOGY

N°48 JUNE 2025

## THE CONCEPTS BEHIND THE SURFACE

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## INTRODUCTION

### THE CONCEPTS BEHIND THE SURFACE

Recovering knowledge from the past has been a pursuit of the human mind since the creation of origin myths, back to prehistoric times. These myths are present among hunter-gatherers and other tribal societies around the world and still survive in present religions. Societies without formal writing preserve their myths by passing it down to new generations through initiation processes, marking the rites of passage into adulthood. Even in isolated tribes, far removed from the rest of the world, knowing the past is essential for becoming an adult. The past is what traditions, knowledge, and beliefs remember and elaborate upon in every society, including our own.

The history of the past is a process of the human mind interpreting facts. Memory tends to diminish over time, and the human mind tries to synthesize events. The biblical story of the Garden of Eden is a synthesis of an early age, crafted by human minds. Recent events are remembered in great detail, while as we move further back in time, details fade.

Any year during the second world war, which took place about 80 years ago, is filled with details which have been described in many books. A year from the Roman Punic wars against Carthage, over 2,000 years ago, is recorded in history books in just a few pages. A year of Neanderthal expansion in Europe, 200,000 years ago, would be summarized in a few sentences, if at all, in history books. Even less was memorized about the exodus of early hominids, who left their original habitat migrating out of Africa two million years ago. Our memory diminishes as time spans increase, while the natural process of synthesis retains and elaborates the key concepts of events and eras.

As we move further back in time, specific facts and events are erased and lost, or idealized. Archeological discoveries, however, bring fragments of history back to light, such as moments, sites, and events, recovering details and chapters of past lives. They offer material evidence deriving from actions that have causes and effects, and, if decoded, they provide data for collective memory and contribute to the knowledge of our past. In the case of prehistoric discoveries, each new piece of information illuminates our understanding of the unknown, shedding light on prehistory.

Recovering forgotten chapters of the past is the goal of archeology. The research process, unearthing, tracing, dating, reconstructing, and interpreting, defines the object or site and provides the raw material for exploring the concepts behind them.

For example, when prehistoric paintings are discovered in a cave, beyond describing, measuring, dating them, defining their cultural context, and saying “how beautiful!”, questions arise. What do they mean? What was their purpose? What were the ideas and concepts behind them?

If an archeological layer contains the traces of human presence, structures, used objects, and traces of a destructive fire, the first step is to describe and date the findings. Defining the site and the cultural layer, understanding who the people were, what they did, why they were there, and what caused the fire, are primary questions for the researcher. And then comes the eternal question, why? What made people act as they did? Over millennia, these questions help shape our understanding of consistent behavioral patterns and the concepts behind them.

Material culture offers the raw material for further exploration. The findings fix a specific time, marking the moment in which they were left as the archeologist found them. This moment had a beginning and an end, shaped by human actions driven by needs, opportunities, expectations, or other factors. Exploring the concepts behind these objects leads to investigating what we consider to be the logical or illogical thinking behind human actions.

The goal of research is understanding, and understanding has different levels. Each step, whether

archeological, historical, anthropological, or semiotic, has its own scale of understanding, evolving with advances in logical thinking, knowledge, and methods. These degrees of understanding represent different analytical levels or research targets.

The past is both a teacher and a father. It tells us where we come from and it gives identity to people, nations, and the entire humanity. Each case studied provides new insights into some facets of the human adventure.

Meaningful examples are presented in this issue of *Expression*. Specific cases provide snapshots of the past in different contexts, as highlights of the human experience.

The Discussion Forum tackles the challenge of decoding prehistoric art, pictorial writing that predates phonetic writing, unveiling primary logical thinking and chapters of life and history from prehistoric times.

A note by Leo Dubal sparks interest in the beginning of coinage, a revolutionary means of trade after ages when people used cowries and other natural objects as currency. With the advent of the Metal Ages, metal became a medium of exchange, with gold, silver, and copper objects being used as money. However, coinage eventually became the primary form of trade, lasting until the emergence of alternative trading methods. Just 20 years ago, coins were still commonly carried in the pockets of most urban people, a habit that is now in the process of fading. Today, it is being replaced by credit cards and other payment methods.

The main articles guide us through case studies on art, megaliths and other human adventure in Bulgaria, Malta, and the UK. Cave paintings in Bulgaria are discussed by Emmanuel Anati, who explores their function within the society that produced them. They appear to represent initiation practices from 5,000 years ago. Some figures have been decoded, while others require further research. However, the case reveals spiritual, social, and educational practices of a Bronze Age society.

Rose Marie Callus examines the meaning of Neolithic megalithic monuments in the Malta archipelago, a unique architecture in the heart of the Mediterranean Sea. She proposes its function and role of 5,000 years ago. What drove a small population on two small islands in the middle of the sea to build such massive structures? What kind of society conceived and created these monuments, and what do they reveal about their social, economic, and spiritual functions? What are the concepts behind them?

Terence Meaden, continuing his work from previous issues of Expression, presents another chapter of his research on the meaning and function of prehistoric megalithic monuments in the British Isles. This time, he focusses on Stonehenge, one of the most discussed prehistoric monuments in Europe, exploring its functions and traditions during the Bronze Age and beyond. This monument remained active for hundreds of years. What happened within the circle of these gigantic monoliths?

Kate Prendergast discusses the case of a large hill figure, the White Horse of Huffington, a geoglyph, over one hundred meters long, on the slopes of a hill in southern England, which has sparked debates about its function and age. What motivated its creators to produce such an image? What was the meaning and function of this horse-shaped hill figure?

These cases present intriguing stories of chapters from the past that have yet to be fully understood. One major question arises. What is the significance of the balance between spiritual and economic concerns in different societies?

The data presented here invite further discussion. Various expressions of human creativity reveal the spirit of humanity and prompt questions about the concepts behind them. What led people to create monuments that were not directly related to daily economic needs? Why? What was important to these different peoples?

Considering these different issues, from the prehistoric art, the origins of money, to the Bronze Age cave paintings in Bulgaria, the Neolithic monuments in Malta, Bronze Age Stonehenge in England and its later functions, and the uncertain date of the Huffington geoglyph, let the mind navigate through the ocean of human creativity and imagination.

E.A.

## A NOTE FOR THE AUTHORS

*EXPRESSION* is a quarterly journal focused on conceptual anthropology, distributed in over 90 countries. Both the authors and readers are researchers, scholars, and students in various fields of the humanities, most of whom are eager to maintain a lively multidisciplinary dialogue, communicate, learn, and explore new trends in humanistic studies. This journal provides a platform for expression and communication to researchers and authors from around the world. The published papers are meant to be read, not simply added to a bibliography. They are aimed at cultured, open-minded individuals with critical thinking.

The goal of *EXPRESSION* is to foster dialogue, communication, knowledge, and ideas about the intellectual and spiritual expressions of past and present cultures and societies. It is an open forum on conceptual anthropology, where more than 250 authors from 50 countries have published and continue publishing their research and concepts.

If you wish to contribute a paper, consider that you are promoting your topic, your ideas, and yourself. Try to make it engaging for those who are not specialists in your specific research field. You must speak to all readers, not just the restricted circle of experts in your particular area. Articles should be scientifically sound, innovative, original, stimulating, and enjoyable for a broad audience.

Your topic, even if focused on a local or specific theme, should ignite the interest of an international and interdisciplinary audience. The visual aspect is important: images provide visual testimony, enhancing the article's impact. Images and text should complement each other.

Authors should engage directly with the readers, speaking to them incisively, and avoiding long descriptions, catalogs, and rhetorical arguments. Refrain from unnecessary references, as they may demonstrate the author's erudition but do not enhance the scientific and cultural value of the article and do not contribute to the flowing reading of the article. Avoid excessive quotations, which might suggest an inability to express independent ideas. Use your own words and refrain from discursive arguments. Consider that shorter articles are generally read more and appreciated more than longer ones.

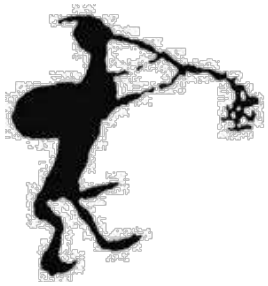
The main articles should address innovative, relevant issues. Communications on current topics, debates, and short notes can be included in the 'Discussion Forum' or the 'Notes and News' sections.

Papers are submitted for review, not to judge their merit, but to assist authors in better communicating with their readers, if necessary. Controversial ideas are not censored as long as they are rational. Progress in research is often driven by disputable ideas. New thoughts and concepts are welcome; they may provoke debate and criticism, keeping communication dynamic. Time will be their judge.

If you have something new to share or display, you are welcome. *EXPRESSION* is an independent, free journal that does not adhere to formal traditional regulations. It offers space for ideas and discoveries, including contentious issues, healthy discussions, and imaginative, creative papers, provided they contribute to research, are conceptually sound, and respect the integrity, ethics, and dignity of authors, colleagues, and readers.

Being published in *EXPRESSION* does not imply that the publisher and/or editors agree with the ideas expressed. Authors are responsible for their ideas, as well as the information and illustrations they present.

For additional information on how to submit a paper, see the 'Notes and News' section.



Kokopeli, The American Pueblo story-teller.
Tracing from rock engraving, Arizona, USA

**Front page image: See article by Emmanuel Anati**
(Fig. 9a. An image of the Lady of the Cave, apparently having a dagger at the belt. The legs look human, the head not. The two circles by the head are present also in some menhir statues)

# DISCUSSION FORUM

**The Discussion Forum invites readers to be active protagonists in debates of worldwide interest in Conceptual Anthropology.**

## PREHISTORIC ART

### THE CONCEPTS BEHIND: WHY FORGOTTEN MILLENNIA SHOULD BE RECOVERED, UNDERSTOOD, AND BECOME PART OF CULTURE

Emmanuel Anati

**When did figurative art start?**

When and how did figurative art become part of human culture? Is art the exclusive expression of Homo sapiens? These questions spark continuing debates. Framing them correctly is essential for understanding the story behind them. And another question is: why forgotten millennia should be recovered and understood? Early human thoughts and feelings, such as vocalizations, gestures, and other communicative expressions, both oral and visual, were not preserved over time, but graphic messages were. They are the data bank of the human elapsed memory.

Archeologists and amateurs debate whether visual art existed before the appearance of Homo sapiens. Precise terms should avoid misconceptions and ambiguities. Previous issues of Expression described how imprints of feet and hands and other casual unintentional signs were left behind by hominids, as well as by other primates, bears, and other animals, over millennia. Despite differing views, these imprints are not intentionally figurative and are not considered art.

Non-figurative deliberate markings, such as likely signs of presence, marks of territorial ownership, message signs, or numeric counting, along with handprints and other stencils, are present long before intentionally created figurative images. Similarly, cup-marks, cupules, and craters probably served functional or practical purposes; again, it is questionable whether these can be classified as art. Traces like those left on a working surface as a result of cutting or shaping an object have been described and published as works of art, due to a lack of conceptual analysis. Obviously, they cannot be defined as works of art.

Doubts are also legitimate regarding claims that stains created by chimpanzees manipulating colors on paper in a London zoo can be defined as abstract art, despite the fact that these conceptually meaningless visual results have inspired contemporary artists.

While some research has attempted to demonstrate the presence of figurative art among early hominids many millennia before visual art became a cultural pattern, none of these isolated instances can be confirmed as deliberately created with figurative intent. A clear distinction exists between two intellectual levels: handprints or other prints created simply through stencilling, and the ability to represent images of animals, humans, and other subjects. Markings and stencils existed well before Homo sapiens and have persisted since. They are improperly defined as proto-art, but in fact, their classification as art is questionable. Art implies conceptual content.

Conceptual anthropology defines Homo sapiens not by the shape of his jaw or chin but by the intellectual output he left behind, that is, evidence of his sapiens nature. Figurative art, image-making, is the testimony of an added dimension in intellectual abilities. It marks the presence of Homo sapiens, regardless of its presumed date. At present, in Australia and Indonesia, it goes back approximately 50,000 years, and in Europe approximately 44,000 years.

**Conceptual meaning of figurative art**

The presence of figurative art signifies a tremendous

leap in conceptual evolution, transforming human intelligence (HI) into an external document of intelligence (EI). It immortalizes memory visually, transferring it beyond the human mind and allowing it to survive beyond a lifetime. Transforming a concept into a graphic form, fixing an idea in a base external to the human mind that conceived it, produces a data base, gathering and preserving memory. This indeed characterizes Homo sapiens.

The relevance of prehistoric art lies in its ability to convey thousands of years of data on human life before conventional human history. Understanding the concepts behind these images reveals the roots of human intellect. Decoding prehistoric art shows the beliefs, concepts, and emotions at the core of culture, as discussed and detailed in various issues of *Expression* journal.

While art objects on durable materials such as stone, bone, or ivory have been found at prehistoric sites, over 90% of prehistoric figurative expressions are preserved in paintings or engravings on rock surfaces. As we know from later hunter-gatherers, visual art was also created on leaves, bark, wood, animal skin, tapa cloth, and even on the human body. However, what has survived the longest is on durable rock surfaces. And research can only rely on what is materially documentable. Studying and evaluating these works offers unique insights into intellectual life over the past 50,000 years, revealing imaginative and conceptual explorations and adventures of the human mind. Further, as detailed in previous issues of *Expression,* some prehistoric figurative art records events, adding chapters to history; others reveal emotional and social relations, aspects of habits and life patterns of prehistoric ages.

**The structural features**

Figurative art style (mode), typology (grammar), and associative system (syntax) reveal the reasoning process, with implications for the social, economic, and intellectual identities of the artists. The structural features, as described in previous issues of *Expression*, reflect similarities and variances in the rational processes of the minds of different cultures and ages.

The basic conceptual structure of prehistoric art is testimony to the frames of elementary human logical thinking. The art of hunter-gatherers and most of the art of other categories of prehistoric societies, across continents, focuses on three grammatical types, pictograms, ideograms, and psychograms, and on five main subjects: 1) anthropomorphic; 2) zoomorphic; 3) structures, topographic subjects, and net forms; 4) tools and weapons; and 5) ideograms or symbols (Anati, 2015, *World Rock Art,* Capodiponte, Atelier). The constancy of these subjects worldwide and their circumscribed typological range may suggest a common conceptual core of the human intellect. Do all human beings have the same common ancestors? How far back?

**The discovery of a hidden heritage**

In many regions the presence of art provides the historical record of bygone ages, adding millennia to conventional history. Art styles and patterns vary according to the lifestyles of hunter-gatherers, food collectors, pastoral societies, and farmers. Artistic patterns mirror life patterns. The information gleaned from these creative expressions tells the stories and identities of peoples across Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, and Oceania.

Visual art preserves events, thoughts, worries, and other expressions of populations that might otherwise have been lost to history. Thanks to their art, these peoples are (or could be) present in our collective memory. Yet much of their testimony remains unknown, often recorded by local researchers and waiting to be integrated into the global cultural heritage. And whatever is recorded should also be deciphered. Art, like speech, is expressed in a language that has to be understood. After describing and dating a language should be deciphered and read. A corpus is growing of decoded prehistoric art, mainly through the issues of *Expression*. This documentation is a basic source, recovering knowledge of the past, and is freely accessible to all.

**Before the advent of conventional writing**

Before the advent of conventional writing, art was the primary form of human visual expression. While the oldest known forms of conventional writing date back just over 5,000 years, visual art offers a record of human life and thought ten times as long, spanning 50,000 years. Despite its value as a source of

cultural, social, and historical information, this form of creative expression has been neglected in many parts of the world, frequently reported, often described, much praised, but rarely decoded and fully understood. Every document makes sense if its meaning is understood. And many deciphered documents together make history. The two endeavors of recording and decoding should follow each other.

The art of forgotten people constitutes a cultural heritage that must become part of general culture: it shows the very roots of conceptual expression, the core of culture. But it means much more: making history of prehistory adds a new dimension to the knowledge of the past, expanding the time and the content of history. It is no less important than other fields of research that benefit from much wider consideration. Research in prehistoric art, the decoding of the messages behind the surface, is a promising and attractive field of enquiry opening up new sceneries on the history of man and the origins of culture.

**Making prehistoric art part of culture**

Making prehistoric art part of the general culture requires the involvement of whoever can contribute. Do not wait for others, individuals or institutions, to do what you can do. If you have knowledge, share and promote it. What becomes known can be studied and decoded, producing culture and historical records; what remains unknown cannot enrich the common heritage, research, and knowledge. And it cannot awaken the interest of the public, which should be a primary goal.

Thanks to the engagement of valuable scholars the world over, parts of this patrimony have become accessible, but an enormous amount of the knowledge preserved by rock surfaces remains unavailable. To foster a more cooperative and receptive environment, it is essential that information, knowledge, and ideas are diffused, explained, awaken debates, be a share of global culture, and become part of education. It is an immense cultural heritage tracing back the roots and evolution of human intelligence.

Expression journal reaches researchers and other readers in over 90 countries and tries to do what is possible in the diffusion of knowledge and concern in prehistoric art, but cooperation with other operators in the field of prehistoric art could further promote a broader network and attract a wider audience among both researchers and the general public. Sharing knowledge is making culture out of research.

In theory, history begins with the first attempt to transmit individual or tribal memory into external memory, an act that has endured for millennia as figurative art. Since then, art has unveiled the soul of its creator and the essence of its era. Research fosters the growth of culture, and culture fosters the growth of research. The knowledge of prehistoric art should be part of general culture, and the results of research should be accessible to all. Researchers should also experience the pleasure and gratification of sharing their knowledge and integrating it into general culture. Let colleagues and friends unite in this shared goal.

EA

# TO THE ORIGINS OF COINAGE

Léo Dubal
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The invention of coinage may be seen as a spinoff of the singular geopolitical context of the *Double Sunset* on May 28th, -584 [1] at the banks of the Halys river, where the Lydian king Alyattes staged the end of the Lydo-Medes war. Regarding the technological level at that date, we highlight the remarkable know-how of the neo-Babylonian lapicides in engraving *rock crystal* octagonal cylinder seals, and that of the Lydian blacksmiths in hardening bronze. Calibrated oval weights, called *staters & fractionals,* were already common (even some certified ones exhibited, obv.: striated field, rev.: double incuse punches). As blanks, for lack of better, the choice has been mainly the 4.75 g & 12 mm Ø Electrum Trite.

## 1. The state-of-the-art of prestige cylinder seals

The engraving of an epigraphic cylinder seal requires special skills: characters and motives must be reversed, engraved *in negative*. The existence of neo-Babylonian cylinder seals in stone as hard as rock crystal shows that lapicides managed to engrave materials significantly harder than their hardest tools, see fig.1.

Fig. 1: Neo-Babylonian octagonal Cylinder Seals in rock crystal and other hard stone

It is noted that to make a precise calligraphy, the octagonal cylinder is preferred to the round one. In other words, for inscriptions the lapicide follows vertical stripes.

## 2. The first series of epigraphical coins

WALWET, written from right to left., in Lydian means *lion*. It is the name of the Lydian king called ALYATTES by the Greeks. On Electrum Trite, this king let mint ***cards of prestige*** with the highest degree of icono-epigraphic redundancy, see fig.2!

Fig. 2: Lydian Electrum coins with a pair of roaring lions & mention of king WALWET. The Blanks were two small.

The two obverses (right [2] & left [3] heads of roaring lions) we selected have most likely been struck on the same die. Their superposition (Photoshop) highlights the perfect coincidence of details, and allows the virtual reconstruction of the *lost rectangular die* with its supposed *eight vertical stripes*, see fig.3.

Fig. 3: Photoshop superposition of the left & right part of the full card of prestige of king WALWET, with its supposed eight stripes die.

If, according to our research, only those two obverses testify of the use of *rectangular dies* for striking the early misfitted blanks, nevertheless, other oval coins comfirm this practice. The reference to KYKALIM, the ancestor of WALWET, squeezed in between the two right [4] & left [5] roaring lions, illustrates the attempts *to legitimize the imperial ambitions* of the grandson. Here, KYKALIM is the message, see fig.4. Those coins are no longer just cards of prestige, but the very first release of a tract of political propaganda!

The superposition of the protomes of Milesian boars, see fig.4. is the work of Rudolf HILBERT [6].

Another coin led Göran HENRIKSSON [7] to formulate his interpretation of *disc on lion's forehead*, see fig. 5. as a representation of the partial solar eclipse of **-584.05.28**. This coin is probably a counterfeit [8]. The letters A-L-Y (for ALYattes), *written from left to right*, are not Lydian but obviously Greek!


Fig. 4: Lydian Electrum coins mentioning king KYKALIM with a pair of roaring lions & Milesian coins with a pair of wild boar.


Fig. 5: Lydian coin (or Greek counterfeit) mentioning king ALYATTES with a roaring lion having a disk on the forehead and a Milesian counterfeit, a striated Electrum hecte overstruck with a roaring lion.

Another case of forgery is a small 9 mm Ø anepigraphic coin. An obv. die used for striking Milesian striated 4.2 g certified hecte has been recycled, i.e.: over-engraved with Lydian iconography (roaring lion & its eclipsed sun on its forehead), see fig.5.

Fig. 6: Hard bronze die from Croesus' time and coin with a shining sun of the lion's forehead.

Fig. 7: Lydian Coin struck on an Elongated Blank to cover the full design.

### 3. The solar eclipse that dates the invention of money

The solar eclipse, correctly predicted by *WALWET's scientific advisor, THALES of Miletus,* appears therefore as the minting founding event. Backing this assumption are two ***later*** artifacts of the *CROESUS reign*: the oldest known hardened bronze die [9] & coin [10] see fig. 6. The die's engraved figure & coin fit now together, and the *original eclipsed sun* and right & left lions give way to a *shining sun* on the forehead of a *unique right* lion.

Nevertheless, at the beginning of the reign of Croesus, as shown by this elongated coin, see fig.7, there have been attempts in the opposite direction, i.e.: to adjust the dimensions of the blanks to those of the die [11]!

The invention of coinage was thus the result of the sagacity of the first man of science, THALES [12], of a power-hungry king, ALYATTES and of the implementation of the accumulated know-how of generations of highly qualified craftsmen, in particular, as we demonstrated, lapicides.

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# FORTHCOMING NEW DEBATES

Readers are proposing themes for debate. When at least three articles are submitted on the same theme, the topic is considered for a forthcoming issue.

1. **OUT OF AFRICA: THE ETERNAL DIASPORA. WHY DID STONE AGE PEOPLE MIGRATE?** Just for hunting and food collecting? Other primates did not expand their territory to the same extent. Curiosity? Sense of discovery? Colonization of the territory?
2. **WHY MEGALITHISM: THE LOGIC BEHIND**. Why relocating and positioning cycloptic stones? What did the monuments mean? How did it start? Why did it stop? Social and conceptual implications.
3. **MYTHS OF ORIGINS: WHERE DID THE ANCESTORS COME FROM?** Global and local traditions. Looking for the roots: why?
4. **PATTERNS OF VERNACULAR CULTURES:** Causes and effects of the expressions of cultural identity.

**PROPOSALS FOR NEW ARTICLES AND NEW DEBATES**

Proposals for papers and suggestions on these and other issues are welcome.

# MAGOURA CAVE, BULGARIA

## CONCEPTS AND MEANING OF THE PREHISTORIC PAINTINGS

*Emmanuel Anati*

Atelier Research Center for Conceptual Anthropology (Italy)

**Summary**

The Magoura cave paintings in Bulgaria are the major known rock art assemblage of the Balkans. Resuming research conducted in the 1960s, using new analytical trends of conceptual anthropology, their date, cultural back-ground, and social role are defined. Each image has its motive; together they reveal their common purpose. The analysis exposes the function of these cave paintings, unveiling the habits and beliefs of their makers[1].

**Keywords**: Prehistoric religion; Pantheism; Prehistoric Bulgaria; Bronze Age; Rock art; Initiation rites; Prehistoric mythology; Cosmology.

**Premises**

Magoura cave, near the village of Rabish 17 km from Belogradchik in northwestern Bulgaria, is the site of the richest series of prehistoric cave paintings known in the Balkans. The cave evolves with halls and large and narrow passages for over 3 km. It is renowned mainly for its geological formations, with impressive assemblages of stalagmites, columns, other geological formations, and suggestive subterranean landscapes. Near the cave is Rabisha Lake, the largest lake in Bulgaria, rich in fish which may have been an important food resource in prehistory, though none is represented in the cave paintings (Fig. 1).

The inhabitants of this area have always known of the cave; the paintings have been an object of interest from at least as early as the 18th century, as evidenced by names, dates, and other inscriptions on the surfaces.

Different opinions have been expressed by various authors about the paintings' age and function. Dates proposed range from the Paleolithic to the medieval.

Regarding function, the generalized definition as a sanctuary does not specify further. Other hypotheses consider the paintings to be related to archeoastronomy and to be a solar calendar. The bases for any conceptual evaluation demand specifically defining their age and cultural relations to similar graphemes elsewhere, and their meaning and function. Such goals were not achieved in previous publications[1].


Fig.1. Location of Magoura cave in the northwest of Bulgaria. (Google map).

A peculiarity of the cave is that the temperature is almost constant at about 12 degrees C all year long. This makes the cave a good shelter throughout the seasons. Water is present in several ponds inside the cave, a valuable element of the hospitability attributes of the cave; the spacious halls are suitable places for assembly and also for living. The area of the paintings, in a small lateral sector, a place dedicated to a defined role, is just an aspect of the possible functions of the cave. Naming it a sanctuary could be appropriate, but what did happen there? And what is the function and purpose of the paintings?

Near the narrow entrance a series of cupmarks mark the rock surface. They were probably made for some purpose, having a ceremonial or ritual function at the entrance, as evident in similar cases (Anati 1961,

1 The present text is a reconsideration of a study of the cave paintings carried out in 1964, following the analytical processing of conceptual anthropology (Anati 1969, 1971, 1979). Unless otherwise stated, photos and drawings are by the author; maps and charts by Dr. F. Mailland.

152-166; 1968b, 22-35).
The cave was used and inhabited in several periods: Pleistocene fossil bones of cave bear have been collected inside; some lithic tools, to be further verified, should confirm a human presence in the Pleistocene. Polished stone axes, flint implements, pottery vessels, loom weights, and other objects show that from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age the cave was intensely frequented by man; traces of this presence persisted thereafter. In the Roman period finds include fibulae, tools, and pottery. A burial of the Roman period was excavated in 1936 by Somov and Aleksandrov (1963). The presence of a burial could indicate that the cave was not used as habitation at the same time.

Fig. 2. A view of the entrance to Magoura cave in 1964.

When we visited the site in 1964, the entrance to the cave was a sloping and difficult passage; it has since been furnished with stairs to provide an easy descent. Visiting the cave now gives a different feeling. Prehistoric men did not have the same touristic facilities.

**The cave and the location of the prehistoric paintings**

After the entrance corridor, there is a large hall with a high ceiling; fallen rocks cover the floor. Crossing this hall demanded some physical effort before the recent adaptations. Various openings are at the sides of this hall. Following one of them, a narrow corridor leads, after over 100 m, to another hall. From there a side corridor leads to the prehistoric paintings. It is a small, secondary corner of a huge cave, to be reached through a labyrinth of passages.
The paintings are concentrated in a length of about 70-80 m. They start with a series of geometric and linear signs. Series of lines could have a numeric value, counting we do not know what, perhaps people – or something else. A panel is reached where a presumed hunting scene is dominant among other paintings. Then the walls become densely covered by signs and figures, until a spacious vaulted hall.
The paintings are concentrated in a specific sector of the cave. The different degree of conservation and the superpositions indicate that different hands during a rather long period of time participated in the growth of what is now considered a prehistoric art gallery. The relatively limited and delimited space of this gallery, in respect to the size of the cave, hints at its role as a reserved and particular place, having a well-defined role and function.
The prehistoric figures are executed in bat guano which abounds in the cave. Guano was used generously, so that some figures are in high relief producing a three-dimensional effect under lateral light. Sometimes the dark brown guano has whitened as the result of calcification, obtaining the same color as the rock surface, while keeping its relief. Some of the guano of the paintings has consolidated and almost fossilized.

Fig. 3a. A group of figures defined as a hunting scene show a few beings and what seems to be a group of ostriches. One of the figures holds a bow and arrow. Other anthropomorphic figures and what seems to be a dog complete the assemblage. What do they represent? Is it just an anecdotical scene? Above the scene, various images with diverse degrees of calcification represent different phases of painting. Those having a similar degree of conservation as the assemblage below represent a phallic anthropomorphic image between two images dressed with frocks, with upraised arms in the orant posture.

Fig3b. Detail showing the diverse grades of calcification and conservation, implying various phases of depiction of the surface. The three anthropomorphic figures reproduced in the tracing appear to have a degree of preservation similar to that of the assemblage below.

**The age of the paintings**

The opinions expressed by various authors about the age of the Magoura cave paintings vary considerably and the question has to be defined. Some later drawings were made with ocher, mud, or by carving. They are sometimes superimposed upon the prehistoric figures, and are easily recognizable. Some of the prehistoric paintings appear to be older than others but most of them seem to belong to the same general conceptual background.

One of the first describers of Magoura cave, Prof. Vasil Nikov, 70 years ago attributed the pictures to the Iron Age. More recently, other researchers have claimed other dates, ranging from Paleolithic to medieval.

The cave was visited and described by the historian and author Hendrik Van Loon who defined the paintings as ancient «mysterious puzzles». A lengthy description of the paintings was published in 1963 in a guide-booklet to Belogradchik and its surroundings, where these various hypotheses are described (Somov and Aleksandrov 1963).

Radiocarbon dating may be attempted but it would provide the age of the guano, not necessarily that of the paintings. The main direct source for establishing the age of the paintings is that of the figures representing tools and weapons similar to those from datable archeological objects. A wealth of such representations determines the age of the bulk of the cave paintings.

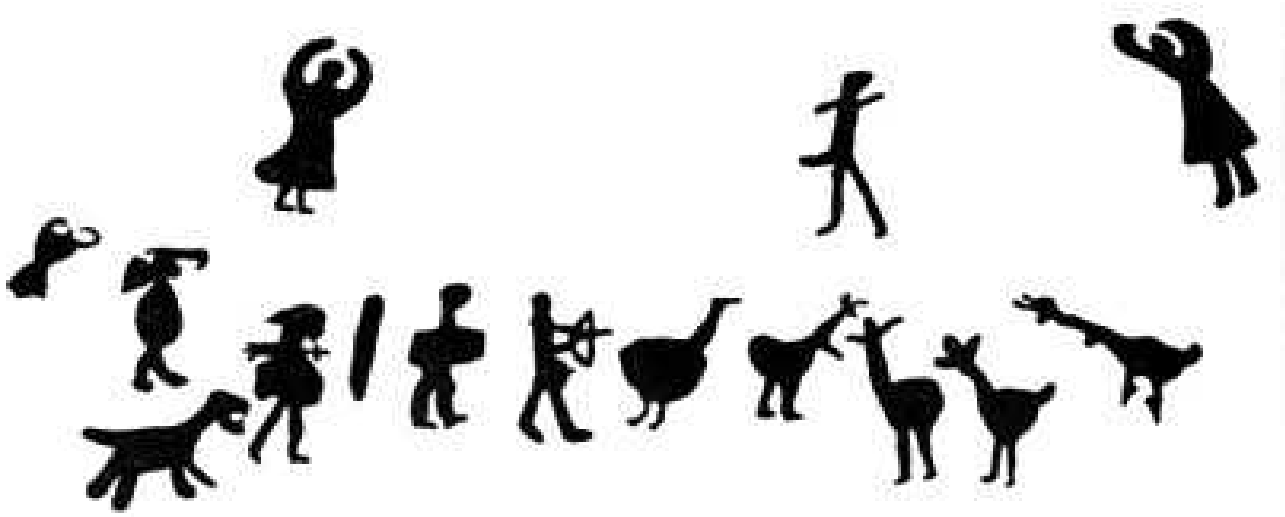

Fig 3c. Tracing of the so-called hunting scene. Various types of anthropomorphic beings are represented, each one with different characteristics. At least one of them seems to have an animal face or mask. The figures of ostriches are the same size as the human figures. It is not clear whether they are figures of animals or of humans disguised as animals. The upper row represents a phallic naked male, between two clothed praying figures. The panel seems to be synthetizing a story.

Several images of axes and some human figures are comparable with the engravings on a cist slab from Krasnaya Gora in Crimea, attributed to the Catacomb-grave period and dated to the third millennium BC (Tallgren 1934: 43, fig. 36b; Formozov 1958: 138; Gimbutas 1956: 46; 1965: 495). Some of the tools are of the same types as those represented in the rock art of Valcamonica, Italy, again attributed to the third millennium BC (Anati 1982).

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Tools of the same type are those represented on anthropomorphic stelae, especially those from Natalevka, in the southern Dnieper region, from Hamangia, in eastern Rumania (Markovin 1959; Häusler 1969), and at Ezerovo, near Varna, in Bulgaria (Tontcheva 1967). Again, all these comparisons lead us to the third millennium BC[1].

1 We apologize for the length of these dry comparative notes, which are meant to clarify and define the much-discussed chronological issue.

Fig. 4a. Paintings representing an elongated battle-ax, paddles, and a mallet.

Fig. 4b. Tracing of a group of paintings of tools and possibly a bucranium-like ideogram from Magoura Cave.

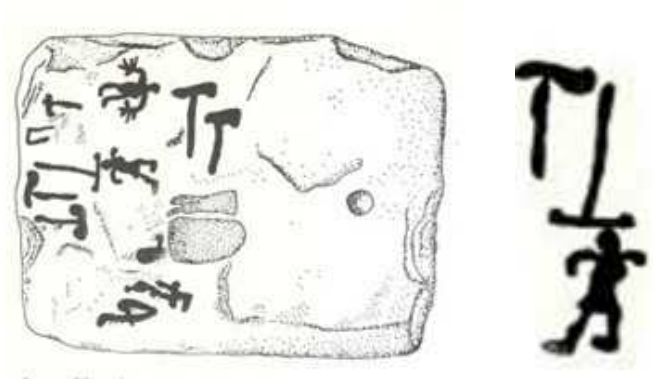


Fig. 5 a, 5b. Tombstone from Krasnaya Gora, Crimea, and detail (tracing from a photograph by A.M. Tallgren 1926: 49).

Fig. 6. Tracing of painting of battle-ax from Magoura cave.

The cultural horizon is well defined by the paintings of tools and particularly by the elongated battle-axes, characteristic of the Bodrogkeresztur culture of Hungary, exemplified by a series of copper battle-axes from Tiszavalki and elsewhere (Patay 1968: 9-23). This context is a pre-Bell-Beaker phase from the final fourth to the middle third millennium BC (Dumitrescu 1970).

In the paintings there is a variety of types of flat, biconvex, perforated axes and hammer-axes, of which some represent objects made of stone and others illustrate metal tools. A few figures of flat axes may represent earlier types. There are images of polished stone axes in a shaft-holder, which may belong to the late fourth millennium and the first half of the third millennium BC. Several stone axes of this kind have actually been found in the Magoura cave.

According to their typology, the represented axes, mallets and hammering tools, bows and arrows, spears, and other tools cover a time-range from the late Neolithic through the Chalcolithic to the Early Bronze Age. They indicate a persistence of about 1,500 years to be attributed to the making of the main group of paintings, from the late fourth to the early second millennium BC, while most of the figures of weapons and tools belong to the third millennium.

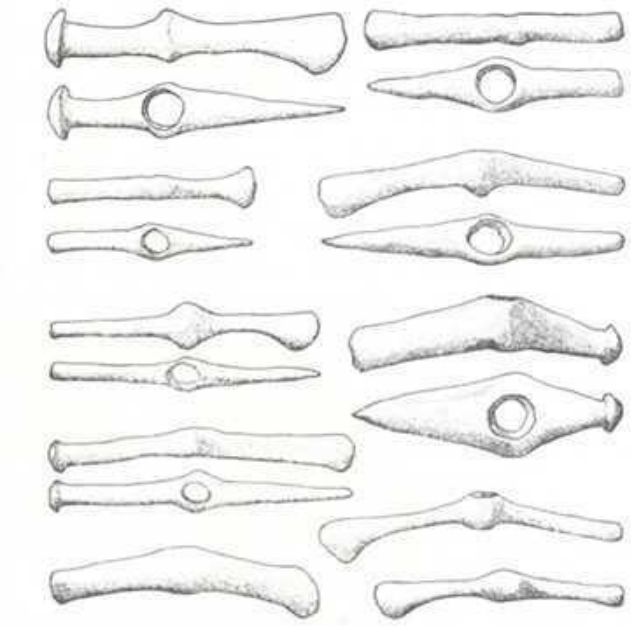


Fig. 7. Copper battle-axes from the Bodrogkeresztur culture of the Hungarian Copper Age, late fourth or early third millennium BC (after Patay 1968).

**The typology and the syntax of the paintings**

The typology defines the identity of the graphemes, while the association between graphemes defines the syntax. The syntax is of four types: isolated figures, groupings, sequences, and scenes. The typology consists of five categories: anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, tools and objects, net-like and topographic, and signs and symbols or ideograms. There may be psychograms, that is expressions of feelings and wishes, but so far they are dubious and so are considered as ideograms. The typology evidences the presence of a limited variety concentrated on a few subjects.

There are approximately 700 prehistoric graphemes. Anthropomorphic and what have been tentatively defined 'oculi face' idol-like or spirit-like pictograms appear to have a pre-eminent role. Whatever they may mean, the anthropomorphic figures seem to have a dominant topic. Animals are limited to a few species: deer, ostrich or other birds, possibly a dog, several unidentified quadrupeds or imaginary animals, and a horse-like figure. The majority, that is, over two-thirds of the graphemes, are signs, markings, and ideograms, which are the emblematic language of this graphic complex. They include solar and astral figures, geometric designs (points, lines, triangles, zigzags, squares and bell-shapes, net-like and ladder-like shapes). Some series or sequences of lines and dots may have a numeric value, representing some counting. Net-like and ladder-like figures may have a metaphorical meaning, as has been proposed for similar graphemes in the rock art of the Camonica valley, Italy and elsewhere in Europe (Anati 2015, fig. 62; 69).

Anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures are represented in a realistic style, reminiscent of rock engravings in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and further east, to such a degree as to suggest some sort of similar conceptual background (Appelgren-Kivalo 1931; Shatskiy 1966; Ksica 1969; Formozov 1969). Other similarities may be referred to rock engravings in Anatolia (Uyanik 1968, 1970a, 1970b; Anati 1968a). Stylistic parallels simply reflect a similarity in the way of thinking and conceptual background, not necessarily direct cultural relations. They suggest that the Magoura paintings are not an isolated case. They belong to a widespread intellectual and and ideological world, that of the early Metal Ages of the Balkans and the areas around the Black Sea.

The artistic skill and aesthetic value vary from figure to figure, indicating the presence of different hands and hinting at a variety of ideas and concepts, in what must have been a rich and multiform ideological, mythological, and intellectual world shared by generations for a long period of time. The size of the figures varies, from a few cm to over 1 m in length.

As for the syntax, figures and symbols are assembled in compositions, sequences, and scenes. It is not a single type of syntax. There are figures and signs depicted as single graphemes. Some figures are grouped together as if they have a meaning as a cluster. There are sequences of graphemes likely representing ideographic sentences or concepts.

Fig. 8. A panel of prehistoric figures appearing as a deliberate sequence and conceived as such, is likely to intend to convey a meaning. Recent scribbling has altered the image. Two figures of the so-called Lady of the Cave appear, one with head and legs, the other, by the side, without head and legs. Are they two different aspects of the same being? The standard features are the same: upraised arms in the orant position and the same protuberances at the belt. The sketched orant between the two 'ladies' has a much thinner smear of color and may be a later addition.

**The Lady of the Cave**

One of the most repeated subjects is what has been defined as The Lady of the Cave, an anthropomorphic image, the body composed of two converging triangles. In fact, despite its epithet, no features really define it as female. Whether the Lady is male, female or sexless, she appears to be wearing a frock, often with projections or objects at both sides of the waist. Despite doubts about the gender, the term Lady has been retained by descriptions and guides, awakening the imagination of visitors about her identity.

Fig. 9a. An image of the Lady, apparently having a dagger at the belt. The legs look human, the head not. The two circles by the head are present also in some menhir statues (Anati 2023, 90-91).

The Lady, again, is not an isolated case at Magoura. She reminds us of the female clay figurines with upraised arms from Stepanovice, in Moravia, which V.G. Childe considered as a goddess "of phase C of the Danubian II period in the Lengyel-Tisza horizon" (Childe 1929, 80).

Among other parallels is a female figure decorating Vucedol pottery (Schmidt 1945, 98, fig. 58) with arms upraised in an elegant posture of prayer or orant. These various images belong to the same period but one may question if they all represent the same being or just the same style.

In all these different places, whether she is or not the same being, no gender attribute is evident.

Even from the images at Magoura, we may question whether they all refer to the same being: are all the images attributed to the Lady of the Cave representing the same being? They are anthropomorphic beings, dressed in the same way, in the recurring posture of the orant.

The Lady sometime appears without a head, or without legs, or just synthetized by two converging triangles. The Lady's head varies considerably in size and shape. Sometimes it has a mushroom form, elsewhere it is round or square or with two disks by the sides, in some case she might be masked or with an animal face.

Fig. 9b. A legless image of the Lady, with symbols added at the missing foot. The head seems to be that of a bird.

Fig. 9c. An image of a headless Lady. What appear as legs are part of a recent inscription.

Fig. 10a. A group of four images: an anthropomorphic figure, a battle-ax, and two images of the Lady: one, apparently in the air, legless and with the head separated from the body, the other fully shaped. Are they two Ladies or two separate aspects of the same being? Meaning? Probably, the group of figures intends to explain something. What ? Tentative reading are arguable. Would the reading of the sentence go from left to right: man= cause or subject; weapon= power or action; the two different aspects of the 'Lady'= effect.

The Lady appears in a variety of scenes and compositions. When she occurs in what seems to be a hunting scene, placed between the hunter and the animal, what is her function?

Fig. 10b. The legless Lady seems to be intervening in a hunting scene. Is she encouraging a successful hunt or is she separating the hunter from the prey? Is this an anecdotal scene or a metaphorical composition?

Fig. 11a. A composition with the legless Lady positioned between two axes on one side, an oculi-face and an animal on the other. The head of the Lady seems to be that of a bird. This composition, likely, intends to convey something: what? The figures of tools or weapons often accompany the 'Lady'. What could they represent?

Fig. 11b. A schematic image of the Lady (?) in a different style but in a context similar to that of the previous image. Again, she is associated with two tools, or a tool and an ideogram, and with the oculi face and an animal. Again, the oculi face is connected to an animal. The figures of weapons could be ideograms, likely meaning energy or action, and possibly having the function of a verb.

More than once, the Lady seems to be worshiping a spirit or an idol, an image of a schematic face without a body: who is she? A divinity, a mythic spirit, a legendary ancestor, a high priestess?
The oculi faces have been associated with the Mesopotamian eye-goddess, implying a similar mythological background (Crawford 1957). Bronze Age rock art all over Europe and beyond has images of oculi faces, usually interpreted as spirits (Anati 1968c). The Mesopotamian examples seem to be a local aspect of a more diffused conceptual phenomenon (Anati, 2023).

**The 'Lady's companion ' and other associations**

In several instances the Lady is accompanied by a schematic figure, which may represent a being, defined as the Lady's companion, despite the doubts defining whether it is a being, a spirit, a totem-pole or an object. Its size is usually smaller than hers. The companion has phallic attributes and the hypothetic couple is accompanied by figures of weapons or tools.

The couple, if indeed it is a couple, is accompanied by weapons, tools, and other signs tentatively considered to represent attributes or verbs, as with the images of European Chalcolithic and Bronze Age menhir statues (Anati 2023).

Fig. 12. A sequence of graphemes with the Lady, her companion, and ideograms. The sketched anthropomorphic figure at the left has a different kind of smear of the guano and could be a later addition. The original sequence is likely to have been of five elements: the Lady, the companion, a bucranium-like sign, and two probable tools or weapons. Each image is supposed to have a meaning and the order of the sequence should have a meaning. The sequence looks like a pictographic writing.

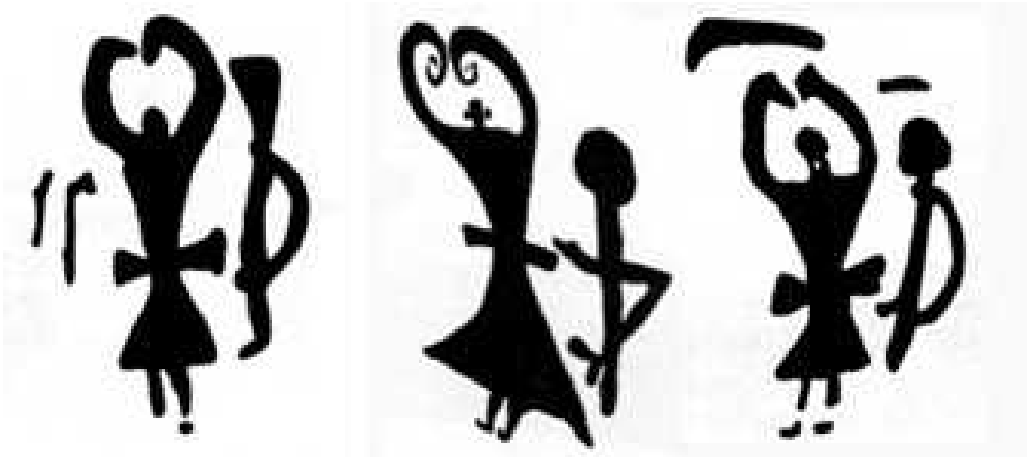


Fig. 13 a; b; c. Examples of the association of the Lady and her schematic companion. The couple is often accompanied by figures of tools or weapons.

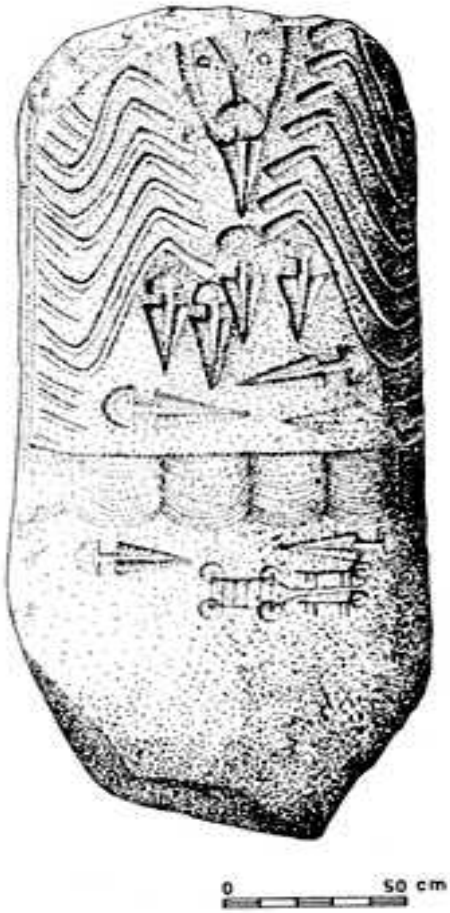



Fig. 14a. An Early Bronze Age menhir statue from Lagundo, Trentino, Italy. Axes and daggers appear as powerful limbs of the anthropomorphized entity. Below is engraved a four-wheeled wagon carried by oxen.

The 'Lady' is a dominant icon in the ideological assemblage of the cave: again, does she represent a divinity, other kind of supernatural being, the priestess of the cave or some other actual or idealized subject? Marija Gimbutas considered her to be the mother goddess and her phallic mate, a male escort to serve her pleasures (during a seminar at the CCSP, ca. 1970).

Different hypotheses are possible. Does she have a her companion? Or is it an ideogram representing an idea, a soul, a shadow or an adjective of the Lady of the Cave? Whatever the case, the so-called Lady and her so-called companion are an intriguing aspect of the ideology expressed by the paintings.

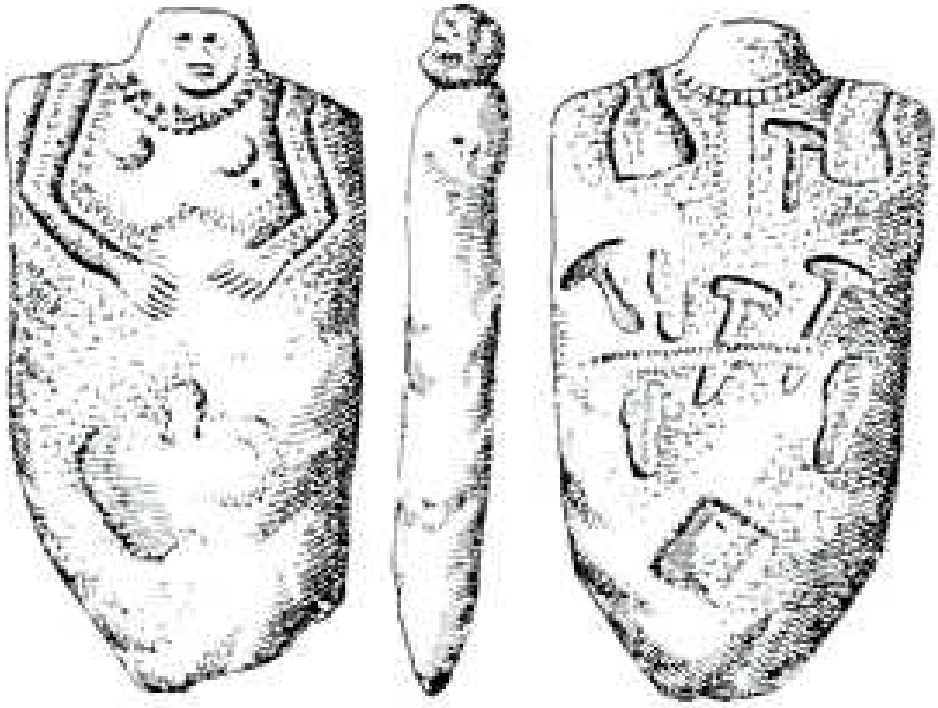
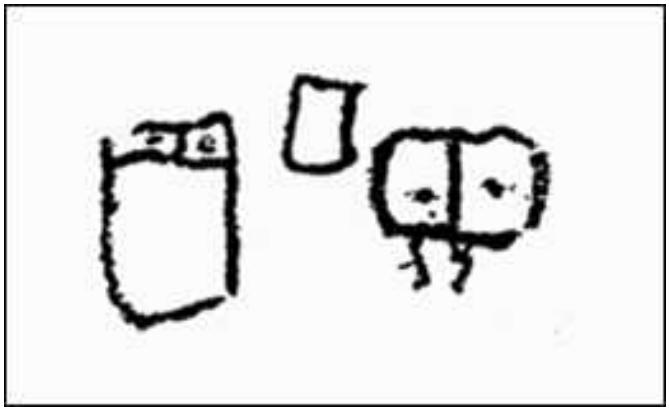


Fig. 14b. A Chalcolithic menhir statue from Hamagia, Romania, witbh weapons and tools engraved on the back (after Gimbutas 1963).

**Other images**

The oculi faces, two points or two eyes inside a circle or other frame, are schematic visages without a body. Here, as elsewhere, it is argued that they represent spirits, ghosts, mysterious elves of the dark underworld, or other mythic entities. They appear also as groups, an assembly of oculi faces. These images are sometimes accompanied by an anthropomorphic figure with upraised arms, similar to the Lady or her alter ego, considered to represent a worshiper, defined as orant. These oculi faces are part of the repertory of the paintings: presumed icons to be revered, worshiped, or feared.



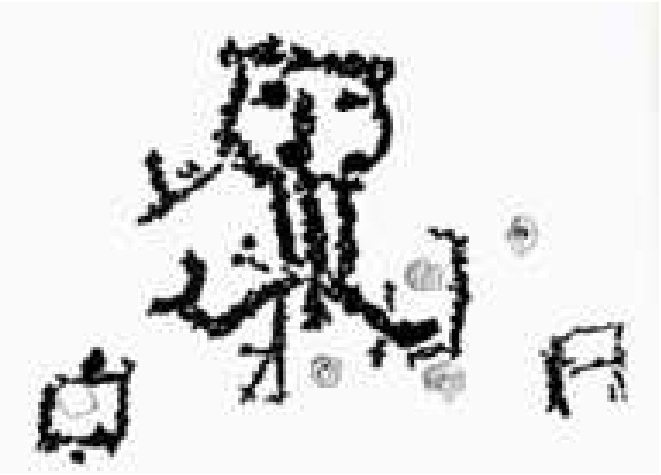


Fig. 16a;b. Rock engravings of oculi faces from the Camonica Valley, Italy. top: from the site of Sellero (Anati 1961); bottom: from the Luine Hill (Anati 1982).

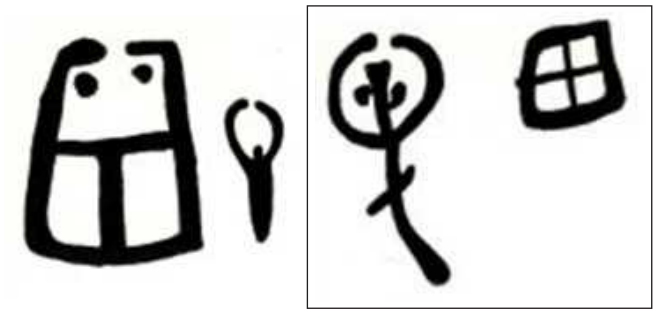


Fig. 15a (top); b; c; d (bottom). Oculi faces and other graphemes likely representing spirits or other mythical conceptions, sometimes accompanied by worshipers.

Fig, 17a; b. Zigzag lines, probably expressing some sort of energies or emanations, are associated with ideograms of upraised arms or bucrania.

To avoid possible misconceptions, some other figures should be singled out. One peculiar picture is that of a galloping horse-like animal. It is painted in guano, as are all the other graphemes, it is among other images on the same surfaces, but in a style different from other pictures and does not seem to belong to the same assemblage. These paintings do not show a high degree of calcification and the image may be a later addition; they are figures out of context.

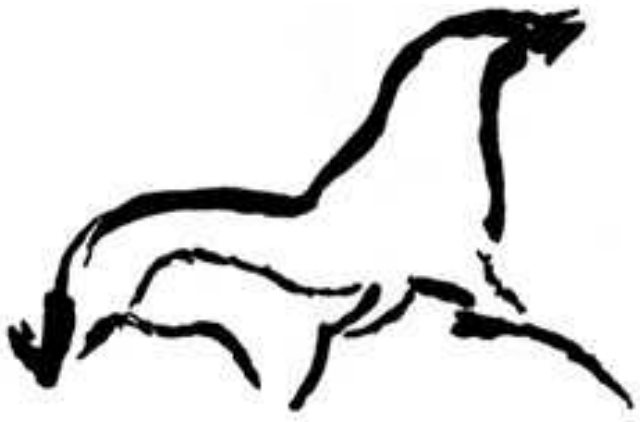


Fig. 18. The painting of what appears to be a galloping horse has a dynamic style, different from that of the majority of the static figures of the sanctuary. It does not seem to belong to the main assemblage of paintings.

Another unusual figure is that of a large deer, created by incorporating previous graphemes having different degrees of calcification and preservation. A large rectangle, made of two different phases of checkerboard patterns, defines the body of the animal. Two small deer figures, with no traces of calcification, are used as antlers and a squarish muzzle is drawn below them. Together they form a composite figure which does not seem to belong to the period and concepts of the assemblages of the battle-ax age.

Fig. 19. A composite image representing a deer. The body is a reutilization of checkerboard patterns, the antlers are deer figures. A muzzle with two eyes and a couple of ears overlaps traces of previous paintings; it is unlikely to belong to the graphic and conceptual pattern of the Bronze Age.

On the other hand, the image of a four-wheeled wagon trained by oxen may look out of place, but it is near a composition with similar typological associations with those of rock art and menhir statues of the same age where, again, the wagon drawn by oxen is represented. In Hindu religious events, the wagon drawn by oxen is used to carry and honor images of divinities or other worshiped beings. According to archeological monuments, this custom seems to go back to prehistoric times. The wheeled wagon appears in Bronze Age menhir statues, symbolically carrying the sacred image, as in the Lagundo monument (Fig. 14a).

Fig. 20a; b. Painting and tracing of a four-wheeled wagon drawn by oxen. The animals are represented by the ideogram of the bucranium.

**The monumental composition**

The most reproduced and popular panel of the Magoura paintings is that of a large and elaborate composition in the central panel of the hall, the so-called sanctuary. The main image is that of a solar figure with two concentric circles, rays all round. Two points or eyes, an oculi face in the middle, anthropomorphize the solar disk. Below it, there are two parallel lines and a checkerboard pattern. On each side of the solar face there are two disks, and two battle-axes are on the left side. One of the lateral disks, again, has two dots making of it an oculi face. They are in a different shade of guano and might not belong to the original composition. Other graphemes, some showing superimpositions, are likely to be secondary additions.

This is an impressive composition which has provoked various interpretations, as an expression of the cult of the sun, as paleo-astronomical mapping of equinoxes (and more).

A detailed explanation by Stoev and Maglova interpret this composition as a 'solar-lunar-earth calendar' (Stoev and Maglova 2014). Those authors provide two dates for the Magoura paintings, an early phase, 'created somewhere between 43,000 and 42,000 BCE shortly after the beginning of the cosmic era of Virgo', and then 'the Solar-Lunar-Earth calendar, a very sophisticated calendar created some 14,000 years ago'. The dates they propose and repeat in other publications ignore the archeological data and are as unrealistic and imaginary as other aspects of their interpretation. As previously discussed, the figures of the battle-axes define the date of these paintings as the third millennium BC. The nature of the composition finds archeological parallels that clarify its meaning.

Fig. 21a, b. Photo and drawing of the composition representing an anthropomorphized solar disk and associated graphemes: two lateral disks, two battle-axes, and below, two parallel lines and a checkerboard pattern. Similar combinations of ideograms are found on menhir statues and rock-art monumental compositions; they represent a widespread ideological concept.

Some of the graphemes described in this calendar interpretation show different degrees of calcification and cases of superposition upon previous graphemes, and so they are unlikely to belong to the original composition. Being considered as part of the composition, while extraneous, has led to some imaginary assumptions.

This composition has a conceptual structure as a group of components similar to those of rock art images and menhir statues of the same period present in various parts of Europe, in particular in the Alps, and belong to a trend.

Fig. 22. A votive plaquette of the third millennium BC from Huelva, Spain, representing an astral face, tree parallel lines, and a square decorated body. (from Anati 1968c: 63).

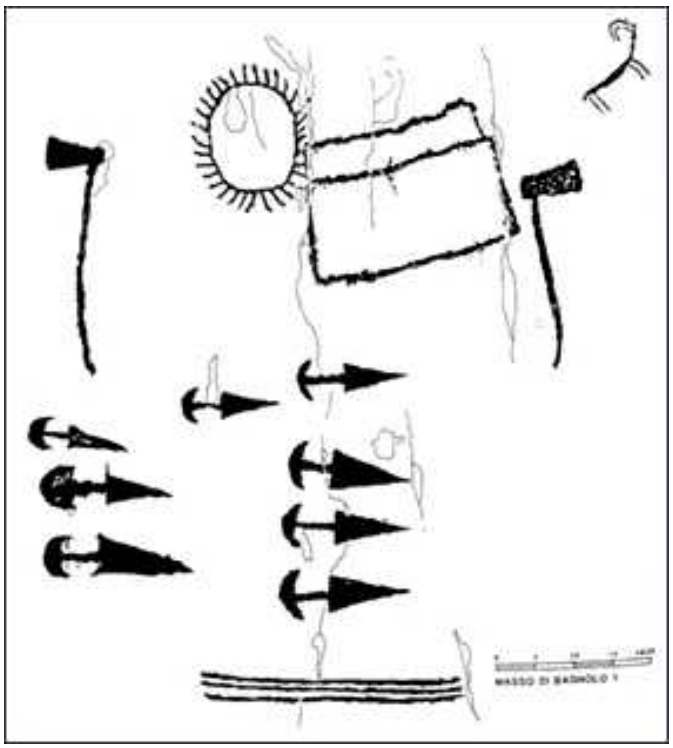


Fig. 23a. Tracing of the engravings of a menhir from Bagnolo in the Camonica Valley, Italy. The round solar shape is near a rectangular shape. This association recurring in various monuments appears to represent the union of the sky, round, with the earth, angular. The two axes represent the arms of the cosmic entity (further details in Anati 2023).

They are the so-called monumental compositions representing the solar disc, or stars, associated with a rectangular form, an ideogram for territory, accompanied by various symbols and weapons (Anati 1990). The same association of sky and land is also repeated in European cult objects from the same period. These compositions sometimes acquire anthropomorphic shapes, such as the sun with the addition of its oculi face in Figure 21. As detailed in another text (1990), they appear to represent an entity encompassing the sky and earth, an anthropomorphized universe, likely a precursor of Indo-European cosmology. Accordingly, the sun and the two circles or stars by its side represent the sky; the rectangular, in the present case a checkerboard, the earth. The two battle-axes appear to be the arms of the superhuman entity.


Fig. 23b. Tracing of the rock engravings on a boulder from Borno, Camonica Valley, Italy. According to the conceptual analysis, the solar disk associated with the checkerboard pattern symbolizes sky and earth. They are accompanied by symbols representing attributes or adjectives like fertility, beauty, and power (details in Anati 2023).

The cosmic body is composed of sky and earth, with added attributes. The same conceptual structure is repeated in the same period in different Eurasian areas, from the Iberian Peninsula to Central Asia (Anati 1968c; Vadetskaia 1967). Like the Hindu Giant Purusha, these compositions encompass sky and earth in a single body in an anthropomorphized cosmology (Piantelli 1983).

Further east, compositions of the same kind are simpler and more obvious. In the Urals, a rock engraving shows the composition of three elements: the solar disc with rays, the rectangle with parallel lines, out of which flow a series of wavy lines and an accompanying animal, similar to those found in connection with the monumental compositions in the Alps (Formozov 1969, fig. 47, 130). In the widespread repetition of the same conceptual assemblage of the sky and the earth, round shapes representing celestial entities and angular ones terrestrial entities, as two parts of the cosmic body.

In the Magoura cave, there are other kinds of composition in which the rounded celestial element and the angular element are coupled. The rounded element may have two smaller circles or dots inside it, forming a face, while the angular element is sometimes further subdivided by lines or acquires a checkerboard pattern schematizing territory.

Fig. 24. A schematic painting uniting the solar symbol and a rectangular pattern, likely again expressing the association of sky and earth. The 13 rays of the sun and the six lines of the rectangle may have deliberate numeric values.

The cosmological image composed of the solar disk and a rectangle or a checkerboard, sometimes accompanied by figures of weapons and tools, is a recurring pattern. In the Camonica Valley and other Alpine areas like Valtellina and Tyrol, these weapons appear to be the divine limbs of the being, either arms or legs, or other symbolic parts of the mythical body. Again, parallels occur in the Hindu pantheon and Vedic mythology (Anati 1968b, 2023).

In the present case, the two battle-axes by the side of the solar image appear as the two limbs or arms of an anthropomorphized cosmological entity. At Magoura, as elsewhere, the arms appear in couples, while in the Alps they occur also in larger numbers, as if the entity had a number of limbs, and not just two pairs like mortal beings.

The presence of such a composition in Magoura cave and the conceptual relations it shows are evidence of the background of a widespread metaphysical concept of the nature of the superhuman: a spiritual vision of the universe as supreme entity, a concept involving a philosophical view of the universe and implying a sophisticated doctrine, possibly a pantheistic conception.

This monumental composition seems to be the central image of the sanctuary cave. But it is not the earliest, as even on the same surface there are traces of older pictures. It was formed while the sanctuary had already been active for some time. Together with the figures of the Lady of the Cave and the other pictograms and ideograms, it represents the graphic forms of a multifaced ideological background.

As we have described, the Magoura pictures embody a complex intellectual world related to coeval groups of rock art, menhir statues, and other graphic manifestations over a vast area. The question arises, what was the function of the site where the paintings accumulated for generations are an expression of widespread ideologies professed throughout Eurasia? What happened in the remote sector of the cave where the paintings are concentrated?

**Function of the site**

The paintings represent a repertory of beliefs, precepts, and myths, memorized graphically in a specific space of the cave which must have had a defined function. The current term of sanctuary may be

appropriate but does not specify how it functioned and what really happened there, underground, in the darkness of a lateral and practically hidden corner of a deep cave. The variety of the images evidences the range of the topics they represent. This does not seem to be a public temple focused on a particular object of worship. Rather, its function appears to be reserved for a limited human presence.

Besides what are defined hunting scenes, which may have an allegorical meaning, the paintings are isolated, sequences, compositions, and associations of ideograms, all over the walls of that secluded sector of the cave. The patterns do not seem to be intended as being decorative or commemorative; most of them do not seem to be anecdotal. They represent a process of accumulation of graphemes, a notebook on the cave walls, with some conceptual assemblages like that of the large composition with the sun which, again, is a grouping of graphemes.

Hidden in the darkness in a lateral passage of the cave in the womb of the mountain, the very location may hint at its being a reserved site, while the paintings reveal a widespread conceptual and ideological function. What was the function of this site? Was it a sanctuary accessible to all, or a secret area reserved to an elite, a sect, or other specific kinds of acolytes? Who were the actors and the spectators? Were they the people of a tribe, or pilgrims to a holy site, or initiated elders, priests and shamans, or an esoteric guild, or learned scholars of occult wisdom? Was it a place of ceremonial assemblies, or individual meditation, or dialogue with the underworld and contact with the supernatural entities? Or the meeting place of a secret society? Or an initiation site?

The main topics, as we have seen, are not many. The monumental composition with the anthropomorphized sun, likely occupied a prominent place in the ideology of the compound as an elementary conceptual vision of the doctrine.

The Lady of the Cave had a relevant role in the ideological background of the paintings. The oculi faces, likely spirits, elves, or some other kind of mythical being, are another frequent theme.

The entrance to the painted space, the first section with geometric patterns and series of parallel lines, appears to have mostly markings of numeric value, a place of counting, presumably counting incoming people or materials. The main painted walls resemble the blackboard of a classroom. Analogous examples from tribal habits suggest that it was a place where young people were preparing for the rite of passage that introduced them to adulthood, an initiation site. (Anati, 2006, 2011, 2018). The painted area appears to be a place where adolescents reaching the age of initiation learned the doctrine, indeed a classroom.

Fig. 25. Detail of a wall looking like a notebook or a blackboard where signs accompany teaching words.

**Conclusions: the ideologic framework**

The definition of the time and cultural frame of the Magoura cave paintings, mainly relying on the typology of the represented tools and weapons and comparisons with other sites, indicates the duration of their making from the Late Neolithic to the Early Bronze age, a period of about 1,500 years, from the late fourth to the early second millennium BC.

The demarcation of the function of the painted area of the cave as an initiation site opens up a window of a relevant social aspect, the presence of educational group activities of adolescents in a society of about 5,000 years ago. This implies the presence of instructors and study in a classroom, a rare documentation of the social structure and educational procedures of a European prehistoric society.

The conceptual aspects emerging from the paintings reveal the presence of both patterns of a widespread ideological background and the presence of vernacular traditions.

The monumental composition uniting the anthropomorphized solar image and the territory in the shape of the checkerboard pattern repeat widespread cosmological concepts, conceiving the world order as a human-like intelligent entity composed of sky as head and earth as body, powered by battle-axes as limb-arms. The presence of this cosmological entity, here as elsewhere, reveals a fundamental chapter in the history of religions: the presence of a pantheistic faith 5,000 years ago. It was professed and young generations were taught and indoctrinated.
On the walls of the same site appear images of oculi faces and other figures revealing a rich intellectual world, reflecting the local patterns of widespread analogous concepts. The Lady of the Cave, whoever she may be, and her presumably phallic mate, represent other stories at the roots of mythology. The numerous weapons depicted and the accompanying orants and other anthropomorphic images imply beliefs in mystical powers or magic faculties of tools and weapons, at the roots of Eurasian mythologies.
The paintings of Magoura cave contribute a vast landscape on social organization, philosophical background, and religious beliefs of a prehistoric society. Other questions remain open. Why the selection of the site, not in one of the large halls of the cave but in a hidden lateral gallery? If indeed it was a site reserved for initiation practices, what really happened there besides teaching and learning the doctrine? Was the darkness used for other material or spiritual exercises? What was the concept of the underworld, the role of these passages inside the womb of the earth, in the silence and noises in the darkness, isolated from the rest of the world?

Can we figure out what happened with the groups of adolescents gathered there, led by an instructor or shaman, with the moving lights and shadows of torches? The paintings survived, the voices and feelings of the acolytes did not. The site is a monument, in situ, with its paintings and the recent superimposed scribbles, as chapters of human history and art history, as testimony of a prehistoric society, a witness of intellectual evolution, part of the cultural heritage, and resource for further research.

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# BETWEEN EARTH AND SKY

## EXPLORING THE COMPLEX MOTIVATION FOR MEGALITHIC CONSTRUCTION

## A STUDY OF MALTA

*Rose Marie Callus* PhD (Melit.) Malta

**Abstract**

The megalithic structures of Malta have long been the subject of anthropological interest; however, studies concerning their architectural and cultural significance often lack critical analysis. Existing research tends to reinforce prevailing biases, resulting in an incomplete understanding of the complexities surrounding these sites. This study advocates for a comparative analysis with other Neolithic Mediterranean cultures, particularly focusing on astronomical data and its narratives within megalithic contexts. Challenging conventional interpretations, it posits that social organization in ancient Malta stemmed from collaboration rather than hierarchical control, driven by the imperative to manage essential environmental resources, such as flora and water. While Sicily has historically been seen as having a key influence on Maltese Neolithic culture, this research introduces a paradigm shift by examining the effects of south-to-north migration and cultural interactions on Malta's development. The findings emphasize the necessity for a multidisciplinary approach to illuminate the intricate social dynamics and cultural exchanges that have shaped this era.

**Keywords**: Megalithic structures, Malta, Neolithic migration, archaeological evidence, cultural symbolism, astronomical knowledge

### Introduction

#### Negotiating the past: diverse interpretations of the Maltese Neolithic landscape

Malta's central yet isolated position in the Mediterranean is often linked to its monumental structures (Robb, 2001; Bonanno, 2008) (Figs. 1 and 2). However, the presence of obsidian artifacts (Vella, 2009) suggests the archipelago's active role in maritime trade, challenging isolation as a limiting factor. Based on archaeological evidence like *Stentinello*-type pottery at *Għar Dalam*[1], dominant theories hypothesize Sicilian migration to Malta around 5000 BCE (Bonanno, 2016). Malta's proximity to Sicily and its agricultural potential may have attracted skilled farmers. However, the emergence of megalithic architecture indicates a more complex process than simple relocation, with diversity in structures, such as *Ħaġar Qim*'s Globigerina and *Ġgantija*'s Coralline Limestone[2], reflecting significant societal evolution. It remains unclear whether builders were directly descended from Sicilian migrants or if other factors influenced this development.

A nuanced analysis of Maltese megalithic architecture should not only address migration from Sicily, but also explore the complex interplay of environ-

1 Located in the southern part of Malta near the village of *Birżebbuġa*, is a significant archaeological site featuring a prehistoric cave with anthropic remains that date back to around 5,400 BCE. It is known for its rich deposits of animal remains and artefacts, providing valuable insights into early human habitation and the region's environment.

2 This juxtaposition of materials offers a compelling lens to explore the interplay of technology, culture, and environment in Maltese prehistory (Bonanno Anthony, interview by Raphael Vassallo. *Was Megalithic Malta the lost city of Atlantis? It all boils down to probabilities.* Maltatoday, November 22, 2022, https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/interview/119921/megalithic_malta_lost_city_atlantis_anthony_bonanno. It also suggests a changing relationship with the landscape, raising questions about resource availability or adaptation to new construction techniques. The utilization of coralline limestone in *Ġgantija* invites speculation regarding the technological capabilities of its builders. This harder, more durable stone may indicate a sophisticated understanding of their environment and the challenges of working with a material demanding skilled craftsmanship. In contrast, the subsequent preference for globigerina limestone at *Ħaġar Qim* raises questions about the evolution of architectural styles and communal functions. The softer nature of globigerina limestone facilitates manipulation and suggests a possible shift towards more intricate design elements and aesthetic considerations.

environmental adaptation and cultural influences from various Mediterranean regions or pre-existing inhabitants. Research questions the prolific architectural output of Malta's Neolithic period, particularly its alignment with the island's resourceful environment (Anati, 2021).

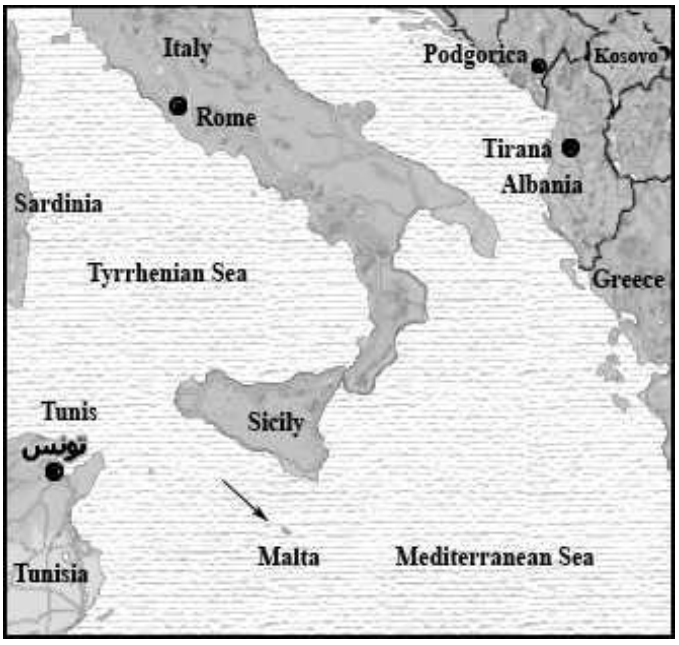


Fig. 1 Malta's geographical position in the Mediterranean (photo from Anati, 2021)

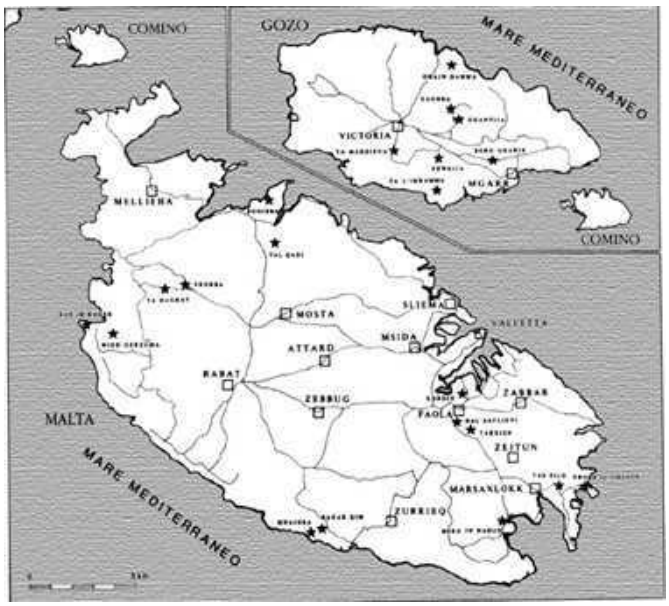


Fig. 2 The Maltese Archipelago. Distribution map of megalithic temples whose identity has been verified (photo from Anati, 2021; Anati, 1988

"Resourcefulness" here encompasses not only material availability but also the intellectual and labor-intensive efforts involved in constructing megalithic structures, known for their celestial alignments and symbolic carvings. Thus, the rationale behind their construction remains more enigmatic than that of the building methods. Anati (2020) highlighted the unresolved questions regarding social structure, motivation, and function. The absence of written records and archaeological gaps, however, introduces biases that complicate the interpretation of early human migrations and intercultural interactions within the archipelago.

This study posits that the explanation for Malta's megalithic legacy likely resides in the intricate balance of isolation and connectivity facilitated by navigation and trade. While megalithic structures may be products of local traditions, they also embody a broader Mediterranean dialogue among ancient societies. This research diverges from existing inquiries by expanding the questions to include: (i) why Malta? (ii) to what extent can a hierarchical society be regarded as the sole social framework in the Neolithic context? (iii) what rationales underlie the contacts and resourcefulness that principally influenced the planning and location of megalithic structures?

**Data and methods**

This research offers a comprehensive analysis of archaeological evidence from key Maltese sites, including *Ġgantija, Ħaġar Qim, Tarxien,* and *Tal-Qadi*[1]. Following Magli (2009:49), the term 'temples' is used cautiously due to uncertainty surrounding their functions; thus, 'buildings' or 'constructions' will be preferred, with 'temples' used contextually. In discussing celestial alignments, this paper explores the tension between intentionality and coincidence in the construction of these structures, in line with current scholarly debates (Barratt, 2022). Alongside celestial alignments, artifacts such as carvings and Venus figurines, chosen for their distinctive iconography, will be examined to deter-

1 The *Ġgantija, Ħaġar Qim, Tarxien,* and *Tal-Qadi* structures were constructed during the Maltese Temple Period, between 3600 and 2500 BCE.

mine how they reflect the material culture's role in shaping social identities and meaning within cultural landscapes. This approach aligns with Cauvin's notion of a symbolic revolution (2000), which argues that societal transformations in the Neolithic were driven by ideological shifts. Additionally, the thematic approach allows comparisons with other Neolithic cultures across the Mediterranean, highlighting Malta's achievements within the broader framework of cultural exchange and shared knowledge systems. It underscores the evolving nature of cultural identity shaped by tradition, collective memory, and the environment.

Using photographic evidence, architectural drawings, and a thorough literature review, this analysis identifies binary oppositions, gaps in existing knowledge, and discrepancies in prior interpretations of celestial alignment, symbolism, and intercultural contact. Interpretations are framed as hypotheses acknowledging alternative perspectives within a fluid historical narrative. The limitations include the interpretive nature of symbol analysis, potential biases in data interpretation, and constraints due to incomplete archaeological data. Despite these, this study aims to illuminate the complex motivations behind megalithic construction, offering insights into ancient builders in Malta and the symbolic expressions that drove societal transformation.

Exploring these inquiries reveals the intricate interplay between logic, intuition, and inherited wisdom, enhancing our understanding of human intellectual and cultural evolution. This perspective challenges conventional approaches, revealing the multifaceted motivations and insights of ancient Maltese builders, and enriching our comprehension of their monumental legacies.

**Prioritizing the pillars of planning: form, view, or celestial alignment?**

The construction of a megalithic site allows little room for trial and error, as reallocating resources could potentially be detrimental to the project's success. Despite these challenges, the ongoing construction of these structures within a constrained geographical area inhabited by a small population, including vulnerable groups, suggests an effective modus operandi (Anati, 2022). The alignment of these structures with solstices, equinoxes, and celestial bodies[1] indicates a well-organized approach guided by knowledge of astronomical events, raising questions about the cultural dynamics that facilitated collective ingenuity.

Fig. 3 A representation of a temple façade is engraved on a prominent upright to the left of the central temple of *Mnajdra* (photo from Anati 2022)

Research suggests that climate-related factors, including wind and orientation, played a role in determining site selection. However, the significance of wind becomes debatable if structures were roofed (Fig. 3) unless it served a specific purpose such as creating echoes or providing shelter. Moreover, the orientation of constructions (the majority pointing southwards; Figs. 4 and 5) and the stone relief forming the wall of a chamber at *Ħaġar Qim* (Fig. 6) had to accommodate the layout of the site and the surrounding terrain, as visibility within and between locations was deemed important (Lomsdalen, 2022) Furthermore, the varying celestial alignments observed in different structures, such as Borġ in-Nadur, Tal-Qadi, and Ġgantija South, raise important questions about deliberate alignment and possible ritual importance.

1 The premise that builders in Malta aligned their structures with celestial events, such as solstices and equinoxes, is well established in archaeological literature. In the case of Malta, Cutajar (1937) conducted initial observations of Maltese sites, and interest in their astronomical significance renewed in the 1980s through the work of Agius and Ventura, building upon Evans' earlier findings (for a full discussion see Barratt, 2022).

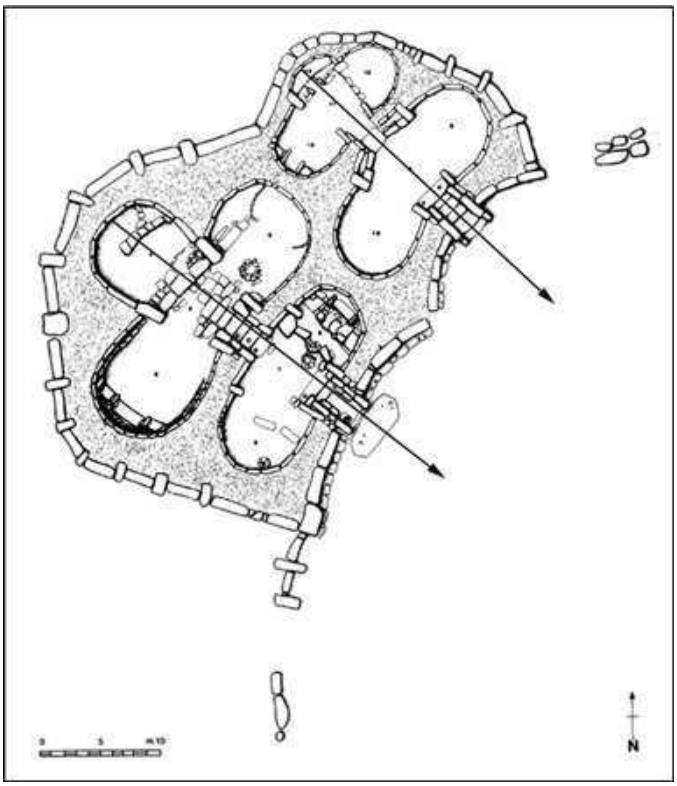

Figure 4 *Ġgantija* – The structure's layout is depicted by directional arrows (photo adapted from Anati, 2022)

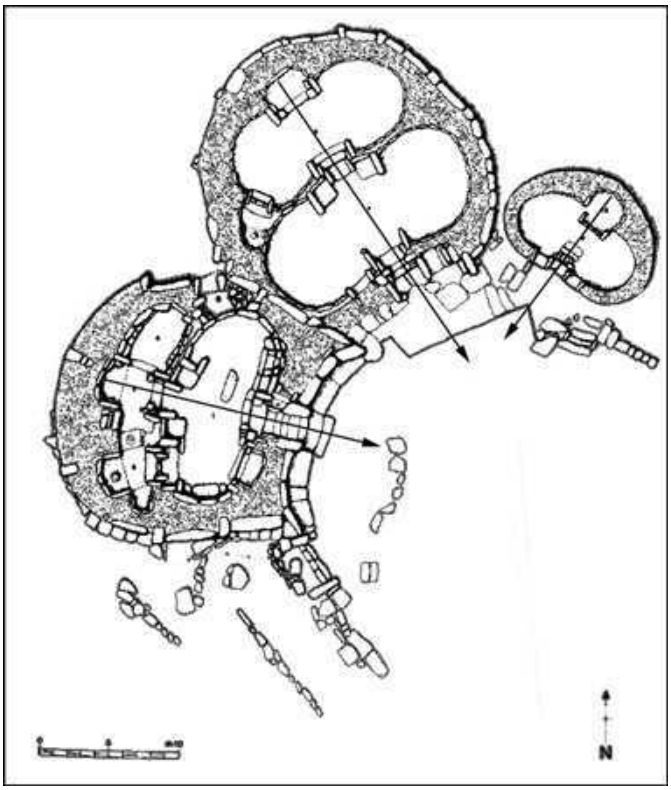

Fig. 5 *Mnajdra* – The structure's layout is depicted by directional arrows (photo adapted from Anati, 2022)

It is reasonable to conclude that Neolithic builders navigated a complex array of variables, including construction timeframes and limited resources (Anati, 2021). Documenting celestial trajectories likely required substantial effort over multiple generations. Nevertheless, such considerations did not mitigate the labor-intensive nature of megalithic construction (although not beyond human capabilities, as evidenced by the circular walled enclosures at Göbekli Tepe, the world's oldest megalithic site, which flourished millennia before the Maltese temples).

Further investigation into the underexplored variables, particularly within construction contexts, is essential. While this period featured universal symbolic motifs, societies were responsive to seasonal changes that impacted agricultural and ritual practices. Thus, the definition of 'way of life' must be tailored to specific local conditions. In this regard, isolation could have been viewed as a manageable challenge rather than a constraint, highlighting the significance of survival strategies and environmental adaptation.

This reflection challenges the portrayal of these societies as strictly hierarchical and specialized (Anati, 2022). The lack of weaponry evidence in Malta hints at a society focused on cooperation, collective survival, and shared knowledge. The relatively modest internal capacities of megalithic structures and the systematic flattening of the areas surrounding them (Anati, 2021) imply that significant gatherings likely occurred outside, marking a separation between sacred spaces and participants. These patterns indicate that rituals likely involved significant community participation, possibly including not just gathering, but also moving around the structure. This activity may have symbolized both life's cyclical nature and the unity of believers in their worship, highlighting the interconnection between individual spiritual paths and the broader community.

Flexibility in temple design suggests a dynamic belief system that does not exclude multiple coexisting rituals. Barratt et al. (2020) provide evidence of communal gatherings and feasts, indicating that spiritual practices evolved with changing social environments. This adaptability highlights the in-

terplay between societal development and spiritual expression in the builders' society. The absence of elite burial sites in proximity to these locations suggests a lack of exclusive control by a ruling class; instead, whatever happened in and around the structures enhanced community involvement. Over the centuries, the transmission of expertise has been essential for sustaining these intricate systems. This continuity indicates that cooperation and mutual respect prevailed over hierarchical control, thereby reinforcing an egalitarian society.

While parallels with ancient civilizations like Egypt arise, especially regarding monumental projects, it must be emphasized that by the time the pyramids were constructed, Egypt had centralized political structures exerting authority over populations. In contrast, Malta's social organization during the temple period appears to be more decentralized and collaborative. The inclusive nature of rituals and collective monumental efforts indicate a society fundamentally reliant on cooperation rather than forced labor.

**Collaboration over hierarchy: the impact of natural resources**

From this broader perspective, a state of coalescence may have emerged from shared cultural practices, mutual support systems, and collaborative endeavors existing outside formal governance structures. The society of these builders appears to have been organized around cooperative efforts uniquely shaped by their contextual and environmental factors. Interestingly, if significant visibility across structures was established (Lomsdalen, 2022), it suggests the absence of clan conflicts, further indicating a harmonious coexistence. The absence of evidence of other builders undertaking similar tasks during this period further highlights the distinctiveness of their collaborative approach in response to specific local conditions.

Key environmental factors, particularly flora and water resources (although the latter was discussed in detail in Grima, 2022), have been insufficiently explored in the existing literature, despite their potential significance in facilitating cooperation and providing valuable insights into ancient communities. The utilization of these resources necessitated collective management and knowledge dissemination, thereby shaping social organization and coordination driven by shared responsibilities in the management of these vital resources.

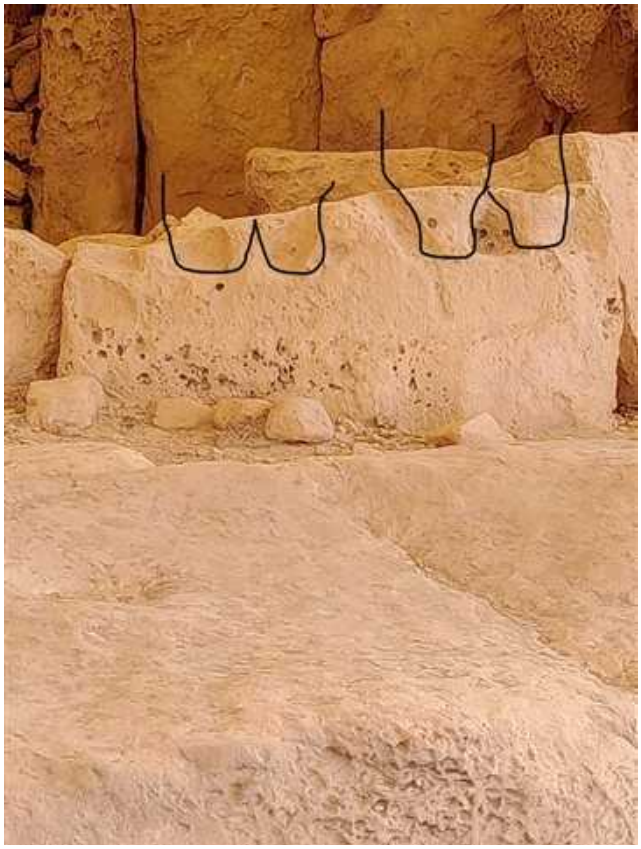

Fig. 6 This photograph shows one of the slabs forming a chamber wall at *Ħaġar Qim*, which is aligned towards the island of Filfla. It is believed that this slab once supported two figures. Filfla is a small, uninhabited island situated approximately 5.6 km (3.5 miles) south of Malta. Given that Africa is located to the south of Europe, the statues would also generally face Africa as they are oriented towards Filfla. If the statues were positioned to face the exterior of the structure, as the current alignment might suggest, this could further bolster the theory that external activities held significant importance. (photo taken by author at *Ħaġar Qim*)

The abundant flora surrounding megalithic structures likely provided immediate indicators of seasonal cycles that are critical for agriculture (Fig.7). Plants could signal optimal planting and harvesting times, suggesting a shift over time toward resource reallocation that favored both agricultural and spiritual functions. For example, *Ħaġar Qim* is bordered by sea squill (in Maltese *Basal tal-Ghansar*), and within the site, archaeologists uncovered a  carved stone pillar depict-

ing a plant in a pot, often interpreted as a generic plant motif. The hypothesis put forward in this study is that it might have represented a squill specimen owing to its significant bulb and association with natural cycles. While the plant may have served medicinal purposes, it has also been revered in subsequent cultures for its connection to fertility cults, drawing parallels to its use in ancient Egyptian and Greek civilizations (and possibly in Malta during the Neolithic).

Fig. 7 An elaborately carved pedestal with reliefs of potted plants on all four sides (photo taken by author at Ħaġar Qim)

Although the *Well of Cyrene* in Libya and the *Well of Santa Cristina* in Sardinia (both famous for the link between water and astronomical events) date later than the Maltese megalith phase, parallels can be drawn between these sites and celestial events (perhaps defining how these observations were carried out). Most Maltese megaliths, including *Ħaġar Qim*, align with equinoxes and are strategically positioned near water sources, indicating cultural and intellectual interest in aligning human-made spaces with natural phenomena. The reflection of sunlight off water likely symbolized the rebirth of the Sun, a theme prevalent in many ancient cultures, enhancing the ritual significance of solstices. The incorporation of water features into the narrative, such as cisterns, adds depth to this interpretation and indicates that the natural environment, including water sources, is a significant intentional factor in site design.

For instance, instead of viewing components such as water sources, celestial alignments, and architectural planning as isolated, they should be seen as interconnected elements that shape megalithic site selection and design. Thus, while the extent to which these builders predominantly led agricultural lives remains subject to debate, it is evident that they actively managed flora, grains, water, and animals to support production and sustenance. Activities within these structures likely integrated spiritual dimensions with practical tasks, indicating multifunctional roles as places of worship and repositories for agricultural surpluses (Fig. 8). The integration of spiritual and practical considerations underscores a comprehensive approach to resource management.

Fig. 8 *Ħaġar Qim* - a small chamber with a seat and table. Anati (2021) proposed that it may have been the seat of an accountant, scribe, or pharmaceutical chemist (photo from Anati, 2021, MLT 86 EA VIII-20).

However, contradictions arise when considering the significance of alignment with the Crux constellation. Barratt (2022) contends that the limited representation of Crux in the material record suggests that it likely served as a navigational aid rather than playing a significant ritual role. Given Malta's Northern Hemisphere location[1], the practical importance of Crux for navigation is questionable. Its visibility may have been limited to specific times of the year, especially from the horizon, casting doubt on its relevance as a navigational guide for journeys between Malta and Sicily only 90 km apart.

**Transcending stone: Exploring the interconnection between sacred spaces and the sea.**

Grima (2022) posits that symbols carved in relief around the structures' court may represent water and the sea, while those in apses could signify land-based environments (Figs. 9 and 10). This perspective emphasizes the intrinsic connection between these sacred areas and their broader ecological context, illustrating how ancient architects integrated both terrestrial and marine elements into their narratives.

Sea travel, often conducted at night when the land was obscured, necessitated reliance on stellar navigation (Robb, 2001; Broodbank, 2013; Pimenta, 2014). The reliance on the Crux constellation stems from the fact that Sirius may not have been as distinct as it is today (Cox, 2001). Notably, travelers journeying from Sicily to Malta would face Crux, while those traveling in the opposite direction would have it behind them, as observed by Stoddart et al. (1993). Therefore, the notion that Crux primarily served as a navigational tool for vessels approaching Malta overlooks its potential utility for voyages originating from the island itself. Thus, it is pertinent to consider why a builder on the archipelago would orient structures towards Crux.

Fig. 9 Motifs depicting the terrestrial domain (quadrupeds at *Tarxien*) as mentioned in Grima (2022) (photo taken from Anati, 2022)

Fig. 10 Motifs depicting the maritime domain (spirals at *Ħal Tarxien*, but other motifs are also found at *Buġibba* and *Ġgantija*) (photo taken from Anati, 2022)

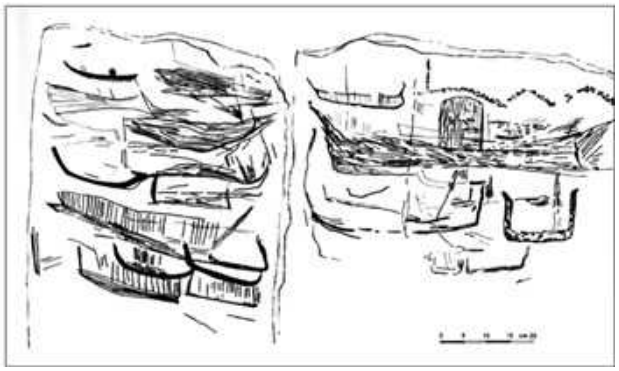

Fig. 11 The boat carvings at ***Ħal Tarxien*** (photo taken from Anati, A.F. and Anati, E., 1988)

The emphasis on Sicily as a primary point of reference diminishes when Malta's geographical advantages are recognized. Given Malta's strategic location and the navigational skills of ancient seafarers, it is plausible that trade routes from Tuni-

1 While Lomsdalen (2022) posits that the Southern Cross was visible from Malta circa 3000 BCE, its location in the Southern Hemisphere raises questions regarding its cultural significance for observers in the Northern Hemisphere. This geographical constraint suggests that alternative constellations, such as the False Cross, and prominent celestial bodies like Sirius, may have held greater relevance to ancient navigational practices and cultural narratives. This observation necessitates further investigation into how these societies conceptualized and interpreted their celestial environment.

sia or the Maghreb region were also accessible, thus influencing maritime trade dynamics. If maritime distances are subject to scrutiny and challenge the assertion that navigation during this period was limited or impractical[1], it is imperative to consider the capabilities of inhabitants who constructed large megalithic structures. Their architectural expertise suggests an advanced understanding of construction materials and techniques, raising questions about the assumption that they were incapable of creating durable vessels suitable for extended voyages.

Furthermore, if commercial interactions occurred, it would be reasonable to hypothesize that the cultural identity of Malta would have influenced neighboring regions, including Sicily. However, despite assertions of significant trade relations that typically facilitate cultural exchange and parallels in architectural practices, megalithic constructions are notably absent in Sicily. The absence of comparable megalithic constructions in Sicily enhances the importance of investigating whether these exchanges were primarily commercial or lacked the depth required for meaningful cultural adoption.

This limited cultural transfer is further emphasized by the contrasting presence of fertility symbols at similar monumental scales between Malta and Sicily. In contrast to the prominent fertility symbols found in Maltese structures such as *Ġgantija, Ħaġar Qim,* and *Tarxien,* Sicily lacks comparable representations at equivalent scales (for reference see Fugazzola Delpino & Tiné, 2002; Cultraro, 2019) (Fig. 12), indicating a distinct divergence in cultural expression between the two regions. This divergence challenges simplistic migration models, suggesting broader cul-

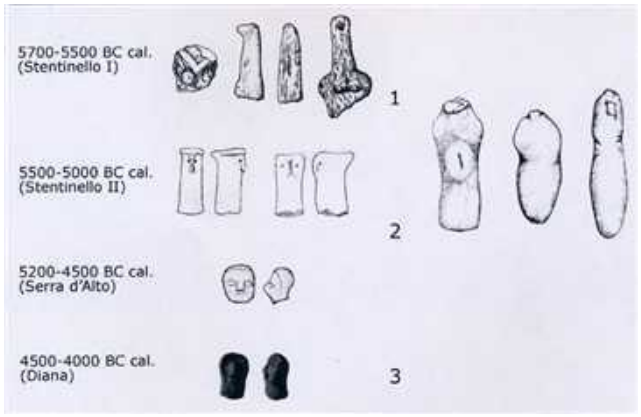


Fig. 12 Evolutionary Schema of Anthropomorphic Statuettes in Neolithic Contexts of Sicily: a simplified evolutionary outline (photo courtesy of Cultraro, 2019)

**Fertility cults and the symbolism of Venus statues in ancient Maltese Culture**

Malta's unique spiritual evolution is underscored by comparisons with earlier sites such as Göbekli Tepe, which features the first written word for God (circa 9600-9500 BCE) (Seyfzadeh & Schoch, 2019) (Figs. 13 and 14). The Venus figurines of Malta offer a compelling perspective on the evolution of spiritual iconography, potentially signifying the Great Mother Goddess and inviting inquiries into Neolithic divinity. This shift suggests a move from abstract concepts to a possibly matriarchal worldview, necessitating further comparative research into shared iconography and symbolism with cultures, such as Göbekli Tepe.

Shared themes of fertility and the sacred in Maltese and Egyptian cultures reveal potential cross-cultural connections, emphasizing the widespread endurance of these beliefs across civilizations. The transition from a more inclusive concept of divinity at Göbekli Tepe to defined gender roles

1 The earliest depictions of sails emerged in the second millennium BC in Egypt, and ship graffiti discovered at *Tarxien* (Fig. 11) are likely subsequent additions from the Bronze Age. However, evidence suggests that maritime movement across the Mediterranean was ongoing during the period of Megalithic construction in Malta, presumably involving the utilization of rudimentary dug-out canoes, such as those unearthed in Bracciano Lake, dating to approximately 5450 BC (Fugazzola Delpino and Mineo 1995; Broodbank 2013). As observed by Broodbank (2013), the diminutive dimensions of these canoes would have necessitated reliance on currents and winds for navigation, substantially influencing their directional capabilities. Nevertheless, the authors argue that despite these constraints, the employment of celestial navigation remains a plausible hypothesis, corroborated by ethnographic evidence from Oceania, where seafaring communities have proficiently navigated considerable distances utilizing celestial guidance.

However, contemporary long-distance swimming achievements between Malta and Sicily underscore the significance of identifying optimal temporal windows—characterized by favorable tides, currents, and meteorological conditions—analogous to the methods likely employed by ancient mariners utilizing celestial navigation. Within this context, the actual dimensions of the canoes may have been less critical than the capacity to recognize and utilize these advantageous conditions for safe maritime transit.

in later societies, alongside women's prominent roles in cultures such as ancient Egypt, highlights the evolving relationship between gender, power, and religious beliefs throughout history.

Fig. 13 World's First Known Written Word at Göbekli Tepe Means God (photo courtesy of Robert Schoch and Catherine Ulissey, www.robertschoch.com)

Thus, Maltese Venus figurines (Fig. 15) have emerged as key focal points for understanding the evolution of spiritual thought and the persistent influence of feminine symbolism.

The practices of Phoenician colonists (800-700 BC) in Malta and Gadir elucidate the dynamics of cultural interaction, providing a framework for analyzing Maltese megalithic structures[1]. The integration of existing megalith structures with Phoenician deities underscores profound engagement with local traditions and supports the argument that these structures functioned as temples at least under Phoenician rule. This contrasts markedly with the absence of dedicated land-based cult evidence for Astarte in Gadir, where maritime worship predominated (Saez Romero, 2021). This disparity indicates strategic adaptations of spiritual practices to local contexts, and questions arise regarding whether prior contacts facilitated the cultural tolerance exhibited by the Phoenicians. Proximity to Tunisia likely facilitated interactions, leading to an exchange of ideas and practices. Although there was a temporal gap, the cultural heritage of the prehistoric inhabitants influenced Phoenician interactions in Malta. This perspective highlights that cultural connections were likely maintained through oral traditions and shared narratives rather than presuming direct relationships between groups.

Fig. 14 Inside ***Ħagar Qim***, there are narrow passages probably not accessible to the public. Anati (2022) states that the function of these stone tables or mushroom-shaped altars is not clear, however, it is interesting to note the H symbol, which recalls the symbol at Göbekli Tepe (Photo taken by author at ***Ħaġar Qim***)

Fig. 15 Standing female statue; it is hypothesized that the head was fabricated separately, as evidenced by the presence of a socket with dowel holes intended for secure attachment (photo taken from Anati, 2022)

1 Despite the Phoenician takeover of Malta, the ancient temple sites, especially Tas-Silg, remained visible. This stands in stark contrast to Göbekli Tepe, which seems to have been deliberately covered up and hidden. This key difference in how these sites were treated may indicate contrasting perspectives on spiritual legacy and ritual importance between the two societies. While the concealment of Göbekli Tepe hints at a possible decline in cultural relevance or a change in spiritual customs, the ongoing visibility and use of Malta's temples suggest an enduring cultural and spiritual significance. This reflects how these ancient structures were adapted to fit the changing dynamics of society over time.

## Discussion

### Malta: a sacred axis mundi?

Anati (2021) posits a pilgrimage state centered around Malta's megalithic structures, suggesting that these sites served as cultural nexuses within the Mediterranean context. While Bonanno (2021) argues that evidence for this claim is lacking, it raises significant questions: why are these structures concentrated in Malta instead of surrounding regions? The primary conclusion would be that this concentration fulfilled criteria commonly associated with cult areas, including exclusivity, remoteness, and narrative connections. Cult areas often correlate with shared beliefs anchored in known narratives, indicating Malta's significant appeal. For instance, non-locals may have engaged with a shared cosmological framework that transcended localized practices, suggesting that Malta's megaliths acted as gathering points for cultural exchanges and spiritual engagement. Moreover, Malta's geographical positioning is advantageous; it is isolated from Europe and less vulnerable to natural disasters than areas like Sicily, which faced threats from Mount Etna. The celestial alignments of these structures, coupled with the symbols of celestial bodies, reveal an advanced shared understanding of their significance in agriculture, navigation, and culture (Barratt, 2002).

While the navigational role of the Crux constellation remains debated, the presence of star symbolism in artifacts, such as the *Tal-Qadi* stone, indicates significant engagement with celestial phenomena among Malta's ancient inhabitants, prompting questions about their possible roles or connections. Literature often emphasizes alignment as a key factor in structural orientation; however, celestial references may also reflect shared understandings of ritual timing or served as markers for gatherings.

The findings support the notion that local structures functioned as central hubs for social and cultural interaction, with gatherings inspired by cyclical life patterns, similar to contemporary seasonal festivals (Anati, 2022 proposes the market hypothesis). Distinguishing between rituals as spiritual practices and festivals as broader communal activities that reinforce cultural identity is cru cial. Ultimately, whether markets (Anati, 2022) or festivals occurred, the interactions among diverse groups suggest a peaceful and tolerant society.

Key questions emerge regarding the organization of rituals and festivals: who presided over them, and how did they communicate? The convergence of populations at these sites also supports the hypothesis of collaborative construction efforts, which indicates a harmonious and adaptive social structure. This scenario aligns with evidence from communal feasting at sites such as Stonehenge and Durrington Walls (Pearson, 2017; Craig, 2015). If earlier assumptions viewed these societies as primitive and lacking surplus, ongoing research presents alternative perspectives (Anati, 2021; Craig, 2015; Pearson, 2017). Moreover, despite the modest size of temples, deliberate leveling around them suggests intentional designs for hosting groups, challenging the rigid notions of statehood. In this light, any other hypothesis linking construction timeframes or population size warrants reevaluation.

If this hypothesis holds, delineating what constitutes a ritual in this context becomes imperative. Festivals signify unique participation, fostering social connections. Offerings within these spaces, including food and tools, would have symbolized reciprocity between visiting cultures and the local populace. This dynamic enhances our understanding of the society during the megalithic construction period in Malta. However, even Malta would have had distinctive offerings (beyond the celebratory atmosphere, which may have served as a spiritual blessing) such as honey (important for Neolithic farmers, according to Roffett-Salque et al., 2015), medicinal herbs, magic mushrooms (Anati, 2022), and flora (like the sea squill), which could have enriched these communal gatherings. The reciprocal nature of these exchanges suggests why outsiders were drawn to Malta, with its natural resources and sheltered harbors contributing to its appeal. The shared cosmological framework reflected in megalithic structures likely facilitated cultural interactions, as local and visiting commu-

nities celebrated significant hunting and agricultural milestones[1].

In this context, it is crucial to recognize the dynamic nature of population movements and interactions during the Neolithic period, which complicates any attempt to ascertain fixed demographics. Some visitors may have chosen to remain on the island, while others may have returned to their places of origin, making it challenging to precisely quantify population growth or cultural exchange. Nevertheless, the spatial organization of the island's structures reflects its social complexity, indicating that these architectural feats were not mere backdrops to daily life but rather pivotal elements shaping societal organization and cultural identity, not only for the people living on the island, but also for the surrounding regions. The symbols and figurines associated with the structures represent liminal spaces where symbolic and physical journeys converged establishing an "axis mundi" that connected various levels of existence (land, sea and the spirit).

**Population dynamics and social complexity**

Recognizing the dynamic nature of population movements during the Neolithic is crucial. This complexity complicates efforts to establish fixed demographics, as some visitors may have remained on the island while others returned to their homeland, making the accurate quantification of population growth or cultural exchange challenging. Nonetheless, the spatial organization of the island's structures reflects social complexity, indicating that these architectural feats influenced the societal organization and cultural identity of local inhabitants and the broader region.

The astronomical alignment of these structures played a vital role in determining the timing of rituals and festivities. Solar alignments, closely linked to survival and agricultural cycles, were especially significant. Thus, the solar alignments of megalithic structures can be seen as intentional expressions of the Neolithic understanding of vital cycles. In contrast, stellar alignments may have been incidental or purposeful based on the context and purpose.

The importance of solar alignment in shaping practical and spiritual practices is significant. Alignments with solstices and equinoxes likely stemmed from an empirical recognition of periods when the Earth received crucial energy from the Sun. For example, the intensity of sunlight around the summer solstice would have been recognized as a time of abundance crucial for agricultural practices. This awareness of solar energy, linked directly to survival, likely elevated the significance of solar alignment in Neolithic society, influencing practical actions such as planting and harvesting, while reflecting deeper spiritual beliefs about the Sun as a life force governing both material and cosmic realms. Stars also served essential navigational functions. The visibility of key stars, besides Crux, likely helped Neolithic peoples in navigating their landscapes or maritime journeys. Beyond practical navigation, stars may have represented a broader acknowledgement of the cosmological forces connecting terrestrial and celestial realms.

By observing celestial patterns, local communities could establish calendars that dictated agricultural cycles and communal celebrations. This structured observance of time aligns with the monumental structures at Göbekli Tepe and Mammoth houses in the Russian steppe, emphasizing humanity's tendency to embed spiritual and communal significance within architecture. Just as the materials from mammoth remains served functional and spiritual purposes, Malta's megaliths celebrated agricultural achievements and the advanced stone-working technologies of Mediterranean cultures.

Contrary to Anati's (2021) assertion that internal features of these structures held greater importance, this analysis contends that external activities and shared experiences surrounding the structures imbued them with meaning. Anati's observation of the global phenomenon of ceremonial urbanization prompts a reflection on the elements that are inherently local to Malta, which may align with broader spiritual or communal traditions.

1 Akin to contemporary seasonal festivals, for example, in Malta, we celebrate the Imnarja on 29th June traditionally known as the feast for farmers which would take place following the harvest when they would rest after their hard work

## Conclusions

### Beyond stone: megaliths as milestones in our journey to the foundations of today

This study examined the complex aspects of Neolithic Maltese society, questioning established theories about its roots and evolution. The distinctive megalithic monuments found in Malta have no counterparts in Sicily, despite being suggested as forerunners of the archipelago's inhabitants. This highlighted the importance of comprehending the relationship between southward-to-northward migration and its effects on culture, thus providing valuable perspectives for bridging historical knowledge gaps. This viewpoint helped to clarify certain observations in the current study. For instance, if Crux (Fig. 16) alignment was not crucial for residents, it might have functioned as a navigational aid for outsiders returning to North Africa (and possibly beyond), where celestial visibility improves further south.

The discussion also evaluated the classification of these structures as temples versus focal buildings, arguing that, while the arrival of the Phoenicians introduced a more defined notion of a temple, earlier constructions may not have represented a significant shift. Notably, the discovery of the term for 'God' at Göbekli Tepe suggests that spiritual thought may have predated the Maltese temple period, yet the Maltese context marked a transition from ethereal concepts to statues representing 'deities'. Future research should concentrate on how earlier traditions, such as those at Göbekli Tepe, might have influenced Neolithic Malta despite their temporal gap, exploring potential evolutionary parallels or similarities.

Fig. 16 Set of holes in the shape of Crux constellation at *Tarxien* (Barratt, 2022) but Anati (2021) argues that they are likely to have been related to some space below them (photo from Anati, 2021, MLT 86 EA II-21)

Furthermore, considering the hypothesis of celebratory practices, this analysis asserts that contrary to the prevalent belief that these builders labored tirelessly, they likely valued their produce, which may have resulted in the legacy of celestial alignments and their connections to rituals and life cycles while incorporating external interactions alongside internal dynamics. Moreover, if Malta functioned as a reference point for surrounding regions, it indicates that the builders possessed skills beyond mere masonry. Cult areas not only share common beliefs and spiritual practices but they are also often grounded in well-documented narratives that enhance their significance, particularly in the absence of a spoken lingua franca. Contrary to dominant scholarly views, this approach suggests that Malta held substantial appeal and tolerance, as non-indigenous individuals were likely attracted to the island not solely for worship but also for participation in a shared cosmological framework that transcended localized practices. The distinctive features of Maltese megalithic culture emerged from a dynamic synthesis of local innovations and broader Mediterranean influences to which other societies possibly related and contributed.

In conclusion, Malta's megalithic structures prompt a reevaluation of contemporary understandings of prehistoric human achievements and challenge assumptions about ancient capabilities and motivations. These builders relied on readily available resources, including stone, flora, and water cisterns. Examining these structures offers critical insights into the sociocultural dynamics shaping human societies, continuously enriching our collective understanding of identity and meaning. Ultimately, they stand as a testament to the enduring quest for creativity and impact, resonating through these monumental legacies and inspiring ongoing scholarship and future research on the multifaceted cultural landscape of the Neolithic Mediterranean.

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# STONEHENGE, TEMPLE OF THE SUN, AT THE TIME OF QUINTUS AND MARCUS CICERO, 54 BC

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**Abstract**

The paper analyses what is known of the visit to Britannia, and what he learnt about Stonehenge in 54 BC, of Quintus Tullius Cicero, the younger brother of the famed Marcus Tullius Cicero. Quintus arrived in southern England as a legatus legionis in the invasion army of Julius Caesar. Reported is a letter in English translation attributed to Quintus Cicero that informs his brother what he had learnt about a mighty temple to Apollo which is clearly Stonehenge. The letter is referenced as a Cicero epistula in an American religious magazine published in Philadelphia December 1828 but the whereabouts of a Latin original are not specified so needs to be sourced. Supposing validity, the account impressively describes how the great stones at Stonehenge were raised, it reports the sun as a worshipped divinity, and it relates the fire-centred fervor of the rejoicing country folk as the day of the summer-solstice festival dawns.

**Introduction**

Stonehenge stands unique—unparalleled for beguiling beauty—as a grand Temple of the Sun on the chalk downland of Salisbury Plain in southern England (Fig. 1). The sarsen-stone phase of this herculean construction, dating from a remote preliterate period around 4500 years ago, is a masterpiece of architectural design, an outstanding construction from the world of a farming community that predates the first Mycenaean and Cretan temples of the eastern Mediterranean by a thousand years. Long before the latter temples were built, Stonehenge had been a centre of attraction if not prominent centre of influence for peoples countrywide and Europe wide. Much is known archaeologically about Stonehenge in the period from 3000 to nearly 1500 BC when stones were arriving and on some later occasions, being rearranged. Nothing is known of the peoples and priests and why the huge project was undertaken. Eventually a long period of silence prevailed ar-

Fig. 1. Stonehenge on Salisbury Plain. 04.45 GMT 14 June 2019. Author's photograph.

chaeologically, from around 1500 BC to 1500 AD by which time the monument became a tumbled ruin (Fig. 2). When did decline begin, and why?

To help unravel its mysteries as to purpose and use, one needs to identify the cultural and religious ideology of the epoch and judge to what extent help from anthropology, ethnology and semiotics can be applied.

What is certain is that Stonehenge was planned and used as a temple to the sun during the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age when the tribes in Britain and Ireland believed in the divinity of the sun. Accounts from around 2350 years ago by Pytheas, a learned Greek explorer and observant scientist from the Greek city-state of Massalia on the Mediterranean coast of Gaul, was the first to confirm in writing that Stonehenge was a place of worship (Meaden 2023; 2024). He met priests whose authority to be in charge resulted from inheritance and he described Stonehenge as a 'magnificent Temple of Apollo' possessing an inner sanctum for which the Greek word is *naós*.

This Holy of Holies has five high three-stone settings called trilithons, each of which comprises a vertical pair of stones separated by a narrow gap and topped by a multi-tonne lintel or impost (Fig. 3). Together they girdle and dignify the revered cult objects of the believers—the male and female icons or idols which are a carved stone phallus and a shaped recumbent stone that centre the monument.

The next literate visitor to southern England who heard tell of Stonehenge was Quintus Tullius Cicero. He landed from Gallia in 54 BC and was asked by his brother Marcus Cicero to write about what he could learn of the native people. As a legatus or legion leader in Julius Caesar's invasion army, Quintus is credited as describing Stonehenge as "a temple in circular form" raised to the god "Geranius, or Apollo, the sun."

Much later there were medieval accounts and speculations, and by the seventeenth century came the first surveys and attempts at reasoning as to how Stonehenge was constructed and what the stones signified. Stonehenge has often been suspected of

Fig. 2. Aerial view of Stonehenge and at the top of the picture the solitary standing stone known as the Heel Stone. Author's photograph.

Fig. 3. The naos of Stonehenge. Compare stone heights with the size of the two adults. Author's photograph.

a temple but no antiquarian or archaeologist was able to prove it, none of them ever aware of what an educated Greek and a cultured Roman had reported centuries earlier.

William Stukeley in 1723 made a fair reconstruction of how Stonehenge had looked when in its prime (Fig. 4). In particular, he had the Altar Stone lying flat and Stone 67 centrally behind it blocking any axial view to the winter-solstice sunset. Refer to Meaden (2024a) about the implication of this.

Twentieth and twenty-first century archaeoastronomers failed to understand Stonehenge too, indeed to such an extent that Clive Ruggles and Amanda Chapman declared that Stonehenge was devised for sighting the sun and not for worshipping it. Ruggles and Chapman (2024, 176) concluded, "Stonehenge. Was it a sun temple ...? We think not—not in the sense that it was built to worship a sun deity … Stonehenge was not built as a temple to the sun, but rather to sight the sun … at the solstices." As for stone circles

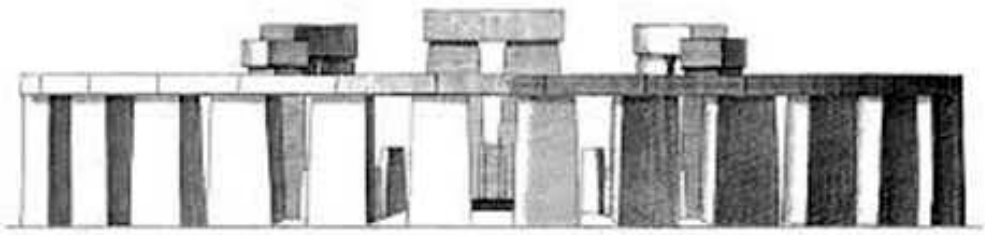

Fig. 4. Reconstruction of Stonehenge by William Stukeley in 1723.

in general, Clive Ruggles (1999, 97) decided that for stone circles "the builders were not concerned with the rising or setting positions of moon or sun" which is the opposite of what the present author has proved for dozens of stone circles in these islands (Meaden 2024).

Among archaeologists, Mike Parker Pearson claimed Stonehenge is "not a temple—that has been a major stumbling block for hundreds of years. It's not a calendar, and it's not an observatory". Instead, "Stonehenge was a place for the dead, while Durrington Walls [nearby] was occupied by the living" (Parker Pearson 2012, 340). He cites Burl (1987, 172-191) who also mistakenly claimed that Stonehenge was "a house for the dead".

Nonetheless, it is fair to mention again William Stukeley, inasmuch he commendably answered the question, what kind of mental reasoning could be behind wanting and then building such a huge exuberant monument. He did so with what he called poetic words, namely "Tantum Religio potuit", meaning "only religion could".

Next, we are able to quote a Roman intellectual who had apparently heard tell of the great construction when he was in England in 54 BC.

**Quintus Cicero who likely heard about Stonehenge in 54 BC**

From correspondence between the brothers Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 to 43 BC) and Quintus Tullius Cicero (102 to 43 BC), we know that Quintus, as a legatus legionis a high-ranking leader of a division in Julius Caesar's army, arrived in Britain at the time of Caesar's second expeditionary force in July 54 BC. From Portus Itrius near Boulogne Caesar crossed the channel with five legions (up to 25,000 men) and 2000 cavalry in 800 ships (Fig. 5).

Marcus Tullius Cicero was a famed orator and lawyer. About 900 letters of his are known to exist, of which many were to friends, relatives, lawyers, administrators and politicians. Significant correspondence by Quintus has survived too. The brothers wrote frequently to one another. They were well-educated intellectuals interested in all matters philosophical, geographical, historical, legal, political and constitutional. This is why, when writing to Quintus in August 54 BC, Marcus Cicero implored his brother, "Just give me Britain, so that I may paint it with your colors, but with my own brush" (*Epistulae ad Quintum Fratrem. Letters to Quintus*, II. 13.2).

Quintus was obviously much occupied by his military duties and friendship with Caesar, but always wanted to oblige his brother as best he could when absent from Rome, and this was by writing long letters. It is why, it seems, when Quintus heard tell of the temple which is familiar to us as Stonehenge, he sought to learn what he could about it—and hurried to inform his brother in Italy.


Fig. 5. The sea route to England from Gaul taken by the invasion force of Julius Caesar's army 55 BC.

The army landed on beaches in Kent near Deal or at Pegwell Bay, the corner of Britannia known to the Romans as Cantium and to Pytheas as Kantion (Fig. 5). The previous summer in 55 BC the invasion was disrupted at the beginning when most of the beached ships of the first expeditionary force were wrecked by a storm the night after landing on 30 August (Meaden 1976 and 2012). On this second occasion Caesar made sure to leave Gaul earlier in the summer and to arrive at high tide for safer beaching.

The first translation is from a four-volume Marcus Cicero collection, "*The Letters of Cicero: The Whole Extant Correspondence in Chronological Order*" by Evelyn Shirley Shuckburgh (Emmanuel College, Cambridge University) 1899. The letters from volume 1, written between 86 and 52 BC approximately, were made available as an e-book on 22 April 2007 under the terms of the Project Guten-

berg License. They are online at www.gutenberg.org [e-book #21200].
In this communication Marcus Cicero expresses his gladness to have received a letter from Quintus in Britannia, in which his brother says he will provide, as requested, descriptions of the island's topography, natural features, manners, tribes, and battles.

***Letter no. 146: CXLVI (Quintus Fratrem II, 15)***
*Page 290 of the Evelyn Shuckburgh book.*
**Rome, September 54 BC: *From Marcus Cicero to brother Quintus in Britannia***

"When you receive a letter from me by the hand of an amanuensis, you may be sure that I have not even a little leisure; when by my own—a little. For let me tell you that in regard to causes and trials in court, I have never been closer tied, and that, too, at the unhealthiest season of the year, and in the most oppressively hot weather. But these things, since you so direct me, I must put up with, and must not seem to have come short of the ideas and expectations which you and Cæsar entertain of me, especially since, even if it were somewhat difficult not to do that, I am yet likely from this labour to reap great popularity and prestige … I come now to a subject which, perhaps, ought to have been my first. How glad I was to get your letter from Britannia! I was afraid [for you] of the ocean, afraid of the coast of the island. The other parts of the enterprise I do not underrate; but yet they inspire more hope than fear, and it is the suspense rather than any positive alarm that renders me uneasy. You, however, I can see, have a splendid subject for description, topography, natural features of things and places, manners, races, battles, your commander himself—what themes for your pen! I will gladly, as you request, assist you in the points you mention, and will send you the verses [of my poetry-epic] you ask for.

***Next is part of a letter reportedly from Quintus Cicero to brother Marcus, 54 BC***

"The temples of the Britons are raised and constructed in a circular form, with obelisks of stone, over which are imposts, all of huge dimensions untouched by the chisel; a peace offering to Geranius, or Apollo, the sun. The huge stones of which they are composed, lay scattered by the hand of nature on the plain: these, with myriads of labourers, the high priest caused to be rolled up on the inclined planes of solid earth, which had been formed by the excavation of trenches, until they had attained a height equal to their own altitude; these pits being dug, they were launched from the terrace and sunk so as to stand perpendicular, at due and equal distances in the circle, and over these were placed others horizontally. After having completed one circle, they formed another that is concentric at some distance, and towards the extremity of the area of the inner circle, they placed a huge stone for the purpose of religious rites.
When the sun enters into Cancer, is the greatest festival of the god; and on all high mountains and eminences of the country, they light fires at the approach of that day, and make their wives, their children, and their cattle, to pass through the fire, or to present themselves before the fire in honor of the deity. Deep and profound is the silence of the multitude during this ceremony, the appearance of the sun above the horizon, when, with loud and continued exclamations, and songs of joy, they hail the utmost of that luminary, as the supreme triumph of the symbol of the god of their adoration." Cic. Epis.

**Comments**

The closing abbreviated words Cic. Epis. mean "Cicero Epistula".
The above sentences from Quintus to Marcus are reproduced from The Religious Magazine or The Spirit of the Foreign Theological Journals and Reviews, Volume 2, July-December 1828, where it occupies parts of pages 498-499 of a 14-page paper in the December issue. The title is "The Origin, Learning, Religion, and Customs of the Ancient Britons". Together with extracts from William Stukeley and comments on earlier Stonehenge legends, it was reprinted from another magazine, The Parish Church which may refer to a church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the city where The Religious Magazine was published. The URL is https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=HG82AAAAMAAJ&pg=GBS.PA499&hl=en

Preceding the reproduced text on page 498 is this comment by way of introduction:
"Quintus, the brother of M. Tullius Cicero, in his confidential dispatches to him, details the mode observed in constructing stone edifices in Britain for sacred use, with as much exactness as if he had been present at their construction; and describes, with great minuteness, the celebration of a religious ceremony, of which he was an eyewitness."
The present paper for *Expression* continues with comments by Marcus Cicero from a long letter to his brother Quintus, epistula number 147, dated 28 September on the pre-Julian calendar.

**CXLVII (Q FR III, 1) from Marcus to brother Quintus (in Britain)**
**Arpinum and Rome, 28 September**

"I now come to your letters which I received in several packets when I was at Arpinum. For I received three from you in one day, and, indeed, as it seemed, dispatched by you at the same time—one of considerable length, in which your first point was that my letter to you was dated earlier than that to Caesar. Oppius at times cannot help this: the reason is that, having settled to send letter-carriers, and having received a letter from me, he is hindered by something turning up, and obliged to dispatch them later than he had intended; and I don't take the trouble to have the day altered on a letter which I have once handed to him.
… As for the British expedition, I conclude from your letter that we have no occasion either for fear or exultation [following the last battle]. As to public affairs, about which you wish Tiro to write to you, I have written to you hitherto somewhat more carelessly than usual, because I knew that all events, small or great, were reported to Caesar. I have now answered your longest letter."

**Considerations**
Although several hundred Cicero epistulae (letters) survive since the first century BC, many from both brothers have gone missing. A few others may have survived into the recent present like, possibly, the original of the one above, but are not straightforward to locate. The present author has not seen the original in Latin to verify the source. All is well if it is held safe in a library or museum in America, Europe or elsewhere. The only reference provided in the *Religious Magazine* is at the foot of Column 3 in Fig. 2 with the abbreviation "Cic. Epis", meaning Cicero Epistula.

Fig. 6. The campaign route taken by three of the five legions in Britain and sites of three battles.
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Considerations of the relevance of certain dates start with the reference to a bonfire festival at the Temple of Apollo "when the sun enters into Cancer" as being "the greatest festival of the god". This unquestionably refers to the summer solstice which in the modern world we recognize calendrically as the date of 21 June. The accompanying detail is incisive and so well penned, whether or not by Quintus' hand, as to be a reliable statement of this tradition by an informed local. Whatever else, it is certain that Quintus did not witness it himself because the Romans did not embark from Gaul until 5 July. However, there was a practicable window of opportunity in September when Quintus could have witnessed the September quarter-year festival at Stonehenge and interviewed people there, as discussed below. If not, then at best he met a well-informed native Briton who related an immemorial story of the construction of sarsen Stonehenge from distant antiquity of which worshippers would have heard tell. The account of the fire-aspect of the festival has convincing detail, and is typical of Quintus' refined literacy. The letter helps support a likelihood that, just as Pytheas had ascertained nearly three centuries previously (Meaden 2023; 2024b), the temple was still

in use, hence being maintained. If the writing was that of Quintus, he likely had no reason per se not to suppose that besides the great construction about which he had heard, other temples in Britannia were similarly constructed—although there are no others. We also point out that recurrent seasonal bonfires at country festivals were widespread in Britain until recent times, and are still lit on special occasions (Fig. 7). In fact, a century ago, astronomer Norman Lockyer, in presenting a fair case for an 8-point farming-world calendar, called up evidence from country traditions dating from antiquity that had persisted into recent centuries. Gordon Frazer (1922) did so extensively. By studying stone monuments, Lockyer (1909, in his book preface) concluded that "our ancient monuments were built to observe and mark the rising and setting places of the heavenly bodies". His Chapters 18-22 (pp 178-251) review his enquiries regarding folklore and traditions connected with date-related festivals, sacred bonfire nights, sacred trees, holy wells, streams, and so on. Among the traditions were pan-European bonfire nights on the eves of the year's eight chief festivals.

Fig. 7. Wind-assisted fire beacon. Queen Elizabeth's diamond jubilee 4 June 2012. Photo by Dave Croker. *Creative Commons Attribution-share Alike 2.0 General license.*

In 54 BC Caesar led his army from Cantius (Kent) through to Middlesex and a Thames crossing to a final battle in Buckinghamshire in early September. Quintus would have been on horseback fronting his legion. There were two battles on the way, one near or at Bigbury Hill, Kent, and the other at Brentford, Middlesex. It was after the third battle at an Iron Age area named Verlamion (meaning 'Place by the Marsh'), near St Albans (Hertfordshire), when the divisions were returning to the coastal camp in Kent, that Quintus on horseback with a retinue for post-battle security reasons could have deviated after recrossing the Thames at Brentford. They were then some 80 miles (130 km) from the widely-famous Stonehenge. Recall that Quintus and Marcus admired each other so much that it is the sort of thing that either brother would do in wanting to be better appreciated by the other. The autumn festival around 20-21 September was another fire festival with hilltop beacons alight that Quintus might have witnessed whether or not he went to Stonehenge. On balance, it is more likely that Quintus never saw Stonehenge because military duties would be paramount. Most of the soldiers and cavalry were in Britain until the last week of the month. The last left on 2 October.

Again, notice that the particular festival which the chronicler refers to as "the greatest festival of the god" occurs "when the sun enters into Cancer" at midsummer. The report is that this much-welcomed occasion climaxed with "the appearance of the sun above the horizon", and that earlier while it was still dark but "at the approach of that day" the devotees lit bonfires. Above all, remark that it was with "songs of joy" that the people hailed "the utmost of that luminary, as the supreme triumph of the symbol of the god of their adoration."

First and foremost, if Quintus was the narrator, he was informing his brother that the monument we know as Stonehenge was a stupendous temple to the Sun-God whose name was the local equivalent to the Apollo of the Greeks and Romans. Whatever name Cicero really heard from an anecdotist, when writing he may have Latinized it to Geranius. The name that he heard or misheard from the nonliterate speakers of a Brythonic tongue could have been Geranis, Garanis or Taranis for instance, seeing that in the P-Celtic language word-beginnings change with declensions, in contrast to Latin where word-endings change.

Miranda Green (1991) has reported that Taranis was a known deity of the Brythonic Gauls, and in the Rhineland Taranis was known as a thunder-god. In western Europe as everywhere in the Roman world there was a pantheon of named divinities. With the Romans they were headed by Jupiter and Juno, and,

as in Greece, Apollo was the Sun God. Perceptively, there were Roman philosophers who rose above this, recognizing the value of science to explain the world instead of relying on myths and fictions. Lucius Annaeus Seneca said, "religion is regarded by the common folk as true, by the wise as false, and by rulers as useful."

In addition to what was expressed above, Walter Allen (1955, 143) writes that Britain "supplied Quintus Cicero with inspiration for poetic composition, although this epic died aborning. We shall also note that Marcus Cicero completed an epic on Caesar's British expedition of 54 BC; but not a single verse of it is extant." These odic verses may have voiced further references to Stonehenge. Peter Wiseman (1966, 108-115) writes, "Cicero turned his talents to an epic poem on the invasion of Britain: Quintus who himself began a similar poem, supplied the raw material and anxiously awaited completion of the work, and Caesar himself was interested in its progress", for which also see Walter Allen (1955).

Ten years later, in 44 BC the Cicero brothers were killed in the aftermath of the assassination of Julius Caesar the year before. Such can be fate.

**Willam Camden who mentioned Cicero when writing of Stonehenge, 1586**

We continue by addressing what William Camden meant when mentioning Stonehenge and Cicero in his masterwork Britannia.

In the first issue, 1586, composed in elegant Latin he writes that he used words from a Marcus Cicero letter, namely insana constructio, to describe the monument. In subsequent English-language editions this was translated as 'a wild structure'. Here is the original text.

"Septentriones versus ad VI. plus minus à Sarisburia milliari, in illâ planitie, insana. (ut Ciceronis verbo utar) conspicitur constructio."

It translates as "Six miles, plus or minus, from Salisbury towards the north, is to be seen on the plain (to use Cicero's term) an insana constructio" i.e., a wild structure, but effectively meaning an 'insanely bold construction'. If Camden's "insana constructio" originated in one of Cicero's letters and referred to Stonehenge, the origin of this reference has yet to be sourced. On the other hand, William Long (1876, 21 footnote) cites a Cicero letter which refers to Titus Annius Milo in which Cicero describes constructions that front Clodius's farm as being *insanas substructiones* (a reference to overwhelmingly big structures, "where easily a thousand men were stationed").

William Long (1876, 45) references again Camden's Britannica in the 1789 edition in which Richard Gough cites Cicero in the same way, but writing "*what Cicero would call insana substructio, a wild structure.*"

**The iconic images that centre Stonehenge**

The paired images, Altar Stone and phallic stone, in the middle of the monument are to be admired for what they are and what they meant to the community during divine worship (Figs. 8 and 9). They prove that Stonehenge was a temple to the divine, while numerous alignments to the sun is additional good evidence in favour of sun worship. The visible power presented by the architectural tour de force which is Stonehenge, emphasizes the strength of devout belief that led to the bold planning and courageous labour to build in the 26th-century BC what became the most spectacular construction in Britain for thousands of years.

Supportive evidence is reported in a further monograph under advanced preparation (Meaden 2026). There are fresh explanations about the purpose of the Slaughter Stone and the Station Stones, especially where they relate to the symbolic hieros gamos arising from shrewd dual-gender alignments between stones and the line to the rising sun. The concept of the Marriage of the Gods is crucial, in being an archetypal form at all levels of experience thro the symbolic conjunction of male and female principles emanating from the psyche.

In conclusion, a reminder is appropriate that on, and near, the summer solstice, expectant witnesses waiting outside the temenos were able to appreciate the drama of the rising sun followed by the phallic-shadow penetrating the monument as a visible manifestation of the union of the gods of Sky and Earth. Even now, 3500 years or more later, the sun-and-stone couplings reoccur on time. Stonehenge is in every way a long-lived Temple of the Sun whose fundamental principle of the Marriage of the Gods continues to function although the priests are long gone; and this because the Heel Stone and the waiting receptive stone are still present.

Fig. 8. The section of the phallic Stone 67 above the turf. Author's photograph.

Fig. 9. The bulbous glans of the phallic Stone 67. Author's photograph.

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# THE ENIGMA OF THE WHITE HORSE OF UFFINGTON

## HORSE SYMBOLISM AND THE TRANSITION FROM PREHISTORY TO HISTORY IN SOUTHERN ENGLAND

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**Abstract**

The dating of the magnificent White Horse figure, over 100m (360ft) in length and carved in chalk on White Horse Hill in Uffington, Oxfordshire has long been investigated and debated, but remains unresolved. Our lack of understanding of the dating of the White Horse reflects a deeper mystery: who originally created the figure, and why? This article explores this 'enigma': in particular, the evidence for establishing a provenance for the creation of the White Horse, and suggests possible reasons for its origin and purpose as a spectacular piece of land art, placing it firmly in a unique indigenous English tradition that spanned the temporal and cultural transition between prehistory and history.

**Key words**

White Horse, White Horse of Uffington, Uffington, White Horse Hill, England, British prehistory, chalk figures, Battle of Ashdown, King Alfred

Figure 1. Map of southern England showing the location of the Uffington White Horse (source: Google Maps, 2025).

**Introduction**

The White Horse of Uffington rightly holds a legendary place in the collective imaginations of the English people. The name White Horse Hill was first noted in Anglo Saxon cartularies in the twelfth century AD (Miles et. al. 2003: 15; Sharpe 2013). A cult of the White Horse was documented in medieval sources, and interest in chalk landscape figures grew rapidly from the sixteenth century AD onwards, as 'antiquarian' scholars drew on new developments in science and the emergence of the discipline of archaeology to attempt to date the White Horse - and create new White Horse figures.

First associated with the military standard supposedly carried by King Alfred the Great at the battle against the Vikings at Ashdown in AD 871, this interpretation gave way to theories that the White Horse of Uffington may have been of Iron Age origins, based on typological similarities with new finds such as the Silchester Horse (Miles et. al. 2003: 23; Fig. 9). The most recent dating techniques have included Optical Stimulated Luminescence (OSL) dating of soil embedded in the levels associated with the packed chalk (Miles et. al. 2003: 61-77), which has given a potential prehistoric construction date of between 1740-210 BC.

Despite these methodological advances, the exact period of history or prehistory in which the Horse was originally created has not been identified.


Figure 2. Map of the Uffington White Horse environs (source: Google Maps, 2025).

The date obtained by OSL has a latitude of some 1500 years, and does not align with any identifiable cultural provenance – a recognisable set of traits that would definitively identify the creation of the White Horse by a particular group of people, at a particular time. It tells us only that it could have been created in the Late Bronze Age or the Iron Age, but gives no

further clues beyond that.

The question this article hopes to address is whether it is possible to unravel these complex sequences and cultural associations and arrive at any definitive conclusion regarding the provenance of the White Horse of Uffington, i.e. which group of people first carved this striking and much-loved creature into the hillside, as a testament to their material culture, their love of the landscape and their wider beliefs?

**The location of the White Horse**

The White Horse of Uffington is a prominent chalk figure carved into the hillside of White Horse Hill, in the parish of Uffington, in Oxfordshire in southern England (Figs. 1-3). At around 110m or 360 ft in length, it is one of the largest hill figures in the world (Figs. 4 and 5). Situated on the northern scarp of the Berkshire Downs, with panoramic views of the Vale of the White Horse and beyond, it forms


part of a complex cluster of monuments located on the hillside, next to the Ridgeway – an ancient trackway, which runs the full length of the Berkshire Downs peaks and has for millennia provided a route across southern England for drovers, pilgrims, traders and others. Alongside the White Horse, White Horse Hill is the location for several long mounds and round barrows dating to the Neolithic and Bronze Ages, the Iron Age Uffington Hill Fort, Dragon's Hill, and high-status burials dating to the Romano British era (Bradley et. al 2005; Miles et. al. 2003: 29-49).

**Dating the White Horse – establishing a provenance**

There have been various attempts to date the White Horse using different methodologies. None of these has been able to pin point when the White Horse figure was first created. Any claim of proof requires triangulation of data to confirm and test its findings.

It is argued here that to date, triangulation has either been missing or attempts to triangulate have made insufficient account of all the available data. It is proposed that establishing a provenance may be the best available method for untangling the complex evidence presented at White Horse Hill, and specifically in regards to the White Horse figure itself. This evidence comprises documentary sources, fictional accounts, typological studies, scientific dating techniques, as well as sequences of abandonment (and in some cases even hiding the Horse, for example during WW2), and reconstruction and maintenance (known as "scouring" the White Horse). These sequences could be interpreted as attempts by successive generations to take ownership of the White Horse and impose their own concerns and interests on it. As a result, information about its origins has become mediated and filtered through the intervention of successive generations. This chronological layering of sequences subsequent to the creation of the original figure requires the application of a 'chain of custody' methodology, used in multiple disciplines including History and Art History, where it is synonymous with provenance – working backwards from the present day to establish the chronology of ownership of an art object, in part to attempt detection of its original creation and creator.

Figure 4. The White Horse of Uffington ariel view (1) (source: Prof. Terence Meaden).

The value of applying a provenance methodology to the White Horse is that the varied methodologies used to investigate and preserve the evidence have led to confusing and even conflicting chains of enquiry. For example, firstly, the identification of an original creation date assumes that successive generations have preserved the figure, but this raises the question of the status of phases of abandonment: the length of time of any one abandonment phase, how obscured the figure would have become and how any successive generation would know that the figure was still there in order to seek to restore it.

Figure 5. The White Horse of Uffington ariel view (2) (source: Prof. Terence Meaden).

Oxford Archaeology estimates that the Horse may have needed to be maintained every decade to keep it visible; if it was created in prehistory, this would mean that over one hundred generations have ensured its continuing existence over time[1]. Second, there are questions around the determination that any documented level in the site stratigraphy relates to a discrete episode of creating (or restoring) the White Horse figure rather than another event, like cutting pathways through the hillside. Third, and as already noted, there is the inherent problem of how to identify an original level at the White Horse, since a date, or a find by itself, cannot achieve this. A chain of custody approach may not be able to produce definitive answers to these questions, but it should allow for the identification of future research questions that can examine the evidence more closely - and perhaps find those answers - as a result.

**Dating the White Horse - Optically Stimulated Luminescence (OSL) Technique**

David Miles, Simon Palmer and Anne-Marie Cromarty undertook two seasons of excavations to identify datable material at the White Horse in 1990

1 Uffington White Horse, Oxford Archaeology Blog: https://www.oxfordarchaeology.com/uffington-white-horse, accessed 28.03.2025

and 1994 (Miles et.al. 2003: 65-77). These excavations followed on from the limited excavations undertaken by W.F. Grimes, 1951-3, during the restoration of the monument after WW2 (Miles et.al. 2003: 64-5).

Four trenches were dug: at the beak, belly, hind leg and lower back of the Horse. The excavations and subsequent dating confirmed the following observations.

The Horse is made up of successive layers of packed chalk, with hillwash and silt between these layers when the Horse was neglected and silted over. Up to six successive levels of packed chalk have been documented, and the last levels were proven to align with Grimes' reconstruction of the Horse in the 1950s (2003: 69).

There is a distinct separation in the sequences between the original bedrock and the main phase of construction of the Horse. These two levels are separated by colluvial hillwash deposits that formed over time. Therefore, there is a distinct chronological difference between the first feature at the site, and subsequent features (characterised by the packed white chalk levels we associate with the contemporary Horse). It is possible that the original Horse was cut out of the bedrock, but this has not been proven (2003:69-71; 75).

The Horse figure was previously bulkier than at the time of the excavation, and has moved up and down the Hill over time. The legs were once 3-4m longer and at one time there may have been alternatively shaped hind legs (2003:66-7).

Two samples of soil were taken from trench 3, for Optically Stimulated Luminescence (OSL) dating. The first (926a) came from a layer of hillwash adjacent to the chalk construction levels. The second (926b) came from a layer of hillwash found under a level of stones and gravel near the chalk construction levels (2003: 72; 76). Both dates obtained from these samples relate to the formation of the hillwash deposits, as OSL methods cannot be used on chalk, and so they can only provide a reference point for any dating of the Horse figure itself. They returned a range between 1380-550 BC at 68% confidence level, or between 1740-210 BC at a 95% confidence level (2003: 76). The authors state that, on this basis, "it seems very likely that there is only a 2.5% chance of the first Horse having been constructed later than 210BC" (2003:76).

The excavations did not discover any corroborating evidence from within the trenches that may provide a contextual clue about when the White Horse was first constructed. Further, the date range given for the colluvial deposit tested is too broad to identify any original construction phase. This means that the OLS dating method has not established the origins of the White Horse figure. The authors suggest the first (i.e original) Horse was constructed by cutting into the bedrock, and was later replaced by alternative methods of construction. They point to other efforts to create chalk figures by bedrock cutting, and note that figures cut using this method may not be visible for long. As discussed, any such original figure may have only been visible for around ten years. If this is the case, no explanation is given for the evident gap between the bedrock and subsequent chalk layers. It would be helpful to have an estimated duration of this intermediate level, and a discussion of how an original figure, having fallen into obscurity, may have been discovered, its significance understood and restored by a later generation.

Alongside this evident 'cultural' hiatus, if the existence of an original figure at the bedrock has not been established, and if there is an evidential layer of silt and hillwash between the bedrock and the packed chalk layers, there is a case for arguing that the chalk White Horse figure existed from the time of the later levels only. Further dating evidence, and/or correlation of these stratigraphies with known renovation events from the early modern and modern period is required to establish the dates of these phases.

**Establishing a provenance for the White Horse using documentary sources**

The earliest written records to describe the territory of and around the White Horse are the Anglo-Saxon charters, including the Chronicles and Cartularies of Abingdon Abbey (Miles et. al. 2003: 15). Earliest records, dating to AD 856, document the two grants of land: Uffentune, per-

taining to Uffington, and AEscesbyrig, relating to Uffington Castle (2003: Fig. 3.1). AEscesbyrig was first granted by King Athelwulf to Aldred in AD 856, and King Eadmund then granted it to his minister Wulfric, around AD 944. It was named in Domesday Book as 'Olvericestone' – Wulfric's estate - in 1086. The Uffentune estate was granted to St. Mary's – the Abbey – at Abingdon by AEthelstan in AD 931. The charters make no mention of the White Horse, either as a name for the hill or of a chalk figure (2003:16). The boundary between the two estates ran almost next to the site of the White Horse, leading the authors to suggest that: "this could argue against its existence at this time and almost certainly against the Horse being a monument created during the time of the great Anglo-Saxon King Alfred in AD 871, this has led to the suggestion that it was of later construction" (2003: 16).

The first references to White Horse Hill occur in the Abingdon Abbey Cartularies, dated from between 1070 and 1200.

There is a reference to "the place commonly known as the White Horse Hill" ("*locum qui vulgo mons albi equi nuncupatur*"), and "Near the hill where it rises to the White Horse" ("*Prope montem ubi ad Album Equum scanditur*") (Hughes 1859: 215; Sharpe 2013: 90-2). A White Horse, with foal, is mentioned in *De Mirabilibus Britanniae* (location not specified), written by Radulfi de Diceto in 1180, and there are further references to the White Horse in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries AD (Miles et. al. 2003: 16-7).

The White Horse is a striking and widespread presence in southern England, both as name and an image. A search on the University of Nottingham Survey of English placenames returned 16 results for the term 'White Horse'[1]. This is likely to be a fraction of the true number of White Horse names in England and it includes established locations such as farms and common land, as well as the numer-

1 Survey of English Placenames. https://epns.nottingham.ac.uk/ (accessed 21.04.25).

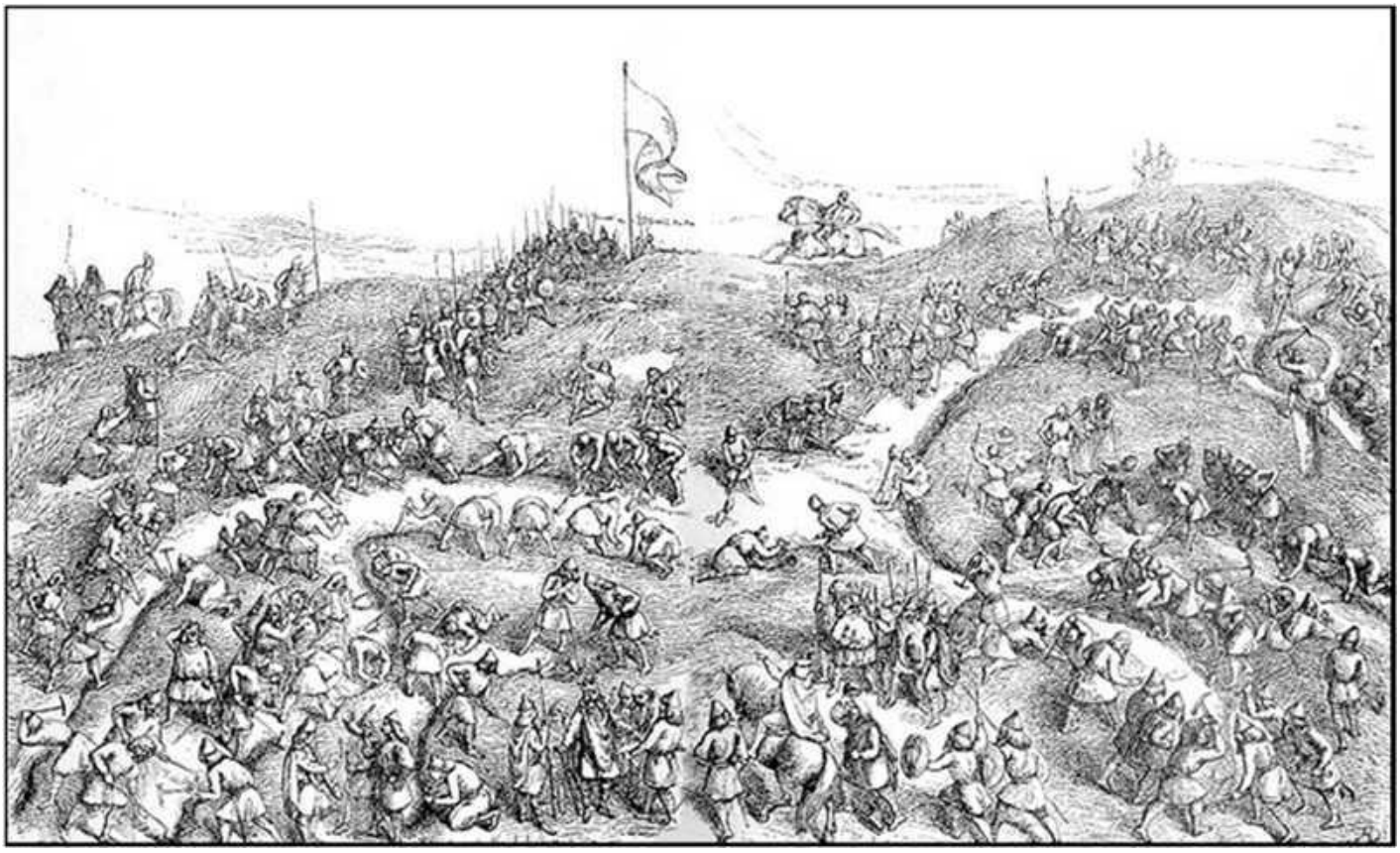

Figure 6. The frontispiece of Thomas Hughes' *Scouring of the White Horse* (1859), by Richard Doyle. The depiction is of King Alfred's army cutting the White Horse following the Battle of Ashdown in AD 871 – but it bears a close resemblance to more recent scouring events, such as the 1857 scouring that Hughes depicts in his fictional work.

ous White Horse chalk figures that sprang up on the Wessex hills during the 18th and 19th centuries AD (Smith 2013).

The White Horse has been adopted as a name and image across southern England: it is the emblem for the County of Kent, and documented history traces this association back to the medieval era (Lloyd 2017). The medieval adoption of the White Horse as a Kentish symbol referenced earlier horse imagery, in particular, the Romano British and Anglo-Saxon legends of the landing of the mercenaries Hengist and Horsa at Thanet to fight in the battle between Arthur and Vortigen (2017: 10-14). References were also made to late Iron Age coins minted by British Kings such as Dubnovellanus of Kent, many which have an archetypal horse figure on the back (Figs. 7 and 8). This chain of custody reveals how the symbol of the horse was used and re-used, from the late Iron Age and Romano British eras, with an attempt to "revive" perceived Saxon symbolism in the medieval era. This provenance of the horse as an image proves how popular, enduring and widespread it was, and how the preservation of the White Horse figure at Uffington, as well as the creation of other White Horse figures, were directly rooted in this documented perception of continuity.

Documents themselves are also subject to their own chain of custody, as methods for translating Latin and Old English into modern English and modern Latin have changed over time. We have already noted the phrase in the Abingdon Cartulary, dated to around 1190, which reads as follows: *Prope montem ubi ad Album Equum scanditur*. This is generally translated in modern translations, as: "Near the hill where it rises to the White Horse." This reference is taken to represent evidence for the existence of the White Horse figure at the time of its writing. However, this view is dependent on a particular translation of the original Latin, that could be regarded as problematic, for the following reasons. First, 'ad' is translated as 'to' in modern Latin, but in older Latin translations, it could have been translated as 'for'. It could also originally have been closer to 'a' or 'ab', both of which functioned as equivalent prepositions in old Latin[1]. 'Ad' makes more sense if it is translated as: "near the hill climbed by the White Horse". This alternative translation would fit with the interpretation of the naming of the hill as [named] 'after the Saxon White Horse', i.e. the hill that was climbed by Alfred's men on their horses.

The plausibility of this alternate translation is strengthened by documentary sources that make a strong case that White Horse Hill was the actual site for the Battle of Ashdown in AD 871. Thomas Hughes, renowned author of *Tom Browne's School Days*, was invited to the famous White Horse scouring festival of 1857, in order to document the sources for and oral traditions of its origins. Hughes decided to semi-fictionalise this account, and the result was the entertaining tale, *The Scouring of the White Horse, or, the long vacation ramble of a London Clerk* (1859). But Hughes' work is not just one of fiction; it contains a summary of known views of the origins of the White Horse, and makes it clear that it was popularly regarded as a commemoration of the Battle of Ashdown. In the following excerpt, Hughes makes the case for why White Horse Hill could be the actual site of the battle.

> "There are four spots in Berkshire which claim the honour of being the AEscendun of the chroniclers, where Ethelred and Alfred gained their great victory; they are Ilsley, Ashamstead, Aston in the parish of Bluberry, and Ashdown, close to White Horse Hill…
>
> Ashdown, the remaining site, and the one which I believe to be the true one, is the down which surrounds White Horse Hill, in the parish of Uffington. On the highest point of the hill, which is 893 feet above the level of the sea, stands Uffington Castle, a plain of more than eight acres in extent, surrounded by earthworks, and a single deep ditch, which Camden, and other high authorities, say are Danish.
>
> There is another camp, with earthworks, called Hardwell camp, about a mile W.N.W. of Uffington Castle, and a third smaller circular camp, called King Alfred's camp, about a mile to the S.W., which may still be made out, close to the wall of Ashdown Park, Lord Craven's seat, although Aubrey says, that in his time the works were "almost quite" defaced, by digging for the Sarscn stones to build Lord Craven's "house in

1 Plantin, C. (2021) Dictionnaire de l'argumentation: https://icar.cnrs.fr/dicoplantin/ab-ad-ex-eng/ (accessed 30.03.2025)

the Park". Wise suggests that the Danes held Uffington Castle; that AEthelred was in Hardwell camp, and Alfred in Alfred's camp. A mile and a half to the eastward, in which direction the battle must have rolled, as the Saxons slowly gained the day, is a place called the Seven Barrows, where are seven circular burial-mounds, and other large irregularly-shaped mounds, full of bones; the light soil which covers the chalk is actually black around them. The site agrees in all points with the description in the chroniclers; it is the proper distance from Reading; the name is the one used by the chroniclers,—"Ash-down," "Mons Fraxini," "AEscendun;" it is likely that AEthelred would have fought somewhere hereabouts to protect Wantage, a royal burg, and his birthplace, which would have been otherwise at the mercy of the enemy; and lastly, there - and not at Cuckhamsley Hill, or elsewhere - is carved the White Horse, which has been from time immemorial held to be a monument of the great victory of Ashdown. For the above reasons, I think we are justified in claiming this as the site of the battle." (Hughes 1859: 219-222).

**Typology as chronology – The White Horse and Romano British material culture**

If OLS dating cannot pinpoint an origin for the White Horse, can the methodology of typology, i.e. establishing a cultural milieu in which figures highly similar to the White Horse were being created? While this would not be sufficient to prove an origin, it could help to situate and secure the association of the figure within a proven cultural context.

The most obvious sources for creating a typological provenance for the White Horse are the depictions of horses on Romano British objects such as coins[1]. Two object types are the focus here: the coins of late Iron Age/Romano British Kings, and late Iron Age/Romano British horse-shaped jewellery.

The similarities between British coins and other objects such as the Silchester Horse, and the White Horse, were noted in the eighteenth century by antiquarians like John Aubrey and William Asplin, who argued that, on this basis, the original White Horse may be of Iron Age date. This dating methodology was developed by archaeologists such as Stuart Piggot in the twentieth century, who believed that the Uffington figure was constructed around the 1st century BC (1931). This view became predominant until it was superseded by the OLS dating in the 1990s – which could incorporate a late Iron Age construction date given its dating horizon. Further evidence would be required to offer proof that the first White Horse dates to this era. The typological chain of custody that establishes similarities between Romano British objects and the White Horse figure could be retrospective, i.e. known horse figures dating to the Romano British era could have provided the basis for copyists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries AD, seeking inspiration in traditional images

1 Romano British is defined here to include British groups in the lead up to the formal invasion of Britain by Rome in AD 43, as well as those indigenous societies who lived under direct Roman rule until at least around 400 AD.

Figure 7. An Iron Age Gold stater Atrebates Celtic Coin, c 50 BC (source: Oxford University). (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:An_Iron_Age_Gold_stater_Atrebates_Celtic_Coin_Index_reference,_1.1924_(FindID_317888).jpg (accessed 14.04.2025))

of horses, in much the same way that a proven medieval provenance for the cult of the White Horse drew on oral traditions of horse symbols extant in the Saxon era.

**Romano-British coins**

Many late Iron Age/Romano British coins feature a horse on one side, with a common typological style that denotes a standard that functioned across tribal boundaries. Two examples are presented here: Atrebates gold staters and the coins of Cunobelin (Figs. 7 and 8).

High status gold and silver coins were minted by tribal kings in Britain as a direct response to encroaching Roman imperial markets, in empire-wide denominations such as the stater. Gold quarter staters often featured a horse on one side of the coin. The Henley Hoard is a hoard of 32 Celtic gold coins, found by a metal detectorist in 2003 and 2004 in a field near Henley, Oxfordshire, and is typical of Romano British coin styles. They were minted by the Atrebates tribe, probably at Silchester, and date from around 50BC. The coins are all of the same type, distinguished by a horse with a triple tail over a wheel on one side. The horse image is highly stylised, so it is easily recognised, and is reminiscent of the White Horse figure in Uffington.

Figure 8. A coin of Cunobelin, leader of the Catuvellauni, AD 10 to 42 (Source: PHGCOM).(https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cunobelin_coin.jpg. Accessed 15.04.25)

The Cunobelin coins are another set that frequently feature a horse on one side of the coin. Cunobelin was the leader of the Catuvellauni tribe (AD 10 to 42), who was referred to as *Britannorum rex* ("King of the Britons") by Roman biographer Suetonis. He ruled over a large part of south-east England, and made Camulodunum (Colchester) his capital and the location of the mint. The frequent depiction of horses on early Romano-British coins, may have represented the military troops raised by each British king to defend their territory, and so formed an indigenous version of the famous, Empire-wide *equites* class, who directly contributed to the raising of the Roman armies.

**The Silchester Horse**

The horse, usually referred to as the Silchester Horse (Fig. 9), was found by Reverend J.G. Joyce on 27 October 1870 during the excavation of the Basilica at the Roman town of Calleva Atrebatum, near the village of Silchester in Hampshire.

This bronze figure was cast in one piece and then hammered and filed to shape. Both sides are decorated and it was probably originally enamelled. It is thought to date to the 1st century AD.

**The Leasingham Horse**

A copper-alloy zoomorphic brooch (Fig. 10) in the form of a stylized horse was found at Leasingham in

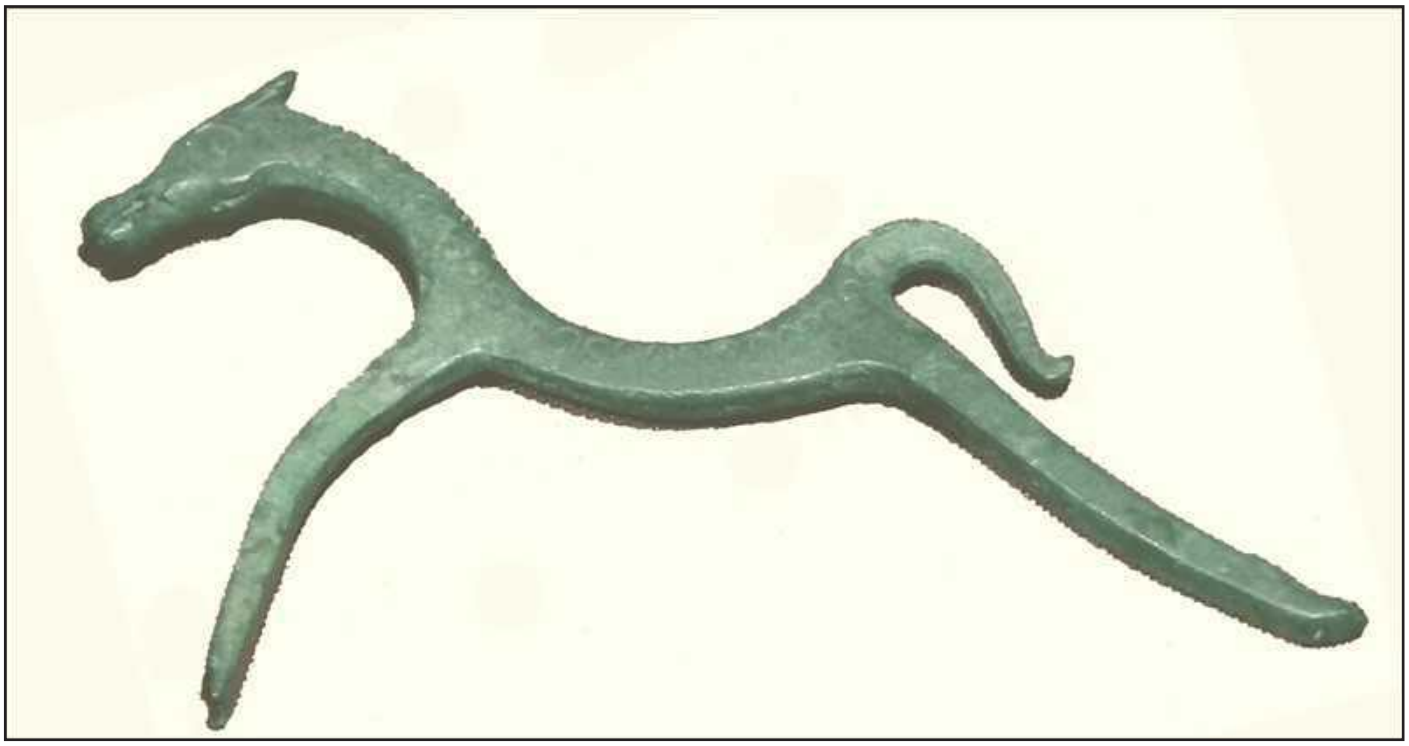

Figure 9. The Silchester Horse, 1st century AD (Source: BabelStone). https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Silchester_Horse.jpg (accessed 15.04.2025).

Figure 10. The Leasingham Horse, early Romano-British import (Source: Brundle). https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:-LIN-09AF6A,_Roman_horse_brooch_(FindID_988451-1089480).jpg. (accessed 15.04.2025).

Lincolnshire in 2020. It is 46.5 mm long and weighs 23.2g. “It has a long arching neck, a subrectangular body and a stubby tail. The legs are not separated but form extensions from the body to house the catchplate (front legs) and the axis (rear legs); the pin, still intact, pivots around the latter.” (Brundle et. al. 2021). It has been tentatively dated as an early Romano British import on the basis of typology.

Figure 11. Thomas Hammond’s illustration of the White Horse (one of four), to illustrate A letter to Dr. Mead Concerning Some Antiquities in Berkshire, by Francis Wise, Trinity College Oxford, 1738.

**A moveable feast – the changing shape of the White Horse over time**

In tracing the references to the shape of the White Horse over time, one thing is very clear: it is a dynamic figure, and changed its shape over the centuries.

In 1607, William Camden travelled the country under commission to produce Britannia. He reports “the shape of a white horse imagined to appear in the whitish chalky hill, they terme The Vale of Whitehorse”, but makes no more specific remark as to its shape. In 1725, Daniel Defoe confirmed the existence of a trench-cut horse figure, as seen from the Vale: “a trench cut on the side of a high green hill, this trench is cut into the shape of a horse….[it] is two yards wide at the top, about a yard deep, and filled almost up with chalk, so that at a distance, for it is seen many miles off, you see the exact shape of a white horse” (1725, quoted in Miles et.al. 2003:19). Do these disparities indicate that the first trench-cut horse was constructed at some time between 1607 and 1725?

The first documented maintenance of the horse (“scouring”) dates to 1681, and subsequent restorations occurred at intervals until the last recorded scouring in 1892 (Historic England). Scouring involved stripping the discoloured and damaged surface, trimming and replacing the turf edges and then packing the Horse shape with a new layer of chalk. To what extent each episode of scouring and restoration affected the earlier design has not been definitively established. Grimes’ excavations in the 1950s revealed that the nose had originally been longer, while the excavations in the 1990s established that the legs were once 3-4m longer and at one time there may have been alternatively shaped hind legs (Miles et. al. 2003:66-7). Francis Wise, Fellow of Trinity College, Oxford, noted in 1730 that the locals believed that the Horse had “moved position up the hill over time” (2003: 19). In 1738, Thomas Hammond produced sketches of the White Horse (Fig.11), that purported to be accurate depictions; if so, this is clear evidence that the White Horse changed shape at different episodes of scouring and restoration. During the 1880s, W. Plenderleath noted that the figure had become totally overgrown and barely discernible, and it was subject to extensive restoration in 1892.

Figure 12. The Westbury Horse, 1939, Eric Ravilious.

The White Horse remained a focus of attention throughout the twentieth century. The genre became a modernist icon, mainly thanks to the paintings of landscape and war artist Eric Ravilious (Fig. 12). The fact that a burgeoning British modernist movement could so enthusiastically embrace and appro-

appropriate the White Horse image, indicates that its promotion was for contemporary audiences with an appetite for land art – as Ravilious painting elegantly implies.

**After a fashion – the Georgian White Horses of Wessex**

The final piece of evidence for establishing a provenance for the White Horse at Uffington is the plethora of chalk figures – mainly horses – carved into the southern English, mainly Wessex uplands, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries AD.

Esther Smith (2013) estimates there were at one time 13 white horses, mostly grouped on the Berkshire and Marlborough Downs (2013: 16-17). Creation dates for the Uffington and Westbury White Horses are under investigation, but all the other extant horses were created between 1778 and 1999. These include: Cherhill Horse (1780), Old Pewsey Horse (1785), Marlborough Horse (1804), Alton Barnes Horse (1812), Hackpen Horse (1838), Old Devizes Horse (1845), Broad Town Horse (1864), New Pewsey Horse (1937) and New Devizes Horse (1999).

The obvious relationship between the Uffington White Horse and the others is one of emulation and imitation; however, it could be argued that the Uffington figure was certainly embellished – if not created – during this era of creative activity, and so adds to the evidence for a more recent origin for the White Horse. It also strengthens the case that the image is itself a referent for and embodiment of the "invention of tradition" in the landscape.

**Discussion**

This paper has introduced some of the complex layers of evidence at, and associated with, the White Horse of Uffington, and its immediate environment. It has shown just how much activity over the centuries has attached to this hillside on the Berkshire Downs. The archaeological sequences span several thousand years, and alongside these are oral histories and documented historic facts about the landscape and its changes over time, myths, legends and creative artistic interventions in the landscape such as the repeated scouring of the White Horse.

It is suggested here, that the reason so much activity was – and is - attached to one place is because it is a site of territorial significance, one that has played a key role in the definition and defence of territorial boundaries in southern England as they have developed over time. The Ridgeway, running along the high ground of the Berkshire Downs, was a key strategic trackway. Regarded as the spine of central southern England, it was marked out as a pathway of significance during the earliest prehistoric phases, notably the Neolithic. The path serves as a shortcut, connecting the southern English plains of Pewsey and Salisbury, to the Thames Valley and beyond. At its southern terminus stands the great Neolithic monument of Avebury, with its own paths and avenues of the Four Directions, defining its place at the heart of southern England. Its northernmost terminus marks the threshold to eastern England – notably the high ground of the Chilterns, and the River Thames, wending its way to the east coast.

The prominence of the site in early prehistory was maintained during later prehistoric and historic sequences. The Uffington hillfort was constructed during the Iron Age, and it was re-used during the Romano British and Saxon eras when the Downs became a site for conflict, as county boundaries were defined and disputed after the departure of the Romans – and later as a result of the attempted invasion of southern England by the Vikings. These conflicts were acted out in the famous battles on its hillsides: Badon, Ashdown, and others. The commemoration of this history is found in the Romano British and Saxon elite military burials around the White Horse - at Dragon's Hill and other barrows, some of which were originally prehistoric and were re-used for later burials (Miles et. al. 2003: 29-49).

The White Horse is known and visible in this already legendary landscape. But somehow, it eludes attainment of a definitive place within these sequences. Soil near its packed chalk construction gives us a prehistoric date range, but this cannot in itself be taken as definitive. The close similarities of the White Horse with Iron Age and Roman artefacts such as the Silchester Horse could be explained by recent cuttings of the figure more closely following these known artefacts as they came to

light. There is no agreement as to the steadfastness of the figure in-situ. Camden called it "imagined", Wise points to local views that the Horse had moved up the hill over time. The scouring of 1892 restored a figure that had become completely covered over. We cannot assume any typological continuity with a putative Iron Age figure if no definitive evidence exists, and with a clear hiatus between the bedrock and later levels that remains unexplained. A more robust provenance would assert that any continuity between the Iron Age/Romano British and later eras resided in the positioning and prominence of the Horse, created to be seen for long distances, enabling observers to identify a site of significance over millennia in the landscape. It also resided in oral and documentary history. Following on, the claims made that the White Horse was constructed to commemorate the historic significance of the site, including as the possible location of the Battle of Ashdown, become more convincing, not less.

Is it possible to pin down one shape, created at one time, and followed ever since? Is it at all possible that a collective memory of hundreds of generations, could remain faithful to a single, original image? Or does its shifting shape, and the associated stories, reflect another kind of faithfulness: a living tradition that requires the input of multiple actors: storytellers and historians as well as landscape artists and archaeologists, as successive generations try to make sense of, and just as important, participate in the multiple meanings so closely knitted into this "tribal" landscape? That the horse and its image is at the heart of this living tradition is of no doubt whatsoever; what is also proven beyond doubt is that the White Horse figure is a splendid icon of that iconic continuity in symbolism that transcends – and defies - the debate to definitively identify the "first" horse to be created on the hillside.

**Conclusion**

This paper has argued that reaching a conclusion as to when the White Horse of Uffington was originally created remains elusive. A chain of custody approach has been followed, in order to attempt to identify what we do know about its provenance. This approach has established that the only recorded reason that has been given for its existence is to commemorate the victory of King Alfred at the Battle of Ashdown in AD 871. If this claim is true, it would require its first construction to date to after AD 871 – but how long after? Does this one given reason suggest that the figure itself evolved out an oral and documentary narrative tradition that told the story of King Alfred's men defending the Kingdom of Wessex at Ashdown from Viking attacks? As a broader White Horse cult developed in the Middle Ages, the specific image of the White Horse became associated with King Alfred, and with the county of Kent; it became widely used as a placename, and it seems to have had associations with a nascent English nationalism, becoming a symbol for the English State. This association appears primarily to have drawn on documentary sources such as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, and other histories of the emergence of the counties and countries of Britain. The historian Nennius, who wrote 'Historia Brittonum' around AD 800, was cited for references to the horses associated with Saxon invaders Hengist and Horsa, and it may be the case that the 'White Horse' was a substitute for the 'white dragon' symbol used by Nennius to represent the Saxons in their battles with the British 'red dragon' (Nennius 2008).

The provenance of the White Horse figure suggests it forms part of that wider medieval and post-medieval "invention of tradition" – a powerful symbol for English national identity, following the symbolism employed in documentary sources; created to remember great events that led to the creation of England as a country. It would appear that this creation was complex, undertaken by antiquarians, artists, oral historians, locals, writers, and that it was in some very real sense a collective undertaking.

The image of the White Horse carries with it real power; it is a genuine reflection of the military activity that created, fought for and defended county and country boundaries following the departure of the Romans. It is in the continuity in military symbolism, this paper suggests, that the origins of the White Horse are to be found. It remains possible that an original Iron Age/Romano British (or even earlier) horse figure, cut into the bedrock, lies beneath the later levels of packed chalk, but this has yet to be proven. A more robust provenance for the creation of the chalk figure on White Horse Hill, lies

in the cluster of evidence from the late medieval to the early modern era, although this fails to account for any original bedrock figure.

Placing the provenance of the current White Horse in the later Middle Ages, allows for the complexity of the question of ownership and originality itself to remain somewhat tenuous – giving due emphasis to local, popular traditions in celebrating and passing on information about important events in the history of England. The combined effort of the Anglo Saxons in thwarting a decisive Viking invasion of Wessex ranks high on that list of events, a defining moment in the creation of England and one that presaged the handing on of the English crown by the Anglo-Saxon dynasty that had fought so hard for it, to the conqueror, William of Normandy, in 1066. We should be forever grateful to the communities of the Downs for reminding us of that important victory for us all to remember and enjoy in the preservation of a spectacular piece of indigenous land art.

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# NOTES
# AND NEWS

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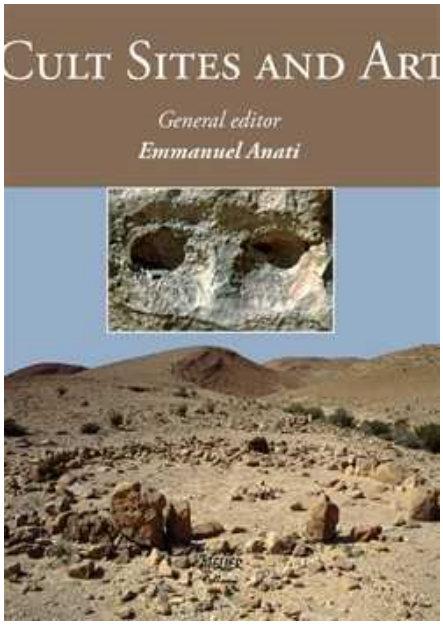


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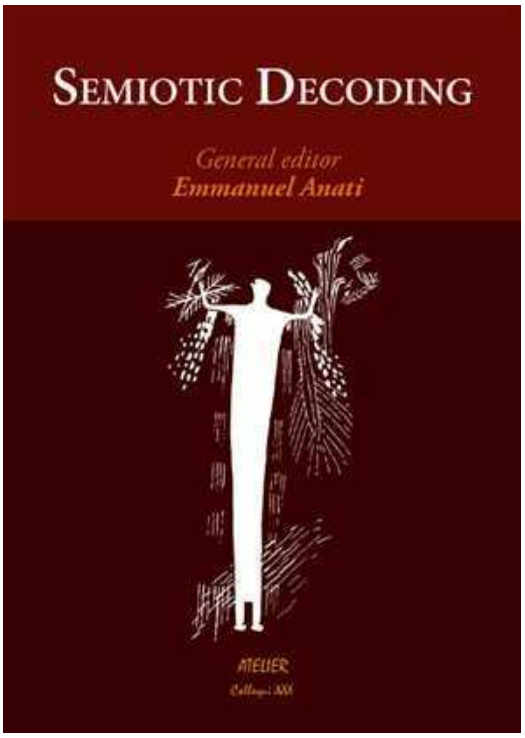


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Colloqui XXX
Capo di Ponte (Atelier), 180 pp., 147 figg. € 40

Archaeology brings back fragments of the past. Findings unveil parts of our buried memory. Description, dating and attribution to a cultural-ethnic or historic context, open the way to the next step, understanding their conceptual meaning and reveal the minds behind their outputs. In this book, typology and examples of diffe¬rent systems of decoding are presenting elementary tools of investi¬gation into the meaning of signs and symbols.

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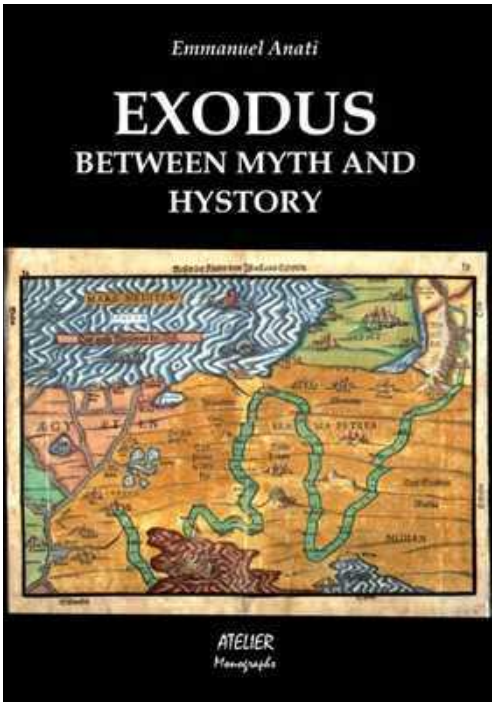


**Exodus. Between Myth and History**
Anati, E.
2016, Exodus. Between Myth and History
Monografie IX
Capo di Ponte (Atelier), 212 pp. 193 figg. € 40

The epic of Moses: is it myth or history? The Biblical narrative of the exodus and the revelation of Mount Sinai are a monumental literary work that has been passed down for well over two millennia, after being transmitted orally for centuries. What would have really happened during the Exodus? How did monotheism emerge? Who were the mentioned people of the desert met by the children of Isra¬el? The central episode of the epic is the revelation at Mount Sinai. The location near the Saint Catherine's monastery is a Byzantine proposal that many scholars believe baseless. New archaeological di¬scoveries suggest a reconstruction of the route of exodus and its hi¬storical context and reveal pieces of history behind the magnificent biblical epic.

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## WHAT IS CONCEPTUAL ANTHROPOLOGY?

Conceptual anthropology is the discipline that explores the "why" behind human actions, studying archaeological and anthropological data through semiotic, historiographic, and sociological lenses. It analyzes the causes and motivations behind behaviors, rituals, beliefs, artistic creativity, and other cultural expressions to understand their underlying reasons.

Every tangible effect of human action is a manifestation that has its roots to be traced, exploring the causes of behavioral processes. The concepts behind facts reveal the dynamics of actions and events relating effect to cause.

The goal of conceptual anthropology is to understand human behavior and cultural trends, including their material, economic, and technological aspects, as well as their social, ethical, aesthetic, and spiritual dimensions. It seeks to uncover the various factors behind human actions and events.

While media, aided by artificial intelligence, accumulate technical and historical knowledge, the associative process of the human mind remains irreplaceable. Our being and actions are rooted in memory, which has both individual and collective aspects. Human behavior is shaped by memory, influenced by indoctrination and contextual conditions. Mistakes often arise from the obscuring of memory, while positive outcomes come from its proper use. This is not just about electronic memory, but the type of memory that transforms into intuition and rediscovery, the memory that originates from the depths of the human mind.

In an age of extreme specialization, which risks reducing scholars to technicians and workers to robots, conceptual anthropology offers an alternative. While technicians are undoubtedly necessary, conceptual anthropology proposes a new (yet ancient) trend in research, centered on a broad vision of the humanistic and social sciences. Let technicians and conceptual anthropologists recognize their distinct roles, carry out their work, and enrich each other through their different conceptual approaches.

Research serves its true purpose when it fosters deeper understanding and discovery. When culture is creative and innovative, it promotes intellectual growth and stimulates new ways of thinking. Conceptual anthropology opens broad perspectives in social and conceptual analysis, offering stimulating awareness and enriching the intellect. It should be an integral part of education for people of all ages.

Conceptual anthropology took formal shape in 2011 at the congress of the International Union of Prehistoric Sciences in Florianópolis, Brazil, when it was recognized as a research discipline. Shortly thereafter, the Atelier Research Center was founded by Professor Emmanuel Anati who chairs it, as the headquarters for this discipline. Based in Valcamonica, Italy, Atelier has a dedicated editorial sector for conceptual anthropology, which, over the past twelve years, has published 80 books and 48 volumes of the quarterly journal *EXPRESSION*. These publications have involved 250 authors and researchers from 50 countries across five continents. They gather ongoing research in conceptual anthropology and serve as a base for the discipline.

In a world searching for its uncertain future, there is a profound need for open, humanistic studies like these. The publications of Atelier offer compelling inquiries into conceptual anthropology, introducing this emerging field of research.

For further information, see *EXPRESSION* vol. 29, 2020, pp. 72-80, or contact <atelier.etno@gmail.com>.

## ATELIER RESEARCH CENTER

Atelier Research Center is the international headquarter for Conceptual Anthropology. It is a workshop for research, experiment, and debates on intellectual and spiritual expressions: traditions, art, religion, and other social and conceptual aspects of human society. It is a meeting place for the human sciences, where artists, philosophers, anthropologists, archeologists, semioticians, psychologists, and students of other disciplines find a common language. Atelier organizes meetings, seminars, and exhibitions; it benefits of a space for exhibitions, a laboratory and meeting facilities in the Camonica Valley, in the Italian Alps, and a research field base in the Negev Desert. It runs a publishing department producing books and the quarterly journal *EXPRESSION*. It is open to supporters and followers wishing to be ***adherents,*** and share knowledge, ideas, and debates. ***Adherents*** receive *EXPRESSION* quarterly journal, the announcements of new books and other communications. Adherents' annual subscription is a free donation, decided by each adherent according to his/her possibility and will. ***Volunteers*** and ***apprentices*** are welcome.
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CISENP is the International Scientific Commission on Research into the Intellectual and Spiritual Expression of Non-literate Peoples. Born as a commission of UISPP, the International Union of Prehistoric Sciences, its goals expanded beyond prehistory, included other sectors of the humanities, involving archeologists, anthropologists, art historians, historians of religion, psychologists and sociologist. It is now a free and independent association of conceptual anthropology participating in the editing, publication and diffusion of *EXPRESSION* quarterly journal and in other activities of Atelier. Authors publishing in *EXPRESSION*, unless otherwise expressed, are considered to be associates of CISENP.
Scholars and students from any country in the world, interested in conceptual anthropology, archeology, art, and other humanistic fields, may apply to join CISENP, by email to <atelier.etno@gmail.com>, including CV, list of scientific publications and other pertinent document. ***Associates*** are scholars and students, they may propose projects and actions, promote meetings and debates, keep contacts and share debates with the family of Associates, contribute articles and/or editorial work to the *EXPRESSION* journal, and other activities by Atelier. The association is based on active participation. Annual subscription is optional, a free donation, decided by adherents according to the individual possibility and will. The function of ***associates*** expires by being inactive for over one year.

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Texts should be innovative, awakening curiosity and queries, provoking thinking and, obviously, be reliable and clear. The journal does not publish dry technical or purely descriptive reports and tries to avoid theoretical general disquisitions. Irrelevant references and other unnecessary displays of erudition should be avoided. The publishing language is English (American spelling).
Articles are submitted to reviewers but the acceptance for publication is decided by the editor. The recommended length of a paper is 2,000 to 5,000 words. Articles counting less than 2,000 words or having no consistent illustration, may be considered for the 'Discussion Forum' or for the 'Notes and News'.
Illustrations should have the resolution of 300 dpi, with a base of 14 cm. They should have explanatory captions, including source when relevant. Illustrations should be presented separately from the text. Both text and illustration should be free from copyright and any other obligation, and preferably not yet published elsewhere.
Authors are fully responsible for the submitted text, illustrations, and contents. Their ideas are not necessarily shared by the publisher or the editors. Every idea and concept expressed by the authors is open to debate and criticism.

## SHORT COMMENTS BY READERS

Dear Editorial Team,

Congratulations to this focus on semiotics! As I have pointed out in my book on Theories of Culture (2020, Routledge), semiotics is a helpful tool to systematically analyze complex systems such as culture.
<https://routledge.com/Theories-of-Culture/Groh/p/book/9781138668669>

Kind regards,

Arnold Groh, Technische Universität Berlin, Germany

Dear Editors,

The title and content of the last issue of Expression (47) sounds like my /our main subject matter and work in the last 25 years and more: **The semiotic of ideograms.**

Thank you!

Margalit Berriet, Artist and Director of Art Gallery, Paris, France

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## N°48 June 2025


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