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PLEISTOCENE ART OF THE WORLD

Short articles
TOWARD A DECORATIVE MODEL FOR THE CAVE OF PEÑA DE CANDAMO (ASTURIAS, NORTHERN SPAIN) IN THE LIGHT OF NEW DISCOVERIES

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Peña de Candamo, discovered and explored at the very beginning of the 20th century, was recently designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The latest research, since 2007, has revealed new decorated zones, as well as unknown paintings and engravings in the known zones. The other objectives of the interdisciplinary research are: an archaeological study of the floors, an analysis of the pigments (already begun by Raman spectroscopy), a 3D reconstruction of the entire cavity (achieved in 2009), and a study of the environmental and conservational parameters.

The new graphics include paired lines, vertical bars, spots and dots, all painted in red inside folds formed by stalagmitic flows and columns, as well as on the ceilings of small galleries and in narrow passages difficult to access. In parallel, in larger galleries – Galería de Entrada, Sala Baja de los Signos and Salón de los Grabados – we find the same motifs at the junctions of various small openings, in the entrances and near the large panels. For example, there are the accumulations of spots and red lines associated with speleothems in the Sala Baja de los Signos, around the panel of triangular and quadrangular signs, composed of painted linear red lines; we also find spots and paired lines in the access ramp to the gallery. In the Gran Salón, series of large red disks were painted on vast calcitic flows to the left of the access to the Camarín. On some of them, there are fingerprints, showing that the paint was applied by hand directly onto the stalagmitic column.

New figurative graphics were also discovered in unexplored zones. This is the case for the headless figure of El Hornito, a platform measuring barely 4 × 4 m and 50 cm high, overlooking a vertical gallery. This possible equid (33 × 13 cm) is engraved on the floor with a fine multiple line. On the right, it is partly superimposed with around six pecked marks. In other cases, zoomorphs, present on the periphery of the main panels, were until now not seen. For instance, on the right site of the Gran Salón, next to new, previously unknown, lines of dots, there is a possible outline of a red aurochs. Another example is found in the famous panel of the El Talud gallery, where new paintings have been identified, representing the horns of an aurochs or the antlers of a red deer, in a yellowish sienna color, and engravings (an aurochs and a red deer drawn with multiple thin grooves).

Finally, toward the end of the cave, in the Galería de Las Batiscias, archaeological activities were revealed (ochre fragments, faunal remains and flaked quartzites) near red spots and blurred lines, and the hindquarters of a deeply engraved herbivore partially covered with calcite.
Red paired lines in the access to the Sala Baja de los Signos.
Our new vision of the parietal ensemble is in accordance with what we observe in other caves in the western Cantabria region. First of all, in the panels with numerous superimposed graphic horizons (Muro de los Grabados in the Gran Salón), some representations are comparable to the oldest known ones. The animals and red signs of this panel, similar to those recently found, correspond to the first phases of execution. Therefore, the traditional hypothesis of a gradual “conquest” of deep underground spaces loses its credibility and is replaced by a different model. The new data indicate that the cavities of the Cantabrian Cornice were explored and decorated in their main sectors, independently of the deeper zones.

The beginning of graphic activity in a number of caves goes back to at least the Gravettian, with a characteristic iconography composed mainly of specific red, and rarely black, motifs and signs. Caves like La Peña de Candelario, Llonín, Tito Bustillo, La Lloseta, El Castillo, La Pasiega and La Garma, among others, have an early phase of painting with characteristic ideomorphs (rows and clouds of dots, bars, paired lines, tracery signs, spots). Next to these, there are a few anthropomorphic figures (outlines, negative and positive hands, vulvae, ...) and zoomorphs (mainly profiles of bovids and equids). These representations underlie the rest of the large panels, which have numerous superimpositions and concentrations of images. In other zones in other caves, we find this same theme in an isolated manner, systematically associated with the support and with speleothem formations. Finally, in a few cases the available $^{14}$C (AMS) dates seem to corroborate this interpretation, as at El Calero II, where the lower extremity of a black zoomorph, dated to approximately 25,200 BP, is associated with signs present on the speleothems (tracery lines, paired lines and rows of dots), which are analogous to those known at Tito Bustillo, La Lloseta and Cudón.
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