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PLEISTOCENE ART OF THE WORLD

Short articles



COSMOPOLITAN AND LOCAL ASPECTS OF EPIGRAVETTIAN ART IN ITALY

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In Italy, figurative art in the varied cultural context of the Epigravettian (19 000-10 000 BP) is characterized by complex systems of expression. There is a strong regional component in the iconography, iconology and technical solutions of this period, as well as a large-scale system of communication that encompasses technologically and typologically different manifestations. The Epigravettian province developed its own original language, while at the same time remaining receptive to outside influences. It is from this dual perspective that we should consider the transformations of artistic productions, from both a formal and conceptual point of view.

There are four main elements of Epigravettian art in Italy:

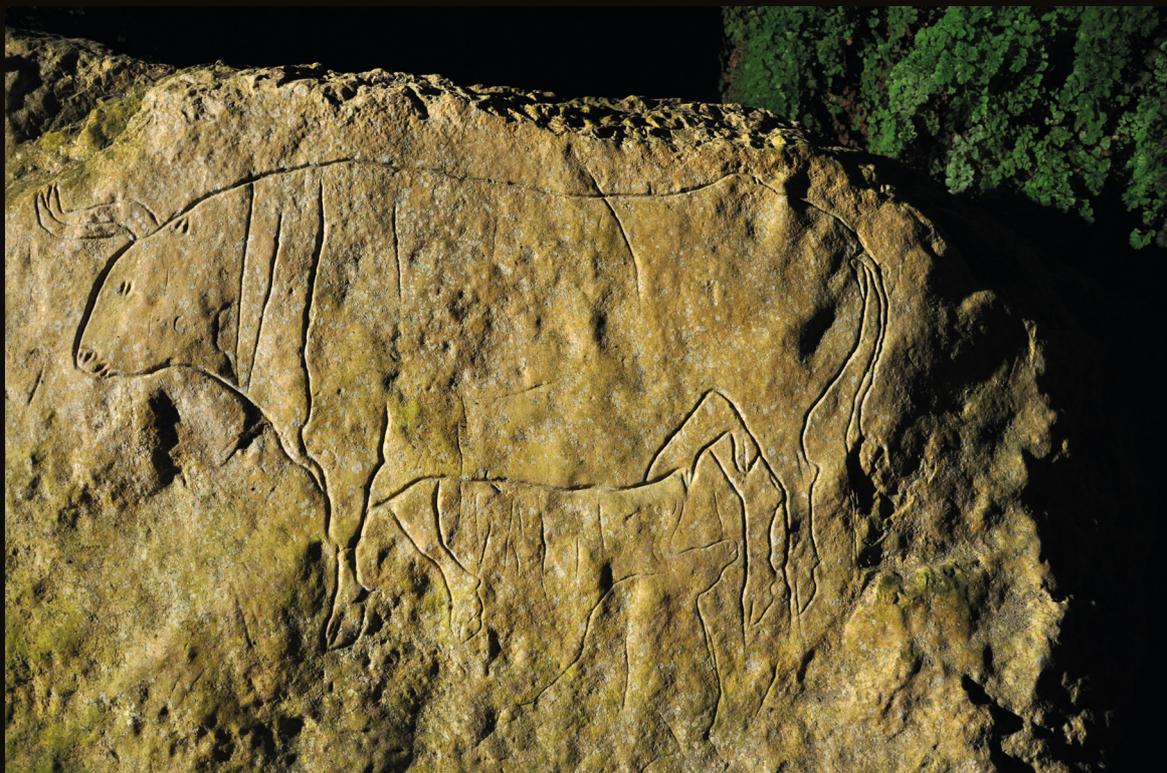
1. a diffusion with a Franco-Cantabrian influence on the Italian peninsula, which through time became limited to the central and northern zone of Italy, until the end of the Tardiglacial period;
2. an essential naturalistic style (“Mediterranean” in the sense of Graziosi), with zoomorphic themes and less often anthropomorphic ones, which is found on peninsulas and in inland zones. Its language is autonomous, codified and gradually become more rigid. It was enriched by geometric-linear forms starting in the second phase of the Final Epigravettian;
3. a schematic style, which lead to the representation of volumes using bidimensional schematic lines;
4. a specialized production with a western origin: Azilian pebbles.

The scarce evidence currently available indicates that the figurative production of the Early Epigravettian is characterized by the presence of a single model: the Franco-Cantabrian model.

In the final Epigravettian, the figurative system becomes much more complex. In the second phase, around 12 000 BP, there is a break with the Franco-Cantabrian inspired western tradition, as well as with the first “Mediterranean” style, as is shown by the original productions and a non-naturalistic vision of reality. During this time, the tendency toward abstraction and symbolism becomes stronger, in relationship with funerary rituals. In these contexts, the grave goods are pared down, though they still maintain a strong symbolic meaning.

This panorama appears to be relatively homogeneous and unitary. If we consider the lithic assemblages, the situation changes and the regional specificities are more apparent. This reveals the existence of a visual culture arising from a shared symbolic behavior, which is not strictly tied to the technical systems. The thematic and formal analogies, concerning the graphic expressions, can be explained only by the diffusion of a transcultural ideology imparted by a shared cultural substratum that groups together different European techno-complexes (Epigravettian, Azilian, Federmesser groups, Tarnow, ...). This homogeneity constitutes a true Epigravettian cultural province that extends from the French Provence region to the Balkans, and on to the Black Sea.





Engraving of a *Bos primigenius* in the Abri Romito (Calabria).



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