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PLEISTOCENE ART OF THE WORLD

Short articles



FROM PLEISTOCENE ART TO THE WORSHIP OF MOUNTAINS IN CHINA:

Methodological Tools for Mimesis in Paleart

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In 2009, Bednarik described the Makapansgat jasperite cobble, a rock shaped as a human face dating to 2.5 to 3 million years ago. Tsao *et al.* demonstrated that face perception is a crucial skill to primates, humans and macaque monkeys. Applying two methodological tools of the Entorno Archaeology – *Psychological* and *Geographical* Entorno – may allow to understand the process that probably led Pleistocene humans to sacralize rocks – *Mimetoliths* – and objects – *Mimetomorphs* – with natural forms that resembled animals or human beings, in increasing scale, from small rocks to mountain ranges, in the early Chinese culture, where we have found that three mythological characters: Pan-Gu, Fu-Xi and Shen-Nong, probably were sacralized mountains.

Mimesis, by the psychological phenomena of Pareidolia, Apophenia and Hierophany (The PAH triad), might explain the many instances when humans between Pleistocene and early Chinese culture attributed religious significance or extraordinary connections to ordinary imagery and subjects. On the other hand, Mimetoliths and Mimetomorphs might contribute to explain the origins of Palaeoart, animism and religion.

The question: “What does it look like?”, regarding an object or event is currently oriented towards searching for mimetoliths and mimetomorphs in archaeological contexts, changing the way to see and therefore the validation criteria.

Psychological phenomena presented

Pareidolia (related to the Rorschach test): involving a vague and random stimulus perceived as significant.

Apophenia: Describe the experience of seeing patterns or connections in random or meaningless data.

Hierophany: The perception of a manifestation of the sacred.

PAH Triad: Pareidolia-Apophenia-Hierophany working simultaneously is part of the unconscious mechanisms inherent to human beings, early present in the development of human conscience. It shows how celestial elements, features in the landscape and others can be transformed into gods.

New kinds of concepts described

Mimetolith (M): A natural topographic feature or rock whose natural shape resembles something else – human, animal, plan.

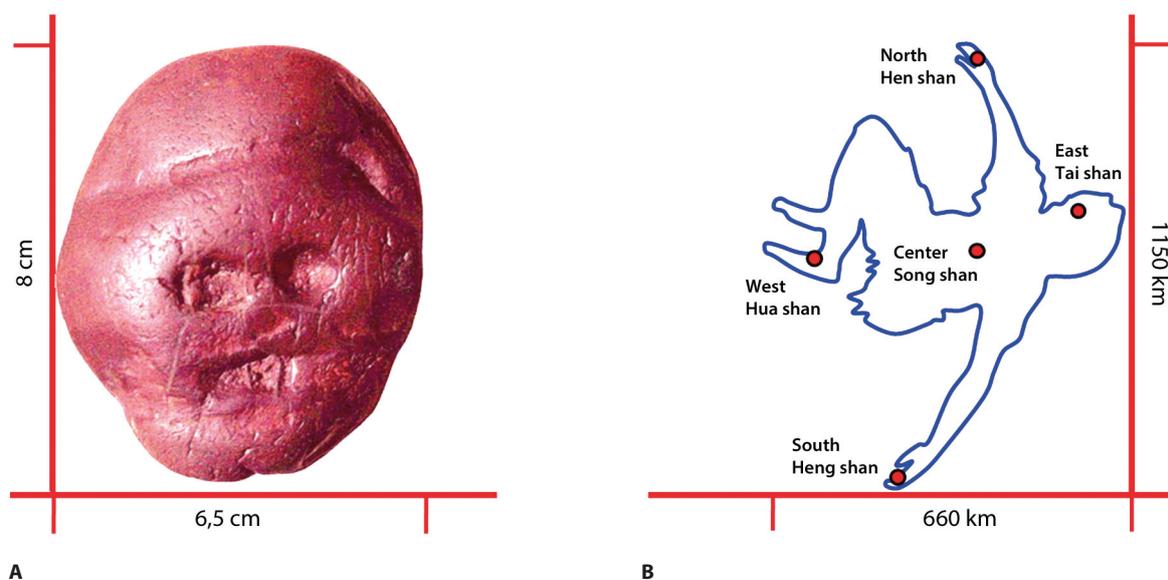
Mimetomorph (Mm): Any kind of material (bones, wood, mud, others) with a natural shape that resembled animals, human beings or others.

Entorno's archaeology: cultural/geographical/climatic/astronomical/psychological/atmospherical/biotal phenomena associated to an archaeological site. It provides entrees to link information from ethno-archaeological data in small, medium and large scale.

The paper presents a selection of Mimetoliths and Mimetomorphs sorted by date from 3 million BP to 2 000 BP. Each object represents a period not a specific date:

1. Makapansgat, 3 millions BP;
2. GROß Pampau, 500 000 BP;
3. Bhimbetka (India), 500 000-200 000 BP;
4. Tan-Tan Venus (Morocco), 500 000-300 000 BP;
5. Berekhat Ram, 470 000-230 000 BP;
6. Erfoud (Morocco), 200 000-300 000 BP;
7. Hamburg-Wittenbergen, ca. 200 000 BP;
8. Katonga River basin, Paleolithic.

Three mythological characters, possible sacralized mountains in the formative period of the Chinese culture (5 000 BP): Fu Hsi Shen Nong and Pan Gu, whose body became the five sacred mountains of China after his death. The Makapansgat mimetolith is the earliest evidence of the pareidolia, 3 million years BP. The Pan Gu mimetolith is the largest mimetolith found at present (1 150 km by 660 km) (figure).



Mimetoliths: A) Makapansgat, the smallest. B) Pan Gu, the biggest.

Pareidolia does not depend on the size of the brain. Examples of pareidolia in animals suggest that this process may have started earlier in the development of the brain. The paper presents five examples: ant-mimicking spider, frog, sea urchins, Indo-Malayan octopus, monkeys.

There are no specific studies regarding pareidolia in animals, but a high percentage of animals may use it to recognize their predators, preys, members of their own species or others, as a survival mechanism.

Probably, when early human beings tried to decipher the “language of nature”, thanks to Pareidolia, they read the cosmos as a gigantic Rorschach test that allowed them to see figures in the sky and the land.

Possibly, whoever had this special ability turned into the interpreters of “God’s plans”, with a special knowledge of the sacred and a particular power over the sky, the land and people’s future, likely as the origin of structured religions.

The PAH triad may explain the origin of art and symbols; at some point, natural forms (*mimetoliths* – *mimetomorphs*) might have triggered the shapes created by humans, “transforming the given by nature into the created by man”. Modern aniconic cultures (Islamism, Judaism...) still consider sacred certain symbolic figures, sites, rocks and others, indicating that it is a strong natural tendency with deep roots in psychology.

The PAH triad applied to surveys is a useful tool to explore the cosmos. Three examples show how this method is unconsciously applied in today’s science:

1. Astronomy, cosmic hand (*PSR B1509-58*);
2. Medicine, hummingbird in brain;
3. Ecology, the face of Mother Nature.

The PAH triad offers a conceptual framework that allows to explain the origin of paleoart, its relation with animism and the possible origin of shamanism and religion, based on psychological mechanisms, independent of altered state of consciousness, but maybe favored by them.

PAH appears to be ubiquitous, we have found evidences of this phenomena in different locations around the world, in the five continents and from all periods of history.





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