

An abstract black line drawing on a dark gray background. The drawing depicts a face in profile, looking upwards and to the right. The lines are expressive and sketchy, capturing the essence of the face and neck. The text is overlaid on the central part of the face.

LIMITLESS ART

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VERDE



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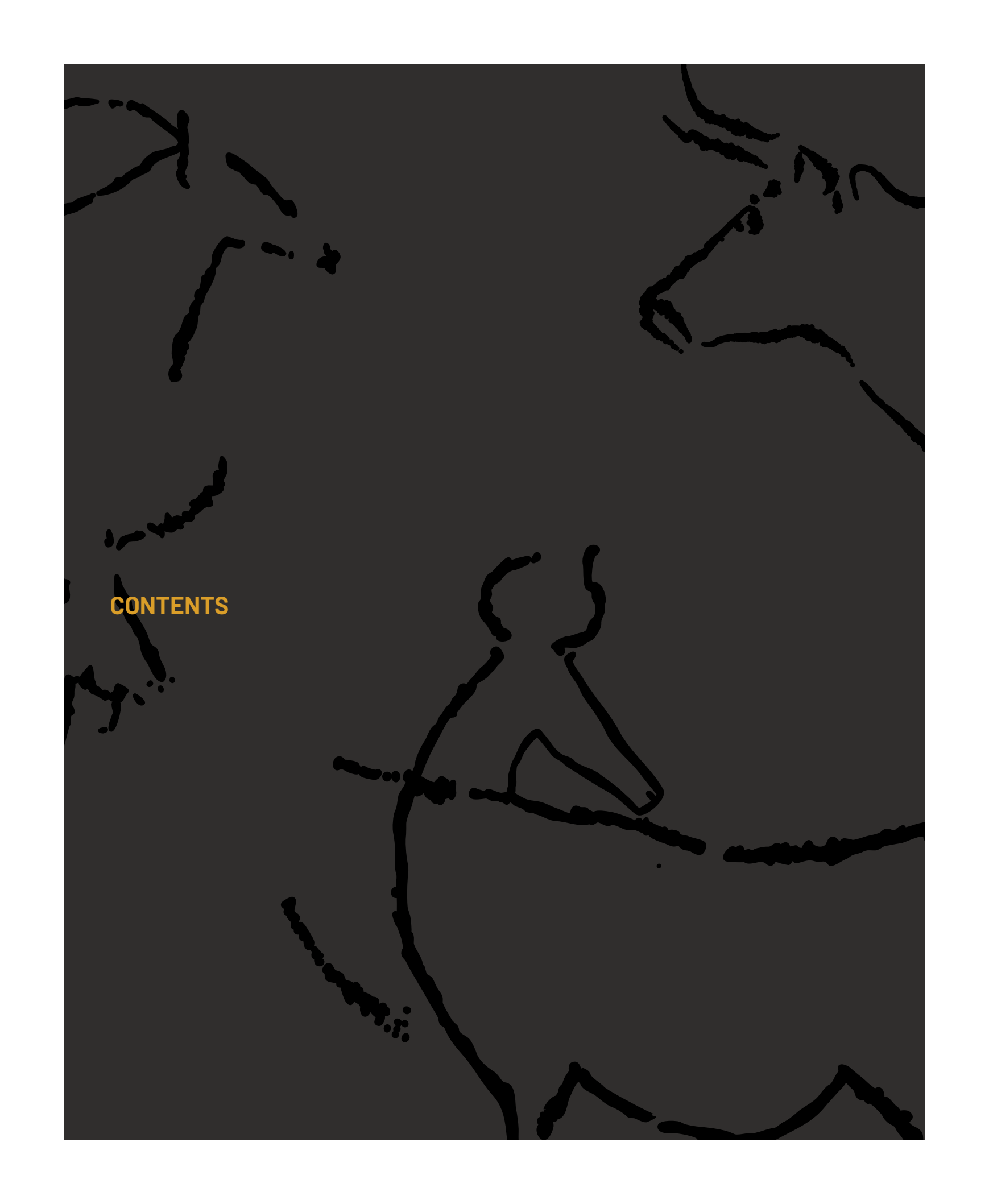
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In memoriam a Bruno Navarro



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An abstract black line drawing on a dark gray background. The drawing consists of several thick, irregular, and somewhat jagged black lines. These lines form a complex, organic shape that resembles a stylized figure or a large, irregular letter. The lines are drawn with a brush-like texture, showing some variation in thickness and a slightly grainy appearance. The overall composition is minimalist and expressive.

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**THE PALAEOLITHIC ART OF THE DOURO BASIN
IN THE CONTEXT OF SOUTHWESTERN EUROPE**

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Images created during the Upper Palaeolithic were first discovered in 1827 or 1828 by P. Tournal during the excavations at the Bize cave complex, as reported by Lartet in an article in 1861. They consisted of a 'series of lines with angular shapes and arranged in the form of chevrons' engraved on a fragment of reindeer antler, now lost.

This and other pieces that appeared were initially attributed to the Celts, but Lartet, in the above-mentioned article—in which he reveals the first pieces with zoomorphic figurations—already maintains that they would be contemporary with animals that no longer lived in the region during Celtic times, such as reindeer or bison, or that were already extinct, such as mammoths or woolly rhinoceri, the bones of which appeared nearby. These pieces would have thus been created by hunters and fishermen who lived in Europe during the 'Stone Age'.

The appearance of various pieces in stratigraphic context, as well as the idea that they would have been produced during one of the many moments when their creators were idle in between subsistence activities, resulted in their age being accepted relatively easily. The pieces were seen as craftwork, comparable to that created by the 'simplest Swiss shepherds of the Oberland,' as Lartet and Christy put it in 1864.

But it was one thing to accept that these people, considered to be primitive, made 'craftwork', and quite another to admit that they were able to produce the images on the ceiling of Altamira, whose characteristics were more clearly related to classic painting. In fact, in 1880, when M. Sanz de Sautuola published the paintings from the ceiling of Altamira, which had been discovered by his daughter María a year earlier, it sparked off a debate over their authenticity that lasted even beyond his death in 1888. The series of discoveries of other decorated caves, especially in France – some of them closed since the Palaeolithic or with images covered by Palaeolithic archaeological layers – led to the acceptance of the age of these images, with 1902 being considered the year



Fig. 1. Location of the sites mentioned in the chapter.

when the controversy subsided. And it was in that same year that E. Cartailhac – one of the Altamira sceptics – published his *Mea culpa* in the pages of the journal *L'Anthropologie*, and a visit to the caves in La Mouthe, Combarelles and Font-Gaume, in the context of the Congress of the French Association for the Advancement of Sciences, led to the collective recognition by the French prehistorians of the age of these images.

In the meantime, discoveries continued to be made, especially in France and Spain. A summary book published by Lorblanchet in 1995 mentions over 300 caves and rock shelters with Palaeolithic art. The same year, the Portuguese government decided to stop the construction of a dam and opted to protect an important group of sites with Palaeolithic art in the Côa Valley. These sites did not correspond, however, to caves or rock shelters, but to concentrations of open-air panels, very similar to others discovered some years before in Siega Verde, on the banks of the River Águeda, another tributary of the Douro parallel to the Côa.

The fact that these engravings were found on the open-air and that important economic interests were at stake resulted in an intense debate that went beyond the scientific field and that, in some aspects, recalled what had happened regarding Altamira. This debate culminated in 1998 with the classification by UNESCO of the region's rock art as World Heritage (extended to Siega Verde in 2010) and a veritable paradigm shift in our understanding of Palaeolithic art. In fact, the number of panels found in the region (then around 100, now around 600) confirmed that open-air images were also being produced during the Upper Palaeolithic, as was already being suggested by the sequence of discoveries that had been taking place since the early 1980s, especially in the Douro Valley. One of the horses at San Isidro Hill in Domingo García had even been published in the '70s by the artillery commander Francisco Gozalo, having been compared to Palaeolithic figures from the Cantabrian region, but it would take new discoveries of this kind to accept their age. Today, there are around 100 known sites with open-air Palaeolithic art in the Iberian Peninsula, 79 of which are found in the Douro basin, 60 of which are concentrated in the Côa Valley and eight around Domingo García.

THE SUBJECT MATTER OF PALAEOLITHIC ART

The iconography of Palaeolithic art has little variability and is very uniform at European level, something that has been underscored by numerous authors, particularly the statistical analyses done by G. Sauvet.

The subjects are divided into two large groups, figurative and non-figurative.

FIGURATIVE SUBJECTS

The figurative subject matter of Palaeolithic art is essentially animal, with no plant representations having been found up to now. Human representations form a very small percentage (around 4% overall). However, within the animal subjects, there is not a high diversity of zoomorphs represented either, mammals making up the majority of these animals, while insects are absent, for example (the only exception is a representation of a grasshopper on a bone in Enlène Cave in France). In general, the animal representations in Palaeolithic art are sufficiently explicit so as to allow the species to be recognised, and, many times, the animal's ethology as well. Distinctions at sex level differ from one species to another, however, and are exceptional in the case of horses and bison, although they are very pronounced in the case of red deer.



Fig. 2. Horse of the “Camarin” in the Candamo Cave (Asturias)(Photograph by Olivia Rivero).

The most-represented subject in Palaeolithic art is the horse (around 30% of the overall total). The horses represented in Palaeolithic art are comparable to *Equus ferus przewalskii*, a modern steppe horse species characterised by being small and robust, having a short mane and changes of shades in the colour of the fur on its legs and withers, and by the characteristic M-shaped ventral sectioning that is frequently represented in Palaeolithic art. Horses also have the particular distinction of being the most ubiquitous animal in Palaeolithic art, with representations being found in all regions and periods, setting them apart from other species and making them the quintessential animal subject of Palaeolithic art.

The bison (*Bison priscus* and *Bison bonasus*) is the second most-represented animal, if we consider the overall totals (around 20%). In this case, though, unlike the horse, there are significant differences between the regions and periods, bison being completely absent across the Iberian Peninsula except in Cantabria, a region where it is the most common subject from the Middle Magdalenian (Altamira, for example), but not during earlier periods. It appears in the Douro Valley in residual numbers. The bison is also a subject that is very present in the parietal art of the Cantabrian Magdalenian but practically absent in the portable art of this region. Representations of bison are heavily deter-

mined by the regions and periods in which they appear, as well as by the media on which they are represented, presenting conventions that can be included within the so-called morphotypes, i.e., sets of formal characteristics that make it possible to differentiate some kinds of representations from others within the same subject.

The third most-represented animal subject in Palaeolithic art is the red deer (*Cervus elaphus*). We also find particularities in this case. Here, it is mainly the distinction at sexual level that we mentioned above. We thus find differences in the presence of representations of male or female red deer depending on the region; female red deer are more prominent in the Cantabrian region before the Middle Magdalenian, while male red deer are present in a greater number in the open-air art of the inland Iberian Peninsula in its early phases, for example.

The ibex is another animal that appears more frequently in Palaeolithic art, in both the parietal and portable versions, being present in all regions and periods, similarly to what we saw for the horse, but in a lower proportion. The ibex species represented in Palaeolithic art are *Capra pyrenaica* and *Capra alpina*.

The aurochs (*Bos taurus primigenius*), the ancestor of modern bull, is also found in a similar percentage if we consider the overall totals, although in this case, it presents more regional and chronological variety, being much more present in the inland Iberian Peninsula than along the Cantabrian coast. In the Côa Valley, the number of aurochs even surpasses that of horses.

The mammoth represents a relatively high percentage of representations (around 7% of the overall total), although it is one of the animals most marked chronologically and geographically, being practically limited to early periods and French Palaeolithic art. In the Iberian Peninsula, on the other hand, there are some examples of representations of mammoths in the Cantabrian region but not in the inland area.

Other species are much less numerous and, in some cases, marginal. These include, for example, the reindeer, rhinoceros, megaloceros, bear, carnivores and felines. These species are represented in variable percentages, without reaching 4% of the overall total, and are particularly scarce in the Palaeolithic art of the Iberian Peninsula, as opposed to what is seen in France, where they make up the majority in early periods (for example, in Chauvet Cave in Ardèche).

Other animals present in Palaeolithic art in a marginal but no less significant way are birds and fish. In some cases, the representations feature enough details to enable them to be identified at species level; this is the case, for example, of some representations of cetaceans or owls (Trois-Frères, Chauvet and Fraga do Gato in the Douro basin). However, even considering their overall total, they make up a small percentage (around 2% of Palaeolithic iconography).

One subject that warrants individual attention are the human representations. These are divided into anthropomorphic figures without any indication of sex, male representations and female representations. The human figurations can represent body parts on their own, the head or sexual organs, and hands can also be included in this group. Complete figures are also represented, although most of the human figures are not very realistic and include animalised parts.

There are also differences in the human representations chronologically speaking, as partial female figurations (mainly vulvas) are characteristic of the early phases of the Upper Palaeolithic, while the female sculptures known as 'Venuses' typical of the Gravettian are absent in the Iberian Peninsula. Male representations with sexual attributes are more abundant starting from the Magdalenian. Some specific types of human representations, such as the so-called masks, are also exclusive to this period.

Finally, among the exceptional subjects of Palaeolithic art, we must mention the imaginary animals and the undetermined representations, which form a very large group, due in some cases to the difficulties in reading Palaeolithic art, and, in others, to the fact that some representations present mixed features (human/animal) or (animal/animal), making it difficult to attribute them with precision.

NON-FIGURATIVE SUBJECTS

This group includes a large number of motifs and figurations that are very different from one another and difficult to classify. Considered overall, non-figurative motifs make up the majority of Palaeolithic art. However, within the non-figurative subjects, structured signs form only part of the record, while most of these representations are marks known as 'parasites' since they do not make up any apparent motif and are very numerous both in parietal art as well as in some portable art media (plaquettes, mainly).

Throughout the research in Palaeolithic art, various researchers have tried to establish an order for the signs based on different criteria. The first Palaeolithic art researchers, among whom H. Breuil stands out, suggested that the signs represented material objects (cages, traps, huts, etc.), in line with the interpretation of Palaeolithic art as a propitiatory magic for hunting. More recently, some researchers, such as B. and G. Delluc, have suggested that the signs are the expression of imprints, tracks and footprints of animals. A. Leroi-Gourhan proposed a classification according to the assumed meaning (male or female), based on the structuralist principles that guide his work. G. Sauvet, on the other hand, suggested a shape-based classification, based on these same structuralist approaches. In the Iberian Peninsula, J.L. Sanchidrián also suggested a shape-based cataloguing of the signs in Andalusia.

As we have seen for some animal species, the signs also show certain regional and chronological particularities, turning them into a marker for certain periods. They also form evidence of the long-distance relationships between different regions during the Upper Palaeolithic, when we find the same kind of sign represented in sites that are far away from one another. This is the case, for example, of the claviform signs characteristic of the Middle Magdalenian, which are represented in both the Cantabrian region and the Pyrenees. In Cantabria, quadrangular signs with internal divisions and Cantabrian claviforms are characteristic. In the sites in the south of the Iberian Peninsula, for example, we find a type of sign exclusive to this region, which has been called 'turtle-shaped'.

PALAEOLITHIC ART TECHNIQUES

Palaeolithic art techniques can be divided into three large groups: additive techniques, subtractive techniques and sculptural techniques.

ADDITIVE TECHNIQUES

This group includes the different pictorial techniques (drawing and painting) that involve adding a colouring matter to create an artistic motif. It is very common in parietal art yet exceptional in the case of portable art, probably due to conservation issues. We only find examples of painted plaquettes in a significant number in the case of El Parpalló (Valencia). In the inland of the Iberian Peninsula, there are only four known pieces at the Fariseu site (Côa Valley), one of which has an anthropomorph.

The pigments in Palaeolithic art have a relatively limited range of shades. There is black, obtained from either burned bones, charcoal or manganese; red, obtained from iron oxide or haematites; and yellow, also produced by an iron oxide, goethite. Between these, we also find a range that can go from violet to brown. Exceptionally, we find the use of clay as a pigment (La Baume Latronne, Ardèche), and there is a single representation in white: a painted hand from Gargas Cave (French Pyrenees).

Painting in Palaeolithic art is generally monochrome, although there are examples of bichromy, where one colour has been used for the outline and another to fill in the figure, and polychromy, where three or more colours are involved in the representation.

The colourants used in Palaeolithic art are obtained by using a pigment applied directly, as is the case of charcoal or ochre or manganese crayons, or a colourant that is grinded and diluted in a solution including water and maybe other elements that would act as a binder, although our knowledge of the use of binders during the Palaeolithic is still very partial as the possible binders of organic origin are not preserved.

The medium with which the pigment was applied also creates differences between the representations. For additive techniques, the main application techniques in Palaeolithic art are finger-painted lines, meaning the diluted pigment is applied using a finger either to delineate the outline or the entire figure, and lines painted using charcoal or ochre or manganese crayons, where this is used as a means of applying the pigment, generally only for the outline. The use of a brush or swab to apply the colourant is marginal in the Palaeolithic.

Other means of applying the pigment are by blowing, using the stencil or airbrushed technique; the colouring matter, in this case diluted, is applied by blowing with the mouth or using tubes that project the pigment onto the medium using the stencil technique.



Fig. 3. Castillo Cave. Quadrilateral signs.
(Regional Government of Cantabria. MUPAC.
Photograph by Pedro Saura)

Finally, the way in which the pigment is applied also creates differences. Thus, we can identify the linear outlines, dotted outlines (when this outline is formed by a series of dots), totally flat painting (where the pigment only fills part of the figure), the partial flat painting (if the pigment only covers half of it), as well as a *sfumato*-like style, where some of the pigment extends from an initial well-defined outline towards the inside of the figure, gradually becoming softer and fainter.

SUBTRACTIVE TECHNIQUES

This includes all the techniques that involve removing the medium material to create a motif. It mostly refers to engraving, within which there is a great deal of variability depending on the tool and medium, as well as the movement used. Engraving is the most-documented technique in portable art, and it is also very present in parietal art, especially in the open air, where the representations created using other techniques are marginal.

Engraving can be divided into three large groups according to the tool used for it. Thus, the use of a pointed tool is considered incised engraving, while when a finger is used on a soft medium this is finger tracing. Pecking and abrasion are done using a tool with a sharp and sturdy point, such as, for example, the quartzite picks found at the Olga Grande 4 site in the Côa Valley.

Incised engraving, done using a burin or a blade on a support, can show significant variations depending on the number of passes used to deepen the groove, as well as depending on the active part of the tool and the movement used; we thus find profiles in a V, in a W and flat profiles, and the outlines of the figures can be single or multiple depending on whether the passes of the tool deepen a single groove or not.

Finger fluting is used when the medium is soft (generally clay or moon-milk, a carbonate precipitate from limestone), and is absent in portable art.

Pecking is done by percussion, either direct or indirect. There is no record to date of pecking inside cavities, as for now it is only documented in open-air art and, exceptionally, in La Griega Cave. Abrasion is the polishing of the previously pecked line. Experiments in the Côa Valley show that it can be done with the same pick used to create the pecked line.

Scraping is also present in the Côa Valley, resulting in the definition of the motifs through the very superficial removal of the surface by means of a friction action, using the side of a lithic piece.

SCULPTURAL TECHNIQUES

This group includes all the techniques that involve the representation of volume and the third dimension. These are relief, differential relief and contour *découpé* (outline cut out).

Relief is the result of a combination of different subtractive techniques: engraving, pecking and abrasion, used to lower the surface outside the figure and make it even to thus obtain a representation with volume. There are different degrees of relief depending on how much the motif stands out from the medium, but they all consist of the same technical procedures and are present in both parietal as well as portable art, although they are much less numerous in the former.

In the Côa Valley, the use of relief was recently identified in the definition of the head of a male ibex on panel 22 of Quinta da Barca.

Differential relief is another technique to represent the third dimension that was defined by H. Delporte. This technique consists of creating different visual planes in one figure or a group of figures by lowering the outer outline of each of the parts involved. This technique involves first delineating the part of the figure or the figure closest to the viewer, lowering its outline, and then successively creating the different visual planes the representation will consist of. *Contour découpé* or free-standing sculpture is very rare in parietal art, and no representation with these characteristics is documented in the Iberian Peninsula as it is only present in the French Pyrenees on clay (Montespan, Tuc d'Audoubert). Sculptures are present in greater numbers in portable art, both on hard animal materials as well as on stone.

THE MEDIA

As has been indicated, the images created during the Upper Palaeolithic appear on different media, which may be mobile or fixed. The art produced on media of the first type is described as portable, while that appearing on media of the second type is rock and/or parietal art.

Portable art can appear on utilitarian objects (spears, harpoons, etc.) and on objects whose functionality is unknown to us (for example, the so-called perforated batons) or that have nothing to do with more immediate subsistence activities (small sculptures, panels and plaques, perforated discs, etc.). These types of pieces can be mineral in nature (limestone, schist, ochre, etc.) or organic (bones, antlers, ivory), where the former survive the erosive processes of most soils more easily than the latter. Therefore, while different examples of pieces created on organic substrates can be found in limestone areas such as the Cantabrian region, in the Douro basin, which has more acidic soils, no object of this kind is known. Only the perforated baton (since disappeared) from Caballón Cave, located in the Ebro basin but very close to the Northern Sub-plateau, is worth mentioning. There are, however, several examples of portable art on stone (exclusively schist in the inland of the Iberian Peninsula), such as the plaques from Villalba, La Dehesa and Martoiros or the large ensembles from Peña de Estebanvela, Medal and Fariseu. Outside the Douro basin but still within the area where the sources of raw material identified in the Côa Valley are distributed, it is worth mentioning the findings from Buraca Grande, Caldeirão, Palha and Vau.

As regards fixed media, Palaeolithic art may appear inside cavities, whether deep caves or rock shelters, or in the open air. The former is traditionally called parietal and the latter rock art, although the difference between the art located at the entrance of some caves and rock shelters and that found in the open air is quite debatable. The difference between one art illuminated by light and another created in darkness and a third executed in the shade is less debatable.

The only cave in the Douro basin where there is definite evidence of Palaeolithic art is La Griega, which we will discuss below. Less definite is this attribution



Fig. 4. Types of media portable art



Fig. 5. Main composition on panel 1 at Canada do Inferno, the first panel identified as Palaeolithic art in the Côa Valley by Nélson Rebanda in late 1991 (Photograph by André T. Santos; Côa Parque Foundation).

to the head of a horse (or bear) at El Portalón in Cueva Mayor in Atapuerca, whose authenticity has been questioned ever since it was discovered. Outside the Douro basin, but on its way to the Ebro basin, the graphic ensemble of Penches and the earliest phase of Ojo Guareña is worth highlighting.

The only graphic ensemble in the region arranged in a shaded area is panel 7 at Faia, located within an existing rock shelter at this site in the granitic sector of the Côa Valley. Other panels, such as 16 at Vale de José Esteves, 6 at Faia or Fraga do Gato – the latter already located in the schists of Ribeira do Mosteiro, a tributary of the right bank of the Douro – are relatively protected by small overhang, but the

images are perfectly lit by natural light. The latter two are also the only ones in the region where the use of pigment is attested.

However, the majority of the Palaeolithic art in the Douro basin is found in the open air, under schist supports of various types. A further 59 sites, besides the above-mentioned Faia, are known in the Côa Valley alone, with around 600 panels. The following are located in the Águeda Valley: Siega Verde, with around 100 panels recorded; Arroyo de las Almas, with 5 panels; and Redor do Porco, with one panel. The Foz Tua site is found in the Tua Valley, very close to its confluence with the Douro. Along the Vale do Sabor, two panels can be identified at the Pousadouro site, three in Sampaio, one in Fraga Escrevida and another in Ribeira da Sardinha. The Mazouco site is located at the confluence of the Albargueira stream with the Douro, and at the Tormes site, there are three panels at Puente de la Salud. Around the town of Domingo García, there are eight sites, where at least 41 panels are distributed, while those at Santa María la Real de Nieva are not inventoried. Outside the Douro basin, but still within the distribution area of the sources of raw materials that are found in the Côa Valley, it is also worth mentioning the two sites at Zêzere—Poço do Caldeirão and Costalta—and the four Tagus Valley sites—Foz do Ocreza, Foz do Ribeiro das Taliscas, Fratel and Gardete.

LA GRIEGA CAVE IN THE CONTEXT OF PALAEOLITHIC CAVE ART

Palaeolithic cave art is geographically confined almost in its majority to the north of the Iberian Peninsula and France, with a much smaller number of decorated cavities outside this area in Western Europe, in Italy, Portugal and England. During the 20th century, the French-Cantabrian core formed the cen-

tre of the research on Palaeolithic graphic activity, although by now a considerable number of decorated cavities have appeared outside the classical region, for example, in the inland of the peninsula, Andalusia and the Mediterranean coast.

In both the Cantabrian region as well as in France, the cavities were a place for habitation and a medium for parietal art during the entire Upper Palaeolithic, between 42,000 and 11,700 years ago. The decoration of the cavities represented a challenge that the men and women of the Upper Palaeolithic were able to adapt to, overcoming difficulties of access (creating scaffolding in some cases, such as at Lascaux, or decorating areas with very difficult accessibility, such as in Aitzbitarte IV), and developing complex strategies that included different lighting systems. The techniques used by Palaeolithic artists were also able to adapt to the different kinds of media that existed in the cavities: clay, moonmilk, limestone, calcite, and ceilings, walls and floors were used as canvases, responding to different motivations that we are not familiar with today.

However, today, there is no doubt about the intentionality of Palaeolithic art, whose execution required learning on the part of the artists and predetermination in the choice of media, subjects, techniques, composition, access, lighting and visibility that came into play when creating the decorations of the Palaeolithic cavities.

There is great variability in types of decorated cavities, from large sanctuaries with huge rooms such as the case of Niaux in the French Pyrenees, to narrow spaces where barely one person can fit in, such as the Arco B Cave in Cantabria. Some of the cavities with Palaeolithic art also have archaeological sites, which tells us that they might have been used as a place for habitation at the time when their walls were decorated (e.g., La Garma in Cantabria). Nevertheless, it is sometimes difficult to prove that the art and the occupation archaeological layers site are contemporary with one another. In other cases, there is no evidence of occupation and the art seems to be the only activity that was carried out at those sites (the case, for example, of cavities such as Niaux and Trois-Frères in the Pyrenees, or La Peña de Candamo Cave in Asturias).

Besides this diversity, there are chronological variations in the decoration of the underground spaces. Some sites probably acted as an aggregation site for generations, which has led to the presence of decorations with different chronologies throughout the entire Upper Palaeolithic, sometimes even decorating the same panel across thousands of years, such as in Altamira, El Castillo, Tito Bustillo, Llonín or the above-mentioned La Peña de Candamo Cave.

Fig. 6. Altamira Cave, female red deer (Altamira Museum, photograph by Pedro Saura)



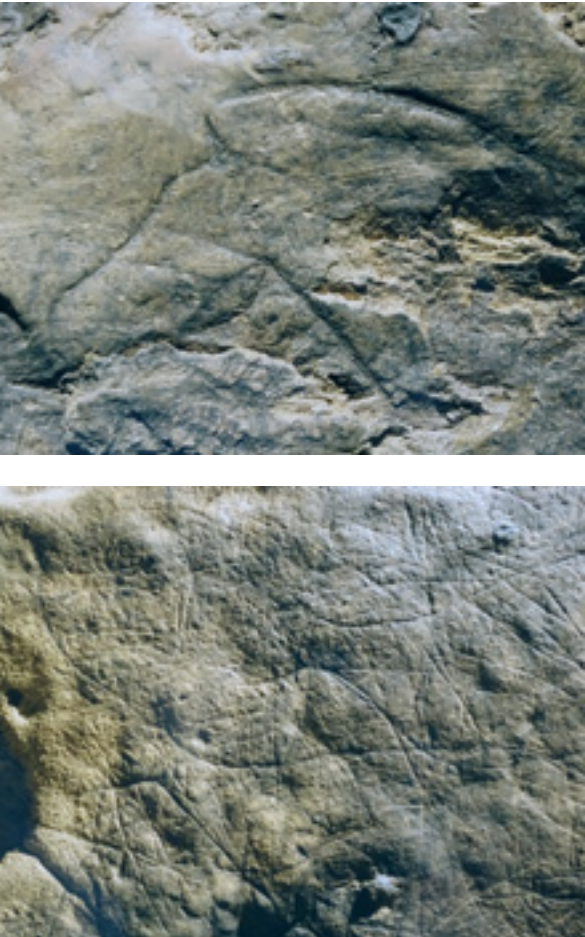


Fig. 7. La Griega Cave Horse's head with mane.
(Photograph by Luciano Municio)

This phenomenon of reusing cavities in some cases goes beyond the Upper Palaeolithic, such as in La Griega Cave (Segovia), where, in the same cave, we find Palaeolithic and post-Palaeolithic parietal art, Roman epigraphs and graffiti from the modern age up to today.

This archaeological site constitutes one of the few examples of Palaeolithic cave art on the Northern Plateau, together with the Penches site in Burgos. La Griega is a complex karst cavity where mainly horses have been represented, although aurochs and red deer also appear, whose chronology can be attributed to the early phase of the Upper Palaeolithic, probably Gravettian/Solutrean (25,000-20,000 years ago) given the characteristics of the figures, in particular the conventions for representing the horses, with duck-billed snouts and linear tiered manes. The figures are spread throughout the cavity, concentrated at times in some sectors and on some panels, and they are all engraved, in some cases using stone utensils, while in others the media were soft enough to use finger fluting on the clay.

The characteristics of the horse representations at La Griega have been compared with sites in the inland of the Iberian Peninsula and Mediterranean coast, such as El Parpalló in Valencia, Doña Trinidad de Ardales in Málaga and Moro Cave in Cádiz, while the subject matter represented allows us to correlate it typologically with the Phase 2 engravings of the Côa Valley sites.

ART: WHY AND FOR WHAT?

The interpretation of Palaeolithic art is conditioned by the quantity and diversity of the findings that are known and the dominant ideology of the society in which the researcher was trained, among other aspects that are more difficult to pinpoint. In this sense, the crudest example is the debate over the authenticity of the Altamira ceiling, which, as has already been pointed out, was very much conditioned by the belief that the human communities of the Upper Palaeolithic lacked the necessary sophistication to produce these kinds of works.

This belief, however, did not prevent people from accepting that those communities could practise craftsmanship in their free time, which, on the other hand, also coincided with the widely held idea of a supposed and idyllic 'golden age' of harmony between humans and (the rest of) nature. This longing for a primeval epoch with idyllic characteristics is not far from the bucolic environments 'sung' by the late classicists/early European romantics. This explanation of 'art for art's sake', whose most famous promoters were Lartet and Christy, explained these kinds of discoveries very parsimoniously, taking into account the cultural setting of the time.

But the type of discoveries changed. Later, in addition to the images created on portable media, many others were discovered inside different cavities, sometimes at a considerable distance from the entrances, with no natural light and that were dangerous to access. The number of these kinds of sites is so noteworthy that Palaeolithic parietal art has been considered, since it was first discovered and during a good part of the history of the discipline, as cave art. This identification of this activity and the type of site where it was practised strongly

influenced the various interpretations that arose around at an early stage of research regarding its magical and religious nature, associated with the darkness of the cave, and the celebration of propitiatory rites, or, later, the idea of the Palaeolithic sanctuary.

In fact, the acceptance of the age of these images coincides, in general, with the spread of the first ethnographic reports that demonstrated that other communities considered to be 'primitive' had, ultimately, an intense religious and ritual life, which encouraged the association of these images with the magical and religious world, an association that continues to this day, in different forms. To Breuil, for example, these images were produced and used in the context of cults officiated by initiates that would promote fertility, success in hunting or the destruction of dangerous animals. The works by Laming-Emperaire and Leroi-Gourhan were particularly important because they showed that the graphic ensembles present at these sites were not the result of a mere accumulation of figures over the millennia, but rather there was an underlying spatial organisation in them. To Leroi-Gourhan, the same organisation was even extended to all the sites. If today it is difficult to accept that the same graphic discourse may be found in all the places, it is undeniable that the graphic ensembles of these sites are not the result of an accumulation at the mercy of chance and that they follow very specific rules. But it was not these new approaches that took Palaeolithic art out of the realm of the sacred. To Leroi-Gourhan, for example, Palaeolithic art was the reflection of a mythography based on the male/female binomial. The association of these images with the world of the sacred was even reinforced with the 'shamanic hypothesis', whose impact on rock art studies, regardless of period and geography, was huge.

However, explanations that were not strictly religious in scope continued to arise sporadically. We should also mention the studies by M. Raphael (1945), for example, who, in observing the organisation of the Altamira ceiling, saw those animals as symbols of different clans. In the 1970s, Laming-Emperaire, influenced by Lévi-Strauss' studies, would also explore this path, but her premature death would prevent her from delving deeper into this hypothesis. This author's studies once again positioned Palaeolithic art in a broader social context, taking it from the strictly sacred sphere and enabling other approaches to appear in the social archaeology sphere.

Nevertheless, we have already mentioned the importance that discoveries of open-air Palaeolithic art have been gaining in recent years, representing a paradigm shift in the conception of Palaeolithic graphic activity. Today, our knowledge of Palaeolithic art shows that the graphic activity is unquestionably linked to the media, which frequently form part of the message, whether inside caves, in the open air or on portable media. The correlation at all levels (thematic, technical, formal, etc.) between cave art, open-air art and portable art shows us that they all formed part of the same symbolic world and are different expressions of the same system of beliefs, which probably had many more manifestations that have been lost in the meantime (music, dance, art on wood, skin, etc.).

Studying this means taking into account all the archaeological evidence that reached us from this age. This kind of holistic study, together with the impact of Descola's work in the first decade of this century, allowed, for example,

proposing that the communities of the Upper Palaeolithic that explored the territories where the sources of lithic raw material found in excavations in the Côa Valley are identified, shared an ontology dominated by the 'totemic mode of identification' (as defined by Descola) and that, consequently, they would see themselves and the other elements of the world as members of different groups that complemented one another. Thus, for example, the Côa Valley would be an aggregation site that all these groups would visit periodically, and the other sites with rock art, smaller and with less diverse subject matter, would be exclusive to specific groups.

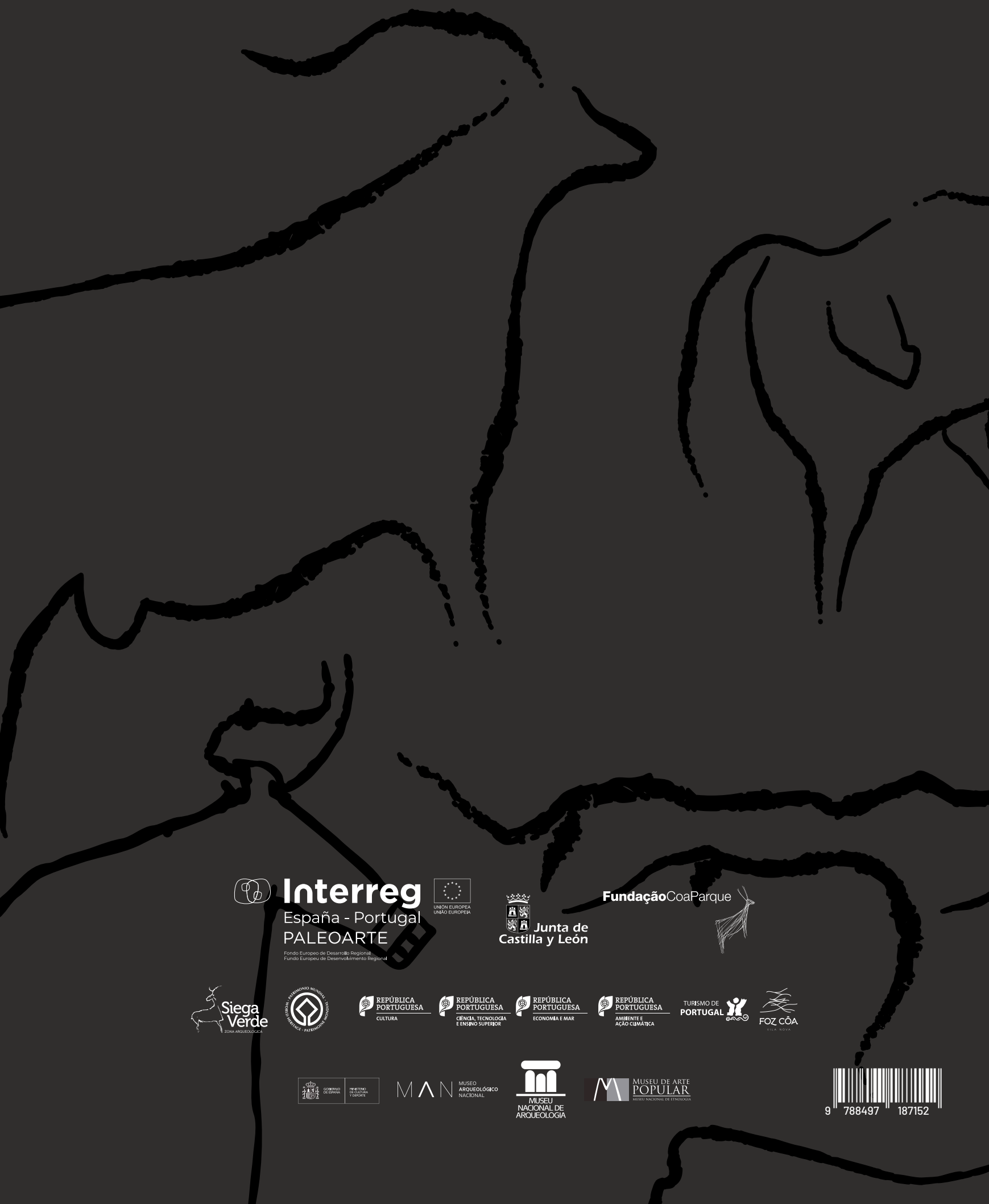
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