



Equine petroglyphs in Europe

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades, numerous examples have been reported of open-air petroglyphs on schists and slates that were attributed to the Upper Palaeolithic period. In the majority of cases, these motifs are said to depict horses. In this paper, a rich concentration of equine petroglyphs on granite surfaces of approximately known ages is taken advantage of to add to understanding the rates of rock surface weathering. The general topic of mistaken Palaeolithic rock art across Eurasia is explored, leading to the appreciation of the difficulties in defining a rock art style. One of these problems is that so many non-Palaeolithic elements have been incorporated in this style that it cannot be regarded as reliable. Another complication arises from the emotive conviction that Pleistocene 'art' is more important than Holocene. That belief probably stems from the notion that the Franco-Cantabrian 'art' substantiates the paradigm of 'civilisation' initially arising in Europe.

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1. Introduction

A review in of the petroglyphs of Siega Verde near Ciudad Rodrigo, far western Spain, showed that the site's corpus of rock art is mostly less than two centuries old, much of it dating from the early to the mid-20th century (Bednarik, 2009a). Previously, the equid and bovid images of the low-grade metamorphics site had been widely attributed to the Upper Palaeolithic. The report also mentioned, very briefly, that similar circumstances apply to thousands of other Iberian petroglyphs at open-air sites. There is in fact a large body of zoomorphic petroglyphs across the Peninsula, consisting almost entirely of horse-like and bull-like petroglyphs on sites of schist, phyllite or slate that have been ascribed to the final Pleistocene. Most recently the first such site has been reported from Germany and assigned to the Auri-gianacian (Welker, 2015).

What these sites all have in common is their lithology, which excludes the possibility of their rock art being Palaeolithic because, if exposed to precipitation, these metamorphic rocks retreat at a rate of 1–10 mm per millennium (Schwegler, 1995; Bednarik, 2007: 61). Therefore after several thousand years any petroglyphs on such supports tend to become erased as the schist hydrates and reverts to mud. This is amply demonstrated by rock inscriptions and dates often found engraved among the rock art, which after a few centuries become practically unreadable. In addition, at some of the sites, such as Siega Verde and many of the nearby Cõa sites in northern Portugal, petroglyphs are subjected to bombardment by suspended loads of coarse angular quartz sand during frequent inundations, which accelerates their erasure.

Zoomorphic petroglyphs, especially of apparently equine figures, occur frequently across Europe, and not only on schist. Granite, like any rock, also retreats with time, but the rate varies widely, from 0.05 mm to 2 mm per millennium, depending on the lithology and environmental conditions. On average it weathers considerably slower than the low-grade metamorphics. To better understand the effects of weathering on petroglyphs, it is particularly helpful to calibrate weathering rates from features of known ages. For instance Bednarik (2009a) utilised engraved dates for this purpose. An alternative approach is to assess petroglyphs on surfaces of known, or at least approximately known, antiquities. The methodology of the present review is to begin with such a study of petroglyphs of known age on granite to provide a context for subsequently considering the generic issue of horse-like and other petroglyphs at open schist sites in Europe that have so often been assigned to the Upper Palaeolithic. The corresponding issues in Asia will also be reviewed, albeit very briefly.

2. The equine petroglyphs of Castro

In Salamanca, western Spain, just 32 km northeast of the Siega Verde site, lies Yecla de Yeltes. About 1 km south of the small town, extending over the plateau of a rocky rise overlooking the Varlaña stream, the Vettones began establishing a fortified Iron Age settlement in the 5th century BCE. The Vettones were probably of Celtic origins and formed a tribal confederacy in the 3rd century BCE that took part in the Second Punic War, eventually becoming absorbed into the Roman Empire through their defeat by Julius Cesar in 61 BCE. During the 3rd century CE, the Romans rebuilt the Castro fortifications and today's remains date mostly from that period. Fur-

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ther repairs and modifications occurred in subsequent centuries until the 5 ha village was finally abandoned late in the 12th century CE (probably shortly after 1184 CE, with a land donation by Fernando II to the Archbishop of Santiago Ecla).

What remains of Castro de Yecla la Vieja are primarily its impressive ramparts, extending approximately 1050 m in length. The massive dry-laid stone walls are mostly about 4 m high, ranging from 3 m to almost 5 m, with four strategically arranged openings. In their design, advantage was taken of the local terrain, especially by incorporating steep escarpments. The walls are entirely of the local granite, much if not most of it quarried on site. The area enclosed by the fortification has been filled to the height of the wall, but traces of quarrying activities are amply evident just outside the walls. These are surrounded by a first line of defence, a few metres from the main walls, consisting of rock outcrops and a low wall. Hundreds of petroglyphs have been executed on these structures, most of them occurring on the outside of the main ramparts, with a small number on bedrock, and in a tiny shelter on the eastern side of the high wall. These deeply pounded motifs are all heavily weathered, many of them so severely that their outlines are no longer definable. About 200 petroglyphs can still be recognised to some degree; many more were clearly present but have become indecipherable (Fig. 1). Those that have survived reasonably well have been suggested to depict mostly horses, although there are also some anthropomorphs and zoomorphs suggested to depict bovinds and suids.

This wealth of petroglyphs on the walls of the Castro postdates the construction of the stone walls (as shown by the relative positioning of imagery), which could have occurred at any time between about 1700 and 800 years ago. The frequent occurrence of motifs that are barely perceptible suggests that other images may have disappeared altogether. The Castro granite contains occasional veins of quartz, is low in feldspar but has a high content of mica, in the form of flakes of up to 5 mm, and this latter component accounts primarily for its rate of surficial breakdown. The average annual rainfall at the site, 706 mm, is relatively high. It is therefore assumed that the surface retreat quotient is probably near the high end of the above-cited spectrum for granite (i.e. perhaps 2 mm/ka).

The Castro equine images show unequivocally that petroglyphs exposed to precipitation are subjected to erasure by surface retreat

even on relatively weathering-resistant facies such as granites, at rates ensuring their obliteration within a very few millennia. The following proposals of Pleistocene ages for similar zoomorphic petroglyphs on more weathering-susceptible rocks such as schists, phyllites and slates need to be seen in this light.

3. Petroglyphs on low-grade metamorphics

The presumed horse images on a schistose outcrop near Gondershausen, Germany (Welker, 2015), are the most recent addition to a long list of percussion petroglyphs at European open schist and slate exposures that have been attributed to the Upper Palaeolithic (Fig. 2). In this case, an Aurignacian antiquity (i.e. > 30 ka) has been suggested, based on perceived style. Although several Palaeolithic art specialists endorsed this assignment, the six zoomorphs were made < 1000 years ago by a right-handed person with a fairly blunt steel chisel possessing a 8–9 mm long edge (Bednarik, 2016). The degree of weathering of the petroglyphs is identical to that of two inscribed characters among them; there are several metal points lodged in the rock outcrop; and the site is surrounded by extensive evidence of quarrying for roof tiles in recent centuries. Even the only argument in favour of Aurignacian age is flawed: equine motifs of similar stylistic parameters, such as those at Castro, are more common from historical periods across Eurasia than from authentic Pleistocene corpora, nor were the latter usually produced by percussion. Since there is not a single confirmed open-air motif of the Pleistocene anywhere in Europe, it is not warranted to conjure up a Palaeolithic age purely on stylistic basis, when the stylistic parameters of ‘Palaeolithic’ rock art are far from established (see below).

The Gondershausen claims were preceded by many others to have found ‘Palaeolithic’ rock art in central Europe, all of which have been refuted. One of the earliest German propositions of Pleistocene antiquity concerned a ‘stag’ image (with runic inscription) in the Kleines Schulerloch, Bavaria (Birkner, 1938: Pl. 13; Maringer and Bandi, 1953: 23; refuted in Bosinski, 1982: 6) and the engraving of an ‘undetermined’ animal figure in the Kastlhöhle (Bohmers, 1939: 40; refuted in Freund, 1957: 55). A black-brown ‘pigmented’ limestone fragment from the Aurignacian of Geißenklösterle was defined as part of an exfoliated, black-painted rock art motif (Hahn, 1988a,



Fig. 1. Zoomorphic petroglyphs on granite fortification wall at Castro de Yecla la Vieja, western Spain, < 1700 years old.



Fig. 2. Zoomorphic petroglyphs on schist at Gondershausen, Germany, a few centuries old.

1988b, 1988c, 1991; Richter et al., 2000). It is a fire-spalled rock fragment bearing an accretion of partly combusted plant resin (Bednarik, 2002). A 'black, yellow and red coloured' piece from the same site (Hahn, 1986; Müller-Beck and Albrecht, 1987) consists of a rock fragment stained by goethite, partly converted to haematite by the reducing flame of a hearth; and a more recent carbonate precipitate containing tiny charcoal flakes. A limestone fragment from Hohle Fels, interpreted by Conard and Uerpmann (2000) as Germany's only evidence of 'Palaeolithic art' was in fact painted after it had fallen from the wall (Bednarik, 2002). Another such assertion concerns dozens of exfoliated wall fragments of *Bärenschliffe* (cave bear polishes) bearing linear incised grooves, which were interpreted as aniconic engravings (Hahn, 1991, 1994; Scheer, 1994; Conard and Uerpmann, 2000; Holdermann et al., 2001). These markings were caused by quartz grains embedded in the fur of the cave bears, rubbing their bodies against the cave walls as they accessed their hibernation lairs (Bednarik, 1994, 2002). A series of grooves in the Mäanderhöhle at Veilbronn, northern Bavaria, thought to be anthropogenic and 'Palaeolithic', are in fact 'stretch marks' formed as the bulging moonmilk ceiling features expanded (Blumenröther et al., 2015). The supposed engravings in another Bavarian cave, the Schönsteinhöhle, are clearly animal claw marks, probably of chiroptera (op. cit.), while a bovid image at Reinhausen near Göttingen is regarded as a recent feature. Thus there is currently no Pleistocene rock art known in Germany.

Further afield in central Europe, there are several other claims of 'Palaeolithic art' that yielded to refutation. They include those from the Czech Republic, concerning a series of red markings in Mladeč Cave (Oliva, 1989; refuted in Bednarik, 2006) and black pictograms in Bycí Skála (refuted in Svoboda et al., 2005). The black rock paintings and torch smears found in Domica Cave, Slovakia, probably date from the Neolithic Bükk culture, the claimed presence of Palaeolithic occupation evidence notwithstanding. The Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age occupation remains in Ardovska Cave provide no support for the radiocarbon date of about 42,800 years bp from charcoal marks on the cave's wall (as noted by Sefcakova and Svoboda, 2015). Petroglyphs at two Austrian sites, Kienbachklamm near Bad Ischl and Stubwieswipfel in the Warschenegg mountains, have been proposed to be of the Pleistocene (Kohl and Burgstaller, 1992), but some of them were shown to be natural rock markings, others are part of the extensive corpus of historical rock art in the northern limestone belt of the Alps (Bednarik, 2009b). Further east, the cave art sites Cuculiat, Kapova and Ignatiev Caves have been ascribed to Upper

Palaeolithic traditions, without evidence. Three charcoal motifs in the last-mentioned site have yielded radiocarbon results ranging from 6000 to 8000 years (Steelman et al., 2002). Several claims of Pleistocene rock art have also been made in England and Wales, beginning with the earliest, by H. Breuil and W. J. Sollas, that they had found red ochre stripes of the Palaeolithic in Bacon's Hole, Wales. The markings had been made by a workman only eighteen years previously. Rogers (1981) reported Palaeolithic cave art in the Wye valley, of petroglyphs with 'malachite inlay'. This was found to be natural rock markings covered by green algae (de Sieveking, 1982). The next claim, from Church Hole in the Creswell Crags refers to three probably recent engravings (Bahn et al., 2003) from a cave that was soon purported to contain 'the most richly carved and engraved ceiling in the whole of cave art' (Ripoll et al., 2005), with well over one hundred petroglyphs. However, these were generally natural ceiling features, the reports lacked scientific detail and presented contradictory interpretations, and a uranium/thorium date provided was irrelevant to the age of any rock art (Bednarik, 2005). Most of these assertions were eventually abandoned by the presenters (Bahn and Pettitt, 2007; cf. Montelle, 2008). They were followed by two other postulated Pleistocene rock markings from British caves, first from Gough's Cave (Mullan et al., 2006), then from Cathole Cave near Swansea (Nash, 2012, 2015). The first seems to refer to a natural marking; the second is highly schematised.

There is thus no shortage of claims of Palaeolithic rock art from several parts of Europe, among which those concerning open schist and slate sites are particularly prominent. Siega Verde in western Spain is only c. 32 km from the described Castro de Yecla la Vieja fortifications and is also dominated by equine petroglyphs. The petroglyph site is divided by a large masonry bridge over the Agueda river, and most of the rock art was created during its construction period, ending 1924, while other petroglyphs seem related to the use of a large mill just upstream of the bridge. Both the petroglyphs and hundreds of inscriptions occurring with them are restricted to the river's flood zone, extending about 6 m above the thalweg. During these frequent floods, vast quantities of quartz clasts and tons of coarse angular quartz sand are rafted past the site, heavily impacting on the schist bedrock and on both the inscriptions and the petroglyphs (Fig. 3). The abrasion coefficient of schist is 40 times higher than that of granite (Attal and Lavé, 2006: 156, 159), and the erasure rate determined from inscribed dates has been applied to the petroglyphs, showing that almost all date from the last few centuries (Bednarik, 2009a).



Fig. 3. Impact of fluvial wear by the suspended load of coarse angular quartz sand on the schist of Siega Verde, western Spain.

The only exception are some higher-lying, fully patinated filiform engravings that could be of the Iron Age. This is confirmed by the absence at the site of any Palaeolithic occupation evidence and of any sediments other than very late Holocene; as well as by the lack of any extinct faunal specimens among the petroglyph inventory. Another factor confirming the recent age of the rock art is the former presence of a final Holocene terrace, now almost entirely eroded.

The many petroglyph sites on the lower Côa river, the next southern tributary of the Douro to the west of the Agueda, have been subjected to the same geomorphological regime. The hard rocks from up-river have cut a 300 m deep ravine into the schist, and the only river terraces found near the thalweg are of the late Holocene. An extensive search for Pleistocene sediments has remained fruitless, and the only petroglyphs found under sediment, virtually unpatinated, were covered by colluvium and alluvium. Where occupation evidence was excavated above the river's flood zone it always featured ceramics and microliths down to bedrock (Zilhão et al., 1997; Aubry et al., 2002). This stands in stark contrast to the Sabor valley, north of the Douro, where in one excavation 125,000 Upper Palaeolithic stone artefacts and over 1400 fragments of engraved plaquettes were recovered, but where not a single petroglyph occurs (Figueiredo et al., 2014). There are no depictions of extinct animals among the hundreds of zoomorphs on the Côa, most of which feature equine (including specimens wearing a bridle) and bovid characteristics. The sub-naturalistic animal images thought to be stylistically Palaeolithic are significantly less weathered and patinated than the inscriptions of the 18th century next to them, and other zoomorphs, highly schematised, are much older than the equine and bovine images. Those that occur in the valley's flood zone show almost no fluvial wear, and numerous petroglyph grooves dissect pre-existing lichen thalli, while no thalli exceeding 2–3 cm diameter have formed on any grooves. The water mills found near the petroglyphs of both Gondershausen and Siega Verde are also repeated in the Côa valley. All petroglyph concentrations are found near the dozens of such ruins or traces of other economic activities of recent centuries, such as rock quarrying. Moreover, the four scientific attempts to estimate the ages of the Côa rock art resulted in the unanimous finding that most of it is of recent centuries (Bednarik, 1995a; Watchman, 1995, 1996).

Gondershausen, Siega Verde and the Côa series of over fifteen sites are only some of the examples of open schist localities that have been attributed to the Pleistocene on purely stylistic assumptions, by ignoring that most equine petroglyphs of Europe are of very recent times. The first of these many sites were Domingo García in central Spain (Martín Santamaría and Moure Romanillo, 1981) and Mazouco in the Portuguese Douro valley (Jorge et al., 1981). The first locality features many 'horse' images while there is only one equine zoomorph at the second. However, the Palaeolithicity of the Mazouco petroglyph was soon refuted (Baptista, 1983). Then, a small series of semi-naturalistic animal heads were reported from another schist site, Fornols-Haut in the French Pyrenees, and pronounced as Palaeolithic on the basis of their 'naturalism' (Bahn, 1985; Sacchi et al., 1987). The next 'Palaeolithic horse' petroglyph was reported from a schist outcrop at Piedras Blancas near Escullar, Almería (Martínez, 1986/87). It was followed by the 'discovery' of the Siega Verde petroglyphs (de Balbín Behrmann et al., 1991; de Balbín Behrmann and Alcolea Gonzalez, 1994), which had been known to the local villagers ever since they had been made (Hansen, 1997). By that time, the idea of discovering open-air Pleistocene petroglyphs in schist sites had become popular, and Ripóll Lopez and Muncio González (1994) offered a series of such sites near Domingo García, including Carbonero Mayor, Bernardos and Ortigosa. The Côa reports from 1995 onwards were the first to be responded to by scientific analyses that refuted a Pleistocene antiquity. In the late 1990s, a headless soli-

tary zoomorph lacking any diagnostic features at Ocreza, Portugal, was declared to depict a horse, and for that reason alone was attributed to the Palaeolithic. It was not until 2015 that the next purported Palaeolithic equine petroglyphs on low-grade metamorphics were reported, from the small Gondershausen site in western Germany.

The susceptibility of any metamorphic rock substrate to re-equilibration reaction (e.g. reversal of component minerals to hydrous state) when exposed to precipitation was ignored in all of these pronouncements. The retreat rates measured on building masonry of natural stone of known construction dates render the survival of Pleistocene petroglyphs at open sites highly unlikely, except on the most weathering-resistant rock types, notably quartzite. This applies especially to deeply pounded petroglyphs on quartzite susceptible to kinetic energy metamorphism (Bednarik, 2015a), a conversion process inducing greatly enhanced survival of petroglyph surfaces. Its products have never been observed on the Iberian schist petroglyphs, none of which can be assumed to pre-date mid-Holocene times, and most of which are of the final Holocene.

The tendency of European commentators to place any semi-naturalistic imagery in the Pleistocene has also influenced pronouncements in Asia, although here the number of such assertions is considerably smaller than in Europe. Examples are the horse and bull pictograms at the open site Shishkino in central Siberia (Okladnikov, 1959; refuted in Bednarik and Devlet, 1993). There is no more a woolly rhinoceros image at nearby Tal'ma as there is one at Siega Verde or Mineda in Spain. A series of rock art sites on the Kalguty river in Siberian Altai (Molodin and Cheremisin, 1993, 1994) and others at Delger-Muren and Tes (Novgorodova, 1983) are not of the 'Stone Ages'; they are of the Bronze Age or younger (Kubarev 1997). The pictograms of the Zaraut-Kamar Rockshelter in southern Uzbekistan are not the 'earliest known rock art of central Asia'; they are of the late 19th century (Jasiewicz and Rozwadowski, 2001). Mongolian petroglyphs attributed to the Pleistocene are superimposed over striae of the final glacial incursion, and the horse and bull images of Dunde Bulake Site 1 in the Altai of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, China (Fig. 4), are not of the Pleistocene, but of the late Holocene (Bednarik, 2015b; Taçon et al., 2016). The line of anthropomorphs at the same locality are not the 'earliest known skiers'; nor is the bone object from Lohanda Nala in India a 'mother goddess' (Misra, 1977), being a well-made but damaged bone harpoon (Bednarik, 1992). And no evidence has been provided for the putative Pleistocene age of the 'dynamic' green anthropomorphs (Wakankar, 1975); they appear to be preceded by Mesolithic 'intricate geometric patterns' (Tyagi, 1988).

4. The stylistic quandary

Nearly all of the supposedly Palaeolithic rock art sites outside the Franco-Cantabrian 'heartland' of the traditions in question are therefore of either very recent antiquities, or their stylistic attribution is at least under challenge. However, even in the core regions of the Franco-Cantabrian traditions of cave art, in parts of France and Spain, many of the contentions about having found Pleistocene imagery are in need of much better evidence for such age. Seen against the background that a significant portion of the supposedly Palaeolithic rock art is of uncertain status or of more recent age, it is not adequate to report some vague pigment traces in a cave in, say, Cantabria, and to pronounce them Upper Palaeolithic simply because authentic Pleistocene cave art occurs elsewhere in the region. Examples of this practice are from the sites Askondo (Garate and Rios-Garaizar, 2011), Praileaitz 1 cave (García-Diez et al., 2012), Lumentxa cave (Garate and Rios-Garaizar, 2012) and Morgotako Koba (Garate et al., 2015).



Fig. 4. Semi-naturalistic equines and bovines at Dunde Bulake Site 1, Chinese Altai region, are not of the Pleistocene, but of the late Holocene.

Most cave art has never been scientifically dated, but has only been attributed to a technological tradition (rather than to a ‘culture’) on the basis of stylistic classification. There is no agreement about style (Conkey and Hastorf, 1990), where it resides, what its role is in archaeological taxonomies, or how one could come to terms with it in a quantifiable, falsifiable, repeatable or objective fashion. Style does not exist until it is perceived to exist. In the case of purported Palaeolithic style, it is unlikely that a single style should have governed for thirty millennia, and the inclusion in this style of large corpora of Holocene rock art have contributed to the formation of untenable stylistic constructs. Ethnography implies that indigenous artists from a single group may apply very different styles to the same subject (Mulvaney, 1996); and a single artist may produce greatly different styles during different phases of a lifetime. These factors challenge the concept of stylistic diagnostics in palaeoart.

But what should be of greatest concern is the manner in which the concept of Palaeolithic style has been invented. Thousands of images that are clearly of more recent times, especially of historical periods, have contributed to the formation of these stylistic constructs, as demonstrated by the numerous animal figures mistakenly included in Pleistocene palaeoart. Specialists of Palaeolithic style often disagree about the nature and ages of these styles (e.g. Valladas and Clottes, 2003 versus Pettitt and Bahn, 2003). This raises the need to clarify their precise characteristics, but apart from a vague reference to ‘naturalism’ in the depiction of zoomorphs these diagnostic properties remain poorly defined. When they are stated it is usually in terms of visual similarity with images of supposedly known antiquities. For instance motifs from Lascaux are frequently cited as reference material, yet the rock art of Lascaux is undated and a significant portion of it appears to be of the Holocene (Bahn, 1994, 1995). Moreover, all of the world’s iconic rock art consists of abstractions and schematisations, none is truly naturalistic: the notion of naturalism is attributable to pareidolic perception. Rock art of various degrees of naturalism has been produced in many eras since the Upper Palaeolithic, e.g. in Greek and Roman times, and superb examples can be found in current ethnography (Bednarik and Sreenathan, 2012).

5. Discussion and conclusions

Freeman (1994) offers a relevant explanation when he observes the strong parallels in the way religious shrines are authenticated by ecclesiastical authority (e.g. in Roman Catholicism) with the authentication of ‘Palaeolithic art sanctuaries’. (Concerning the latter formulation it needs to be remembered that a significant portion of this corpus, perhaps most of it, seems to be the work of children and teenagers; Bednarik, 2008.) Freeman makes the important point that these two manifestations of “belief, reverence and validation of experience”, in both traditions of authentication, have the same origin at a deeper structural level. He considers that origin to be “promising material for further serious investigation” (Freeman 1994: 341). A fundamental difference is that ecclesiastical authority arbitrates only religious beliefs, whereas authentication of Palaeolithic ‘art’ by those Thompson (2014) defines as ‘high priests’ demands scientific authority. Their adjudication is informed by a construct of style that is not clearly defined and can differ significantly among practitioners (Bednarik, 1995b). Not only does this lead to disagreements among Palaeolithic art specialists; it causes spirited disputes when scientists provide quantified data that imply a younger age. And yet the stylistic diagnostics in these practices are unquantifiable and beyond scrutiny, idiosyncratic and never delineated in a repeatable, testable format. However, even if there were clear stylistic guidelines, they would still need to be questioned, because as detailed above, so much of the record that contributed to their formulation derives from rock art that is of the Holocene — usually of the latest Holocene.

Equine petroglyphs at open sites, often accompanied by bovine depictions, have been produced across Eurasia since the final Pleistocene, but the majority of them can be attributed to the second half of the Holocene (Bednarik, 2012). Therefore the a priori probability of any specific occurrence of them being of the Pleistocene is relatively low, and yet there is a distinctive trend in archaeology to claim such antiquity in all cases. This seems to coincide with a conviction of Pleistocene archaeologists that Pleistocene rock art is somehow more important than rock art of the Holocene, a belief well reflected in UNESCO’s World Heritage List. It contains numerous Ice Age rock art sites from Europe, but not a single one from the rest of the

world. This is despite the much greater number of occurrences of Pleistocene rock art outside of Europe, especially in Australia (where all of it is of Mode 3 technocomplexes, i.e. comparable to Middle rather than Upper Palaeolithic), and despite the much greater ages of palaeoart in both Asia and Africa (Bednarik et al., 2005; Beaumont and Bednarik, 2015). This observation coincides with the fact that not a single fake Pleistocene palaeoart find is known from Africa, Asia, Australia or South America, while there are tens of thousands in Europe and a small number in North America. For instance Russia boasts a corpus of Pleistocene mobiliary ‘art’ comparable to western European occurrences, but not a single fake is known there.

As these biases are so pronounced the answer to Freeman's observation might be that there seems to be some form of preoccupation with the topic of European Pleistocene palaeoart. One possibility to explain this is that many people seem comfortable with Europe's perceived role as the ‘cradle of civilisation’, and such material as the cave art and the figurines appears to confirm this. The previous similar idea, that humans first evolved in Britain, had to be abandoned with the debunking of the Piltdown hoax (Weiner et al., 1953), but the similarly mistaken concept of art-like production having begun in Europe still remains widely accepted. This is despite the greater quantity and antiquity of palaeoart in other continents. The effects of this predisposition on the study of the world's Ice Age palaeoart have been profound, and they have included the pronouncement of thousands of recent rock art motifs as Palaeolithic. The extrication of Palaeolithic art commentators from this paradigm will be difficult and painful.

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