1 Introduction

There are two ways of writing about European rock art. Either the text will be lengthy, detailed and cautious, or it will be shorter, optimistic and more thematic. In keeping with the format and word limit of this series, I have chosen the second course.

In most regions of Europe, the study of prehistoric rock art plays a peripheral role in archaeological research and is seldom integrated with wider discussions of the past. That is not always true – an obvious exception is work in Scandinavia – but its investigation has often been a self-contained specialism with its own meetings, institutions and publications (Bahn 2010; Bednarik 2016). Description has always been paramount and can easily become an end in itself. There has been too little awareness of chronological change and too much emphasis on subjective interpretations influenced by the literature of comparative religion (see, for instance, Anati & Fradkin 2008, and de Lumley & Echassoux 2009). Projects and their publication are often constrained by modern borders and languages. This need not be the case and I shall outline the contribution that it can make to some of the main topics of contemporary research.

For the purposes of this study, the 'later prehistoric' period extended between the Neolithic and the Iron Age. The distinctiveness of 'rock art' was explained in a recent paper by Robb (2015), who defined four of its salient features: its siting in the open air, in contrast to cave paintings which are predominantly Palaeolithic; its overlap with monumental art and statue menhirs; its close relationship with decorated objects, including pottery and metalwork; and the rarity of narrative during most phases of its existence. I shall follow his characterisation.

The literature on this subject has certain limitations. Most accounts are concerned with individual sites or regions and do not consider the wider significance of their rock art. Even fewer compare the evidence from different regions or different styles of imagery. That is because these studies are often issued as short articles. A surprisingly high proportion of the key sources appear in edited volumes, with inevitable restrictions on length and presentation.

This publication provides an up to date summary of four major styles of rock art in post-Palaeolithic Europe, supported by a large but selective bibliography. It considers the roles that these rock art styles might have played in different areas. There is also an emphasis on how their character changed over time and their relationship to other developments in later prehistory. The Iberian Peninsula is considered in Section 2, the Atlantic in Section 3, the Southern Alps and their periphery in Section 4, and Northern and Southern Scandinavia, Finland and

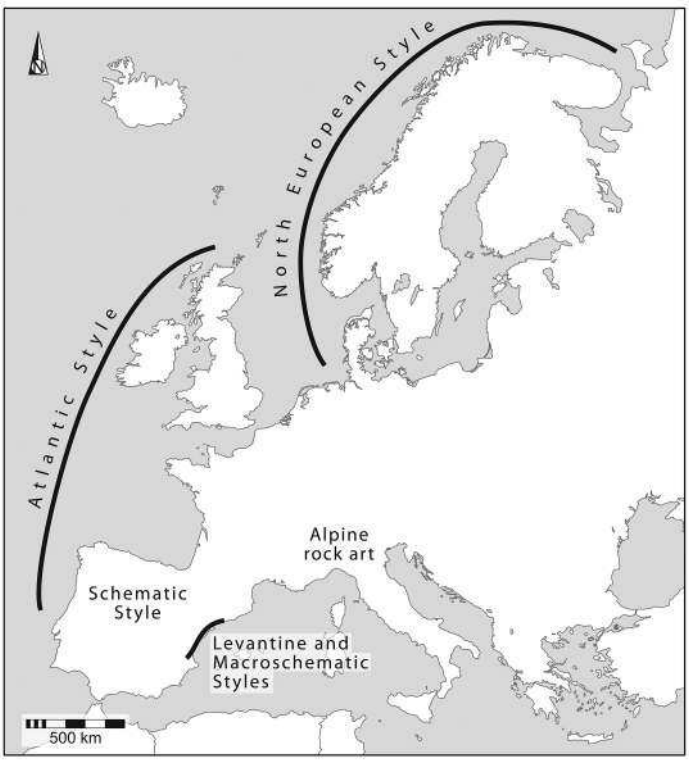

Fig. 1 Map showing the main regional styles of rock art considered in the text. Drawing: Aaron Watson

European Russia in Section 5 (Fig. 1). Smaller regional groups or single sites are excluded, including examples in Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Albania, Sardinia and Greece. The rock art of the Canary Islands is not included as it is related to that of Africa, nor are those images south of the Mediterranean which are occasionally compared with Spanish Levantine Art (Wilcox 1984). Cup marks are almost ubiquitous but play a limited role. Section 6 compares the principal traditions with one another, identifying similarities and contrasts between them over long periods of time. It argues that these distinctive images illuminate some of the most important processes in ancient society. Further information on key sites or major issues is provided in a series of text boxes; where possible, they draw on the results of projects in which I have been involved.

The study of rock art has changed in recent years. There have been important *technological developments*. Among the most informative are studies of shorelines in Fennoscandia where the images are closely related to the sea (Ling 2013 and 2014); scientific dating of pigments or the deposits that formed over them

(Ruiz et al. 2012; López-Montalvo et al. 2014). Other initiatives have included characterisation of the paint used in making the images (Hameau 2005; Collado Giraldo et al. 2014; López Montalvo et al. 2014; Bueno Ramírez et al. 2019), the experimental replication of the motifs (Hameau & Painaud 2011; Vourc'h 2011; Lødøen 2015; Santos da Rosa 2018), and detailed survey of the areas around the decorated surfaces in order to locate structures and artefacts. An increasing number of sites are investigated by excavation.

A second development concerns *new methods of recording* the decorated panels. Painted surfaces can be enhanced using digital technology to capture images that have faded from view and to document their original colours (David et al. 2001; Brady, Hampson & Sanz 2018). Pecked motifs can also be recorded in three dimensions, together with the configuration of the surfaces on which they were created (Horn et al. 2018; Horn, Potter & Pitman 2019). This makes it easier to identify superimposed motifs. Geographic information systems help to document the views from, and between, the decorated sites and, even more importantly, their relationship to routes across the wider landscape (Fairen Jímenez 2006; Fairen Jímenez 2007; Martínez Rubío & Martorell Rubío 2012).

Lastly, rock art has been investigated using *new theoretical approaches* (Jones & Cochrane 2018; Moro Abadía & González Morale [in press]). More attention is paid to the properties of the decorated rocks and their relationship to the local topography (Bradley 2009). Were some places easier to access than others (Di Fraia 2011)? Where did people stand in order to create and observe the motifs? Some of these studies have drawn on phenomenology (Tilley 1991; Tilley 2004). At the same time there could have been a direct link between the configuration of the rock and the images made there. They can be studied in three dimensions rather than the usual two. Some panels in Northern Europe have been described as 'micro-landscapes', because their surface contours show the hills, valleys and paths followed by people and animals in the drawings (Gjerde 2010; Helskog 2014). Pictures that show the killing of whales incorporate actual pools and channels (Gjerde 2012). Similar concerns extend to the processes affecting the sites, including the relationship between the images and the movement of sunlight and water (Bradley 2009: 197–8). Advocates of the new materiality go much further, contending that any distinction between cultural and natural elements will be misleading and that the rock must be treated on equal terms with the 'art' formed on its surface (Lødøen 2010; Jones et al. 2011; Jones 2017; Goldhahn 2019a; Goldhahn 2019b: chapters 8 and 9; Fahlander 2019; Herva & Lahelma 2019). The stone should be regarded as a living being. This approach works best where there is ethnographic evidence, as there is in Fennoscandia (Lahelma 2008; Helskog 2014).

These new approaches inform the sections that follow. In this Element, I shall outline the contribution that later prehistoric rock art can make to some of the main topics of contemporary research. My account is not intended for specialists on rock art, who have concerns of their own, but for those who need to be persuaded that it can play a part in wider studies of the past. I hope that readers will find the argument convincing.

TIMES AND TRADITIONS

Robb (2015) compares the different traditions of prehistoric art in Europe between the Upper Palaeolithic period and the Iron Age. There was a distinct peak in the Neolithic phase: so much so that he suggests that it was farming that 'made us artists'. Although visual imagery had been important during earlier phases, 'expressing something that was previously fluid or ephemeral in durable materials or fixed places is not a trivial change' (2015: 640).

His study compares the chronological distribution of the images created in a variety of different media, three of which feature in this account: 'rock art', 'architectural art' and 'statuary'. Within the period considered here, rock art was usually in open settings rather than caves. Architectural art is represented by the embellishment of megalithic tombs, and most statues are anthropomorphic sculptures. An important distinction is with small figurines of fired clay or stone.

Robb's analysis explores the histories of these media. He considers the number of separate traditions documented in different parts of Europe. Two show similar trends over time, and the images characterised as 'rock art' had the same chronology as figurines, beginning between 6000 and 5000 BC, occurring in more separate styles during the fourth millennium, and becoming less common during the second; the representation of rock art recovered after 1000 BC. During the Neolithic period, architectural art showed a similar chronology to open-air rock art; a second peak was associated with complex societies in the Mediterranean and is not treated here. Lastly, between 4000 and 2000 BC, stelae were represented in a variety of regional styles. Like rock art, they also featured in the first millennium BC (Fig. 2).

The groups of rock art studied in this Element are not closely dated. This question is addressed in the separate sections, but their histories are consistent with Robb's overall scheme. The earliest were the Northern style in Fennoscandia and the Levantine Art of south-eastern Spain. In the past, both have been described as 'hunters' art' and assigned to the

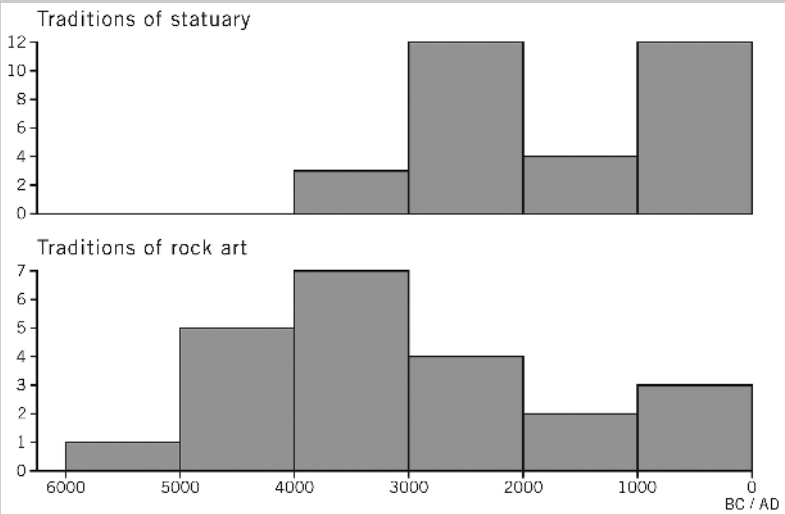

Fig. 2 The number of distinct styles of later prehistoric rock art per thousand year BC. Information from Robb (2015). Drawing: Aaron Watson

Mesolithic period. In the case of Levantine Art, the argument is controversial, but this tradition is certainly documented during the early Neolithic period. It was supplemented and eventually replaced by Iberian Schematic Art, whose chronology extended into the Copper Age and Early Bronze Age. During both phases, it was used in parallel with another style: Atlantic Art. It is less clear whether the history of Atlantic Art in Spain and Portugal extended into the first millennium BC.

The history of Alpine rock art overlapped with that of Schematic Art, with an emphasis on the Chalcolithic phase and, more locally, the Early Bronze Age. After that time, it played a smaller role, but its production was renewed on a lavish scale during the first millennium BC when it dominated the archaeological record at Valcamonica. This development has been compared with the latest manifestation of Atlantic Art and also with the sequence in South Scandinavia where the oldest images date from about 1600 BC and the most recent from the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age a thousand years later.

The distributions of some traditions overlapped, but others remained largely separate. Rock art and figurines may share similar chronologies, but for the most part they are found in completely different regions. The figurines were mainly a feature of Central and Eastern Europe where rock art was poorly represented, but they do occur in the Copper Age and Early

Bronze Age of Iberia (Scarre 2017). By contrast, the images associated with decorated passage graves overlap with the Schematic Art of Spain and Portugal and the Atlantic Art of Britain, Ireland and the north-west of Iberia (Bueno Ramirez & Balbín Behrmann 2000; Bradley 2009; Alves 2012). In north-western France and the Iberian Peninsula, the images associated with megalithic tombs are found in the same regions as statue menhirs. In the same way, the distribution of Copper Age and Bronze Age rock art in the Alps overlapped with the anthropomorphic stelae of the same periods, but only at Valcamonica were their elements combined.

2 Rock Art in the Iberian Peninsula: Images in Contention

There were four main styles of rock art in the Iberian Peninsula: Levantine, Macroschematic, Schematic and Atlantic Arts (Lillios 2020, 149–56). The first three are considered in this section, but the fourth, which was once termed 'Galician', formed part of a more extensive tradition discussed in Section 3 (Fig. 3).

The first of these, *Levantine Art*, is defined both geographically and stylistically (García Arranz, Collado Giraldo & Nash 2012; Lillios 2020, 150–6).

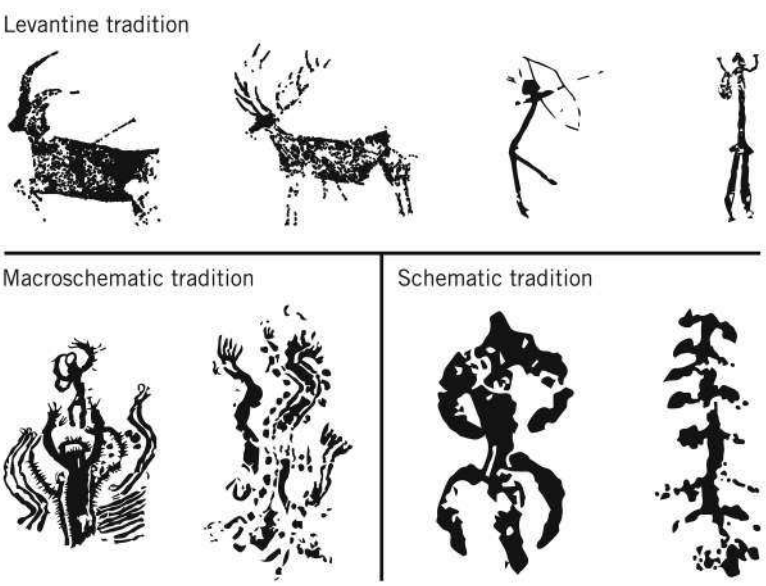

Fig. 3 Typical motifs in Levantine, Macroschematic and Schematic Art. Information from Fairén Jiménez (2006). Drawing: Aaron Watson

Its distribution is restricted to south-east Spain. All the images were painted and were characterised by hunters, wild animals, dancers and scenes of foraging and fighting. Unlike the other styles, it is essentially figurative. Some scenes include one dominant creature (Bea & Rojo 2013), and there was an obvious emphasis on masculinity (Escoriza Mateu 2008). The contents of these panels became increasingly violent over time (López-Montalvo 2015).

Research in the Iberian Peninsula was influenced by studies of earlier cave paintings, and Breuil (1933–5) investigated both genres. Because of its emphasis on hunting and wild animals, Levantine Art was connected with Palaeolithic images. There could have been stylistic links between them. The paintings described as Levantine Art have been compared with the drawings of early postglacial origin (Bueno Ramírez & Balbín Behrmann 2016). It remains uncertain whether there was any hiatus between the last images created during the Palaeolithic period and those dated to the Neolithic.

The styles of *Macroschematic* and *Schematic Art* are much less clearly defined. To some extent they overlap, and their very names are unhelpful. Schematic Art had a lengthy history and included a wide variety of painted and pecked motifs (Breuil 1933–5; Acosta 1968; Fairén Jiménez 2015). Macroschematic Art, on the other hand, may have been less diverse (Hernández Pérez 2006). Its distribution was similar to that of Levantine Art, while Schematic Art is recorded almost everywhere in Iberia apart from the far north-west. Today, rock paintings are more common to the south and pecked imagery to the north (Fig. 4). There was a similar distinction in megalithic art which corresponds to two climatic zones, one more favourable to the preservation of pigment (Devignes 1997). Both Macroschematic and Schematic Arts combined figurative and abstract images and were distinguished from one another by size and sometimes by chronology. New images may have been added to older ones, and others were altered over time (Fairén Jiménez 2006; Cruz Berrocal & Vicent García 2007). With a few exceptions, they did not constitute compositions or ‘scenes’.

There were certain contrasts. As its name suggests, Macroschematic Art included significantly larger images than Schematic Art. The most diagnostic were strange composite creatures which included humans merging with animals or other beings. Schematic Art, on the other hand, favoured abstract signs, dots and bars, wild animals, weapons, axes, miniature humans, eyes (*oculi*), handprints and depictions of the sun. There was considerable variation between individual sites and panels. The distribution of these elements was studied by Acosta (1968) who drew on the publications of Breuil. She showed that there were local variations, and the images themselves could have been made at different times.

Fig. 4 Painted figures in the Schematic style at Peña Piñeda, Vega de Espinareda, Spain. Photograph: Lara Bacelar Alves

Chronology

Levantine Art, with its depictions of people and wild animals, may have originated in the Epipalaeolithic: a view supported by a small number of radiocarbon and optically stimulated luminescence dates (Bueno Ramírez, Balbín Behrmann & Barroso Bermejo 2012; Bueno Ramírez & Balbín Behrmann 2016; Lillios 2020, 153–4). There are other sources of information for Levantine Art: the types of arrowhead depicted in the paintings (Fernández López de Pablo 2006); the use of milk products in the pigment (Roldán et al. 2018); and a few scenes supposedly portraying tame animals (Bea & Pajas 2016). All three features suggest that it was being made during the Neolithic phase. The same applies to Macroschematic Art which shared the same designs as Impressed Ware dating from the earliest Neolithic period (Fernández López de Pablo 2014; Binder et al. 2017). Similarly, Schematic Art resembled the decoration inside a few Iberian passage tombs (Bueno Ramírez & Balbín Behrmann 2000; Bueno Ramírez, Balbín Behrmann & Barroso Bermejo 2009; Bueno Ramírez, Balbín Behrmann & Barroso Bermejo 2015), the distinctive pottery known as *Symbolkeramik* (Martín Socas & Camalich Massieu 1982), occasional Bell Beaker ceramics, and a series of engraved plaques and 'idols' (Lillios 2004; Hurtado Perez 2008). Lillios (2008) dates the plaques between 3500 BC and the Beaker phase in the mid to late third millennium BC. There are radiocarbon dates for painted *oculi* in the mid fourth millennium

(Ruiz et al. 2012), and those for the idols also fall in the later fourth and the earlier third millennia BC. This evidence suggests that Schematic Art was current between the Early Neolithic and the Early Bronze Age and that it outlasted the other traditions.

The situation is more complicated because of the relationship between these styles in south-east Spain (Fairén Jiménez 2006). Here, diagnostic images from all three groups might be superimposed or their positions juxtaposed with respect to one another on the same sites (Hernández Pérez 2006: fig. 13); Fernández López de Pablo 2014). The problem is that this did not happen in a consistent order. Thus Levantine Art could overlie Macroschematic or Schematic Art, or they could be located on separate parts of the same panel. Because of the link between Macroschematic Art and decorated pottery, it has been implied that Levantine Art was a wholly Neolithic phenomenon but in that case it is difficult to explain the emphasis on hunting and the wild. If it had an earlier beginning, might these superimpositions have occurred at a later stage in the history of this style?

Distribution

Schematic Art extended across most parts of the Iberian Peninsula, into the south of France (Hameau 2002), and, on a more local scale, to Italy (Matteoli 2012; Cremonisi & Tosatti 2017). The distributions of Levantine and Macroschematic Arts overlapped with Schematic Art in south-east Spain but reached no further, supporting the argument that the latter style lasted a longer time (Martínez García & Hernández Pérez 2000). It complemented the Atlantic Art of the north-west whose date is still disputed (Alves & Comendador Rey 2018). There could be local contrasts in the selection of sites in all three traditions, but it remains to account for the frequency of superimpositions. Why was it so important in landscapes where equally suitable locations could be found nearby?

Locations

Studies employing geographic information systems suggest that sites with rock art could be situated between settlements but were rarely linked directly to them (Cruz Berrocal 2005). On the other hand, they were usually close to paths (Martínez i Rubio & Martorell Briz 2012). There were local preferences for rock shelters or caves. Despite evidence for the intermittent use of these places, artefacts are rarely found, and there were comparatively few direct links between Schematic Art and human burials. Closer connections are indicated where motifs in the same style were associated with megalithic tombs (Bueno

Ramírez & Balbín Behrmann 2000; Bueno Ramírez, Balbín Behrmann & Barroso Bermejo 2013).

All three styles favoured cliffs, rock shelters and outcrops (Sanches & Morais 2011; Collado Giraldo 2016). Some of them were difficult to access or had restricted space – the name of one site translates as 'the Frieze of Terror' (Collado Giraldo et al. 2014) – but others were much easier to reach (Fairén Jiménez 2006). River margins were important too, especially those of the Tagus and Guadiana (Bueno Ramírez, Balbín Behrmann & Barroso Bermejo 2008; Alves 2012). They are not fully documented as many examples are submerged today (Gomes 1983), but new research links many of the images with Schematic Art (Collado Giraldo 2006; Garcês and Oosterbeek 2020). Rock art of every kind could be associated with routes across the upland landscape (Collado Giraldo 2016) and, in certain cases, the sites commanded extensive views. For example, a decorated rock shelter at the important site of Menga was close to an enormous passage grave and faced an anthropomorphic mountain (Rogerio-Candelera et al. 2018). Some of the panels would have been as difficult to paint as they are for archaeologists to record. Indeed Hameau (2007) suggests that the topography provided a kind of 'natural architecture' and that certain locations were chosen specifically because they were secluded.

Interpretations

To differing extents, Levantine Art and Schematic Art featured hunting scenes, and it is true that the bones of wild animals are found in inland areas throughout the Neolithic period (López-Montalvo 2018). The association between decorated sites and summer grazing in the historical era suggests that domesticates should have been illustrated too, but, like Levantine Art, Schematic Art seems to have depicted a masculine world typified by wild animals and occasional drawings of weapons (Escoriza Mateu 2008). It also included more specialised elements – *oculi*, geometric patterns recalling the decoration of schist plaques, and depictions of the sun. The positions of sites with rock art could be influenced by natural features and processes. They included the presence of thermal springs or percolating water (Hameau 2003; Oosterbeck 2009). There was a local preference for the use of red rock or red concretions (Hameau 2005); again, the pigment was often red (Rogiero Candelera et al. 2018). Other common elements were outcrops containing quartz veins, locations where sound was amplified, and places with echoes (Mattioli et al. 2017). Caves and shelters with paintings of the sun might be illuminated at the solstices: a typical example is the aptly named Cueva del Sol near Cádiz. Almost 60 per cent of the sites depicting the sun faced south, compared with 30 per cent of the decorated