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PATRIARCHY AND IDEOLOGY IN THE ROCK ART OF THE IBERIAN MEDITERRANEAN BASIN

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Summary: Interpretations of the female body in prehistoric art are socially constructed and marked by a series of norms using the language of the patriarchal order. The analysis conducted here suggests the existence of a sexual division of labour, and that inequalities in this indicate that women were a socially exploited group. I argue that control over women is reflected in the scarcity of representations such as maternity, the cancellation of sexual attributes, and the invisibility of female activities.

Key Words: Spanish Levantine Rock Art. Figurative Representations. Feminist Theory. Exploitation. Violence against Women

Résumé: Les interprétations du corps femelle dans l'art préhistorique sont socialement construites et sont marquées par un feuillet de normes utilisant la langue de l'ordre de patriarcal. Le análisis a dirigé ici suggère l'existence d'un division sexuelle de travail, et que les inégalités dans ceci indiquent que les femmes étaient un groupe socialement exploité. Je dispute ce contrôle par-dessus les femmes est reflété dans la rareté de représentations telles que de grossesse, l'annulation d'attributs sexuels, et l'invisibilité d'activités femelles.

Mots Clés: Art Rupestre du Levant Espagnol. Représentations Figuratives. Théorie Féministe. Exploitation. Violence contre les Femmes

WOMEN AND LEVANTINE ROCK ART

The figurative representations which I examine here form part of what is traditionally called Levantine Rock Art or, more recently, Rock Art of the Mediterranean Basin of the Iberian Peninsula. The surviving representations produced in this artistic style were declared an element of World Heritage by UNESCO in 1998. A whole range of painted figurative representations, forming compositions and scenes of varied themes are collectively known as Levantine Art (Hernandez Pérez *et al.* 1988; Hernandez Pérez y Soler Díaz 2005). Among these compositions can be found figures of women, men as well as of sexually indeterminate figures. There are also various types of animals and a range of objects, often related to the figures. The figurative character and composition of scenes means that Levantine Rock Art can be thought of as a manifestation which provides information about the material conditions and social life in general of the communities which produced and used them (Escoriza Mateu 2001; 2002a y 2002b).

These Levantine productions are to be found in social spaces where daily life was not carried out. These are places where life was not lived on a continuous basis, but rather where activities occurred which were related to the representations, which show by means of figures a series of understandings and experiences. That is to say, these were areas where politico-ideological practices took place. The majority of the painted panels with Levantine figures are to be found in rock shelters and open caves, in shallow spaces exposed to the open air and well lit by natural light. Generally they are in accessible sites, on gentle hillsides, although there are also some in steep rocky slopes with more difficult access (Fairen 2004).

On the basis of the most recent information available, Levantine Rock Art would have occupied the whole of the Mediterranean Fringe, the coastal and pre-coastal

regions of the Eastern Iberian Peninsula, from the foothills of the Pyrenees (in Huesca Province) to the mountainous regions in the interior of the south-east of the Iberian Peninsula (Almería and Jaén Provinces). Within this area, there are rock shelters with Levantine figures at distances of more than 600 km from each other, in geographical areas which can be qualified as being highly diverse.

The chronology of these manifestations has given rise to an important debate, given that independent physico-chemical datings are still not available, and analyses of stylistic serialization and figurative parallels continue to be lacking. At present, there is a generally shared opinion that this is a post-Palaeolithic art form (Molina *et al.* 2003; Garcia *et al.* 2004). Recently its chronology has been located in the Neolithic period of the Mediterranean region of the Iberian Peninsula. From the 1980s the chronological framework of Spanish Levantine Rock Art has remained fixed in this prehistoric period thanks to the discovery of the so-called "Macro-Schematic" Rock Art. This is because macro-schematic representations have been found beneath paintings in the Levantine style, such that the latter form must be posterior to, or at least contemporary with the former. Together with its difficult chronological identification, there are certain other problems with Levantine art, such as the limited number of studies dealing with the correspondence between the rock shelters with Levantine paintings and inhabited areas. Another serious chronological problem is the existence of paintings added to the same composition, making the reading of scenes more difficult given that it is hard to be sure of the time difference between different figures. Both questions could be clarified once an adequate absolute chronology for the paintings has been established.

From the beginning my interest has been centred on trying to recover, document and analyse the greatest

number of female representations in the Levantine panels. The aim was to try to explain them in relation to the social practices in which they were involved, based on the activities represented. In the face of the enormous volume of existing information, I decided to devote this first study exclusively to the analysis of the scenes in which female representations are documented. Nevertheless, I am aware that it is necessary to broaden this work with future investigations analysing compositions both with and without female representations. It is therefore necessary to analyse both the scenes composed of men and those with figures of indeterminate sex. There is an important with the figures of indeterminate sex, because they have been sexually identified incorrectly, and erroneous sexual attributions have been made to the activities which they are carrying out. Only with a detailed sexual attribution of the representations will we be able to really know what place women and men occupied in relation to the different economic and politico-ideological activities portrayed.

As such, I propose the need to recover both women and men, and in order to do so it is necessary to "sexuate" (identify according to sex) with the greatest possible accuracy. At present, archaeology has two ways of sexuating the past. In the first place through the analysis of bone remains which allows us to gain an exhaustive and precise understanding of the subjects recovered. The second approach is the use of images and/or figurative representations carried out on different types of material supports, and which are always sexuated. This is the option we will use in the present work, in relation to the Levantine Rock Art compositions (Escoriza Mateu y Sanahuja Yll 2002).

This study of Levantine Rock Art sets out from the articulation of various theories and methodological proposals, which have the novelty of dealing with different aspects of the subject matter from the analysis of the empirical evidence to historical explanations. In contrast to the most frequent conception, which identifies production exclusively with the production of objects, the perspective of the "Theory of the Production of Social Life" which is used here, proposes that all societies are reproduced by means of different types of production, namely: Production of Bodies; Production of Objects; Maintenance Production of Subjects and Maintenance Production of Objects. These productive processes each present their own specific characteristics, and they also extend to the consumption, use, profit and/or enjoyment of the resulting products of social labour, both the objects and the subjects themselves (Castro Martinez *et al.* 1996).

This proposal emerges from the Historical Materialist tradition, but it incorporates and is enriched by contributions from Materialist Feminism. The "Theory of Social Practices" which is followed in this work allows us to establish the network of activities and relations which make up social life. And from the perspective of this theory we can tackle the study of the activities represented in the figurative portrayals of Levantine Art.

Finally, in this study of Levantine productions, a "Theory of Figurative Representations" is developed, in order to take on the analysis of images with recognizable figures (women, men, animals and/or things) (Escoriza Mateu 2002b; Escoriza Mateu 2005). The study made on the basis of the isolated scenes from a total of 60 shelters analysed has allowed me to reach a series of conclusions which affect different aspects of the subject matter.

REPRESENTATION AND REALITY: THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF LEVANTINE ART

From the years 8000-5000 cal BC, there was a variability in the forms of food production in different parts of the eastern Iberian Peninsula (Castro Martinez *et al.* 2006; Schuhmacher y Weniger 1995). This contrasts with the themes represented in the Levantine paintings, which show, by contrast, a great homogeneity between the different communities, with hunting as a central economic activity. Having rejected the possibility that these representations correspond to a pre-Neolithic time period, this leads to the suggestion of the existence of similar and shared political practices and ideological schemes in the different social groups, transcending the ambit of the different economic strategies. In conclusion, the economic image of Levantine Art does not respond to reality. Levantine Art creates a false version of economic practices, giving hunting an importance which it did not really have.

The sexual identification of the figures in the Levantine panels can be made in a high percentage of cases. There are two clear elements of sexuation which figure in many occasions, breasts for women, and penises for men. At the same time, we have documented a large number of human representations for which the sex cannot be determined, as it is not represented or it is not clearly recognizable from our contemporary perspective. The presence of sexually indeterminate figures is a serious obstacle insofar as it prevents the establishment of clear relations between these and the rest of the subjects and/or material objects represented with which they establish relevant associations in many occasions.

Fortunately there is another possible means of sexuating the figures represented in the cases in which these do not show either breasts or penises. In the case of women, the repeated presence of long skirts, always associated with figures with breasts allows us to use this item of clothing as an additional element of sexuation. In the case of the male collective no other element of clothing is to be found which is sufficiently widely shared to allow it to be used as an extra element of sexuation. Nevertheless, the insistent recurrence between masculine figures, that is to say those with a penis, and those carrying bows and arrows suggests that the sexually indeterminate figures which carry these objects are masculine representations. This means that we can consider bows and arrows to be

an indirect form of sexuation, in the same way as clothing (the long skirt) in the case of feminine representations. This argument takes on more value when no feminine figures are to be found carrying bows and arrows, let alone using them, even in the hunting scenes in which women participate.

ECONOMIC LABOUR IN THE LEVANTINE REPRESENTATIONS

By means of the analysis of the economic activities portrayed we can affirm that the Levantine panels represent the female collective carrying out a wide range of labour activities. These include: clearing fields, harvesting, sowing, herding, transport of objects and participation in beatings for collective hunts. To these should be added other economic activities such as the production of new individuals (production of bodies) and the maintenance of the infant individuals (children), as represented in some of the scenes recovered (Escoriza Mateu 2002a).

All the evidence point to an important fact: the female collective is represented in Levantine Art engaging in a wide range of economic activities, participating with its labour both in the Production of Bodies as well as in the production of a wide range of objects and maintenance production tasks. On this basis it can be argued that the women are the main contributors to the production and maintenance of social life in general. As regards the masculine collective, its participation in economic activities is much less varied, although the scarce range of tasks which they engage in are represented in a much greater number of cases. Masculine figures appear in hunting and pastoral scenes, for which reason it does not seem excessive to argue that their social contribution is much smaller than that of the women. Other tasks cannot be attributed sexually, such as the possible riding and/or domestication of animals and climbing to collect goods, even the impossibility of ascertaining whether the figures carrying out these activities are of women and/or men.

This division does not necessarily imply the exploitation of one collective by the other, but the inequality existing in the division of tasks indicates that the feminine collective could be a social group whose labour benefited the men without adequate compensation. The women, although they shared certain activities, such as grazing animals with the men, carried out more tasks than them, and those tasks were more important from the point of view of the satisfaction of the alimentary requirements of the whole community. Furthermore, the women also carried out other tasks such as gestation, nursing and the care of children – basic maintenance production, of absolute importance for the continuity of the social life and which benefit the whole community.

Thus, in function of the representations portrayed in the Levantine panels, it is not possible to suggest the

existence of a symmetrical or reciprocal situation in the division of labour between women and men. The existence of reciprocity would require that there was a compensated investment of labour and/or a similar participation between the different social (sexual) collectives, as well as a symmetrical social consumption and/or benefit (Castro Martínez *et al.* 2003). The existence of exploitation, or by contrast of reciprocity, in these relations, depends on the establishment of imbalances in the participation in labour, and on the benefits implied by access to consumption/use/enjoyment of the products. For this reason it is vital to indicate the differences between the social activities of labour and of consumption-use-enjoyment, if these are represented.

It must not be forgotten that the existence of exploitation does not depend on the framework of social practices in which labour activities are carried out, but rather on the compensation that the women and men obtain in exchange for that participation. In this sense, it has already been mentioned that with regard to participation in labour, the conditions cannot be qualified as being symmetrical. This is the case given that there is a clear asymmetry between the sexes with the masculine collective benefiting from a series of tasks carried out by the women, without that collective apparently compensating this situation with corresponding material benefits.

In relation to the type of exploitation which occurred, it could be suggested that there are sufficient clues of a figurative nature to support the existence of a relative or partial exploitation, but not an in extended form (Castro Martínez *et al.* 2003). Possibly this is a material reality in which women and men make different labour investments (to the detriment of the feminine collective), although it is not possible to determine whether there are patterns of consumption and/or benefits which can be considered to be asymmetrical in some aspects between the two collectives (and if this is again prejudicial to the female collective). On the other hand, there are no indications that allow us to suggest the use of associated groups for exploitation or, as such, the existence of what we have referred to has extended exploitation. In any case, it can be concluded that among the Neolithic communities responsible for Levantine Art, equality is a fallacy and the reality is one of a fundamental difference between the sexes with regard to their social contribution within the framework of different forms of production. Levantine Art itself reinforces this situation, repeatedly representing masculine activities, which took on an importance which they did not appear to actually have.

All of the above leads me to suggest once more the existence of control over women, which even results in the concealment of certain tasks within Levantine Rock Art, such as the production of bodies, the cancellation of sexual attributes and in general a scarce representation of the wide range of activities which women carried out. The politico-ideological strategy is to screen that collective

and limit its social value in relation to its work in the creation of the material conditions for the production and maintenance of social life (Castro Martínez *et al.* ep.)

THE POLITICO-IDEOLOGICAL PRACTICES REPRESENTED

The study of the politico-ideological activities identified has also allowed me to reaffirm the existence of the politico-ideological practices within which I have been able even to propose diverse modes of activities to study. In the first place, there are what I have called “relational activities between women”. In the second place, “ceremonial type activities” and finally “activities related to war, violence and death” (Escoriza Mateu 2002b).

With the term “relational activities between women” I refer to a whole series of scenes which show two or more women together in a group and/or establishing some type of relation among themselves. These are women who appear not to be using any material object nor to be engaging in any of the economic activities defined and analysed previously. Nor are they found with other social subjects (figures of male or indeterminate sex) except for other women and perhaps with very young children who sometimes accompany them. The relational activities between women tell us about the women, about themselves, about their feelings, their most immediate surroundings, perhaps at a day to day level, and about the social spaces where they establish links with other women. The “ceremonial type activities” are compositions which traditionally have been given ambiguous names, such as of ritual, symbolic and/or religious character etc. All these representations illustrate social practices in which both women and men, as well as figures of indeterminate sex participate. With regard to the last form, that which we have termed “activities related to war, violence and death”, I would indicate out that this type of activity should be qualified or defined as non-productive and as the antithesis to production itself. That is to say, war and confrontations not only engender violence and death but they also imply the destruction of the primary social material: the body. And they are activities in which women never participate actively.

The detailed analysis of this type of representations has led me to suggest an unmistakable association between the male collective and violence, destruction and death to judge by the representations in the Levantine panels. And it is at this point where we must pause once again to reflect on a central question. I refer to the evident separation or segregation in function of sex regarding the non-participation (voluntary or imposed) of women in this type of politico-ideological activity at a figurative level. And it is here that the first major difference between men and women is rooted, a material difference, of sexuated bodies, which places us in relation to the life cycle in absolutely different and diametrically opposite places

LEVANTINE ART, IDEOLOGY AND ECONOMY

Having evaluated the available archaeological information I go on to propose a number of interpretative hypotheses relating to Levantine Rock Art and the possible social groups associated with it. These hypotheses set out from a recognition of Macroschematic Art, and its relation to the Levantine productions during the so-called Neolithic in certain geographical zones. If we are to suppose the existence, according to the information provided by the archaeological record, of the use of different food production techniques by the different Neolithic groups we will tend towards a conclusion that this represents a situation of lack of homogeneity. Not all the communities share and implant the same economic practices, nor in the same order of importance.

On the other hand, the Levantine paintings seem to indicate a homogeneous and shared ideology, which nourishes and legitimizes hunting as the fundamental economic activity. This assertion leads to an evident conclusion, which is that the politico-ideological activities (and particularly the parietal figurative representations) are governed by an apparent thematic uniformity. This fact signifies the existence of shared norms, patterns and/or schema which extend across a range of geographical zones over a great distance, and which coincide in a single direction: the image that the hunt is the most relevant activity from the economic point of view. We thus face a situation which shows very different “realities”, in which the evidence from the settlements does not agree with the image shown by Levantine Art. In the face of this situation, two possible hypotheses could be proposed:

Hypothesis I. ***Levantine Rock Art is the Ideology of the Hunters of the Mediterranean Basin***

The Levantine representations are the material expression of communities which used hunting as the principal food gathering strategy, although they coexisted with other communities which obtained their food through other activities. If this is the case, it would not prevent us from talking about the existence of a legitimizing “hunters’ ideology”, which is always imposed in the sense that it over-dimensionalizes only one method of obtaining food – hunting. According to the different types of figurative representations analysed, we could suggest the existence of a screening and/or limited figuring of certain tasks carried out by women. This fact would be detrimental to the female collective and to women’s contribution to the production and maintenance of social life. The Levantine compositions would cease to be vehicles of social communication, and would constantly manifest the limited participation of women, and the limited relevance of the work which they carry out.

If this representative universe were true, we could suggest, as we have commented previously, the existence

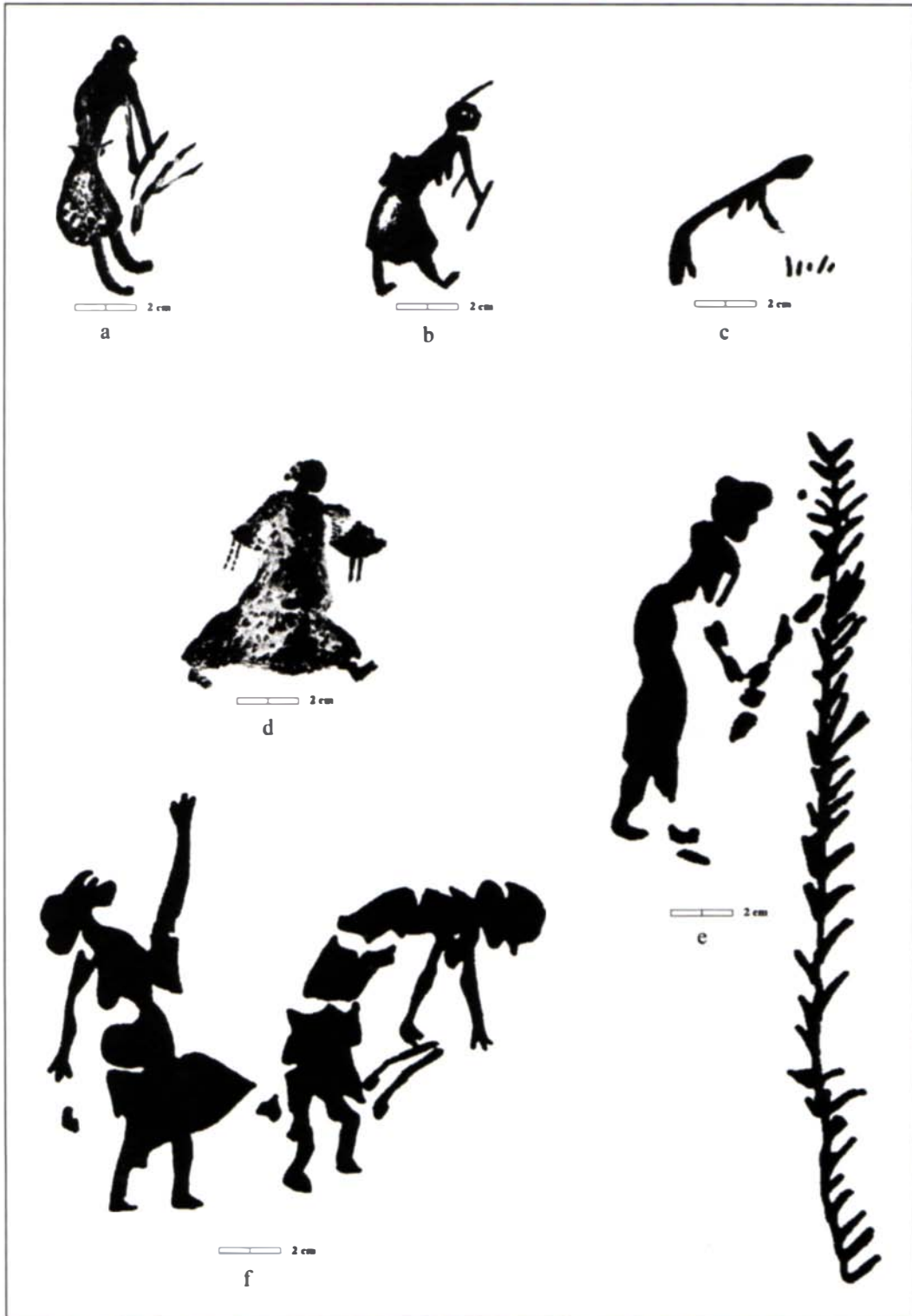


Fig. 5.1. Women in economic activities:

- a) y b) Abrigo del Ciervo (Dos Aguas, Valencia). Según Jorda y Alcocer (1951);
- c) Abrigo de los Trepadores (Barranco del Mortero, Alacón, Teruel). Según Dams (1984, fig.32);
- d) Abrigo de la Pareja (Dos Aguas, Valencia). Según Jorda y Alcocer (1951);
- e) Covacho Ahumado (Barranco del Mortero, Alacón, Teruel). Según Dams (1984, fig. 14, 15 y 16);
- f) Barranco del Pajarero (Albarracín, Teruel). Según Dams (1984, fig.111)

of exploitation of the female collective. This exploitation takes the form of a clear inequality in the division of tasks that they carry out, and in the non-existence of material returns on the part of the men. The situation would be very different if there were an appropriate compensation for the labour carried out in the different fields of production. In that case we could accept the existence of a reciprocal situation. If Hypothesis I were to be confirmed, it would imply a maximal expression of the patriarchal ideology of a group of hunter gatherers, which legitimizes and institutionalizes masculine domination and material control over women and which is manifested in their limited representation, and in the screening of some of the tasks which they carry out. Social value is removed from women when the concentration is placed on hunting, an activity predominantly associated with men.

Hypothesis II.

Levantine Rock Art is the Ideology of the Neolithic Patriarchs of the Mediterranean Basin

It seems that Levantine Rock Art is a material expression shared by a large number of social groups who engage indiscriminately in different techniques of food production. We are thus faced with figurative representations relating both to agricultural and herding communities and with hunters and gatherers, or which develop food gathering techniques which share some forms of production. If this is the case, we could suggest the existence of politico-ideological activities which generate "norms" at a representative level which again, as in the previous case, legitimize hunting as the most important activity. These circumstances are detrimental to the existence of other techniques of food collection in a productive panorama which we know, in economic reality, to be more varied. This circumstance would lead us to suggest the existence of a patriarchal ideology as a construct which extends across all the different economic and political territories in which Levantine manifestations occur.

An important conclusion can be drawn from both of the hypotheses sketched out here: the existence of a patriarchal ideology legitimized by coercive power, which generates a whole series of politico-ideological practices (figurative representations) which transcend the existing economic forms practised by different communities. The illustrated representation of the sexual division of labour allows us to talk of situations of social asymmetry and exploitation, independently of the food obtaining techniques used. We can conclude then, that a direct correlation can not be established between the food production techniques and the forms of social relations established, without taking into account other questions of equal relevance. The basis of the homogeneity of Levantine Rock Art was in the existence of a series of common social and economic relations, in a fundamentally patriarchal reality which was favoured and supported by means of different mechanisms: alliances between communities, circulation of products, social mobility through exogamy.

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