

NEW DISCOVERY AROUND KARS-BORLUK VALLEY: ROCK ART IN TENDÜR CREEK

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ABSTRACT

Petroglyphs or rock drawings are the oldest cultural products that have survived from the prehistoric times which goes as far back as thirty-five thousand years ago. In Turkey, it is possible to see similar examples of this art which are also encountered in different parts of the world, and some of these examples have been discovered in Tendür Creek located within the borders of Ataköy about 8 km south of the province of Kars in the northeast of Turkey. A total of twenty-nine drawings have been identified whose subject-matter consisting in hunting activity and hunting animals, engraved or pecked on a rock face in the Valley. Based on their technical and stylistic differences, four groups of drawings belonging to different periods have been determined. It is also possible to see similar examples of the ibex figure widely depicted in Tendür Creek, in many other parts of Turkey as well as in Iran, Caucasus region, Levant, Saudi Arabia and Central Asia.

Keywords: Kars-Tendür Creek, Petroglyphs, Prehistoric Art, Hunter, Ibex, Deer

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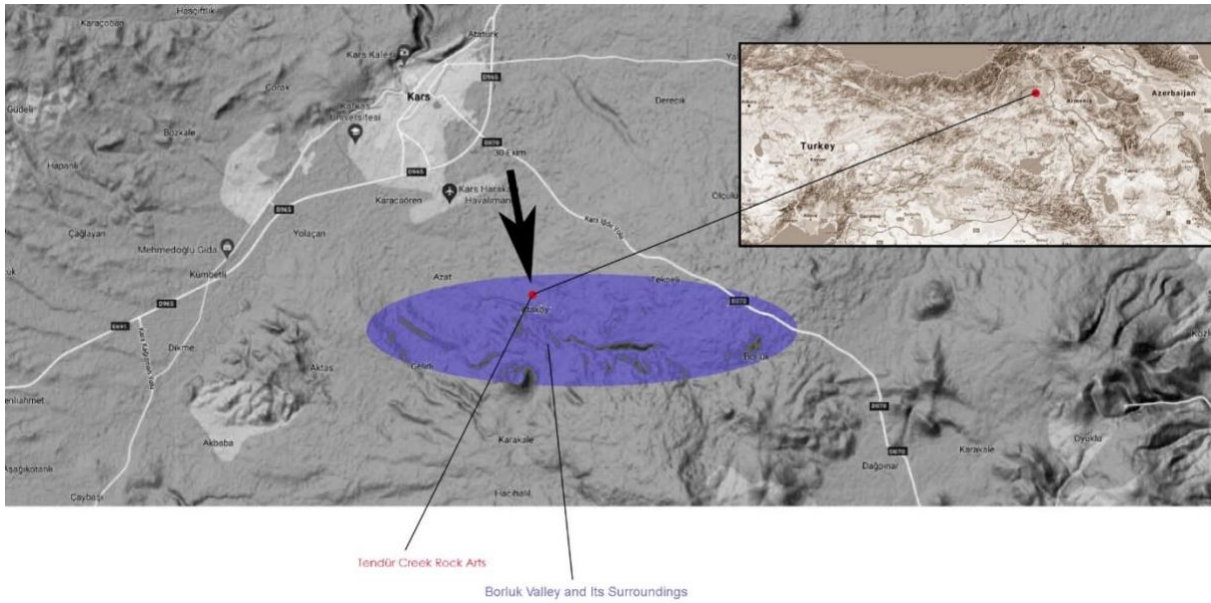
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Introduction

Petroglyphs are considered to be one of the most important artistic and cultural relics by the various fields of the social sciences such as archeology, art history and anthropology. The examples of this art dating back to 35.000 years ago (Andreassen, 2008: 1) have been found in many parts of the world, and thanks to these petroglyphs, some information about the living habits and conditions of our ancestors as well as their artistic activities and skills can be gathered. Turkey with its vast geography has proved to be an important site for Prehistoric art especially with the new discoveries of rock and cave paintings which displays different features. To date, rock paintings in around eighty different sites in Turkey have been visually documented, yet according to the literature only a fraction of these rock paintings has been systematically analyzed and dated. And such analysis has mostly been based on formal and stylistic comparisons. In this sense, dating the rock art in Turkey continues to be a problem.

Kökten (1944), who conducted a research on the prehistoric sites in Kars in 1994, found and documented many such places. One of those places was the Borluk Valley and its surrounding area, five kilometers to the city center of Kars. In a recent research conducted in this valley, important petroglyph samples have been identified and studied. The nearby regions also were researched with the thought that there may be more petroglyphs in the surrounding valleys which have similar structural features as the Borluk Valley. Thus, new examples of rock art from the Prehistoric Ages were found in Tendür Creek, approximately 2 km from the Borluk valley. It has been observed that most of the drawings in this valley are similar to the drawings found in some other locations in the Borluk Valley, in terms of their thematic and technical features. With this discovery, it was made evident that Kars and its surroundings were vital for people of the Prehistoric Ages. The often-depicted ibex and deer figures shows the importance of these animals for the locals who did these drawings, and also shows that such drawings served a social and communicative function.



Map 1. Tendür Creek and the surroundings of Borluk Valley.

Purpose of the Study

This study is based on the data gathered during the fieldwork done in 2021, and its purpose is to document, analyze the petroglyphs of Tendür Creek located at the center of the city of Kars and compare them with other similar examples in nearby regions examples based on their formal and iconographic features.



Figure 1. Tendür Creek (above) and the general view of the rock face where the drawings are located (below).

Location of Tendür Creek and Its Surrounding Area

Tendür Creek¹ is a shallow valley located within the borders of Ataköy, about 8 km southwest of Kars province, in northeast Turkey (Map 1). Tendür Creek, which is approximately 2.5 km long, extends roughly in the east-west direction (Figure 1). While the western side of the valley has steep high rocks, the wider eastern side is mostly farmland and pasture. The north of Tendür Creek extends to the city center of Kars in the form of wide and uneven plains. The drawing site is located at the western skirts of the valley, approximately 2 km north of the village of Mağaracık and Borluk Valley, 3.3 km west of the village and Mound of Azat, and 5.5 km east of the village of Tekneli. In Tendür Creek, melting snow waters form only at certain times of the year, especially in March, and this water merges with Kars Stream and pours into Arpaçay, an important branch of the Aras River. The stream dries up in the summer. There have not been found any places where people can take shelter such as caves and rock niches within the stream area, but it

¹ The name Tendür Creek was used as indicated by the inhabitants of Ataköy village.

may be possible that some collapsed high cliffs were such structures. There are no green areas such as forests and gardens in and around the streambed where the pictures were found. In general, the region has cold winters, mild summers and green vegetation. The snowfall starts in mid-October and continues until the end of March. The region is ideal for animal husbandry with its high and densely covered pastures. The place where the rock drawings are located is 1857m above the sea level.

Formal Features of the Drawings in Tendür Creek

Though the site has many flat, smooth rock surfaces suitable for drawing, only on this 290-cm-high and 350-cm-wide andesite rock face approximately 7 meters high from the valley floor have been found a total of 29 drawings of different sizes. (Figure 1). 21 of these drawings have identifiable features and subject matter (14 are ibex, 5 deer and 1 mountain sheep, and 1 hunter figure). Some drawings have been damaged due to natural causes such as snow, rain and wind. The surface of the rock has a patina that does not interfere with the visibility of the figures. The engraved figures are placed in a disorderly and mixed fashion. On this rock, there is no geometrical motifs and painted figures.

In the middle of the upper part of the rock, a 5-cm-wide and 4-cm-high² stylized ibex is drawn in a vertical position with its head upwards (Figure 2/1). In addition, there are quite a few engraved parallel lines of different lengths that continue down to the bottom of the rock face.

On the lower left, a 19-cm-wide and 23-cm-high ibex figure is pecked in profile, in a standing position, facing left (Figure 2/2). Just above it, a 22-cm-high and 4-cm-wide hunter figure holding a bow and facing right is engraved, (Figure 2/3). The head of the only human figure on the rock is indicated in a round shape without any detail. The legs of the hunter figure shown in walking position are very short compared to the body and engraved in an inverted "v" shape over an unidentifiable previous drawing made by pecking, which indicates that these two groups of drawings may have been drawn in different periods. In front of and relation to the hunter figure, a 31-cm-wide and 19-cm-high ibex figure is depicted in profile with a similar technique (Figure 2/4). The hind legs of this ibex figure are superimposed on an unidentified shape just to its right. Just below and to the right of the hunter and the ibex figures are zoomorphic figures of different sizes (Figures 2/8 and 2/9). In the lower left corner of this group, five smaller ibex figures and one deer figure are depicted together in similar style without intersecting (Figure 2/5). The average size of the ibex figures is around 8-cm-wide and 5-cm-high and they all are depicted in profile and positioned vertically. The horns and the beards of the ibex figures are carefully indicated, and these figures show a significant difference from the ibex figures found so far in the Borluk Valley and its surrounding area. The body of the zoomorphic figure at the far left of the group, which is discerned to be a deer from the shape of its horn, is not completed (Figure 2/6). The zoomorphic figure on the right side of this group, which also seems to be a deer, is 12.5-cm-wide and 10-cm-high and drawn in the same direction as the ibex figure (Figure 2/7).

In the middle section are four ibex and two deer figures. The 20-cm-wide and 10-cm-high deer figure on the right is engraved in profile, positioned vertically and its head upwards (Figure 2/10). The tail of the deer points downwards and its head is depicted in detail. Its "v" shaped horns are shown in 3/4 profile. Under this deer figure, a 19-cm-wide and 20-cm-high ibex figure is pecked in a different style (Figure 2/16). The other deer figure, which is 10-cm-wide and 6-cm-high, is vertically positioned not to overlap the other drawings, perhaps due to lack of space, which also indicates they were done later (Figure 2/11). Of the three pecked ibex figures, measuring around 10-cm-wide and 10-cm-high, one is drawn from the right profile, the other below it is positioned vertically and the one on the right is shown on its back (Figure 2/12). It seems that depicting the bodies, heads and horns of the ibex figures quite explicitly was very important for the makers of these drawings. It is possible to encounter such prehistoric ibex petroglyphs with curved long horns in many places around the world.

At the bottom section of the rock are two deer, one sheep and two zoomorphic figures. On the left corner of the lower section, a 21-cm-wide and 12-cm-high deer figure with "v" shaped horns and short upturned tail is depicted prominently (Figure 2/13). It is posined vertically and its head pointing upwards as the deer figures in the mid-section drawn in a similar style but smaller in size. Just to the right of this deer figure is a zoomorphic figure with a thin long line (Figure 2/14). In the middle section is a 16-cm-wide and

² The height of the ibex and deer figures given throughout this article indicates the distance from the bottom of the feet to the tip of the horns.

11-cm-high deer figure drawn with thicker lines and pecked (Figure 2/15). To the lower right of this figure is a pecked incomplete zoomorphic figure, positioned vertically with its head pointing upwards (Figure 2/17). On the lower right section is an 18-cm-wide and 7-cm-high pecked figure, possibly a mountain sheep, shown on its back and its head to the left (Figure 2/18). This figure which has an enlarged tip of tail and an oval head is depicted differently, somewhat more stylized than the other figures. To the far right of the rock are two similar sized pecked figures, one zoomorphic (Figure 2/19) and the other an ibex, both pointing north-east (Figure 2/20). Since there is almost no patina on these two figures, it is possible that they were made later.

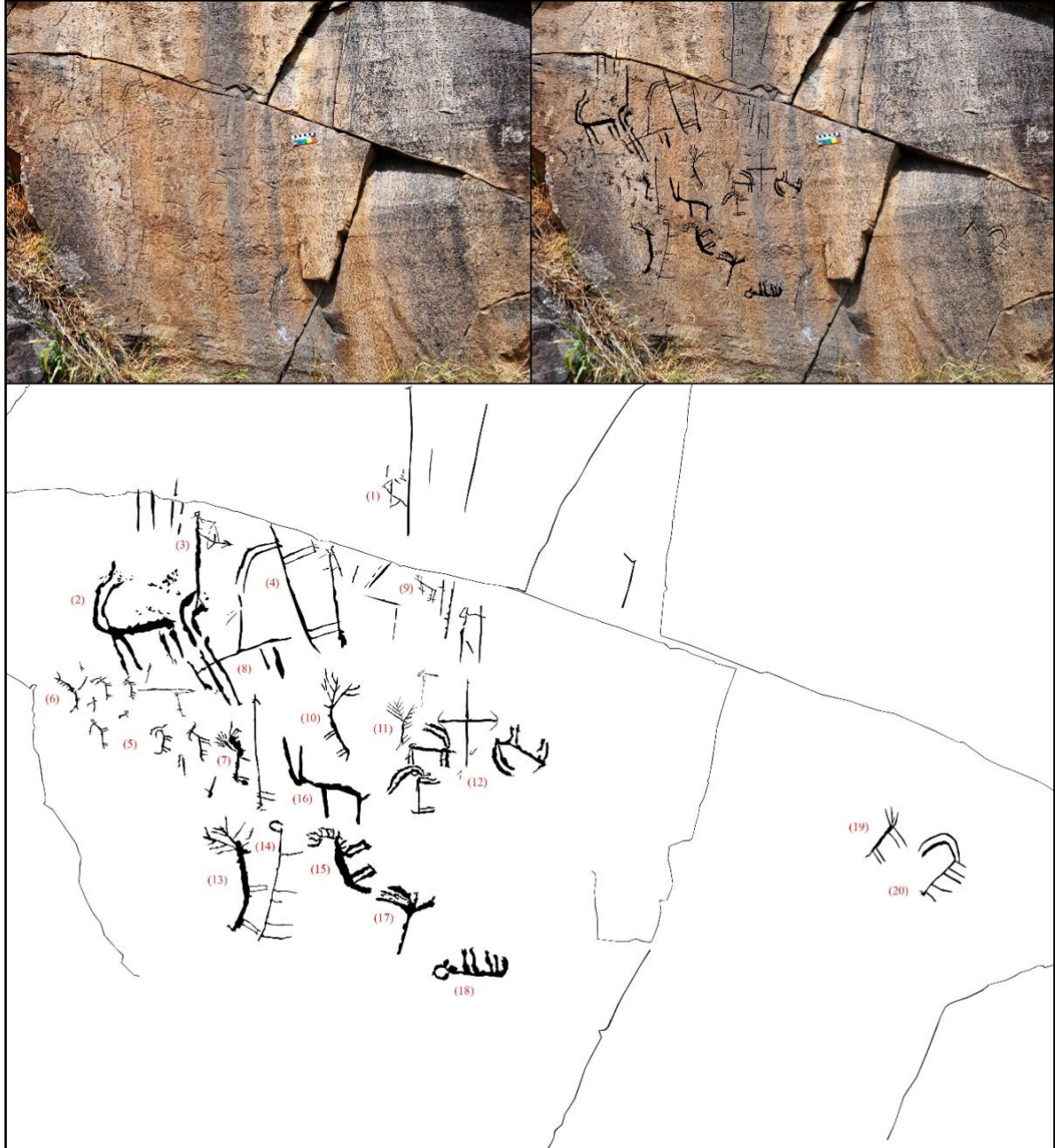


Figure 2. General view of the petroglyphs (above) and their line drawings (below).

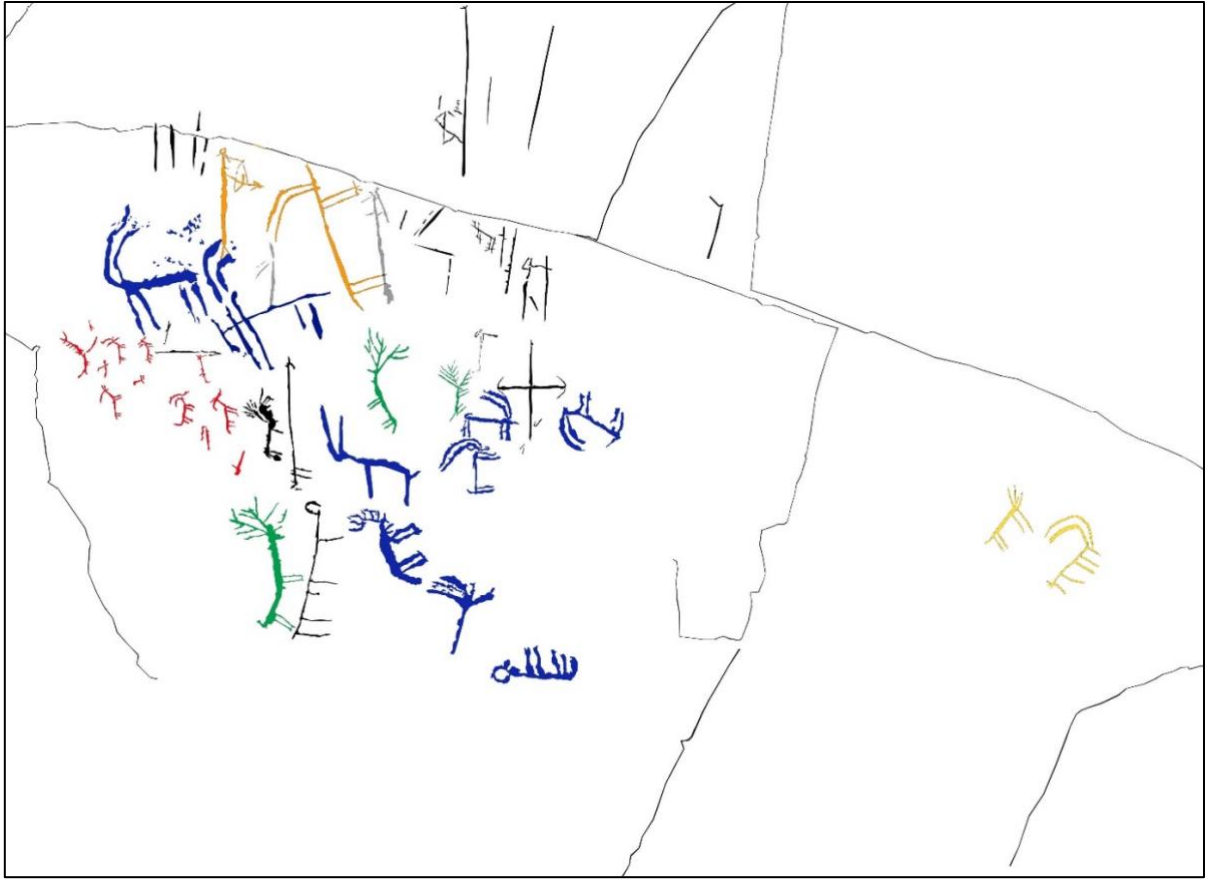


Figure 3. Color drawings of the four different groups of rock art in Tendür Creek.

Results

The sheer fact that these drawings were made only on this single rock in Tendür Creek, which has many other rocks with suitable surfaces may indicate that it had a special meaning and function (such as ritual) for different groups of people who lived there.

Given their different production techniques and formal features, it is possible to conclude that the drawings were made at different times. And also, the fact that each of the four groups of drawings are made in different size may be the result of a concern no to superpose and cross one another. Such technical and stylistic differences can be said to be related to differences in perceiving and experiencing the world and living environment.

Based on an examination of the formal characteristics of the drawings, four different groups were identified. The first group consists of engraved ibex figures and an incomplete deer figure both on the middle-left section of the rock (In Figure 3, this group is indicated in red). The most important and distinguishing characteristic of this group is that, compared to the other groups, they (ibex figures) are smaller in size, positioned vertically with their heads upwards and depicted in a more dynamic style. Because the engraved figures have more patina and erosion, they are thought to be the oldest drawings among all. In the second group are engraved ibex, deer and mountain sheep figures depicted in the same style, sometimes in groups and sometimes as single and dispersed (In Figure 3, this group of drawings is indicated in blue). The pecked torsos of these figures are depicted larger and fuller, and their legs static. The ibex figures, which are the most common ones, are depicted from the profile with stick legs, curved horns and short upward-tilted tails. Though there are differences in their drawing technique, the ibex figure is the most common in three groups. The third group consists of an ibex figure and a hunter figure, which seem to be part of the same scene, because they both are drawn bigger compared to the figures in the other groups (In Figure 3, this group of drawings is indicated in yellow). That these engraved drawings superimposed over those made with pecking technique indicates they were made in a later date. Lastly, the forth group includes engraved deer figures with "v" shaped horns in the middle and lower sections of the rock (In Figure 3, this group of drawings is

indicated in green). These figures are superficially cut into the rock and have less patina, which again indicates that they belong to a later date. If the drawings in these four groups were to put in a chronological order; the drawings on the middle-left section of the rock are the oldest ones, then comes the pecked figures and then the engraved hunter figure, ibex figure and the deer figures with "v" shaped horns.

Again, the differences in technique, style and patina of these rock paintings show that they were made in different periods. Yet it is not possible to propose a definite chronological frame for each drawing group based on their technical and formal characteristics. In addition, to date there has not been any archeological excavation or lab work on the Prehistoric petroglyphs in and around Borluk valley, which would provide data to compare with the drawings in Tendür Creek.

Similar ibex figures, which can be grouped into three periods based on their iconographical and typological characteristics, is found in Kahni Melikan (Kahniya Melikan), Lake Sat, Varagöz Plateau, Gevaruk (Alok, 1988), Borluk Valley (Belli, 2006; Toprak, 2021) and Cave Kurbanaga (Kökten, 1970). Also we find similar petroglyphs in many parts of Iran, such as Howz-Mahy (Mobarakabadi, 2013), Hamadan (Azandaryani et al. 2015), Shamsali-Gorgali (Azandaryani et al. 2015), Arasbaran (Rafifar, 2007), Khra-Hanjiran (Binandeh, 2016), Mohammad Hassandahil (Mirzaei et al. 2016) and Cave Ghalat Niloo (Rezaei, 2013). In addition, we find similar Prehistoric ibex figures in South Fardat Shamous of Saudi Arabia (Bednarik & Khan, 2005), which is rich in petroglyphs, and in many parts of Middle Asia. In a closer region, the Caucasus, an ibex figure can be seen in Gemikaya, Nakhchivan (Halilov, 2017) and in Ukhtasar, Armenia (Vahanyan, 2016). Again, in Desert Necef in Levant (Eisenberg-Degen & Rosen, 2013) there are many petroglyphs depicting ibex figures. The ibex figure commonly found in many rock art sites was engraved throughout all periods no matter the maker's ethnicity, religion, political regime, or economic base. The meaning of the ibex probably differed depending on the period and the needs and beliefs of the society (Eisenberg-Degen & Rosen, 2013: 247). The fact that the image of the ibex was commonly engraved on cave walls and rocks in such different geographies, clearly shows the existence of cultural, artistic relations and interactions between Prehistoric Age communities.

Conclusion

Whether the terms art and aesthetics are applicable to artifacts and images from the prehistoric times and whether those artifacts and images constitute an isolated, distinct field of study have been a subject of debate among the anthropologists of art from the nineteenth century on, mediated through the activities of museums and private collectors. (Ingold, 1996; Bradley, 2009). Belting (2011: 2) describes a work of art "be it a picture, a sculpture or a print" as "a tangible object with a history, an object that can be classified, dated and exhibited." Yet he differentiates between the art object and the image it embodies. The image which relies on two symbolic acts, that of fabrication and of perception, requires the mediation (medium) of our living bodies which process, receive and transmit them. In this sense, images are not the media, but they need the media/tion of our living bodies in order to be transmitted to us, to become visible for us. In this sense, the image is "the *presence of an absence*", of the real object that is now lost.

The image is present to our gaze, certainly. But that presence, or visibility relies on the medium in which the image appears whether on a monitor or embodied in an old statue. In their own right, images testify to the absence of that which they make present... They need a presence as medium in order to symbolize the absence of what they represent. The body analogy here comes into play again. The relation between absence, understood as invisibility, and presence, understood as visibility, is in the final instance a body experience... The mediality of the pictures [the medium] is thus the missing link between images and our bodies (Belting, 2011: 6).

In Belting's sense, we can use the term "rock art" without worrying whether or not Western categories of aesthetics and art are cross-cultural and applicable across time. Rock art as object has a history, can be classified and dated one way or another. As for what they could have meant to the actual people who made them, that is as image, it mostly remains a matter of interpretation informed and also limited by our anthropological discoveries, historical understanding and the "image" (meaning) we, as living bodies here and now, ascribe to the art object.

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