

# Anthropomorphic Images

in Rock Art Paintings and Rock Carvings

edited by

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Cover image: Rock in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. The male figure, nearly 2 m long, is surrounded by images of females. Photo by Mike Donaldson.

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# Contents

Preface .....	iii
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## Continental Europe and Britain and Ireland

Chapter 1: Fertility Petroglyphs at Drombeg Stone Circle Help Explain Through <i>Hieros Gamos</i> the Calendar Planning Principles of Drombeg and Other Recumbent Stone Circles Including Stonehenge .....	3
Terence Meaden	
Chapter 2: Hieros Gamos—ἱερός γάμος—Symbol of Fertility and Orphism in Thracian Ideology .....	16
Stavros D. Kiotsekoglou	
Chapter 3: An Image Description Method to Access Palaeolithic Art: Discovering a Visual Narrative of Gender Relations in the Pictorial Material of Chauvet Cave .....	33
Gernot Grube	
Chapter 4: The Grotta Palmieri of Lettopalena (Chieti, Abruzzo): Preliminary Presentation of a New Site with Rock Paintings .....	49
Tomaso Di Fraia	
Chapter 5: Representations of the Human Figure in the Anfratto Palmerini on Monte La Queglia: Engravings, Paintings, Symbols.....	63
Guido Palmerini	
Chapter 6: A Unique Example of Engraved Transfigurative Rock Art at Avebury Cove in Wessex, Southern England .....	75
Terence Meaden	
Chapter 7: Anthropomorphic Images in High Lunigiana, Massa Carrara, Italy .....	81
Angelina Magnotta	
Chapter 8: A Rock Art Site on the Avebury Hills in Wessex Whose Images Express a Perception of Death and Possibly a Mystical Link to the Solstice Sunsets .....	91
Terence Meaden	

## Asia

Chapter 9: Gobekli Tepe, Anatolia, Turkey – the Womb of the Mother Goddess .....	101
Anu Nagappa	
Chapter 10: Revelatory Style Art: The Human-plant Engagement Revealed by the Jiangjunya Petroglyph, China .....	120
Feng Qu	

## Australia

Chapter 11: Anthropomorphic Engraved Images in South-East Queensland, Australia .....	135
Marisa Giorgi	
Chapter 12: Anthropomorphic Images in Australian Rock Art through Time and Space.....	149
Mike Donaldson	

## **Africa**

<b>Chapter 13: The Postures of Childbirth in the Bovidian Women in the Rock Art of Tassili N'ajjer, Central Sahara of Algeria .....</b>	<b>163</b>
Hassiba Safrioun and Louiza Belkhiri	

## **North America**

<b>Chapter 14: What Can Be Learnt from Body Postures and Gestures of Anthropomorphic Figures in Petroglyphs of the Southwest USA .....</b>	<b>179</b>
Carol Patterson	

<b>Chapter 15: Some Select Vulva Rock Petroglyphs and Forms in North America .....</b>	<b>200</b>
Herman E. Bender	

<b>Chapter 16: Manitou or Spirit Stones and Their Meanings, Personification and Link to the Native American Cultural Landscape in North America.....</b>	<b>215</b>
Herman E. Bender	

<b>Chapter 17: Multi-Layered Meanings in Anthropomorphic Figures in Yokuts and Western Mono Rock Art, California.....</b>	<b>257</b>
Mary A. Gorden	

<b>Chapter 18: The Thunderbird in Native American Rock Art.....</b>	<b>268</b>
Herman Bender	

## **South America**

<b>Chapter 19: Anthropomorphic Representations in the Cave Paintings Located in the Archaeological Region of Seridó in Brazil .....</b>	<b>281</b>
Nathalia Nogueira and Daniela Cisneiros	

<b>Chapter 20: Anthropomorphic Figures at the Alto De La Guitarra Site, Moche Valley, Peru.....</b>	<b>289</b>
María Susana Barrau and Daniel Castillo Benítez	

<b>Chapter 21: Exceptional Anthropomorphic Figures at the Monte Calvario Site, Poro Poro, Cajamarca, Peru.....</b>	<b>304</b>
Daniel Castillo Benítez and María Susana Barrau	

<b>Index.....</b>	<b>317</b>
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# Chapter 7: Anthropomorphic Images in High Lunigiana, Massa Carrara, Italy

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**Abstract:** Almost 200 cup marks and rock carvings were discovered between 2012 and 2017 by the Archeoclub ALATE (Apuan Ligurian of Tuscan Emilian Apennine) in High Lunigiana, in the Province of Massa Carrara, Tuscany, Italy. The first report was published in an Italian archaeological review in January 2014 and, in October of the same year, some of the sites were inspected and considered as very interesting by an official from the Superintendence of Archaeology of Pisa, who took into consideration two metal, probably bronze, artefacts found on the site, in order to examine the chemical composition. The rock carvings discovered may have been produced by a society of hunters gatherers (Magnotta 2015a) but also shepherds and herdsmen, between the Neolithic and the Bronze Age. The carvings from different sites concern: Nature and its elements especially the Moon, customs and traditions, the ancestors' cult especially fighters' cult, and the Mother Goddess' religion as a celebration of Nature that feeds and gives life, weapons and hunting.

**Keywords:** anthropomorphic, stele, sexual images, Lunigiana, Neolithic.

## Lunigiana, Land of the Moon

The anthropomorphic forms and fertility images of High Lunigiana, are deeply carved in the rock. They are quite different from the engravings of Valcamonica where tooling only lightly cuts the surface. The petroglyphs of High Lunigiana are marked by characteristics that make them unique and worthy of the same status as other prehistoric sites, both Italian and worldwide. They are situated at seven rock-engraving sites on the buttresses of the Mount Orsaro range, whose highest peak is Mount Marmagna (1852 m above sea level). The name Marmagna is thought to originate from *Mater Magna* (in Latin), or Mother Goddess. The name Lunigiana, i.e. the Land of the Moon, has a significant link with the 'statue stele', with the rock carvings and with the culture which they represent, as for example the discovery of the 'Bas-relief of the Stele', demonstrates (Figure 1) (Magnotta 2015b: 167 ff).

In the Lunigianese territorial context, where the oldest statue stele are female (Ambrosi 1972) and recognizable by their same physical aspect, by a prosperous breast, and their hands on the womb (prolific?), while the male ones have their hands on weapons (fighting?), meaning the woman procreates, the man provides food for one's clan. The natural sexual representation is very frequent, like the constant representation of the Moon, the Virgilian divine 'Midwife, the Goddess of the Moon' (Virgil *Eclagues* IV-10) always present in the rock art sites of High Lunigiana. Nevertheless, the Moon finds

its most important temple in our recent discovery of the 'Rock of the Moons', where five moons are carved on the rock and one of them, the most visible Moon, contains the image of a bear, probably in relation to Mount Orsaro, which means Mount of the Bears.

## The cult of the Mother Goddess in the Land of the Moon

This is the name of a book that I have recently authored. It reports the discoveries of the Apuan Ligurian Archeoclub ALATE, with the images and interpretations of the majority of the rock carvings, published by the Tuscany Region, which immediately recognized the importance of these discoveries. The petroglyphs consist of small or large empty cuplike marks or incisions on quadrangular and rectangular boulders, of trees or flames, of anthropomorphic forms and human genitalia, some male but mostly female, which are sometimes fused together in the act of copulation. There are also truly large scale, notably expressive sculptures which have been made by using the form and the colour of the rock, in being appropriate for the purpose of the representation.

Various techniques have been used: the oldest sculptures were made by hammering directly with a stone that was harder than the rock being worked on, while other sculptures were made by indirect hammering, smoothed and treated, such as 'Navicella Ligustica' (Ligustian Little Boat—Figures 2 and 3),





Figure 1. This carving of the bas-relief of the stele is similar to the Apuan Ligurian *Statue Stele*



Figure 2 and Figure 3. High relief of the *Navicella Ligustica*, whose artistic protome may be the head of the Cygnus myth.



which is an important ethnic sculpture of the archaic Apuan Ligurian people. It is a sun-boat in the shape of a Cygnus or Cyncus (Swan), symbol of the lineage of a great people. Both the Cygnus and the Moon are ethnic elements present in the culture and in the conceptuality of the ancient population which lived in High Lunigiana (Magnotta 2016: 63-70).

Almost all the incisions are contained within an almond-shaped frame, symbol of the sacred female. This is similar to the *vesica piscis* used in Christian iconography to frame the Madonna or Christ. The incisions are either isolated or alongside others on the rock, usually very high up. Many display the so-called 'bud', a semicircular form that may represent the moon and its waxing and waning.

Many representations of the Moon have been found at several sites in High Lunigiana. Its representation gives rise not only to the name Luni Land, but to the same Roman colony of Luni, near La Spezia (2nd century BCE). Other carvings represent the sun, or constellations such as Orion, or animals, such as the turtle, the bear (two carvings, in two different sites and contexts), the fish (three carvings), and the owl. Some represent a deceased person, and have the goal of protecting the surrounding environment, like the 'Archaic Cameo' (Figure 4). Deeply carved in the rock, the sculpture celebrates a dead person, probably a clan hero, as identified by the Oblong Shield (Figure 4) which stands above it. Polybius (*The Histories* XXIX 14, 4) wrote that the oblong shield is typically Apuan Ligurian as such, so this image possibly belonged to the archaic Apuan Ligurian people. It is almost life-size (maximum depth 30 cm; height 65 cm; width 40 cm), considering the short and thin, but very strong Apuan Ligurian's body structure. Diodorus Siculus wrote: 'in a fight between a Celt and a minute Ligurian, often the stronger Celt was beaten by a short Ligurian'. The dolichocephalic cranium within the carved almond carved, was typically Apuan Ligurian, as some scholars like Sittoni (1924) proved in the 19th century. These sculptures may therefore relate to the Apuan Ligurian people.

### Fertility images

Many other sculptures are genital organs, credibly represented as fertility images. They are several and separately concern male genitalia (Figure 5) or female (Figure 6), in sexual natural fusion (Figure 7) or symbolic. The so-called 'Life Column' (Figure 5) is part of generating nature, erect between two chevrons above the base, showing the testicles, and at the top (sexual fusion?), carved on the red ferrous rock, within the almond frame, near cinnabar casting. We suppose that this could be the strongest possible fertility image ever made, and in no way inferior to the well-known



Figure 4. *Oblong Shield and Archaic Cameo*  
The oblong shield: width 28 cm, height 22 cm, max depth 10 cm. It overhangs the archaic cameo: width 36 cm, height 33 cm, depth 19 cm, surrounded by the almond

painting of 1866 the *Origin of the World* by Gustave Courbet.

An extraordinary sculpture represents the fertility of the female organ giving birth to a baby (Figure 6). The ferrous rock gives the natural red colour to the vulva, which shows a striking likeness to the Neolithic terracotta figurine reconstructed by Marija Gimbutas (1924: 106), as shown below in the drawing of Figure 7.

Sometimes, it is possible to find sexual fusion, as in the sculpture *Sexual Intercourse* (Figure 8), where the sacrality of the fertility image is surrounded by the typical Lunigianese almond, but it is also possible to see other fertility images, where the female and male genitalia are separate but facing (as shown in Figure 9).

In this figure Male and Female are sculptured in the fissure of the rock; the male sexual organ is carved in the rock in front of the female one, at a site accessed with difficulty due to its harshness and wildness, and





Figures 5. *The Life Column*, erect between two chevrons (is this sexual fusion?)



Figure 6. *Giving Birth* The ferrous rock gives the natural red colour to the vulva





Figure 7. Drawing. Neolithic terracotta figurine reconstructed by Marija Gimbutas, 6300-6200 BCE.

which is difficult to see at first sight in the closed fault along the rift between the walls in close vicinity. Near it, on a side wall, very high up, there is a carving of a large fish, symbol of transformation and new birth. It appears as a further very significant sign. It is possible to find fertility images in natural sexual fusion, e.g. in Male and Female in the Sacred Almond already shown (Figure 5), or symbolic, as the Lunigianese kind of lingam demonstrates (Magnotta 2017: 47). It is believed to represent an abstract symbol of the divine, which is preserved in human fertility.

Also discovered by the Archeoclub ALATE is the image of the uterus (Figure 10) in the sacred almond typical Lunigianese *facies* of almost all the carvings. It is carved on a not big, but isolated, red ferrous rock, similar to the reproductive organ which was often represented in Etrurian terracottas like the example of the seventh century BCE (Archaeological Museum of Chianciano, Siena, Italy, Figure 11). It seems noticeable that the sculpture of the *Lunigianese Uterus* be aligned to *The Life Column*, perhaps to represent rituals of human fertility.



Figure 8. *Sexual Intercourse*: the sacrality of the fertility image is surrounded by the typical Lunigianese almond.





Figure 9. *Male and Female* are sculptured facing each other in the fissure of the rock, beside the carving of a large fish (out of the field of vision).

### The monolith of the hunting scene

Unpublished to date, this pentagonal calcareous megalith, called the *Monolith of the Hunting Scene*, (Figure 12), has images on three sides. The stone gets its name from the representation of weapons (on the north-east side), of a hunting scene (east side), and of the female sexual organ engraved on the south-west side. This interesting anthropomorphic carving probably relates to the Mother Goddess which has been documented many times by ALATE as a recurring rock engraving on the buttresses of Mount Orsaro. Its proportions are 22 cm width, 32 cm height, 14 cm thickness.

The female sexual reproduction organ represents the Mother Goddess, as *Natura Generans, Alma Venus Genitrix* (Lucretius: *De Rerum Natura*), that fires and gives life to all living beings. In the carving (Figure 13) the anatomical details, much emphasized, are represented with unexpected realism and at the same time with sacredness, both regarding the accentuated proportions and the underlying frame (15 cm x 40 cm) sculptured in the rock. This female sculpture may be an older carving; it was perhaps made using a hard stone, tool. Considering its form, it could perhaps almost be an unfinished work.



Figure 10. *Lunigianese Uterus*, reproductive organ, in the sacred almond, similar to the one that is represented in Etrurian terracotta.





Figure 11. *Uterus, Etrurian terracotta, seventh century BC, Archaeological Museum of Chianciano, Siena, Italy. (courtesy of Doctor Paolo Dell’Agnello).*



Figure 12. *The Monolith of the Hunting Scene with the prominent symbol of the Mother Goddess. This south-western side contains the representation of the female organ.*



Figure 13. *The Monolith of the Hunting Scene, again. Its north-eastern side displays two paired arrows (each 40 cm long) similar to those on the so-called ‘Stele Bocconi’ located in a private palace of Pontremoli, and a bow (50 cm).*





Figure 14. *The Hunting Scene* with its three carvings: the probable head of a bear, a trapezoidal axe and a dagger.

### **The hunting scene, and a reasonable dating for the monolith of the Hunting Goddess (at its eastern side)**

Hunting was a vital necessity for the Ligurian prehistoric clan. In the *Hunting Scene* (Figure 14, Figure 15), an animal—with the face of a bear resembling the one sculptured on the *Rock of the Moons*—has been killed. In the scene the weapons are not used against an enemy, but for human survival; a hunter was the author, not a fighter. The bear inside the sculpture on ‘*The Rock of the Moons*’ may indicate maternity and defence or, according to Anati’s observation (Anati 1988: 46) ‘the cult of aggressive animals: the bear and the wolf’. By contrast, the bear inside ‘*The Hunting Scene*’ may be the clan’s food or clothing.

The two bears were sculptured by different techniques, at sites on the buttresses of Mount Orsaro not far apart. Incision is the technique for the bear carved on the *Rock of the Moons*, while bas-relief is the technique of the bear carved on the monolith. The hunting scene is very important because it allows us to formulate a reasonable hypothesis for dating. It indicates that the hunter used a trapezoidal axe, with binding and handle, to kill the bear. Precise lines delineate the edge of the archaic axe. Some segments, made by a blunt instrument, are parallel to those lines. This is most noticeable in the handle. The artist used direct percussion to engrave the weapons and bas-relief for the bear’s head. In contrast,

the narrow dagger has a finer finish. The different technique suggests that society viewed the dagger with higher esteem.

The Lunigianese dagger has a similar shape to the Allensbach-Strandbad flint dagger, which dates from 3000 to 2800 BCE, as dated by Carbon 14 from the wooden handle (Schlichtherle 2003). There is a question on comparisons with Remedello daggers. As explained, the female sexual symbol is sculptured beside the clan’s activities on the *Monolith of the Hunting Goddess*, as ‘*Natura generans vel naturans*’.

### **Techniques and period**

The techniques used for carving and polishing vary. In the ‘*Rock of the Giant Anthropomorph*’ (Magnotta 2015b: 88-89, 93), whose image is etched into the sub-cylindrical vertical rock that serves as a neck, the technique is rudimentary (Figure 16).

On the other hand, in the anthropomorphic form known as *The Sleeper* (Figure 17) whose facial expression surprises with its features and proportions, the incisions are much clearer. The sculptor of *The Hunting Scene* used direct percussion to engrave the weapons and the bas-relief of the bear’s head.

In conclusion, the age of the carvings can be placed between the Neolithic period (e.g. with regard to the

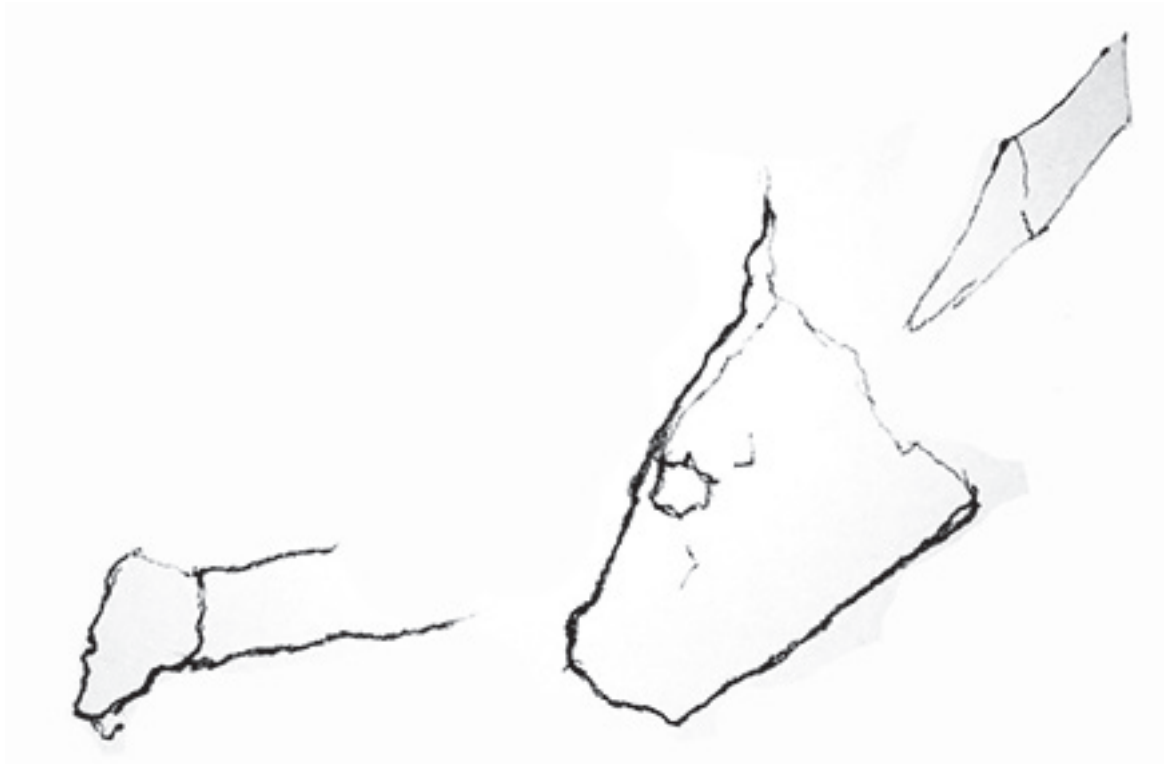


Figure 15. Drawing of *The Hunting Scene* (Artist Prof. Aquilina Andreini, Pontremoli).



Figure 16. Rock of the *Giant Anthropomorph*. The rock serves as a neck; the technique is rudimentary.





Figure 17. *The Sleeper*, its expression surprises with its features and proportions. The incisions are much clearer.

Lunigianese dagger of the Hunting Scene, whose base has a similar shape to the Allensbach-Strandbad flint dagger wooden handle, (Figures 14 and 15) and the Bronze Age of The Life Column, with the male symbol (Figure 5).

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