



A Millenary Chorus Line. La Peña Del Castrejón (Ojos Albos, Ávila, Spain).

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Abstract

The rock art found in the province of Ávila is not exceedingly well known, except for certain sets such as Peña Mingubela, in Ojos Albos (González-Tablas, 1980) [1], and La Peña de las Zorreras in Raso de Candeleda (Terés Navarro, 1987) [2], identified more than thirty years ago. The exploratory work done in recent years has allowed evidence to be extended to previously empty areas and has put important data on the table to take on a comprehensive interpretation of the phenomenon in the future.

One of the newly discovered complexes is also located in the Ojos Albos area, a short distance from Peña Mingubela, although the paintings at the latter site are undoubtedly referenced in more recent times. The objective of this study is to make the complex of rock paintings at La Peña del Castrejón known. These are located on a wall that does not quite constitute a rock shelter per se, very exposed, in which an anthropomorphic figure with arms akimbo and legs can be seen with the naked eye.

The complete study of the panel through the use of different digital image processing systems and algorithms has allowed a complex scene to be identified that, due to its stylistic characteristics, once again raises the need to reconsider classic approaches to the study of post-Palaeolithic cave paintings.

This is a set of 22 anthropomorphic figures with exceptional naturalism, far from schematic conventions, of which only one corresponds to a male character, with the figures apparently connected to three circular idiomorphs of different morphologies. Superimposed on this set are three classic schematic anthropomorphic figures and a circular sign made with dots.

Keywords: Post-Palaeolithic Rock Art; New Technologies; Interdisciplinary Study; Chronological Timeframe

Introduction

The first studies of rock art in the Sierra de Ojos Albos are thanks to F.J. González-Tablas in the rock shelter at Peña Mingubela, whose paintings he attributed to four phases between the Final

Bronze Age and the Middle Ages (González-Tablas, 1980) [1]. La Peña del Castrejón is found at 150 m from this point.

The Sierra de Ojos Albos, a part of the Central System, is an

important visual reference within a wide territory of the upper Voltoya river, between the areas of Campo Azálvaro and the Valle Amblés. In it, La Peña del Castrejón appears as a well-defined hill at

a fork in the river between the Corral Hondo stream and the Voltoya river valley. (Image 1)



Image 1: Location of La Peña del Castrejón site, aerial photo of the geographic surroundings and view of the rocky outcrop complex in which the set at La Peña del Castrejón is located.

The paintings are located in a rocky outcropping of quartzite, very characteristic of the area's geology, a steep territory in which the existing network of historical ravines suggests the importance of natural corridors in the area as communication routes in previous periods.

The Rock Shelter at La Peña Del Castrejón

It was given this name based on data in the local toponymy. The shelter opens at the southern end of a quartz outcropping with a front that is 8 m high, and is actually a small inclination of the rock wall only 0.60 m deep and 2.50 m high. So, strictly speaking, more than a rock shelter it should be considered a point of shelter, with reutilization in historical times, as evidenced by remains of a shepherds' hut that occupy the area in which the paintings were made. Exposure to the elements and successive uses of the place may be some of the reasons for the deterioration of the paintings.

Archaeological Context of the Rock Shelter at La Peña Del Castrejón

Compared to the archaeological potential of the nearby Valle

Amblés, intensely occupied from the end of the Neolithic period to the present (Fabián, 2006; Blanco, 2008 and 2009) [3-5], the Sierra de Ojos Albos appears to have had residual occupation, perhaps due to the orographic restrictions and low agricultural yield of the land.

By contrast, frequent prehistoric use having symbolic or ritual connotations has recently been documented here, indicated by various tumulus (Blanco and Fabián, 2011) [6], including two dolmens (Fabián, 1997 and 2006) [3,7], to which other, still unpublished, places with schematic paintings should be added. This circumstance, coupled with scarce residential use, suggests human activity in the area mainly aimed at farming practices. Even the few structural ruins in the surroundings of La Peña del Castrejón seem to be a result of pastoral activities already developed in historical times.

The only important reference to contextualize the paintings at La Peña del Castrejón is, therefore, the proximity of the tumular and dolmenic structures mentioned above and the possibility that both realities correspond to expressions of Late Neolithic societies (Fabián, 2006) [3]. Apart from this, all that is known is the chance

finding of a flint sickle element, decontextualised, in the vicinity of the shelter.

Notes on the Study Methodology for the Paintings

Part of the SIGAREP II (Geographic Information System applied to Rock Art) research project has been done in the surroundings of the rock art set at Ojos Albos (Ávila) using an array of emerging technologies that have made possible, in the case of the rock shelter at La Peña del Castrejón, discovery of a scene having great formal and interpretative complexity.

On the cave’s rock surface, smooth and with only a little protection from a type of visor or overhang, apparently only one painted anthropomorphic figure was identified with crossed arms and legs and the sex indicated, very similar to the characteristics of swallow-shaped anthropomorphs according to the classification by professor Pilar Acosta (1968) [8]. But by applying a high-resolution multispectral photography system along with a series of algorithms developed by the company GIM Geomatics, a larger number of figures have been identified, forming a diverse set that could not be seen with the naked eye.

For digitisation of the shelter, a geomatic method was proposed based on the combined use of traditional photogrammetry supported on high resolution point clouds coming from a 3D laser scanner that had previously been georeferenced via a Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS).

A high-resolution 3D scan (1 point every 2 mm) of the entire shelter was done by means of a Laser scanner 3D X-130, which has block adjustment using least squares and is linked to the coordinates of the GNSS points. This cloud is used to support the photogrammetric pairs obtained by means of a Sony A7R Mark ii and a pre-calibrated 50 mm lens.

This combined technique makes documentation of rock art more sustainable, as it permits:

- Reducing the length of stay, lessening impact on the site.
- Avoiding the use of sighting elements, which means better preservation.
- Increasing the accuracy of support points: 2 mm from a point versus 5-7 mm from the no prism measurement systems of topographic total stations.
- Having control points throughout the panel to analyse deviations from the photogrammetric model.
- Digital image processing: Decorrelation stretching

Decorrelation stretching is used to eliminate the high correlation normally present in multispectral data sets and to produce an image made up of more vivid colours. Highly correlated data sets typically produce fairly light colour images. Decorrelation stretching requires three bands for input. (Image 2)

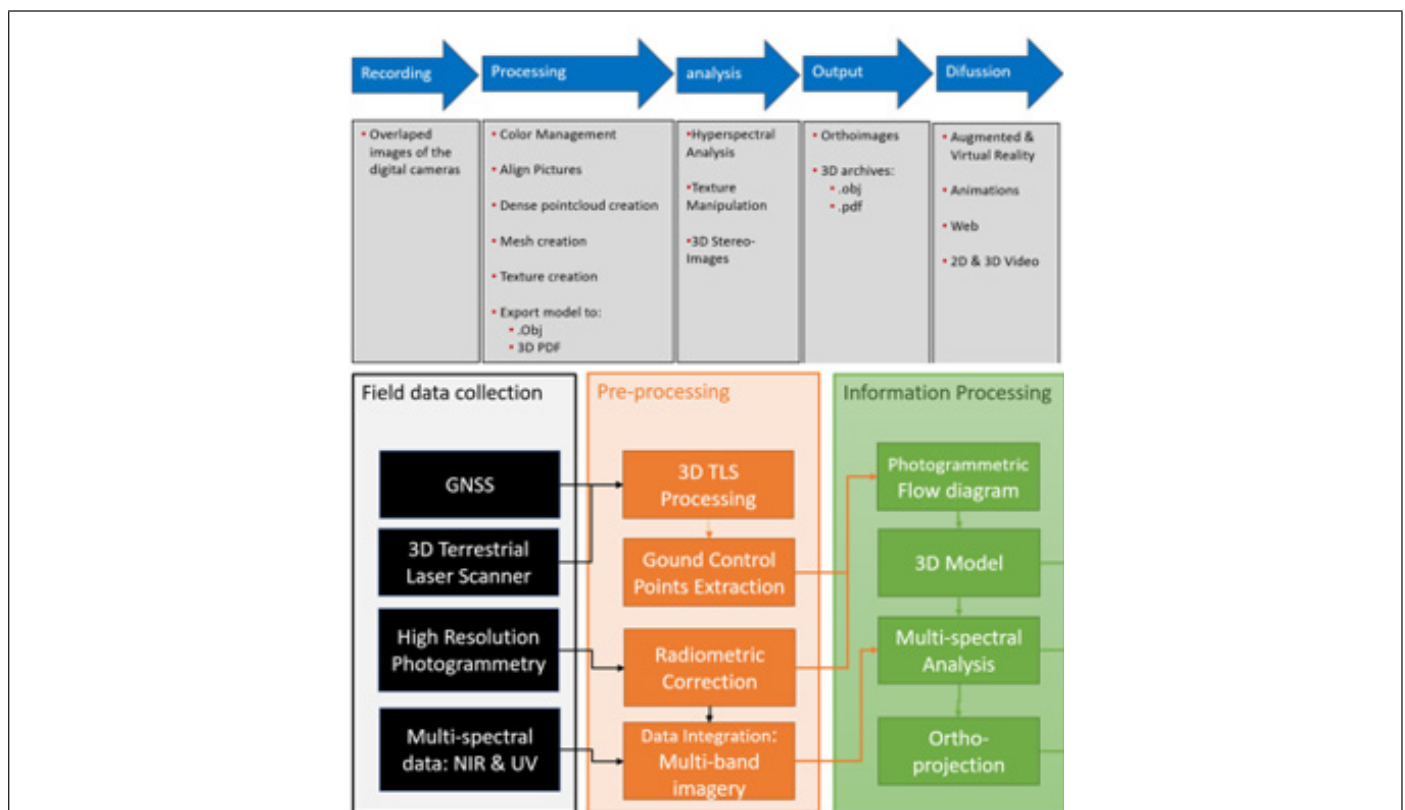


Image 2: Diagram of the general flow and phases followed in the photogrammetry process.

Having exaggerated colours facilitates visual interpretation and discrimination of pigments.

If we see the three band pixels of an image as three vectors, the goal is to find the linear transformation that results in removal of the correlation between vectors in the transformed space. This is an eigenvector problem, and can be considered as a rotation of the coordinate system of the original vector space. Within this

rotated space, each component is readjusted (contrast adjustment) by normalizing the vector variances. This is when the rotation returned by the vectors for the initial coordinate system is applied.

Both the rotation and variance normalization steps can be described by a matrix and vector operations, which can be combined into a single mathematical operation that operates the input image and results in a decorrelation stretch. (Image 3).



Image 3: Orthoimage of the set on the decorated panel.

The effect of the process is to obtain an output image whose pixels are well distributed among all the possible colours while at the same time preserving the relative sense of hue, saturation, and intensity of the input image (Gillespie et al. 1986) [9].

This work presents the results of all this, focusing especially on

a set made up of bitriangular anthropomorphic figures, with arms akimbo and very characteristic hair ornaments on the head. They resemble those found at the site of the rock shelter at Arroyo de Hellín in the Guadalmena river basin in Jaén (Soria Lerma et al. 2001) [10], as will be explained later on. (Image 4)



Image 4: Part of the decorated panel with the ABS_OCRES digital processing by GIM Geomatics.

Description of the Figures

The set described below is made with a light ochre colour, HUE 2.5 YR 5/8 (Munsell, 1954), and on a yellowish-coloured quartz surface, smooth and only altered in some areas by lichens and micro-fissures that traverse the rock horizontally, following

the fracture planes. The explanation is made from left to right and according to their position, starting with the naturalist content and ending with the schematic figures. We have not made reference to the dip of the different figures as most are almost totally vertical, except for one that we will specifically talk about. (Image 5)

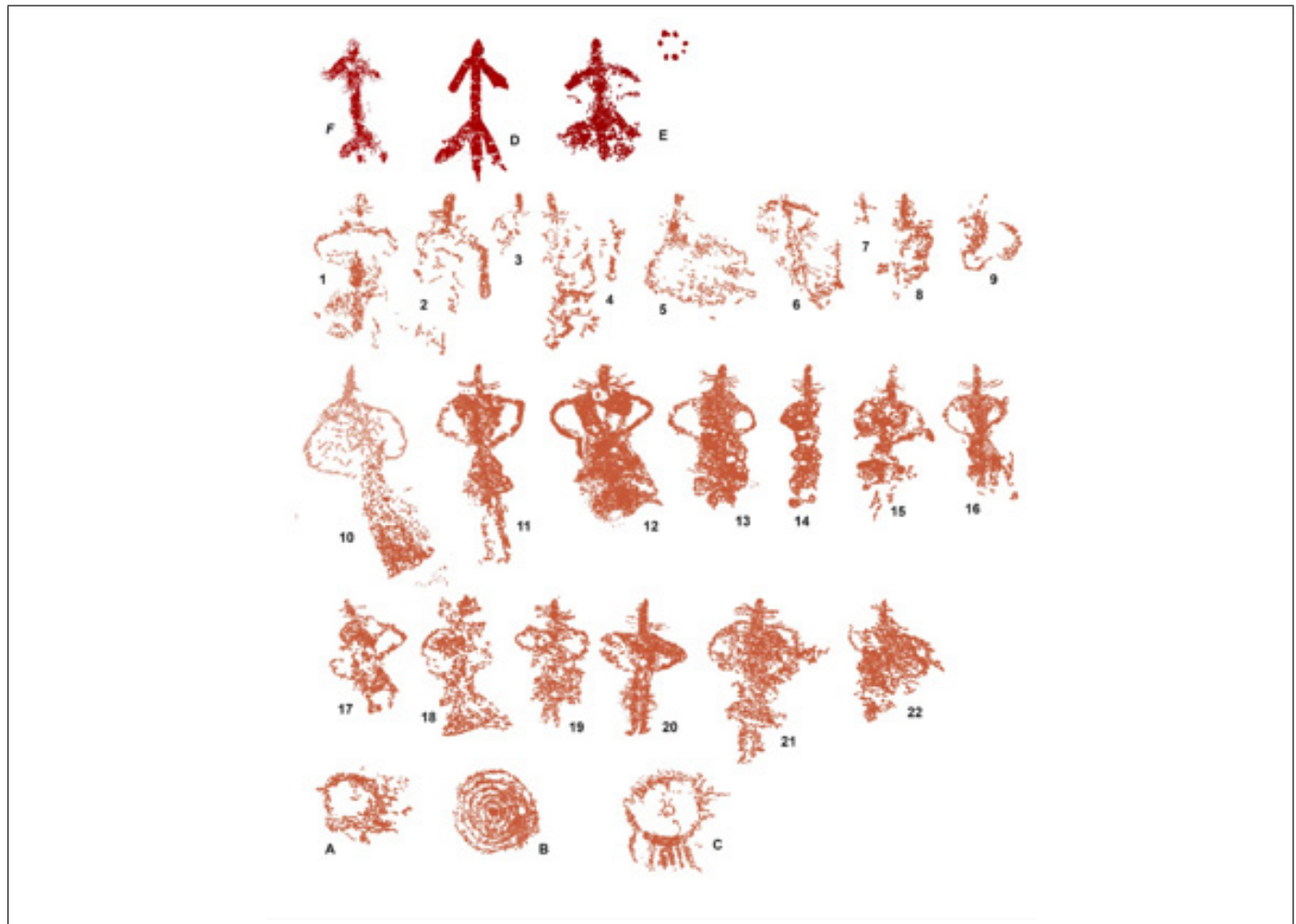


Image 5: Detailed view of all the figures identified on the panel and described in the text.

Considering the importance and novelty represented by these paintings, a description of the figures seems obligatory:

Figure 1. On the upper part of the panel, separated from the rest of the group, appears this figure whose identification is possible because of the lines that appear on either side of the head. It has a length (vertical) of 17.2 cm and a width (horizontal) of 9.2 cm. Digital image processing has allowed us to identify the arms held akimbo on both sides of the body, which is quite faded, but the triangle-shaped upper part is hinted at as well as the beginning of the lower part of what we presume can be a skirt because of the similarity with other, more complete representations.

Figure F. In the upper right corner of the panel we find another

schematic anthropomorph, somewhat different from those described as it has a much longer body and the extremities and penis are shorter. It has a length of 12.5 cm and a width of 6.1 cm.

Figure A. In the right-hand area and above we have identified an oval-shaped sign with a length of 7.1 cm and width of 9.7 cm. The circumference is less regular in the area to the right due to a smearing of the pigment that deforms it slightly.

Figure B. Circular sign made from concentric circles (6) around a central point. It has a length of 8.4 cm and width of 9.4 cm. In the lower right part of this idiomorph, the paint forms a stain that blurs the continuity of the lines.

Figure 2. To the right of the idiomorph made with concentric circles, we have identified another quite faded figure representing a woman. On both sides of the head, the horizontal lines are differentiated as pigtails or braids. It has a length of 11.7 cm and a width of 4.5 cm. The entire body is practically faded, but remains of the torso and arms can be distinguished under anthropomorph A.

Figure C. Returning to the left area of the panel, below the sign with concentric circles, we discovered another circular sign also painted in light red ochre with a length of 10.2 cm and width of 10.7 cm. This idiomorph has the singularity of having a series of lines or appendages at the bottom (6). Inside the circle we have found a small circle, about 2 cm, that seems to show some horns.

Figure D. Anthropomorph painted in dark red ochre with a length of 14.5 cm and width of 7.2 cm. This is a typical salamander-type figure according to the typology from professor Pilar Acosta (1968) [8]. The head is differentiated from the rest of the body, which extends between the legs in a long, thick penis. The arms are thick, as are the legs, which form a cross with respect to the body. This figure is clearly superimposed on figures 3, 7, and 8 and is therefore definitely subsequent to the female figures.

The second pictorial phase of this complex panel is made with a darker ochre whose digital signature is the same for the five elements that compose it and which are clearly superimposed, at least in one case, on the figures described earlier.

Figure 3. To the left of the aforementioned anthropomorph A one can distinguish a new head, smaller than the rest, but the image's set reaches 12.4 cm and a width of 3.7 cm. On the head, only one of the pigtails in the hairstyle on the left side can be differentiated, looking straight at the figure, in reality to the right of the figure. The arm on this same side, in the form of a handle or a semi-circle, is also identified.

Figure 4. Immediately to the right and at the same height appears a new female figure whose length is 13.9 cm and width barely 6.03 cm, as the arms cannot be differentiated. All of it has a low degree of preservation, and identification is again made possible by the lines, two on each side of the head.

Figure 5. Practically in the centre of the panel and above anthropomorph B there is an oval silhouette with an extension on top that reminds us of one of the female silhouettes, with the two sides of the oval possibly being the arms and the line above perhaps corresponding to the head. Inclusion in the group of dancers might be a bit forced, but the digital pigment signature shows us that minimally it is made with the same colorant as the other figures. It has a length of 12.4 cm and width of 10.4 cm.

Figure 6. In the upper right area of the panel, an anthropomorphic figure appears that has certain similarities with the large set of dancing figures, but the digital pigment signature tells us that it is clearly the one used to make the anthropomorphs described here. It has a length of 11.5 cm and width of 6.1 cm. It is possible that the

people who painted such schematic figures saw the others, which are more naturalistic, and tried to copy them in a secondary area respecting the integrity of the set, despite having painted large anthropomorph A on top of some of the figures.

Figure 7. A new figure is identified, again by the lines on the sides of the head, that is to the right of idiomorph C and above large figure no. 10 and which barely reaches 3 cm in length and a width of 3.4 cm. The body is not distinguished, or it was not represented to give a sense of depth, as if it were in the background.

Figure 8. Underlaid anthropomorph A's leg we found another female figure that has a clearly distinguished head with braids on either side, two on each side. It has a length of 9.9 cm and width of 4.09 cm. The body is barely preserved, but we can see the right arm among the pigment stains.

Figure 9. Only the right arm in the form of a handle can be distinguished on this figure, as the rest of it is underlaid anthropomorph A. It has a length of 10.6 cm and width of 6.9 cm.

Figure 10. In the area to the right on the rock panel, very close to a natural crack in the base, a large figure stands out that reaches 21.6 cm in length and a width of 10.4 cm. This figure differs somewhat from the rest. This is because, although it follows a similar morphological diagram, it differs in that the skirt is much longer and hides the legs. Additionally, it appears to be lying down or sitting with a positive dip of 21°, keeping its arms akimbo on both sides of the body. On the head we only see two lines or pigtails. It is quite poorly preserved, as lichens proliferate in this area.

Figure 11. In the centre-lower part of the panel, a magnificent figure that reaches 24.52 cm in length and 10.76 cm in width, with a maximum of 10.72 cm between parallels, stands out due to its good state of preservation. It is undoubtedly the most characteristic figure, and all the most significant and diagnostic elements of the set are used in its composition.

The head is resolved with a vertical line of 3.67 cm. from which lines stick out on both sides, but in an asymmetric shape, like a hairstyle based on erect braids that do not reach 2 cm in length. The torso is represented by an inverted triangle whose upper apexes split both arms in the form of handles and whose hands come together on both sides of the waist.

On the lower part, it appears that this figure is wearing a short skirt, above the knees, also formed by means of another triangle from which emerge in the lower part two legs and some perpendicular appendages, which probably represent the feet. The left arm of the figure (the right as seen from the front) is more defined than the right.

Figure 12. To the right of the previous figure, and at the same height, another very similar figure appears, although with a slightly different style in some details. It would possibly be the largest figure in the set with a length of 20.18 cm, but it lacks legs, and a width of

12.24 cm, which coincides with the maximum between parallels. The details we mentioned are that the head, besides being slightly shorter (2.40 cm), is thicker than the previous one (1.23 cm versus

0.78 cm). Several perpendicular lines can be seen on the sides of the head, apparently three on each side, and they are slightly longer as they reach 3 cm. (Image 6).



Image 6: Detail of the upper part of figure no. 11 with the ABS_OCRES digital processing by GIM Geomatics, in which the hairstyle and arms akimbo can clearly be seen.

The body, which maintains a subtriangular shape, is wider at the bottom, which links to another having the same characteristics, but inverted. It appears to represent a slightly thicker woman than the previous one, whose waist is very short. It also has the arms on both sides in the shape of handles grasping the waist, but in this case the right arm (the left as seen from the front) seems to be carrying a cylindrical bag or basket, unless the artist wanted to represent the hands with scant mastery.

Figure 13. To the right of this last figure, we perceive another with similar characteristics having a length of 14.7 cm and width of 8.9 cm and a maximum between parallels of 8.8 cm. On the head, only two pigtailed can be seen on the right-hand side and three on the left. Both arms are shaped in the form of handles, and although the left one (the right as seen from the front) is inserted into the

next figure, with digital processing it is possible to see its exterior outline.

Both the body and skirt are less triangular than in the previous two figures, appearing as a slightly constricted rectangle in the centre part or at the waist. The legs are simply hinted at with broken lines.

Figure 14. This figure, situated between two others, is 14.5 cm long and barely 4 cm wide. It seems the artist wanted to place it in the background, as you cannot see the arms, which apparently would be covered by the other two representations that are in the foreground.

The details on the head are less obvious, but you can distinguish a couple of lines on either side of the head. It has no legs.

Figure 15. To the right of this figure we find another that follows the same canon as the others. This one also appears in the foreground and reaches 15.7 cm in length and 8.04 cm in width and a maximum between parallels of 8.15 cm. The head, poorly preserved, has a length of 3.63 cm and only shows one pigtail on each side of it, barely 1 cm long. The body is a little blurry due to the state of preservation, but it seems to have a roundish shape framed by the arms in the form of handles. On the left arm (the right as seen from the front) it seems to be carrying a bag or basket.

The waist is very narrow and gives way to the top of the skirt, which is poorly preserved or perhaps was intentionally not represented to give prominence to the figure (no. 22) that appears in the lower part.

Figure E. In the central part of the rock surface, another swallow-type anthropomorph can be distinguished having a length of 12.4 cm and width of 8.4 cm. This silhouette is blurrier than the previous one as the pigment has run, possibly due to its exposure to the environment. In any case, the arms, legs, long and thick penis, and body are clearly differentiated.

A sign made in dark red ochre from small dots (8) with a diameter of 3 cm. The tonality of the pigment as well as the digital signature let us connect it directly to the anthropomorph that is situated to its left.

Figure 16. Between the two large figures, nos. 12 and 13, in a slightly lower area, we find another characteristic female figure that barely reaches 13.65 cm in length by 6.63 cm in width, the maximum between parallels coinciding. The head is very well defined and is 3.03 cm long. On both sides of it are two pigtails, the ones in the left area of the head reaching 2.12 cm in length.

The body has an inverted subtriangular shape and arms in a handle shape on both sides of the torso, although they are not as symmetrical as in other figures. The skirt also has a triangular silhouette and is juxtaposed to the previous one in a narrow waist. The legs are suggested to the knees, and on one of the sides you can distinguish a line that is difficult to interpret.

Figure 17. Next to the legs of central figure no. 13, a new female figure can be seen that reaches a length of 11.27 cm and width of 7.88 cm. It is leaning slightly to the left with a positive dip of 28°. On the head, which is small, only one pigtail can be distinguished on each side. The body has a sub-rectangular structure and the arms, in the form of handles, are very faded. Very short legs stick out from below the skirt.

Figure 18. This figure, difficult to read, we identify as another female figure because of the skirt, which is the most obvious element. It measures 13.86 cm in length and has a width of 6.88 cm. We can distinguish the handle-shaped arms.

Figure 19. We find a new female figure with a somewhat better state of preservation in which the head is distinguished by several pigtails on each side, at least three although there could be up to

four. The arms are in the shape of handles and both legs stick out from the bottom of the skirt. It measures 13.02 cm in length and 7.67 cm in width.

Figure 20. This is the only figure we have identified as male in the entire set. It is not very large, as it barely reaches 12.86 cm in length and a width of 8.10 cm. In general, the structure of the body is similar to the other figures in this pictorial phase, but on the head, made with a vertical line, the characteristic pigtails do not appear and the arms, also in the form of handles, are sturdier and thicker than in the others, integrated with the torso.

The legs come from the waist and not from a skirt and are finished off in respective lines that can represent feet. This man seems to be dancing around the other female figures and has special relevance, given that no other figure is superimposed over it or hides any parts of it. It was expressly desired to personalize him.

Figure 21. On the right side of the decorated area, we find another female figure that measures 16.80 cm in length and 10.78 cm in width. On the right side of the head (the left as seen from the front) there are three pigtails, while on the opposite side only two can be distinguished. The torso is longer than usual and, nevertheless, the skirt is much smaller, shorter, and has a triangular morphology. The arms are in the shape of handles and the short legs stick out of the bottom part in respective lines that are faded.

Figure 22. Finally, nearly on the ground, another difficult-to-read female figure is distinguished whose identification comes from the head with pigtails on each side. The body is a roundish mass of very faded pigment in which we can distinguish, with some difficulty, both arms. Preservation of this last image is quite poor as it is very close to the ground and, although there is not much vegetation at present, it is likely that it has suffered friction from the plants and moisture from the substrate. (Image 7)

Some Reflections on the Paintings at La Peña Del Castrejón

It has been more than three decades since theoretical approaches on the evolution of schematic phenomenon on the Iberian Peninsula were defined (Ripoll, 1983) [11] which, in one way or another, have marked the studies and interpretations of these manifestations up to now.

Study of the rock paintings at La Peña del Castrejón can contribute to opening up the old debate (up to now falsely closed) regarding identification and characterization of what is Levantine and what is schematic, and about the boundaries determined for dispersion of both styles.

In spite of their spectacular nature, the paintings in Ávila are not strictly a novelty in peninsular artistic repertoires, among which group 5 of the set at Arroyo de Hellín (Guadalmena river, Jaén) contains motifs surprisingly similar to those at La Peña del Castrejón, which coexist with other Levantine classics (Soria Lerma et al. 2001) [10].

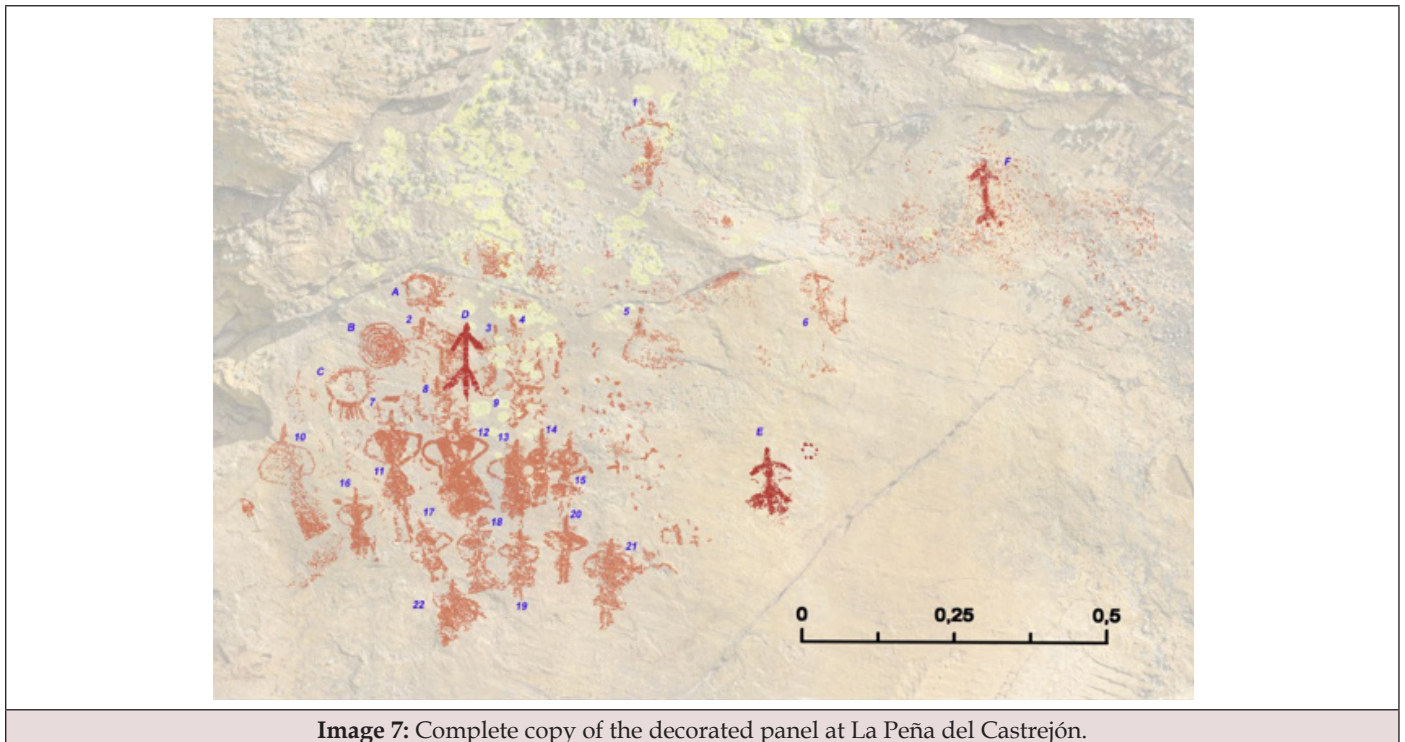


Image 7: Complete copy of the decorated panel at La Peña del Castrejón.

In La Peña del Castrejón, it is necessary to differentiate three groups of motifs:

1. Classic schematic anthropomorphs.
2. Human figures with bitriangular body, arms akimbo, legs, and detailed hair ornaments/hairstyles, situated between naturalist and schematic.
3. Abstract idiomorphs.

Classic schematic anthropomorphs differ from the other two groups in their technical execution as well as in the type of pigments, a fact that has been corroborated by the image processing and colorimetric studies done. It is less clear that the figures in groups 2 and 3 can be separated, being pairs in regard to their execution and use of pigments.

Everything points to considering at least two phases of execution, the oldest being the set of figures with a semi-naturalist look, on which anthropomorphic schematic D would later be expressed, assimilable in all to figures E and G, which would constitute the most recent pictorial layer in the shelter.

If we consider schematic art as a single phenomenon, it would be simple to fit this set within its repertoires: Simple anthropomorphs and symbols are among the most repeated motifs of this art in all its sets. Nevertheless, the distinctive features of the figures with bitriangular bodies in Ávila demand a more detailed analysis.

We have openly chosen to consider these motifs as being female figures, with a pattern that is quite distant from canonical conventionalisms, as the basic anatomical traits of the figure

are revealed in them in a simple but clearly identifiable way. Conceptually, they are very different from the other anthropomorphs in this same set and being aware of the difficulty of using the terms semi-naturalist or semi-schematic, burdened by the most absolute subjectivity, it is appealing to think that these figures do not seek identification of an abstract concept but rather perhaps a singularly specific reference, in which the social component could have an important specific weight.

The bitriangular design can provide information on specific aspects, such as a particular type of clothing, and is an interesting volumetric reference, even as a conventionalism about flat figures. The paired lines on the sides of the head are very detailed, handled by means of small juxtaposed dots that suggest their identification with braided hairstyles, rather than as facial tattoos of faces that are not depicted.

All are portrayed in a frontal view, with arms akimbo. The way the arms are represented stands out: the right, by means of a semi-circle; the left, always at an angle. It should be considered whether this responds to a meaning (conventionalism or particular situation) that explains its repetition.

An orderly arrangement is perceived around the two biggest figures (nos. 10 and 11), which centre the composition. Along with this apparent hierarchy, the smaller figures are joined in pairs or trios (the case of nos. 10, 11, 12, and 13).

All these references suggest the existence of an organizational approach: The individual details, the hierarchy, and the organization of the figures speak of an authentic scene with narrative intention,

in which a series of characters united by appearance and attitude participate, and in which the relationship of the human figure-circular signs is striking, as the two largest figures are in an important position with respect to the signs and the smaller characters accompany the scene by surrounding these two figures.

Comparing these motifs with those of other sets in the Sierra de Segura and north of Jaén, whose figures appear drawn by the same hand and with the same technique as those in Ávila, we cannot fail to think of the existence of a community of ideas that goes beyond geographical limitations and speaks of open cultural relations in a permeable territory, with human and social groups not determined

by their environment.

It is necessary to make reference to the aforementioned shelters with rock art in the Guadalmena river valley (Soria Lerma et al. 2001) [9]. As of their discovery, the paintings in Jaén were attributed to schematic art, even coexisting with purely Levantine motifs, resorting to the strictest and most traditional point of view in regard to definition of this style. And this could be the fate of the ones in Ávila, from that academic and formalistic conception, although in neither of the cases do we have the desired objective archaeological references for chronological and cultural accuracy of the paintings. (Image 8).

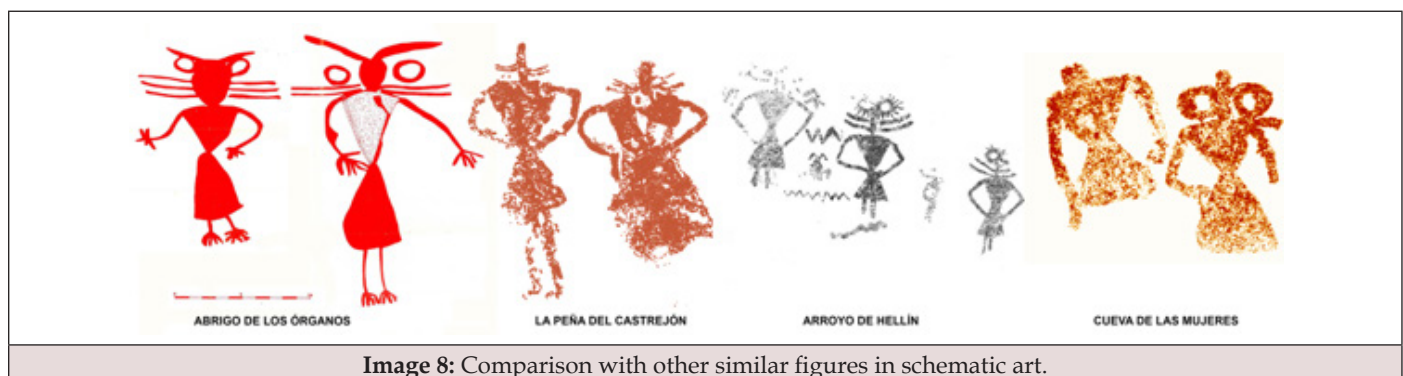


Image 8: Comparison with other similar figures in schematic art.

The formal conception of the paintings at La Peña del Castrejón takes us back to the dance scenes in Levantine art, described and studied by Ripoll (1963, 1968), Beltrán (1969), Almagro (1960) and Jordá (1966, 1976) [12-17], in which it is possible to interpret, at least, a more or less orderly distribution of characters around another central figure and which suggests some kind of interaction between them all. As already noted, the conceptual, technical and chromatic differences mark two clearly differentiated groups: the naturalistic “dancers”, which form a homogeneous and clearly ordered group, and the few schematic anthropomorphs that share the space on the rock with them.

Two techniques for execution, two very different styles, and two apparent chronological moments. But no material or stratigraphic data. It is worth remembering the Levantine motifs that coexist with the paintings in the shelter at Hellín, or rescue from oblivion the great anthropomorph with a head ornament and the goat, both certainly naturalistic, in the shelter at Solapo del Águila in nearby Duratón river canyon, among other figures of this same set whose execution differs from schematic canons and, minimally, point to the need to undertake a review of the material evidence, its interpretations and chronological and cultural setting, along with its comparison with other peninsular sets having similar issues.

The denominated shelter at Hellín (Soria Lerma et al. 2001: 293 ss.) [10] has similarities with La Peña del Castrejón, in which the figures in its group 5 (which are only differentiated from those in Ávila by the appearance of eyes/suns on the sides of the line that

represents the head) are contrasted with those that make up group 7, in this case two outstanding anthropomorphs, male and female, superimposed over a naturalistic deer.

This group 7 is assigned to the Levantine and the rest of the panels to the schematic, even though some of the Levantine figures present a high degree of schematization and the zoomorphs do not have significant naturalistic power. In addition, it stands out that the Levantine figures are related technically, chromatically and spatially to an anchoriform motif and to another that is ramiform, which fit better within the theme of schematic painting. The Levantine anthropomorph-schematic ramiform connection contributes to rekindling the debate on the coexistence of the two styles, supported by the superimpositions documented to date in both senses. Their discoverers have referred to this as a good example of the expansion of the Levantine figures along the natural communication routes of the Alto Guadalquivir.

Within the set of schematic figures, the bitriangular eyed figures notably stand out. Nor do they constitute a unicum, given that they are very similar to the figures in the shelter at Los Órganos, in Santa Elena (Jaén) (López & Soria, 1988:95-97) [18], although in this latter case they do not show radial lines in the eyes.

The hair ornaments made of small bars shown on these figures are considered typical of figures in the eastern part of Sierra Morena (Aldeaquemada, Martín Pérez, Garganta de la Hoz) (López & Soria, 1988: 42:75-76) [18], while the eyes-suns are linked with

environments typical of the southeast of the peninsula, in the area of Los Millares (López & Soria, 2001:308) [10].

Once again, the situation is interpreted as a consequence of the shelters' location in the Guadalimar-Mundo corridor, whose role as a natural communication route compels it to be considered as a route for expansion of Levantine artistic manifestations inland, as the authentic gateway for Mediterranean influences in the Southern Plateau.

In the absence of archaeological references and precise stratigraphic relationships, the superimpositions recorded indicate the presence of schematic motifs over others that are Levantine (Ripoll, 1968; Beltrán, 1968; Hernández et al. 1988; Alonso & Grimal, 1995) [13,19], but we have just seen how in one of the sets at Guadalmena schematic signs appear that are related to Levantine figures, a situation that is repeated in Tabla de Pochico (López & Soria, 1988) [18]. But it has also been documented in this same area of eastern Sierra Morena the fact that naturalistic or semi-naturalistic zoomorphic figures, technically and morphologically Levantine, appear quite intrusively in schematic groups.

Outside the Guadalmena area, the Cueva de las Mujeres (Medina-Sidonia, Cádiz) also allows comparison with the figures in Ávila, based on five female figures arranged around a rectangle that seemingly distributes the composition. The two figures on the left are larger than the rest, and one of them has eyed/circular motifs on the head. The figure on the left shows the left elbow raised to shoulder level, which somehow brings to mind the position of the figures in Ávila. The eyed figure also shows a dysmetric arrangement of both arms (Carreras et al. 2009) [20].

As in Ávila, it would be possible to define groups of related and, apparently, hierarchical figures. It has been suggested that remains of circular motifs could be preserved to the left of the two main figures. It is appealing to be able to suggest an orderly arrangement of the motifs (circles/stelliforms - main figures - secondary groups) composing a scene that could contain a specific narrative/conceptual intention.

Among researchers of this phenomenon, the idea is widespread that figures transcend merely narrative or artistic aspects, with interpretation generally being oriented towards habitual theories that they are the graphic reflection of various types of ritual aspects. This, without it being possible to discard that they constitute the reflection of significant social aspects of the communities that expressed them on stone.

The shelter at Los Órganos (Santa Elena, Jaén), also located in the area of influence of Despeñaperros gorge, again brings us back to the question of natural corridors and relationships between areas, as this is the most suitable way to go from the Guadalquivir valley to the Central Plateau. Its female figures, also having hair ornaments with circular motifs and parallel bars/hairstyles, along with the motifs in the other sets mentioned, enclose an artistic area that shares artistic conceptions, pictorial technique and, above all,

a space characterised by the permeability provided by important natural communication routes in whose area the shelters are located, authentic transmission routes for people, cultures, and ideas between distant but closely-related areas.

Even when bitriangular signs show up in formal repertoires of schematic art, the more naturalistic conception of these singular human figures, the narrative/descriptive character of the scenes they play a leading role in, etc., make it necessary to form a specific group with them that, until now, was located in the Sierra de Segura and the Alto Guadalquivir Mountain range. The discovery in Ávila suddenly expands this area and transports us to a point very far from the main nucleus of where these motifs appeared. The formal comparison is indisputable: The figures in the Andalusian locations and the Castilian ones seem to respond to the same artistic phenomenon in formal terms, but it seems preferable to note that they respond to one same conceptual reference and, with due caution, to a same perception of social and spiritual reality.

In view of the figures at La Peña del Castrejón, and of the evident differentiation between the simplest anthropomorphs and the elaborate female figures, it is unavoidable to address the problem of the styles and setting of these figures in the panorama of post-Palaeolithic rock art in Spain. Once again turning to the clichés regarding execution processes and representational models, differentiation from the most classic schematic motifs in the academic sense, characterized by their simplicity, with poorly defined profiles and thick lines, seems evident faced with the more technical representations that we find in this site in Ávila and in the sites already mentioned in the Sierra de Segura, Alto Guadalquivir, etc.

It is true that, with the exception of the figures noted from the Duratón river canyon, nothing resembling Levantine rock art had been defined in the peninsula's inland up to now. But it cannot be denied that in some of the Andalusian sites mentioned, with motifs comparable to those at La Peña del Castrejón, what is Levantine and what is schematic share space (Alonso & Grimal, 1995-1996; Mateo Saura, 2001: 184) [19,21].

Until now, the Plateau and the western part of the peninsula did not permit comparisons in this regard. The sets in the Alto Segura are very different from what was seen in Valonsadero, for example, and in Extremadura, but the discovery in Ávila comes closer to these schemas and, above all, based on comparison with the Andalusian sets repeatedly cited. With regard to these new findings, which call into question the impermeability of the inland to artistic conceptions from the Levant, it would be necessary to again recall the figures at Roca Benedí (Jaraba, Zaragoza) (Utrilla, 2010) [22], a clear display of westward expansion of Levantine art, which is now located in the access to the Plateau, with this location being surpassed in its western projection only by the Jaén nucleus in the Alto Guadalquivir. And perhaps it is not the only reference to consider, since in the shelter at Rillo de Gallo, in Guadalajara, a bovine figure compatible with the Levantine (Balbin et al. 1989)

[23] is described even further to the west than Roca Benedí.

Noting these references, the dispersion map of the Levantine is very expressive: The Mediterranean arch, indeed, but with notable projections toward Upper Andalusia, the Tagus River basin and the Central and Western Pyrenees, which suggest a possibility of the existence of inland locations.

And the same could be said based on the Andalusian nuclei and their relationship with the historic Despeñaperros gorge as a communication route between the Guadalquivir and Tagus basins or, what is the same, between the Mediterranean area and the Central Plateau.

Including the figures from the La Peña del Castrejón set in the block of the Levantine raises a good number of doubts and creates more than a few problems, but their departure from the canons of schematic art seems unquestionable [24]. Contrary to the apparent disorder of the schematic sets, a structured arrangement of the figures in a closed compositional space, perfectly delimited, is seen in the Levantine panels. A staged intention seems evident, with a marked narrative character, of something that can be interpreted as a specific action.

It is something we believe to interpret in the set at La Peña del Castrejón, based on the arrangement and distribution of the motifs, their almost certain hierarchization, and the relationship suggested between the anthropomorphic figures and the signs [25]. Both the technical execution of the motifs and their distribution fit perfectly with the theoretical approaches and formal characteristics defined for what is Levantine. If the figures do not exactly respond to Levantine stereotypes, the composition of the scene certainly distances it from the solutions of schematic art.

Technically and aesthetically, there are known paintings considered to be Levantine having a much less naturalistic style than the figures on the hill at Castrejón, whose careful execution brings us closer to precise details in regard to hairstyles or hair ornaments, clothing and attitudes [26]. On certain occasions, the discovery of motifs that have been included in schematic repertoires despite their strong naturalistic tendency has led some researchers to establish a differentiation of those less orthodox paintings from both the schematic and the Levantine. In this sense, it is necessary to remember what is known as the art of Laguna de la Janda, in Cádiz, and especially the aforementioned scenic figures in the Cueva de las Mujeres and in the Guadalupe area. In the area of La Janda, the shelters are situated in the circle of schematic art, but emphasizing their more naturalistic style (Carreras, 2009: 29) [20], differentiated from both the schematic and the Levantine, but taking part in the characteristics of both groups.

In many of the known dance scenes, the existence of certain elements that seem to guide the composition are suggested. Above we referred to a similar situation in the case of La Peña del Castrejón, but, in our opinion, the anthropomorphs are not the references, being the stelliform motifs the ones that order the

arrangement of the female figures, while the canonical schematic anthropomorphs appear to correspond to other phases of the cave's use. Re-paintings, accumulation, reuse of space in different moments... all this is pending definition and new work that allows for in-depth analysis of the existence, or not, of superimpositions in this set of cave art.

We find two types of materials, two techniques for execution, two very different styles, and two apparent chronological moments. But no direct material or stratigraphic data. Perhaps it's time to take stock, appreciating the different figures and compositions we have referred to previously and to analyse, from other points of view and other techniques, the growing accumulation of signs whose execution departs from the criteria considered as orthodox up to now. The need to take on a review of the material evidence is clearly evident; that is, its interpretations and chronological and cultural setting, along with its comparison with other peninsular sets showing similar problems.

To sum up all the above, the figures at La Peña del Castrejón cannot be openly identified with canonical Levantine figures. On the other hand, however, it is difficult to consider them as another subsection of the schematic world and, as we have seen, they are by no means an exception within the repertoires of post-Palaeolithic peninsular rock painting.

Moreover, the novelties that are ever more frequently publicised in this field seem to move us further away from the "provincialization" of prehistoric art and are certainly suggestive in regard to defining an extensive community of social practices and knowledge that increasingly weakens fragmentation and study as local phenomena of these graphic representations. A good example of this is the news story recently disseminated in various media about the discovery of schematic paintings in Casaio (Orense), where the existence of an eyed idol correlates the paintings with a large community that includes the Plateau, northern Portugal, Extremadura and Andalusia, and which again provides arguments to question the existence of closed areas.

In short, we know the signs, the materials, the adaptation to a physical space that is self-evident, but we do not have a single piece of information about behaviours and processes or patterns of knowledge of the human groups that produced the signs.

The similarities between the examples we have used in the course of these reflections, very geographically distant, lead us to pose the existence of not only cultural but also common social aspects. Not everything can be reduced to repetition, copying or transmission of material stereotypes. In the background of a set of very similar figures undoubtedly lies the existence of a series of common practices or behaviours, whether ritual or social. Labelling cultural manifestations based on the realm of territoriality can only lead to outlining local versions having very little strength in the study of prehistoric cultures.

However much we strive to find singularities in the rock art

of a certain territory, this territory will never be constrained by artificial limits, nor can classical or less classical conventionalisms pretend that these manifestations are not integrated into a common development of the different groups, which are undoubtedly

the reflection of a more global sociocultural reality than some want to recognize, and whose resources for communication and transmission of ideas or knowledge we are still far from being able to interpret. (Image 9)



Image 9: QR code that links to an explanatory video about the digital processing done to identify the different figures.

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