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## ROCK ART AND RITUAL LANDSCAPE IN CENTRAL SPAIN: THE ROCK CARVINGS OF LA HINOJOSA (CUENCA)

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*Summary. In this article the rock art carvings of La Hinojosa in central Spain are examined. Their connection to a major transit route recorded at least from the medieval period is explored, as well as their location in a valley located at the confluence of two primary river basins in the Iberian Peninsula separated by less than five kilometres. It is argued that this singularity of the landscape seems to have been perceived by the people who marked the stones. From the 17 decorated rocks recorded in La Hinojosa valley, three were exceptionally elaborately decorated. They were situated at regular intervals in the valley. The site with the greatest number of motifs, the large rock of San Bernardino, occupies a central location. This site is also exceptional because of the transformations which the rock shows throughout the day, pointing to a narrative in which cups and anthropomorphs seem to have a primary role. It is suggested that gender may have constituted one of the main guidelines of the narrative, given the apparent replacement of feminine by masculine human representations throughout the day.*

In the Iberian Peninsula most studies of post-Palaeolithic rock carvings have traditionally concentrated on its north-west corner, in Galicia (Bradley 1997; Costas Goberna and Novoa Alvarez 1993; MacWhite 1951; Obermaier 1925; Sobrino Buhigas 1935). The existence of carvings in other areas of Spain has been recognized from as early as the beginning of the twentieth century (Cabré Aguiló 1915, 211), but until recently their study has received little attention. Yet it is now known that prehistoric rock carvings are present all over the Iberian Peninsula in areas as far apart such as Cantabria (Teira Mayolini and Ontañón Peredo 1996), Catalonia (Díez Coronel y Montull 1986–87), Huelva (Belén Deamós 1974) and Almería (García del Toro 1979–80).

The discovery of rock carvings in the area of La Hinojosa, in central Spain (Figure 1), came as a surprise. After several years studying Bronze Age settlement patterns in this area, the author of this article came across a photograph taken by Dr. M. Isabel Martínez Navarrete a few years earlier. This showed an anthropomorphic statue-stela of probable Chalcolithic date (c.3250–2250 cal BC: Gilman 1992) (Figure 2 and Bueno Ramírez *et al.* 1998, 113). The statue-stela had an obvious importance given the rarity of similar finds in the area, and a visit was paid to the owner and local amateur archaeologist, don Vicente Martínez Millán. He had found the statue-stela on the hill of San Bernardino (also known as La Cruz de San Bernardino)

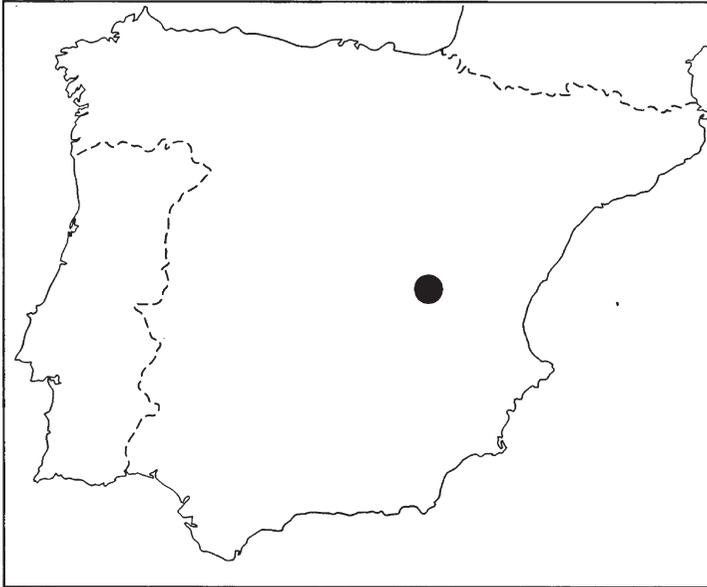


Figure 1  
Map of the Iberian Peninsula with location of La Hinojosa rock art.



Figure 2  
The anthropomorphic statue-stela from the hill of San Bernardino.

together with a few fragments of Dornajos beaker pottery published some years ago (Galán Saulnier and Poyato Holgado 1980, 71). Moreover, the finder was also able to provide further information including a collection of pottery fragments and flint implements which represented the largely unknown Chalcolithic occupation of the area (Aceituno *et al.* 1998), and photographs of a large number of petroglyphs which he had found around the village of La Hinojosa.<sup>1</sup>

In 1996, thanks to the grant, *Becas de Investigación 1995*, provided by the Provincial government of Cuenca, the author together with Professor Rodrigo Balbín, Dr. Primitiva Bueno and one of their postgraduate students, Amparo Aldecoa (Bueno Ramírez *et al.* 1998)<sup>2</sup> visited the rock-art sites located by Martínez Millán. Further fieldwork was carried out in the summer of 1997 with Eduardo García and Ignacio Montero and new sites were discovered further to the north-west. In all, about 30 carved outcrops were recorded, some of them located to the north of La Hinojosa, in the Cervera del Llano area.<sup>3</sup> Given the thorough surveys undertaken by Mr. Vicente Martínez Millán over a radius of 7 km around La Hinojosa village, it is highly likely that the number of decorated rocks recorded in that area represents the total of what is preserved. Further away, no such confidence is possible.

#### THE GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

The petroglyphs of La Hinojosa are situated in central Spain, in the Southern Meseta, in the northern area of La Mancha. Administratively they belong to the Autonomous Community of Castilla-La Mancha, Province of Cuenca. The local topography of this study area is formed by wide valleys framed by higher hills into which sandstone outcrops project (Bullón and Díaz-Andreu 1992). In La Hinojosa the valley takes the form of a wide corridor, and here the outcrops are only found in the north-east part of the valley (Figure 3). As the area is around 900 m above sea-level, temperatures can be extreme, very cold in winter and hot in summer. Later prehistoric climate, at least around the early second millennium cal BC, was similar to that at present, as is indicated by the analysis of plant imprints in wattle-and-daub from the Bronze Age settlement of El Recuenco (Rivera *et al.* 1994). The present vegetational cover and faunal composition of both valleys, however, are substantially the result of a great transformation which occurred in the nineteenth century, when a high proportion of land was brought into agricultural use (Martínez Millán, personal communication).

The valley of La Hinojosa is located on a major transit route recorded at least from the medieval period. Then, a net of routeways for transhumant pastoralists existed all over the kingdom of Castille. One of them known as *La Cañada Real de los Chorros* passed along the valley (Martínez Fronce 1991, Fig. 4). The route was still in use ten years ago, as local people commented on the passing of transhumant shepherds with cattle and sometimes with sheep and goats during one of the excavation seasons at the Bronze Age settlement of El Recuenco in the mid-1990s. The relation of the carvings with this track seems worth exploring, especially given that other carvings in central Spain such as those of Minateda have been

1 Although their discovery had been published in the 1970s by the director of the Provincial Museum, they were dated to the medieval period (Osuna 1974; Osuna 1976).

2 A first report on the fieldwork undertaken in 1996 was published by Bueno Ramírez *et al.* (1998).

3 This article is based on the rock art of La Hinojosa. The rock-art sites found in the Cervera del Llano district mentioned in Bueno Ramírez *et al.* (1998) are not part of the landscape analysis undertaken below.

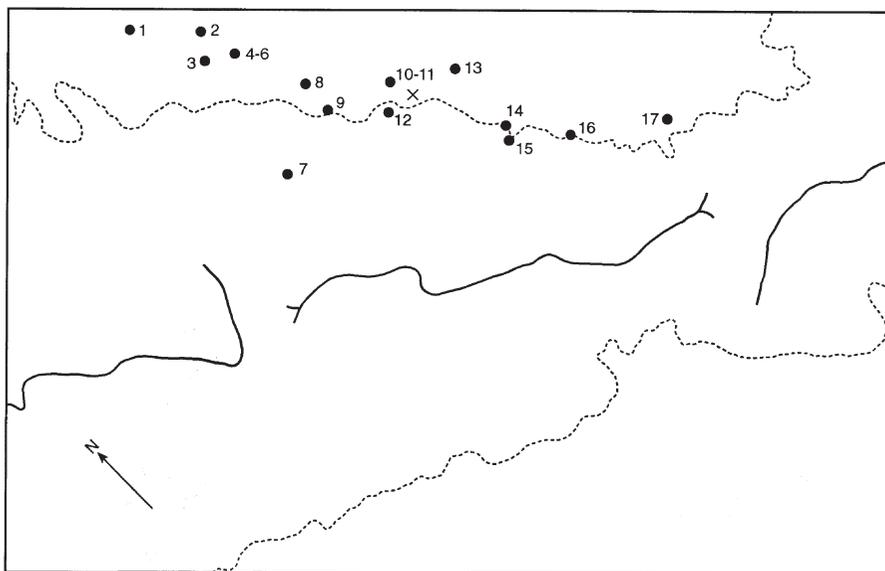


Figure 3

Map of the rock-art sites of La Hinojosa: 1. Las Cabañuelas II; 2. Las Cabañuelas I; 3. Peña Buitre; 4–6 Las Viñas Viejas I–III; 7. El Ranal; 8. Las Solanillas; 9. El Corral de Arsenio; 10. La Cruz de San Bernardino; 11. The slopes of San Bernardino; 12. The large rock of San Bernardino; 13. La Butrera; 14. Ladera del Palomar or Laderas de La Atalaya; 15. El Peñasco; 16. El Santo (also known as Las Pilas); 17. Peñas de Mollana. X indicates the location of Los Dornajos site.

explained through their relation to transhumant routeways (Jordán Montes 1991–92, 26). Initial enquiries may point to this relation as crucial to understanding the rock carvings of La Hinojosa (Figure 4). Carved rocks are also found to the north, towards the Sierra de Cuenca, precisely following the *Cañada Real* track. These are found in the local communes of Cervera del Llano, San Lorenzo de La Parrilla and La Parra de las Vegas. On the other hand, at least two neighbouring communes which are not on that route, Olivares del Júcar and La Almarcha, do not have carvings (Martínez Millán, personal communication).

There is another major feature to be emphasized regarding the geographical context of the carved outcrops analysed here. La Hinojosa valley is located at the confluence of two primary rivers in the Iberian Peninsula: the river Júcar, which runs from the Sierra de Cuenca and changes direction in this area to flow east, towards the Mediterranean; and the river Guadiana, which flows west in its search for the Atlantic. In the study area both basins are separated by less than five kilometres, in which an endorheic course in La Hinojosa valley keeps the balance between both watersheds.

#### ROCK-ART SITES IN LA HINOJOSA AND THEIR MOTIFS

Seventeen decorated rocks were recorded in La Hinojosa valley. From north-west to south-east the following sites are found (Figure 3): Las Cabañuelas II; Las Cabañuelas I (Bueno Ramírez *et al.* 1998, 110); Peña Buitre (Figure 5) (Bueno Ramírez *et al.* 1998, 111, 114); Las

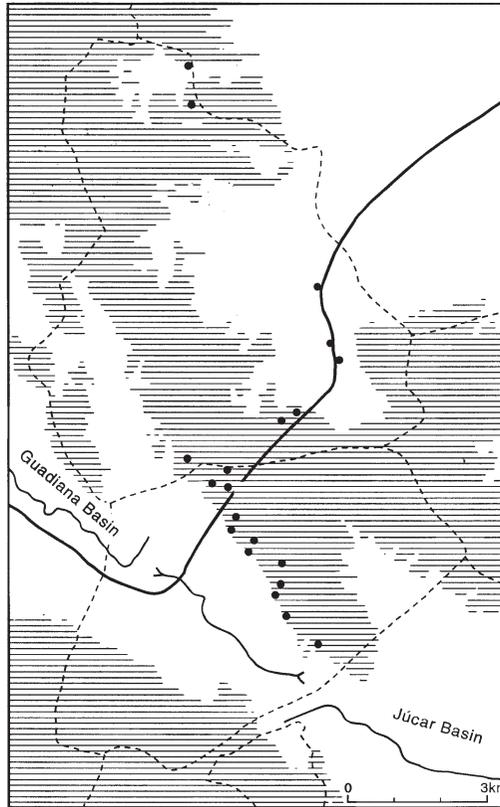


Figure 4

The *Cañada Real de los Chorros* routeway and the rock-art sites of La Hinojosa and Cervera del Llano.

Viñas Viejas I–III (Bueno Ramírez *et al.* 1998, 112); El Ranal (Bueno Ramírez *et al.* 1998, 115); Las Solanillas (Figure 6) (Bueno Ramírez *et al.* 1998, 113 (?)); El Corral de Arsenio; La Cruz de San Bernardino; the slopes of San Bernardino; the large rock of San Bernardino; La Butrera; Ladera del Palomar or Laderas de La Atalaya (Bueno Ramírez *et al.* 1998, 104); El Peñasco (Figure 7); El Santo (also known as Las Pilas) (Figure 8) (Bueno Ramírez *et al.* 1998, 109); Peñas de Mollana (Bueno Ramírez *et al.* 1998, 112). I will follow Bueno Ramírez *et al.* (1998) in accepting that the representation of a horse found in El Ranal is not contemporary with carvings found at the other sites. At all other sites cups and grooves were found, contrasting with the few anthropomorphic representations (in Peña Buitre, Las Viñas Viejas I; the large rock of San Bernardino; El Santo and Peñas de Mollana). Each outcrop has been decorated differently, and the degree of complexity varies greatly. Three sites seem to have been exceptionally elaborately decorated. In the first, Peña Buitre, several anthropomorphs are found; there is a large one on a vertical surface looking at the valley, whereas another example – a bottle-shaped anthropomorph (Figure 5) – is on a separate rock. In the case of the large rock of San Bernardino several panels combine cups and grooves with a few anthropomorphic representations (see below). Finally, the third site with a large number of carvings, El Santo, has several panels, with



Figure 5  
Peña Buitre. Anthropomorph.



Figure 6  
Las Solanillas.

large basins in a few of them, some rectangular in shape, and cups connected on occasion by channels or grooves (Figure 8) (Bueno Ramírez *et al.* 1998, 109). In another panel a stela-shaped anthropomorph (which is reminiscent of the statue-stelae of San Bernardino) is found (Figure 8). Other sites have either only cups and grooves or the number of representations included are fewer than at the previous three sites.

In addition to the differences in complexity, two other aspects may be worth exploring in relation to the rock-art sites of La Hinojosa valley. The first relates to intervisibility, the second to the location of complex and simple sites. Most of the decorated rocks have a high degree of



Figure 7  
El Peñasco.



Figure 8  
El Santo.

visibility towards the bottom area of the valley. However, as noted during the fieldwork undertaken in 1997, there is a great deal of variability in the visibility between the rock-art sites<sup>4</sup> (Figure 9). This includes the three exceptionally decorated sites in La Hinojosa valley – El Santo, the large rock of San Bernardino and Peña Buitre. In contrast, the hill of San Bernardino, where the statue-stela was found, is a place with good visibility. In general terms it could be suggested

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4 Additional notes to those taken in the field were provided by Vicente Martínez Millán on 10 September 1997.

A/

1																
2	X															
3	/	O														
4-6	O	O	O													
8	O	O	X	/												
9	O	O	X	O	X											
10	O	O	X	O	O	X										
11	O	O	X	O	O	X	X									
12	O	O	O	O	O	X	/	O								
13	O	O	O	O	O	O	X	O	O							
14	O	O	O	O	O	O	X	O	O	O						
15	O	O	O	O	O	O	X	O	O	O	X					
16	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	/	X				
17	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	/			
	1	2	3	4-6	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17		

B/

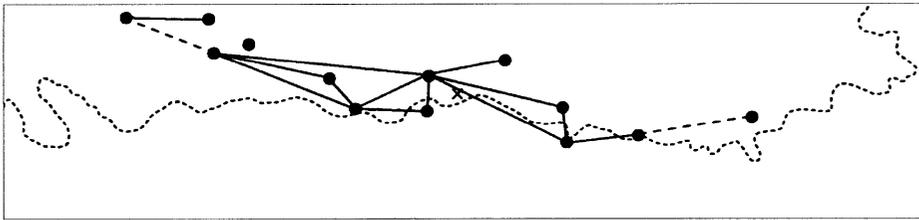


Figure 9

Intervisibility between rock-art sites in La Hinojosa valley. Numbers refer to sites in Figure 3. El Ranal site has not been included for reasons given in the text. X = visibility; O = no visibility; / = hindered visibility.

that sites can only see others nearby and, therefore, that long-distance intervisibility was not particularly sought by the artist(s). No correlation between visibility and the complexity of designs was found.

If intervisibility does not seem to be highly significant, the location of the sites in the landscape, and the degree of complexity, do. Once the sites with a higher number of motifs are plotted against those with less simple motifs, a pattern emerges. Sites with simple and complex designs alternate, implying deliberate patterning (Figure 10). The three sites with complex motifs are evenly distributed along the valley, and the one with the highest number of motifs, the large rock of San Bernardino, occupies a central location. The exceptional character of this site is due not only to the high variety of its motifs, but also (as explained below) to the transformations the rock shows throughout the day.

THE LARGE ROCK OF SAN BERNARDINO. A STORY IN TIME

The large rock of San Bernardino is located in a secluded place, at the foot of the hill of San Bernardino. It is a massive outcrop (6 by 8 m) which, unlike most of the other decorated rocks, does not form part of the scarp. Its shape is also peculiar, as it can be divided into several distinct parts. The location of this rock is also unusual as it is situated at one extreme of the

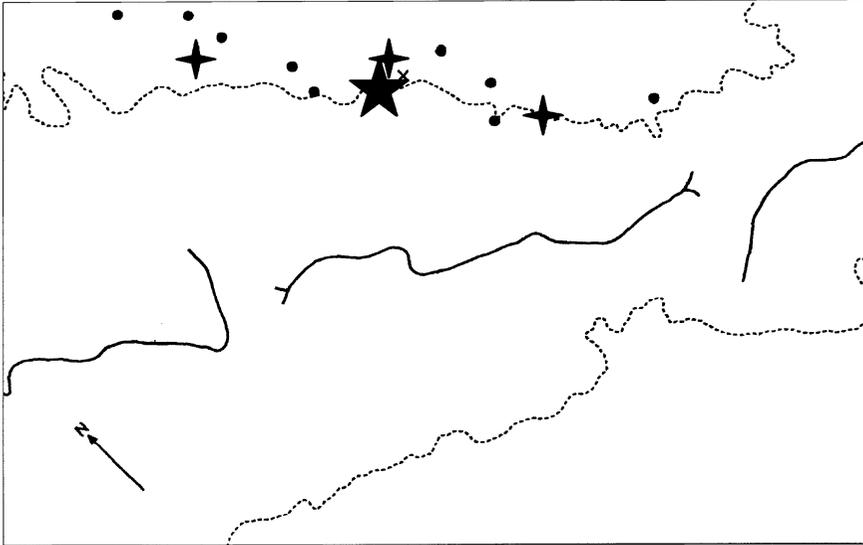


Figure 10

Distribution of complex (stars) and simple (dots) rock-art sites. X indicates the location of Los Dornajos site. The star above the large rock of San Bernardino indicates the site where the statue-stela was found.

lower ground of the valley. Although nowadays the whole of the cultivated area of the bottom of the valley is visible from here (Figure 11), a few trees would easily have hindered the view in the past. The visibility towards other carved outcrops is also very limited, and only El Corral de Arsenio and, to a certain extent, the hill of San Bernardino, can nowadays be seen from here. Despite this unpretentious location, the large rock of San Bernardino is the site where carvings are organized in what we could classify as the most complex composition.

The carvings on the large rock of San Bernardino present a narrative which is only readable by observation throughout the day (Bueno Ramírez *et al.* 1998). Motifs appear and disappear depending on the sunlight in a prescribed sequence. The rock has an uneven surface, and forms five distinct panels which are illuminated at different times of the day. Only two motifs are visible the whole day long. These are two cups towards the south-west and the north-east of the outcrop (Figure 12). Whereas the former (that in the foreground of Figure 12) is a simple motif – only a cup and a short channel – the latter is a huge semicircular motif (52 by 42 cm) towards which at least eight channels converge. These, in turn, are connected to other cups and channels (Figure 13).

As discovered during the fieldwork undertaken in 1996 (Bueno Ramírez *et al.* 1998) the large rock of San Bernardino tells us a story in time. Early in the morning the sun gives the carvings in panel 2 a brief prominence (Figure 14).<sup>5</sup> The panel is very weathered and motifs are

5 A visit paid to San Bernardino by the author of this paper together with Eduardo García on 8 August 1997 allowed the recognition of which times were best for the visibility of the panels: 10.30 a.m. for panel 2, 11 a.m. for panel 3, between 12 noon and 1 p.m. for panel 4. At 5 p.m. the anthropomorphs in panel 1 began to be seen as such (and not as blurred lines), but they were best seen at 7.30 p.m. The cups of panels 1 and 5 were seen at all times.



Figure 11  
Location of the large rock of San Bernardino.



Figure 12  
Cups towards the south-east (panel 5) and the north-west (panel 1) illuminated the whole day long.



Figure 13  
Large cup towards the north-west in panel 1.



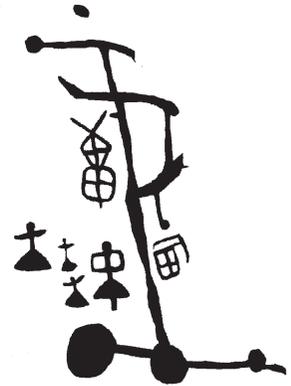
Figure 14  
Motifs in panel 2.

not clear, although some are undoubtedly modern because they represent letters. However, two of the five lines finish in a cup, a characteristic shown by other prehistoric motifs on other panels. There is also a triangular motif. Some of these motifs might indeed be prehistoric, although they were later reused to create new messages. In any case it is apparent that, in contrast with other panels, the carvings were never very deep and there was no intention of creating a highly visual narrative in the middle of the day, if at all.

Shortly after, the carvings in panel 3 begin to appear prominent (Figure 15, Note: the recordings of Figs. 15, 16 & 17 are based on Bueno & Aldecoa in Bueno et al. 1998, Fig. 2).



Figure 15  
Motifs in panel 3.



In this panel the composition has a channel as its axis. This channel ends in a cup, from which, in the same line, but ascending towards the cup on panel 5, there is a sequence of pecked grooves suggesting that there was the intention of carving another duct. The composition is, thus, unfinished. The cup is linked to a chain of other cups and channels running in the opposite direction which flows towards the exterior of the rock. To the left (as one looks at it) of the axial channel, four or five female figures and a complex motif are located. To the right an indeterminate motif is found.

Midday is an impasse, a silent time in which only cups predominate. In the afternoon the motifs on panel 4 are illuminated (Figure 16). They are placed on a very steep surface. High in the panel the bottom part of a natural hollow has been carved into a cup which connects with a channel. At the centre a sequence of lines and grooves descends, leaving to the left at least two anthropomorphic cruciforms. There is another anthropomorph at the far right of the panel. At the base of the panel, located on the visual line of an adult standing on the ground looking at the panel, two tree-like motifs attract attention. They are the first ones to be seen when the panel begins to be sunlit. The panel ends, at its lowest point, with a natural cup which flows to the exterior.

In the last hours of the day anthropomorphs on panel 1 emerge (Figure 17). As with most anthropomorphs on the large rock of San Bernardino, they are located to the left of the compositions formed by cups and channels. Modern additions, in the form of a round and eyed head added to one anthropomorph, can be distinguished by the carving technique and style which differ from those used in the prehistoric period. There are at least four human representations of the type usually interpreted as men.

There is clearly a narrative in the large rock of San Bernardino of which at least two elements may be defined. The first is the importance of the cups. Cups predominate because of their number, their position, their size, and their visibility throughout the day. Yet the object or idea to which cups refer lies beyond the limits of interpretation available to archaeologists. Various interpretations, such as their signifying the sun or perhaps having a practical use as liquid containers, are equally possible and in the absence of further ethnographic information it is impossible to say which one (or ones) make sense in the culturally-constructed world of meanings of the creators (Layton 2001, 315; cf. Quine 1960).



Figure 16  
Motifs in panel 4.

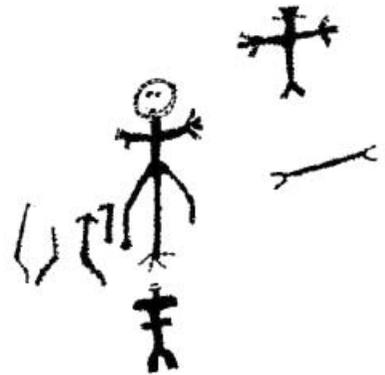


Figure 17  
Motifs in panel 1.

The second element to emphasize in the large rock of San Bernardino is the repeated representation of humans. In this case, continuity of perception in the last millennia allows a modern viewer to argue with a high degree of confidence that these anthropomorphs literally represent human bodies. Three main types of anthropomorphs can be defined on the base of the lower half of the motif: those with two divergent lines, those with a triangle and those with a simple line. Parallels to other aspects of material culture dated mainly to the Neolithic and Chalcolithic (Acosta 1968; Bueno Ramírez and Balbín Behrmann 1992) seem to point to their

differences as representing two genders. In the large rock of San Bernardino the anthropomorphs which arise in the morning seem to represent women. Then they disappear and after an impasse, it is men who follow with the narration. The replacement of feminine by masculine human representations throughout the day strongly suggests that gender constituted one of the main guidelines to constructing the story.

In sum, even if the cultural knowledge which would allow an interpretation of the metaphorical meanings and the story(ies) behind them is unknown to the modern viewer, there are many aspects that point to this rock site as special. These are mainly the shape of the rock, its location on the valley floor, its central position between two major river basins, the exceptional use of light employed to create a sequence in the narration and the use of different motifs to allow a change of scenario from one panel to the next creating a wealth of discourses from which we only have some hints of one of them – that of gender. These features endow the large rock of San Bernardino with a singular meaning which, as argued in the next section, seems to have been related to a high level of ritual significance.

#### THE LANGUAGE OF LANDSCAPE IN LA HINOJOSA

Rock art can be seen as one of the means used by prehistoric communities to convey the specificity of particular places. In La Hinojosa valley this specificity was revealed through the carving of outcrops. Through the decoration of rocks people modelled their landscape. Locales were 'named' and the identity of the place was established. Through the cultural act of signing the stones the landscape was further integrated in a social discourse (cf. Tilley 1994, 18). This discourse was both profane and sacred, for in pre-state societies both are part of the same thing (Ingold 1986, 140–1). As argued elsewhere (Díaz-Andreu 2001) a concept that can help in discussing this dual character of the landscape is that of ritual depth.<sup>6</sup> It refers to the uneven balance between secularity/sacredness of each locale in the landscape. This is to say that some locales are more ritually charged than others – the degree of secularity and sacredness of a grave, for example, cannot be equated to that of a dwelling place; equally, daily tasks and practices in domestic space may be guided by basic religious schemata, but to a great extent they are connected to what we understand nowadays as secular activities.

The landscape of La Hinojosa had both profane and ritual aspects. In functional terms, it was crossed by a major routeway to which other rock-art areas were seemingly connected along its route. Yet, in contrast with these, La Hinojosa valley showed a distinctive physical peculiarity: no clear river was to be seen anywhere. The valley is a liminal landscape: it is located in an area of a few kilometres between the river basins of the Júcar and the Guadiana, two of the main rivers of the Iberian Peninsula which run into the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean respectively. Yet in La Hinojosa valley water does not apparently flow into either of them.

The singularity of the landscape seems to have been perceived by the people who marked the stones. Rocks were inscribed in a meaningful way. A comparison between the large

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6 The concept of identity was also discussed in Díaz-Andreu (2001) as one that could greatly help to improve our understanding of rock art. Although gender identity has been mentioned in relation to the large rock of San Bernardino, in other rocks its relevance would be a difficult issue to assess given the indeterminate character of the representations at most of the other sites.

rock of San Bernardino located in a central position in the valley and other rock-art sites highlights a variation in the decisions taken to decorate the stones. The large rock of San Bernardino was peculiar not only because of the reasons mentioned in the previous section (shape of the rock, its location, its central position, the complexity of the carved motifs and the technique used to narrate the story behind the carvings) but also because it is at the foot of the hill where the statue-stela was found and also extremely close to Los Dornajos site, where a large number of Dornajos beaker pottery sherds were recorded in the late 1970s and 1980s (Galán Saulnier and Fernández Vega 1982–83; Galán Saulnier and Poyato Holgado 1980).<sup>7</sup> The large rock of San Bernardino would, therefore, be the locale with the greatest depth of sacredness in La Hinojosa valley.

In addition, two other decorated rock-art sites seem to stand out because of the number of motifs carved in them: Peña Buitre and El Santo. These two sites were equidistant to the large rock of San Bernardino, Peña Buitre to the north-west and El Santo to the south-east (Figure 10).<sup>8</sup> They differed from the first, however, in that no sequence was apparent in their narration and that, as most other rock-art sites are, they were located in the scarp that defined the valley bottom towards the north-east. Yet a third level of depth could be suggested, as around these three major sites other rocks were decorated with fewer motifs. This hierarchy of the large rock of San Bernardino at the greatest depth located in the centre of the valley, followed by Peña Buitre and El Santo at each side, and then by other minor rock-art sites surrounding all of them, shows a varied ritual landscape. In this the ritual depth, the degree of sacredness, changed from a high peak to a medium one in two other highly decorated places nearby, then to others with less depth in between and further away.

The analysis of the rock-art area of La Hinojosa in central Spain has shown the potential which the study of prehistoric carvings in the Iberian Peninsula in areas other than Galicia can have for the understanding of how prehistoric communities perceived the physical setting they inhabited. Its study provides more than merely complementary information to that produced by the distribution of Chalcolithic pottery and lithic remains in the area (Aceituno *et al.* 1998). It allows a glimpse of the cultural understanding which prehistoric communities had of the landscape in which they lived. Although no specific cultural meanings can be recovered, the data are significant enough to show how people manipulated the topographical features in their area to create discourses at many levels, including that of gender. The message provided by the inscribed rocks would have changed throughout the years to be finally lost – at least in its original understanding – probably already in the Bronze Age and surely in the first millennium BC during the Iron Age. Modern additions show a quite divergent use of these landmarks.

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7 The seeming lack of connection between schematic art and Bronze Age sites has recently been noted in the conference of 'Rock art and archaeological landscape' (Baldellou Martínez 2001, 165) (but see dates in Ulreich *et al.* 1993).

8 The star above the large rock of San Bernardino indicates the site where the statue-stela was found.

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