

Stefan Ruhstaller (Sevilla)

**NAME CREATION AS AN INTERPRETATION
OF THE INCOMPREHENSIBLE.
TRADITIONAL POPULAR NAMES OF CAVE ART SITES
IN SPANISH SPEECH COMMUNITIES**

Long before their discovery by scientists in the late 19th century, many places with prehistoric rock paintings were well known among the traditional inhabitants of the surrounding areas. These speech communities, which completely lacked any kind of historical or archaeological knowledge, created names by which they could describe and identify the sites of the enigmatic findings. Linguistic and cultural analysis of the proper names thus coined makes it possible to reconstruct the popular reception of the phenomenon we now consider *rock art*, and highlights the mechanisms by which realities that are beyond objective comprehension are designated among speakers characterized by language competences limited to everyday rural speech and by the parameters of popular Hispanic culture and beliefs.

Key words

toponymy; Spanish speaking areas; rupestrian art; naming process; name motivation

Introduction

In the Spanish-speaking world there are thousands of prehistoric cave paintings, spread out over numerous different sites. Some of these sites, like Altamira (Cantabria, Spain) and Cueva Pintada (Baja California, Mexico), are universally known and officially listed as UNESCO Heritage Sites, or at least as *bienes de interés cultural* (assets of cultural interest). Other, less spectacular locations are known only to a small number of people. Cave paintings only came to the attention of modern scientific investigators relatively recently, and did not become the subject of serious study until the late 19th century. Before then, nobody was even aware of their age or their artistic-historical value. However, many sites had been known since time immemorial to local rural populations: agricultural laborers, hunters and gatherers of raw materials had come across the striking images concealed there during the course of their everyday activities out in the country. These people were, of course, completely lacking in the historical, archaeological, anthropological and artistic expertise needed to be able to fully appreciate their discoveries, but they nevertheless experienced the same sense of intrigue as a more educated person when confronted by such unusual graphic displays. They also felt the same need to understand them.

The names they coined to identify the places where they had found images constitute a field of study of enormous interest (cf. Gordón Peral – Ruhstaller, 1991,

pp. 217–218; Gordón Peral, 2011) because the linguistic analysis of these toponyms reveals how what we now know as prehistoric art was interpreted in popular culture by uneducated, mostly illiterate, people. The purpose of the present study is to initiate an interdisciplinary line of investigation centered on this subject. It is based on a corpus constituted of 120 Spanish proper names that belong to the vast heritage of traditional Hispanic microtoponymy and designate places where the existence of cave paintings has been documented. The material has been compiled from the scientific publications and institutional websites containing detailed descriptions of the designata (i.e., of the rock images by which the names are inspired).

Types of names for places with cave paintings

1. Generic references to the presence of images

The first group of names broadly signals the existence of paintings on a stone support, but makes no reference to specific images. References to the plastic technique employed clearly predominate, usually in the form of the adjectives *pintado* ‘painted’ and *pinto* ‘in different colors’, or the noun *pintura* ‘painting’: there are cave paintings at several sites named *Cueva Pintada* ‘Painted Cave’ (Mulegé, Baja California, Mexico; Gáldar, Canary Islands, Spain; Paso de Ovejas, Veracruz, Mexico; Azacualpa, La Paz, Honduras), at *Cuevas Pintadas* ‘Painted Caves’ (Santa Ana, Francisco Morazán, Honduras), at *Cueva Pinta* ‘Cave Painted in Various Colors’ (San Pedro de las Colonias, Coahuila, Mexico), *Cuevas Pintas* (Loreto, Baja California) and at *Las Pinturas* ‘The Paintings’ (Concepción de María, Choluteca, Honduras; Yuscarán, El Paraíso, Honduras).

Painted motifs are generically referenced using a variety of lexical terms, such as *figura* ‘figure’ (at *Tajo de las Figuras* ‘Cliff of the Figures’, Benalup-Casas Viejas, Cádiz, Spain; *Cerro de las Figuras* ‘Hill of the Figures’, Metapán, Santa Ana, El Salvador; *Planchón de las Figuras* ‘Rock of the Figures’, Chiapas, Mexico), *dibujo* ‘drawing’ (at *Piedra del Dibujo* ‘Stone of the Drawing’, Choluteca, Honduras) and *lámina* ‘sheet, plate, engraving’ (at *Las Láminas*; Cabezarrubias del Puerto, Ciudad Real, Spain). In some toponyms, the words *escrito* ‘inscribed’, ‘inscription’, *letra* ‘letter’, *letrero* ‘sign, inscription’ and *número* ‘number’ are also used to allude to both abstract and iconic (zoomorphic, anthropomorphic) pictorial motifs. The fact that such non-alphanumeric motifs were considered “letters” or “numbers” is understandable if we remember that the inventors of the names were usually illiterate. In *Peña Escrita* ‘Rock Inscribed Upon’ (Fuencaliente, Ciudad Real), for example, there are some spectacular anthropomorphic, zoomorphic and arboriform representations, as can be seen in the image below.

Other examples include *Peña del Escrito* ‘Rock with Writings’ (Villar del Humo, Cuenca, Spain), *Cueva de los Letreros* ‘Cave of the Inscriptions’ (Vélez-Blanco,



Peña Escrita
(Fuencaliente, Ciudad Real). Photograph:
José Andrés de Úbeda

Almería, Spain), *Cinto de las Letras* ‘Rock of the Letters’ (Dos Aguas, Valencia), *Las Letras de Malacena* ‘The Letters of Malacena’ (Oria, Almería), *Portell de les Lletres* ‘Pass of the Letters’ (Montblanc, Tarragona), *Los Números* ‘The Numbers’ (Castellar de la Frontera, Cádiz).

2. Identification of what is shown in the images

2.1 Zoomorphic representations

Zoomorphic motifs predominate in many prehistoric works due to their number and their positions of prominence within graphic ensembles. Many pictures of animals are impressively realistic, hence the concordance between how a motif is described in the traditional popular name and how it is identified by scientists specializing in cave art. Images of specific species (bulls, deer, goats, equidae, snakes) can be made out more or less clearly in the *Toro Negro* ‘Black Bull’ caves (Albarracín, Teruel), at *El Torico* ‘The Little Bull’ (Castellote, Teruel), and at *Los Toricos [del Prado del Navazo]* (Albarracín); at *Tinada del Ciervo* ‘Shed of the Deer’ (Nerpio, Albacete) and *Cueva del Ciervo* ‘Cave of the Deer’ (Los Barrios, Cádiz); at *Canchal de las Cabras Pintadas* ‘Rock of the Painted Goats’ (La Alberca, Salamanca) and *Cueva de las Cabras* ‘Cave of the Goats’ (Cieza, Murcia); at *El Medio Caballo* ‘The Half Horse’ (Albarracín), *Los Dos Caballos* ‘Two Horses’ (Albarracín) and *Cueva de las Mulas* ‘Cave of the Mules’ (Tepehuanes, Durango);¹ and in *Cueva de la Serpiente* ‘Cave of the Snake’ (Mulegé, Baja California).

¹ The illustrations, representing a herd of mules (animals introduced by the Spaniards), are thought to date from the early decades of Spanish dominion in the region.

Animal species can usually be identified thanks to certain characteristic features, which are often rendered in an exaggerated form. Interpretation of the images which gave rise to the toponyms *Cerro de la Cabra* ‘Hill of the Goat’ (Ojos Albos, Ávila) and *Las Cabras Blancas* ‘The White Goats’ (Tormón, Teruel),² for example, was made fairly easy by the presence of backward curving horns and a beard – features typical of goats –, while the trademark antlers on the animal roughly drawn on a cave wall at the *Piedra de los Venados* ‘Stone of the Stags’ immediately identify it as a male deer (Mongua, Boyacá, Colombia).³ One of the images at *Los Borriquitos* ‘The Little Donkeys’ (Alacón, Teruel) shows an equine form with the long ears typical of that species. The close attention the creators of traditional place names sometimes paid to the images they found is highlighted in the toponym *Los Encebros* (Alacón). The equine forms represented in this cave were specifically identified as *encebros*, a now extinct species of the wild ass thought to have survived until the 16th century in the south-eastern part of the Iberian Peninsula.

When a picture lacks the particular features associated with a specific animal species, this can easily give rise to an interpretation which differs from the better-informed designation provided by modern-day scientists. That is precisely what happened in the cases of *Boquilla de las Chivas* ‘Cave of the Kids’ (Chihuahua)⁴ and *Cova dels Cavalls* ‘Cave of the Horses’ (Valltorta, Castellón, Spain),⁵ where the animals in the pictures were identified as goat kids and horses, respectively, despite in fact representing female deer (hence the missing antlers). And at *Cueva de la Araña* ‘Cave of the Spider’ (Bicorp, Valencia) the bees surrounding the human figure that can be seen climbing a tree to collect honey were taken for spiders (*arañas*).⁶

Schematic images and images in a poor state of conservation make it even more difficult for observers to immediately identify what they are seeing. The zoomorphic forms visible at *Peña del Gato* ‘Rock of the Cat’ (Cereceda de la Sierra, Salamanca, Spain), for example, are very hard to interpret. Today, the local population believes them to be dogs,⁷ but the members of the speech community who first discovered them in the distant past saw them as cats (as indicated in the toponym). No conclusive, scientifically-grounded explanation exists as to the species of the

² An image can be viewed at <<http://www.patrimonioculturaldearagon.es/bienes-culturales/abrigo-de-las-cabras-blancas-tormon>>.

³ Image at <<http://www.rupestreweb.info/sasaima2.html>>.

⁴ Image at <<http://www.cronica.com.mx/notas/2010/506114.html>>.

⁵ Image at <http://www.xn--espaescultura-tnb.es/es/monumentos/castellon/cova_dels_cavalls_de_valltorta.html>.

⁶ An image of this scene can be viewed at <<https://www.auladehistoria.org/2015/11/comentario-cueva-la-arana-bicorp.html>>.

⁷ Cf. <<http://pataloso.blogspot.com.es/2016/02/las-pinturas-rupestres-de-la-pena-el.html>>.

animals depicted at *Peñasco de los Gatos* ‘Rock of the Cats’ (Tepehuanes, Durango, Mexico; Herrera Maldonado 2012, pp. 32, 91), either, but again the traditional name shows that they were initially identified as cats (probably for the position of their tails). One of the most outstanding zoomorphic motifs at *Cueva del Ratón* ‘Rock of the Mouse’ (Mulegé, Baja California) is interpreted in the site’s traditional popular name as being a representation of a mouse, whereas specialists established that it actually depicts a puma.⁸ Cases like these show that sites containing difficult-to-interpret zoomorphs were originally named after animals with which the creators of the toponyms were familiar in their everyday lives.

One of the strange schematic forms visible at the site traditionally known as *Cueva del Gorrión* ‘Cave of the Sparrow’ (Medina Sidonia, Cádiz, Spain) was popularly interpreted as a “sparrow” (images in Breuil – Burkitt, 1929, p. 72). A similar name – *Peña del Gorrión* ‘Rock of the Sparrow’ (Jaén) – is almost certainly a reference to one of the unusual reddish colored zoomorphs painted on the rock there.⁹ Another interesting toponym, *Cueva del Gallinero* ‘Cave of the Henhouse’ (Bárcabo, Huesca), evidently interprets the series of over one hundred figures conserved on the rock face, in different colors and with a huge variety of forms and motifs,¹⁰ as a group of hens. The name cannot possibly refer to a real henhouse (*gallinero*) because the painted cave walls are in a wild location at the top of a towering cliff far from any population nucleus.

2.2 Anthropomorphic images

Anthropomorphic images are usually schematic. Indeed, in many cases they are simply lines representing the torso, limbs and head. It is therefore hardly surprising that they should have been described by creators of traditional toponyms as *muñecos* (or, in some dialects, *niñotes*), ‘dolls, figures [drawn by a child]’: examples include *Cañada del Muñeco* ‘Valley of the Doll’ (Sultepec, Mexico) and *Cueva de los Niñotes* ‘Cave of the Dolls’ (Ayna, Albacete, Spain; this second name refers to three human figures painted on the wall at the entrance to a cave).¹¹ Catalan toponyms of this type include the *Barranc de les Nines* ‘Valley of the Dolls’ (El Perelló, Tarragona)¹², an area with paintings depicting hunting scenes

⁸ Cf. <<https://lugares.inah.gob.mx/es/zonas-arqueologicas/zonas/estructuras/12537-225-cueva-del-ratón.html>>.

⁹ Image at <<http://www.redjaen.es/francis/?m=c&o=62948&letra=&ord=&id=218406>>.

¹⁰ Cf. <<http://www.patrimonioculturaldearagon.es/bienes-culturales/cueva-del-gallinero>>.

¹¹ According to <<https://ayna.es/cueva-nino.php>>, *Cueva de los Niñotes* is a traditional local name for the site, although non-local scholars have promulgated the now widely used name *Cueva del Niño* ‘The Boy’s Cave’.

¹² Cf. <<http://patrimoni.gencat.cat/ca/arturpestre/cabra-feixet-el-perello>>.

(a *nina* is a ‘toy in the shape of a human figure’). Some anthropomorphic figures are shown in such wild postures that they are interpreted as monkeys (*Pila de los Monos* ‘Basin of the Monkeys’, Huajicori, Nayarit,¹³ *Cueva de las Monas* ‘Cave of the Monkeys’ Chihuahua).¹⁴

In several cases toponyms refer to graphic representations of parts of the human body. The places known as *Las Caritas* ‘The Little Faces’ (Guaymango, Ahuachapán, El Salvador) and *Las Carasetas* ‘The Masks’ (Navarrés, Valencia) contain numerous images of human faces; the use of the terms *caraseta*, which in Catalan means ‘face mask’, and the diminutive form *caritas* instead of simply *cara* for ‘face’ reflect the schematic nature of the drawings. Hands, referenced by names like *Las Manos* ‘The Hands’ and *Manitas* ‘The Little Hands’, are also a frequently found motif. *Cueva de las Manos* ‘Cave of the Hands’ (Lago Buenos Aires, Argentina), *La Mano del Indio* ‘The Indian’s Hand’ (Putendo, Valparaíso, Chile), *Paredón de las Manos* ‘Rock Face of the Hands’ (Villa Cerro Castillo, Chile), *Manitas* ‘The Little Hands’ (Tierra Blanca, Guanajuato).

Many human figures, while still essentially schematic, have features which invite more specific interpretations, such as particular anatomical peculiarities, conspicuous postures suggesting bodies in movement (limbs separated from the torso, torso inclined) or noteworthy clothing or ornamentation (garments, headdresses). All these features generally depict rituals or specialized activities (hunting, war, crop gathering). Naturally, the creators of the toponyms being studied here identified figures and motifs in accordance not with the parameters of the culture which the images belong to but with their own personal perceptions. Particular features like tails and horns on anthropomorphic figures, for example, inevitably invited them to identify the subject as a devil (even though the artist may well have been attempting to reproduce elements associated with ceremonial rituals). Despite its horns, the figure seen in the place traditionally known as *El Diablito* ‘The Little Devil’ (La Rumorosa, Baja California)¹⁵ is not a picture of a devil: it actually represents a hunter wearing a deer’s head as a headdress, a hunting ploy still common among native Californians in the 18th century and described by the Jesuit F. Clavigero (1789, p. 125): “Per cacciare i Cervi usano d’un curioso strata-gemma. Prende un Indiano una testa di cervo conservata a questo fine, e mettendosela sul capo s’appiatta talmente tra le macchie, che non ne lascia vedere altro, che quella testa posticcia, la quale muove in tal maniera, che sembra propriamente

¹³ Cf. <<https://gentenayarit.com/2017/11/09/1132/>>.

¹⁴ Cf. <<http://inahchihuahua.gob.mx/sections.pl?id=80>>.

¹⁵ Image at <<https://www.elvigia.net/general/2012/12/21/ilumina-el-diablito-rumorosa-102550.html>>.



Cueva de las Mujeres
(Medina Sidonia, Cádiz). Images: Breuil –
Burkitt, 1929, p. 8 / S. Ruhstaller



Cueva del Pajarito
(Medina Sidonia, Cádiz). Image: Breuil –
Burkitt, 1929, p. 48

un di que' quadrupedi. I Cervi ingannati dal vederla, vi s'accostano, e sono facilmente ammazzati da altri cacciatori messi in aguato."¹⁶

The names *Cueva del Diablo* 'Devil's Cave' (Toquepala, Tacna, Perú; Potosí, Bolivia) and *Peñón del Diablo* 'Devil's Rock' (Huánuco, Peru)¹⁷ have similar explanations.

For modern observers, most of the anthropomorphic forms visible in *Cueva de las Mujeres* 'Cave of the Women' (Medina Sidonia, Cádiz) bring to mind women dressed in traditional Andalusian costumes (see image above).

An even more interesting case is that of the figures represented in *Cueva de los Taconeros* (Los Barrios, Cádiz). Clearly identifiable most of them as women (from the size of their hips), they are shown dancing, or moving in a procession, and clapping their hands.¹⁸ Considering that the word *taconero* derives from the verb *taconear* 'to tap one's feet while dancing' (a term commonly used in flamenco dancing), there can be no doubt that the toponym is an anachronistic reference to flamenco *bailaores*.

¹⁶ "To hunt deer they use a curious stratagem. An Indian takes a deer head prepared for this purpose, and putting it on his head he crouches so much among the shrubs that nothing else can be seen than that false head, which moves in such a way that it seems one of those quadrupeds. The deer, deceived from seeing it, approach and are easily killed by other hunters lying in ambush." Cf. <http://lugares.inah.gob.mx/inicio/opinion/12818-%C2%BFqui%C3%A9n-es-el-diablito.html?lugar_id=1657&item_id=12818>.

¹⁷ Images at <<http://llaqtayku-art.blogspot.com/2010/06/pintura-rupestre-cueva-de-toquepala.html>>, <https://correodelsur.com/ecos/20190106_leyendas-del-potosi-prehispanico.html>, <<http://www.rupestreweb.info/rumi.html>>.

¹⁸ Photographs and a description can be found at <<https://petrisgaditanum.wordpress.com/2016/01/03/cueva-de-los-taconeros/>>.

The need to make sense of an image fires the observer's imagination, especially when schematic figures appear in strange poses and with attributes that are difficult to identify. Several figures in cave paintings are likened to birds. In *Barranco del Pajarejo* 'Ravine of the Little Bird' (Albarracín, Teruel) there are some striking anthropomorphic forms in unusual postures undoubtedly meant to represent ritual ceremonies (Bea – Utrilla, 2016, p. 816). Also *Cueva del Pajarito* 'Cave of the Little Bird' (Medina Sidonia) has several strange figures that could be interpreted, albeit rather naively, as depicting "little birds". For example, see the one Breuil – Burkitt (1929, p. 44) describe as "with four legs, the horizontal line is prolonged into a head with a muzzle pointed like a beak", and the ones reproduced in the same work shown on p. 120. Breuil – Burkitt (1929, pp. 43, 74) found similar figures also in two different caves known as *Cueva del Pajarraco* (both in Los Barrios, Cádiz). The four names mentioned describe the figures generically as 'birds', but do not specify any particular species. Their suffixes also indicate that they are intended not as an objective but as an affectionate, even humorous, description: *-ejo* adds a pejorative nuance to the root *pájaro* (perhaps an allusion to what is perceived to be a rough, crude way of painting); *-ito* is a diminutive used here to express affection; and the term *pajarraco*, full of derogatory connotations, means 'large, unknown (or unidentified) bird'. These toponyms therefore identify certain zoomorphic representations generically as 'an animal that looks like a strange bird' (as opposed to other, more realistically represented animals). This interpretation is favored by the great variety of shapes and sizes to be found in the different bird species and the attractive colors used in the paintings.

Before bringing this chapter to a close, I would like to mention one more particularly interesting case: that of the toponym *Los Gatos* 'The Cats' (Santa Elena, Jaén). The anthropomorphic forms represented here were identified as cats because of the noticeable elements they display at face height. These marks, which were probably of ritual significance, do indeed bring to mind a cat's whiskers.



Los Gatos
(Santa Elena, Jaén).
Image: José Andrés de Úbeda

Representation of objects

In some places there are cave paintings that represent specific material objects. *Cueva de las Flechas* ‘Cave of the Arrows’ (Mulegé, Baja California),¹⁹ for example, refers to weapons, and has pictures of a man pierced by seven arrows. Images of heavenly bodies, too, are recurrent and perfectly identifiable – although, naturally, open to alternative interpretations with regard to their purpose and meaning – in places like *Cueva de la Estrella* ‘Cave of the Star’ (Mosqueruela, Teruel; Artenara, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria), *Cueva del Sol* ‘Cave of the Sun’ (Tarifa, Cádiz) and *Cueva de los Soles* ‘Cave of the Suns’ (Jaén, Spain).²⁰

Abstract forms

The images most difficult to interpret, even for modern scientists, are abstract designs. Here, traditional names tend to simply describe the shapes the earliest observers recognized. One particularly interesting example is that of *Cueva de la Música* ‘Music Cave’ (Mulegé, Baja California), where parallel lines marked on a cave wall and the anthropomorphic motifs drawn between them were identified as a musical stave and notes.²¹

References to certain motifs instead of others in name creation

Most cave art sites have graphic representations with not just one but several, and even many, different motifs. Toponyms, however, usually refer to one single element. Evidently the people who created the names chose to prioritize one motif over all the others. The motif chosen was sometimes the most prominent image, either for its size or its central position in the ensemble, and its susceptibility to easy, immediate interpretation was undoubtedly an important factor.

It should also be remembered that names were created not when the visitor first entered a cave and saw the images, but later, when telling other members of the speech community about the surprising discovery. By that time, the discoverer remembered only the motif he had been most impressed by, not the whole display. So, for example, of the huge variety of motifs (around 200 figures, including bulls,

¹⁹ <<https://culturabcs.gob.mx/recinto/117>>.

²⁰ Images at <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/estodotuyo/3703552357>>, <<https://sitioshistoricos.com/la-cueva-de-los-soles>>.

²¹ A photograph of the design can be viewed at <https://lugares.inah.gob.mx/zonas-arqueologicas/zonas/estructuras.html?search=estructuras_mosaico&task=search&estructura_zona=1658&lugar_id=d&estructuras_tipo=Cuevas>.

Los Toricos
(Albarracín, Teruel).
Image: Jordá Cerdá,
1976, p. 198



deer, fighting scenes, anthropomorphic forms in all kinds of positions and attire, and abstract signs) found at *Cueva del Venado* ‘Cave of the Deer’ (Alpera, Albacete, Spain; also known as *Cueva de la Vieja* ‘Old Woman’s Cave’), the created toponym refers only to the one that attracted the most attention of the discoverer: a central picture of a stag that is immediately identifiable for its realism and its exaggeratedly large antlers.²²

This habitual reference to only one motif in newly created toponyms indicates that the discoverers of cave art sites were often unaware of how different pictorial elements are related: that is to say, motifs often constitute ensembles depicting relatively complex scenes or even narrating events like hunting episodes, wars or group rituals. To an observer familiar with cave paintings, the scene reproduced above represents a hunting scene in which several hunters armed with spears, bows and arrows (admittedly difficult to make out) are attacking a herd of bulls. Some of the animals are shown in charging poses. However, the diminutive suffix *-ico* in *Los Toricos* [*del Prado del Navazo*] ‘The Little Bulls [of Prado del Navazo]’ (Albarracín, Teruel), the name by which the place is popularly known, expresses fondness, suggesting that the local population saw only a bucolic country scene with a peaceful herd of bulls.

A similar example of a hunting scene popularly interpreted and described in its toponym as a picture of grazing cows is the cave known as *La Vacada* ‘The Herd of Cows’ (Castellote, Teruel, Spain; Beltrán, 1982, p. 33), while the creators of the toponym *Cabras Blancas* ‘The White Goats’ (Tormón, Teruel)²³ ignored the hunters in the hunting scene depicted on the cave wall there and focused exclusively on the herd of goats.

²² An image of the paintings can be seen at <<http://art.lostonsite.com/67021046-010/>>.

²³ Cf. <<http://www.patrimonioculturaldearagon.es/bienes-culturales/abrigo-de-las-cabras-blancas-tormon>>.

3. References to the presumed creator of the images

As can be seen in the numerous cases analyzed, the material remains of preceding cultures present in many places in the Spanish-speaking world tend to fascinate local rural populations, leading them to seek explanations for that presence. Such populations, however, are almost totally lacking in any objective historical knowledge. In the case of the inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula, this knowledge is limited to the awareness that for centuries Christian culture coexisted alongside Moorish culture.²⁴ Many archaeological sites of interest for their ruins, coins, etc. in general, and for their cave paintings in particular, therefore have toponyms which include innocently erroneous references to *moros*, “Moors” (cf. Gordón Peral – Ruhstaller, 1991, pp. 120–125). Examples include names like *Cueva de los Moros* ‘Cave of the Moors’ (Valle de Hecho, Huesca, Spain) and *Furacón de los Mouros* ‘Hole of the Moors’ (Toreno, León, Spain), *Roca dels Moros* ‘Rock of the Moors’ (Cretas, Teruel) or *Los Moros* ‘The Moors’ (Arraia-Maeztu, Álava), all of which denote places with cave paintings. In the Americas, similar manifestations of cave art were generically attributed to “the Indians”, hence names like *Cueva de Indios* ‘Cave of the Indians’ (San Felipe, Guanajuato, Mexico).²⁵

The names studied in this work suggest that their creators were aware of the sacred nature and magical or religious connotations of the images they saw. Indeed, in many cases, cave paintings were attributed not generically to some mythical preceding culture but to a single individual – either male or female – representative of that culture, resulting in names like *Cueva del Moro* ‘Cave of the Moor’ (Tarifa, Cádiz), *Cueva del Rey Moro* ‘Cave of the Moorish King’ (Ayora, Valencia), *Cabezo del Moro* ‘Hill of the Moor’ (Almansa, Albacete), *Peña de la Mora* ‘Rock of the Moorish Woman’ (Casas de San Lázaro, Albacete). Interestingly, the toponyms *Cueva del Moro* in the Canary Islands (Agaete, Gran Canaria) and *La Morita* ‘The Moorish Girl’ in Mexico (Villaldama, Nuevo León)²⁶ do not actually refer to places with an Arab past. This corroborates the existence of a narrative tradition, exported from Spain to the newly discovered territories from the 15th century onwards, in which traces of any pre-Christian culture were automatically associated with the legendary “Moor” figure. Nevertheless, the most common practice in Latin America was to attribute cave paintings to a mythical Indian, as illustrated in names like *Cueva del Indio* ‘Indian’s Cave’ (Tecate, Baja California; Burgos, Tamaulipas, Mexico; Arecibo, Puerto Rico; Viñales, Cuba; San Rafael,

²⁴ The Iberian Peninsula was partially under Muslim rule from 711 to 1492, and in the regions that were gradually conquered from the north to the south by the Christians (a process known traditionally as *Reconquista* ‘reconquest’) there was a close contact between the two cultures.

²⁵ Image at <<http://conociendomexicoenimágenes.blogspot.com/2015/02/sierra-del-cubo-san-felipe-guanajuato.html>>.

²⁶ Cf. <<http://www.rupestreweb.info/lamorita.html>>.

Mendoza, Argentina), and *India Muerta* ‘Dead Indian Woman’ (Achiras, Córdoba, Argentina).

Native Americans evidently felt the need to provide an explanation, albeit a legendary explanation, for what they saw as the equally enigmatic presence of cave art from earlier cultures in their own surroundings. According to Francisco Javier Clavigero (1789, p. 107), they attributed such images to a mythical race of giants from the north (“I Californiesi affermano concordemente, tali pitture essere stata opera d’una Nazione gigantesca venutavi già dal settentrione”).²⁷ This belief, too, is reflected in toponyms (*Cueva del Gigante* ‘Giant’s Cave’, Marcala, La Paz, Honduras, for example).²⁸

In some cases, cave paintings were attributed to mysterious figures living isolated from the rest of society, like gypsies (*Cueva del Gitano* ‘Cave of the Gypsy’, Yeste, Albacete; Valle de Carranza, Vizcaya; *Los Gitanos* ‘The Gypsies’, Agüero, Huesca), or alienated figures identified using eminently folksy proper names such as *Mingo* or a related nickname (*Peñón de Mingo* ‘Mingo’s Rock’, Los Villares, Jaén; *Hoz de Mingo* ‘Mingo’s Ravine’, Puente de la Sierra, Jaén; *Pico Mingorro* ‘Mingo’s Peak’, Las Batuecas, Salamanca; *Peña de Mingo Vela* ‘Mingo Vela’s Rock’, Ojos Albos, Ávila) or *Pascuala* (Villar de Humos, Cuenca).²⁹ References to the witchcraft rites supposedly associated with cave paintings can also clearly be seen in names which attribute the images to specific witches or shamans (*Cueva del Hechicero* ‘Cave of the Sorcerer’, Sierra de Quichagua, Jujuy, Argentina; *Cueva de las Brujas* ‘Cave of the Witches’ Suances, Cantabria; *Las Brujas* ‘The Witches’, Peñamellera Alta, Asturias).

Lacking the vocabulary needed to be able to say exactly what kind of priests were believed to have conducted religious ceremonies at cave art sites, creators of toponyms resorted to Catholic terminology – *monje* ‘monk’, *obispo* ‘bishop’, *Virgen* ‘Virgin Mary’, *santo* ‘saint’ –: *Cueva del Monje* ‘Monk’s Cave’ (Cabezarrubias del Puerto, Ciudad Real, Spain); *Cueva del Monje* (Jumilla, Murcia); *El Monje* (Hinojosa de Calatrava, Ciudad Real); *La Cocinilla del Obispo* ‘Bishop’s Kitchen’ (Albarracín, Teruel); *Las Cuevas del Obispo* ‘Bishop’s Caves’ (Los Barrios, Cádiz: one pictorial motif found inside a cave showed a cross, and this may have led the discoverer of the site to link it with a member of the Catholic clergy); *Cueva de los Santos* ‘Cave of the Saints’ (Alfoz de Lloredo, Cantabria);³⁰ *Cueva de la Virgen*

²⁷ “Californians agree that such paintings are the work of a nation of giants from the north.”

²⁸ <<https://www.xplorhonduras.com/la-cueva-del-gigante-marcala-la-paz/>>.

²⁹ Names of this type related to archaeological remains in general are studied in Ruhstaller, 2015.

³⁰ The possibility that these names may have their origins in perceived similarities between cave paintings and frescoes of saints in churches, which were very familiar to the creators of the toponyms, cannot be ruled out.

‘Virgin Mary’s Cave’ (Ramales de la Victoria, Cantabria);³¹ *Cueva del Espíritu Santo* ‘Cave of the Holy Spirit’ (Corinto, Morazán, El Salvador). The images found at *Canchal de Mahoma* ‘Mohammed’s Rock’ (La Alberca, Salamanca)³² would appear to have been associated with Islamic rites.

The most plastic demonstration of the naive assumptions underlying these names is arguably *Igreja dos Mouros* ‘Church of the Moors’ (Arronches, Portalegre, Portugal; Oliveira – Oliveira, 2013), a toponym which reflects the perfectly reasonable belief that the site was once a place of worship used by an earlier culture, but which at the same time reveals an almost total ignorance of history and lack of lexical resources with which to describe anything outside the local population’s own religious universe. Other, equally naive, names are *Cueva de Los Libreros* (Medina Sidonia, Cádiz) and *Abric de les Llibreres* ‘Bookmen’s Cave’ (Freginals, Tarragona, Spain), which attribute cave images thought to be a form of writing to a legendary bookseller, and *Tío Escribano* (Titaguas, Valencia), which alludes to a fictional scribe.³³

Cave paintings as the focal point for a complex act of communication

The drawing, painting or engraving of graphic signs on stone is unquestionably the first non-ephemeral act of communication to be seen in human cultural evolution. Both the transmitter of the signs (the prehistoric creators of the images) and the immediate, coetaneous receiver for whom the signs were intended (the other members of the community) perfectly understood their meaning and communicative purpose (magic spells, magical and religious rites, social rituals) because they were familiar with the code employed.

Those prehistoric signs have now survived for thousands of years, but they are still visible to receivers who belong to radically different cultures. Scientists specializing in cave art thus become a second type of receivers. Thanks to the knowledge acquired over more than a century of research, they are able to provide perfectly rational interpretations of the signs they see, although their grasp of their true meaning is never 100% complete since their conclusions regarding many elements of cave art – above all symbolic motifs – can only be hypothetical. The extensive scientific knowledge acquired thus far is grounded in meticulous

³¹ The name *Cueva de la Vieja* ‘Old Woman’s Cave’ (Alpera, Albacete) recalls VETULA, the mythical pagan predecessor of the Virgin Mary (cf. Rohlf’s, 1979, p. 79–103).

³² <<https://servicios.jcyl.es/pweb/datos.do?numero=8519&tipo=inmueble->>.

³³ It would not be unreasonable to include *Sierra del Niño* ‘Child’s Mountains’ (Los Barrios, Cádiz), a name referring to an area containing numerous cave paintings, in this group, because it may reflect the belief that the very schematic images which appear there were scrawled by a legendary child.

analysis (using sophisticated technical procedure), comparisons with other pictorial manifestations as a means of establishing general trends and specific features, and the study of contemporary communities which even today continue to live in a cultural environment similar to that of prehistoric artists and to uphold similar customs.

The third type of receivers, and the one addressed in this study, is the rural population of areas close to sites where cave paintings can still be seen thousands of years after their creation: people completely lacking in objective (historical, anthropological, semiotic or artistic) knowledge but who still feel the need to understand this phenomenon so alien to their own culture. As impromptu receivers in an act of communication, members of these speech communities interpret what they see exclusively in the light of their own capacity to observe. They are unable to go beyond the parameters of their own culture, parameters determined by their Catholic faith and by traditional popular beliefs and folklore, and the only vehicle through which they can attempt to describe what they see is their own language, so poor in many lexical fields.³⁴ Without the knowledge needed to formulate an objective explanation, they turn to myths and legends involving fantastic, super-human beings, a reaction undoubtedly rooted in their awareness of the sacred, or magical, significance the sites in question had for prehistoric artists. The study of the names used to refer to cave paintings in traditional, local speech communities very plastically reveals how non-scientific receivers are impacted by cave art, a phenomenon of enormous linguistic, anthropological and, in general, cultural interest.

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³⁴ Strangely enough, archaeologists sometimes invent equally spontaneous names for the sites of their discoveries. These names differ from popular names in their more sophisticated vocabulary (*Abrigo de las Figuras Diversas* ‘Abri of Various Figures’, *Abrigo de los Cápridos* ‘Abri of the Caprids’, *Abrigo de los Recolectores* ‘Abri of the Harvesters’, *Abrigo de la Diosa* ‘Abri of the Goddess’, *Solsticio* ‘Solstice’, etc.).

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UTVÁŘENÍ JMEN JAKO VÝKLAD NEPOCHOPITELNÉHO. TRADIČNÍ LIDOVÁ JMÉNA PRO JESKYNNÍ MALBY VE ŠPANĚLSKY MLUVÍCÍCH ZEMÍCH

Již dlouho předtím, než vědci na konci 19. století tyto lokality popsali, byla přítomnost prehistorických nástěnných jeskynních maleb místním obyvatelům dobře známá. Tito lidé, členové místních komunit bez jakýchkoliv dějepisných či archeologických znalostí, pro ně vytvořili jména, pomocí nichž by mohli tato místa záhadných nálezů lépe popsat a identifikovat. Jazykovědná a kulturní analýza takto vytvořených jmen umožňuje rekonstruovat, jak bylo umění nástěnných jeskynních maleb lidovou tradicí vnímáno a přijímáno, přičemž klade důraz na mechanismy, které byly pro tehdejší mluvčí mimo možnosti objektivního chápání reality, přičemž jazykové kompetence těchto lidí se omezovaly na běžnou lidovou mluvu v rámci hispánských lidových kultur a jejich místních pověr.

Klíčová slova

toponyma; španělsky mluvící oblasti; jeskynní malby; proces pojmenování; motivace pojmenování

Stefan Ruhstaller
sruhkuh@upo.es
Departamento de Filología y Traducción
Universidad Pablo de Olavide
Carretera de Utrera, km. 1
41013 Sevilla
SPAIN