

Arte Prehistórico

Idioma: EN

EXAM STATEMENT:

Theoretical part: 1st question: Paleolithic cave art in the Cantabrian region. 2nd question: The art of Phoenician colonization. Practical part: Comment on the figures in the plate that will be provided. The exam, in all its parts, is an exercise in development. This means that it is not merely a matter of listing data or creating an outline with keywords. The practical part is a reasoned commentary on a figure; it is not an excuse to present a theme. The latter will be graded negatively.

Question 1: Paleolithic cave art in the Cantabrian region.

Question 2: The art of Phoenician colonization.

Question 3:

A) Comment on the figures in Plate A

B) Comment on the figures in Plate B

Question 1

Paleolithic cave art in the Cantabrian region.

STUDENT RESPONSE:

Paleolithic cave art in the Cantabrian region, encompassing caves primarily in northern Spain, represents a significant concentration of Upper Paleolithic artistic expression, particularly dating to the Magdalenian period (around 17,000 - 12,000 years ago), although art spans from Solutrean to Azilian phases. This art is characterized by its naturalism and sophisticated techniques, differing somewhat from the earlier Franco-Cantabrian region's focus on large, realistic depictions of animals.

The caves themselves – Altamira, El Castillo, Tito Bustillo, Covaciella, and many others – served not merely as canvases but as integral parts of complex ritualistic and symbolic activities. The selection of cave locations wasn't random; often, art is found deep within the caves, in difficult-to-access areas, suggesting a deliberate choice tied to the cave's inherent properties or perceived spiritual significance.

The predominant themes revolve around depictions of animals, particularly bison (the most frequent subject), horses, deer, and aurochs, all key components of the Paleolithic hunting economy. These are rendered with remarkable accuracy, exhibiting a keen understanding of animal anatomy and movement. Beyond simple representation, the art displays sophisticated techniques like shading, perspective (though not fully developed in a Renaissance sense), and the use of the cave walls' natural contours to enhance the three-dimensionality of the images. Polychromy, using red, black, and ochre pigments derived from minerals like iron oxide and manganese, is common, though the extent of original coloration is often debated due to preservation issues.

Unlike the earlier, more static representations found in caves like Lascaux, Cantabrian art exhibits a greater dynamism and narrative capacity. Scenes depicting herds, hunting sequences, and even possible abstract symbols are present. The "horse panel" at Altamira exemplifies this dynamism, with multiple horses depicted in various poses. At Tito Bustillo, complex scenes with overlapping figures and sophisticated shading demonstrate artistic skill and a potential narrative intent.

The meaning of this art remains a subject of intense debate. Early interpretations focused on "sympathetic magic," suggesting the paintings were intended to ensure successful hunts. More recent theories emphasize the symbolic and ritualistic importance of the art, viewing the caves as sacred spaces where Paleolithic people engaged in shamanistic practices, ancestral veneration, or cosmological storytelling. The presence of hand stencils, claviforms (abstract symbols resembling keys), and other geometric markings supports the idea of a complex system of symbolic communication.

The Cantabrian caves are not isolated examples; they are part of a wider network of Paleolithic art sites across Europe. However, their concentration, preservation, and artistic sophistication make them uniquely important for understanding the cognitive and symbolic abilities of early modern humans and the origins of artistic

expression. Ongoing archaeological research continues to refine our understanding of the chronology, techniques, and meaning of this remarkable legacy.

Question 2

The art of Phoenician colonization.

STUDENT RESPONSE:

The art of Phoenician colonization, primarily manifested throughout the Mediterranean from the 9th to 3rd centuries BCE, represents a complex synthesis of indigenous traditions and Phoenician stylistic preferences, serving both economic and ideological functions. Unlike a unified "Phoenician art" style, the archaeological record demonstrates regional variations heavily influenced by local artistic practices in areas like Sardinia, Sicily, North Africa, and Spain. Characterized by a pragmatic focus on trade and establishing coastal settlements, Phoenician artistic expression largely centered on funerary contexts, religious sanctuaries, and decorative elements within urban infrastructure.

Sculpture, predominantly in limestone, often took the form of anthropomorphic sarcophagi, frequently displaying assimilated local motifs alongside Phoenician iconographic elements such as the Phoenician deity Melqart (identified with Herakles by the Greeks), depictions of ships, and geometric patterns. These sarcophagi, notably found in Sardinia and Carthage, reveal a blend of Egyptian, Assyrian, and local Italic or Punic styles. Relief carvings adorned temple walls and public buildings, typically depicting religious scenes, royal processions, or symbolic representations of power and prosperity.

Pottery, a crucial trade good, initially exhibited Levantine styles but rapidly adapted to local tastes, with regional ceramic workshops developing distinct forms and decorations. Metalwork, particularly bronze, flourished, with Phoenician artisans renowned for their skill in creating jewelry, weapons, and ritual objects. These items often showcased intricate filigree, granulation, and the use of semi-precious stones.

Architectural contributions, while often utilizing local materials and labor, introduced features like ashlar masonry, monumental gateways (as seen in Carthage), and sophisticated harbor constructions. However, Phoenician architecture was generally less concerned with grand displays of monumentalism than contemporary Greek or Egyptian styles, prioritizing functionality and defensibility.

In Iberia, particularly in sites like Cádiz (Gadir), Phoenician art is characterized by the adaptation of local Iberian sculptural traditions, creating hybrid forms. The influence is evident in the development of Iberian sculpture, particularly in the depiction of warriors and deities. The archaeological evidence suggests a deliberate assimilation strategy, fostering cultural exchange while maintaining a distinct Phoenician identity within their colonies. The art served to solidify Phoenician political control, legitimize their presence, and facilitate trade networks rather than represent a consciously defined aesthetic movement. Ultimately, Phoenician colonial art is best understood not as a singular style but as a dynamic process of cultural interaction and artistic adaptation.

Question 3

Comment on the figures in Plate A



Figura 1

STUDENT RESPONSE:

Plate A depicts a fragment of rock art, likely originating from the Levant region of the Iberian Peninsula, specifically attributable to the Levantine art style. The primary motif is a clearly defined, albeit incomplete, equine figure. The depiction emphasizes the animal's anatomy, showcasing the curvature of the back, the suggestion of limbs, and a simplified head. The execution employs a linear technique, relying on incised lines to define form rather than shading or color. The style is characterized by naturalism and dynamism, although the fragmented nature of the support limits a full assessment of the original composition. The simplicity of the lines, combined with the focused representation of the horse, suggests a deliberate artistic intention aiming for recognizable representation rather than abstract symbolism. The fracture lines across the rock fragment complicate a comprehensive understanding of the original context and potentially other associated figures. The overall aesthetic aligns with the hunting scenes and animal depictions common in Levantine rock art, indicative of a society closely connected to its natural environment and likely reliant on hunting for subsistence.

Question 4

Comment on the figures in Plate B



Figura 2

STUDENT RESPONSE:

Plate B depicts a scene from Levantine rock art, likely originating from the Spanish Mediterranean region. The composition features a prominent, naturalistically rendered auroch, occupying the majority of the frame and exhibiting a strong sense of volume through shading and contouring. The animal is depicted in a dynamic pose, seemingly in movement, with detailed attention paid to its anatomy – musculature, legs, and head. Adjacent to the auroch, and significantly smaller in scale, is a human figure. This figure is highly schematic and elongated, displaying a distinctly different stylistic approach compared to the animal representation. The human figure appears to be engaged in some form of interaction with the auroch, potentially hunting or participating in a ritualistic activity, although the precise nature of the interaction is ambiguous. The color palette is limited, primarily utilizing reddish-brown pigments derived from iron oxides, typical of Levantine art. The figures are painted directly onto the rock surface, utilizing its natural irregularities to enhance the three-dimensionality of the animal. The overall scene suggests a narrative element, capturing a moment of interaction between humans and their prey, reflective of the hunter-gatherer lifestyle prevalent during the Late Paleolithic and Mesolithic periods in the region. The contrast in rendering styles – naturalistic animal versus schematic human – is a characteristic feature of Levantine rock art, potentially signifying differing symbolic importance.