

## 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:

The Paleolithic cave art of the Cantabrian region, located in northern Spain, represents one of the most significant concentrations of Upper Paleolithic artistic expression in Europe. This area, which includes parts of Asturias, Cantabria, and the Basque Country, is renowned for its extensive network of decorated caves, many of which are recognized as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The art of this region is primarily associated with the Magdalenian period (circa 17,000–12,000 BP), though some earlier Gravettian and Solutrean examples also exist.

The Cantabrian cave art is characterized by its naturalistic and dynamic depictions of animals, particularly large herbivores such as bison, horses, deer, and ibex. These figures are often rendered with remarkable anatomical precision, utilizing techniques such as engraving, painting, and bas-relief. The use of color is notable, with pigments derived from minerals like ochre, manganese, and charcoal, applied through methods such as blowing (spraying), finger-painting, or brushes made from animal hair or plant fibers. The artists also exploited the natural contours of the cave walls to enhance the three-dimensional effect of their depictions, creating a sense of movement and realism.

Thematic and compositional elements in Cantabrian cave art often include isolated figures, though some caves feature complex groupings or scenes. For example, the cave of Altamira, often referred to as the "Sistine Chapel of Paleolithic art," contains a famous polychrome ceiling depicting a herd of bison in various poses, some lying down and others standing. The cave of Tito Bustillo, another key site, features a wide range of animals, including reindeer and horses, as well as abstract signs and hand stencils. The cave of El Castillo is notable for its extensive use of red dots and handprints, some of which may represent early symbolic or ritualistic expressions.

The chronology of Cantabrian cave art spans several millennia, with the earliest known examples, such as the red disks and hand stencils in El Castillo, dating to around 40,000 years ago. However, the majority of the art belongs to the Magdalenian period, when artistic production reached its peak. The significance of this art remains a subject of debate among scholars. Interpretations range from shamanistic or ritualistic purposes, such as hunting magic or fertility rites, to more complex social or narrative functions. Some researchers suggest that the caves served as sanctuaries or places of initiation, where art played a role in communal or spiritual activities.

The Cantabrian region's cave art is not only a testament to the technical and creative abilities of Upper Paleolithic humans but also provides valuable insights into their cognitive, symbolic, and social worlds. The preservation of these sites, along with ongoing archaeological research, continues to deepen our understanding of prehistoric art and its broader cultural context.

## Question 2

The art of Phoenician colonization.

### STUDENT RESPONSE:

The art of Phoenician colonization reflects the cultural and commercial expansion of the Phoenician civilization, particularly between the 12th and 6th centuries BCE, across the Mediterranean basin. This artistic production is characterized by its eclectic nature, blending indigenous traditions with Near Eastern influences, and serves as a testament to the Phoenicians' role as intermediaries between the eastern Mediterranean and the West.

Phoenician art during this period is primarily funerary, religious, and decorative, with a strong emphasis on craftsmanship and luxury goods. One of its most distinctive features is the use of ivory, gold, silver, and glass, often employed in the creation of small-scale objects such as jewelry, amulets, and ritual vessels. These items frequently incorporate Egyptian and Mesopotamian motifs, including lotus flowers, palmettes, sphinxes, and winged deities, adapted to local tastes. The ivory carvings from sites like Nimrud (Assyria) and the Phoenician colonies in the western Mediterranean, such as those found in the necropolis of Puig des Molins (Ibiza), exemplify this syncretism, combining Near Eastern iconography with local stylistic elements.

In architecture, Phoenician colonization introduced new urban and religious models, particularly the temple and the necropolis. The tophet, a sacred precinct dedicated to child sacrifices (often associated with the god Baal Hammon and the goddess Tanit), is a hallmark of Phoenician settlements, with examples found in Carthage, Motya, and Sulcis. These spaces feature stelae with inscriptions and symbolic decorations, such as the sign of Tanit—a stylized figure with a triangular body and outstretched arms—alongside other religious symbols like the caduceus or the Egyptian ankh.

Sculpture in Phoenician art is predominantly small-scale and functional, often serving as votive offerings or funerary goods. The "Lady of Galera" (a terracotta figurine from the 7th century BCE) and the "Sarcophagus of Ahiaram" (from Byblos, 10th century BCE) are notable examples. The latter, an anthropomorphic sarcophagus with a relief depicting a seated figure and an inscription in Phoenician script, illustrates the fusion of Egyptian funerary traditions with local artistic conventions. Similarly, the terracotta masks and figurines from Sardinia and Sicily reflect both Near Eastern and indigenous influences, often depicting deities or idealized human forms.

Phoenician pottery, while less elaborate than their metalwork or ivory carvings, is significant for its role in trade and cultural exchange. The production of red-slip ware and black-glazed pottery, often decorated with geometric or floral motifs, spread throughout the Mediterranean, influencing local ceramic traditions. The distribution of these wares, particularly in sites like Carthage, Gadir (Cádiz), and Utica, underscores the Phoenicians' commercial networks and their ability to adapt their artistic output to regional markets.

The art of Phoenician colonization also played a crucial role in the transmission of iconographic and technological innovations to indigenous cultures, particularly in

the Iberian Peninsula, North Africa, and the western Mediterranean islands. The adoption of Phoenician motifs by local populations, such as the Tartessians in southern Spain, led to the development of hybrid artistic styles, as seen in the goldwork of the Carambolo treasure or the ivory plaques from the necropolis of La Joya (Huelva). These objects often retain Phoenician techniques but incorporate indigenous themes, reflecting a dynamic process of cultural interaction.

In summary, Phoenician colonial art is defined by its adaptability, technical skill, and syncretic nature. It served not only as a means of expressing religious and funerary beliefs but also as a tool for consolidating trade networks and cultural influence across the Mediterranean. The legacy of this art is evident in the enduring presence of Phoenician motifs and techniques in the artistic traditions of the regions they colonized.

### Question 3

Comment on the figures in Plate A



Figura 1

#### STUDENT RESPONSE:

The object shown in Plate A is an example of Paleolithic mobile art, specifically a piece of portable or mobiliary art from the Upper Paleolithic period. This artifact appears to be a decorated stone or plaque, likely made of schist or a similar material, featuring engraved lines that form a pattern.

The engravings consist of fine incised lines that create a series of parallel and intersecting motifs, possibly representing abstract or geometric designs. Such pieces are often associated with symbolic or utilitarian purposes, reflecting the artistic expression of early human societies. The technique used here is typical of Paleolithic mobile art, where hard tools were employed to scratch or carve designs into the surface of stones, bones, or antlers.

This type of artifact is commonly found in archaeological contexts linked to Magdalenian or Solutrean cultures, which were prominent in the Cantabrian region of northern Spain and southwestern France. The piece may have served as a personal ornament, a symbolic object, or even a functional item with engraved markings for record-keeping or communication.

The study of such objects provides insight into the cognitive and cultural development of Paleolithic humans, illustrating their capacity for abstract thought, artistic creation, and the use of symbols. The preservation of engravings also allows researchers to analyze the techniques and tools employed in their production.

## Question 4

Comment on the figures in Plate B

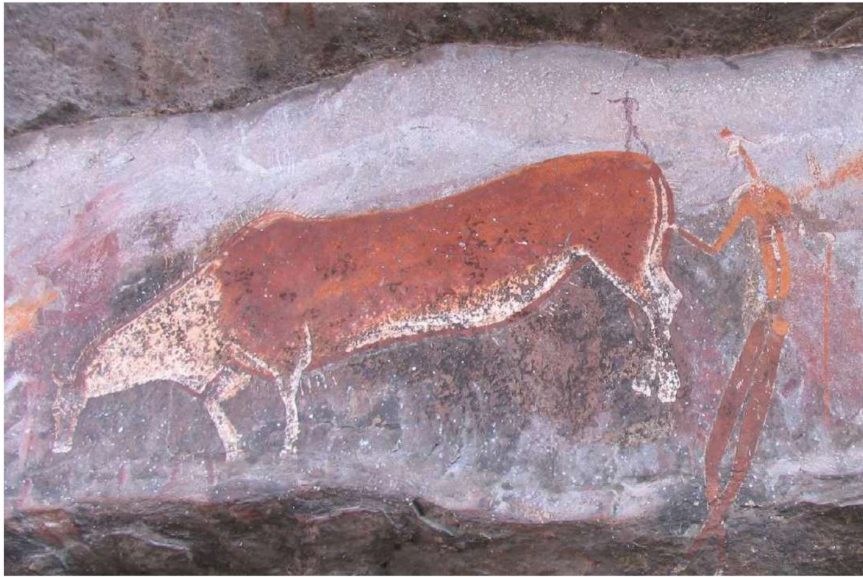


Figura 2

### STUDENT RESPONSE:

The image in Plate B depicts a scene of prehistoric rock art, specifically a representation of an animal that can be identified as a Paleolithic depiction. This figure appears to be a bison, a common subject in Paleolithic cave art, particularly in the Cantabrian region of northern Spain.

The technique used seems consistent with parietal art from the Upper Paleolithic period, likely created using natural pigments such as ochre, hematite, or charcoal. These pigments were often applied by blowing through a tube or with brushes made from animal hair or plants, resulting in the characteristic outlines and shading seen here.

The bison is shown in a profile view, a typical feature of Paleolithic animal representations, which allows for a clear depiction of its distinctive features such as the hump, horns, and body shape. The use of shading and contour lines provides a sense of volume and three-dimensionality to the figure.

This type of art is often found in deep cave settings, suggesting it may have had ritualistic or symbolic significance rather than purely decorative purposes. The Cantabrian region, particularly sites like Altamira, is renowned for such high-quality and well-preserved examples of Paleolithic cave art.

The condition of the painting, with some areas appearing faded or damaged, indicates its considerable age and the challenges of preservation over thousands of years. The study of such figures contributes to our understanding of early human cognition, artistic expression, and cultural practices during the Paleolithic era.