

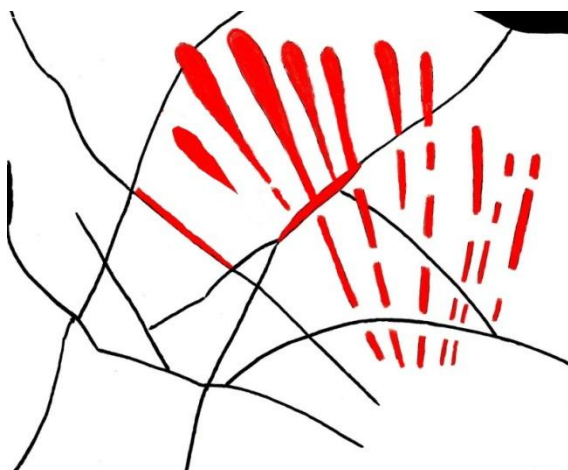
Some thoughts on Llonín Cave's giant

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Imagine yourself and your friends exploring the walls of a pitch-dark cave. The light of torches and bone-marrow candles reveal all sorts of irregularities in the rock surface. Then, all of a sudden, you spot a freak of nature, exactly at eye level, resembling the lateral outline of a giant human head, about 80 cm high, three times larger than an ordinary one. This accidental combination of minor protuberances, cracks and fissures in the wall suggests the contours of a high forehead, nose, lips, chin, neck and back of the head. You even recognize an ear, whereas a minor depression in the rock's surface might be the eye. You would feel thrilled and excited, remember old orally transmitted stories of a youngster and a giant who could not open his eyes.

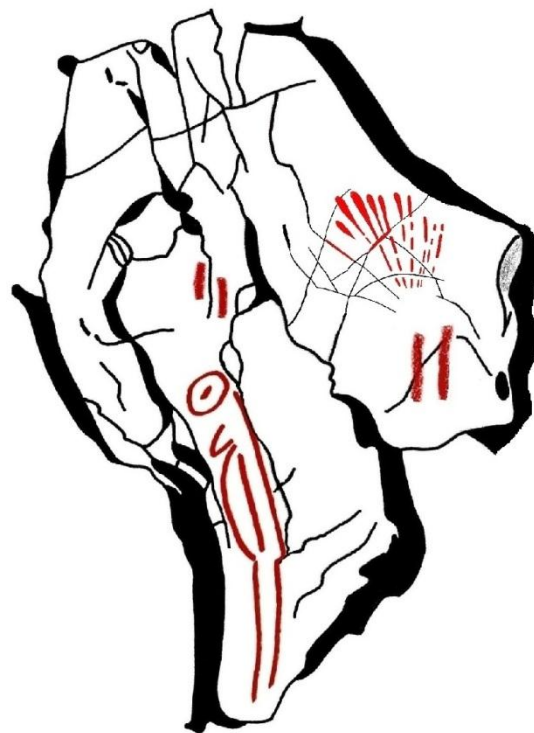
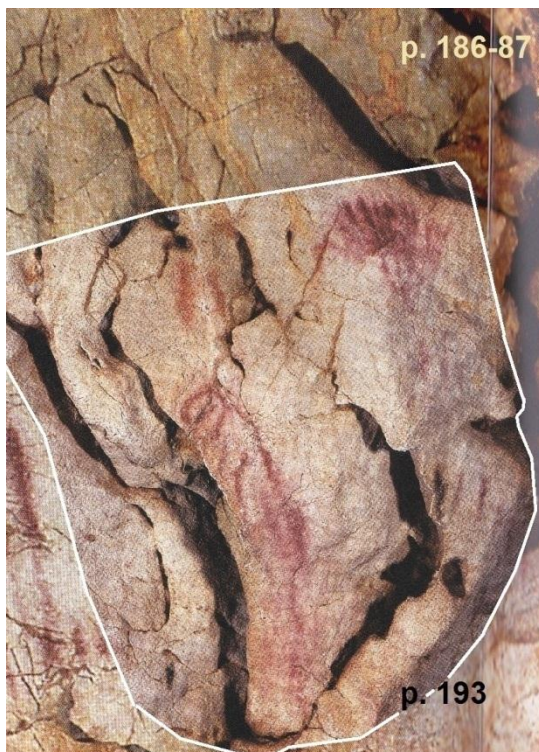
This is what happened to our Late Palaeolithic predecessors, some 25.000 BP, in Llonín Cave (Asturias, Northern Spain). Our ancestors, with an innate cognitive capacity to recognize zoomorphic or anthropomorphic masks in natural protuberances of the rock surface in the world-famous Altamira Cave (Castro 2014), must have been capable to detect the outline of a huge head in this natural feature. This suggestion is supported by the fact that they covered the 'eye' for some reason, perhaps trying to evoke the essence of that old tale.



The set of red radiating lines, covering the 'eye'. Drawing after Saura Ramos & Múzquiz Pérez-Seoane (2007: 186-87 and 192-93).

With utmost care, using red ochre as paint, somebody covered the 'eye' with a set of 11 straight lines, all parting more or less from a single virtual center and ending at the upper border of the depression that might be interpreted as the brow above the eye.

There are tens of sets of red sub-parallel lines on the wall around the head. However, these are clearly freehand painted, in sharp contrast to the refinement expressed in this set of radiating lines, as if the artist had used a ruler. It must have served a very specific purpose: to illustrate a story about a giant with a covered eye. It seems equally logical to imagine that the red anthropomorphic female figure on the neck played a similarly important role in this tale. Did the female help the giant to open his eye, to look at the people gathered in front of the wall? Had she covered the eye for some good reason, to prevent him seeing the visitors?



The giant head in Llonín Cave (Asturias, Northern Spain). Drawing after photographs by Pedro Saura (in: Saura Ramos & Múzquiz Pérez-Seoane 2007: 186-87 and 192-93).

Two subvertical red lines on the cheek and two subvertical lines in front of the 'ear' are here interpreted as possible tattoos. Afterwards, they covered the wall to the right and the left of the head and below it with abstract red signs, mainly lines and dots.

25.000 BP, the head with the set of radiating lines and the female figure evoked the essence of a primeval story that may have survived until today, with a youngster and a giant who could not open his eyes in the lead roles. It is a thought provoking idea that, over the

millennia, a Palaeolithic tale might have evolved into the present-day legends of 'Jentilak', 'Balor', 'Vij', 'Hásohkata' and similar creatures (Lajoie 2014). Can a modern myth really have such old roots? The answer may be affirmative, since the ancestral roots of various myths have been traced back to the Palaeolithic by regrouping common signals in tales from different parts of the globe in phylogenetic, Bayesian tale trees (Lajoie 2014; d'Huy 2015a-b).



The privileged position of the head on the wall in Llonín Cave, surrounded by hundreds of red signs, 25.000 BP (modified after Berenguer Alonso 1979: Lamina II).

Five to ten millennia later (between 20.000 and 15.000 BP), new generations returned to Llonín Cave. They engraved and painted animals (notably striated hind, but also deer, bison and horse) on the wall around the head, obliterating many of the earlier red signs. Were these animal figures meant as symbolic sacrifices to the giant, to avoid his anger, thank or ask him for something, the birth of a child, recovery from illness, successful hunt? Whatever the answer, people avoided to touch the head, as if our ancestors had tacitly agreed that the message behind this ideograph had not lost any of its validity.



The privileged position of the head on the wall in Llonín Cave, 15.000 BP. Note that engravings and black paintings of animals blurred many earlier red signs, but did not damage the head (modified after Utrilla & Martínez-Bea 2008: figure 10).

Other Late Palaeolithic, supernatural entities have been described from the caves of Trois-Frères, El Juyo and Entrefoces.

In the 'Sanctuaire' of Trois-Frères Cave (Ariège, Southern France), a 75 cm high 'Sorcerer', also named 'Dieu cornu' or 'Horned God', presided over a scenery of many dozens of engraved zoomorphic and zoo-anthropomorphic (perhaps humans disguised as bison?) creatures (Breuil 1930; Thymula 1995; Begouën *et al.* 2014).

In El Juyo Cave (Cantabria, Northern Spain), a 35x32x21 cm large zoo-anthropomorphic stone sculpture, in the form of a 'head', presided over a complex of shallow, man-made trenches transformed in low mounds because of the enormous amount of gifts, consisting of animal bones, antler, burnt herbs and fruits, ochre, colored clay and sand, bone spear points and eyed bone needles (Freeman & González Echegaray 1981).

In Entrefoces Cave (Asturias, Northern Spain), a small (124x84x69 mm) quartzite boulder has been retouched by someone to enhance the features of an anthropomorphic head.

Subsequently, this head has been placed in a vertical position in a niche of the cave. Moreover, large, yellow, red and grey boulders, as well as a selection of high-quality flint 'nuclei' and flint tools in front of this head suggest a 'possibly significant association' of gifts (González Morales 1990).

Were the tales of these supernatural entities the same as or did they differ from the story of the giant in Llonín? The quest for the primordial roots of folktales may help to decipher the, as yet extremely speculative and problematic, meaning of such Palaeolithic pictorial narratives and sacrificial complexes.

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