Authors: Meenakshi Dubey-Pathak[1,2,5]; Sara Garcês[3,4,5], Noelia Priego Cecilla [3,4,5,6]

[1]Tagore National Fellow (Ministry of Culture), India
[2]IGRMS National Museum of Humankind, Bhopal; meenakshividushi@gmail.com
[3]Polytechnic Institute of Tomar, Portugal
[4]Instituto Terra e Memória, Portugal
[5]Geosciences Center, Portugal
[6] Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa, Portugal

Session Title: Obsessive Patterns: Visual Recurrence and Symbolic Identity in Prehistoric Imagery

Abstract:
This session proposes a reflection on rock art sites distinguished by the recurrence and concentration of a single motif or theme in their representations. Across different regions of the world, certain rock art assemblages reveal an almost obsessive repetition of particular elements—such as negative hand stencils, anthropomorphic figures, concentric circles, or other abstract signs—creating dense and visually striking compositions that may suggest ritualized practices, collective identities, or specific modes of symbolic expression. The aim of this session is to bring together case studies that analyze the dominance of a single motif, exploring both its formal and technical aspects as well as the possible social and cultural meanings behind such visual persistence. It seeks to discuss whether these repetitions reflect deliberate aesthetic choices, processes of symbolic transmission, or specific ritual contexts. By assembling contributions from different rock art traditions and methodological perspectives, this session intends to promote an interdisciplinary dialogue about the nature and function of thematic repetition in rock art, and about the impact that such concentrations of symbols have on the construction of prehistoric graphic landscapes and visual identities.

Keywords: Repetition; Motif; Rock art; Symbolism; Prehistoric imagery

Acknowledgments:
Sara Garcês and Noelia Priego Cecilla are supported by Portuguese funds from Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P. (Portugal) in the frame of UIDB/00073/2025 and the UIDP/00073/2025 projects of the I & D unit of Geosciences Center (University of Coimbra, Portugal).