

On the Trails of Rock Art: Landscape, Mobility, Visuality, and Cosmologies in Open-Air Rock Art Contexts

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Abstract:

In this session, we propose to open a conversation on how rock art relates to mobility and mobile and oral societies from both spatial and temporal perspectives. Our working hypothesis is that movement is not merely a background condition but a generative force behind rock art's localisation, imagery, and purpose. In many elevated environments of Central Eurasia, for instance, rock art flourishes precisely in periods and contexts where pastoral mobility – seasonal, economic, ritual – plays a defining role in shaping local landscapes and cosmologies. Within this framework, rock art sites, their iconography, and human engagement with the stone surface appear embedded in cyclical temporalities, often materialising in periodical site access and a layered micro-stratigraphy of the rock art.

We invite contributions examining relationships between rock art and rhythms of movement, between lowlands and uplands or across diverse and distant sites, whether related to pastoral mobility, hunting, long-distance routes, or ritual journeys. We also encourage papers addressing movement as transition in multiple dimensions: physical passages between ecological zones, temporal shifts between seasons, and symbolic crossings between the human and spiritual or funerary realms.

In this way, we aim to address the following questions – welcoming case studies from Prehistory through historical periods to modernity. How do spatial and temporal movements materialise in rock art, both on the rock surface and within the wider landscape? How might iconography, compositional choices, or a specific focus on colour and light effects reveal patterns of interconnection and periodic movement of humans and animals?

By fostering a reassessment of rock art through movement, this session aims to illuminate methodological and theoretical approaches that integrate rock art with broader networks of mobility, visuality, memory, and agency.