

Rock & Ritual

*Caves, Rocky Places and Religious Practices
in the Ancient Mediterranean*

Edited by
Sonia MACHAUSE
Carmen RUEDA
Ignasi GRAU
Réjane ROURE



Presses universitaires de la Méditerranée

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Collection « Mondes anciens »

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Contents

<i>List of Authors</i>	9
Rosa PLANA-MALLART	
<i>Foreword</i>	11
Rosa PLANA-MALLART	
<i>Préface</i>	13
Sonia MACHAUSE LÓPEZ, Carmen RUEDA GALÁN, Ignasi GRAU MIRA & Réjane ROURE	
<i>Presentation: Rock & Ritual. Caves, Rocky Places and Religious Practices in the Ancient Mediterranean.</i>	15
Sonia MACHAUSE LÓPEZ, Carmen RUEDA GALÁN, Ignasi GRAU MIRA & Réjane ROURE	
<i>Présentation : Rocs et rituels. Grottes, rochers et pratiques religieuses en Méditerranée ancienne.</i>	19
Robin SKEATES	
<i>Introduction: The Potency of Landforms in the Ancient Mediterranean</i>	23
Ricard MARLASCA MARTÍN, Josep M ^a . LÓPEZ GARÍ & María J. ESCANDELL TORRES	
<i>Bronze Age Cave Rituals in the Pitiussae Islands: Cova Des Fum Example</i>	31
Konstantinos P. TRIMMIS	
<i>Little Islands of Darkness. Caves and Cults in the Cyclades Archipelago from Prehistory to the Present</i>	41
Mireia LÓPEZ-BERTRAN	
<i>Landscapes, Sensescapes and Figurines: Understanding Rural Shrines in the Punic World</i>	51
Carmen RUEDA GALÁN, Sonia MACHAUSE LÓPEZ, Iván AMORÓS LÓPEZ & Ignasi GRAU MIRA	
<i>Modes of Religiosity in Iberian Iron Age Caves: Religious Behaviour and Sensorial Experience</i>	63
Susana GONZÁLEZ REYERO	
<i>Ritual Practices and Social Change. The Umbria de Salchite Caves, Memory and Landscape in South-Eastern Iberia (4th to 1st Centuries BC).</i>	77

César ESTEBAN	
<i>Caves, Astronomy and Ritual in the Iberian Peninsula</i>	89
Ivan COTS, Maria PÉREZ, Jordi DILOLI, Ramón FERRÉ & Samuel SARDÀ	
<i>Ritual Spaces in the Font Major Cave: The Sala del Llac and the Sala de la Mamella (L'Espluga de Francolí, Tarragona)</i>	101
Marco GIUMAN	
<i>The Centaur's Cave. Symbology of Space and Rituality in the Myth of Heracles and Pholus</i>	113
Ingrid DUNYACH	
<i>A "Rock-spring" Sanctuary in the Greek Tradition? Ritual Practices at La Fajouse, a Sacred Spring on the Summit of the Eastern Pyrenees (Late 6th Century BC–6th Century AD)</i>	119
Mario GUTIÉRREZ-RODRÍGUEZ, Margarita ORFILA & Paul GOLDBERG	
<i>The Geoarchaeological Evidence of a Sanctuary use During Roman Times. High-resolution Microstratigraphical Analysis of Cova Dels Jurats (Calescoves, Menorca)</i>	129
Nicola SCHEYHING	
<i>Thoughts on the Delimitation and Demarcation of Sacred Spaces Without Visible Boundaries: Standing Stones in the Levant</i>	143
Holley MOYES	
<i>Mesoamerica and Beyond: Considering Ritual Cave use From a Cross-Cultural Perspective</i>	153

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Modes of Religiosity in Iberian Iron Age Caves: Religious Behaviour and Sensorial Experience

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Introduction

We propose a study aimed at the observation and analysis of the models of religious behaviour (cognitive models) and forms of religiosity associated with worship and Iberian rituality. We focus on cult places, as they clearly enacted an important role in the religiosity of these protohistoric societies. From a spatial perspective they played an active part in the territorial organisation. Their functions were heterogeneous, although their role in community identification and cohesion is evident. They were also a physical reference point for the projection of ideology in the territorial dynamic (González-Alcalde 2002; Ruiz *et al.* 2010; Rueda 2011; Grau, Amorós 2013; Rísquez, Rueda 2013; González Reyero *et al.* 2014; López-Bertran 2015; Rueda, Bellón 2016; Machause 2019; Machause, Quixal 2018).

In general terms, our spatial reference spans a wide strip of the eastern and southeastern Iberian Peninsula stretching from the province of Castellón to the Alto Guadalquivir region (Fig. 1). This brings us into contact with a diverse range of political territories and contexts. Our chronological framework is equally wide, although we focus particularly on the 4th and 3rd centuries BC as a key period for this type site that went hand-in-hand with the transformations undergone by the Iberian societies of the time. We will not enter into an analysis of the continuity or transformation processes following the end of the Second Punic War at the end of the 3rd century BC, as this would lead to a complex discussion concerning the forms of abandonment or remembrance in an extremely wide-ranging map of situations.

Thus, we find ourselves looking at a heterogeneous map as a fundamental feature that defines this type of context. Historiographically, the term “cave-sanctuary” has been used in a broad sense (Gil-Mascarell 1975; Aparicio 1976

1997; Serrano, Fernández 1992; González-Alcalde 1993, 2002, 2002–2003a, 2002–2003b, 2005a, 2005b, 2006; Moneo 2003, among others). This has led to cult places in different territories and with distinguishable features being analysed under a single category and with a certain homogenisation of different religious situations. We would like to break with this idea, as it is a dynamic that has diluted the possible particularities of each of them, while emphasising their common features, which tend to be generic and determined by the presence of the cave (Grau, Amorós 2013: 187–188). With these factors in mind, our approach will be mainly based on two variables. On the one hand, we understand caves as key sites in the landscape, as they contributed to strengthening collective participation and, therefore, to the mechanisms of integration and religious identification that incorporated the ritual mobility processes. On the other hand, we emphasise their multisensorial nature, as they combined special characteristics that facilitated and even fostered the recreation of ritualities charged with symbolism.

1 Cave Sanctuaries in the Territory: Ritual Mobility and Symbolic Appropriation of the Landscape

Studying in depth the ritual aspects linked to caves obliges us to place into context, albeit briefly, the role of the landscape in the religious structure of the Iberian societies. In these societies the religious systems were connected and linked to nature (Moneo 2003; Grau, Rueda 2018). That which was known and selected was projected onto the landscape, which served to build the collective identity and foster the sensation that the physical environment made sense and had value. In the landscape, therefore, we perceive the features that were impressed on it by a society. This was true also in terms of the symbolic aspects, as nature became a source of metaphors and an explanation of the different ways of understanding the world (Urquijo 2010). For that reason, territories had a clear symbolic dimension that was projected through specific landmarks in the landscape. These could have been the caves that became points of attraction that conditioned

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of organising the religious experience and its practices. A concrete example could clarify this idea. We are referring specifically to the vast territory of Cástulo (Linares, Jaén) and its sanctuaries, Collado de los Jardines (Santa Elena, Jaén) and Cueva de la Lobera (Castellar, Jaén) (mid-4th-3rd centuries BC), that contributed to the organisation of a very large religious community (Fig. 6) (Rueda *et al.* 2008; Rueda 2011). Worship in these cave areas began with a pilgrimage within the territory, starting from different towns and taking up to several days to reach the sanctuaries. Once there, they held very important practices for the society (rites of passage, nuptial rites, aggregation rites, couple and fertility rites, healing rituals, etc.) (Rueda 2013; Rísquez *et al.* 2018).

There are variables that define those contexts from the doctrinal model. Thus, the scale of participation itself (a very extensive community that encompassed various lineage groups) and an equally large frequentation translated into deposits of several thousand offerings, among which the more than 7000 bronze figurines stand out (Rueda 2011; Prados *et al.* 2018) (Fig. 6.3). On the other hand, the rite was channelled through reiterated behaviours of which the bronze iconography was the principal means of expression. In this way were established the different corporal expressions (gestures) that contributed to the learning (organised around the principal phases of the life and social cycle) and to orientating the adaptative conduct and ritual behaviour. Thus, reiteration led to implicit behavioural habits that occurred independently of thought or conscious control. Without doubt, complex performances were involved in the formalisation of the ritual and these can be read in the archaeological record. This is an eye-catching feature of the doctrinal model in which the rituality was organised around processes that were by no means simplistic and that, in some cases involved the transformation of the very person (for example by cutting their hair or placing masks on them). Another important feature is that this rule allowed and favoured a clear class distinction, plainly differentiating between the aristocracy and their clientele through the votive image of the offerings and the hierarchisation of the space in both sanctuaries.

However, from our point of view, these features did not invalidate or restrict intensive emotional experiences in which diverse mechanisms also mediated. One example is the presence, in the case of Cueva de la Lobera, of a visual phenomenon interpreted as a solar hierophany that occurred inside the cave during the equinoxes (Esteban *et al.* 2014) (Fig. 6.2). This phenomenon, which would have been incorporated into the actions and times of the ritual, may have acted as catalyser, to the extent that it reproduced an archetype of the feminine that can be recognised in the collective imaginary, a perceived image that played an important role as an element of social cohesion and that could have magnified intensive sensorial experiences. They would have been sensorial and visual experiences specific to that historical moment and would have contributed to creating a conduit of sensorial empathy based on which collective subjectivities and identities would have been built. They would also have contributed to creating the narratives and mythologies, in other words, the memory of these communities.

Conclusions

The re-readings that can be made based on the application of these theories regarding modes of religiosity enrich the analytical perspectives and offer us new possibilities for revising the archaeological record and incorporating all the possible variables. Moreover, they involve an analysis of those factors that have to do with the subjectivities and their conceptualisation that are implicit in the religious experience. Methodologically therefore they reaffirm the need to overcome the passive concept of the materiality of the objects and to delve more deeply into aspects that go beyond mere visual representations, investigating the channels of sensorial and emotive empathy. The task will be to approach the “cognitive geographies” that offer a fruitful analytical route in the religious space and on the ritual plain.

On the other hand, the heterogeneity of the Iberian religious landscape allows us to appreciate how both ways of organising the religious experience are manifested in contemporary religious contexts. Not everything is based on the nature of the cult, to the extent that similar modes of religiosity organise rituals originating in diverse motivations. Therefore, in cave sanctuaries it is necessary to apply analyses on different scales that explain their functionality in the territorial context, as well as their role in identity-building on a social level.

The scales are necessarily involved in the organisation of the worship. Here, the *imagistic* mode is a basic-primary form of ritual organisation that becomes more complicated in the more complex political territories. In them the intervention of a doctrinal mode is necessary, although without categorically excluding the religious experiences created by sensorial phenomena. This can mainly be seen in hierarchised territorial pyramids, in which the political structures required collective cohesion processes that went beyond the regional scale. The mode of religiosity in these contexts contributed to the organisation and perpetuation of the social order, to regulating political alliances (for example through the ritual sanctioning of marriage) and to reforming the channels of aggregation. These processes can be read above all up to the late 3rd century BC, when Rome brought about their breakup by incorporating a much more stratified doctrinal model.

This is a line of study that we have barely outlined here, but it has tremendous potential in the Iberian religious space.

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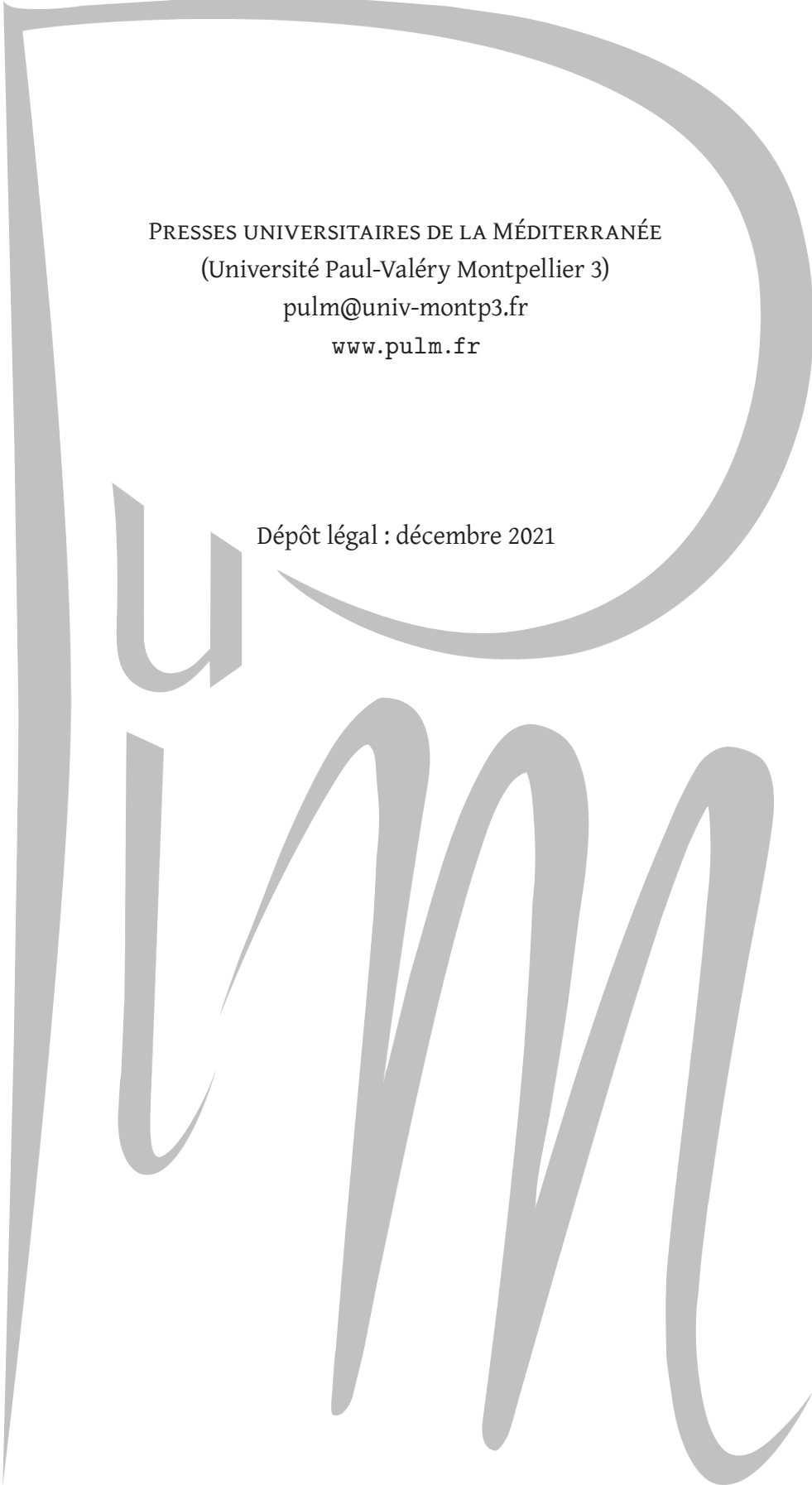
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