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Written in stone

Rupestrian manifestations of the Canary Islands

Project conceived and produced by the CajaCanarias Foundation
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Acknowledgments to the heritage departments of the Island Cabildos of the Canary Islands

Throughout its history, the CajaCanarias Foundation, as heir to the work of the *La Obra Social y Cultural de CajaCanarias*, has fully supported the protection and diffusion of the historic heritage of the Canaries, in its broadest sense.

This exhibit recovers one of the most interesting, yet least known, archaeological manifestations of our archipelago: rock engravings.

Written in stone is a photographic exhibit of the most emblematic rupestrian sites in the territory of the Canary Islands. In general, these sites are located in privileged environments and landscapes, mostly in mountainous areas with commanding views of their surroundings and, on occasion, they appear associated with flora endemic to the Canary Islands. The rock motifs represented are quite varied and many of the sites have been declared *Bien de Interés Cultural* (BIC), a category of the Spanish heritage register, in accordance with Law 4/1999, 15 March, on the Historical Heritage of the Canary Islands.

Despite their legal protection, preserving these heritage sites is challenging because most of them are located out in the open and therefore subject to environmental phenomena (erosion) and anthropic aggressions (spoliation). In this regard, the exhibit seeks to raise public awareness of the need to preserve these natural environments and archaeological sites, because the rupestrian world is always integrated into a landscape, into a biogeographic location that must be preserved in the best conditions.

This exhibit continues a line initiated years ago by the CajaCanarias Foundation, with other exhibits that also sought to increase knowledge about Canarian heritage, by disseminating it to every corner of the archipelago and decentralizing the cultural offer.

CajaCanarias Foundation

The nature of Canarian rupestrian manifestations

The rupestrian motifs found in the archipelago are abstract, geometric, figurative and alphabetic representations, carved or painted primarily on the surfaces of rocks by the original populations of the Canaries, who were genetically and culturally related to the North African Amazigh world, from which they came. Today we know that many of the rupestrian sites in the Canary Islands are similar to sites documented in the High Atlas of Morocco, Tunis and East Algeria.

The cultural reality of the indigenous people of the Canary Islands spans a period between the First Millennium BCE, when the island was first populated, and the 15th Century, when the indigenous world started to collapse due to the conquest and colonisation of the archipelago.

Rupestrian manifestations in the Canaries can only be dated using relative, rather than absolute, chronology; that is, employing criteria such as 'before' or 'after', according to aspects such as the technique, patina, the position of the motifs on the panel, typological criteria, analogies, etc. The absolute dating methods available only reveal the age of the geological substrate upon which the motifs are engraved, but not the moment in which they were created. One exception is the Painted Cave of Gáldar, whose interior has been dated between the 11th and 15th Centuries CE, using carbon obtained from mortars in which this black colour had been ground up and later used to paint the multi-coloured chamber.

Recent archaeological investigation has revealed the existence of many rupestrian sites distributed throughout the geography of the archipelago, and today they form part of one of the most active research fields in the Canaries. Their meaning is still being studied, as carved motifs had a deep cultural significance for the societies that created them, representing their experiences, thoughts and beliefs. The 'messages' they sought to transmit with these motifs have not yet been adequately deciphered, as they form part of a hermetic code that the indigenous people of the islands learned and used as a tool to communicate information that would be transmitted down the ages. Some researchers believe that many of these sites represent a kind of territorial border, in addition to the religious and/or cultural meanings that many rupestrian sites appear to have.

Rock art or rupestrian manifestations?

Rupestrian manifestations are purely a reflection of the intellectual capacity of early societies to abstract and represent their reality, experiences, thoughts and beliefs. Denominating it 'art', however, does not mean that they are artistic objects in the same terms and with the same objectives with which we understand art from the perspective of our Western culture. Calling it 'art' imbues these manifestations with a meaning that does

not necessarily coincide with the way they were understood by their creators. Therefore, the term ‘rock art evidently carries implicit ethnocentric baggage and its use is inappropriate.

THE SITES

There is a close relationship between the location of these rupestrian sites and the natural environment. That is, the sites where rock motifs were engraved were not chosen arbitrarily, they were chosen based on the social and cultural needs of the indigenous people of the island. There was also interdependence between the raw material available (geological medium) and the cultural stage of the indigenous world (the tools available to make the engravings).

The majority of the rock motifs are located out in the open. In some cases they are part of large groups and in others they appear in isolation, and they span every bioclimatic belt, from the coast to the summit. They were generally carved on basaltic, phonolitic and trachytic rock, as well as on volcanic tubes.

THE TECHNIQUES

By studying the lines carved in the rock, the way in which they were made can be deduced, even though archaeological investigation has not yet been able to document the type of tools used to make the engravings. The techniques that were used in the Canaries are:

- Incision: a cut is produced when pressing an object on the surface of the rock. The most frequent result is a V-shaped groove for thin lines and U-shaped for thick lines. Some incised motifs seem to be made using a mixed technique, in conjunction with abrasion or pecking.
- Pecking: this technique involves percussion of the surface to be carved, causing small splinters of rock to break off. Pecking can be continuous, following the entire outline of the motif uninterrupted, or discontinuous, when it is used to intermittently draw the lines on the panel. The patinas vary depending on the depth of the pecking, with the darker ones generally being the deepest. In many panels it can be observed that an initial incision was made and then pecking was used afterward.
- Abrasion: produced by applying friction to, or polishing engraved grooves to eliminate the irregularities left by pecking or percussion. This technique was generally used to finish motifs that had been created with other techniques, although in some cases it was applied to the surface of the panel before carving

the motifs. Abrasion can also produce high and low reliefs. Porous materials, such as volcanic pumice, could have been used to produce abrasions.

- Scratching: this involves a very thin cut in the rock that usually does not go deeper than the weathered surface layer. It produces very fine, superficial motifs and with few exceptions the technique is generally associated with contemporary graffiti.

ROCK MOTIFS

Rock motifs can be grouped in three broad categories: geometric, figurative and alphabetic.

- Geometric: these are the most common and cover a great variety of motifs (rectilinear, reticular, checkerboard, rectangular, quadrangular, cruciform, triangular, rhomboid, oval, spiral, meandriform, serpentine, fretwork, concentric circles and semi-circles, etc.). They have been documented in all seven islands, but how representative they are varies from island to island. They are not as common in Gran Canaria, while in La Palma the most common are spirals, circles, concentric semi-circles or meandriforms. In the islands of Tenerife, La Gomera, Lanzarote and Fuerteventura checkerboard forms, grids and lines with no particular shape predominate. In El Hierro there are many intertwined ovals and circles, associated with alphabetic inscriptions from the Libyco-Berber alphabet.
- Figurative: these motifs are identified with different figures, including anthropomorphs (human figures), zoomorphs (animal figures, such as lizards, horses or fish), podomorphs (silhouettes of feet), cruciforms (figures in the form of a cross), boat figures and soliforms (solar motifs). Their representativeness also differs from island to island, although they very common in Gran Canaria.
- Alphabetic: these motifs are represented by letters that have been identified with the following scripts:
    - Libyco-Berber. It has been documented throughout the archipelago and is related to the autochthonous writing system of the Amazigh of Northwest Africa. It is a consonantal alphabet that is generally written vertically from top down, and also from right to left or from left to right. This writing could have been introduced into the Canaries in the middle of the 1st millennium BCE. These inscriptions were engraved on rock surfaces using the pecking technique and, in later periods, probably after the Era changed, using incising or scratching.
    - Latino-Canarian. This syllabic writing system has only been documented in Lanzarote and Fuerteventura. It is related to the cursive

script characteristic of border territories of the Roman Empire, and with a form of the ancient Libyan language. In the majority of these cases it is arranged horizontally and read from left to right. It can be dated to around the change of the Era and it has only been documented made by incision or scratching. In general, this Latino-Canarian script coexists on panels with Libyco-Berber script, forming bilingual inscriptions.

THE PROTECTION, PRESERVATION AND DIFFUSION OF OUR RUPESTRIAN HERITAGE

Scientific documentation

Our knowledge of Canarian rupestrian is possible thanks to scientific research that involves the exhaustive study of rupestrian sites by specialists, including surveying, archaeological, photographic and three-dimensional examination, and the publication of results, not only in journals or specialised monographs, but also in popular media.

Preservation

Almost all of the rock engravings are located out in the open, which makes them vulnerable to deterioration due to natural causes. Phenomena such as wind erosion, frost weathering, fires and animal excrement (mainly of birds, due to its corrosiveness) are the main causes of deterioration of these sites. However, anthropological factors are the most aggressive and destructive: clearing land for agriculture, rock extraction, building tourist developments in areas surrounding archaeological sites, spoliation, illegal trade and graffiti are the main causes for the disappearance or deterioration of the island's rupestrian heritage.

Legal protection and diffusion

The enactment of Law 4/1999, 15 March, on the Historical Heritage of the Canary Islands, gave continuity to a heritage policy that has allowed many archaeological sites to by catalogued as *Bienes de Interés Cultural* (BIC), a category of the Spanish heritage register, due to their special significance. This has provided them adequate protection, preservation and study and, in some cases, they have been put to use for public enjoyment. This is the case of La Zarza and La Zarcita Cultural Park (Garafía) or the Belmaco Archaeological Park (Mazo) in La Palma; Painted Cave of Gáldar Museum and Archaeological Park in Gran Canaria; or El Julan Cultural Park (Frontera) in El Hierro.

Heritage values

- The rupestrian heritage of the Canary Islands reflects the North African *Amazigh* influence on our archaeological heritage. It is a manifestation of a substantial exchange of human values during a certain chronological period, in a specific cultural area (the Canary Islands) that is unique in the world.

- The rupestrian sites are a testament to the indigenous culture prior to the conquest and colonisation of the islands. They provide exceptional testimony of a cultural tradition that has disappeared.
- They are generally located in highly valued areas, in terms of landscape and environment.

GRAN CANARIA

Painted Cave of Gáldar

It forms part of an archaeological site that includes excavated caves and more than 60 houses that were occupied between the 6th and 16th Centuries. The current aspect of the interior of the cave has been dated between the 11th and 13th Centuries CE using carbon obtained from mortars in which this black colorant was crushed and then used to paint the multi-coloured chamber. It was evidently used as a ceremonial space: the ideograms can be related to a system of measuring and calculating time, an elaborate lunar and solar calendar that would be based on the combination of series organised using the number 12 and in alternating red, white and unpainted spaces. This interpretation is reinforced by discoveries in Painted Cave at the end of the 19th Century: mummies, vessels and other utensils.

It was common in the indigenous culture of Gran Canaria to paint the walls of homes, funeral chambers or ceremonial centres. Painted Cave of Gáldar is one of the most complex and best preserved examples of this practice, which has not been documented in the rest of the archipelago.

GRAN CANARIA

Barranco de Balos (Agüimes)

This archaeological site, also known as *Los Letreros*, is one of the rupestrian sites in Gran Canaria with the greatest number of panels and a great variety of engraved motifs (anthropomorphs, zoomorphs, Libyco-Berber script and geometric motifs or ideograms). This site has been known, at least to the academic world, since 1882, due to an article published by the researcher René Verneau.
The photo shows schematic representations of human figures on horseback, very similar to those documented in different archaeological sites south of the Atlas Mountains in Morocco, belonging to the Camel Period (around the turn of the Era). These motifs, the riders, are related to the concept of territoriality, of marking the territory occupied by an ethnic group. The vertical ramiform motifs that complete the panel have been interpreted as extremely stylised human figure outlines or as representations of tree men.

The relation between the native population of Gran Canaria and the Atlas Mountains had been noted in *Historia de las siete Islas de Canaria* (1694), by Tomás Arias de Cubas, who wrote when he discovered the customs of the natives of the island*: ...when they got together they would tell the stories of their ancestors from memory, and they would regale each other with tales about the clear Atlante Mountains in Africa, using metaphors of doves, eagles...*

GRAN CANARIA

Cueva de Los Candiles (Artenara)

This artificial rectangular cave, also known as Cueva de las Brujas, measures 28 m^2 and has a maximum height of three metres. It is located in an isolated spot in the area near Risco Chapín. In its interior, six niches are located in the far wall at medium height; five niches in the left wall, one at ground level; and four niches in the right wall, one very large and at ground level, near the entrance. It has also been documented that the walls are completely covered with 320 inverted triangles (230 on the left wall, 80 on the right wall and 10 on the back wall), engraved using the pecking technique and also in low relief, which have been identified with female vulvas, similar to those documented in different archaeological sites in the Saharan Atlas Mountains.

Los Candiles is the archaeological site with the largest concentration of triangles or female pubic figurations on the entire island of Gran Canaria. Also documented in its interior are engravings of domes, more than one hundred, and other motifs that are difficult to interpret, although some penile representations can be distinguished.

The orientation of the cave toward Roque Bentayga, the motifs carved in its interior and its relation to the Risco Chapín Sanctuary, have led to the belief that this cave was a mountain sanctuary related to fertility cults.

Because no archaeological remains have been found in the cavity interpretations of this space are limited to the rupestrian manifestations found there. However, according to the testimony of nearby inhabitants, when this cavity was discovered it held well-preserved human remains, along with wooden vessels.

GRAN CANARIA

Majada Alta (Tejeda)

This archaeological site is a small natural cave (the floor is 3.2 x 2.6 m, with a maximum height of 1.9 m) that was discovered in 1960 and studied by Sebastián Jiménez Sánchez. There are 13 human figures painted on the rock in its interior, but the best preserved, shown in the photo, are found at the back of the cave, where they have not been as affected by the action of atmospheric agents.

The paintings were made with red ochre, probably dissolved in animal fat. Fingers were used instead of brushes, so the width of the lines coincide with fingerprints. The length of the figures varies between 15 and 40 cm. The figures are stylised and of varying typology (asexual, apodal, bipedal, depicted with phallus, with fingers drawn), but all of them have heads. Some have ithyphallic characteristics, which has led this site to be interpreted as a sanctuary for sexual fertility, reproduction or initiation practices.

Due to their typology, the human figures are related to some of those found in Barranco de Balos or Morro de las Chocillas, in Gran Canaria and with those documented in different archaeological sites in Amazigh Kabylie in the north of Algeria.

LA PALMA

Cueva de Belmaco (Mazo)

This living cave, which is 35 m long and has a maximum height of 10 m, was rediscovered in 1752 by Domingo Vandewalle de Cervellón, Military Governor of La Palma, who came upon the rock carvings found within it when inspecting the cadaver of a man who had fallen off a cliff. In 1772, Veira y Clavijo mentioned them in Tome 1 of his *News of the general history of the Canary Islands*, describing them as *mere scribbles, the fruit of chance or the fantasy of the ancient barbarians* and ever since, these peculiar engravings have converted this site into a reference for many researchers who have visited it, as can be seen in the historiographical production.

Oral tradition considers this cave to be the residence of the last kings of the *Tigalate* canton: Juguiro and Garehagua. Archaeologic investigation has revealed the key role of this site in explaining the original settlement of La Palma and the different ceramic phases of the island. The cave forms part of an archaeological complex made up of 12 natural caves used as living spaces, five pastoral settlements and a burial cave.

The use of the cave in historical times, until 1950, also gives it ethnographic value. In this sense, it conserves a stove and a paved stone floor in the centre of the cave, which was part of a *pajero,* used to store straw.

This site contains four panels with engravings on large rocks, which have been moved from their original position. Using the pecking technique, these rocks were carved with meandriform, spiral, serpentine, circular and semi-circular motifs similar to those that have been documented in other rupestrian sites on the island and which different researchers have related to the North African Libyco-Berber world, between 200 BCE and 700 CE. The fact that the cave has carvings has led some authors to identify it as a possible sanctuary or cultural space.

LA PALMA

La Zarza and La Zarcita (Garafía)

This rupestrian site is located near a water source in laurisilva forest. It is part of an archaeological complex that includes pastoral settlements, various caves used as living spaces and five rock engraving sites.

Its discovery in 1940 opened a new era of research in La Palma and from that point on the rupestrian catalogue of the island grew.

La Zarza is one of the most complex and scientifically significant archaeological sites in La Palma because of the amount of engraved surfaces (29 panels) and due to the complexity and long chronology that its carved motifs represent. It also contains various shelters that were excavated in the 1990s.

La Zarcita has less panels (18) and covers less chronology, but it stands out for how its engravings (basically meandriform) contrast with those in La Zarza (which have greater iconographic variety), especially considering how close they are to each other, although both are located at an altitude of 1,000 m.

The rock motifs represented can be grouped in four basic categories: spiral, circular, meandriform and lineal, which appear alone or combined, made using the pecking and abrasion techniques. They are usually interpreted as related to magical practices that sought to produce favourable natural conditions for water, because spirals, meandriforms, etc. are related to the symbolic representation of water (as a vital element), and also to lunar cults, with the objective of guaranteeing an abundance of natural resources on which their production strategies depended.

As occurs with Belmaco, the first occupation of this archaeological site could be dated around the 3rd Century CE.

LA PALMA

El Cementerio (El Paso)

'El Cementerio' (Cemetery) was discovered in 1982. This archaeological site containing 13 panels is located in the channel of Barranco de Las Canales, next to a small cave near a water provision site (*ere* was the term used for these natural water collection sites). At the same time it is within a pasture from the indigenous era, as evidenced by archaeological discoveries (shepherd resting places in the surrounding area). Due to its location, the site is an excellent natural platform from which livestock can be watched. In this sense, it has been documented that at the base of the cave where the petroglyphs are engraved are four small cavities that were temporarily occupied in the indigenous era, at least during Ceramic Phase IV.

Some researchers suggest that before its pastoral use, and therefore when rupestrian manifestations still had magical-religious meaning, El Cementerio could have functioned as a kind of sanctuary where the ancient Palmeros would go to celebrate their rites. In this sense, the motifs (meandriforms, concentric semi-circles, spirals or fretwork) and the techniques used to make them (pecking and abrasion) suggest that the majority of the motifs were made during Ceramic Phase III. The preponderance of these geometric motifs in the archaeological sites in La Palma can be explained by the fact that the supplications of the indigenous people were focused on basic needs (water for crops, pasture for the livestock...).

LA PALMA

La Fajana (El Paso)

This archaeological site, discovered in 1982 in El Lomo de La Fajana, is located like many others in a space that stands out from the surrounding area, providing excellent views of the neighbouring ravines and ridges.

The motifs, engraved using pecking and abrasion, repeat the forms documented in other rupestrian sites on the island (spirals, concentric circles and semi-circles), but this site presents a series of distinctive traits: it is the largest panel documented to date in La Palma (4 x 3 m), almost the entire surface is covered with engravings and it has five circular motifs. These circular forms, whose details differ from one another, have only been documented in this archaeological site. Some researchers relate them to the Sun cult, while others believe it may be a lunar calendar.

The large size and uniqueness of some rupestrian sites of La Palma has led them to be catalogued as insular sanctuaries (La Zarza and La Zarcita or La Fajana). Other sites might have been used to mark territory (Belmaco), others might have been used by the inhabitants of one or various settlements and, finally, the smaller sites could have been used by individuals or families.

LA GOMERA

El Roque de María Pía (Targa, Alajeró)

Only recently has systematic research on rupestrian manifestations in La Gomera been carried out. Up until the last third of the 20th Century the 'inexistence' of rock engravings on the island and in Tenerife was attributed to the supposed 'cultural archaism' of both, which were thought to be mostly populated by Cro-Magnons. This theory was discarded at the start of the 1980s, when the first rupestrian sites were found on the island, on the summit of Hermigua.

The María Pía archaeological site contains different panels on which incised geometric motifs predominate, forming clusters of straight lines, groups of lines that are transversally crossed by other straight lines, etc. In La Gomera, like in Tenerife, Lanzarote and Fuerteventura, it is common to find these types of lines without a specific form, making them difficult to interpret. In general, these sites with lineal motifs are located in areas that were used by indigenous shepherds, such as resting places, lookouts and areas used to watch over the livestock.

LA GOMERA

El Ancón de Guanchipe (Barranco de Abalos, San Sebastián de La Gomera)

This site, which is located within an archaeological site that includes caves used as living spaces, burial caves and sacrificial altars, shares some characteristics with other rupestrian sites in La Gomera: there are other rupestrian sites in its surroundings, it has good vistas of the ocean and includes representations of boat figures.

The techniques used to create the indigenous engravings of La Gomera are incision, pecking, abrasion and scratching. The image shows a panel with a main motif, executed through deep incision, representing a geometric figure that is difficult to interpret.

After the conquest of the Canaries, the natives continued engraving in many of the rupestrian sites. This practice, documented throughout the archipelago, is especially frequent in La Gomera. These carvings from the historical era are characterised, among other things, by the general representation of crosses and boat shapes.

LA GOMERA

Las Toscas del Guirre (San Sebastián de La Gomera)

This archaeological site is a natural shelter that contains the largest panel with Libyco-Berber script documented to date in the Canaries (120 characters), as well as a series of basins and channels carved on the surface of the volcanic tube. Archaeological investigation carried out in the enclave has revealed how the indigenous people observed and measured the movement of the sun on the horizon.

One of the walls contains a small circular opening carved in the rock, through which a section of the mountainous horizon can be seen to the west of the island, centred on a spot where the sun sets during the winter solstice. As the sun sets light enters through the orifice, projecting a point of light that travels across the cave floor and goes up the opposite wall, just to the right of where the Libyco-Berber text is located, and whose theoretical translation refers to, among other things, the provision of water for the livestock. Before the sun sets entirely, the last ray fits perfectly in a small oval basin carved in the rock for this purpose. Because this only occurs during the winter solstice, the cave presents two complimentary ways of marking the date of the solar calendar. The exact point where the solstice sun sets coincides with Las Nieves hermitage, in the surrounding area of which various sacrificial altars of the ancient Gomerans are preserved. Archaeologists believe that the location of the hermitage is related to indigenous religious practices and, therefore, pre-Christian.

Among other functions, monitoring the son on the horizon allowed the passing of the seasons to be followed exactly and can be used to synchronise the lunar calendar with the solar calendar, forming the basis for a stable lunisolar calendar.

LANZAROTE

Cueva Palomas (Femés)

Knowledge of the rupestrian sites of Lanzarote began to take off at the end of the 1970s, before which there was only news of lucky discoveries that were out of context.

In Lanzarote Cueva Palomas is, without a doubt, the most complex rupestrian site on the island, given the number of panels that it holds (101), the variety of subjects represented in them and the techniques used to execute them. The cave holds Libyco-Berber and Latino-Canarian script, podomorphs executed using pecking and on occasion polishing, the representation of a sandal, rectilinear geometric motifs, as well as representations of diverse ships from the historical period.

The panel shown in the photo holds the most significant group of Libyco-Berber symbols, inscribed using the thick incision technique. When these inscriptions appear associated with Latino-Canarian scripts, as is the case here, they can be dated around the turn of the Era. This is exactly the epoch of the colonies of Augustus in Morocco (Tingis, Lixus, Zilis, etc.: 27 – 14 CE) and of the Mauritanian king Juba II (25 BCE – 23 CE), with his Tyrian purple factory on Mogador island and probably also in the Canary Islands.

LANZAROTE

Montaña Tenésera (Tinajo)

This site is located in an archaeological area that also documents a site with channels and basins. The rock motifs are concentrated in two sectors of eight and six panels, in which incision was used to engrave 15 lines of Latino-Canarian script, as well as three lines of Libyco-Berber and a few other loose symbols from the latter script.

The presence of Latino-Canarian script implies that the North African *Imazighen* populations, who were influenced by Roman writing and culture, introduced a second type of alphabetic inscription in Lanazarote (and also Fuerteventura, where this script has also been documented). The fact that the panels are bilingual reveals that the author of this script had knowledge of both alphabets. He possibly came from a territory located within the borders of the Roman Empire, used the Imazighen script and learned the other when he came into contact with the Romans.

Among the Latino-Canarian lines documented in Lanzarote and Fuerteventura we can find personal names that are well known to North African inscriptions: Anibal, Nufel, etc. Romanised Imazighen wrote their names in Latin characters and added their affiliation in Libyco-Berber characters: they felt like co-participants in the Roman system and culture, but at the same time close to their Amazigh roots.

In the case of Tenésera, the Masidya place name or individual name has been documented written in Latino-Canarian. In the lower right panel, seen in the photo, it is possible that both inscriptions repeat the same term, related to Venus, but not the same transliteration.

LANZAROTE

Montaña de Guatisea (San Bartolomé)

This rupestrian site is located on a mountain of significant elevation (544 mamsl), considering the orography of the island. It is found on the substrate of a volcanic tube and contains a large quantity of channels, gutters, basins (pits carved in the rock), steps, *almogarens* (sanctuaries), etc.

These ‘channels and basins sites, as Guatisea and other examples distributed throughout the archipelago are called, are generally located in mountains. These enclaves could have held rituals in which liquids were poured to worship the sun and moon. The presence of astral symbols engraved in many of these places (constellations, soliforms, etc.), as well as their astronomical orientation, seem to corroborate the hypothesis.

Regarding the function of these sites, there is an illuminating quote by Abreu Galindo made at the start of the 17th Century in his *History of the conquest of the seven islands of Canaria*; when referring to the natives of Lanzarote and Fuerteventura he indicated that ‘*they made sacrifices[to their god] in the mountains, spilling goat’s milk.’*

Sun and moon worship was also a widespread practice in the North African Amazigh society, as archaeological evidence has shown in the Moroccan Atlas Mountains, among other areas.

LANZAROTE

Quesera de Zonzamas (Teguise)

The Zonzamas archaeological site is one of the most representative of the island. The main area is the village, made up of houses dug into the ground and the *Zonzamas Palace*. Surrounded by a gigantic wall, it has been considered the home of the island Chief near the end of the 14th Century. It also forms part of the *Piedra del Majo* group, a rock engraving site.

Next to the village there is a distinctive rupestrian manifestation of the indigenous culture of Lanzarote, known as *quesera* (cheese dish). The Zonzamas site has five channels carved in a block of porous basalt. The grooves are 30 cm high and between 27 and 45 cm wide, with various protrusions of between 30 and 50 cm. The channels are facing northwest and are closed on either side, probably because they were meant for pouring or storing liquids. In this sense, its designation as *quesera,* could refer to ritual practices in which milk was poured, or because it resembles the slots of a cheese dish. The structure, therefore, could be related to the 'channels and basins sites, although for its size it would have to be linked with some indigenous practice that we do not know about.

EL HIERRO

El Julan (Frontera)

The rock engravings of El Julan were discovered in 1783 by Aquilino Padrón. Since then, El Julan has occupied a central position in Canarian archaeological literature. This archaeological area includes two rupestrian sites, *concheros* (large accumulations of mollusc shells, produced by the eating habits of the indigenous societies), sacrificial altars (spaces dedicated to ritual practices) and caves used as living spaces and burial sites.

The rock engravings of this site are found on the borders of two lava flows. The first group, *Los Letreros*, is the longest and its panels are the largest in size and have the greatest complexity. It includes 69 panels with engravings. This group of panels is located near a *tagoror*, a structure built of dry stone that was used by the natives as a meeting place for councils.

The second group, *Los Números*, is located about 500 m north of *Los Letreros* and includes 37 panels. Recently another series of rock carvings was found in the area of El Julan that has given even more relevance to the site.

The rock motifs documented in El Julan were created mostly using the pecking technique and include: Libyco-Berber alphabetic inscriptions and especially geometric engravings made up of isolated circles split by one or more diameters or tangents, sinuous lines, horseshoe shapes, etc. The geometric motifs generally form very complex panels, some various meters long, and present clear similarities to panels documented in the African Atlas. Some researchers have dated the Libyco-Berber inscriptions in El Julan around the middle of the First Millennium BCE, which are similar to dates given to those documented in northern Algeria and Tunis.

EL HIERRO

La Candia (Valverde)

This archaeological site was discovered by Aquilino Padrón in 1875 and was soon after studied by various French researchers, such as Sabin Berthelot or René Verneu, who put forth the first theories about their origin and cultural significance in relation to the Libyan and Numidian populations.

The alphabetic inscriptions are located on the basaltic columns of a large rock and on the cornice of the cave. The latter group of inscriptions can be seen in the photo. Some testimony from the beginning of the 20th Century claimed the cave was used as a tomb, in whose interior a cistern was built in the historical era. However, different researchers have questioned this theory due to the lack of supporting archaeological evidence.

La Candia, like other rupestrian sites containing inscriptions on the island (Tejeleita, Barranco del Cuervo or Cueva del Agua), is located in the river bed of a ravine, next to a point where water collected (*ere* was the term used for these natural water collection points). Water was scarce in El Hierro during the indigenous era, so the rock engravings could be related to rituals to bring rain and, therefore, with the vital needs of the community.

EL HIERRO

Cueva del Agua or Cueva del Letime (Isora)

This cave, discovered in 1980, owes its name to the filtered rain water that was seeping in its interior, as well as its location on the upper edge of the cliff that borders La Costa de Las Playas.

The engravings, executed using the pecking technique, are located on the lateral walls, starting from the entrance of the volcanic tube and extending along about half its length. Geometric motifs predominate (circles, ovals and short lines). The panel in the photo is located on the left edge of the entrance, displaying Libyco-Berber inscriptions. The cave was not used as a living space and, just as in La Candia, the site again reflects an association between a water supply and nearby rock engravings.

If we consider that Cueva del Agua is located in an area of transit, the engravings could be explained as indicating a place where water could be found, or also as an expression of the sacralisation of the spot, due to the existence of water in an area where it was difficult to find, as occurred throughout the island.

FUERTEVENTURA

Montaña Blanca de Arriba (Antigua)

The first discoveries of rock engravings in Fuerteventura occurred at the end of the 19th Century. These are only known about through Sabin Berthelot's work *Antiquités canariennes* (1879). However, these rupestrian manifestations were not studied systematically until 1977, after the most important archaeological site of the island was discovered: La Montaña de Tindaya.

The Montaña Blanca site holds 25 panels that include some of the most common rupestrian motifs of the island: Latino Canarian and Libyco-Berber inscriptions, boat shapes and rectilinear and rectangular geometric motifs. The vertical photo shows a stem shaped motif. All of the engravings were made using the incision technique, although in some cases scratching is also documented.

Engravings continued to be made in one of the areas of the site until a recent era, as can be deduced from the characteristics of the motifs and the engraving techniques.

FUERTEVENTURA

Barranco de El Cavadero (La Oliva)

Of the archaeological sites with inscriptions documented in Fuerteventura, Barranco de El Cavadero is the most complex. It is distributed in five groups that contain 86 panels. In them, 42 contain Latino-Canarian inscriptions and only three have Libyco-Berber writing.

Regarding the engraving technique used, generally the Libyco-Berber symbols were made using incision. While the Latino-Canarian writing in both Lanzarote and Fuerteventura was also mostly made by incision, in Barranco del Cavadero some lines were carved using continuous pecking. Furthermore, the Latino-Canarian inscriptions vary in position, that is, they are not always presented horizontally, as can be seen in the panel to the left in the photo, where the writing is vertical.

The site is located on either side of the ravine near an *ere*, the term used for a point where water collected naturally. Therefore, once again we see a practice documented in other islands: the placement of certain rupestrian sites near the territory's water resources.

In addition, all but two of the archaeological sites that have been documented with alphabetic motifs to date are located in the old kingdom of Guise, north of Barranco de La Peña and Barranco de La Torre.

FUERTEVENTURA

Montaña de Tindaya (La Oliva)

Montaña de Tindaya is a 400 m tall trachytic volcanic plug. Approximately 300 engravings of podomorphs have been found engraved on its rock, the largest concentration of this motif in the Canaries. Some of these motifs, which are silhouettes of human feet, contain well-defined anatomical features.

These podomorphs show clear similarities with others documented in North Africa (Western Sahara, the Moroccan Atlas Mountains or Tassili N'Ajjer, in Algeria). They were made with the pecking technique in some cases and with incision in others and are located at medium to high altitudes of the mountain. The fact that Tindaya was sacred to the indigenous population can be established by comparing it with similar sites documented in North Africa, for example in the Atlas Mountains, where carvings of feet served to make a space sacred, that is, the engravings themselves were not considered sacred, but the environment in which they were carved.

The podomorphs have been related to taking possession, of purification of places of transit, or with places where justice was meted out. They are also related with the worship of divinities, spirits or immaterial genies – the 'Invisible Ones' –that chose the summits of certain mountains, natural springs or certain trees as places to consecrate as sanctuaries where the indigenous people could worship them, praying to them for rain, fertile land and abundant livestock. Astronomical studies have established that the Tindaya engravings are facing certain orographic landmarks (Mount Teide, or the island of Gran Canaria), as well as significant astronomical events (solstices, lunar events, the position of certain stars and constellations), which has led to the possibility that they are linked to astral cults.

TENERIFE

Aripe (Guía de Isora)

In 1980 the first rupestrian site was discovered in Tenerife, in Aripe. Its discovery and study by Antonio Tejera Gaspar and Rodrigo Balbín Behrman led to the discovery of other rupestrian sites that have increased the number or these kinds of archaeological sites on the island, overturning the hypothesis that had been accepted since the end of the 19th Century, which attributed the supposed nonexistence of archaeological sites in Tenerife to the cultural archaism of the Guanches.

The incised motifs found in the site are distributed in two groups, and include straight lines, cruciforms, animals (horses) and different human figures presented as warriors carrying weapons, some wearing headgear. This iconography is similar to the Libyan warriors documented in the Sahara, south of the Atlas Mountains.

The main photo shows a practice that has also been documented in other rupestrian sites on the island: the tendency to use incision to make lineal motifs, but cutting the same lines over and over in order to give them greater depth. The cultural meaning of this indigenous practice is unknown.

TENERIFE

Barranco de Arujo – La Centinela (San Miguel)

Geometric motifs are the most abundant in the rock engravings of Tenerife. This archaeological site holds a large concentration of ‘checkerboards’ associated with grids, isolated or crossed lines and circular motifs, made using the incision technique.

Some researchers have interpreted the ‘checkerboards’ as game boards, with a possible magic-religious implication, as occurs among the Amazigh of Algeria and Morocco, where games are played after funeral ceremonies to dissipate the mourning atmosphere and bring a year rich in rain. These motifs have also been documented in rupestrian sites in La Palma, Lanzarote, Gran Canaria, El Hierro, La Gomera and Fuerteventura.

Many of the engraved ‘checkerboards’ could have been used for games. However, in some cases the position of the checkerboard, carved on a vertical rock surface or next to craggy rock protrusions, make it unlikely they were used for games. In this sense, various rupestrian sites with ‘checkerboards’ are located in areas near burial caves or linked to funeral usage in the indigenous era (according to oral sources, places used to prepare mummies). Furthermore, some checkerboards were made using lines that evidently imply knowledge of the number φ (phy or fi), with the objective of elaborating a lunisolar calendar that allowed both cycles to be synchronised.

TENERIFE

Montaña Ifara (Granadilla)

This site is located within a larger archaeological area that had been used for pasture in the indigenous era, as can be deduced by the presence of *concheros* (piles of discarded mollusc shells), lithic workshops, shepherd resting places and living structures (cabins) in the surrounding area. From a heritage perspective, this area of Ifara also contains the largest concentration of archaeological evidence in the municipality. Moreover, the particularity of the rupestrian site lies in its association with structures used as living quarters, which is uncommon in the Canary archipelago.

The rupestrian enclave, containing 38 panels, is located on a ridge from which the surroundings can be controlled visually, both toward the summit and toward the coast. The motifs, made using incision and, to a lesser degree, abrasion and pecking, are mainly geometric and lineal, although there is a series of panels that represent various boats in the historical era. This reveals that the space was used in the post-conquest era. It is particularly interesting that some of the motifs are carved in the walls and surfaces of some of the structures near the rupestrian site.

In the photo, along with the lineal strokes, some palm shaped motifs can be seen that were made using incision and abrasion, giving them the sensation of relief. Some researchers have interpreted them as a representation of the goddess Tanit.