

CASE 2 : PREHISTORIC ART

Xàbia Cave Painting

The most important expressions of prehistoric art in Xàbia are to be found in a cave in the Migdia ravine, located on the cliffs of the southern slopes of Montgó, at a height of about 375 m. Members of the Gata Caving Group discovered the cave by chance in 1989 while they were training on these cliffs.

The cave entrance is to the east, at a height of 10 m. From here a narrow gallery runs west for some 25 m, ending in the cave where the paintings were found. This spacious chamber, open to the outside, is about 7 m. wide, with a maximum height of 4 m.

This group of paintings has been divided into 10 panels with different motifs and a varied states of preservation. The Migdia paintings are representative of the style known as 'Schematic Art' (only the basic elements of each figure are represented). This style is relatively common in the Marina Alta and covers a period of nearly 4000 years, between the 5th and the 1st millenniums BC.

Most of the designs in Migdia were painted with an intense black colour while a rather faded red has only been used to represent parallel lines and odd spots, which are difficult to interpret.

There are all sorts of motifs: fingerings, bars, dots, triangles, diamonds, wavy lines, zig-zags, star shapes, pectiniforms (comb like), zoomorphic (animal-like) and anthropomorphic (human-like) shapes, and others more difficult to define. In some cases these motifs appear to form groups which need to be interpreted together in a unified way. Thus the group on the north wall with an anthropomorphic figure, possibly an idol with eyes, seems to represent a scene from a cult with religious, probably funereal, significance.

Another interesting motif is that of a shape like a bag or net, globular and flat on top. A cross and other marks nearby appear to be part of this group. The similarities of the group to a net or trap, or maybe even a hive, fits with the location of the painting, which is in a hole in the ceiling of the cave. Others have seen this shape as an idol with eyes, with parallels in portable art. Other scenes are easier to interpret, such as the herd of four-footed running animals.

The cave was also a burial chamber. There were at least three burials here (two adults and one child) and each had grave goods buried with them - a vessel of handmade pottery, a small blade and an arrowhead, both of flint.

These remains allow us to date the burials to the 2nd half of the 3rd millennium BC.

Other archaeological sites in Xàbia contain remnants of wall paintings, but these groups are less important and are very poorly preserved. One such is the Abric del Pastor (Shepherd's shelter) on the Montgó, where there are several spots and some traces of red paint. Remains of red paintings in the "Schematic" style have also been found in the upper and lower Coves Santes (Holy Caves).



The Museum's logo is a symbolic motif from the Barranc del Migdia cave