

Ibex Comparison

in prehistoric rock art





It is not a surprise to find prehistoric rock engravings and paintings across the world. This confirms human presence on all continents at a very early stage. Our early ancestors moved about 1.8 million years ago out of Africa into the Near East and much later after the last Ice Age into Europe and further on to the Far East.

Please have a look at the specific articles on this website to compare in more detail the immense variety of prehistoric rock art images. Their similarity at different sites in various continents will really surprise you. In this article we look specifically at the comparison of paleolithic and neolithic ibex or ram images in Europe, Asia, North and East Africa.

Ibex Images

Many sites in these three continents show uncountable engravings of typical rather natural looking ibex images with long backwards curled horns. Ibex often appear with other animals which roamed together in herds in the same area at the time. But ibex are often a most dominant image.



Oldest Ibex Image

The picture shown on the front cover of this article is possibly the oldest ibex depiction worldwide. It is part of the famous prehistoric rock art galleries of the unique Chauvet cave paintings. These are the oldest animal depictions in Europe and go back up to 40.000 years.

Larger compositions with numerous ibex images tell us an interesting story. On one side the rock panels with man and ibex give us the impression of herding activities. But others show real hunting scenes with bow and arrows used by men as weapons. Which are the older depictions?

Domestication

We have to look at animal domestication to understand this. It started in the so-called Fertile Crescent. This region included southeast Turkey, Syria and Irak and stretching further into northwestern Iran.

First domestication took place some 15,000 years ago and took less than 3,000 years to include various species.

Man first started to train and breed wolves for hunting purposes. The first domesticated dogs were proven in the Natuf Culture in the Jordan Valley.

Eight species of wild goats followed shortly after. This included in Europe the Alpine capra ibex and the Iberian capra pyrenaica.

In Africa the Nubian capra nubiana and the Ethiopian capra walie.

In Asia the Bezoar capra aegagrus, the West Caucasian capra caucasia, the East Caucasian capra cylindricornis and the Siberian capra sibirica.

Sheep were domesticated around the same time as ibex in the Taurus Mountains in Turkey.

Cattle domestication from aurochs was started in northern Iraq. And horses followed later in the Al Magar area in Saudi Arabia based on latest research.

Dating Rock Art

In this discussion we have to remember that Paleolithic and Neolithic rock engravings can only be dated securely by corresponding excavation finds.

Such as stone tools and fire places, which are technically datable and can be linked in a secure context and time horizon.





Example Brazil

This was the fact recently in Brazil at the Serra Capivara site, where an age of about 30,000 years could be established.

This was a new record for South America and proves that history regarding the population of this continent so far estimated to have happened 15,000 years ago has to be re-written.

European Situation

Interestingly in Europe developments of cultural sophistication were at a similar stage. For example cave paintings in the famous Chauvet cave in southern France have a similar age and show a high level of artistic finesse already.

Human Development

What has that to do with prehistoric ibex images? Quite a lot, because we have to understand that the pictures of primitive men created some 50 years ago were wrong. But we did not know better than.

Our prehistoric ancestors had much higher capabilities, then we previously thought. Today we know that they had a well-

developed pre-frontal cortex, was capable of structured thinking and planning, logical reasoning and finally clear decision taking.

Developed Communication

Our ancestors could also communicate well in words and with perfect pictures, further they could sing and play music.

They also had a high level of creativity to paint animals with imagination and abstraction, tell a story by creating a composition of various animals, show them in various

perspectives and dimension in space, scale and form. For this man produced defined working tools for very specific purpose made from stone, bone, antler and ivory.

Creative Preconditions

Paleolithic rock art is only possible to be created when the following cultural conditions exist: strong beliefs, important rituals, deep seated shamanic cults and passing knowledge down to younger generations.

In this case images show spiritual closeness between animals and their creators. Scientists believe that our hunter-gatherer ancestors in their spiritual world did not differentiate between man and animal nor the living and non-living.

Therefore animal depictions including ibex express this spiritual closeness between man and beast. Unfortunately we do not yet know which role ibex were playing in the their spiritual univers.

But we do know that their impressive horns inspired man and certain spiritual attributes





were attested to them in the beginning of shaman rituals.

Possible Ibex Myth

Consider the following facts which might have helped to create certain myth for prehistoric man. Ibex were living in mountains at high altitudes and could climb steep rock surfaces at speed. So they were believed to have close connexions to gods.

Males using their immense horns for fierce and forceful fighting over females producing an unforgettable clacking noise certainly have impressed man showing braveness and force. Therefore in all depictions their horns are always shown as huge and some times oversized.

Various Cultures

Images of ibex were also used on ancient pottery, gold jewelry and cylinder seals in the important Minoan trading culture on the Island of Crete at Knossos around 4.000 years ago.

Purpose of Rock Art

Rock art had a multitude of purposes, such as: cult rituals, meditation, myth, clan identity, wealth demonstration, prestige, memory recordings, funerary purposes, initiation and teaching the young.

But the main purpose is that of creating and passing on an important message. Rock engravings are a universal communication instrument understood by everyone across any language borders.

Engravings and paintings were created during celebratory,



commemorative, initiation or propitiatory rituals and ibex images played an important role in this context.

Common Concept

But how was it possible that our ancestors in various parts of the world developed a common art tradition with similar images and themes?

We first have to remember that homo neanderthalensis was not as creative as homo sapiens. But certainly he was therefore not primitive. He lived under different climatic conditions so other skills were important to survive.

Creative Homo Sapiens

It was homo sapiens who left behind the majority of rock engravings and art objects. His human creativity exploded at some point in time about 40,000 years ago.

Fast Moving Explorers

We do not believe that a common concept was developed already in Africa.

But we can assume that human immigration and expansion across the world happened much faster than we imagine.

There are indications that the first colonisers of the Americas moved down the over 10,000 kilometer long coastline rapidly in only few hundred years and not slowly taking many thousand years.

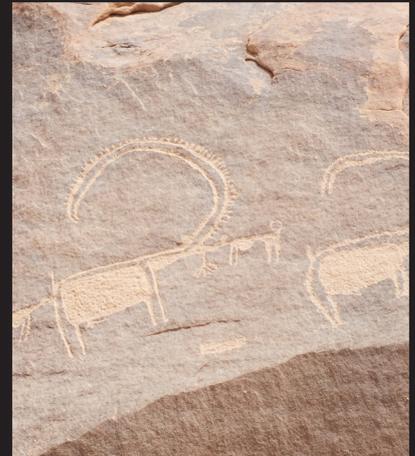
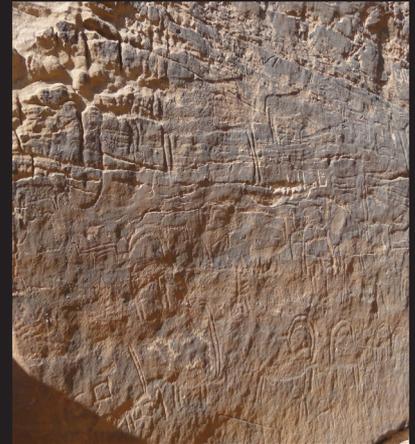
Possible Comparison

We need to study a wider sample of rock art images and compositions. Ibex represent a dominant portion of all images in regions where they roamed from Europe to Asia and northern Africa.

They are being depicted in all forms and sizes, from very realistic and also abstract engravings as we can see from the pictures in this article.

For your comparison we have selected various pictures of ibex representations. It is surprising how similar they are at sites across the world.

Most were engraved on rock surfaces either by direct or indirect pecking or scratching and only very few were painted and these paintings were all created in caves.



comparison ibex image from Kyrgystan



comparison ibex image from Kyrgystan