

Peer Review

Review of: "Collective Pareidolia"

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Once again, Robert Bednarik addresses an innovative topic on rock art. In this article, he explores a fascinating (and also controversial) psychological phenomenon, approaching it in an experimental way: how a group of people can come to perceive non-existent patterns in an archaeological context. Through a specific case, the author analyzes how social and cognitive factors combine to generate shared misperceptions, which in this instance led a team to identify petroglyphs where they did not actually exist.

One of the greatest merits of the article is the relevance of the topic, as it highlights the vulnerability of archaeological interpretations to perceptual biases, especially in the study of rock art. This is extremely interesting for understanding how similar factors may have influenced the perceptions, interpretations, and readings made by academics focused on rock art motifs—even in something as seemingly simple as naming certain categories.

As it is a lab experiment, the analysis not only provides empirical evidence from a real case but also calls into question the reliability of interpretations that rely exclusively on visual perception, particularly when researchers are influenced by prior expectations or group dynamics.

Prehistory/Archaeology (and even more specifically, Rock Art) has developed an important methodology emphasizing inter- and multidisciplinary work. This is a notable aspect of the paper, given its integration of multidisciplinary perspectives. The author combines knowledge from neuroscience, psychology, and archaeology to explain how pareidolia—a phenomenon normally associated with individual experiences—can become a perception shared by several individuals. This reinforces the importance of considering cognitive and cultural limitations in scientific interpretations. Nothing more, but nothing less.

In this context, Bednarik points out the ethnocentric tendency to impose modern meanings on ancient artifacts, which adds a critical and ethical dimension to the archaeological debate. This idea resonates

with other explanatory models for rock art, such as the neuropsychological approach.

To build a more solid foundation, it would be necessary to analyze more than a single example. Similarly, greater attention could be paid to the impact of emotional and social factors on perceptions, including the role that group pressure or individual emotions may play in generating such collective perceptions.

Nevertheless, the article's conclusions are relevant, as they warn us about the risks of blindly trusting human perception in archaeological contexts. They also emphasize the need to develop more critical and methodologically rigorous approaches in the interpretation of rock art. Additionally, examining other historical or archaeological cases could help assess the extent to which collective pareidolia has influenced past interpretations.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.