

# A new rock art discovery in Spain

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This past July I presented a paper at a conference (56º Congreso de Americanistas) in Salamanca, Spain. My talk was part of a session on Yuman hunter gatherers (Cazadores-recolectores, agricultores y ceramistas yumanos) organized by Antonio Porcayo, Mexicali Archaeologist. I gave a talk on the colorful El Vallecitos (also called La Rumorosa) pictograph site in northern Baja California.

Salamanca is a beautiful town famous for its university. Founded in 1134 it is among the oldest in Europe. For the past 600 years students have painted a symbol made up of the letters VICTOR in bull's blood on the walls of the university when they have graduated. Today many of the interior and exterior walls of the university have been covered in these symbols and other paintings. Figure 1 shows a DStretch enhancement of a university wall covered in painting (the actual painting is much faded). There are several VICTOR symbols visible. One can be seen at the upper right. Why this may be of interest will be seen later.

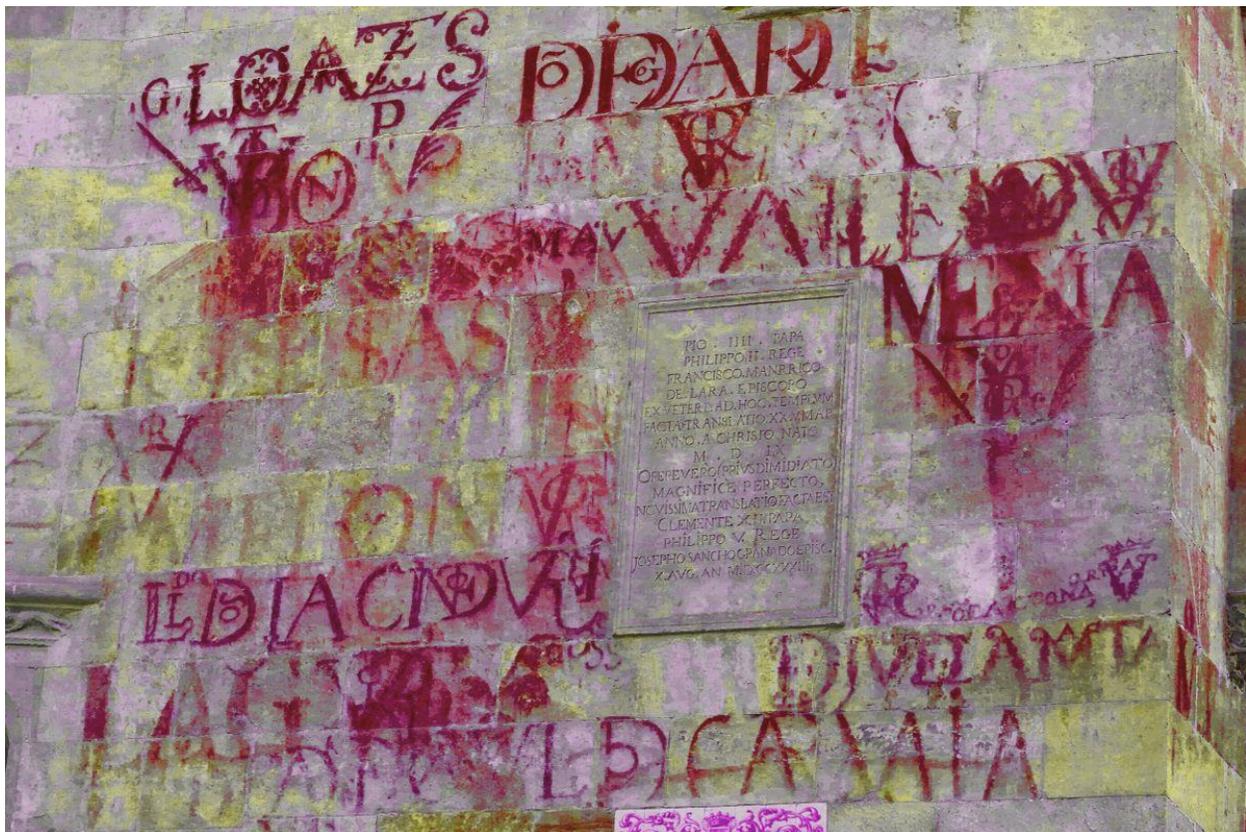


Figure 1 Painting on wall of University enhanced using DStretch LRE.

Because of DStretch I had been in contact with a professor at the University of Salamanca, Professor Julián Bécares Pérez. Prof Bécares had used DStretch to great effect on rock art around Salamanca. He most graciously offered to take us (the Baja California archaeologists, my wife Sheila, and myself) to see

a rock art region that he had studied. So, on a day after our session was finished Prof Bécares took us on a tour of Las Batuecas, a valley a little less than 2 hours from Salamanca.



Figure 2 View of Batuecas Valley from a pass high above.

The valley is in a rugged region of steep cliffs and forested hills. It contains a convent founded in 1599. The rock art has been known for a long time. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (Bécares, see references) Antonio Ponz, a painter and traveler mentions the paintings in his work *Viaje de España* (1772–1794). The paintings may have been obliquely mentioned in (the famous Spanish playwright and poet) Lope de Vega's play "«Las Batuecas del Duque de Alba» written in 1598. The Abbé Breuil visited the region in 1910 after learning about it from an article by Vicente Pared in 1909. Before Breuil's arrival he sent Juan Cabré to explore the valley. Breuil (see references) described the rock art in a paper published in 1918. This was after he had broken with Cabré in a dispute over the chronology of Levantine art (or perhaps over Spanish control over its own Rock Art). The rock art at Batuecas is within the Schematic rock art tradition of the Iberian Peninsula.

We visited several sites, I will only show some images from two (actually three including the new one). The sites have been known for hundreds of years and of course have suffered much degradation. They are protected now by iron fences and bars. Prof Bécares, who has been studying the rock art for 40 years, had the keys so we got a special chance to view the rock art up close. The sites were in rugged

cliffs and could be rather difficult to access, but there are parking lots for cars and a system of hiking trails. The day we visited was a beautiful warm sunny day.

## El Canchal del las Cabras Pintadas

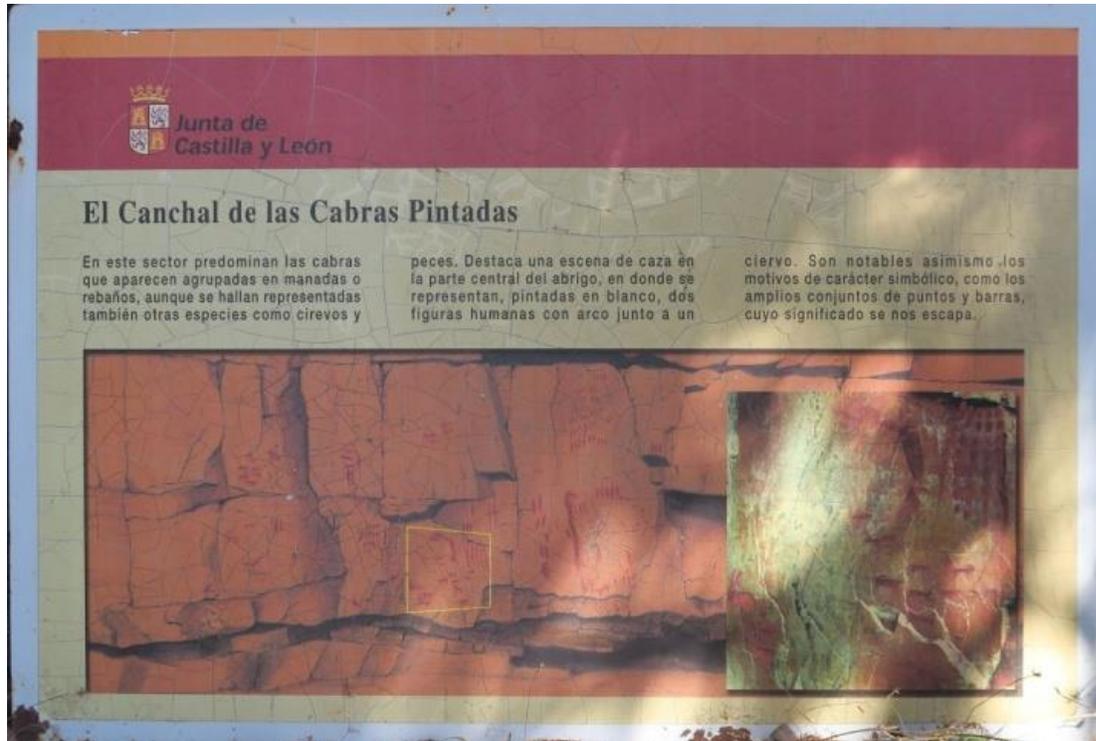


Figure 3 our first site. El Canchal del las Cabras Pintadas.

The first site we visited was El Canchal del las Cabras Pintadas. It is a major site and was mentioned by Ponz in 1778:

*walking towards the convent there is a place called the “painted goats”, because in the cliffs, which are perpendicular as a wall of houses with their corners and straight angles, certain figures are very poorly made by the same shepherds with red ocher, in which it seems that they were representing goats.*

This may be the first published reference to rock art in Spain. Breuil documented this site in 1918. The images are very faded. There are dark red goats and geometric forms together with some white painted elements and lots of graffiti.





Figure 5 DStretch LDS enhancement of Figure 4.

As can be seen in Figures 5 and 7 DStretch worked very well on several of the panels.



Figure 6 El Canchal del las Cabras Pintadas panel with white paint.

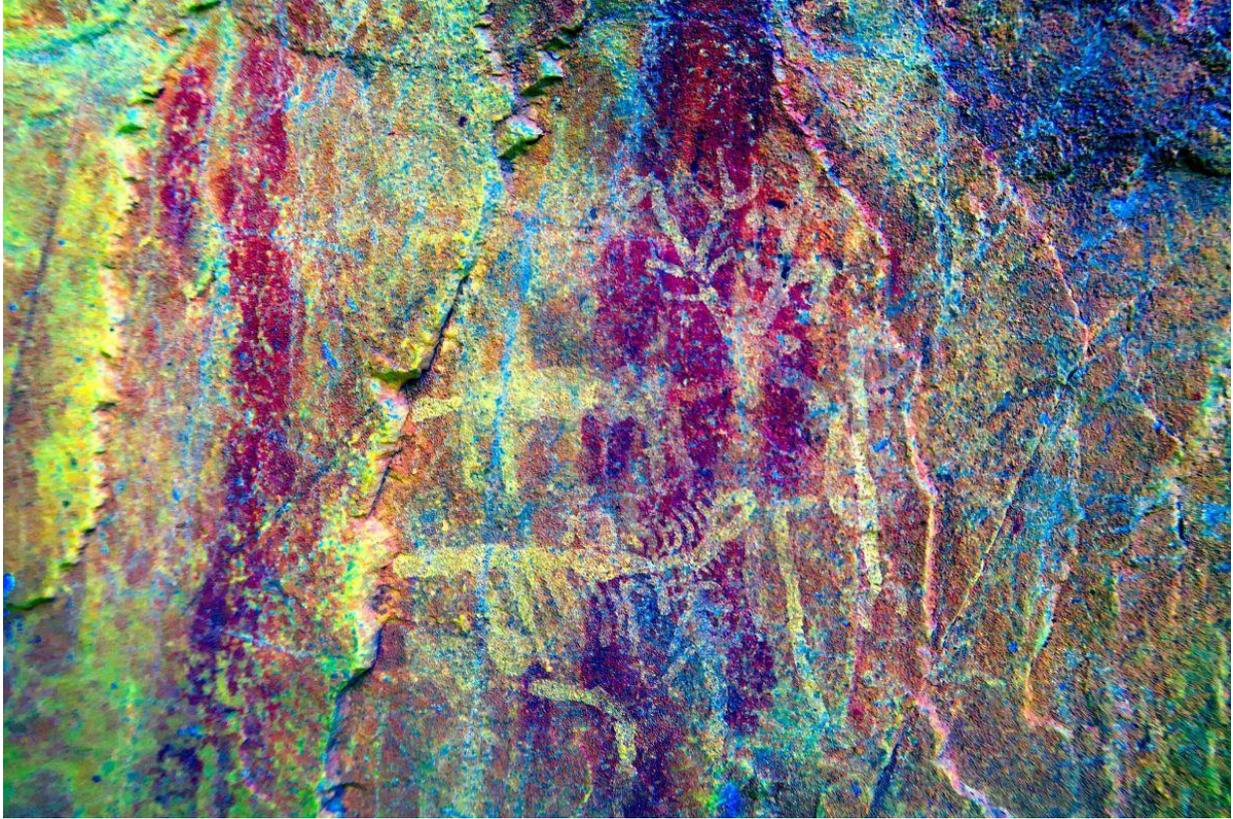


Figure 7 DStretch LDS enhancement of Figure 6. In the center is a deer with huge antlers.

## The new discovery

After visiting some sites near Cabras Pintadas we hiked down to the Batuecas River for lunch.

Maybe our lunch spot was the one described by the Abbé as recorded in (Brodrick, p89)

Here is our Abbé in the Batuecas: "Under the burning caress of a June sun the torrent was leaping and dashing its roaring cascades against the rocky bastions, onto the stepped Parapets of the savage gorge. From time to time, under a low vault of lentiscus and ilex, a basin of crystal waves revealed a bottom of variegated rockery." When he plunged into this inviting bath his muleteers thought him crazy . . . "In that natural bath I enjoyed the divine intoxication of the crystalline coolness and in my gambols I shot up spurts of water which fell in babbling cascades onto the clear mirror of the pool."

After lunch came the surprise. In a place studied for a hundred years Sheila found some new rock art! In the rugged cliffs above our lunch spot along the river Sheila found some paint streaks which were clearly finger stripes. There were several of these along the small angled rock faces in the cliff. Prof Bécares was impressed with Sheila's sharp eyes.



Figure 8 Sheila showing Prof Bécades her new find.



Figure 9 Part of the new site. Note the red painted finger stripes.

### **Canchal de la Umbria del Cristo**

The last site we visited was an impressive site high up and overlooking the valley. Access was via a very steep and dangerous slope. Again this site was protected by iron bars, but Bécares had the key.



Figure 10 Canchal de la Umbria del Cristo.



Figure 11 Close up of main panel.

This site has a very unusual and complicated element painted in red over older designs (Figure 12). It is not present in Breuil's documentation of this rock shelter in 1918 (Figure 13). The predilection for painting on walls by Salamanca University students (Figure 1) hinted to me that students might be possible culprits. I have since learned that there is a Carmelite Monastery of cloistered secluded monks called the Discalced (one of several strict orders of Catholic friars or nuns who go barefoot or wear only sandals) Carmelites located along the river below the rock art. It was founded in 1599. Most likely someone from there painted the pictograph (according to [ibericamagica.blogspot.com](http://ibericamagica.blogspot.com), Feb 2012). Breuil mentions that the monastery was in ruins when he visited. According to the monastery website (<https://monasteriodelasbatuecas.wordpress.com/>) it was revived in 1950. It is tempting to speculate that monks new to the region and unaware of the history of the place might have done this vandalism sometime after 1950. To further complicate matters there is (what appears to me) Arabic writing in white on top of everything, see Figure 11.



Figure 12 DStretch YRE enhancement showing the complicated red design painted over older designs.

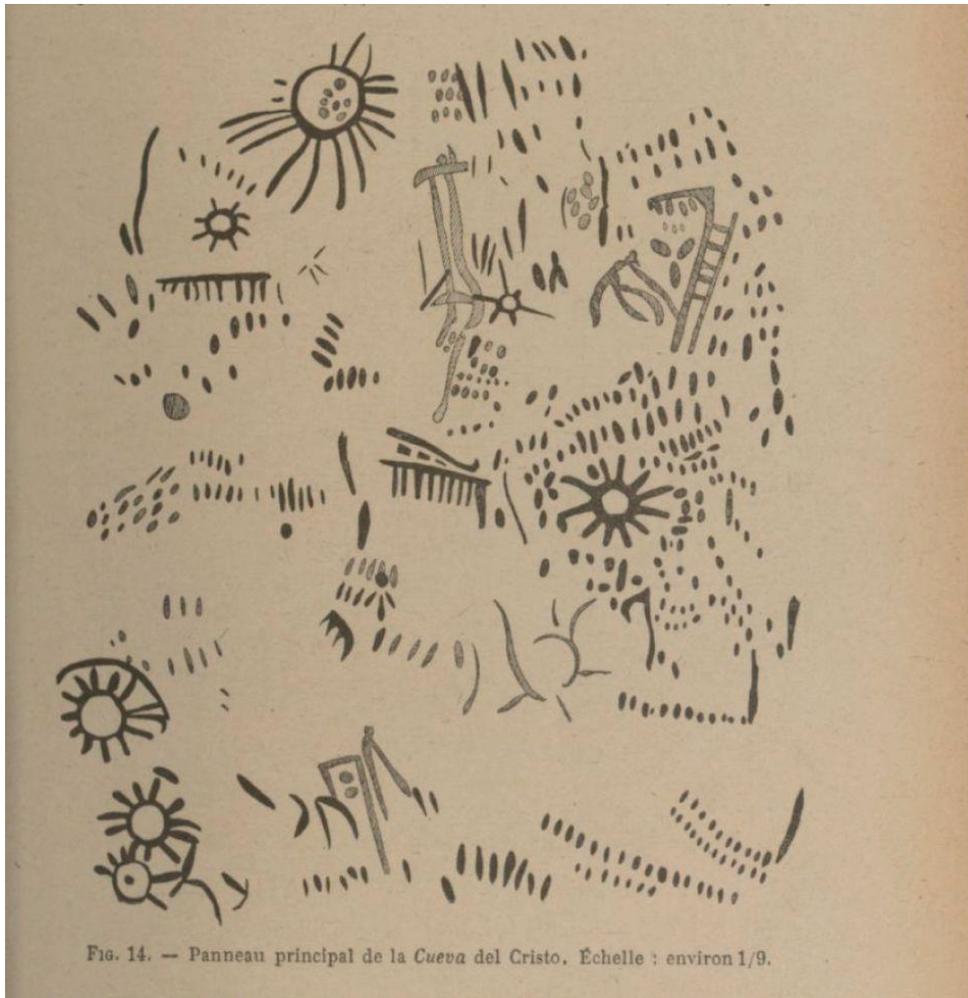


Figure 13 Breuil's drawing of the panel.

Figure 14 is a DStretch LDS enhancement that can be compared to Breuil's drawing. In general, from what can be seen now, Breuil's drawing is a faithful rendition.



Figure 14 Upper part of panel enhanced using DStretch LDS

### **An Experiment.**

Back at the river Prof Bécares found a piece of ocher similar to that used for some of the red paint. He demonstrated how easy it was to powder it and add water to make a very striking red paint. He then painted a symbol onto a rock (Figure 15). It looked very good (Figure 16). Next he washed the paint off (Figure 17). Some paint still could be seen in Figure 17, but DStretch was able to visualize (most of) the original design (Figure 18).



Figure 15 Prof Bécades painting a design using powdered ochre.



Figure 16 The design.



Figure 17 Design washed off.

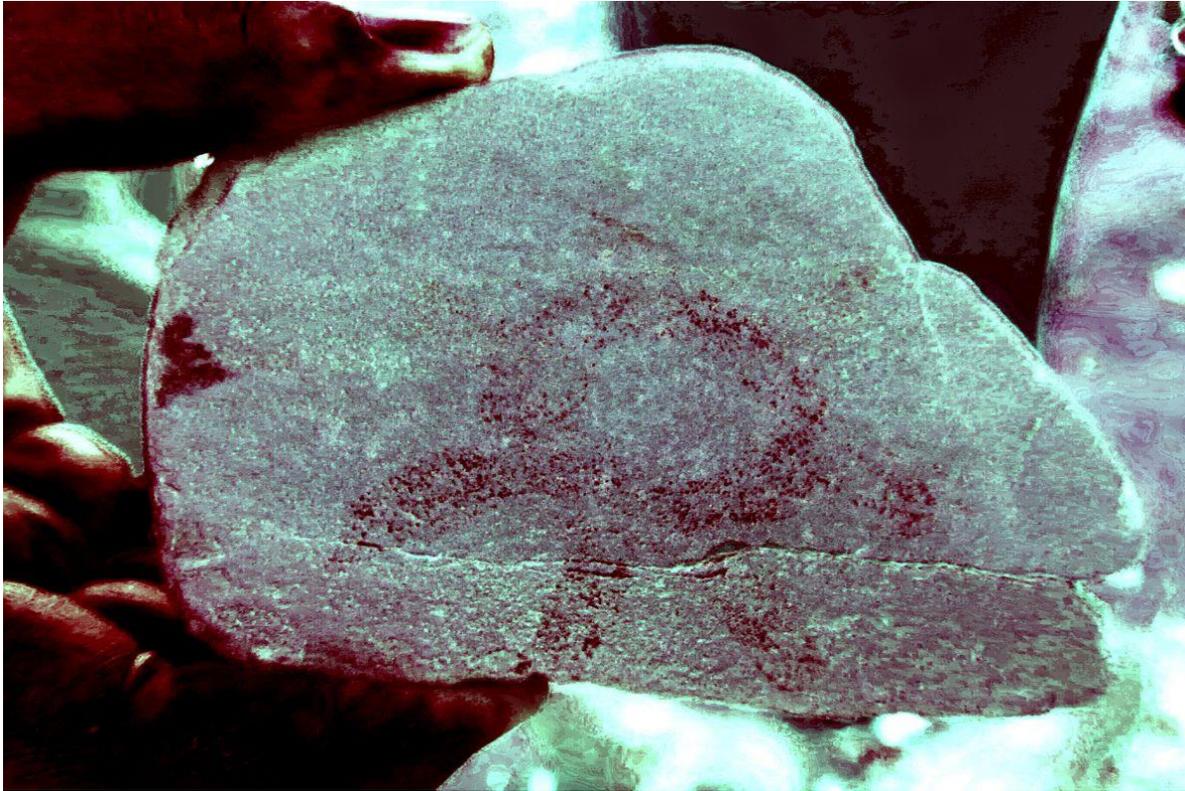


Figure 18 DStretch YRE reveals design.

## Acknowledgement

Thanks to Professor Julián Bécares of the University of Salamanca for his wonderful tour of Batuecas.

## References

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