

Faces in the pre-Hispanic rock art of Colombia: Semiotic strategies, visual semiospheres, and gestures

Martín Cuitzeo Domínguez Núñez¹

Abstract. This article analyses the sign systems or semiotic models that make up the meaning of a double face or mask drawing in the pre-Columbian rock art of Colombia, also discussing two human figures with depicted faces associated with the main picture. The sample of rock art was detected on the walls of the Chicamocha Canyon at the Mirador de Bárcenas site in the Santander Department in Northeast Colombia. Its origin is attributed to the Guane chiefdom. We hold as a central argument that this face and its gestures were part of a sign system or visual semiosphere that spread along the banks of the Chicamocha Canyon. However, the image shared some semiotic models and visual communication strategies with societies that inhabited areas in central Colombia located hundreds of kilometers away from the site studied. We support this claim because the forms, the use of the space in the images, and the gestures of a hieratic character appear both in the faces of the petroglyphs of the Huila Department as well as in some pre-Hispanic gold masks from the Cundinamarca region.

The images of the rock art faces were analysed using a visual semiotic model based on the suggestions of the Mu group and analyses by Félix Thürleman and Jean Marie Floch. The analysis was complemented by Jacques Fontanille's proposal for the levels of semiotic relevance, with Juri Lotman's concept of the semiosphere employed as a key concept.

Keywords: rock art of Colombia; pre-Hispanic faces; Guane culture; ancient semiotic systems; visual semiosphere; gestures

¹ Escuela de Antropología e Historia del norte de México, Chihuahua, México Licenciatura de Arqueología; e-mail: martin_dominguez@inah.gob.mx.

1. Introduction

How to define a face from a semiotic perspective? How to account for the historical transformation of the face and the systems of signs to which it has belonged? Answering these questions implies a cross-cultural and diachronic approach. To develop this perspective, this article is going to discuss the representation of five pre-Hispanic faces at a site of more than 500 years old cave paintings located in northeast Colombia, South America. The paintings have been attributed to the Guane culture or chiefdom and share similarities with images from other regions of Colombia.

I analyse the images using an archeosemiotic approach, as well as employing an interdisciplinary methodology deriving from visual semiotics and archeology. The results are compared with petroglyphs, two gold objects, and a wooden sculpture from the Central region of Colombia, leading to the conclusion that the faces were part of a visual semiosphere and a system of signs that extended through the Chicamocha Canyon and shared elements with other regions of central Colombia, which serves as the central argument of the article. As a second argument, I claim that these faces are characterized by gestures and expressiveness that become manifest through particular visual details.

The location and historical and anthropological situation of the study region are presented in the first part of the article, followed by an introduction of the site analysed and of the methodology and concepts used in this analysis, including such notions as the visual semiosphere, and the system of visual signs and gestures. The next section presents the results of the analysis of the faces, followed by a comparison of the faces with material from Central Colombia. Thereafter I will discuss the visual semiosphere to which the images belonged; the article concludes with comments on the faces, their gestures and meanings.

2. Location, geography, and cultures of the region

Mirador de Bárcenas rock art paintings are located in the Chicamocha Canyon, in the Santander Department in Northeast Colombia. The 227 kilometers long Chicamocha Canyon is considered the second largest canyon in the world. It covers around 108,000 hectares and is around 2,000 meters deep (Colparques 2020)². The canyon crosses the Departments of Santander and Boyacá and has been formed by the effect of the Chicamocha River, being the product of:

² Information on the canyon can be found at Colparques 2020. *Cañón del Chicamocha. Reserva Natural Regional*, <http://www.colparques.net/CHICAMOCHA>.

[...] the erosion over the riverbed with the formation of great gorges on both sides of the Banks. The canyon begins in the surroundings of the municipality of Socha, Pisba, Chita and ends near the municipality of Lebrija. These mountains plates are the result of the tectonic movements of the earth where geological faults that comprise the Chicamocha territory up to regions such as Mesa de los Santos and the city of Bucaramanga pass and emerge, but its vast majority extends over the municipality of Aratoca³. (EcuRed 2020)

Regarding the archeology of the region studied, Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff points out in his introduction to the archeology of Colombia:

In the foothills and plateaus of the Eastern Cordillera, north of the Muiscas, lived some indigenous groups that shared many cultural traits with the inhabitants of the Cundiboyacense region, but that formed small independent chiefdoms, all with quite developed agriculture and with metallurgy, textiles and lithic carvings. The Guanes, Laches, Chitareros and others spread across the current departments of Santander (Santander and Norte de Santander), but we do not know much about the archeology of these regions. The few pottery complexes known from this extensive area contain various (ceramic) painted types, with geometric motifs, which are most likely related to the Second Painted Horizon of the Ranchería River and, through this, to the bichrome complexes of western Venezuela. In any case, it seems that there has been close prehistoric contact between the Chibcha-speaking peoples – Muisca, Guanes, Laches, Tunebos, Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta – along the Eastern Cordillera, whose chronological, typological and sociocultural details are still missing to be elucidated. (Reichel-Dolmatoff 2016: 353–354)

Reichel-Dolmatoff describes the geography of the region, but above all, he introduces us to the pre-Hispanic societies that inhabited the region, as well as the surrounding areas, such as Guanes, Laches, Chitareros or Chitareros, Panches, and Muiscas. 16th-century Spanish conquerors gave these names to the different groups of people who inhabited the foothills and plateaus of the Eastern Cordillera.

The Guane culture inhabited the territories in which Mirador de Bárcenas or Pozo Tocaregua is located. The Laches and Chitareros or Chitareros were

³ Quoted from EcuRed 2020. *Cañón de Chicamocha*. https://www.ecured.cu/Ca%C3%B1on_de_Chicamocha; the original reads: “[...] de la erosión sobre el lecho fluvial, con la formación de grandes desfiladeros en ambas orillas. El cañón inicia en inmediaciones del municipio de Socha, Pisba, Chita y termina cerca al municipio de Lebrija. Estas placas montañosas son resultado de los movimientos tectónicos de la tierra, en donde pasan y se desprenden fallas geológicas que comprenden el territorio del Chicamocha, hasta regiones como la Mesa de los Santos y la misma ciudad de Bucaramanga pero en su gran mayoría se extiende sobre el municipio de Aratoca.” Translations from Spanish are by the author of the article.

neighbours of the Guane people. The Chitareros or Chitarreros lived north of the Guanes in the present Department of Norte de Santander, in the region of the city of Pamplona. The Spanish gave them the name since when the people of these towns came out to meet them, they appeared with containers with Chicha, a fermented drink made with corn and still widely consumed in rural Colombia today. The Chitareros who lived in cold areas were organized into chiefdoms, while those who lived in warmer lands lived in tribes. The people worked the land provided by a chief and, in return, they were paid in blankets and red dye. The caciques returned part of these goods during the festivities, when these were distributed among the community (Gamboa 2004: 755–756). This is an important antecedent to interpreting both the origin of the pigments in the cave paintings, as well as the presence of some symbolism that is found both in the funeral blankets and in the images studied here.

The Laches lived to the south, in the Sierra Nevada del Cocuy; they were engaged in mining the salt. This mineral was used both for their own needs and for commerce with distant communities. Upon the arrival of the Spanish a process of emergence of social classes began within their society. Their religion was based on the cult of rocks, which they considered to have been the first human beings to inhabit the earth. At the same time, they were warlike societies that resisted the Spanish conquest (Acuña 2006).

Yet another neighbouring culture of the Guanes was the Panches, who also inhabited the south of the Guane territory in the current department of Boyacá. 16th-century texts indicated that

[t]his Panche People land is fertile as to maintenance and food, most of it, because another part of it is less abundant and another much less. And the misery in some part of the Panche People comes to so much that, while subjugating them, he ran into the Panches that surround the land of Tunja between two mighty rivers, in some mountains.⁴ (Banco de la República 1979: 95)

The Muiscas or Chibchas, for their part, were the ancient inhabitants of the eastern Andes, in the present departments of Cundinamarca and Boyacá. They also lived south of the Guane territory. They formed a heterogeneous and complex society organized into chiefdoms, characterized by the coexistence of both egalitarian as well as profoundly unequal patterns. In this society, the economic and symbolic

⁴ The Spanish original reads, “*Esta tierra de los Panches es fértil de mantenimientos y comida, la mayor parte della, porque otra parte della es menos abundante y otra muy menos. Y viene a tanto la miseria en alguna parte de los Panches que, andandolos sujetando, se topó en los Panches que ciñen la tierra de Tunja entre dos ríos caudalosos, en unas montañas.*”

processes were deeply rooted and it is difficult to differentiate them (Langebaek 2019). The Muiscas were characterized by their work of metallurgy, the craft of agriculture, pottery, textiles, salt work and specialized trade (Uribe, Martín 2012: 773). They were also characterized by their tombs dedicated to their chiefs or caciques, as well as by the cult of rocks that was expressed in their diverse and vivid rock art. The Muiscas were related to all the societies mentioned above. These different cultures possessed, as we will see, cultural traits and types of organization similar to the Muiscas.

Speaking of this complex mosaic of neighbouring cultures to the Guanes serves not only to introduce the reader to the complex cultural panorama of the region in pre-Hispanic times, but is also a first approach to the hypothesis that the images of the other Chicamocha cave paintings were part of a common semiosphere that was sustained by the interrelationships between the peoples mentioned here. The following section focuses on the Guane society.

3. Pre-Guane and Guane Societies

The hypothesis that the Guane society was the author of the cave images of the Mirador de Bárcenas and other sites in the Chicamocha Canyon is proposed here for two main reasons: firstly, because some of the cave images have motifs similar to those found in Guane textiles; secondly, for the Spaniards' chronicles from the time of the Conquista indicated that the Guane people inhabited the actual territories of Santander and Cañón del Chicamocha (Castellanos 1886; Simón 1891; Fernández de Piedrahita 1942; Banco de la República 1979; Gualdrón, Bermúdez 2018: 57). This hypothetical statement only serves as the starting point to our interpretation of the Chicamocha cave paintings, for we are primarily interested in understanding the semiotic, symbolic and social processes that gave rise to the cave images.

According to the archaeologist Justus Schottelius (1941) and the archaeologist Leonardo Moreno (2012: 127, 139), the Chicamocha region was inhabited first by the Preguane societies. Preguane people had sedentary settlements in the region, especially in Los Santos. There are indications of Preguane people from around the 400 A.D. (Moreno 2012: 127, 139). Around the 12th century, the Preguane population underwent a transformation because it disappeared. According to Moreno (2012: 139), this could be the consequence of migrations and cultural assimilations in some regions and of violent impositions in others. The Guanes and Chitareros, two agro-ceramic societies, occupied the region during this time (Morales, Cadavid 1984). In the 16th century, when Spaniards arrived to conquer the region, the Guane societies were consolidated and completely settled in the Chicamocha area.

The Guane culture spread through the northern region of the Chicamocha Canyon, the Mesa de Los Santos, and the Mesa de Bucaramanga. In some cases, housing sites were built on the alluvial terraces on one side of the Chicamocha River. At the time of contact with the Spanish, the Guanes occupied the southern and western lands towards the Suárez, Chicamocha, and Barichara rivers. They also inhabited the Socorro region, Oiba and the Serranía de los Cobardes (Restrepo 2010). The Guane chiefdoms belonged to an agricultural society that grew corn, as well as yucca, cotton, chili, pumpkins, and coca. At the same time, their livelihood depended on the consumption of, for example, ants, and other insects. The Guanes wove cotton, produced ceramics, built small circular buildings, as well as stepped buildings (Sutherland 1971). They made rock art paintings and cultivated land on artificial terraces at the foot of the hills. Their houses were artificially levelled through the construction of platforms. They also had two or three parcels of land located in different regions, and used these spaces to move from one place to another several times a year (Domínguez 2011). According to the Spanish friar Pedro Simón, the Guane worshipped a deity called Bochica, whose image was portrayed on stones found on the banks of the Sogamoso River (Gualdrón y Bermúdez 2018: 58) that rises at the confluence of the Río Chicamocha and the Río Suárez. On the other hand, Bochica is identified as a “civilizing” god to whom the origin of many cultural elements was attributed; he was also a deity worshipped by the Muisca.

4. The cave paintings of the Mirador de Bárcenas and the Chicamocha Canyon region

The Mirador de Bárcenas paintings, elaborated presumably by the Guane society, consist of 11 rock shelters with cave paintings (see Fig. 1). The two predominant colours are red and white and the paintings are characterized by geometric, animal, plant, and human-shaped images. The geometric motifs include circles, ovals, triangles, lemniscates – figures that, for our society, resemble an eight or an hourglass, triangles, ovals with straight lines inside them, half ovals, and rectangles. The animal forms possibly represent reptiles, amphibians (see Fig. 2), and insects such as ants; the vegetables are scarce and represent trees, possibly Guayacanes (Gualdrón, Bermúdez 2018: 185–186) – see Fig. 3. Finally, there are human images that are represented with extended limbs, which is important to notice because some of the faces covered in this study belong to this kind of human figures.

To infer everyday living habits, the cosmology and mythology, of these societies, it should be asked what elements, processes, and prerequisites were needed for

the realization of the rock images. This section gives an account of the economic, social, and ecological processes that were required for the realization of the images and provides an explanation to the main painting motifs of the Mirador de Bárcenas and its associations, which will allow us to understand the rock faces of this site. However, first the characteristics of the images should be described. In answer to the question what kind of elements and social, ecological, and economic processes were required for the realization of these motives, it appears that, in terms of the motifs of animals and plants, knowledge of the animals and plants was required, their habitual use and consumption were important, as well as a symbolic appreciation of them. Thus, there are ants among the animals represented (Fig. 4). The economic importance of the ants in pre-Hispanic times is documented in the colonial chronicle *Epítome of the conquest of La Nueva Granada* (*Epítome de la Conquista de La Nueva Granada*):

[...] a province of people, not very small, whose maintenance was nothing but ants, and make them bread to eat by kneading them. The ants are very abundant in the same province, they are raised in corrals for the same purpose; and the corrals are separations made of wide leaves that surround the anthill. And there, in that province, diversities of *hotmygas* (ants), some large and others small.⁵ (Banco de la República 1979: 95)

The breeding of ants and their consumption spread between the Guanes and the Panches. This allows us to infer that the Guane society interacted with their environment via the use of insectivorous resources. There is also evidence of the cultivation of corn and other vegetables and plant resources. In the course of fieldwork carried out in 2011, I observed remains of ancient corn and arrows made of wood wrapped in vegetable fibres in a cavity behind a cave painting at the Vereda San Rafael rock art site.

The Guane society had an organization and social structure that allowed it to grow corn and cotton, raise insects and produce blankets. It was a chiefdom with incipient social differentiation, and I argue that the cave paintings of this region, especially the rock shelters analysed here, are related to this social differentiation.

⁵ Original in Spanish “[...] una probincia de gente, no muy pequeña, cuyo mantenimiento no hera otra cosa sino hormigas, y dellas hazen pan para comer, amasándolas. De las quales hormigas ay muy grande abundancia en la mesma probincia, y las crían en corrales para este mismo effetto; y los corrales son unos atajos hechos de hojas anchas con que rodean el hormiguero. Y ansy ay allí, en aquella probincia, diversidades de hotmygas, unas grandes y otras pequeñas.” (Banco de la República 1979: 95).



Figure 1. General view of the Mirador de los Santos site⁶.



Figure 2. Rock Shelter 1 through a digital filter. Reptile images and lemniscates can be detected.

⁶ All the photographs have been taken and edited by the author of the article.

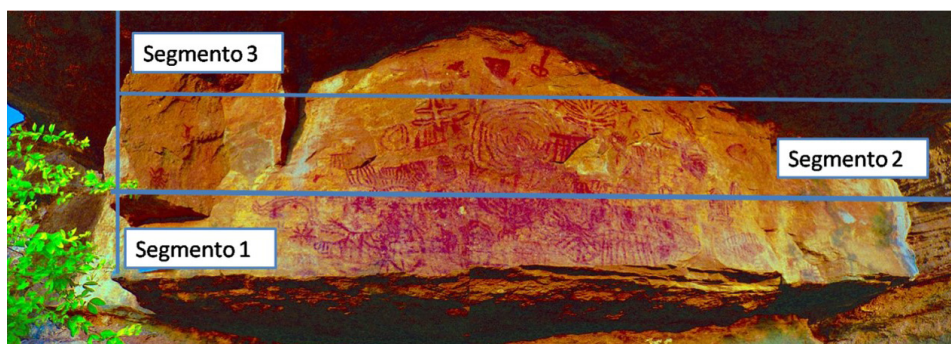


Figure 3. Rock Shelter 2. An image of a Guayacán tree is located in the centre.



Figure 4. Ant detail in Rock Shelter 2.

5. Methodology and concepts

The methodology used here has two dimensions: on the one hand, the archaeological dimension, in charge of accounting for the materiality of the images; on the other hand, the semiotic dimension, responsible for the study of the images as forms of representation belonging to a visual semiosphere. This approach is located within the perspective that Roberto Flores has called ‘archaeosemiotic’. ‘Archaeosemiotics’ is a term that refers to “the study of the meaning offered by the materials of the past, both to their creators and initial users, as well as to archaeologists and archaeology lovers (who, undoubtedly, are also, in their way, creators and users)” (Flores 2019: 176).

Thus, an archaeological record of the cave paintings was first completed in order to analyse the images. The paintings were documented according to two

registration approaches, one deriving from the American Association of Rock Art (Arara 2007) and the other from the Mexican archaeologist Miguel Messmacher (Messmacher 1981). The paintings were geographically located, the geology and geography of the surroundings were described, both general photos and pictures of each motif were taken. Dstretch software was applied that allows highlighting details that cannot be observed with the naked eye, using digital filters colours (Harman 2011⁷). As part of the project, two cave sites were registered: El Mirador de Bárcenas or Mirador de los Santos and La Vereda San Rafael.

Regarding the semiotic analysis, the plastic components, that is, the forms, spaces, colours and textures of the images, were studied. The panel was divided into three sections based on the grouping of human forms and taking the largest image, which was a mask or a double face, as its axis. This methodology was based on the proposals for visual analysis suggested by Félix Thürleman (2004), Jean Marie Floch (1994) and the Mu Group (Grupo Mu 1993). However, it is also based on the visual analysis of a Coco Chanel advertisement conducted by Roberto Flores (2007) and on two semiotic analyses of cave paintings made by the author of this article (Domínguez 2009, 2011).

Once this analysis had been completed, the images were placed in a model of semiotic relevance levels proposed by Jacques Fontanille (2006). The recovered levels were the sign, that is to say, an individual figure in our case; the text, i.e., which corresponded to the complete image or panel; the object or support, which in this case would be the surface of the rock shelter; the practical scenes that means the spatial interactions or relations of proximity or distance between the different caves with painting which constituted the archaeological site.

The next step was to compare and contrast the images with those of the central and southern regions of Colombia. These included petroglyphs, two pieces of gold, and a wooden sculpture. Through this analysis, a system of signs or a visual semiosphere was inferred. The concept of the semiosphere was taken from Juri Lotman to account for a series of similarities in the ways of representing faces. In this order of things, the visual semiosphere is derived from Lotman's concept of the semiosphere (Lotman 1996: 12) as semiotic universe of the past made up of various texts and visual discourses. In this case, it is a semiosphere made up of multimodal discourses such as cave images, cotton blankets, and ceramic pictographs.

These multimodal discourses were configured from sign systems and semiotic models typical of the social and cultural processes of the peoples from the studied region. It is difficult to define semiotic sign systems or models in the

⁷ Harman, John 2011. *Using Decorrelation Stretch to Enhance Rock Art Images*, available at <http://www.dstretch.com/AlgorithmDescription.html>.

archaeosemiotic domain. For this purpose, Winfried Nöth's definition of systems was appropriated, understood as a set or assembly of signs, relationships, and structures (Nöth 1995: 198) of the societies that inhabited the region in the past. The system of visual signs was defined as a set of images used by past societies. These images were related to one another in such a way that they had a common visual structure. This definition was complemented by Jean Marie Klinkenberg's idea of system and code (Klinkenberg 2006: 138–139). Thus, the semiotic models of the past were a set of differences of visual signs with two dimensions, that of the signifier and that of the signified. These dimensions had codes that structured them. There were visual codes that configured the relations of difference between images on two planes: that of expression and that of content.

To return to Lotman's concepts, these visual systems were both static and dynamic, closed and open at the same time (see Lotman 1996). From an *emic* perspective, or from within a society, these systems of signs can be called semiotic models, understood as models and schemes of the world that the society creates. However, from an external perspective, the schemes created by semiotics can be called systems. This article seeks to build a semiotic model in order to study the systems of signs and visual semiotic models of the pre-Columbian societies that created the cave faces of the Chicamocha Canyon. I consider these sign systems to have been expressed in the semiotic-visual strategies of the images studied, which is why, to reconstruct the system of signs, we must study these strategies.

The last step consisted of the analysis of facial gestures. The dictionary of the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language (*Diccionario de la Real Academia de la Lengua Española* 2020⁸) defines 'gesture' (*gesto*) as "Movement of the face, hands or other parts of the body, with which affections are expressed or messages are transmitted" and also defines 'expression' (*expresión*) as "the manifestation of affections and emotions through gesticulation". Such facial expressions and gestures are considered by Theo van Leeuwen as physiological communication resources and as elements of non-verbal communication (Leeuwen 2005: 93).

6. Description and results of the semiotic analysis of the faces

The rock art set in which the faces were depicted is located in a yellow rocky shelter, which is oriented towards the east, the direction from which the sun rises. It is composed of 12 images (Fig. 5). To analyse these, the set of images was divided into three sections based on the observation of the way the motifs were grouped.

⁸ See *Diccionario de la Real Academia de la Lengua Española* 2020: <https://dle.rae.es/gesto?m=form>.

Segment One corresponded to a concentration of medium and small elements in the left sector of the set in which five elements were counted. Segment Two was composed of the double face and several small associated elements; in it we counted five images. Finally, Segment Three was made up of a series of small images located on the right side of the composition; the number of images in this segment was four.



Figure 5. Rock art faces from Mirador de Bárcenas.

In Segment One, visual significance has been created through the use of straight lines, rectangles, circular shapes, ovals, half-circles, points, and a dot. Some of these forms create the image of two human figures with identifiable faces and extended limbs. All the images are medium high if we compare them with the images of other segments. As concerns their spatial location, one of the human figures is situated in the lower right, very close to the centre of the scene. Above, a strip of six horizontal lines can be seen on the left-hand side, a human figure in the centre, and a semicircle with ten points on the right; above these forms a spot can be observed. As regards the colours, the shape below is red with white dots; in contrast, the human figure above is white and yellow with red dots. The semicircle is red with eight red and two white dots. I will describe the human forms, specifically their faces in more detail. The limbs of the first figure, the one in red, are presented as extended and flexed. The neck can be observed, as well as the face composed of

a horizontal line serving as the mouth and two points as eyes. These are negative shapes whose colour is formed by the surface of the rock. Above the face, there is a headdress formed by approximately ten lines (Fig. 7A).

The second human shape, the one at the top, is made up of points, straight lines, a curved line, an oval shape, and a rectangular shape. The figure has a headdress composed of seven red dots and seven white vertical lines. The face consists of an oval line, two red dots for the eyes, and a horizontal red line for the mouth. The face is attached to the white-coloured body that has a rectangular shape; its legs and arms are extended. The body is crossed by a vertical line and the four extremities have a red line at their ends (Fig. 7B). Next to this image, there is a half-circle with dots inside it (Fig. 7C).

The double face located in Segment Two has been created, utilizing a half oval. In the upper part, there is a human figure with outstretched arms that consists of a circular shape, points and a horizontal band, and an inverted triangle shape. The vertex of the triangle extends downwards and forms the nose of the face or mask below. The previous figure is separated from the main face by four horizontal straight lines that converge in the half oval; these mark just half of the image. Two of the lines are on the left and two on the right. Inside the oval, forming the face or mask, there are three horizontal lines with the one at the top being longer than the two at the bottom; these lines make up the eyes and cheeks of the face (Fig. 7D).

Finally, at the bottom, 14 curved vertical lines form a kind of a beard. Above the image on the upper right-hand side, there is a short Y-shaped line, as well as two triangles, one very small and one larger; these latter forms are hardly noticeable. The face or double mask is the largest figure in the entire composition, while, in contrast, the other shapes in this segment are small. Segment Two forms the centre of the entire panel, as the rest of the images are grouped around the double mask.

Segment Three is made up of a human shape with a headdress formed by two vertical lines on the head and a curved line in the shape of a C. The human shape has been made by means of a V-shaped line as well as points. The predominant colour is red, although the human form boasts white spots and dots. The images are peripheral and are located at the extreme right of the composition (Fig. 7E).

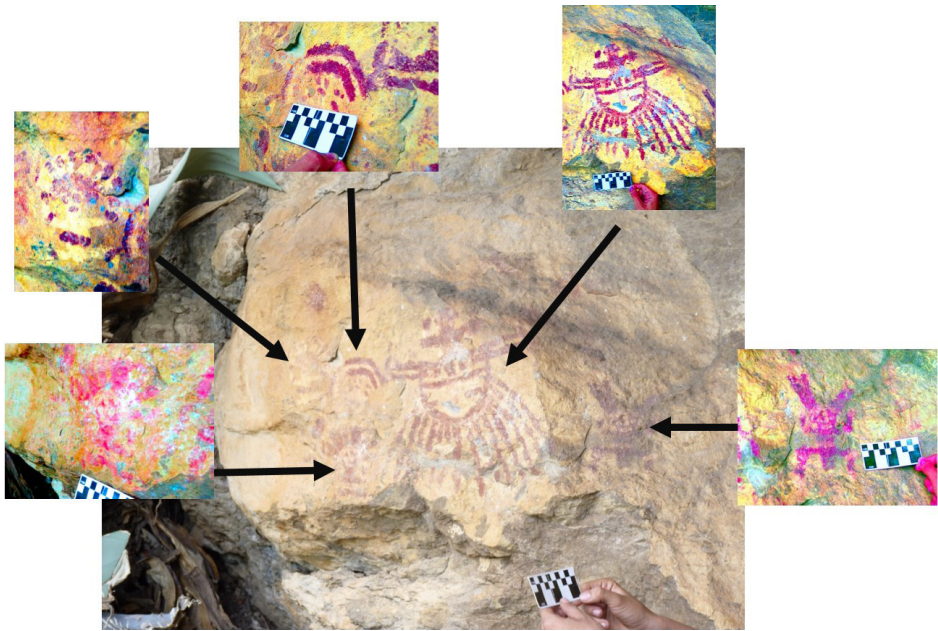


Figure 6. General location of the human images.

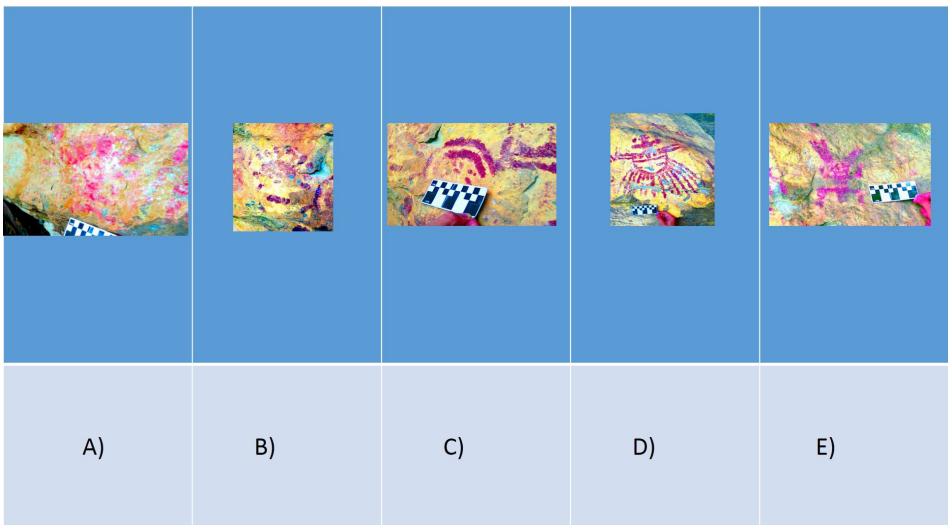


Figure 7. Human figures in detail.

6.1. Visual strategies used in the elaboration of the faces

A visual strategy consists in a principle of visual syntagmatic composition (Fontanille 2016: 30) that orders the relationship between shapes, spaces and colours in an image. It is also one of the semiotic levels of relevance. In this case one of the main strategies consisted in placing the larger face in the centre of the composition. It is inferred that this strategy helps to emphasize the visual importance of this image, referring us to visual hierarchies in which the largest objects are located in the centre. I propose here as a hypothesis that this form of hierarchization may have been a reflection of a Guane society in the process of social differentiation that involved the beginning of social hierarchies.

As a second strategy it can be argued that faces were elaborate, using oval and circular geometric shapes. Straight lines were employed in order to making up the eyes and the mouth. Also the opposition in the use of two colours, white and red, was part of this strategy.

Thirdly the use of headdresses is observed always on the top of the faces. In my opinion, their presence emphasizes the hierarchical status of the faces, which seems to have been the same in the Muisca region of Bogotá where death masks with headdresses were associated with the chiefs or caciques.

6.2. Colours and meanings

So far, the colours red and white have been described; however, their meaning has not been mentioned, as archeology and semiotics alone cannot provide us with these meanings. For this reason, it is important to talk about these colours both in an universal and in a regional perspective. The relationship between the red and white colours is almost universal, in many cases the colour black is also part of this link. Thus, the red-white opposition has been observed since the Neolithic era, in Africa, Eurasia and Europe, where it also appears in classical cultures and in the medieval world. The relationship is also observed in the folklore and ethnography of various contemporary peoples (Hemming 2012: 310). It is highly probable that this universality is the product of neuro-physiological processes. Red is the most visually exciting colour that the human being can perceive; this excitability probably has to do with human evolution and with the purpose of our arboreal ancestors to search for food (Hemming 2012: 325).

In Ancient America, red was the most frequent colour in cave paintings. In Colombia, the indigenous Uwas or Tunebos who live in the Sierra Nevada del Cocuy, in the central-eastern region of the country, have myths about the meaning of the colours white and red. Everything indicates that these communities are descendants of the Laches, a pre-Columbian people with whom the Guanes interacted, as noted above.

Eduardo Londoño (1995: 88–89) describes an Uwa myth about the white and red colours: “[...] at the beginning, the world was made up of a top (white) and a bottom (red); when the movement occurred, these separate worlds mixed and the middle world emerged, made up of blue and yellow”. This gives rise to the hypothesis that the red and white colours of the faces of the cave painting analysed may be related to myths about the origin of the world and colours.

However, when interpreting the colours of the paintings, it must be taken into account that sometimes these deteriorate over the centuries and that the original hue may have changed. Still, it should be noted that the red colour, generally made from iron oxide, is one of the pigments that survives best over time (Argüello, Martínez, 2004⁹). As for the white, we believe that it is also of mineral origin, but it is necessary to carry out a chemical analysis of the paintings of the Mesa de Los Santos to determine the origin of the pigments with any certainty.

At least to the naked eye the rock art pigments appear to be different from those used in other archaeological objects such as e.g. the pre-Hispanic textiles. Archaeological studies of Chibchas, Uwa, and Guane pre-Hispanic textiles indicate that dyes of vegetable origin, especially a small plant called *Fridericia chica* (Naturalista 2021¹⁰), were used in 60% of Colombian pre-Hispanic textiles. Furthermore, while Trunk of Brasil [*dracaena*; *Palo de Brasil* (GardenTags 2021¹¹)], a tree from whose wood a dye is obtained that is sometimes red and sometimes yellow (Rico Arce 1999), was used in 10% of the sample (Devia *et al.* 2016: 8)¹². This dye is still widely used today.

6.3. Gestures and meanings: From semiospheres to gestures and facial expressions

The last point we concentrate on here concerns the expressiveness of the faces and its counterpart, hieratism. ‘Expressiveness’ is understood as the movements of the

⁹ Argüello, Pedro y Martínez, Diego 2004. Procesos tafonómicos en el arte rupestre: un caso de conservación diferencial de pinturas en el altiplano cundiboyacense, Colombia. *Rupestreweb*; can be found at: <http://rupestreweb.info/sutatausa.html>.

¹⁰ Naturalista 2021. *Fridericia chica*; see <https://colombia.inaturalist.org/taxa/578619-Fridericiachica>.

¹¹ GardenTags 2021 *Dracaena Fragrans ‘Trunk of brazil’ syn. ‘Palo de brasil’*; see <https://www.gardentags.com/plant-encyclopedia/dracaena-fragrans-trunk-of-brazil-syn-palo-de-brasil/38431>.

¹² See Devia, Baetriz; Cardale de Schrimppff, Marianne; Devia, Carlos; Niño Izquierdo, Camilo 2016. Aproximación al conocimiento de los colorantes en la comunidad indígena Ika de la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta (departamento del Cesar, Colombia) *Nuevo Mundo, Mundos Nuevos, Coloquios*. <http://journals.openedition.org/nuevomundo/69205>; <https://doi.org/10.4000/nuevomundo.69205>.

face that communicate messages and also its visual effect. Specifically, we refer to the appearance of movement transmitted by two parts of the face: the eyes and the mouth. Expressiveness is opposed to hieratism, that is constituted as its opposite, that is, the visual effect suggesting that the face lacks movement.

Gestures have biosemiotic, social and cultural dimensions. Among different animals and primates they communicate aggressiveness, fear and other emotions. In the case of human beings and, more specifically, of the cave faces of the *Mirador de Los Santos*, expressiveness has been permeated by social and cultural semiotic processes. We can argue in this case that the people who made the paintings captured a series of cultural codes and world schemes through the gestures and hieratism of faces.

Two of the faces seem to have their mouths open, which generates a sensation of movement. It seems that these faces are screaming. There is a third face that conveys the visual sensation of movement, since one of its eyes is larger than the other. In contrast, the mask and the face with two bumps do not seem to show movement and therefore appear to have no emotion.

Thus, it seems that the visual semiosphere of the region had at least two different types of visual representations that schematized and encoded facial gestures: one consists of the representation of faces in movement, while the other represents faces statically. This opposition between movement and immobility is not unusual since the concept of opposition is present also in other rocky shelters of the *Mirador de Los Santos*.

6.4. From facial gestures to meanings

What kind of construction of specific meanings was behind these faces and their two types of expressiveness? For other cultural regions of America such as Mesoamerica in Mexico, rock faces have been taken as an expression of individuality, as a representation of the mountain as divinity, as ancestors who protect and own mountains and ravines (Valdovinos 2014: 1–11).

How does this relate to the case presented here? I argue that in *Mirador de Bárcenas* there was an enormous variability in the faces represented, which indicates the importance of the individuality of every face, as it happened in ancient Mesoamerica. Regarding faces and mountains as a dimension of divinity, it is not easy to answer the question if there was an indigenous worldview in the Guane region that related ravines and hills with gods. For this purpose a more in-depth investigation would be required regarding the pre-Hispanic worldview of the region and surrounding regions.

However, there are alternative interpretations. For instance, Camilo Gualdrón and Oscar Bermúdez have interpreted the scene of the faces as a ritual in which the characters were dressed in animal costumes. They mention the Huan ritual of the Muisca people of the Bogotá region celebrated in December, during which the participants placed red and blue ornaments on their heads, sang and danced (Gualdrón, Bermúdez 2018: 211). The same authors have suggested that the double face is possibly the mask of a feline as their research has shown that the current inhabitants interpret this image as a feline; they also realized that the colonial chronicler Pedro de Simón affirmed that there were sorcerers who turned into felines (Gualdrón, Bermúdez 2018: 216).

In addition to this interpretation, the authors have pointed out that the central face of the panel could also be “*Bochica* or the supreme deity *Chiminigagua*. This is due to the central position of the image, as well as its larger size compared to the rest of the motifs of the scene, which would denote its importance in the pantheon” (Gualdrón, Bermúdez 2018: 214). These hypotheses, certainly seeming to be promising, should be tested, yet seem quite plausible considering the available data.

To complement the previous hypotheses I would like to propose a last one, suggesting the possibility that the faces were related to the representation of the dead and the deceased, as well as to the ancestors. I hold this for two reasons: the first is that human burials were found behind the different rock sets many years ago (Nelson Ramírez, personal communication); and, secondly, the rock motifs from other painting sites in the region, such as the Vereda San Rafael, have also been found in funeral blankets in which the dead have been wrapped. This hypothesis should certainly be tested in the course of future research.

To end this section, we might recall the comments made above on the Guane society, its worldview, and that of neighbouring peoples. In the first place, the colours white and red seem to refer to a myth of the origin of the world, in which all colours and the world in between them originate from the mixture of white and red. At the same time, we have the aforementioned hypothesis that the face in the centre may correspond to the image of the civilizing god Bochica. Rocks were considered the first human beings who inhabited the earth, to which we may add the idea proposed in the previous paragraph about ancestors having been represented in the rock art paintings. Thus, both the faces and the support seem to reflect the myth, the world of the dead, and the ancestors, but also the social stratification and the hierarchies within the Guane society. An argument to support this is that, as Langebaeck (2019) points out in the Muisca case, materiality, economy, social structure, and symbolism cannot be separated in the societies of pre-Hispanic Colombia.

7. Comparisons and contrasts between the faces and the visual semiosphere of the region

Behind the faces analysed here, there was a visual semiosphere characterized by visual rules and strategies. Elements of social structure, myth and worldview were also represented in it.

Other cave painting sites in the region such as Vereda San Rafael employed similar strategies and combined economical and symbolic topics. For example, in the Vereda San Rafael rock art site, a beetle and a fantastic creature with many legs were depicted: the insects, that were part of the Guane economy and diet, were combined with mythical creatures.

In other archaeological objects of Santander, we can observe visual strategies similar to those used in Mirador de Los Santos, but adapted to specific supports. These supports are pre-Hispanic ceramics and cotton blankets, which are currently sheltered in the Bolívar House Museum in the city of Bucaramanga. The ceramics, although very diverse, include specimens in case of which the use of the colours red and white can be observed as well as the use of forms similar to those employed in rock art. Despite this, there is no evidence of representations of faces having been found in the ceramics of the region (Domínguez 2011: 96). The blankets, meanwhile, are cream or white in colour; sometimes red inks were used and they were decorated with circular shapes. The blankets accompanied burials in caves (Cardale 1987), but no faces have been depicted on the blankets.

In addition to these cases, the regions of Bogotá and the Huila Department, inhabited by Muiscas, Panches, Laches, and other cultures mentioned in this article, share visual and sociocultural elements, even though these areas were located hundreds of kilometers away from the study site.

7.1. Petroglyphs from Aipe

The painted rock from Aipe, in the north of the department of Huila in central Colombia, has a series of petroglyphs made by the ancient societies of the region. These images can be compared with the depictions of humans and faces analysed here. The stone was recorded in the 19th century by the painter Manuel María Paz employing a watercolour technique (Biblioteca Digital Mundial 2020)¹³. It consists of a large rocky massif with human shapes, some possible plant representations, as well as geometric motifs and points on it, and is still standing today. There are more than a dozen of human forms that look straight ahead and whose limbs are either

¹³ Biblioteca Digital Mundial 2020. *Piedra con jeroglíficos cerca de Aipe, en la margen izquierda del Magdalena, provincia de Neiva*, see <https://www.wdl.org/es/item/9146/>.

flexed or extended. Two of the figures are similar in shape both to the paintings in Mirador de Bárcenas and to those on the gold objects described below. The similarity lies in them having bent arms and two protrusions on the head. On the other hand, the shapes resemble the profile of the double mask, since they have a human shape at the top and are composed of a semicircle at the bottom. Other similarities involve the combination of both economic and symbolic elements, such as corn plants and curve pectorals (Falchetti 1989: 25–26) in the case of the Aipe petroglyphs. These features are the indication of common visual strategies such as the use of similar forms and the representation of prominent elements over the head.

7.2. Gold masks and faces and their cultural meanings

Gold was a common raw material for the pre-Hispanic societies that inhabited Colombia, especially for the Muisca culture. This material, usually associated with offerings and tombs, was used to make masks and human figures whose faces were discernible (Fachetti 1989; Uribe, Martínón 2012). These artifacts allow a comparison with the rock art faces of the Chicamocha and with their details such as the headdresses. The gold objects analysed in this article are located in the Gold Museum (*Museo del Oro*) in Bogotá; in some cases, they belong to the societies that inhabited the current Bogotá savanna, in other cases it is difficult to specify the origin of the objects.

The artifacts with which I will compare the Guane rock art will be a breastplate, a gold boat, and, finally, a face carved in wood. The cultural significance of these objects for the Muisca has to do with the offerings to which they belonged. Thus, these pieces consist of representations of schematic human beings and are associated with the burials of chiefs or political and religious leaders, as well as the consumption of psychotropic substances and related rituals. They are also linked to human sacrifice, war, and the civilizing god Bochica or Chibchacum who was worshipped by both Muisca and Guane (Uribe, Martínón 2012: 782–784). Thus, the three faces described here were part of such offerings of ritual, political, and warrior significance.

7.3. Gold breastplate

The first piece with which I want to contrast the images of the Chicamocha is a gold breastplate that represents a human figure (*Banco de la República* 2020a¹⁴). As in the Chicamocha images or the petroglyphs previously analysed, the figure's

¹⁴ Banco de la República 2020a. *Arte prehispánico: un recorrido por el ciclo del oro y la sala Cosmología y simbolismo desde la mirada del arte* can be found at <https://www.banrepcultural.org/bogota/actividad/arte-prehispánico-un-recorrido-por-el-ciclo-del-oro-y-la-sala-cosmología-y-6>.

limbs are flexed – this position of the body seems to appear across the visual semiosphere studied. The body is decorated with horizontal and diagonal lines, as well as dots.

To elaborate or construct the face of the figure, a semicircle has been used, the same form on the faces of the Chicamocha images. The nose is made using a line and is reminiscent of the nose of the double face, previously analysed in the case of Mesa de Los Santos, while circles have been used to constitute the eyes and the lashes. In its lower part, the face wears earrings. Finally, it can be said that the face bears a hieratic expression. The meaning of this image could be related to the representation of a divinity, presumably Bochica.

7.4. Gold boat

The second gold object with which I wish to compare the faces is the so-called gold boat – the representation of a raft on which a chief is observed accompanied by his servants. The object was found in 1969 by the peasant Cruz María Dimaté in a cave in the department of Cundinamarca near Bogotá. Other pieces of gold and ceramic objects were associated with the finding (*Banco de la República* 2020b¹⁵). It is related to the descriptions, deriving from the time of the conquest, of a ritual in which the Muisca caciques were transported by a raft through the lagoon of Guatavita, celebrating a ceremony (*Banco de la República* 2020b).

As for the human figures in this piece, several elements can be highlighted, first of all the hieratic, rigid attitude of these figures. Their faces have been made by means of oval shapes and they wear elaborate headdresses that are very similar to the headdresses of the faces in the Chicamocha region. I suggest that the meaning of the boat is related to the political power of the caciques. The reason why I make the comparison with the Guanes paintings is both because of the similarity between the human representations, and because both figures were used by caciques as part of a process of social differentiation. The piece is full of details that, by themselves, like other pieces in the Gold Museum, would deserve a separate analysis; however, here I comment only on the description of the faces. Next, I will comment on a pre-Hispanic face depicted on a piece of wood found in the central region of Colombia.

7.5. Face carved in wood

Finally, I want to point out that there are other types of supports such as wood or stone in which faces have been represented as well. These faces have both similarities and differences with the cave paintings of Chicamocha. At this point I

¹⁵ *Banco de la República* 2020b. *La balsa muisca y el dorado* can be found at <https://www.banrepultural.org/coleccion-arqueologica/balsa-muisca>.

would like to mention the wooden sculpture of a human being found in the Cave de Bojacá in the Sabana de Bogotá (Reichel-Dolmatoff 2016: 354). The figure has bent limbs, but these are close to the body. The eyes are represented as points, as in most of the faces of the Chicamocha and the nose is a vertical line similar to the nose of the double mask. I suppose that this carving represents an ancient Muisca divinity, probably Bochica. Additionally, like the rock art paintings, it is related with a rock shelter. This relationship and the importance of the rocks among Guanes and Muisca is the reason why I introduce also this object as an element of comparison.

7.6. The visual semiosphere of the region

It seems that from these descriptions a common way of representing the face among Guanes, Muisca, and other indigenous peoples from pre-Hispanic times can be inferred. In my opinion this serves as evidence of the existence of a semiosphere in which semiotic codes, mythological elements, and socio-political features were shared. However, there are also differences between the regions, some concerning the raw material employed to elaborate it. Others have to do with the forms used in the representation of the faces, or with the meanings.

Thus, I argue that the ethnic diversity of the region has given rise to these variations in the ways of representing and signifying faces and bodies.

8. Conclusion

The Guane society used a system of visual signs or semiotic models that was part of a large visual semiosphere extending through the Chicamocha, but sharing elements with cultures such as the Laches, Chitareros, and Muisca. This semiosphere integrated visual codes and strategies with social, economic, and mythological elements.

The faces depicted in Mesa de Los Santos rock shelters by the Guane culture were made by using geometric shapes such as semicircles, lines, and points. These faces had some formal characteristics shared with the Bogotá and Huila region, such as the use of similar forms to represent the face and the body.

The two most used colours were white and red. Using a contemporary Uwa myth we can hypothesize that both colours are related to a story according to which only the colours red and white colours existed at the beginning of the world.

The cave faces of the Guane culture also had a possible mythological dimension. To this would be added the interpretations suggesting that the central image could be related both to the god Bochica, a civilizing deity, and to the rocks

that are linked to the first inhabitants on earth. Other symbolic dimensions of the faces could be related to the dead and worshipping the ancestors. However, faces also have a social dimension where they functioned as a form of legitimation and social differentiation on the part of the social segment that produced the paintings.

Thus, through the study of the rock art faces from the Chicamocha canyon, we have tried to explain some social and symbolic processes of the Guane culture to which we attribute the authorship of the images. In addition to outlining the mythological and social dimensions already mentioned, I tried to explain the interconnections between the Guanes and other societies through the faces studied, emphasizing, above all, the relationship with the Muiscas of the Bogotá savanna region, but also with the Laches, Panches and Chitareros. These interconnections give us an account of a visual semiosphere sustained by the relationships and commercial contacts between these societies. Thus, the Guane sociocultural process did not occur in isolation but was part of a series of shared visual rules and codes, as well as similar sociocultural situations, between societies and chiefdoms that were in a process of social differentiation. Finally, this article has been an attempt to describe and interpret the Guane semiotic system, as well as the visual semiosphere to which the Guane society belonged. Thus, we have tried to show how in the pre-Columbian past of Colombia, the faces of rock art were part of complex symbolic and social meanings.

References

- American Rock Art Association (ARARA) 2007. *Basic Guide for Rock Art Recording*. United States: American Rock Art Association.
- Acuña Rodríguez, Blanca Ofelia 2006. Territorio Indígena de la sal en La Sierra Nevada del Cocuy. S XVI. *Historia y Espacio* 2(27): 71–86. <https://doi.org/10.25100/hye.v2i27.4569>
- Banco de la República 1979. Epitome de la conquista del Nuevo Reino de Granada. *Boletín Cultural y Bibliográfico Banco de la República* 16(03): 81–97.
- Cardale de Schimpff, Marianne 1987. Informe preliminar sobre el hallazgo de textiles y otros elementos percederos conservados Cuevas en Purnia, mesa de los Santos. *Boletín de Arqueología* 2(3): 3–23.
- Castellanos, Juan 1886. *Historia del Nuevo Reino de Granada. Tomo I*. Madrid: Imprenta de A. Pérez Dubrull.
- Domínguez Núñez, Martín Cuitzeo 2009. “Las Manitas” rock art site in Cañada de Cisneros, Tepotzotlán, México: An analysis using visual semiotic tools. *American Indian Rock Art* 35: 161–170.
- Domínguez Núñez, Martín Cuitzeo 2011. *La dinámica enunciativa de dos sitios con manifestaciones gráfico-rupestres de la Mesa de los Santos, Departamento de Santander, Colombia*. (Tesis de maestría.) Bucaramanga, Colombia: Universidad Industrial de Santander.

- Falchetti, Ana María 1989. Orfebrería prehispánica en el altiplano central colombiano. *Boletín Museo del Oro* 25: 3–41.
- Fernández de Piedrahita, Lucas 1942. *Historia general de las conquistas del Nuevo Reino de Granada*. Bogotá: Ministerio de Educación.
- Floch, Jean Marie 2002. Composition iv de Kandinsky. In: Henault, Anne (ed.), *Questions de sémiotique*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 121–151.
- Flores, Roberto 2007. De Cuerpos, brillos y transparencias. Análisis semiótico de una imagen publicitaria. *Escritos Revista Ciencias del Lenguaje* 35/36: 7–40.
- Flores, Roberto 2019. Fundamentos de arqueosemiótica. *Cuicuilco. Revista de ciencias antropológicas* 76: 175–192.
- Fontanille, Jacques 2016. *Prácticas semióticas*. Lima: Universidad de Lima, Fondo Editorial.
- Gamboa, Jorge Augusto 2004. La encomienda y las sociedades indígenas del Nuevo Reino de Granada: El caso de la provincia de Pamplona (1549–1650). *Revista de Indias* 64(232): 749–770.
- Grupo Mu 1993. *Tratado del signo visual. Para una retórica de la imagen*. Madrid: Cátedra.
- Gualdrón, Camilo; Bermúdez, Oscar 2018. *Cosmovisión, paisaje y Manifestaciones Gráfico Rupestres en el sitio Mirador de los Santos, Santander Colombia*. (Tesis de pregrado.) Bucaramanga, Colombia: Universidad Industrial de Santander.
- Hemming, Jessica 2012. Red, white, and black in symbolic thought: The tricolour folk motif, colour naming, and trichromatic vision. *Folklore* 123(3): 310–329. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0015587X.2012.716599>
- Klinkenberg, Jean Marie 2006. *Manual de semiótica general*. Bogotá: Fundación Universidad de Bogotá Jorge Tadeo Lozano.
- Langebaeck, Karl Henry 2019. *Los muiscas: La historia milenaria de un pueblo chibcha*. Bogotá: Editorial Debate.
- Leeuwen, Theo van 2005. *Introducing Social Semiotics*. London, New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203647028>
- Londoño, Eduardo 1995. Linajes y circuitos de matrimonio en tres linajes chibcha: U wa, koguy y muisca. *Boletín Museo del Oro* 38/39: 87–111.
- Lotman, Yuri 1996. Acerca de la semiósfera. In: *La semiósfera I. Semiótica de la cultura y del texto*. España: Frónesis Cátedra, Universidad de Valencia, 10–25.
- Messmacher, Miguel 1981. *Las pinturas rupestres de la pintada, Sonora. Un enfoque metodológico*. México D. F: INAH.
- Morales, Jorge; Cadavid, Gilberto 1984. *Investigaciones etnohistóricas y arqueológicas en el área Guane*. Bogotá: Fundación de Investigaciones Arqueológicas Nacionales. Banco de la República.
- Moreno, Leonardo 2012. Arqueología del Nororiente colombiano. Los Teres: un sitio de asentamiento de las culturas prehispánicas Preguane y Guane. *Anuario de Historia Regional y de las Fronteras*. 17(2): 115–142.
- Nöth, Winfried 1995. *Handbook of Semiotics*. Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Reichel-Dolmatoff, Gerardo 2016. *Arqueología de Colombia: Un texto introductorio*. Bogotá: Ministerio de Cultura, Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia.

- Restrepo, Lotero John 2010. *Reconocimiento Arqueológico para las concesiones Mineras 1 D4-09211 y 1 D2-16551. Cañón del Chicamohca. Departamento de Santander. Licencia 1480^o*. Bogotá: Proyecto de Salvamento. ICAHN.
- Rico Arce, Lourdes 1999. El palo de Brasil. *Ciencias* 54: 42–44.
- Schottelius, Justus 1941. *Arqueología de la Mesa de los Santos*. Bogotá: Publicación de la Escuela Normal Superior, Imprenta Nacional.
- Simón, Pedro 1891. *Noticias Historiales de las Conquistas de Tierra Firme en las Indias Occidentales. Tomo III*. Bogotá: Casa Editorial de Medardo Rivas.
- Sutherland, Donald 1971. *Preliminary Investigations into the Prehistory of Santander, Colombia*. (Ph.D. Dissertation.) Tulane: University of Tulane.
- Thürlemann, Félix 2004. Blumen Mythos (1918) de P. Klee. In: Henault, Anne; BeyaertAnne (eds.), *Ateliers de Sémiotique Visuelle*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 13–40.
- Uribe Villegas, Martha Alicia; Martinón Torres, Marcos 2012. Composition, color and context in Muisca votive metalwork (Colombia, AD 600-1800). *Antiquity* 86: 772–791. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003598X00047918>
- Valdovinos Rojas, Elda Vanya 2014. *Rostros en la montaña. Arte Rupestre en Tlayacapan y Amatlán Morelos*. (Tesis de maestría.) Ciudad de México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

Лица в доиспанском наскальном искусстве Колумбии: семиотические стратегии, визуальные семиосферы и жесты

В статье анализируются знаковые системы и семиотические модели, составляющие семантику рисунка двойного лица или маски в доколумбовом наскальном искусстве Колумбии. Также рассматриваются две человеческие фигуры, связанные с основной картиной. Образец наскального искусства был обнаружен на стенах каньона Чикамоча на участке Mirador de Bárcenas в департаменте Сантандер в Северо-Западной Колумбии. Его происхождение приписывается племени гуане. В основе работы лежит предположение, что это лицо и его жесты были частью знаковой системы и визуальной семиосферы, распространенной по берегам каньона Чикамоча. В то же время, это изображение повторяет некоторые семиотические модели и стратегии визуальной коммуникации обществ, которые населяли районы в центральной Колумбии на расстоянии сотен километров от изучаемого участка. Формы, использование пространства на изображениях и жесты религиозного характера появляются как в лицах петроглифов департамента Уила, так и в некоторых доиспанских золотых масках из региона Кундинамарка.

Изображения лиц в наскальном искусстве были проанализированы с использованием визуальной семиотической модели на основе предложений группы Мю и анализов Феликса Тюрлемана и Жана Марии Флоха. Анализ был дополнен уровнями семиотической релевантности Жака Фонтаниля, при этом в качестве ключевой использовалась концепция семиосферы Юрия Лотмана.

Näod Colombia Hispaania-eelses kaljukunstis: semiootilised strateegiad, visuaalsed semiosfäärid ja žestid

Artiklis analüüsitakse märgisüsteeme ja semiootilisi mudeleid, millest tuleneb joonistatud kaksiknägede või maskide tähendus Colombia Kolumbuse-eelses kaljukunstis; käsitletakse ka põhipildiga seotud kaht inimfiguuri, kelle nägusid on kujutatud. Vaadeldav kaljukunsti näide avastati Chichamocha kanjoni seinalt Mirador de Bárcenase leiukohast Santanderi departemangus Kirde-Colombias. Seda peetakse guane hõimu looduks. Meie keskseks väiteks on, et see nägu ja selle žestid olid osa märgisüsteemist ehk visuaalsest semiosfäärist, mis levis piki Chicamocha kanjoni kaldaid. Ent sel kuvandil oli ühiseid semiootilisi mudeleid ja visuaalse kommunikatsiooni strateegiaid ühiskondadega, kes elasid uuritavast alast sadade kilomeetrite kaugusel asuvates Kesk-Colombia piirkondades. Toetame seda väidet, sest kasutatud vormid, ruumikasutus piltidel ning hieraatilise iseloomuga žestid ilmuvad nii Huila departemangu petroglüüfide nägudel kui ka mõnedel Cundinamarca piirkonnast pärinevatel Hispaania-eelsetel kuldmaskidel.

Näokujutusi kaljukunstis analüüsi, kasutades visuaalsemiootilist mudelit, mis tugineb Müü rühma (Groupe μ) ettepanekutele ning Félix Thürlemani ja Jean Marie Floch'i analüüsidele. Analüüsi täiendavad Jacques Fontanille'i poolt välja pakutud semiootilise relevantsuse tasandid ning võtmemõistena Juri Lotmani semiosfääri mõiste.