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# ‘No country for old artists’? New discoveries on Upper Paleolithic rock art in Balkans

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## Résumé

Western archaeologists have traditionally considered Paleolithic art and symbolism as a phenomenon exclusively associated with anatomically modern humans (hereafter AMH). Moreover, proponents of the ‘Human Revolution’ model have suggested that art first appeared in Europe at the same time as the dispersal of AMH throughout the Old World ca. 40-50 cal. BP. While there is still no consensus about whether other hominin species (Neanderthals) created artwork, recent discoveries of several Pleistocene decorated caves in Australia, Indonesia and South Africa (dated to about c. 40,000 cal BP) open up the possibility of a non-European origin of the first artistic representations.

In 2016, we began the BALKARTS project (“Looking for the origins of art: *BALK*ans Archaeological Rock ar*T* Survey”) to test the paradigm conceptualizing Paleolithic rock art as a phenomenon exclusive to Western Europe. Our hypothesis is that the lack of rock art in adjacent areas (such as in the Balkans) is mainly due to a lack of systematic survey, rather than reflecting a past behavioral reality. To assess this possibility, we have developed a survey program comprising of a number of archaeological sites (including several Paleolithic caves) in order to identify possible prehistoric graphic evidence in the Western Balkans region.

In this paper we will present the preliminary results of the BALKARTS project. After surveying 62 caves and rock shelters in Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro, we have discovered two Paleolithic rock art sites, and we are currently studying two other possible ones. The previous lack of evidence for Paleolithic art in the area, the special relevance of the Balkans for understanding AMH’s early colonization of Europe, and debates about the cultural relationships between Eastern and Western Europe during the Upper Paleolithic, make these discoveries particularly relevant.

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