



Series **archives**
tome 34
165 x 240 mm paperback
text in French
492 pages, 140 figures
ISBN 978-2-38327-040-9
39 € TTC | 36.97 € VAT Excluded

Published on 18th December 2025

L'art des peuples sans art une histoire des gravures préhistoriques du Mont Bégo (1868-1939)

Maddalena Cataldi

THE BOOK

The Vallée des Merveilles, in the Alpes Maritimes, is one of the current jewels of the Mercantour National Park. Located around Mont Bégo, it has been famous since the 16th century for its *mirabilia* (wonders). This scientific term referred to representations of Greek objects and myths on coloured rocks, as well as natural magnets, “monsters” and “Pygmies”.

Interest in the site was revived around 1860 as part of a newly established field of knowledge, prehistory. *L'art des peuples sans art* analyses the emergence of this new scholarly interest and the heritage status of the site, which was seen as an expression of the culture of “primitive man”. Maddalena Cataldi analyses how, over the course of a century, scientific interpretations have succeeded one another, imposing a prehistoric imaginary in place of the references to Greek myths invoked by 16th-century observers. The study of Mount Bégo offers a privileged observatory of everyday prehistory. It reveals the technical codes associated with the reproduction, dating and varied hermeneutics of rock engravings. It reveals a series of international controversies on the origins of art and writing, primitive religions, the value of ethnographic comparativism and the obscure, haunting questions, at the end of the day, of national ethnogenesis in fascist Europe.

THE AUTHOR

A research fellow at the CNRS (Larhra - UMR 5190), Maddalena Cataldi holds a PhD in the history of science from the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales. Her research focuses in particular on the national and international dimensions of the activities of scientists who developed the paradigm of biological unity and cultural diversity of humanity and who defended the need to protect its heritage.

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