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Rodrigo de Balbín Behrmann, José Javier Alcolea González, Manuel Alcaraz Castaño & Primitiva Bueno Ramírez. *La Cueva de Tito Bustillo. Ribadesella. Asturias*. (Consejería de Cultura, Política Lingüística y Turismo del Principado de Asturias-Impronta, 2022. Oviedo, 414 pp., 407 colour illustr., 31 tables, pbk. ISBN: 978-84-124856-4-6.)

The cave of Tito Bustillo in Asturias was found by a team of teenage speleologists in April 1968 and was named after one of them who was killed in a mountaineering accident only nineteen days later. It proved to contain not only a great wealth of imagery, but also had an important archaeological occupation at its original entrance.

In the early years, both art and archaeology were investigated by a number of scholars, most notably the late lamented Alfonso Moure Romanillo, and then by Rodrigo de Balbín Behrmann. Their work resulted in a long series of important papers, and over the years a number of popular books on the cave were published by others (e.g. Millara & Angulo, 2010;

Polledo, 2011). Now, however, after half a century of work, Balbín and his team have produced the definitive account of the cave and its contents.

Very few major Ice Age decorated caves have ever been adequately published; even Altamira, the first to be discovered, still lacks a comprehensive monograph, despite the two co-authored by the abbé Breuil!

Tito Bustillo is unique in many ways; it is the only decorated cave I know where one can hear the mysterious roar of the underground river far below, and it is surely no coincidence that the vast majority of its imagery is concentrated close to that spot. The cave contained a source of unusual violet pigment (a natural mixture of red ochre and manganese) which was

used for some big horse images (pp. 129, 173). At what was the far end of the cave is an astonishing painted motif that is usually interpreted as a 'map' (p. 53). There is a large depiction of a whale in one side chamber (pp. 105–06); another houses a collection of strange motifs that are usually assumed to represent vulvas (p. 59); and another side chamber, which is physically very difficult to reach, contains a drapery with a humanoid figure on both sides (pp. 83–84; also presented on the book's cover). In addition, some beautiful portable art objects have also been found, in particular a pile of four bone cut-outs of horseheads, discovered on a ledge (p. 281).

The cave was visited in different phases of the Upper Palaeolithic—dating ranges from a minimum of c. 30,000 years BC (from calcite on top of the humanoids) to the classic Magdalenian. During those many millennia, people clearly explored every nook and cranny of this 600-metre cavern.

The monograph begins by presenting the team's methodology for studying and recording the panels, themes, and techniques of the imagery. The other caves in the same massif and local area are then examined, some of them also containing minor decoration. The imagery in Tito Bustillo itself is divided into eleven ensembles, with No. 1 being at the far end, and No. 10 being the principal panel close to the original entrance. A combination of excellent photographs and tracings show the reader what is in each group, while tables supply all the details.

There follows a full account of excavations and prospectations in the cave, with major finds being highlighted, such as a carved ibex head, some engraved plaquettes and bones, and the pile of horseheads. Finally, the various dating results

obtained from different figures and sectors are presented. A comprehensive English summary of the Spanish text is provided at the end.

Inevitably, where so many different figures are presented—not all of them very readable—one may disagree with some of the authors' interpretations. This certainly applies to the enigmatic motifs in the 'vulvas' chamber, and particularly where the myth of the German Aurignacian 'lion-man' is concerned (p. 305)—in this reviewer's opinion it is a standing bear, and dates to the Magdalenian (see Clifford & Bahn, 2018)! But despite these minor quibbles, this handsome volume stands as the epitome of how to publish all aspects of a rich and complex decorated cave in a well-structured and beautifully illustrated format. It is to be hoped that it will serve as a template for other such caves, and the authors should be thanked and congratulated for their achievement.

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doi:10.1017/ea.2024.39