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Abstract

Micro-Raman spectroscopic technique allowed the characterization of organic and inorganic pigments of different colours sampled from a rock-art shelter named Abrigo del Aguila, located in the district of Badajoz, Cabeza del Buey (Extremadura – Spain). Micro-Raman analyses has been coupled with SEM observation and elemental analyses (EDS). The white and the black colours, used for non-representative figures, have been identified respectively as anatase and amorphous carbon, while two different type of red pigment has been found on figurative representations. The darker one, sampled, from a sun-figure, comprises an indeterminate organic compound beside of hematite. The second one, sampled from an anthropomorphic figure, is of a brilliant red and only hematite has been recognized in it.

Keywords Laser spectroscopy; Micro-Raman; Scanning Electron Microscopy; Schematic rock-art; Pigments.

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Cover Letter

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The authors confirming that it is of original material i.e. has not been submitted elsewhere for publication.

This research has been carried out in, with an interdisciplinary team from Italy (TekneHub Laboratory - Ferrara University), Portugal (Geosciences Centre) and Spain (ACINEP).

This paper explores the processes involved in the production of prehistoric paintings using red, white and black pigments; from sourcing the raw material to the processing of pigments.

In this work we present the results of micro-Raman spectroscopy analyses on pigments samples of a site in Badajoz Spain. Pigments from these rock painting panels' as well natural ochre samples were analysed using Raman spectroscopy, Scanning Electron microscopy (SEM). Results from red pigments revealed that the main chemical element was iron (Fe). The Raman spectra indicated the presence of hematite.

With SEM analyses, other chemical elements besides iron were identified; the white and the black colours, used for non-representative figures, have been identified respectively as anatase and amorphous carbon, while two different type of red pigment has been found on figurative representations. The darker one, sampled, from a solar figure, comprises an indeterminate organic compound beside of hematite. The second one, sampled from an anthropomorphic figure, is of a brilliant red and only hematite has been recognized in it. Possibility of rock-art dating using carbon trace from black figures is also discussed.

Dear Dr. Dahotre,

Thank you for considering our article for publication in Optics and Laser Technology. We are grateful also to the reviewer for the valuable suggestions provided, which were of great help in revising the manuscript.

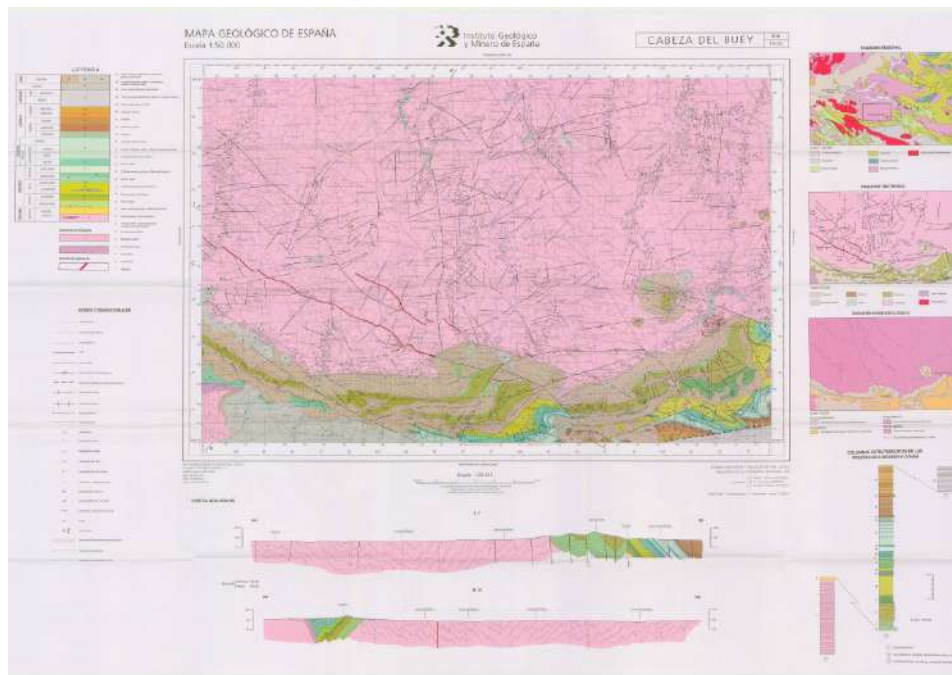
Here are responses to the reviewer comments:

Comment 1: What type of rocks is supporting the paintings? Are they calcareous, sandstone, granitic... etc.? It is important to know their composition in order to distinguish between pictorial and supporting materials. Samples from these rocks should have been analyzed.

(Lines 29-30) The archaeological site of Abrigo del Águila is placed in the East part of the quartzitic alignment of Sierra de la Rinconada (Fig. 1).

Even if it is no more possible to access the site and collect samples of the supporting rocks to be analysed, it's possible to state that the substrate of the paintings is quartzite, on the base of the geological map of the area (also available on line at .

<http://info.igme.es/cartografiadigital/geologica/Magna50Hoja.aspx?intranet=false&id=806>)



Comment 2: The Raman spectrum shown in Fig. 4 does not correspond to reference spectra of natural alizarin (e.g. Ref. 18, Table 2, Az powder, the strong bands at 1569, 1191 and 470 cm^{-1} are not present in the spectrum of Fig. 4; see also the spectra from Pozzi et al., Heritage Science, 1 (2013) 23). The additional record of the spectral range 2800-3200 cm^{-1} would have shown relevant C-H aromatic stretching bands of the anthraquinone rings at wavenumbers higher than 3000 cm^{-1} (or the presence of C-H stretching bands below 3000 cm^{-1} of possible saturated organic compounds). Moreover, several organic compounds are present in madder root. Ruberthryrine from the root dried, fermented and treated with acids yields xylose, glucose, alizarin and purpurin. Did the prehistoric painters know this technique? This is the first time that alizarin is considered a prehistoric pigment. Clear evidences must be presented to confirm this finding, i.e. a reliable assignment of the Raman bands observed in the spectrum attributed to alizarin. Is the spectrum of Fig. 4 indicating a mixture of different compounds from madder root? Alizarin is a very fluorescent compound exciting at 632 nm. A higher wavelength, 785 nm (Ref. 18) or 1064 nm is required to avoid the

strong background of fluorescence radiation, and the use of the SERS technique to get acceptable Raman spectra.

(Lines 119-147) Ochre are not the only raw material used to make red pigment. The analysis of the sample taken from the sun-figure at Abrigo del Águila rock-art shelter suggests the use of an organic component in association with hematite. This figure is of a dark shade of red if compared with other red figures in the painted shelter and Raman analysis of the sample taken from it has revealed the presence of undefined organic matter with peaks at 1176, 1232, 1359 (vs), 1371, 1484, 1590.(Fig.4).

This organic matter may or may be not part of original pigment.

Organic chromophores, although referenced since historical times, are very difficult to preserve, so they are sometimes identified as dyes but not used as pigments. The extraction of the dyes has been done from different parts of the plants: in some the leaves were used, while others used flowers, roots, fruits, trunks or seeds. The dyes could be extracted through complex processes involving different operations, such as maceration, distillation, fermentation, decantation, precipitation, filtration, etc. [17].

A widely used vegetable dye was the natural indigo known from the Egyptians to the Britons, extracted from the *Isatis tinctoria* plant [18]. From the *garança* plant (*Rubia tinctorium*) various colouring compounds were extracted, such as alizarin and purpurin (not to be confused with purpurin of animal origin). These substances have been used at least since the 3rd millennium BC to dye tissues and still been used and marketed today [19,20]. Alizarin is a dye molecule of the anthraquinone family, which can be found in many other plants and animals [21, 22]. . Some examples of anthraquinone used as pigments in an archaeological context are cited in Clementi et al. (2011) [21].

Because of weak Raman signal and strong fluorescence background, alizarin and other highly fluorescent anthraquinone dyes are usually detected using surface-enhanced Raman scattering (SERS) in order to improve Raman signal and quenched the fluorescence background [23, 24].

(Line147) Moreover, there is the possibility that the organic compound derives from pigment's rearrangement.

Comment 3: On the other side alizarin is photodegradable and partially soluble in water. Does alizarin support thousands of years on the wall of a rock shelter with sunlight and possible humidity and rain?

There´s some bibliographic reference on organic compounds recognized in rock art (Serrano et al., 2007; Clementi et al., 2011).

Comment 4: Check if the spectrum shown in Fig. 4 does not correspond to a prehistoric pigment, but to organic compounds from biofilms covering the pictograph (microbial photo-pigments, bacteria, fungi, algae or lichen colonies... etc.).

(Lines 143-146) On the other hand, many of the organic materials identified are "concretions" that may appear for biogenic or climatological reasons, associated to the presence of microorganisms that, in contact with the humidity and depending of the temperature conditions and sun exposure, mineralize - biomineralization [25], making it difficult to interpret the obtained results.

We would be happy to make any further changes that may be required.

Highlights

In this paper we present the chemical results from rock painting of Abrigo del Águila rock shelter.

Nine samples of pigments of white, red and black pigments samples were collected.

The analyses of the samples have been carried out using Raman microspectroscopy and SEM-EDS chemical analyses.

Results indicate presence of titanium (anatase), hematite, charcoal and a possible organic substance.

1 **Micro-Raman spectroscopy for the characterization of rock-art pigments from *Abrigo del***
2 ***Águila* (Badajoz – Spain)**

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9

10 ABSTRACT

11 Micro-Raman spectroscopic technique allowed the characterization of organic and inorganic
12 pigments of different colours sampled from a rock-art shelter named *Abrigo del Águila*, located in
13 the district of Badajoz, Cabeza del Buey (Extremadura – Spain). Micro-Raman analyses has been
14 coupled with SEM observation and elemental analyses (EDS). The white and the black colours,
15 used for non-representative figures, have been identified respectively as anatase and amorphous
16 carbon, while two different type of red pigment has been found on figurative representations. The
17 darker one, sampled, from a sun-figure, comprises an indeterminate organic compound beside of
18 hematite. The second one, sampled from an anthropomorphic figure, is of a brilliant red and only
19 hematite has been recognized in it.

20 KEYWORDS: Laser spectroscopy, Micro-Raman, Scanning Electron Microscopy, Schematic rock-
21 art, pigments.

22 1. INTRODUCTION

23 As confirmed by several previous studies, μ -Raman spectroscopy is proving to be a valuable tool
24 for the investigation of pigments used in prehistoric rock-art paintings as well as on a wide range of
25 archaeological artefacts [1-5]. In this work Raman spectroscopy and SEM-EDS analysis have been
26 carried out in order to characterize rock-art pigments from *Abrigo del Águila* (Cabeza del Buey,
27 Badajoz, Spain).

28 1.1 Regional and Geological Settings

29 The archaeological site of *Abrigo del Águila* is placed in the East part of the quartzitic alignment of
30 *Sierra de la Rinconada* (Fig. 1). The site is located 40 meters above soil level, within a great rock
31 crack of about meters of length. Since prehistory this place have played an important role for its
32 orographic characteristics as it's located in the region which separates *Sierra de la Rinconada* from
33 *Sierra de la Osa*, becoming an inevitable passage for the routes towards the prairies of *Sierra de la*
34 *Rinconada*.

35 Fig. 1 - Geographic Location of *Abrigo del Águila* (Badajoz, Spain)

36

37 1.2 Rock art pictographs at *Abrigo del Águila*

38 The present paper classifies and investigates rock-art pigments from the archaeological site of
39 *Abrigo del Águila*. The pictorial rock-art group consists of thousands of figures that are arranged in

40 45 rock panels and are placed in the inner part of the rock-shelter. Preliminary studies revealed
41 repeated pictorial motives that are irregularly spread on the surface of the archaeological site: some
42 of the areas are characterized by few motives, while other show real palimpsests. Motifs are both
43 abstract and figurative.

44 Despite the high concentration of these figures, it is difficult to evaluate the figurative overlapping
45 in order to determine the diachronic evolution of the graphical use of this site. Even if it is not
46 possible to establish a detailed chronology, cultural references exist that allow to refer the site to the
47 lap-time between the end of the Neolithic and the Copper Age [6].

48

49 In schematic rock-art of Iberian Peninsula figures are usually of a red colour, drawn with mineral
50 pigments rich in iron oxides, such as hematite or goethite. Black and white pigments are, instead,
51 uncommon [7]. At *Abrigo del Águila* rock-art shelter most of the figures are red, but white and
52 black representation are also present. The red colour is of several shades, from orange tones to
53 darker ones. The different colour shade could be due to several factors such as conservative state,
54 environmental and biological degradation, interaction with rock surface, diverse adherence to the
55 rock support, different thickness of pigments (Fig.2).

56 Fig.2 - Overlapping figures in panel 36, from *Abrigo del Águila*.

57

58 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

59 2.1 *Sample collection*

60 Nine samples were collected in strategic figurative representations, in order to encompass all the
61 chrono-cultural spectrum of the painting motives and variation of the colour of the figures (white,
62 black and various shades of red) were also taken into account. Where possible, sample collection
63 has been done using non-contact ethical extraction techniques (applying the code of ethics and
64 guidelines for practice of American Institute for conservation). Each sample, weighing between 10
65 and 100 mg, was extracted in areas of the panel where pigment was easily observed. Each sample
66 was obtained using a sterilized tungsten scalpel and insert in a 0,5ml microcentrifuge tube [8].

67 The archaeometric research aims to create knowledge based with all the relevant parameters and
68 can provide reliable data for interpretation, conservation and management of rock-art sites. In this
69 context, analytical techniques applied to elemental, chemical and structural characterization of
70 parietal pigments and deterioration causes, thus provide vital information.

71 2.2 *Instrumental*

72 Micro-Raman spectroscopy was employed to determine the mineralogical composition of pigment
73 samples. Raman measurements were performed by LabRam HR800 spectrometer (Horiba Jobin
74 Yvon, France), coupled with an Olympus BXFM optical microscope (Olympus, Tokyo, Japan). The
75 spectrometer was equipped with air-cooled CCD detector (1024×256 pixels) set at -70 C° , and
76 with 600 and 1800 grooves/mm gratings. The laser beam was concentrated in a spot with 1 mm
77 diameter and the spectral resolution was approximately 4 cm^{-1} . The He-Ne laser line at 632.82 nm
78 was used as excitation source and was filtered to keep the laser power varying from 0.2 to 10mW.

79 Exposure time, beam power and accumulations were optimized for each sample in order to obtain
80 sufficiently informative spectra but ensuring to avoid alteration of the sample. Several
81 measurements were performed at low powers and increasing it gradually, where possible. Raman
82 spectra were recorded in the range of 200–2000 cm^{-1} with an exposure time of 5–16 seconds and 5–
83 11 accumulations. The 10x and 50 x microscope objectives were employed to focus the laser beam
84 onto the samples, placed on the X-Y motorized sample holder, and the spot size diameter was about
85 2–3 μm . The wavelength scale was calibrated using a Silicon standard (520.5 cm^{-1}) and the acquired
86 spectra were compared with scientific published data and reference databases, such as Horiba
87 LabSpec 5 (Horiba) and RRUFF (RRUFF, University of Arizona, AZ, USA).

88 SEM-EDS analysis has been carried out in order to study the morphology of pigment particles and
89 to determine the chemical composition of each sample. SEM observations and EDS microanalyses
90 were carried out using a ZEISS EVO MA15-HR scanning electron microscope (SEM) (Zeiss, Jena,
91 Germany), equipped by Oxford Inca 250 X-Act EDS microanalysis system (Oxford Instruments,
92 Abingdon, United Kingdom). The specimens were not coated with gold or carbon; therefore, the
93 analysis was performed under variable pressure. The combined use of secondary and backscattered
94 electron imaging modes provided to better recognize the pictorial layers from the rock substrate.
95 The analyses were performed using an accelerating voltage of 20 kV and a working distance of 8.5
96 mm.

97

98 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

99 Table 1- Results

100 3.1 Red pigment

101 Red figures at *Abrigo del Águila* rock-art shelter are mainly composed of hematite. Raman spectra
102 of the red samples are presented in Fig. 3 and show the typical peaks of this mineral at 222, 289,
103 406, 607, 658, 1313 cm^{-1} . This is consistent with the literature about prehistoric rock-art pigments
104 and with the results obtained by other authors [1, 3, 8-13]. Hematite is a very common mineral and
105 is one of the principal components of natural ochres that have been used since prehistory in mural
106 paintings [14].

107 What is remarkable in the spectra obtained in this research is the double peak at 607 and 658 cm^{-1} .
108 These peaks can be attributable to a disordered phase of hematite, as occur in natural ochre [13, 15]
109 but many other factors, both anthropic and natural, such as heating, grinding, biodegradation and
110 weathering can be responsible for the arising of these peaks and Raman technique cannot be used to
111 differentiate among them [15].

112 Figure 3 - Raman spectrum of hematite from sample AGU_05.

113 In addition to high concentration of Fe, SEM-EDS analyses on red samples revealed also the
114 presence of Al and Si. Thanks to the thickness of the pictorial layer, it is possible to attribute these
115 elements to the pictorial matrix and not to the rock substratum, reinforcing the hypothesis that red
116 pigment has been obtained from natural red ochre [16].

117 Table 2 - Semi-quantitative SEM-EDS analyses performed on two different type of red pigment
118 (AGU_05/AGU_09)

119 Ochre are not the only raw material used to make red pigment. The analysis of the sample taken
120 from the sun-figure at Abrigo del Águila rock-art shelter suggests the use of an organic component
121 in association with hematite. This figure is of a dark shade of red if compared with other red figures
122 in the painted shelter and Raman analysis of the sample taken from it has revealed the presence of
123 undefined organic matter with peaks at 1176, 1232, 1359 (vs), 1371, 1484, 1590.(Fig.4).

124 This organic matter may or may be not part of original pigment.

125 Organic chromophores, although referenced since historical times, are very difficult to preserve, so
126 they are sometimes identified as dyes but not used as pigments. The extraction of the dyes has been
127 done from different parts of the plants: in some the leaves were used, while others used flowers,
128 roots, fruits, trunks or seeds. The dyes could be extracted through complex processes involving
129 different operations, such as maceration, distillation, fermentation, decantation, precipitation,
130 filtration, etc. [17].

131 A widely used vegetable dye was the natural indigo known from the Egyptians to the Britons,
132 extracted from the *Isatis tinctoria* plant [18]. From the garança plant (*Rubia tinctorium*) various
133 colouring compounds were extracted, such as alizarin and purpurin (not to be confused with
134 purpurin of animal origin). These substances have been used at least since the 3rd millennium BC to
135 dye tissues and still been used and marketed today [19,20]. Alizarin is a dye molecule of the
136 anthraquinone family, which can be found in many other plants and animals [21, 22]. . Some
137 examples of anthraquinone used as pigments in an archaeological context are cited in Clementi et
138 al. (2011) [21].

139 Figure 4 - Raman spectrum of sample AGU_ 09 (organic substance)

140 Because of weak Raman signal and strong fluorescence background, alizarin and other highly
141 fluorescent antraquinone dyes are usually detected using surface-enhanced Raman scattering
142 (SERS) in order to improve Raman signal and quenched the fluorescence background [23, 24].

143 On the other hand, many of the organic materials identified are "concretions" that may appear for
144 biogenic or climatological reasons, associated to the presence of microorganisms that, in contact
145 with the humidity and depending of the temperature conditions and sun exposure, mineralize -
146 biomineralization [25], making it difficult to interpret the obtained results.

147 Moreover, there is the possibility that the organic compound derives from pigment's rearrangement.

148 3.2 *White pigment*

149 Evidences of the use of white pigment in Spanish prehistoric rock art are very rare and so are the
150 available informations in literature [7, 10] for this reason is very important to determine chemical
151 and mineralogical composition of prehistoric white pigments.]. μ -Raman analyses performed on
152 white pigment sampled from Abrigo del Águila rock art shelter has shown the presence of anatase
153 (fig.5) with characteristic peaks at 143, 196, 396, 516 and 637 cm^{-1} [29, 31]. This mineral is a

154 polymorph of titanium dioxide and occurs in nature in many geological contexts but in relatively
155 small quantities and rarely as well formed crystals [32].

156

157 Figure 5 - Raman spectrum of sample AGU_01 (anatase)

158 Commercially, anatase has started to be widely used as white colourant since the early twentieth
159 century, due to the difficulties to synthesize it before the modern commercial manufacture began.
160 For this reason anatase is considered one of the key inorganic pigment indicators in authenticity
161 studies and some researchers assume its use in antiquity as unlikely. Nevertheless it has been found
162 on pottery both from Neolithic and roman period as a component of the white pigment used for
163 decorations [38, 32] and on rock-art pigments, as reported by Edwards et al. [33]. Laser
164 spectroscopy techniques, such as μ -Raman spectroscopy, are able to detect anatase in clay white
165 pigments, even if it is present in very small quantities, as anatase has an extraordinarily intense
166 Raman scattering [23].

167 SEM-EDS analysis performed on the white pigments sampled at *Abrigo del Águila* rock-art shelter
168 shows a widespread abundance of Al, Si and K, suggesting a clay composition (kaolinite, illite) of
169 the pigment (Fig. 6).

170 The presence of punctual concentrations of titanium is also noticeable and is referable to the
171 presence of titanium dioxide (anatase) in the matrix of the pigment.

172 Raman bands attributable to clay minerals have not been recognized in the spectra due to the high
173 fluorescence background of aluminosilicates [11] and because the intense Raman scattering of
174 anatase, whose bands dominate the spectrum [23]. Thus, contribution of SEM-EDS analysis has
175 been essential to attempt any interpretation.

176 Figure 6 - SEM-EDS analyses on a sample of white pigment. High percentages of Ti are
177 concentrated in the small white crystals attributable to anatase. The other elements, which were
178 detected in the grey matrix, suggest clay minerals in the samples.

179 As anatase can be incorporated naturally in kaolin, usually at the 2% level, and the latter has been
180 used as white pigment in antiquity [31, 33], we assume that the white figures at *Abrigo del Águila*
181 rock-art shelter could have been made using minerals from the illite-kaolinite group. In particular,
182 kaolin is found relatively pure in numerous location and requires little processing for use as a
183 pigment [13].

184 3.3 Black pigment

185 Black figures are also rare in Iberian Peninsula schematic *rock-art*, although are more frequent than
186 the white ones. The most often detected raw material used for drawing black figure is amorphous
187 carbon [3, 8, 11] and this result has been confirmed also in this case. Small black particles have
188 been found in the specimen taken from the dark figure and analysed with Raman spectroscopy
189 giving rise to amorphous carbon spectrum (Fig. 7).

190 Figure 7 - Raman spectrum of sample AGU_8 (amorphous carbon)

191 Carbonaceous materials (of mineral, vegetable or animal origin) used as pigment has been identified
192 in prehistoric sites worldwide and carbon-based black pigments has been largely employed even
193 later in times [13, 34]. μ -Raman spectroscopy has played and continues to play an important role for
194 their study and characterization. Through this analytical technique is possible to differentiate
195 between different type of carbonaceous material allowing for example provenance study or
196 archaeological interpretation [34, 35].

197 Figure 7 shows the strong and broad G and D1 bands of amorphous carbon at 1603 and 1348 cm^{-1}
198 respectively [3, 4, 8, 11, 34] that are typical of disordered sp^2 carbon. In particular, D1 band at 1348
199 cm^{-1} is one of the D bands associated with different causes of disorder [34]. The absence of bands in
200 the 960-970 cm^{-1} spectral region rule out the use of ivory or calcined bones in the pigment
201 preparation, as previously observed by other authors [3, 4, 8, 11]. These observations suggest that a
202 charcoal of vegetal origin or soot is the main component of the pigment used to draw the black
203 figure at *Abrigo del Águila* rock-art shelter.

204 4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

205 Archaeometric analyses, carried out thanks to laser spectrometric techniques, allowed to
206 characterise rock art pigments used at *Abrigo del Águila* in the Spanish region of Extremadura. In
207 this context, red, white and black pigments were collected and analysed.

208 This is the first investigation on white pigment used in Extremadura rock art, but the use of white
209 pigments rich in titanium has already been documented in other rock-art site in the Iberian
210 Peninsula.

211 The red hematite pigments results have origin from various types of regional ochres. One of the
212 samples revealed the presence of organic substance associated with hematite.

213 Black figures were drawn using amorphous carbon, the presence of carbonaceous material in the
214 pigment could allow the use of radiocarbon dating (AMS) techniques [36] to obtain an absolute
215 chronology of the rock-art at *Abrigo del Águila*, favouring further comparisons and interpretations
216 of the archaeological context.

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344

SAMPLE	COLOUR	DESCRIPTION	RAMAN RESULTS	SEM-EDS RESULTS
AGU_01	White	Non-representative figure, parallel lines	Anatase	Titanium Barium
AGU_02	Red	Pectiniform	Hematite	--
AGU_03	Red	Eye Idol	Hematite	Silicium
AGU_04	White	Non-representative figure, parallel lines	Hematite Calcite	--
AGU_05	Red	Anthropomorphic figure	Hematite	Iron Titanium
AGU_06	Red	Red figure	Not analysed	Not analysed
AGU_07	Red	Pectiniform figure	Hematite	--
AGU_08	Black	Non-representative figures, parallel lines	Amorphous carbon	Barium
AGU_09	Dark red	Soliform figure	Hematite + Organic compound	Iron Arsenic Barium

345 Table 1 - Results

346

Element	Red (AGU_05) Hematite	Dark Red (AGU_09) Organic Substance
	Weight%	Weight%
C	11.64	4.83
O	43.13	40.62
Na	0.17	0.00
Mg	0.43	0.00
Al	4.84	3.21
Si	20.42	5.12
P	0.58	0.87
S	0.45	0.25
K	1.00	0.45
Ca	0.40	0.00
Ti	0.51	0.00
Fe	16.44	43.00
As	0.00	1.66

347 Table 2- Semi-quantitative SEM-EDS analyses performed on two different type of red pigment
348 (AGU_05/AGU_09)

349

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351 Fig. 1- Geographic location of *Abrigo del Águila*.

352 Fig. 2- Overlapping figures in panel 36, from *Abrigo del Águila*.

353 Fig. 3- Raman spectrum of sample AGU_05 (hematite).

354 Fig. 4- Raman spectrum of sample AGU_09 (organic substance).

355 Fig. 5- Raman spectrum of sample AGU_01 (anatase).

356 Fig. 6 - SEM-EDS analyses on a sample of white pigment. High percentages of Ti are concentrated
357 in the small white crystals attributable to anatase. The other elements, which were detected in the
358 grey matrix, suggest clay minerals in the samples.

359 Fig. 7- Raman spectrum of sample AGU_8 (amorphous carbon)

360 Table 1- Results

361 Table 2- Semi-quantitative SEM-EDS analyses performed on two different type of red pigment
362 (AGU_05/AGU_09)

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