



NETWORK FEEDBACK

AMANITA MUSCARIA ANCIENT HISTORY

PATRICK DUVIVIER

In southern France stands a beautiful mountainous massif named the Maritimes Alps, the last one of the Alps chain just before it meets with the Mediterranean sea.

In the highest and most remote part of this area stands an ancient sacred mountain named BÉGO. This mountain is surrounded with thousands of pre-historic engravings. The core of these engravings have been dated from 2500 BC to 14 BC. It is one of the oldest and most important cultural sites of this type in Europe.

There are three impressive wild valleys conducting toward this mountain, which have been considered as being three different sacred paths. The valley that surrounds MOUNT BÉGO is named the "Valley of Wonders." The higher part of this valley opens to the most important sites of engravings. At the top of it, just at the feet of the sacred mount, there is the most central and significant site—the "Altar Rock."

It is a big red-purple rough rock standing on a large plaque of a different smooth rock covered with thousands of engravings. From a tiny hole in that plaque springs a small source of living waters. This rock stands like an altar right at the core of a gigantic natural cathedral.

Just before this magic spot, at the place where the valley narrows for a last time, stands a large plaque of a particular

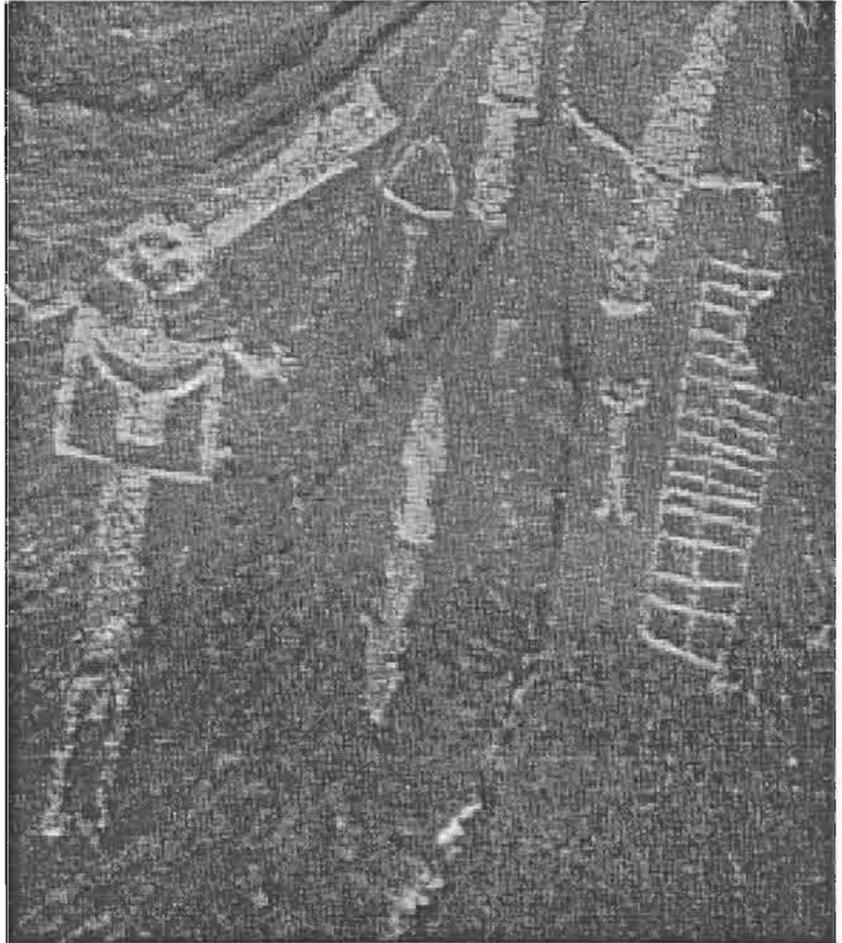


PHOTO BY GIORGIO SAMORINI

FIGURE 6. The "Chief of the Tribe" and mushroom effigy of MOUNT BÉGO.

rock that has been carried, erected, and engraved there—which is a unique case in this context. This engraving is in many regards noteworthy. It is a very central one, and it stands on the sacred path of this valley exactly like the front on a medieval church. This site might then represent and summarize the central element of a very ancient cult.

This carving also has one of the fairly rare anthropomorphic figures of the site, and it has been named the "Chief of the Tribe." Now look at the reproduction of it (see back cover), and it is even more obvious in a photograph (see FIGURE 6) or in life. This supposed "Chief of the Tribe" might rather be the representation of a shaman whose plant ally or plant of vision was the mythic mushroom *Amanita muscaria*. Exactly like with the Siberian or the Ojibway shamans for whom the power of the sacred *A. muscaria* was also closely linked with lightning (STAFFORD 1992); our "Chief of the Tribe" is enlightened (symbolized by the lightning bolt) with the power of the mushroom.





The other striking thing about this story is that there is, among scholars devoted to the study of this very important site, a school among which noted personalities for over a century and a half, have developed the thesis of an Indo-European origin and influence on this site, going back to the very beginning of the *Vedas*. Incredibly, none of them—as far as I know—has identified the small motif over the head of the lightning-stricken “Chief” as being a mushroom of the species *A. muscaria*. (It is worth noting that *A. muscaria* grow all over the foothills of these mountains.) Instead these scholars have developed all kinds of sophisticated interpretations about this so-called “abstract design.”

There was a very ancient cult, 4500-years-old, in the Maritimes Alps of southeast France. Its origins go back to the end of the Neolithic, 2500 BC, and it lasted all through the Bronze and Iron ages, up to the coming of the Romans in 14 BC. This cult of shamanic practices was linked with some kind of Vedic or pre-Vedic religious influence.

Now, if we accept that the motif is a representation of an *A. muscaria*, and also R. GORDON WASSON’s proposition that this mushroom was the principal original component of the Vedic Soma, then we have to conclude that both had in common the ritual use of the sacred Siberian mushroom for religious and shamanic purpose. Hey people, this is quite a finding!

In turn, if the scholars who suggest a Vedic influence on this neolithic European cult are right and the motif is an *A. muscaria*, this might then be the first archeological discovery able to prove R. GORDON WASSON’s proposition about identity of the Vedic Soma. — P.D., France

After receiving the information above, ER contacted GIORGIO SAMORINI, editor of Eleusis (see page 49), and a noted expert on ancient mushroomic art. He kindly provided his additional thoughts, as well as the photograph (see FIGURE 6) and a related bibliography (included on page 55). We are grateful for his input.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS ON THE MUSHROOM EFFIGY OF MOUNT BEGO

I have been familiar with the rock art of MOUNT BEGO for many years and I always believed that the famous “Altar Rock” features an explicit representation of *Amanita muscaria*.

Apart from the mushroom images of Scandinavian rock art (KAPLAN 1975), this is the only other representation of the fly agaric in European prehistoric art discovered to date. The rock engravings of MOUNT BEGO are part of a larger group of rock art works in the Alpine arc dating from late Paleolithic to historic times. The largest concentration of rock engravings (more than 100,000 images) is in Valcamonica (Lombardy, Italy) and is the work of the Camuns people (cf. ANATI 1982). I noted in an earlier work that there were many psychoactive mushrooms, *Amanita* and *Psilocybe* in the area of the engraved rocks of Valcamonica and suggested that these mushrooms may have had a part to play in the cults and rituals of the Camuns (SAMORINI 1988). Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that all the rock art of the Camuns and Alpine rock art in general are closely associated with religious cults.

The second series of rock art works of major importance in the Alpine arc (over 30,000 images) is at MOUNT BEGO and the “Valley of Wonders.” Studies of this prehistoric site go back one hundred years (cf. BERNARDINI 1971; BLAIN 1976). The main peculiarity of this rock art is the altitude of the site (2000–2500 meters) and the significant—one might say obsessive—presence of horned zoomorphic images (essentially Bovidae). A further peculiarity is that practically all these horned figures are engraved in such a manner that the horns point toward the peak of the mountain. This is not a chance occurrence. It has been observed that MOUNT BEGO is one of the Maritime Alps mountains most frequently struck by lightning, and it has been hypothesized on more than one occasion that MOUNT BEGO was selected by prehistoric peoples as a “sanctuary” precisely because of this meteorological characteristic (cf. for example, MARRO 1945–46). In ancient times it was widely believed that the sacredness of certain localities could be derived from this characteristic. It is also worth noting the zigzag form of many of the MOUNT BEGO horns, reminiscent of lightning. A number of scholars have already pointed this out (cf. for example, MARRO 1944–45). We should now turn our attention to the “Altar Rock” with the engraved scene inappropriately called the “Tribal Chieftain,” about which I’ll make my own observations, adding these to the observations mentioned by P.D. in the previous article.

The anthropomorphic figure originally called “Tribal Chief” was then considered a sacrificial victim, due to the knife pointing toward the right of his head. Since there is a cow skull adorning the drape-like vestment of the anthropomorphic figure, for a long time it was thought that this was a scene associated with a Mithraic-style sacrificial act. How-





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