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## Dangerous 'Preservation' in Malaysia

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LETTERE AL DIRETTORE - *LETTERS TO THE EDITOR*  
LETTRES AU DIRECTEUR - *CARTAS AL DIRECTOR*

AMERICAN ROCK ART  
RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

It has been over a quarter of a century since I first became interested-no intrigued, really-with rock art. Standing below a panel of small, red-painted figures in the Southern California desert, gave me the greatest feeling of being privy to history, a feeling that I had never felt in any other archaeological context. Yet this excitement was leavened with the realization that this remnant of our heritage was quite tenuous.

You can image the exaltation when I discovered that there were others equally concerned. The birth of ARARA gave our collective concern life that has subsequently grown into maturity. The formation of the Advisory Board in turn represents the most important step forward since that birth in 1974. With your presence on the Board, I feel we are going to proceed at a most professional and rewarding pace. Cooperation between ARARA and the CENTRO will contribute to accomplish the purposes of our motto: 'Research, Preserve, Inform'.

Dr. Frank Bock  
American Rock Art  
Research Association  
El Toro, California, USA

THE UISPP CONGRESS

During the Southampton Congress of UISPP in September 1986, a 2-3 day meeting will discuss problems concerning 'Relations between rock art and other aspects of the respective culture'. The papers will focus on how rock art is similar to, or differs from, the styles and content of other artistic works emanating from the same culture (such as ostrich shell, pottery, wood, bone etc.). The rock art Specialist will discuss the chronology of rock art in a particular culture in connection to other ways of dating the archaeology of the culture concerned.

I will be pleased to provide further information upon request.

H.G. Bandi  
University of Bern  
Switzerland

THE STANDARD OF BCSP

Let me congratulate you on yet another excellent volume of BCSP (vol. 22). The journal's standard of presentation is unmatched in the area of rock art, and the contributions you have selected clearly underline the universality of BCSP: all continents are represented in research papers. The contributions by Lewis-Williams and Wainwright are particularly valuable additions to the world literature on rock art.

R.G. Bednarik  
Victoria, Australia

DANGEROUS 'PRESERVATION'  
IN MALAYSIA

A recent article appeared in a daily newspaper of Kuala Lumpur reports on alarming preservation measures that the Muzium Negara intends to implement at the Gua Tambun rock art site. They must be halted immediately if the rock paintings are to remain in a pristine state.

From the text and photographs published, it appears that the paintings are being outlined in chalk by the Muzium staff. This is a permanent alteration of the art, and is extremely detrimental to the future research value of the paintings. If the art is indeed being traced with chalk directly on the rock, this activity must stop, as it causes irreversible damage.

It is said that the 'preservation' includes cleaning the paintings with water. The binders and pigmentations of the paintings will most certainly be adversely affected by such methods. Conservation must not be attempted by anyone other than a rock art specialist with specific knowledge in such techniques.

The article reports that a groove will be chipped around the paintings to protect them from rainwater flowing over them. As my report to the Muzium recommends, no action is needed to divert water flow, since rain will rarely, if ever, penetrate the deep shelter. The damage from water flow has already occurred, and additional damage is doubtful. Chipping a groove in the rock face will not divert surface water flow, but it will damage the site, and will perhaps affect the delicate surface of the limestone. Also a protective coating over the art is not advised for a variety of reasons.

This is project with potentially hazardous results to the art, and should be stopped.

No doubt the Malaysian authorities have good intentions, but they must be helped to avoid a disaster.

The case should be of concern to all those involved in preservation and conservation of rock art.

Prehistoric art is an endowment of the past which must be saved for future generations.

Paul Faulstich  
Los Angeles, California

#### THE DEBATE ON HAR KARKOM

*The discoveries at Har Karkom have awakened a wave of discussions. The readers reveal such an interest in this topic that we decided to give it coverage through publication of a larger than usual selection of the comments received. Some of them are in favour, others strongly oppose the identification of Har Karkom with Biblical Mount Sinai. The principal opinions, both positive and negative, are being published to provide an overall view of the different view points. As we see, the discussion focuses on three main points: the meaning of the rock art depictions at Har Karkom, the geographical location of Mount Sinai and the dating of the events described in the Book of Exodus. This seems to be just the beginning of a very stimulating debate that we shall further follow up in forthcoming issues.*

#### HAR KARKOM E L'ITINERARIO DELL'ESODO

Mi congratulo molto per le scoperte di Har Karkom. Quando anni fa ero salito sul

Sinai (quello ufficiale) avevo trovato molto strano che gli Ebrei avessero vagabondato a tal punto da finire così lontano dall'itinerario più logico, anche se il valore simbolico di quella gigantesca montagna era molto evidente.

Roberto Ruffino  
Intercultura, Roma, Italy

#### HAR KARKOM: IL LIBRO E LA RICERCA

Avevo letto sulla stampa del suo libro Har Karkom ma solo ora ho potuto leggerlo, approfittando delle vacanze estive. Da molti anni non mi capitava di non potermi staccare da un libro dall'inizio della lettura fino alla fine. Già dall'inizio della lettura ho sentito una vera presa d'interesse che non mi ha mai lasciato fino in fondo. La logica, l'analisi, impiegati sui ritrovamenti e studi fatti da Lei e suoi collaboratori sono un meraviglioso esempio di un lavoro altamente scientifico che ha dato, senza alcuna ombra di dubbio, un forte contributo alla conoscenza della storia delle origini. Non ho potuto trattenermi dallo scriverle per esprimerle tutta la mia ammirazione e il mio incoraggiamento a proseguire i suoi studi.

Ing. J. Meytsar  
Milano, Italy

#### HAR KARKOM E LE NARRAZIONI BIBLICHE DELL'ESODO

Anati fornisce elementi di alta probabilità per l'identificazione del Sinai biblico, o almeno di quello che Israele considerava tale dal sec. VIII in avanti. Una certezza assoluta non si potrà probabilmente mai avere: esisterebbe solo ove venissero rinvenute iscrizioni che identificano il sito senza ombra di dubbio. Ma ciò appare estremamente improbabile per un luogo abbandonato all'epoca del medio Bronzo, per essere rioccupato solo in quella nabatea.

Dove invece non concordo con l'autore è nell'esame che fa dei testi, testi che tratta, nonostante la prudenza ed i dubbi che manifesta, quasi fossero testi storiografici. Chi li legga criticamente, invece, ne ricava immediatamente la quasi certezza di avere a che fare non già con itinerari tradizionali, ma con itinerari leggendari se non mitici, di valore liturgico, al livello delle narrazioni di Ulisse e di Enea, nel miglio-