

Grabados rupestres de la fachada  
atlántica europea y africana

Rock Carvings of the European  
and African Atlantic Façade

Edited by

Rodrigo de Balbín Behrmann

Primitiva Bueno Ramirez

Rafael González Antón

Carmen del Arco Aguilar

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# ROCK ART AS LAND ART. A DIACHRONIC VIEW OF THE CÔA VALLEY (NE PORTUGAL) POST-PALAEOLITHIC ROCK ART

*Luís Luís*

*Parque Arqueologico do Vale do Coa. Avda, Gago Coutinho.  
5150-610 Vila Nova de Foz Coa. PORTUGAL  
lluis.pavc@igespar.pt*

*Were someone to ask to Joana Carda what had possessed her to scratch the ground with an elm branch (...), if she had not thought of the possible consequences of an act that seemed meaningless, and these are the most dangerous acts of all, perhaps she might reply, I don't know what came over me, the branch was lying on the ground, I picked it up and drew a line."*

José Saramago, *The Stone Raft*, 1986

*Let's see: style is a subtle way to transfer life's confusion and violence to the mental scheme of a meaning unity. Do I make myself clear? No? Well, we can't stand life's numb disorder.*

Herberto Helder, *Os passos em volta*, 1963

**RESUMEN:** *El paleolítico Valle de arte rupestre al aire libre del Côa, fue dado a conocer durante la segunda mitad de los 1990. El descubrimiento de este primer arte a la luz, sólo insinuado anteriormente por unos pocos sitios de la Península Ibérica, se anunció en medio de una controversia que tuvo repercusiones internacionales. En el Valle de Côa se libró una batalla entre la conservación de un patrimonio único y la construcción de un gran proyecto hidroeléctrico que lo amenazaba. La conservación ganó, gracias a los esfuerzos de los ciudadanos portugueses y de la comunidad científica internacional.*

*El sitio fue clasificado como Monumento Nacional en 1997 y Patrimonio de la Humanidad al año siguiente. La controversia y el reconocimiento moderno de este conjunto rupestre se debió principalmente a su ciclo Paleolítico. Sin embargo, como las investigaciones continuaron, resultó evidente que en los mismos sitios, y a veces en los mismos paneles, había motivos de arte rupestre de otras fases distintas al Paleolítico. El Valle del Côa tiene hoy uno de los ciclos más largos de arte rupestre. Más de 800 paneles grabado se agrupan en más de 40 sitios, a lo largo de los últimos 20 kilómetros de río Côa y en su confluencia con el Douro. Comenzando en el Paleolítico Superior, la actividad artística regional continuó tras las fases glaciales. Hay ejemplos de motivos sub-esquemáticos y esquemáticos de los primeros agricultores, y un iconográficamente rico arte rupestre de la Edad de Hierro, que termina en una fase histórica, cuando se realiza principalmente a partir de los molineros, entre el siglo 17 y la década de los 50 del pasado siglo.*

*Basando nuestro análisis en su contexto natural, presentaremos aquí las características generales de este vasto conjunto de arte rupestre Holoceno, en el ámbito de las poblaciones que lo producen y utilizan.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE :** CONJUNTO DEL CÔA, ARTE RUPESTRE POSTPALEOLÍTICO

**ABSTRACT:** *The Côa Valley Palaeolithic open air rock art was made public during the second half of the 1990s. The discovery of this first art of the light, only previously hinted by a few sites in the Iberian Peninsula, was announced amidst a controversy that had international repercussions. In the Côa Valley a battle was fought between the conservation of a unique heritage and the construction of a large hydroelectric project that was threatening it. Conservation won, due to the efforts of the Portuguese citizens and of the international scientific community.*

*The site was classified as a National Monument in 1997 and as World Heritage the following year. The controversy and modern recognition of this rock art ensemble was mainly caused by its Palaeolithic cycle. However, as surveys continued it was clear that in the same sites, and sometimes in the same panels, there were rock art motifs from other phases than the Palaeolithic. The Côa Valley as today one of the longest rock art cycles. Over 800 engraved panels are grouped in more than 40 sites, along the last 12 miles of the River Côa, and around its confluence with River Douro. Beginning in the Upper Palaeolithic, regional artistic practice continued through out post-glacial phases. It comprises examples of sub-schematic and schematic motifs of the first agriculturalists, an iconographically rich Iron Age rock art, ending in an historic phase, when it was produced mainly by millers, between the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the 1950s.*

*Basing our analysis in its natural context, we shall present here the general features of this vast ensemble of Holocene rock art, in the context of the populations that produced and used it.*

**KEY WORDS :** CÔA ENSEMBLE, POSTPALEOLITHIC ROCK ART

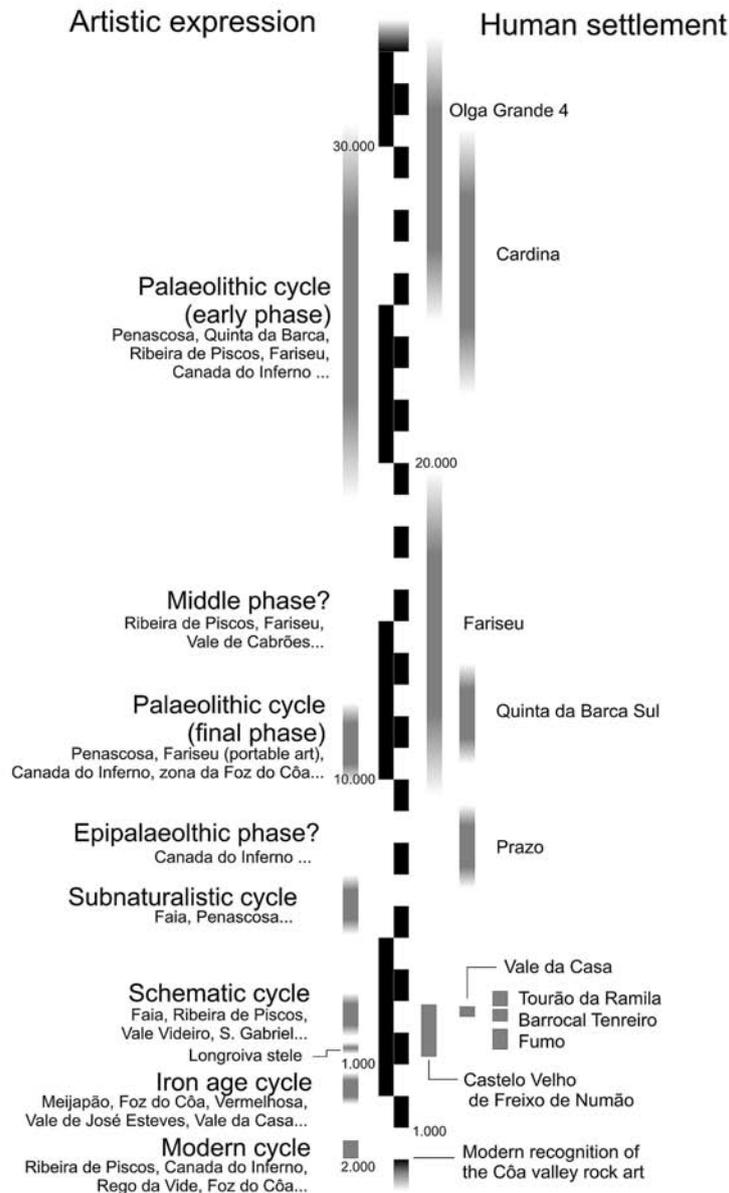


Fig. 1 - The Côa Valley rock art cycles and human settlement (in this case it is only considered scientific datings, which are cited along the text).

## INTRODUCTION.

The Côa Valley Palaeolithic open air rock art was made public during the second half of the 1990s. The discovery of this first art of the light, only previously hinted by a few sites in the Iberian Peninsula, was announced amidst a controversy that had international repercussions. In the Côa Valley a battle was fought between the conservation of a unique heritage and the construction of a large hydroelectric project that was threatening it. Conservation won, due to the efforts of the Portuguese citizens and of the international scientific community.

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Fig. 2 – The Côa Valley at the western end of the Iberian Meseta.

produced mainly by millers, between the 17th century and the 1950s.

Basing our analysis in its natural context, we shall present here the general features of this vast ensemble of Holocene rock art, in the context of the populations that produced and used it.

### ***The natural context***

The Côa Valley is located in the northern interior of Portugal in the High Douro, close to today's Spanish border. Its current administrative location results from the dynamics of the formation of the Portuguese territory, based on the conflict between peninsular Catholic kingdoms and Islamic powers through out the High Middle Ages. But if this is historically correct, it is also true that this political boundary reflects a geomorphologic reality. The final miles of the River Côa mark the western limit of the Iberian Meseta, the large geomorphologic formation of the centre of the Iberian Peninsula (fig. 2).

The last 12 miles of the Côa are characterized by a transition between Hercinian granitoids and the schist of the Schist-

Greywacke Complex, also known as the Douro-Beiras Super-Group (Ribeiro, 2001). Between Cidadelhe and its mouth, the Côa begins to flow along the high resistant Meda-Escalhão granites, which high led to the formation of a linear and deeply incised valley. This area called Faia has steep riversides, with 250 meters high scarps.

The granites are replaced by the Douro-Beiras Super-Group schists, at the latitude of Tomadías. In a first moment, along the Rio Pinhão Formation, the river valley is still deep and narrow, broadening in the area of Penascosa/Quinta da Barca, where the Pinhão Formation begins. In the final miles of the Côa course, this is the area where the valley is more open, between the mouths of Ribeirinha and Ribeira de Piscos. From then on, in the context of the Desejosa Formation, the valley narrows again and the river flows between high scarps until its mouth in the Douro, where it presents similar features.

The schist bedrock of the Rio Pinhão and Desejosa formations presents a vertical fracturing system. In the slopes these fractures are exposed, creating the typical vertical schist panels of the region, locally called “testas” (foreheads). The only horizontal surfaces used in rock art

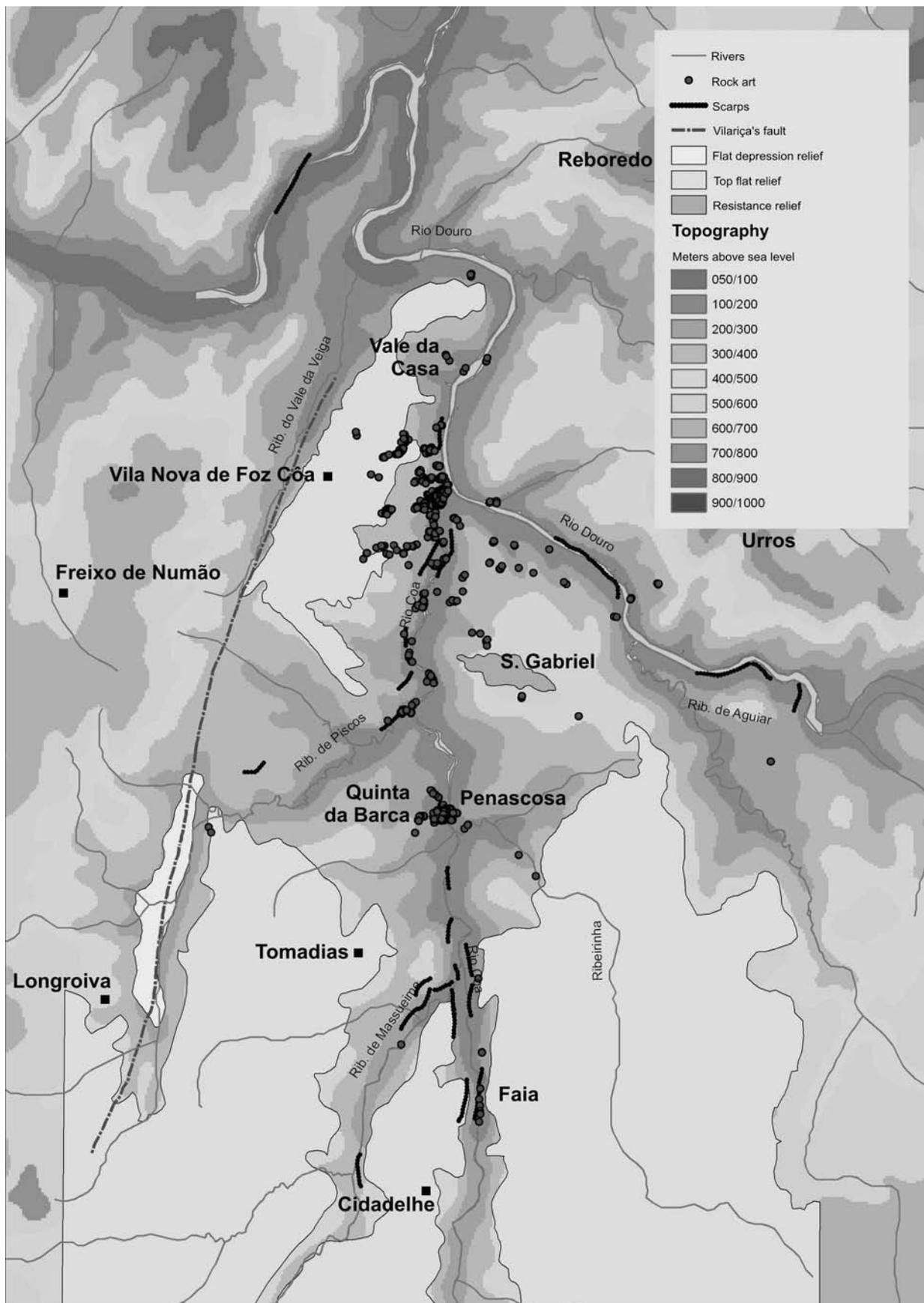


Fig. 3 – Côa Valley's geomorphology and phisigraphy (adapted from Coelho, 1996).

are in Vale da Casa, a river terrace created by the erosion of the River Douro.

Towards north, the left bank of the Côa is defined by a top flat relief at an altitude of 400 meters, until the Ribeirinha valley. From there until the Douro valley abrupt, stands the quartzite resistance relief of S. Gabriel, ascending to 650 meters high (Coelho, 1996).

Coming from east, this plateau continues to the Côa right bank, in a lower step, cut by two abrupt lines with a south-north orientation, the valleys of the Côa and Massueime. Towards north, this relief is interrupted by the valley of Ribeira de Piscos, continuing afterwards through the Chã (plain) of Vila Nova de Foz Côa, until it reaches the Douro gorge. After overcoming this deep valley, the plateau continues at the same level towards north until it reaches new quartzite resistances in Urros and Serra do Reboredo, 970 meters high.

The drainage from the plateaus towards the rivers that flow at a level about 110 meters is done through small steep valleys, that are locally called “canadas”, or through a few more incised streams.

To the west, the plateau stops at the Vilariça fault. This complex fault system, with a SSW/NNE orientation produced the fertile Longroiva graben, a flat depression relief. It then continues through the Ribeira da Vila valley until the Douro, crossing it towards the Vilariça valley.

This is the Meseta’s western limit, the place where it gives way to the Western Mountains (Cordeiro and Rebelo, 1996; Ferreira, 1978). The area of the Meda/Freixo de Numão plateau altitudes reaches over 600 meters high (fig. 3).

The geomorphology of this area hints that we are in face of a natural border. Deeply gorged, the River Côa defined an historical border between the kingdoms of Portugal and Castile-Leon until 1297. We believe that the existence of an important rock art ensemble in this area is related to this geological and geomorphologic reality.

### THE LAST FORAGERS.

The survey, record and study of the Côa Valley rock art are far from finished. New panels, new motifs, new sites continue to show as research continues (Baptista et al. 2008; Baptista and Reis, 2008). After more than a decade of research, the biggest breakthrough was the identification of panel 1 from Fariseu and its archaeological context that allowed the first archaeological dating of the European open air Palaeolithic rock art, as well as a remarkable ensemble of Palaeolithic portable art (Aubry et al., 2006; Aubry and Sampaio, 2008a and b).

The older phase of the Côa Valley Palaeolithic rock art has a minimum TL date of  $18.300 \pm 1.600$  BP, obtained

in Fariseu’s stratigraphic unit 7, in which it was found an engraved fragment of the panel (Aubry and Sampaio, 2008a). Nevertheless, since this date provides only a minimum date, this phase is stylistically attributed to the gravetto-solutrean (Baptista et al., 2008). It is an art that follows contemporary Palaeolithic cave art. It is naturalistic, based mostly on the Horse, Aurochs and Goat trilogy, mainly technically based on pecking and abrasion.

The final phase of the Palaeolithic includes rock and portable art, archaeologically dated from bone fragments found in Fariseu’s stratigraphic unit 4, that contained 66 slabs with portable art. This unit dated from Recent Dryas, between 11.000 and 10.000 BP, through TL, OSL and radiocarbon dating (Aubry and Sampaio, 2008b: 16).

The inscribed motifs in this portable art are comparable to some of the motifs carved in the Côa Valley open air panels. They tend to be more geometric, based on fine line and striated incision, and portray mostly Cervidae, but also goats, horses and aurochs. This thematic change may reflect the beginning of the environmental change that led to the change from Pleistocene to the Holocene. Faunal remains that accompanied this portable art were mainly rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), wild boar (*Sus scrofa*), chamois goat (*Rupicapra rupicapra*) and deer (*Cervus elaphus*) (Gabriel, 2008). Remains of *Leuciscus* sp. or *Rutilus* sp. and allis shad (*Alosa alosa*) were also found. Allis shad is an important species in terms of understanding the seasonality of the site occupation (Aubry and Sampaio, 2008b).

There were no later archaeological contexts found in the Côa Valley and adjacent plateaus after this moment, which led to the conclusion that there was no human settlement in the area during the early Holocene (Carvalho, 1999).

Nevertheless, Prazo, a site located in the plateau area of de Freixo de Numão (fig. 4) yielded an Epipalaeolithic/Mesolithic, dating from  $9.525 \pm 70$  to  $6.710 \pm 50$  BP (2 sigma calibration) (Monteiro-Rodrigues et al., 2008). The interpretation of this context permitted to define an environmental model and the subsistence strategy of these populations. Between the beginnings of Holocene and the 6th millennium cal. BC, the region would have been defined by a dense oak forestation, namely *Quercus suber*, and these populations would continue to have a hunter-gatherer economy (Monteiro-Rodrigues et al., 2008).

In terms of artistic representation, it was identified a group of six rocks with motifs that have been classified as Epipalaeolithic. All of them are inscribed on the typical vertical schist panels, technically based exclusively on pecking, either marking the entire bodies or only their contour.

One of the main Upper Palaeolithic rock art sites, Canada do Inferno, presents five of these panels. The left sides of

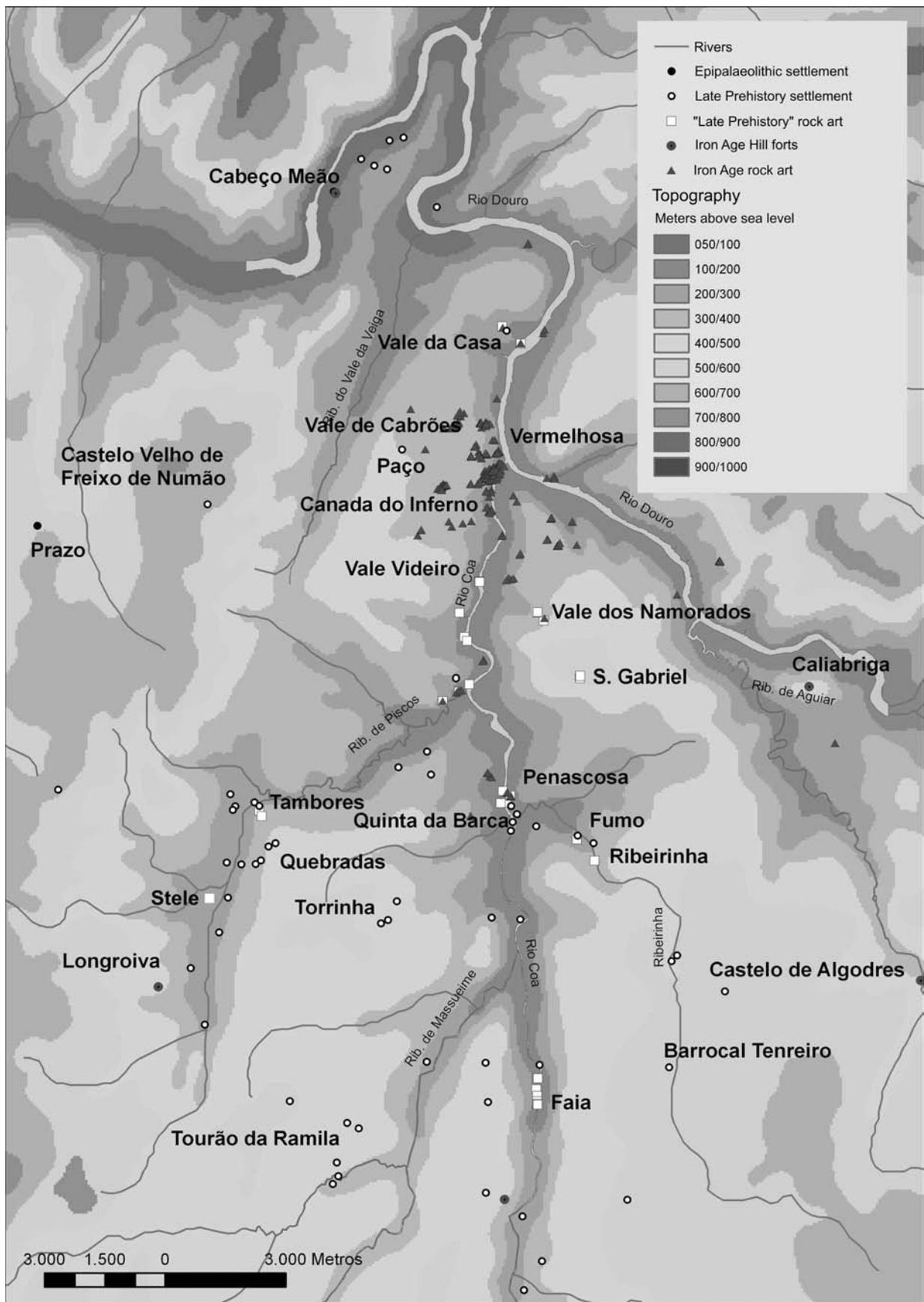


Fig. 4 - Holocene rock art and settlement.

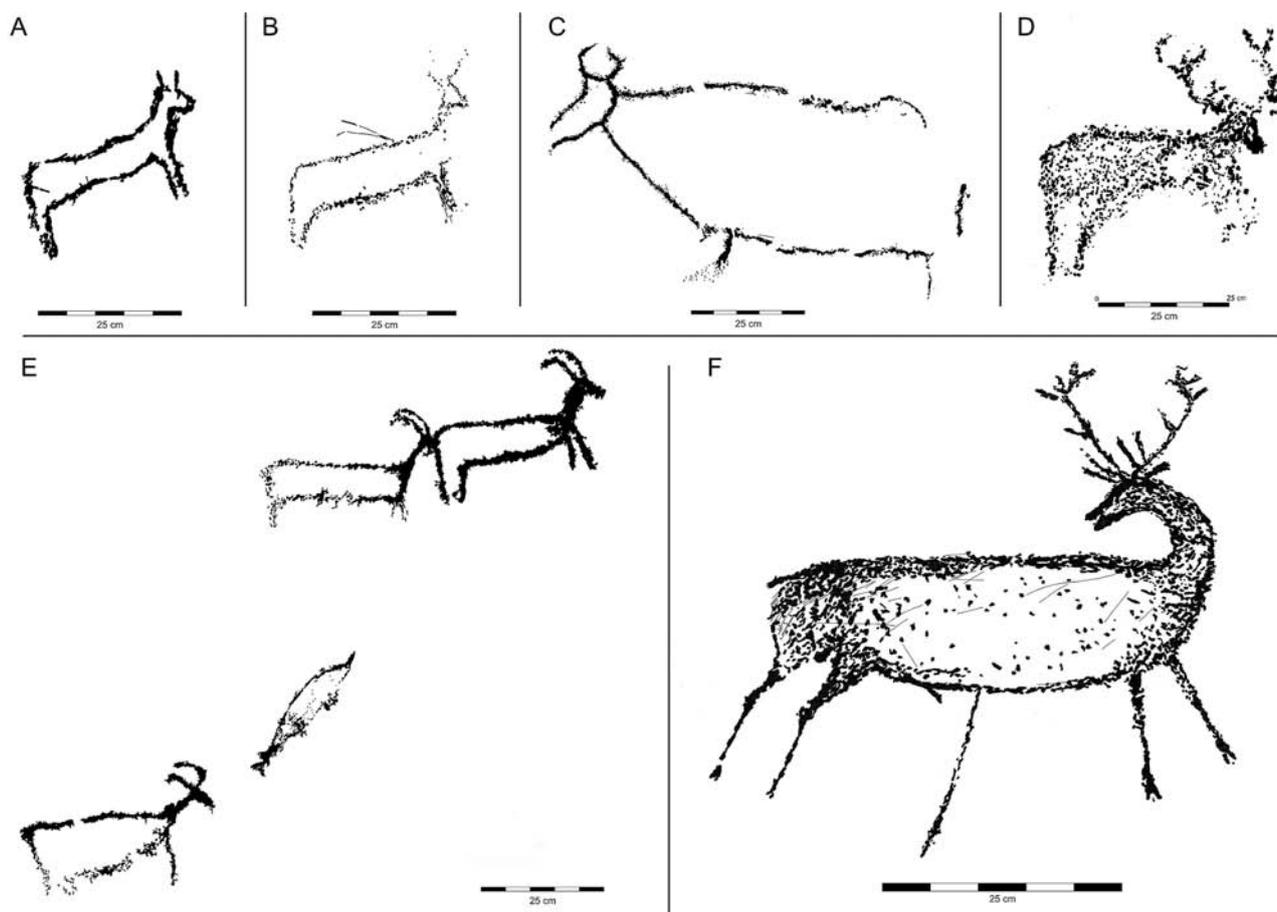


Fig. 5 – “Epipalaeolithic” motifs. A – Canada do Inferno 3; B – Canada do Inferno 4; C – Canada do Inferno 32; D – Canada do Inferno 33; E – Canada do Inferno 36 (partial); F – Vale de Cabrões 1 (A to E – adapted from Baptista and Gomes, 1998; F – Baptista, 1999: 139).

panels 3 and 4 have two motifs (fig. 5A, B), stylistically and technically similar (Baptista and Gomes, 1998: 221-222, 268-269). They are two animal representations, with slim bodies and short legs. On top of the head they present two, sub-parallel (panel 3) or v-shaped (panel 4), lines that can be interpreted as horns or long ears. Technically both were carved through “rice-shaped” pecking.

The “Abrigo das Cabras” (Goat shelter), was the centre of the Canada do Inferno river beach, today under the waters of the Pocinho dam. Around it there is the second group of possibly Epipalaeolithic rock art in this site.

There’s an aurochs on panel 32 (fig. 5C), with the body defined by a pecked line, sketched legs, massive trapezoidal body, oval head, separated from the body by a line, and lyre-shaped horns, in twisted perspective (Baptista and Gomes, 1998: 250, 294).

Panel 33 presents a deer (fig. 5D), defined by a profoundly pecked contour, and an equally, but more dispersed and smaller sized, pecked filling. Its front legs are merely sketched, opposed to the back legs that are portrayed in frontal twisted perspective. Its antlers are portrayed in the

same way, and are long and ramified (Baptista and Gomes, 1998: 250, 295).

All of panel’s 36 motifs have been attributed to the Early Holocene (fig. 5E): three goats, two quadrupeds, one possibly goat and another possibly bovine, two circles and a segmented circle, as well as several peckings (Baptista and Gomes, 1998: 252-253, 297; Baptista, 1999: 82). The three goats are formally similar, and can be interpreted as a part of a pre-mating scene within a group, documenting a flehmen reaction. All of them have long sub-rectangular bodies, short legs. Only one of them has all four legs represented, as the other two have only one for each pair sketched. Their bodies are defined by a pecked line, as opposed to the heads that are totally pecked. The horns are in a segmented circle shape and are portrayed in a lateral twisted perspective.

The panel has also two fish, one of them only sketched, with fusiform bodies, triangular caudal fins, doubled in the case of the best defined one. This fish has also a pectoral fin and a pointed head (fig. 5E).

Panel 1 from Vale de Cabrões has also a deer (fig. 5F) that

has been arguably classified as post-Palaeolithic (Baptista, 1999: 138-139). Jean Clottes (2008), for instance, classifies it as Solutrean, therefore Palaeolithic. This deer was pecked, with notable skill, producing a “chiaroscuro” effect to convey a sense of three-dimensional volume. Fore and hind limbs, as well as the neck, head and dorsal area have a large density of impacts, as opposed to the abdomen, where they are sparse. It has a long body, voluminous abdomen, projected limbs, with the four hoofs portrayed, as well as the hind limbs articulations. Its head is turning backwards, ears marked, ramified antlers, bow tine in twisted lateral perspective and the rest in twisted frontal perspective. The mouth is open, and the tail is slightly up. In the belly, near the sheath, there’s a line, slightly thicker on the extremity opposed to the animal.

It is an image with remarkable dynamism and technical, formal and narrative skill. It can be interpreted as the representation of a hunting scene, during which an alerted (tail up) and running animal is hit by a projectile, turning its head backwards and grunting. We believe that the turning of the head and the vocalization, expressed by the open mouth, can be interpreted as being prior to the escape, expressing alert. In this case the sequence would be: head turning, grunt, tail up, running and then hit.

This group of rock art that we’ve just described is fairly homogenous, with the exception of the Vale de Cabrões deer. When compared with the Palaeolithic rock art, we see the same species, except the horse, but following a different artistic canon. Formally they are advancing towards a progressive schematism, as opposed to a naturalistic anatomic synthesis. Heads are sub-triangular or oval-shaped, sometimes distinguished from the body by lines or full pecking. Bodies are slim and geometric, with flat cervicodorsal lines; the legs are either short or only sketched.

Stylistic parallels for this rock art can be found in the older phases of the Tagus Valley (Castelo Branco/Portalegre) rock art (Gomes, 1983: 277-279), or Guadiana’s, in Molino Manzániz (Badajóz, Spain), in the zoomorfos subnaturalistas group (Collado Giraldo, 2007: 280-290). Both of these examples are found in a fluvial environment.

This rock art is placed in a similar context as the Palaeolithic but in a lesser degree of intensity. This fact, when related with the archaeological context data, suggests that human settlement was less intense in the area during this period. We can relate this with the evolution of environmental constraints that indicate a growth of forest areas and species as Cervidae, that had already began during the latter phase of the Palaeolithic. This rock art continues to suppose a forager economy, based on hunting and fishing. Its style is evolving towards geometrization and schematism that also continues a final Palaeolithic trend in the valley. Less naturalistic, these representations can be interpreted as a “decadent” phase of the Upper Palaeolithic rock art.

## ANTHROPIZATION.

In Prazo, anthropization begins to be identified between the end of the 6th millennium, and the third quarter of the 5th millennium cal BC, by the abundant presence of bush species that grow after the extensive use of fire (Cistaceae and Ericaceae). This deforestation doesn’t seem to have agricultural purposes, since this activity is not archaeologically documented. It can be related with the opening of bare places, either to create pasture areas, which is reinforced by the presence of ovicaprine remains, or to attract wild animals, within a hunting strategy. It can also be interpreted as the result of a strategy related to the creation of habitable areas (Monteiro-Rodrigues et al., 2008). Economy continues to depend on hunting of species such as deer, roe deer, wild boar and rabbit, along with gathering, and probably fishing. These groups would have been nomadic or semi-nomadic, beginning to use pottery, with simple domestic structures, which indicate short term settlement (Monteiro-Rodrigues et al., 2008).

Quinta da Torrinha, where there was no evidence of any kind of archaeological structure, concurs to this notion. This site is located in the Chãs plateau area (fig. 4), near a small brook. Its occupation was dated from the beginnings of the 5th millennium cal BC, by comparing its pottery with dated regional archaeological contexts (Carvalho, 1999: 55-59).

Nearby, in Quebradas, there was also no domestic structures identified. Archaeological material was composed mainly of handmade pottery. The presence of amphibolite flakes, due to the edge repair and a fragment of ovicaprine tooth (Carvalho, 1999: 41-54) indicates some productive activity by the end of the 5th, beginning of the 4th millennium BC (Carvalho, 2003).

Faia has the largest group of rock art from the early phases of the Neolithic. High scarped granite walls of this deeply incised area allowed the preservation of painted motifs.

The right sector of its panel 1 has two sub-naturalistic bovines (fig. 6A), associated to a line, all painted in red (Baptista, 1999: 159; 2008). One of the bovines has crescent-shaped horns in twisted frontal view. Both have four limbs, formed by straight lines. Bodies are large with large abdomens and a flat cervicodorsal lines. The central area of this panel has a third bovine, with lyre-shaped horns and v-shaped limbs, suggesting movement, along with a schematic anthropomorphic figure, with long torso, short limbs and rounded head. On the left side of this panel there is a second group of anthropomorphic figures, all in red. Sector C of this same panel presents a “prayer”, once more painted in red (Baptista, 1999: 160; 2008). It has short legs, long torso, arms up (fig. 6C). Its right hand ends with five fingers and the other bears a cross-like motif. Its head ends in a kind of semi-circled hat.

The shelter that protects panel 3 preserved another sub-

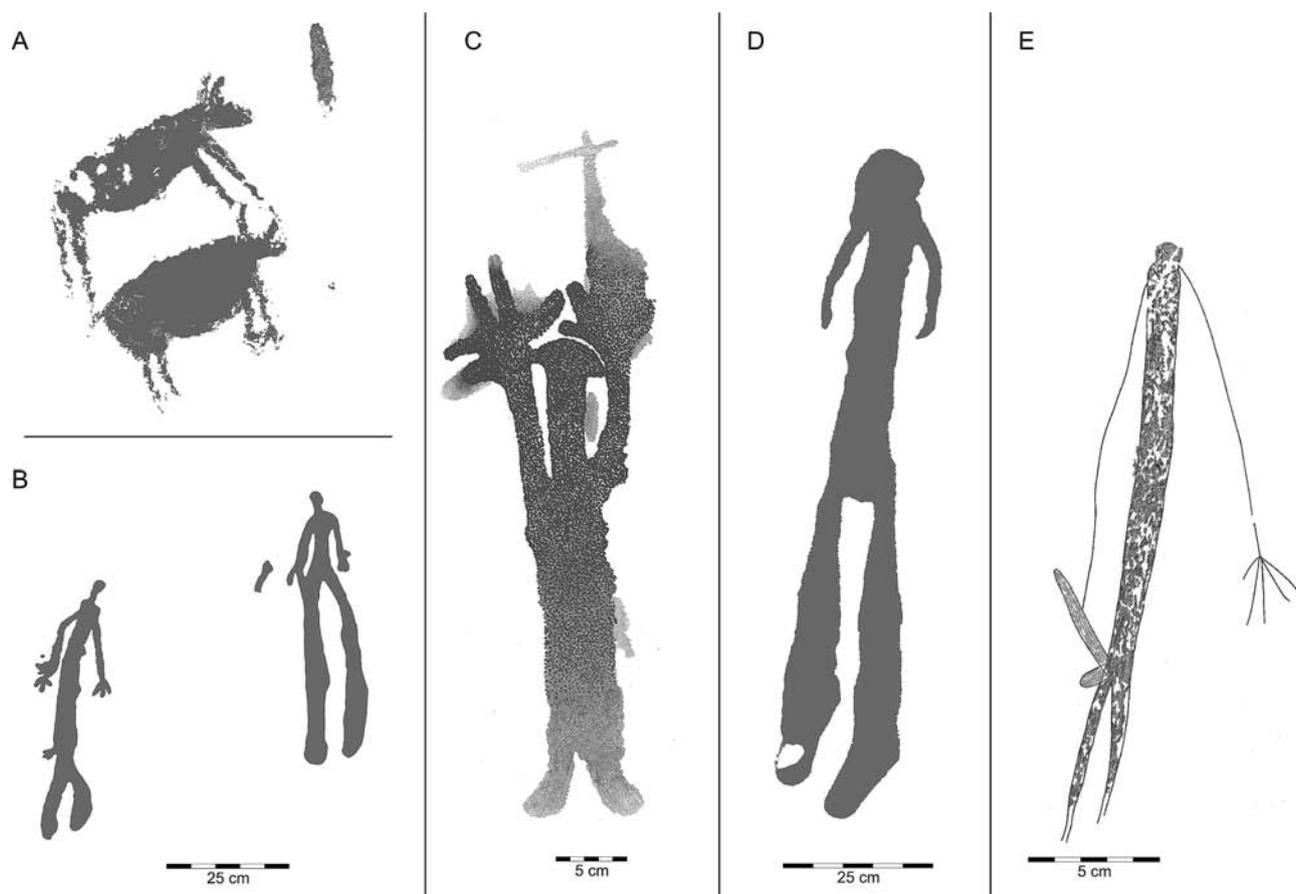


Fig. 6 – Sub-naturalistic motifs. A – Faia 1 right; B – Faia 5; C – Faia 1 C; D – Faia 3; E – Penascosa 17 (A, B, D – Baptista, 2008; C, E – Baptista, 1999).

schematic anthropomorphic representation painted in red (fig. 6D). This time it has long legs, with feet, probably shod, torso equally long, with short arms displayed along the body (Baptista, 1999: 158; 2008; Luís, 2008: 109).

Finally, panel 5 portrays an odd pair of human figures, also in red (fig. 6B). The left figure has short lower limbs, long torso and short arms disposed along the body, ending with three fingers. In the genital area there is a probable phallus. The figure on the right has long legs and torso, and arms slightly shorter. Both have relatively smaller necks and heads.

Although using a different technique we include in this group the anthropomorphic engraving of Penascosa's panel 17 (Baptista, 1999: 112-113), in a schist environment. It is another figure with short lower limbs, long torso, and rounded head with no neck. Its long arms are displayed along the body. The left one ends with three fingers and the right holds an erect penis. This image is behind a stylistically Palaeolithic goat. It was produced by using fine line incision for the contours and arms, and the inside is fully scraped (fig. 6E).

This is a stylistically homogenous group. In terms of motifs cattle continue to be portrayed, but human representation

stands out from earlier phases. These anthropomorphic figures are longilineous, with short limbs and long torsos, or vice-versa. They have some anatomical detail, such as fingers, heads and necks. Formally they remind Levantine art (Carvalho, 1999), namely its macro-schematic phase, already related with the round heads phase from the Sahara rock art (Beltrán Martínez, 2001). Regionally, this Côa Valley phase is can be related with Fraga d'Aia (S. João da Pesqueira, Viseu) paintings, which are formally similar (Jorge et al. 1988).

In the centre of Portugal, the 4th millennium BC is characterized by the diffusion of farming, animal husbandry and the megalithic phenomenon. This megalithic tradition seems to be absent from the Côa Valley area.

Late Neolithic settlement is confirmed in Tourão da Ramila (fig. 4), in the plateau of the River Côa left bank. This site still has no identified domestic structures, and it was dated from  $4.450 \pm 40$  BP, from rock rose and broom charcoal. These species attest human action through forest fires (Carvalho, 2003).

The first post-Palaeolithic domestic structures appear in the 3rd millennium. In Barrocal Tenreiro, tn Côa's left bank plateau (fig. 4), a group of regular and orthogonal negatives

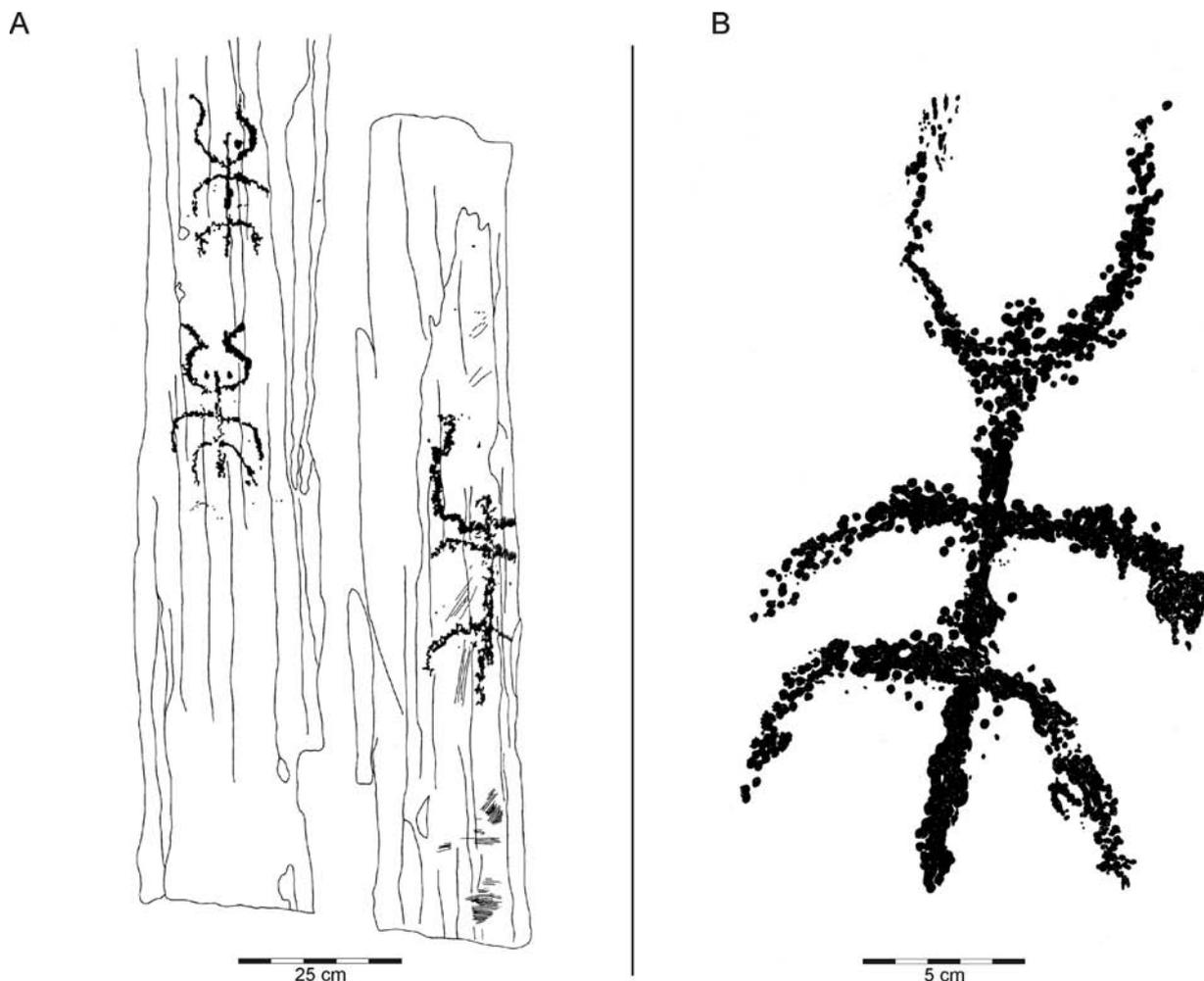


Fig. 7- Corniforms. A – Vale da Casa 11; Vale dos Namorados 1 (Baptista, 1999).

has been interpreted as the support infrastructure of a granary, that was built above the ground to preserve stored food from animals and humidity (Carvalho, 2003: 260). This occupation was dated from  $4.100 \pm 60$  BP (14C), that corresponds to a developed phase of regional Chalcolithic (Carvalho, 2003).

The upper levels of Quinta da Torrinha preserved a ceramics “horned idol” attributed to the first half of the 3rd millennium BC (Carvalho, 2003).

In 1983 three horn-shaped motifs were identified in Vale da Casa’s panel 11 (fig. 7A). They were then attributed to a Chalcolithic/Bronze Age phase (Baptista, 1983, 1999: 164-165). Near these representations and more recent ones, a cist was identified and excavated, dating between 2.880 and 2.500 BC (Cruz, 1998: 160, 162).

After the discovery of the rest of the Cõa Valley rock art, the same type of motifs was identified in Vale dos Namorados’ panel 1 (fig. 7B). These motifs were drawn schematically, with horns pointing up, a trace representing the body, two semicircles for the limbs and a line prolonging the body,

that can be seen as a tail, if we interpret these figures as bovines, or a phallus, if we see them as humans. Vale da Casa figures have lyre-shaped horns. One of it has two dots around the area of the head, suggesting eyes, a second one has only one dot, and the third has none. Both lyre-shaped horns and eyes are absent from Vale dos Namorados, which have ellipse-shaped horns.

These corniforms have been also attributed to Late Neolithic (Carvalho, 1999: 68) by comparing them to a group of horn-shaped motifs from Escoural’s (Évora) “exterior sanctuary”. In this case, these motifs were covered by archaeological layers, and were archaeologically dated from the beginnings of the 3rd millennium (Gomes et al. 1983). The Cõa Valley corniforms are more complex than Escoural’s or even Fial’s (Viseu), where similar motifs were found (Santos et al., 2006: 140). In these two cases there is no representation of limbs, or even eyes. The motifs are merely formed by ellipsoid horns and the body line. Nevertheless, Vale dos Namorados’ panel 1 has an unpublished group of motifs that is similar to these, namely two graphical units composed by a trace, and a circular to oval element its extremity, that can be compared to Escoural and Fial’s motifs.



*Fig. 8 – View from Castelo Velho de Freixo de Numão over the end of the Meseta. To the left S. Gabriel hill. In front the plateau of Vila Nova de Foz Côa. To the back the Côa river incision and from then to the horizon the Meseta's plateau.*

Fratel's panel 1 (Tagus valley) has a horned motif very similar to the Côa Valley ones, even though it has rectilinear limbs. It has been attributed to Late Neolithic/Early Chalcolithic (Gomes et al., 1983: 298).

### **HIERARCHIZATION.**

During the middle to late 3rd millennium BC and the beginning of the following millennium, regional settlement pattern becomes more complex and hierarchized. Firstly there are large sites, dominantly placed in the landscape, and monumentally built, such as Castelo Velho de Freixo de Numão (Jorge, 2002), but also N. Sra. do Castelo de Urros and Castelo Velho dos Tambores. Castelo Velho de Freixo de Numão is placed on the eastern limit of the Freixo de Numão plateau, thus dominating all the Côa Valley and the end of the Meseta (fig. 8). In a lower level, Castelo Velho de Tambores visually dominates the fertile Longroiva graben (fig. 4). These exceptional sites, notably Castelo Velho de Freixo de Numão, should have had an aggregation function. Besides them, human settlement in the Côa Valley during Chalcolithic would have been based on smaller sites, less structured and placed in low altitude platforms, near soils suitable for agriculture and small water courses (Carvalho, 2003: 270).

The region was then characterized by Mediterranean type bush, still dominated by *Quercus*, with the important presence of *Cistaceae*, *Ericaceae* and *Leguminosae*, a direct consequence of human action over natural vegetation (Queiroz and Van Leeuwen, 2003). Besides this indirect proof, farming is documented by Barrocal Tenreiro's negatives and uncountable grind stone fragments. Husbandry is proved in Castelo Velho's Chalcolithic layers, by goat, sheep, pig and cattle bones (Antunes, 1995).

The less studied rock art cycle in the Côa Valley is the schematic one. It is composed of 41 panels over 13 different sites. However we may be including chronologically different motifs in this generic term. Its thematic is mostly based on anthropomorphic figures, in a "stick figure" style, but also geometric shapes. Painting and engraving continue to be the main techniques. Differently from previous phases, its placement is now diversified, as it is settlement.

Faia's panel 6 (fig. 9A), in the granitic deeply incised valley area presents a group of schematic anthropomorphic figures painted in red (Baptista, 1999: 161). Panel 23 from Quinta da Barca (fig. 9B), in the area of the open valley, has a pecked anchoriform (Baptista, 1999: 165). Another schematic anthropomorph from Ribeira de Piscos' panel 4 (fig. 9D) is also pecked (Baptista, 1999: 161). This site, where the valley becomes deeply incised again has another schematic human figure in panel 18, with arms pointing up (fig. 9C). This figure is painted in red and is placed inside a shelter. Already in the area of the gorged valley, Vale de Videiro (fig. 9E) has a schematic figure painted in wine red colour on its schist walls (Baptista, 1999: 161).

Besides this valley bottom sites, artistic expression is now imposed on landscape through two panels painted in the quartzite resistance of S. Gabriel (fig. 4). It is a naturally monumental site, dominating all the area, which was humanized through rock art. Schematic rock art appears also in the eastern riverbank plateau with the paintings of Ribeirinha shelter. This granitic shelter is placed near Fumo, a settlement with a rock carved with cup marks. This kind of motifs is also related with other Neo-Chalcolithic settlement sites such as Tambores and Monte Meão.

Settlement hierarchization continues during the transition of

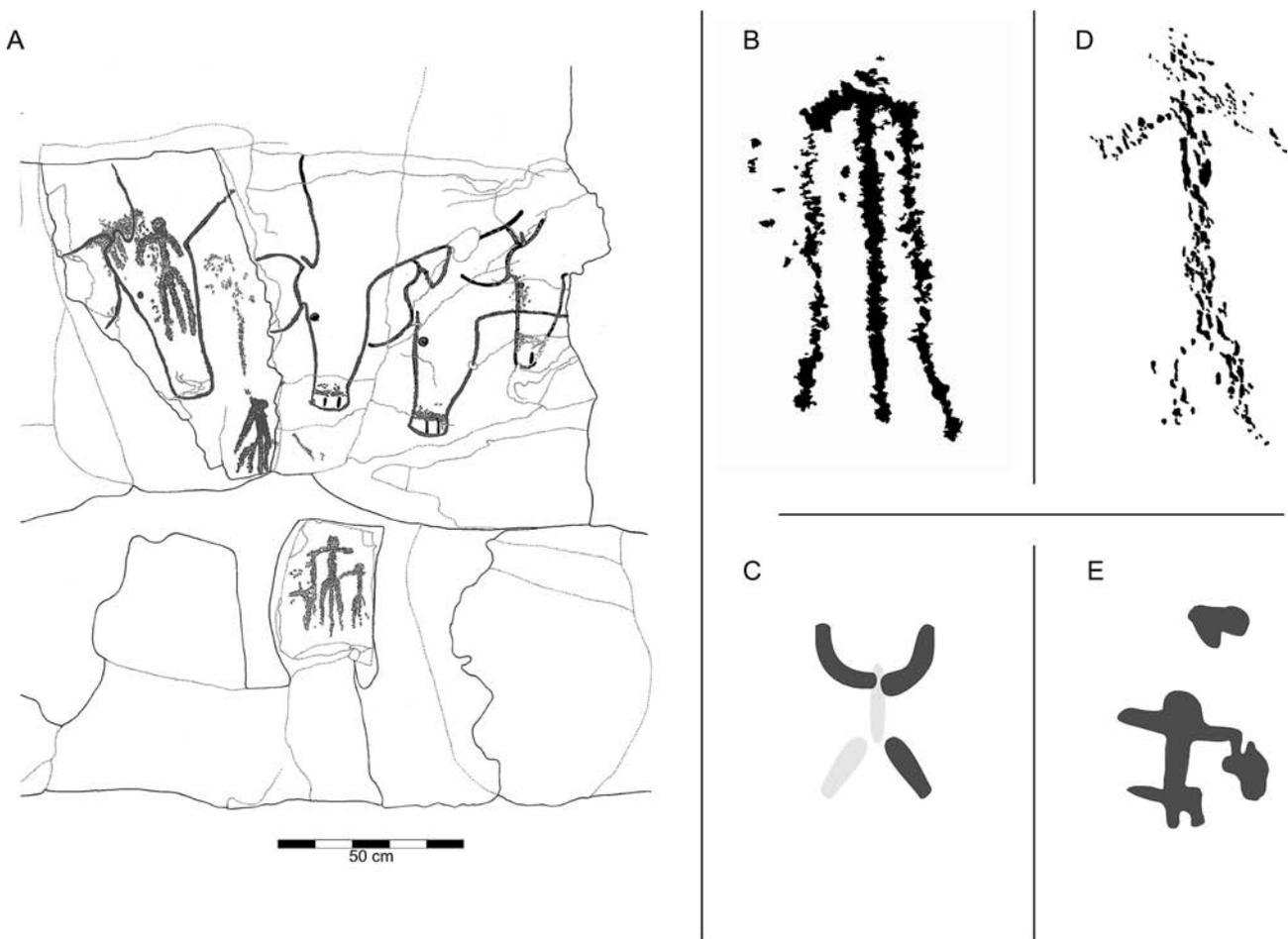


Fig. 9 – Schematic motifs. A – Faia 6 (the four aurochs heads are of Palaeolithic style); B – Quinta da Barca 23; C – Piscos 4; D – Piscos 18; E – Vale Videiro (A – Baptista, 1999; B, C, E – Drawing from photo in Baptista, 1999; D – Drawing from author's photo).

the 3rd to the 2nd millennium. Castelo Velho de Freixo de Numão has a continuous occupation until 1.300 BC (Jorge and Rubinos, 2002). In a different rank of sites, Fumo is located in the transition between the Almendra plateau and the lowlands of the Côa valley, in a protected area (Carvalho, 2004). Contemporary sites, such as Tambores and Alto da Lamigueira are placed around Longroiva's tectonic depression (fig. 4).

In the centre of this valley it was identified the Longroiva stele (Almagro, 1966: 108). It is a granite slab with an anthropomorphic figure, about 1, 40 meters high, with eyes, nose, mouth, a possible beard and necklace (fig. 10A). Its right hand holds a halberd with a blade with central rib. On the left hand it holds a dagger and what has been interpreted as a bow, but can also be interpreted as a shield. This stele has been related to warrior chiefs' cult, as well as marking an important way for ore trading (Almagro, 1966: 108). We believe that both interpretations are valid, the first one due to the iconography of the stele and the second due to the fact that the Longroiva graben, as a part of the Vilarica fault, is a natural way of passage with a SSW/NNE orientation. Despite being different in nature, stelae and rock art share similar symbolical meanings: they both

organise space culturally. Even though stelae aren't in direct relation with the natural, they also humanise space. In this case, the Longroiva stele polarizes Bronze age settlement around this fertile valley.

Early 1st millennium settlement is documented only in Castelo dos Mouros de Cidadelhe (Perestrelo, 2003: 65-67), a hill fort dominating the Faia gorge. This site has a continuous occupation until de medieval times.

When compared with similar motifs (Santos et al. 2006: 140), both pecked podomorphs (fig. 10B) from Vale da Casa panel 23 (Baptista, 1983: fig. 13) shall date from this moment in Early Proto-history. Curiously these motifs are only known on this horizontal surface.

From this moment on we enter in what has been called the "twilight" of rock art (Beltrán Martínez, 2001). However, the Iron Age cycle is one of the brightest in the Côa Valley.

Iron Age settlement (fig. 4) was based on hill forts, related to fertile soils (Longroiva/Langobriga and Monte Meão/Coniumbriga), the control of the Côa (Castelo dos Mouros) and Douro river crossing (Castelo Calabre/Caliabriga), and

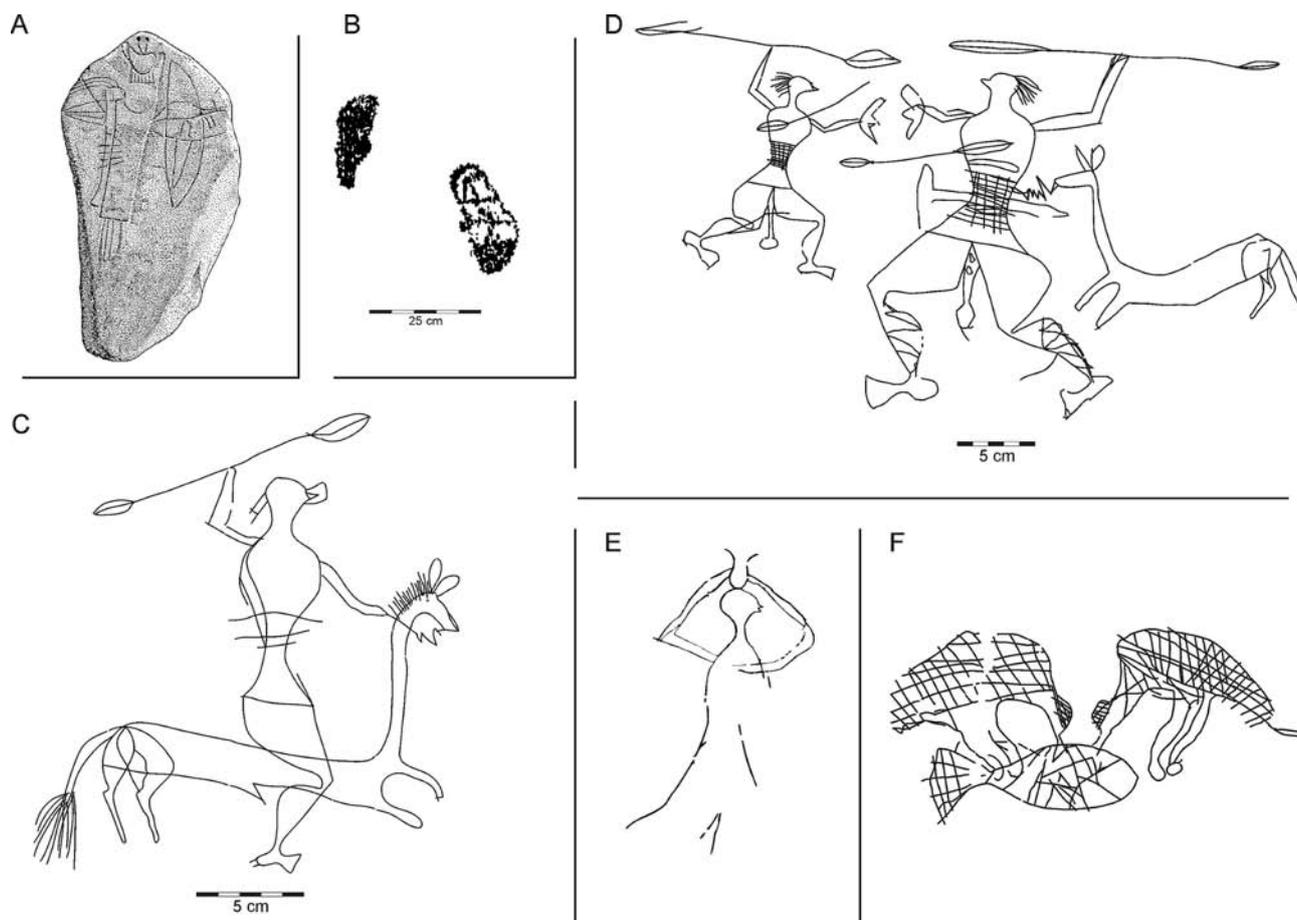


Fig. 10 – Bronze and Iron Age motifs. A – Longroiva stele; B – Vale da Casa 23; C – Vermelhosa 1; D, E, F – Vermelhosa 3 (A – Almagro, 1966; B – adapted from Baptista, 1999; C, D – Baptista, 1999; E – adapted from AA. VV., 2007; F – adapted from Abreu et al., 2000).

also mining (N. S. do Castelo de Urros) (Luís, 2008; in press a). Secondary settlement network is unknown.

This rock art cycle dates from the Second Iron Age, probably entering in Roman times. It is located mainly in the confluence between the Côa and Douro. We distinguish four kinds of placement: river terraces and waterfront areas, temporary watercourses that lead water from the plateau to the rivers, more embedded creeks, and finally, slopes facing both rivers (Luís, in press b). Besides rock art, two slabs were found containing Iron Age motifs, coming from Roman sites, such as Paço and Olival dos Telhões (Cosme, 2008; Baptista, 2008).

The main technique is fine line incision. Motifs include zoomorphic (horses, deer, dogs, birds and fish) and anthropomorphic figures, some of the times with a birdlike heads. These human figures are normally portrayed as warriors associated with weaponry (spears, caetrae, daggers, falcatae), that also appear isolated. The image of a horseman armed with shield and spear is central in this art (Fig. 10C), as shown in Vermelhosa's panel 1 (Baptista, 1999: 146-147). Other than this theme, there is a group of scenes, namely a deer hunting scene, with a horseman

and its dogs in panel 23 from Vale da Casa that also has a Celtiberian type inscription (Baptista, 1999: 180-181).

Vermelhosa's panel 3 presents a remarkable group of representations (AA. VV., 2007). In the centre of the panel there is a big human figure with a birdlike head, with a well define eye, armed with spear and round shield. To its left there is a second bird headed figure carrying a vase on its head (fig. 10E). To the right, in the middle of tangled lines there is a necrophagous bird with its beak ending in an undulating double line. Below another human with a bird-shaped head near a bird of prey. Under the large warrior, two other bird headed warriors fight in a duel, armed with spears and caetra (fig. 10D). One of them has the reins of a horse tied to his waist. Another bird headed human figure carries a vase on his head below this scene, and near the ground level two necrophagous birds eat a fish (fig. 10F).

From its comparison with Iberian iconography, we interpret this type of images as representations of the warrior chiefs' heroization after death (Luís, in press a and b). This art would define a border, eventually between populi (Luís, 2008), but also between the living and the dead. It would work as a social reproduction mechanism, naturalizing an

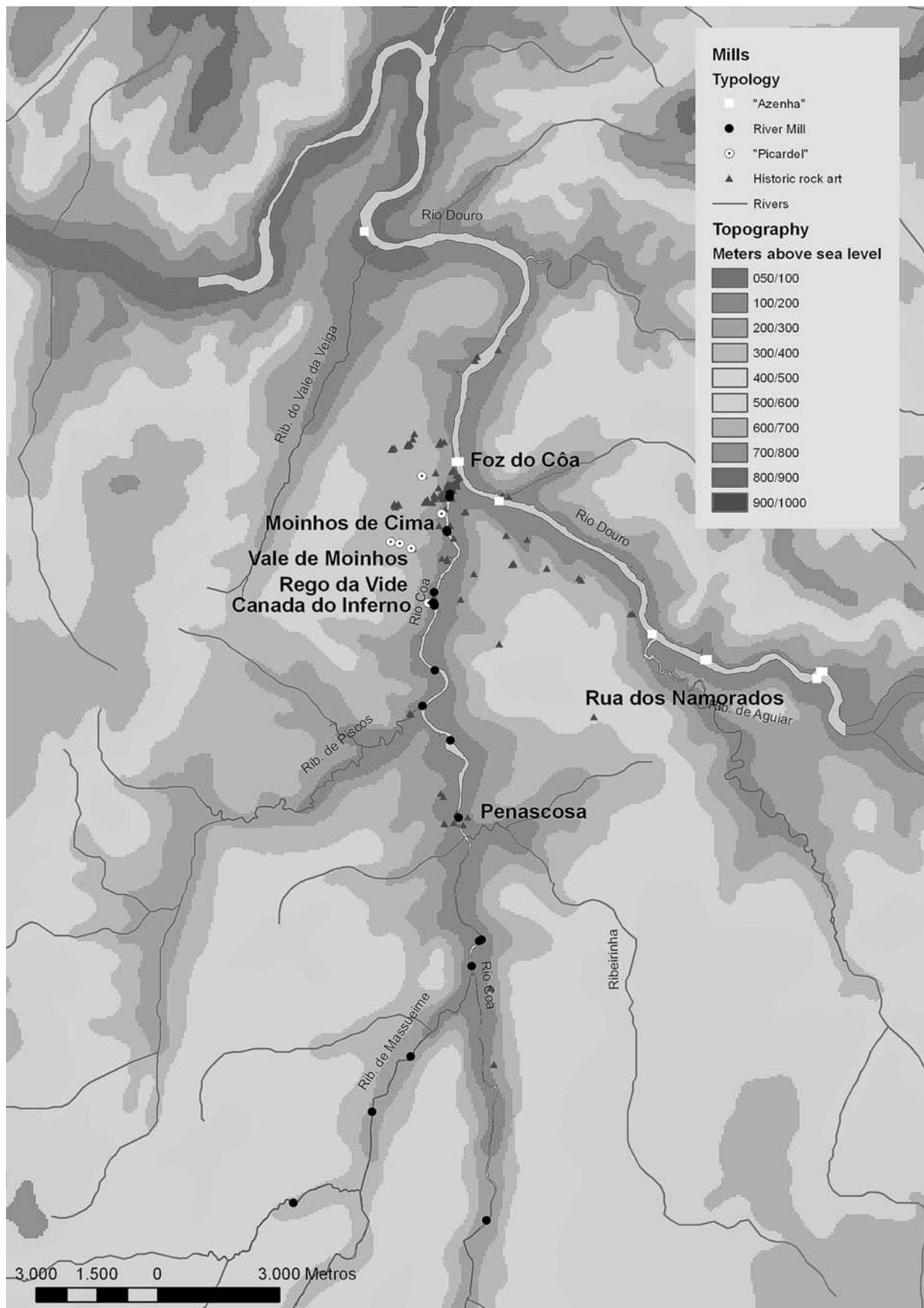


Fig. 11 - Milling and historic rock art in the Côa Valley.

ideology of power, defining space and attributing meaning to it (Luís in press b).

Nearby, Yecla de Yeltes (Salamanca) hill fort presents a group of carved motifs in bedrock and also in some of its wall stones, defining here the domestic space (Martín Valls, 1983). In this Iron Age rock art there are quadrupeds, horsemen and circular motifs. Although more schematic, we feel that these motifs are similar to the Côa Valley Iron Age rock art, namely horsemen and some animals. We consider that stylistic differences between them are due to bedrock differences. Yecla's granite is less suited to engraved details than Côa's schist.

Besides this example, this Côa Valley's cycle has parallels with other rock art, such as Guadiana's, namely Ñete's site XI horseman, in Molino Manzán (Badajóz, Spain) (Collado Giraldo, 2007: 447), but mainly Mones's (Asturias, Spain) diadems (Marco Simón, 1994), some of the Iberian and Numantia's (Soria, Spain) painted pottery and Lower Aragon's (Spain) stelae (Luís, in press b).

### *The millers*

It is supposed that rock art is a way of expression for societies without writing (Taçon and Chippindale, 1998). In fact, Iron Age rock art has an inscription with the first alphabetic writing in the region, but from then on there's a void in rock inscription in the valley, beginning with Roman occupation. By opposition, Freixo de Numão's granitic plateau presents several Roman rock inscriptions (Coixão and Encarnação, 1997). This is probably related with differences in roman settlement density between both areas (Luís, 2005).

Pecked motifs on schist blocks from two walls of Namorados' street (Castelo Melhor) were dated between the 15th and 18th centuries. It is a group composed mainly of vegetal motifs, also with fish, a colonnade and a horseman. Their original context is unknown, since they are on a street wall, with some of the motifs inverted, clearly pointing to a secondary position (García Díez and Luís, 2002-2003, Luís, 2008).

The Côa Valley's historic cycle begins with these carvings. This cycle has 160 panels grouped in 30 different sites recorded until now. Some of these panels are placed in the plateaus and slopes, related with farming and herding, but most of them, and the most impressive, are along the valley bottom, near the river, in direct relation with river mills.

Lower Côa had an important milling activity until the 1950s. This activity had local specificity (Fig. 11). There was a group of mills, notably in Canada do Inferno, Rego de Vide and Moinhos de Cima. These mills would be submerged by periodical floods, during autumn and winter. Millers would then move to some smaller mills, locally called "picardéis", located higher in the slopes, along the

"canadas", where the seasonal rain water would run from the plateaus to the flooded rivers. Millers would come back to the river mills when the water levels would permit it. Mills were constructed in a way to resist these floods. By June, the Côa would dry, "losing its waters". Millers would then move to the nearby Douro, a larger river, where they had the "azenhas". These watermills had a large vertical wheel, and worked on the natural river course, as opposed to the Côa mills, which had horizontal wheels and diverted water from the river, using small dams. Millers would move back to the Côa mills by the end of summer (García Díez and Luís, 2002-2003, Luís, 2008).

During their spare time, young millers would use the iron picks they had to revive grinding stones, to produce rock art. This activity is documented in Canada do Inferno since the 17th century (Baptista and Gomes, 1998). There is an early phase, defined mainly by religious motifs, such as crosses and monstres, along with alphabetic and numeric inscriptions. In the final moment of this phase motifs are related to daily life representations, such as the river boatman, the sun and the moon, fishes, stork feeding, and the train crossing the Côa's bridge (Fig. 12). The last millers, like José Alcino Tomé and António Seixas allow us to reach this rock art through the ethnoarchaeological method. Unaware of the long tradition they maintained, these young millers used the same natural support, the same pecking technique, with different tools, to leave their world view to posterity (García Díez and Luís, 2002-2003).

Even before the modern scientific recognition of the Côa Valley rock art, Jorge Trabulo, born in Chãs, carved motifs on the large granite blocks from this plateau area. It is someone influenced by "neo-paganism" that organizes solstice and equinox celebrations.

The recognition of the Côa Valley rock art led to some few intents to imitate Palaeolithic art, namely by Fernando Mimoso, a local inhabitant. Fernando Barbosa, the Côa Valley Archaeological Park designer, and Thierry Aubry, the main researcher for the Palaeolithic rock art context, have also produced some carvings in the context of Archaeological experimentation. All these experiments were either made on loose slabs or recently exposed panels in the dam construction site. Finally, the dates inscribed on some panels demonstrate that there were as local custom to use them to inscribe messages and drawings. The debate related to the preservation of the Côa Valley rock art, and some discontent related to it led to some negative inscriptions, notably on Penascosa's panel 17, the only vandalism act recorded to date

### **DISCUSSION.**

As all artistic expression, rock art can be seen as the reflex of the social reality that produced it. Because of the intrinsic relationship between iconography and natural support, rock art is also a unique medium to understand the space

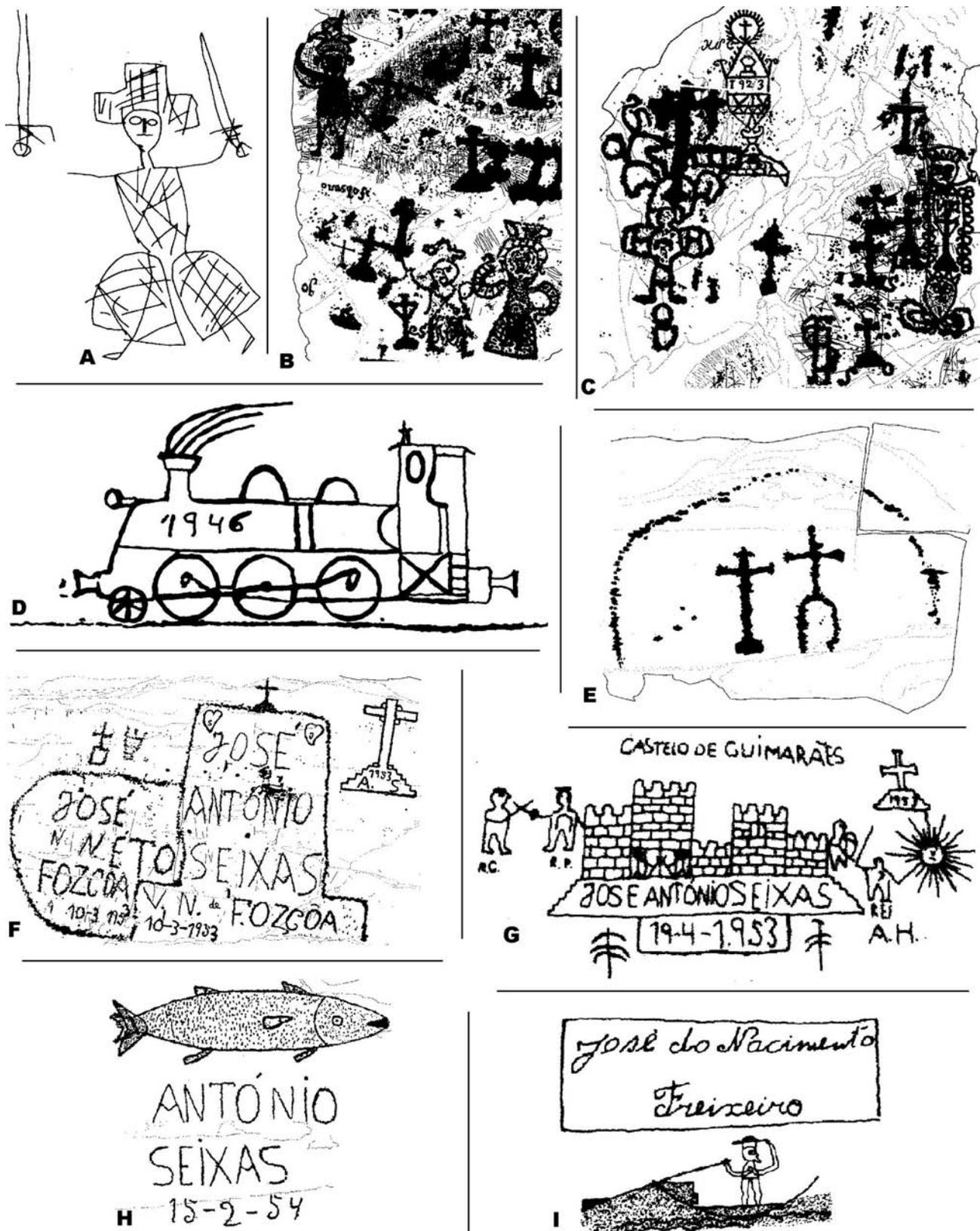


Fig. 12 – Historic motifs (Baptista and Gomes, 1998 and from photos in Baptista, 1999). A – Ribeira de Piscos 17; B – Canada do Inferno 24; C – Canada do Inferno 24; D – Foz do Côa 2; E – Rêgo da Vide 8; F – Canada do Inferno 9B; G – Canada do Inferno 9; H – Canada do Inferno 9A; I – Foz do Côa 3 (García Díez and Luís, 2002-2003)..

conceptions and organisation of different groups: the social construction of space (Tilley, 1994: 10). In the Côa Valley we can analyse it through time. We have tried to describe the general lines of this evolution.

Epipalaeolithic art seems to continue the Upper Palaeolithic model, but the scarceness of remains doesn't allow much elaboration. Although the region continued to be occupied, there is a discontinuity of the settlement in the valley and the riverside plateau. The only Epipalaeolithic/Mesolithic settlement is documented in the high plateau of Freixo de Numão. There is a radical thematic change in the Early Neolithic. Moreover, the motifs are now circumscribed to discrete areas, far from settlement sites, deep in the gorged valley, in Faia. In the 3rd millennium, also in discrete areas, there is a documented relation between rock art and funerary practices in Vale da Casa, on the Douro riverside, with more schematic motifs. Neo-Chalcolithic schematic art seems to define the "entrances" of valley bottom territory, restricted economically and symbolically (Carvalho, 2003: 271). Nevertheless we assist also to the beginning of the imposition of human settlement in the landscape, through architecture and rock art. The paintings of S. Gabriel and the monumental enclosure of Castelo de Freixo de Numão exemplify this idea, having a high visual dominance.

This strategy continues through out the 2nd millennium, but we see a new focus of settlement around Longroiva graben. This geomorphologic unity is marked by a stele. Even though it is also a way of culturally organizing space, we interpret the erection of a stele more of a social imposition than the inscription of iconography onto bedrock. By rock art one naturalizes an ideology, as opposed to when one builds a monument or erects a stele. In this case one is also attributing meaning, but as a clear cultural imposition to the natural. This imposition is made by the social group who is portrayed in the stele. This stele, along with other regional Middle Bronze Age remains, namely Ataúdes (Guarda) stele, defines a "cultural border" during the 2nd millennium BC (Vilaça et al., 2003), again at the end of the Iberian Meseta.

We think that Iron Age rock art follows the same pattern (Luís, in press a and b). Placed outside the exploitation territories, in low visibility areas, related with permanent and seasonal water courses, this rock and its iconography define another border. In this case we argue that it is a border, between the living, and between these and the dead.

Direct information from the last Côa Valley millers and also the context of modern recognition of the Côa rock art, says that this last phase no longer had any clear social function (Luís and García Díez, 2008). It was merely the result of an individual will for immortality, related to a "semi-nomadic" activity along the valley bottom.

The millers' emigration during the 1960s and the waters of Pocinho dam, since 1982, covered with forgetfulness this

long artistic tradition. Paradoxically it would be necessary the construction of a new dam for the modern scientific recognition of the Upper Palaeolithic rock art that led to the recognition of more recent phases.

We argue that geographical and geomorphologic context are major factors for the interpretation of this rock art placed at the end of the Iberian Meseta. Moreover, based on lithic raw material of the Upper Palaeolithic settlement, it has also been argued that this interpretational framework can also be applied to the Upper Palaeolithic rock art cycle (Aubry and Mangado, 2006; Luís and García Díez, 2008; Luís, 2008: 103-105).

The Côa Valley post-Palaeolithic rock art followed this tradition. We believe that rock art can be interpreted as the first form of Land Art, in the modern sense of the word. If Landscape Art is an artistic representation of landscape, within Land Art landscape is defined by art. It is a human intervention on landscape, a domestication of the land (Jorge, 2000). Space is not the container of art, it is its medium. Rock art is closely related to this idea. It is a society's direct intervention on the natural, humanizing it, giving it meaning by its iconography. As we stated above, as opposed to architecture and the erection of stelae there is an inextricable relation between symbol and natural support. Local geomorphology leads us to the idea of border.

We have tried to present the Côa Valley Holocene rock art within this framework. In this same context, different men and women, with different concerns, organised their space and engraved their memory in the Lower Côa panels.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.

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