



PUBLIC IMAGES, PRIVATE READINGS: MULTI-PERSPECTIVE APPROACHES TO THE POST-PALAEOLITHIC ROCK ART

PROCEEDINGS OF THE XVII UISPP WORLD CONGRESS
(1–7 SEPTEMBER 2014, BURGOS, SPAIN)

Volume 5 / Session A11e

Edited by
**Ramón Fábregas Valcarce and
Carlos Rodríguez-Rellán**



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Foreword to the XVII UISPP Congress Proceedings Series Edition

Luiz OOSTERBEEK
Secretary-General

UISPP has a long history, starting with the old International Association of Anthropology and Archaeology, back in 1865, until the foundation of UISPP itself in Bern, in 1931, and its growing relevance after WWII, from the 1950's. We also became members of the International Council of Philosophy and Human Sciences, associate of UNESCO, in 1955.

In its XIVth world congress in 2001, in Liège, UISPP started a reorganization process that was deepened in the congresses of Lisbon (2006) and Florianópolis (2011), leading to its current structure, solidly anchored in more than twenty-five international scientific commissions, each coordinating a major cluster of research within six major chapters: Historiography, methods and theories; Culture, economy and environments; Archaeology of specific environments; Art and culture; Technology and economy; Archaeology and societies.

The XVIIth world congress of 2014, in Burgos, with the strong support of Fundación Atapuerca and other institutions, involved over 1700 papers from almost 60 countries of all continents. The proceedings, edited in this series but also as special issues of specialized scientific journals, will remain as the most important outcome of the congress.

Research faces growing threats all over the planet, due to lack of funding, repressive behavior and other constraints. UISPP moves ahead in this context with a strictly scientific programme, focused on the origins and evolution of humans, without conceding any room to short term agendas that are not root in the interest of knowledge.

In the long run, which is the terrain of knowledge and science, not much will remain from the contextual political constraints, as severe or dramatic as they may be, but the new advances into understanding the human past and its cultural diversity will last, this being a relevant contribution for contemporary and future societies.

This is what UISPP is for, and this is also why we are currently engaged in contributing for the relaunching of Human Sciences in their relations with social and natural sciences, namely collaborating with the International Year of Global Understanding, in 2016, and with the World Conference of the Humanities, in 2017.

The next two congresses of UISPP, in Melbourne (2017) and in Geneva (2020), will confirm this route.

Introduction

Ramón FÁBREGAS VALCARCE, Carlos RODRÍGUEZ-RELLÁN

A significant number of Holocene societies throughout the world have resorted at one time or another to the making of paints or carvings on different places (tombs, rock-shelters or caves, open-air outcrops). The aim of the session “Allé. Public images, private readings: multi-perspective approaches to the post-Palaeolithic rock art”, which was held within the XVII World UISPP Congress (Burgos, September 1-7 2014), was to put together the experiences of specialists from different areas of the Iberian Peninsula and the World. The approaches ranged from the archaeological definition of the artistic phenomena and their socioeconomic background to those concerning themselves with the symbolic and ritual nature of those practices, including the definition of the audience to which the graphic manifestations were addressed and the potential role of the latter in the making up of social identities and the enforcement of territorial claims. More empirical issues, such as new recording methodologies and data management or even dating were also considered during this session.

The papers presented at the session might be grouped in three sections: those dealing with the objectification/quantification of the graphic record and here would fit that by A. Vázquez *et alii*, aiming at the elaboration of a first general inventory of the Galician prehistoric art (North-western Spain), charting the variability of its manifestations.

A second group of papers has to do with the actual insertion of the prehistoric art in the wider landscape: Rodríguez-Rellán & Fábregas deal with the question of the alleged association of Galician petroglyphs to the natural routes and certain resource-rich areas by mobilizing techniques such as GIS applications.

The last section has to do with several case studies, where biographic, continuity and symbolic aspects may be ascertained. In Bueno *et alii*, the authors deal with the possible existence of megalithic stelae prior to the raising of megalithic chambers that quite often reused some of the former. One of the most talked-upon themes in the Iberian art belonging to the Neolithic and Copper Age, that of masks and eye motifs and their presence in N Portugal is addressed in Sanches's paper. Also dealing with the prehistoric art of N Portugal is Figueiredo *et alii*'s presentation, this time centering on the Sabor valley whose CRM archaeology has yielded a vast number of art manifestations, otherwise ranging from the Upper Palaeolithic to the Iron Age. Finally, Muñiz-López *et alii* report on their survey carried out in an all too-forgotten area, Western Sahara, that has produced a large number of new painted shelters, adding significantly to the catalogue of graphisms already known there.

Illustrating the Sabor Valley (Trás-os-Montes, Portugal): rock art and its long-term diachrony since the Upper Palaeolithic until the Iron Age

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Abstract

The construction of a major dam in the Trás-os-Montes region of Northeast Portugal, has led to an unprecedented archaeological survey that included a specific study of rock art over an area of 3000 hectares. Over the past four years, the implementation and development of this study revealed that the number of rock art sites is much higher than initially expected. In addition, the quality and the chronologies of the findings are exceptional, not only in a regional context but on a peninsular and European scales.

The present paper seeks to explore a specific geographical area within the Sabor Valley, where we found the highest concentration of rock art sites, with chronologies ranging between the Upper Palaeolithic to the Contemporary Period. However, this paper will only focus on the rock art produced between the Upper Palaeolithic and the Iron Age.

From the Palaeolithic era, we will look at the Foz do Medal terrace and its collection of exceptional portable art with over 1500 engraved fragments. Regarding rock art from the transition of the Holocene and post-Palaeolithic period, we will focus our attention on three main sites containing original depictions of caprids and cervids. Finally, we will look at Iron Age plaques uncovered in the Crestelos site. We would like to stress the fact that all mentioned sites are located within an area of less than 2 kilometers.

Due to the concentrated materiality in a very restricted area, our aim is to approach different continuities and discontinuities in terms of rock art archaeological records. Were the same animals depicted in the Upper Palaeolithic as in the post-Palaeolithic periods? Why do we find mobile supports both in the Palaeolithic and Iron Age periods and none in the time in between? These are some of the questions that will be addressing.

Key words: Rock art; Palaeolithic; recent Pre-History; Iron Age; Northeast Portugal

Résumé

La construction d'un barrage de grande ampleur en Trás-os-Montes, région du Nord-Ouest du Portugal, a conduit à une recherche archéologique sans précédent dans laquelle s'est insérée une étude spécifique de l'art rupestre s'étendant sur une surface de 3000 hectares. Au cours des quatre dernières années, l'implantation et le développement de cette étude ont révélé que les sites d'art rupestre ont été beaucoup plus nombreux que ceux initialement prévus. En outre, la qualité et les chronologies des découvertes sont exceptionnelles, non seulement à l'échelle régionale comme à l'échelle péninsulaire et Européenne.

Cet article vise à explorer une zone géographique spécifique dans la vallée du Sabor, dans laquelle nous avons trouvé une grande concentration de sites d'art rupestre, avec des chronologies allant entre le Paléolithique supérieur et la période contemporaine.

Cependant, cet article ira se concentrer uniquement sur l'art rupestre produit entre le Paléolithique supérieur et l'Âge du Fer.

En ce qui concerne l'ère Paléolithique, nous nous pencherons sur la terrasse du Foz do Medal et sa collection d'art mobilier exceptionnel ayant plus de 1500 fragments gravés.

Pour ce qui est de l'art rupestre, de la transition entre de la période Holocène et la période post-Paléolithique, nous focaliserons notre attention sur trois principaux sites contenant des représentations originales de caprinés et de cervidés. Pour terminer, nous nous pencherons sur les plaquettes de l'Âge du Fer découvertes dans le site de Crestelos. Nous tenons à insister sur le fait que tous les sites mentionnés sont situés sur une étendue de moins de deux kilomètres.

En raison de la concentration de matériel dans un espace unique et limité, notre objectif est d'aborder différentes continuités et discontinuités en matière de registres d'art rupestre. Est-ce que se sont les mêmes animaux qui ont été représentés au Paléolithique supérieur comme dans les périodes post-paléolithiques? Pourquoi trouvons-nous des supports mobiles à la fois dans les périodes Paléolithique et à l'Âge du Fer et aucun entre ces deux ères. Ce sont quelques-unes des questions que nous aborderons.

Mots clés: Art rupestre; Paléolithique; Préhistoire Récente; Âge du Fer; Nord-Ouest du Portugal

1. Introduction

The Trás-os-Montes region is located in the very Northeast of Portugal and until very recently it was an unexplored area in terms of its archaeological potential. The lack of large academic projects conducting archaeological field work in this area, as well as the regions poor quality infrastructure, kept away most archaeologists and researchers, who concentrated in other points of the country, known to be more prolific in archaeological findings.

Fortunately, just across the Douro River that limits this region to the South, the well-known Côa valley opened a precedent through a great discovery that drew the attention of whole world. In the Côa valley, more than one thousand engraved rocks on which Palaeolithic motifs stand out for their splendour, made UNESCO to classify this region as World Heritage in 1998. Due to this amazing discovery and its consequences, new institutes of archaeology were created and re-organized, and the so-called preventive or rescue archaeology grew and became completely professionalised.

In the beginning of the twenty first century, major constructions were planned for the Trás-os-Montes region. One of these constructions, the Baixo Sabor hydroelectric project, had a huge impact on the landscape, and submerged an area of 3000 hectares. In order to minimize the impacts, a Plan for Heritage Protection¹ was created, which began in 2010, and is now coming to an end.

The study of rock art in the Sabor valley begun in 2010 and, at that time, the plan was to study around 30 rock art sites. However, in the following 4 years, deep field surveys were conducted all over the valley, and, by the end of 2013, the number of rock art sites had grown to the astonishing number of around 200 (totalizing open air and shelters), 700 decorated blocks from different modern and contemporary constructions, and more than 2000 plaques from different archaeological excavations. During 2014, a huge database was under construction, taking into account more than 10,000 motifs discovered in the Sabor valley river, and distributed on different supports and with chronologies ranging from the Upper Palaeolithic until the contemporary period. With only 4 years of fieldwork and 1 year to process this huge mass of information, it should be easy to understand that the study and understanding of the rock art found in the Sabor valley is an immense work still being undertaken.

¹ The Plan of Heritage Protection is part of the Baixo Sabor Hydroelectric Exploitation, promoted by EDP Production, and whose implementation is the responsibility of Baixo Sabor, ACE- ODEBRECHT/Bento Pedroso Constructions and Lena Engineering. The Plan of Heritage Protection has the following structure of coordination: General Coordination: Paulo Dordio; Research coordinators: Filipe Santos (Cilhades), José Sastre (Protohistory), Luis Fontes (Middle Ages), Paulo Dordio (Modern and Contemporary Periods), Rita Gaspar (Prehistory), Sérgio Antunes (Monitoring), Sérgio Pereira (Romanization), Sofia Soares de Figueiredo (Rock Art), Susana Lainho (Conservation). The Plan of Heritage Protection is part of the Environment, Quality and Safety Area coordinated by Augusta Fernandes.

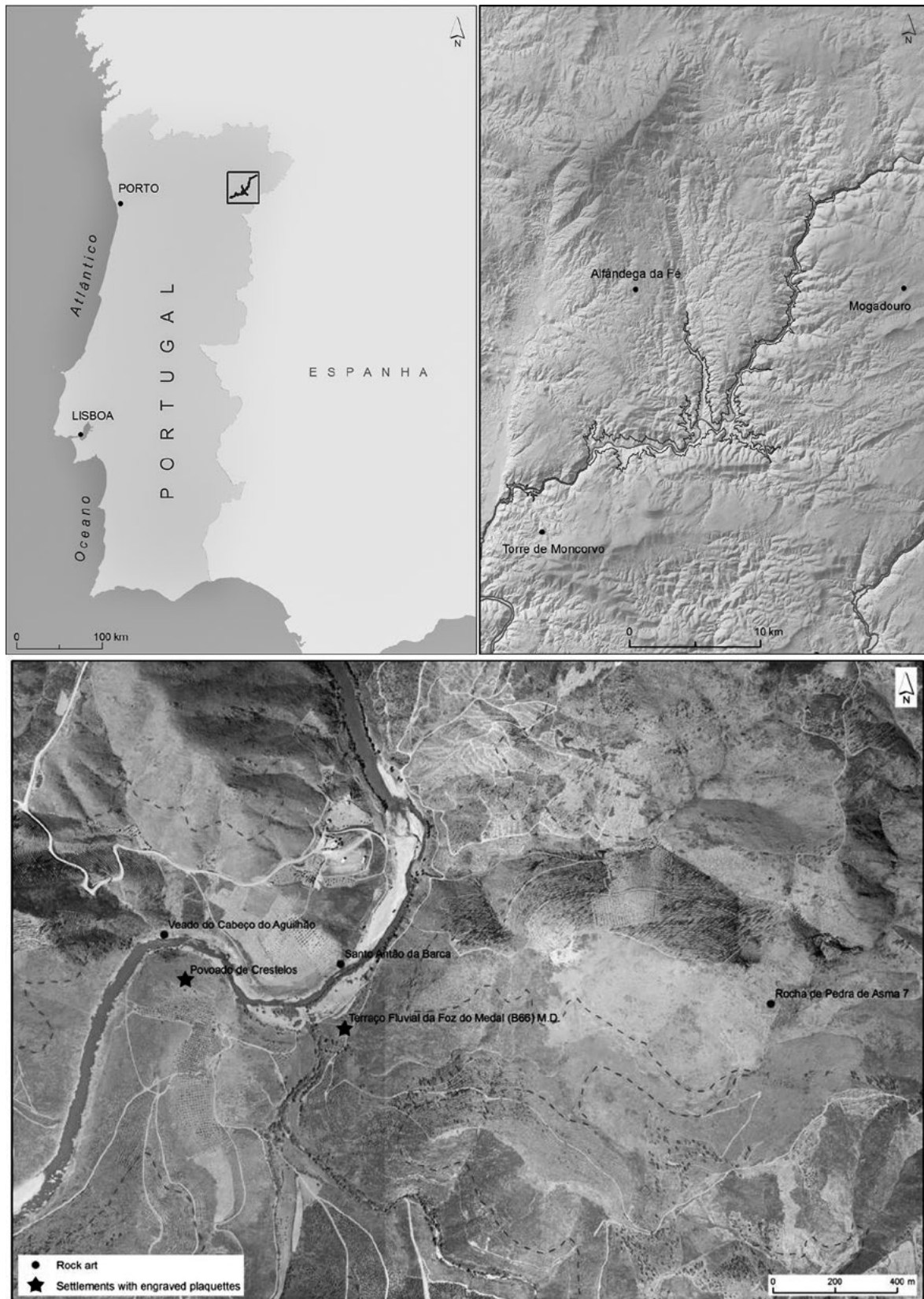


FIGURE 1. LOCALIZATION OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES MENTIONED IN THE TEXT, IN THE SABOR VALLEY AND PORTUGUESE CONTEXT. MAP BY JOÃO MONTEIRO.

Looking at the Sabor River (Figure 1), we can easily observe that it is a deep valley, with V shaped slopes, although, in some areas, it opens up into more wide spaces. It is precisely in these areas, where streams are found and passageways become easier, that we find concentrations of human occupation (Figueiredo, Nobre *et al.* 2014:13).

2. Palaeolithic Art and the Foz do Medal Terrace

The excavation of the Medal river terrace started in 2011 and, one of the most amazing findings was the layer 1055. The total number of plaques found in the right bank of the Foz do Medal Terrace is 1504, although we are still studying the data related to the different layers, making this number a preliminary one. As the layer 1055 is the best understood up to present, in this text we will focus only on the engraved plaques from this deposit. Nevertheless, in our large scale thematic analysis conducted in this article, all the figurative motifs from the Foz do Medal terrace will be taken into account.

Although the integrity of the collection was maintained, layer 1055 has suffered a post-depositional relocation, leading all the materials to be found in a secondary context (Figueiredo, Nobre *et al.* 2014:14; Figueiredo, Nobre *et al.*, in press: 435). Taking into account the stratigraphic position of this layer, as well as the characteristics of the lithic assemblage recovered, we are dealing with Palaeolithic art from the Magdalenian period.

The collection is difficult to characterize due to the fragmentation of the pieces, and this created a great amount of work trying to reassembly as many fragments as possible. As a result, 254 fragments were reassembled into 170 complete or semi-complete plaques (Figueiredo, Nobre *et al.*, in press: 441). Still, the collection is very fragmented, and to recognise the represented motifs in the majority of plaques fragments is very difficult if not impossible. Nevertheless, the plaques on which we were able to identify the depicted motifs show us amazing figures, typical from the local Palaeolithic repertoire, with some original features (Figure 2).

The raw material used was mostly greywacke and schist, and about 170 plaques are engraved in both surfaces. We were able to identify three main techniques in the engraving of the slabs: fine, superficial engraving; deep engraving; and, in a residual number, a picking technique.

Concerning the figurative themes represented in increasing order of appearance, we can recognize goats, horses, aurochs and *cervids*. At least one anthropomorphic figure was also identified in the figurative themes. It is rather interesting to notice that most represented figures are the ones that display a higher technical variability in their execution, being the best example represented by the *caprids*. Also in terms of style, we were able to distinguish two different trends, one more schematic, the other more natural one. However, different styles do not necessarily correspond to different chronologies and, our first impressions led us to the assumption that they were contemporary. Nevertheless, future studies focusing mainly the recognized overlaps can show otherwise.

3. Art from the Holocene transition and recent Pre-History

Moving further in, and following a chronological sequence, we will now leave the Foz do Medal Terrace behind and continue to the open air rock art manifestations of the Holocene transition and recent Pre-History. In order to do so we have to move towards the east, climbing gentle slopes that lead us to a small valley formed by a tributary stream of the Medal stream or creek, where we find the first of the three analysed sites.

However, before we get there, it should be stressed that the three outcrops we aim to analyse in this section, have already been object of publication in two different works. The first constitutes the PhD thesis of the first author (Figueiredo, 2013) of this article and, the second, is a paper that has been accepted to be published in the Conference Proceedings of the III International Meeting

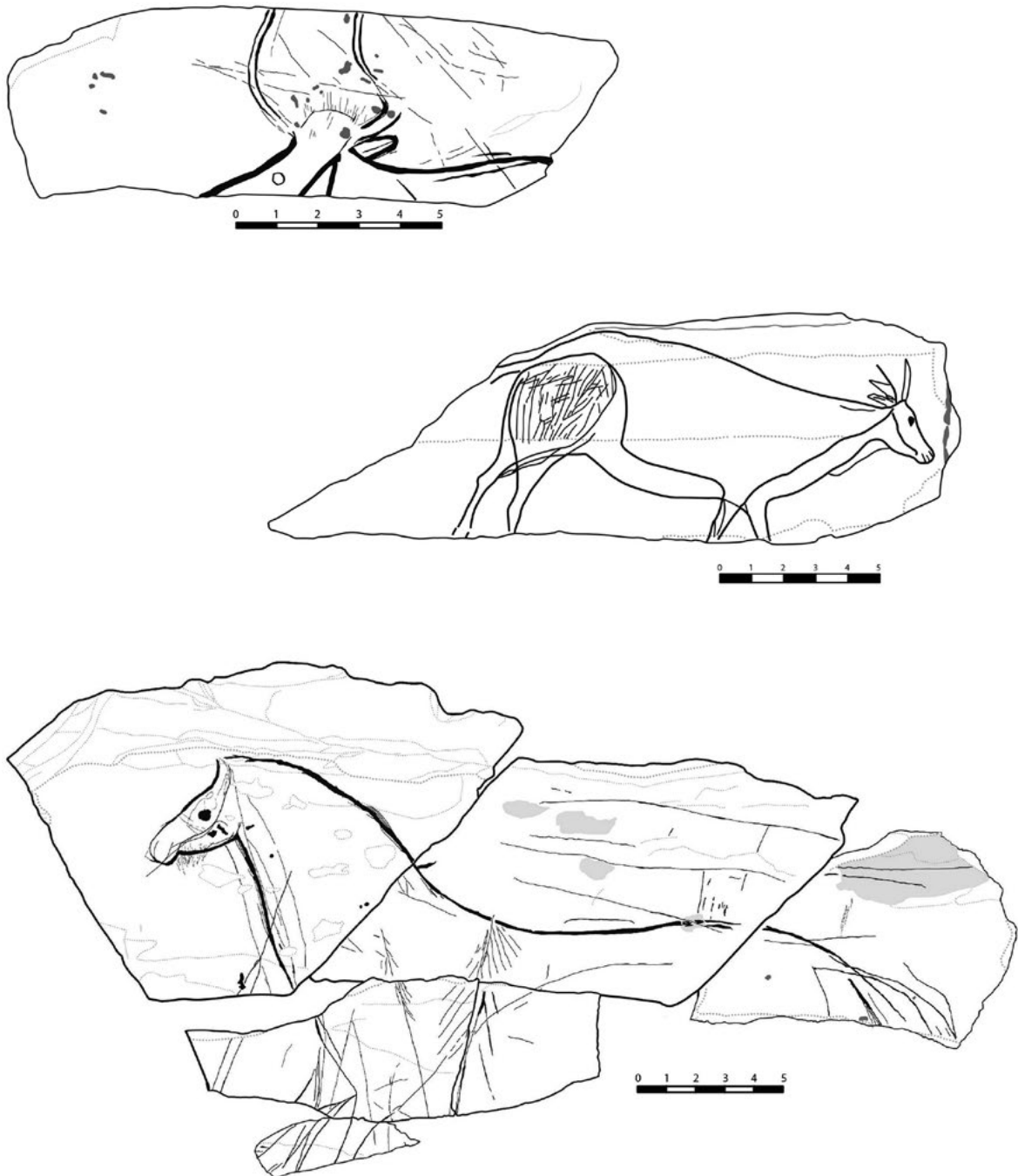


FIGURE 2. ENGRAVED PLAQUES FROM THE FOZ DO MEDAL TERRACE WITH REPRESENTATION OF AN AUROCH, AN IBEX AND A HORSE. ACCORDING TO FIGUEIREDO, NOBRE *ET AL.* 2014, IN PRESS.

of Doctorates and Post doctorates: Art in Prehistoric Societies, held in Nerja in 2013 (Figueiredo, Xavier *et al.*, in press). In this sense we will sum up the main ideas already presented in the mentioned papers.

In the small valley formed by the tributary stream of the Medal, the Ribeira da Pedra de Asma stream, on the right bank we find one of the most surprising rocks of the Sabor Valley. This rock is

organized into three engraved panels. We will only approach Panel A and its earliest chronology, as the remaining motifs are from historical periods. In this panel are eight motifs that refer to a group of lines presenting different directions. In the middle of these series of lines we detected a zoomorphic figure that represents a small *caprid* (Figure 3). In terms of analogies, it is interesting to notice that this is the first figure to be found in the Trás-os-Montes area presenting these stylistic features: a less natural formalism, new shapes and silhouettes and greater predominance of the multiple traced incision (e.g. Baptista, 2009). In both Foz Côa and Siega Verde areas these designs correspond to the transition between the Palaeolithic and the Post-Palaeolithic periods.

Going down the stream again, towards the west, we find another rock art site called Santo Antão da Barca where we have identified five zoomorphic drawings associated with diverse picking and dimple techniques, representing deer. One of these figures stands out due to the concentration of its picked elements around the inner part of the body, which generate a sense of prominent volume, and, therefore, in our interpretation, suggest a pregnant female. Males seem to be absent from this group, which is interpreted as the representation of a matriarchal group (Figure 3). Considering the natural cycles of this specimen, and that the births occur between May and June, we may conclude that the figurines are representing the springtime season (Figueiredo, Xavier *et al.*, in press: 197).

Further downstream, on the same bank, we find the third open-air rock art site considered in this section, named “Veado do Cabeço do Aguilhão” rock. Here we find the representation of a male deer facing upstream, and looking towards the rock we have just described. The representation leaves no doubt that we are dealing with a male given the size of the antlers, the tail represented facing upwards and the stretched neck, suggest the rutting period, which occurs between October and December (Figure 3).

The proximity of both rocks from the course of the river is responsible for their natural submersion in certain periods. Under these circumstances, we believe that a real dynamic between these two rocks and the waters was created: subsequent to the deer’s mating season (represented by the Veado do Cabeço do Aguilhão rock), the river level rises and begins to decrease in the springtime, when the new-borns come- represented by the Santo Antão da Barca rock.

Trying to ascribe chronologies to these two rocks is difficult, since they are unique in the Trás-os-Montes region and their best parallels are to be found not in the Côa Valley, but in the Tagus Valley. Our proposals locate these motifs somewhere between the Neolithic and the Chalcolithic, although we assume that this large time span can become even larger in the light of new data that we are currently processing.

4. Iron Age rock art and the Crestelos settlement

If we stand on the Veado do Cabeço do Aguilhão rock and look to the other side of the Sabor River, we see a high hill with an imposing appearance. This hill is one of the two excavated areas where Iron Age remains were identified. In fact, concerning the Iron Age period, the so-called Crestelos area can be divided into two different spaces: an area on the top of the hill, where structures for storage were found; and another area at the foothill, where the settlement was located (Sastre, 2014:79). In the same area but from later chronologies, remains of a Roman settlement were also found as well as constructions dating from historical times.

In the Crestelos archaeological site, 105 engraved plaques were found. 32 engraved plaques were found at the foot of the hill, mainly decontextualized due to their later use in the construction of structures, and 73 were found at the top of the hill. Also at the top of the hill the excavation revealed five rock outcrops with Iron Age engravings. In Castelinho, another Iron Age settlement only 7 kilometres downstream from Crestelos, these artefacts were also found totalizing an impressive number of 521 engraved plaques (e.g. Santos, Sastre *et al.* 2012).

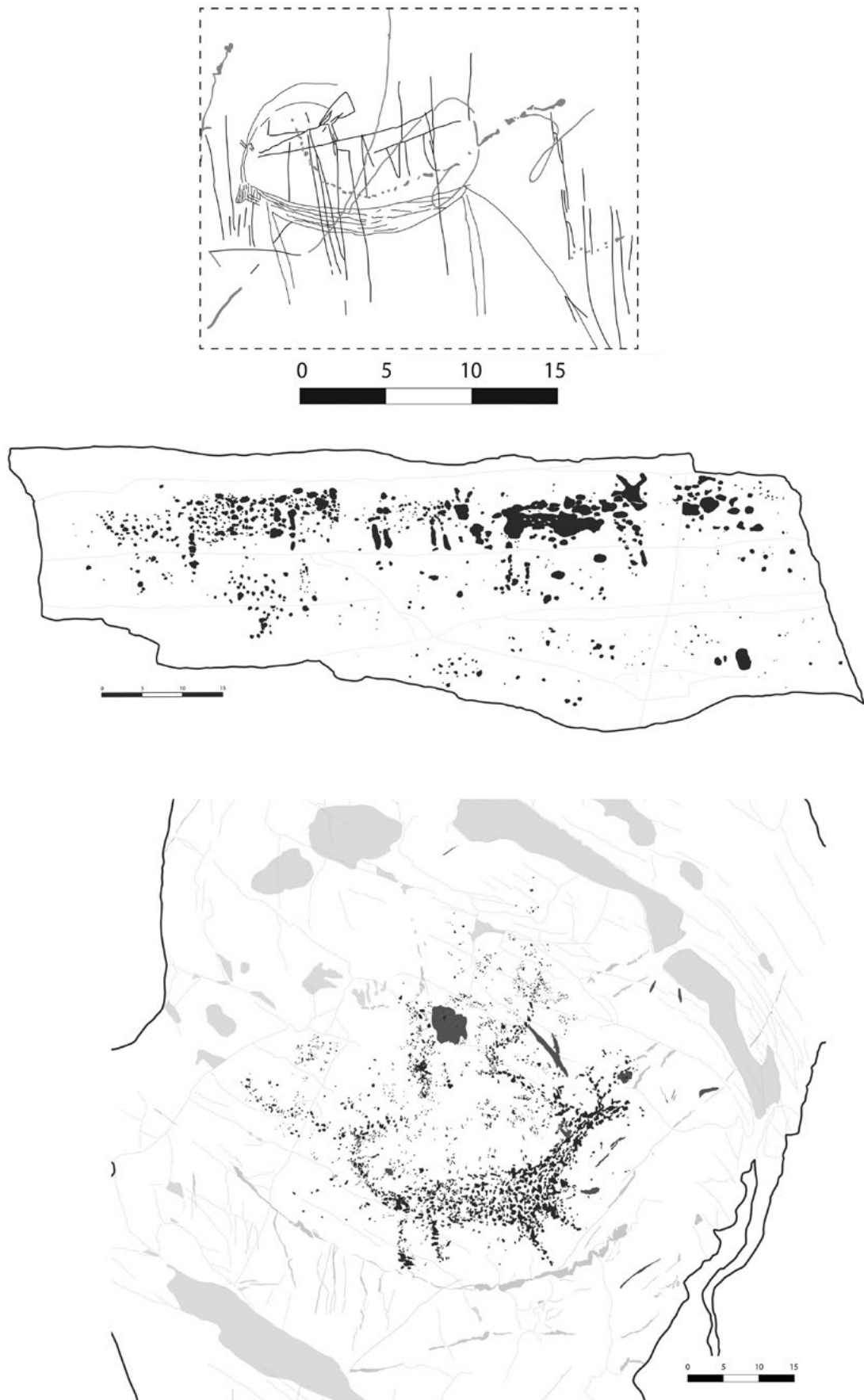


FIGURE 3. ROCK ART SITES OF RIBEIRA DA PEDRA DE ASMA 7, SANTO ANTÃO DA BARCA AND VEADO DO CABEÇO DO AGUILHÃO, IN SEQUENTIAL ORDER. ACCORDING TO FIGUEIREDO, XAVIER *ET AL.*, IN PRESS.

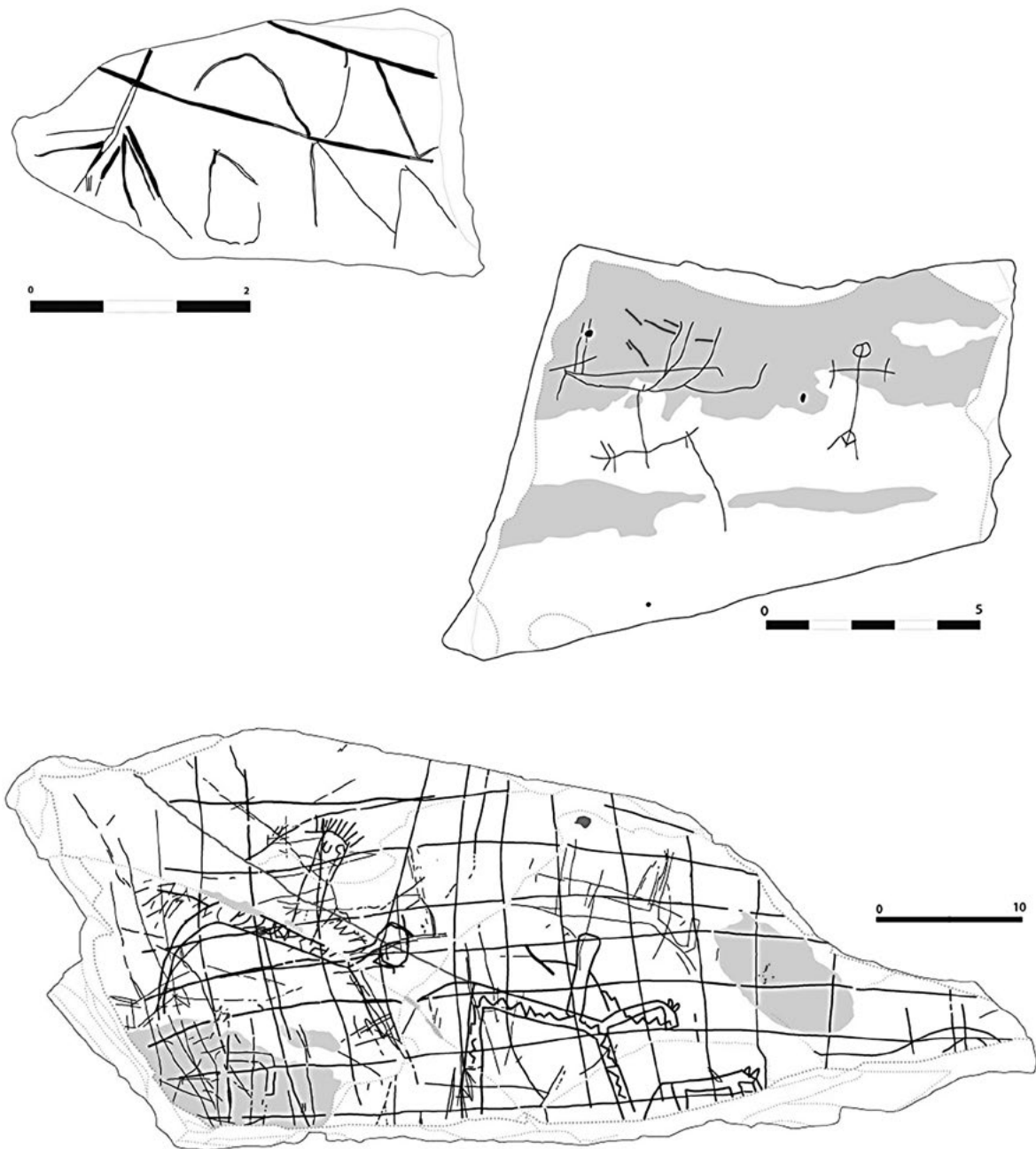


FIGURE 4. ENGRAVED PLAQUES FROM CRESTELOS WITH REPRESENTATIONS OF ABSTRACT AND GEOMETRIC MOTIFS, HUMAN DEPICTIONS AND RIDERS FIGURES. DRAWINGS BY FIGUEIREDO *ET AL.*

In the portable art collection of Crestelos, the raw material used was schist. Among the techniques used to engrave the slabs we were able to identify fine and superficial engraving, deep engraving, as well as picking. Concerning the figurative motifs represented, we were able to distinguish two main themes: horses and human figures. The depictions are rather schematic, done by the incision of simple lines that combine into simple forms. Nevertheless, in some plaques fine representations are found together with less careful depictions (Figure 4). In other cases, the small size of the figures is really impressive.

5. Through time, space, supports and figurative themes

As we already stated, our aim is to form an initial idea around the different contexts and supports of the figurative themes, found in a specific geographical area in the Sabor Valley, from the Palaeolithic till the Iron Age. With this in mind, the first issue we will address will be the organization of a space.

Taking into account the different supports on which rock art was found, mobile in the Palaeolithic and Iron Age, and fixed to the landscape in the recent Pre-History, our analysis will undoubtedly be reduced in chronological terms to the last mentioned period. When describing two of the rocks included in this chronological gap, Veado do Cabeço do Aguilhão and Santo Antão da Barca, we said that a real dynamic between these two rocks and the waters seem to have been created. In the first rock we have the representation of the male deer at winter, facing upstream to the female group, which in turn, is represented in the spring time when new-borns are to come. The female group is located precisely in the best pedestrian connection between both banks of the Sabor River; therefore, also being an optimal spot for the animals' water supply, and an area to fight for.

We believe that this shows a clear intention of the organization of space by recent Pre-Historic societies. It is also interesting to note that, unlike the Medal Terrace or the Crestelos area, which are both places of habitat (although in the first case the remains were somewhat decontextualized), the recent Pre-Historic places referred to in this text are only open air rock art sites, which were apparently not connected to any recognizable habitat site. This can be due to the disappearance of these sites or, to the fact that habitats were at the time situated at higher elevations, where no surveys were performed since they would not be affected by the hydroelectric project. The situation of funerary contexts and rock art sites located in the lower valley, as opposed to the location of habitat contexts at elevated levels, is also referred to in an area further down-stream in the Sabor River (Gaspar, May *et al.* 2014:34), which also denotes a certain organization of space.

It is quite interesting to note that the Palaeolithic is lacking evidence for open-air rock art and, in the Iron Age, the open-air rock art is not as visible as in recent Pre-History. Another interesting question is, why is portable art absent in recent Pre-History? This question may present us with some interesting ideas. First, until the discovery of Castelinho and Crestelos, portable art was rarely found in the Iron Age period, with few examples coming mostly from Portugal and Spain (e.g. Cosme, 2008; Meijide, Vilaseco and Blaszczyk, 2009). Also in the Palaeolithic, portable art is usually associated to the interior of caves, with some exceptions represented by Gonnersdorf (Germany) and Fariseu (Côa valley – Portugal). In recent Pre-History, besides the world of the *stelaes*, in this region there is no evidence for portable rock art. But very recently, an amazing piece was found in the Vilarica valley (close to the Sabor Valley), where recent Pre-Historic figures are represented on a schist slab. It is possible then that there is a world of recent Pre-Historic mobile art yet to be found, but its existence is associated with contexts that are found outside our studied geographic area. It is also important to stress that until the discovery of the first engraved plaque at the Castelinho Iron Age site, some engraved slabs were thrown away because no one was aware of the possibility of existence of these slabs. Ending our brief discussion about the supports of the engravings from different chronologies, it is curious to note that both in the Palaeolithic as in the Iron Age, the portable supports seem to be quite connected to the daily life of the communities.

We will finish this paper by presenting our thoughts on the figurative motifs. It should be stressed that we are only focusing on a specific geographical area, that once expanded could give us different results and, that the amount of data analysed in each period is not equal. But for now, and until full statistical analyses are realized, this is our state of the art.

In the following graphs of Figure 5, we can see the distribution of the different figurative themes in the Palaeolithic, recent Pre-History and the Iron Age. It is interesting to note that the widest range of

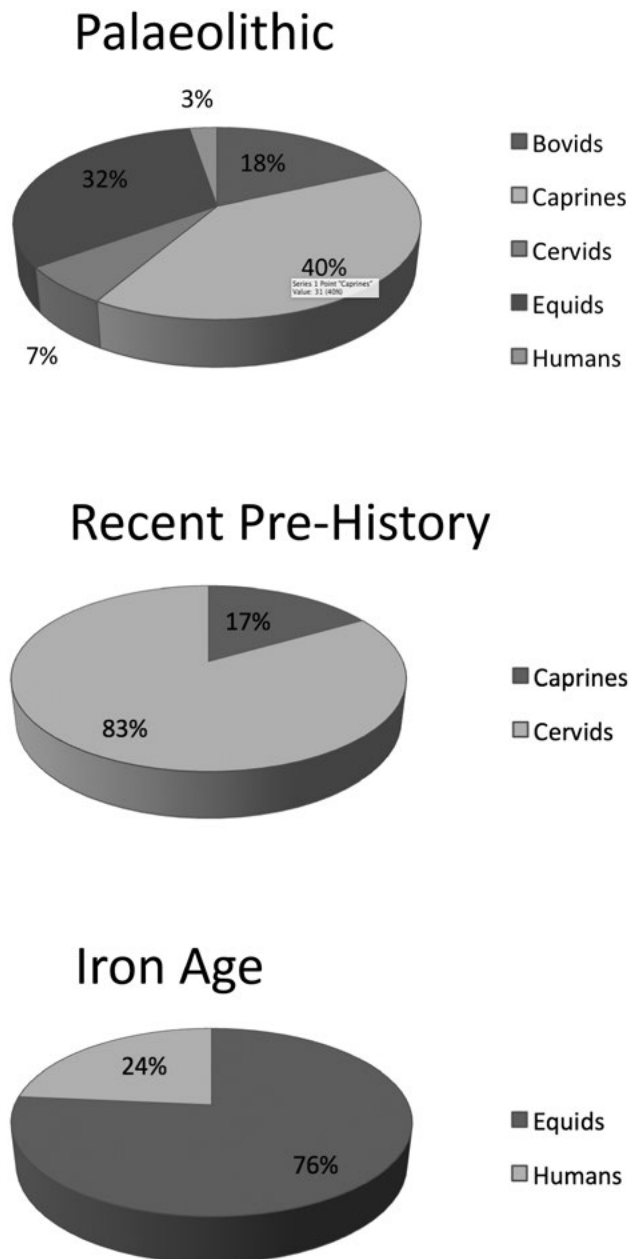


FIGURE 5. GRAPHS INDICATING THE PERCENTAGE OF FIGURATIVE MOTIFS REPRESENTED IN THE PALAEOLITHIC, IN THE RECENT PRE-HISTORY AND IN THE IRON AGE.

figurative representations is found in the Palaeolithic. Here we can observe the representation of aurochs, goats, deer, horses and humans. Contrary to what was expected, there are no anthropomorphic figures in the engravings from recent Pre-History, instead goats and mostly deer are the animals chosen to be represented. In the Iron Age the horses are the dominating theme, and are sometimes associated to human figures like riders.

In the Palaeolithic, the animals represented correspond to the same main four species represented in the Côa Valley Palaeolithic art: equides (horses), bovids (aurochs), caprids (ibex and chamois) and cervids (red deer and *Cervus elaphus*). The distribution of the represented animals is closer to the one verified in the Cantabria, where Magdalenian style assemblages show a strong increase in the representation of goats, that is the dominant animal in El Bosque or Covarón (González Sainz, 2010: 40). Following this tendency, the rock from Ribeira da Pedra da Asma also exhibits a goat representation, although in a different style, that we can associate to Style V as proposed by Bueno, Balbín and Alcolea (2008). Already at a later period, somewhere in the recent Pre-History, the deer theme is resurrected, as we can see in the two rocks from Santo Antão da Barca and Cabeço do Aguilhão. In this period the deer seems to have a special meaning in all kinds of contexts. If we amplify the analysed area we can find its representations not only in carvings but also in paintings, both in open-air sites, such as Forno

da Velha, as in megalithic tombs, such as Anta da Arquinha da Moura or Orca dos Juncais (e.g. Figueiredo and Baptista, 2010). During Iron Age, the themes suffer another turn and without any doubt the horses become the most represented figurative theme. We can state this unequivocally since the results we obtain in the analysis of the figurative motifs from Castelinho, where 521 slabs were studied, show consistent results. This demonstrates the importance of the horse, which when under human control, transformed transportation, warfare and trade among many other aspects of Iron Age populations (Bendrey, 2010: 10).

In summary, throughout Pre-Historic and Proto-Historic times, the depicted animals as well as their prominence is quite revealing. The wide variety of animals clearly demonstrate the importance or special meaning they had, both in an economic as well as in a spiritual sense. The disappearance of the representation of goats and horses in recent Pre-History must also be linked to the dramatic climate change and the predominance of some species over others.

6. Conclusions

This paper summarize results from a four-year field survey project that was undertaken as a result of the construction of a hydroelectric dam in the Northeast of Portugal. All the data collected is still under analysis and it will take some more years to get a clear picture of the meaning of the findings. Nevertheless, here we selected a small area, with a high concentration of rock art, to carry out a small case study regarding different temporalities, spaces, supports and ways of depicting figurative themes. On one hand our aim was to present some of the most important archaeological sites of the Sabor Valley to the scientific community through a summarized description. On the other, we wanted to stress some important issues that have been in our minds throughout this project. For instance, the importance of a whole new portable rock art collection that in this region seems to have reached two peaks: one in the Palaeolithic, the other in the Iron Age. As far as we know, there is no other place in Europe where portable art assumes such a huge importance, in such different human periods. So, could this be an isolated phenomenon or were other archaeological sites over-looked due to a lack of awareness of this kind of findings? Note that it is extremely difficult to recognize thin incised lines in schist surfaces during archaeological works. Another important issue addressed has to do with the long-term diachrony of the art manifestation at the Sabor Valley. We are perfectly aware that this is not an isolated case and we have to go no further than the Côa Valley to observe exactly the same reality. However, the lack of studies regarding the latest periods, the Iron Age and Historical periods, in our view, seems to limit a whole universe of information that could be extracted from rock art studies.

This article can be considered as a first and very preliminary attempt to overcome this situation. Although we have only discussed figurative themes, and we have gone no further than the Iron Age, the numerous occurrences of rock art at the Foz do Medal terrace, Ribeira da Pedra de Asma, Santo Antão da Barca, Cabeço do Aguilhão and Crestelos, makes a much broader investigation desirable and probably possible in a near future.

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