



Sobre rocas y huesos: las sociedades prehistóricas y sus manifestaciones plásticas

Coords./Eds.:

M^a Ángeles Medina-Alcaide

Antonio J. Romero Alonso

Rosa M^a Ruiz-Márquez

José L. Sanchidrián Torti

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M^a ÁNGELES MEDINA-ALCAIDE

ANTONIO J. ROMERO ALONSO

ROSA M^a RUIZ-MÁRQUEZ

JOSÉ L. SANCHIDRIÁN TORTI

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Coordinadores/editores:

M^a Ángeles Medina-Alcaide

Antonio J. Romero Alonso

Rosa M^a Ruiz-Márquez

José L. Sanchidrián Torti

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In memoriam

Ana María Márquez Alcántara

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Abstrac: The study of Rock Art in Baixo Sabor valley covers a wide territory, one that has been diachronically occupied between the Palaeolithic and the Contemporary Age. This is a study documenting a broad number of motifs that exist across several and different supports. Among them, three rocks with chronologies from the Late Glacial or Epipalaeolithic and the Neolithic-Chalcolithic periods deserved our special attention.

A caprid design with a Late Glacial style was identified on the rock “Pedra de Asma 7”. Assigned with a later chronology were the rocks “Veado do Cabeço do Aguilhão” and “Santo Antão da Braca”. The former includes an original representation of a deer drawn through the picking, and the latter contains a singular group of cervids also executed with the picking technique.

The selection of rocks used as the supports is not casual; all three outcrops gravitate around a privilege passageway at the Sabor valley. This is also the geographic location of both Foz do Medal Fluvial Terrace, where a Palaeolithic occupation was detected and over 1.500 engraved plaque fragments were uncovered; and Quinta de Crestelos settlement that revealed a proto-Historic, Roman and Historical setting with around 100 engraved plaques from the Iron Age and the Medieval times being uncovered on site.

Rock art from recent pre-History performs a subject lacking a more exact characterization at the Sabor valley. For this reason, and through the analysis of these three particular rocks, we aim to shed some light over the societies producing them. The supports provide us with clues related with landscape key-points and the represented motifs with access to the original natural cycles of the represented fauna. Lastly, an analogy established with wider rock art sites is expected to raise our knowledge regarding the type of settlements and broadly graphical continuities of these communities.

Keywords: Post-Palaeolithic rock art, zoomorphic figures, engravings, northeast Portugal

Resumen: El estudio del Arte Rupestre del Bajo Sabor incide sobre um amplio território ocupado de forma diacrónica desde el Paleolítico hasta la actualidad. En este contexto se han documentado un gran número de motivos grabados y pintados que han sido registrados en una gran diversidad de soportes. De todo este conjunto, destacan tres rocas que apuntan para una cronología que va desde la transición entre el Magdaleniense Final/Tardiglaciario o Epipaleolítico hasta el Neolítico.

En la roca “Pedra de Asma 7” encontramos la figura de un caprino cuyo estilo se encuadra en el Tardiglaciario. De una cronología posterior destaca la roca “Veado do Cabeço do Aguilhão” y la roca de “Santo Antão da Barca”. En el primer caso, se trata de un original grabado piqueteado de un ciervo. En el segundo caso, se trata de un singular conjunto de cérvidos también ejecutados a partir de la técnica de piqueteado.

La selección de rocas que sirven de soporte para estos motivos figurativos no ha sido casual, pues los tres afloramientos gravitan en torno a un lugar privilegiado de paso dentro del Valle del Sabor. En este espacio geográfico es donde se encuentra la Terraza Fluvial de la Foz do Medal, donde ha sido detectada una ocupación paleolítica con más de 1500 placas grabadas y el Poblado de la Quinta de Crestelos, con una ocupación desde la Edad del Bronce hasta el periodo Moderno/Contemporáneo, también con placas grabadas de la Edad del Hierro hasta la Edad Media.

El análisis de los motivos nos permite establecer conclusiones de los ciclos naturales de la fauna, pudiendo reconocer la especie, sexo y fase de crecimiento del animal representado. Los soportes nos dan indicios de puntos de paso o travesía sobre el río o entre diferentes morfologías del terreno. Finalmente, los contextos arqueológicos nos dan información sobre el poblamiento de este conjunto y su importancia.

Palabras clave: Arte Rupestre Postpaleolítico, figuras zoomorfas, grabados, Noreste de Portugal

THE HOLOCENE TRANSITION AND POST-PALAEOLITHIC ROCK ART FROM THE SABOR VALLEY (TRÁS-OS-MONTES, PORTUGAL)

El arte de transición holocénico e post-paleolítico en el Valle del Sabor (Trás-os-Montes, Portugal)

Sofia Soares de FIGUEIREDO

CITCEM, Trans-disciplinary Research Centre, Unity of Archaeology of the University of Minho (UAUM)

ACE, ODEBRECHT/Bento Pedroso Constructions and Lena Engineering-Estaleiro do Baixo Sabor

Pedro XAVIER

ACE, ODEBRECHT/Bento Pedroso Constructions and Lena Engineering-Estaleiro do Baixo Sabor

Andreia SILVA

ACE, ODEBRECHT/Bento Pedroso Constructions and Lena Engineering-Estaleiro do Baixo Sabor

Dário NEVES

ACE, ODEBRECHT/Bento Pedroso Constructions and Lena Engineering-Estaleiro do Baixo Sabor

Isabel DOMÍNGUEZ GARCÍA

ACE, ODEBRECHT/Bento Pedroso Constructions and Lena Engineering-Estaleiro do Baixo Sabor

ACINEP, Prehistory Studies Institute

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Hydroelectric Exploitation of Baixo Sabor is the widest hydric project in progress in Portugal. In territorial terms, it will submerge an area of 3.000 hectares located in northeast Trás-os-Montes. The project impact upon the landscape and heritage led to the development and establishment of a Plan of Heritage Protection¹ in 2010, responsible for the creation of specific archaeological studies, with the vast majority being focused on different chronological eras - pre-Historic studies, proto-Historic studies, Roman studies, etc. Additionally, a specific rock art study was developed, and, since 2010, we have been coordinating all the works related with this particular research.

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: Paul Dordio; Research coordinators: Filipe Santos (Cilhades), José Sastre (Protohistory), Luis Fontes (Middle Ages), Paulo Dordio (Modern and Contemporary Periods), Rita Gaspar (Prehistory), Sergio Antunes (Monitoring), Sergio 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.

Geographically, the Sabor valley is within the vicinity of the Côa valley; however, in terms of rock art, the former has been considered extremely poorer when compared to Côa, a World Heritage Site classified by UNESCO in 1998. In 2010, only 30 rocks had been identified in the Hydroelectric Exploitation of Baixo Sabor circumscribed area, a circumstance that changed with the works carried out in the past four years and uncovering a new reality, one that stands out for the originality of its supports, the representation of its motifs and the wide diachronic designs detected.

Moreover, and at the time when the present paper was written, we had recorded and studied 210 shelters or open-air rock art sites, 79 edifications with engraved or painted blocks, 10 decorated single blocks and over 2.000 engraved plaques emerging from 5 different excavations, all located at the Sabor valley.

In chronological terms, the Upper Palaeolithic richness is present in the portable art plaques emerging from the Foz do Medal Fluvial Terrace (Figueiredo *et al.*, 2014; Figueiredo, *in press*). Equally, the Iron Age period is mainly materialized in the plaques or engraved slabs discovered at the Castelhinho, Crestelos, Mouros Cemetery and Laranjal sites (e.g. Santos *et al.*, 2012). From the 210 shelters or open-air rock art sites alongside the remaining identified edifications and single blocks, the majority of engravings belonged to the historical periods, mainly from the Modern or Contemporary ages (e.g. Coelho *et al.*, 2012).

In contrast with the expected results, rock art with recent pre-history chronologies and located at the Sabor valley, with a few exceptions, is the one presenting the major challenges in terms of characterization and chronological analysis. Adding to this, we failed to uncover portable art remains from enclosed archaeological contexts. Several surveys conducted with the aim of contextualizing rock art representations in terms of recent pre-history also failed to reveal the expected results. Finally, and disregarding 4 shelters exhibiting schematic paintings, namely Ribeira do Xedal Shelter, Fraga do Fojo, Medal Brooke Rock 2 and Ribeira do Resinal Shelter, the remaining valley sites registering recent pre-history estimated chronologies, almost exclusively, refer to geometric or abstract designs, such as dimples, linear incisions or the so-called *unhadas do diabo* (devil's nails), which can have wide chronological intervals ranging between pre-History and the Contemporary period (Xavier *et al.*, 2014). In the absence of a more precise archaeological context, their inclusion in exact chronologies is extremely challenging.

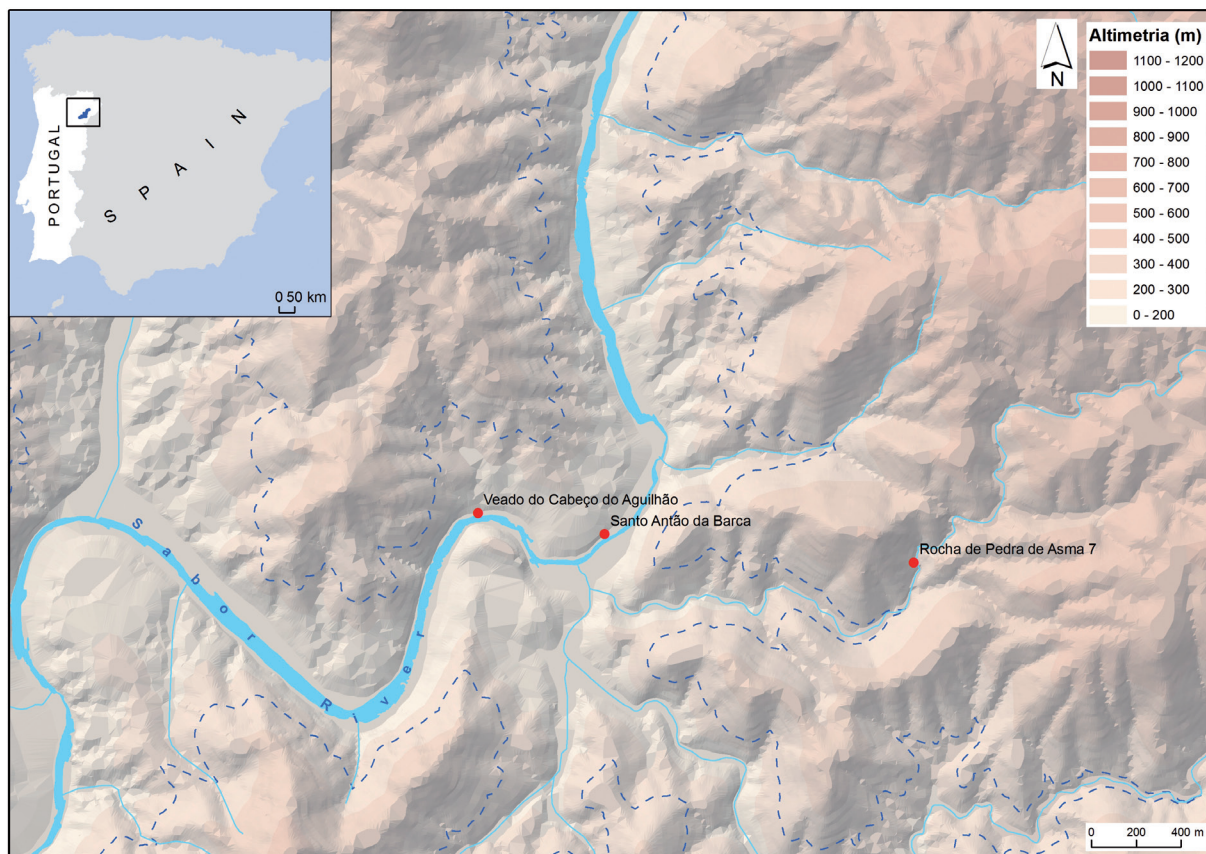
Regardless, there are 3 rocks where this scenario is contradicted. With unique zoomorphic themes for the eastern Trás-os-Montes region and with analogies only established with art from the Côa Valley and the Tagus river, we highlight 3 outcrops that are geographically close and display incised or picked caprids and cervids. Their study and the understanding of their location within the landscape is expected to increase our knowledge related with the communities roaming and occupying this land throughout the wide chronological interval of the Late Glacial and Chalcolithic periods (Figure 1 and Figure 2).

2. OBJECTIVES

A few works developed at the Sabor valley and focusing on ancient pre-Historic, proto-Historic and Historic art have already been published; and as referred above, recent pre-Historic rock art is the subject presenting major challenges in terms of its assessment.

The present paper aims to develop a first approach related with rock art studies from the Epipalaeolithic-Mesolithic and recent pre-History periods at the Sabor valley through the analysis of 3 specific rocks, albeit works still in progress at the valley have limited these studies. We attempted to analyse existing motifs alongside their location within the landscape, in order to draw the necessary parallels.

Benefiting from a previous study focused on schematic painting existing in northeast Trás-os-Montes, and from a brief analysis of the transition period to the Holocene alongside the coming of the



Neolithic era to this region, we also expect to improve existing knowledge related with a certain graphical *continuum* present in the studied rocks and indicative of a community *continuum* based upon a wider territorial analysis and supported by wider archaeological works developed in the last decades.

3. ROCKS, PANELS AND MOTIFS DESCRIPTION

When the rock “Pedra de Asma 7” was discovered, it performed a real shift in terms of the type of representations known to exist in the Sabor valley (Xavier, Figueiredo, Neves, 2013). The rock is located on the right margin of Pedra de Asma, a tributary of the Medal brooke that, in turn, is a watercourse of the Sabor river. The outcrop under study is not a prominent feature within the landscape and the visibility existing on its location is far reduced. The access to the rock is considerably difficult due to the sharp inclination existing on the hill where the rock is located. An area not necessarily identified as a shelter can be seen in the central part of the rock, it details a flaw that can serve as a harbour. In this rather reduced space where two people could not cohabitate, 3 engraved panels have been detected. The present paper will only approach Panel A and its first engraving period, as the remaining motifs (periods 2 and 3 of the panels A, B and C) have Modern and Contemporary Age chronologies.

Associated with the first engraving period of Panel A are 8 motifs that, in their vast majority, refer to a group of lines presenting different directions. Despite this tangling of lines, we detected a zoomorphic motif - a caprid from the

Figure 1. Localization of “Veado do Cabeço do Aguilhão”, “Santo Antão da Barca” and “Rocha de Pedra de Asma 7” in Sabor valley, in the peninsular context. Map by João Monteiro.



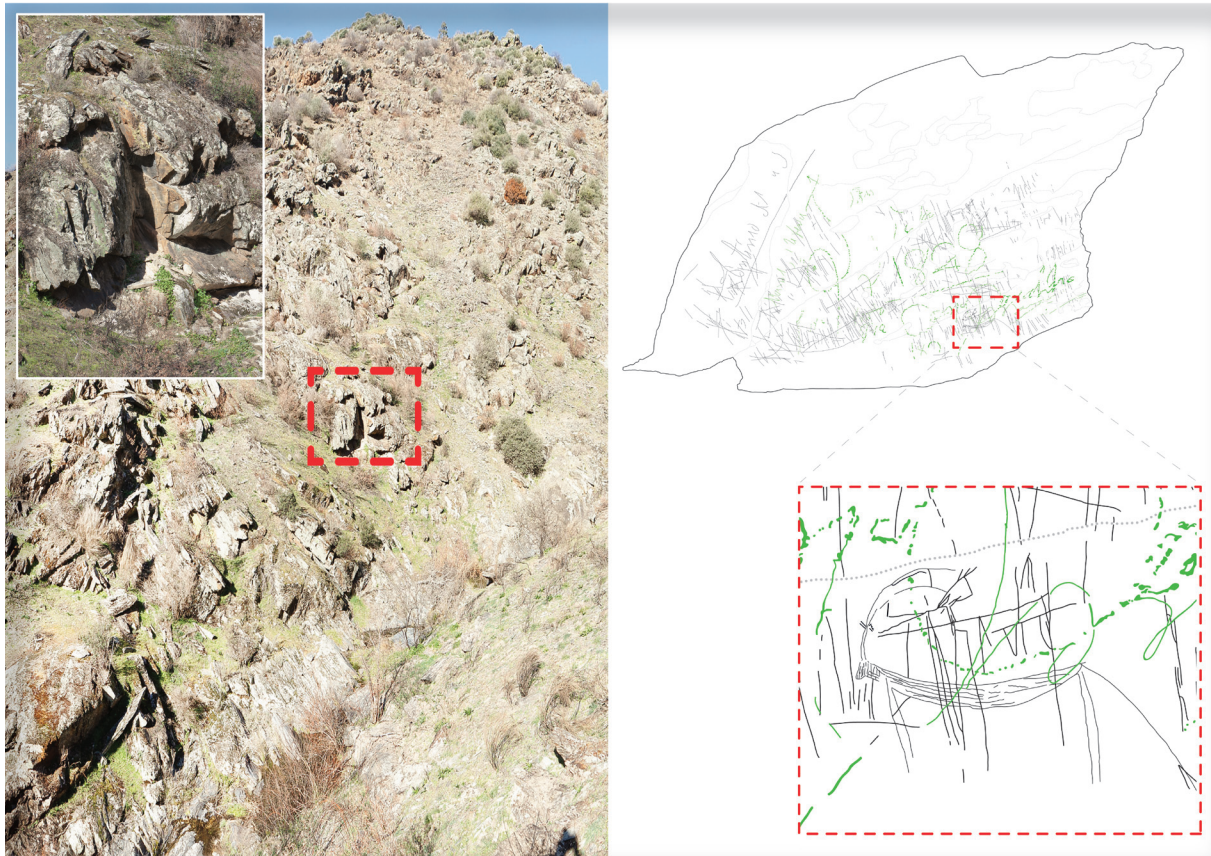
Figure 2. Localization of the main sites referred in the text. Map by João Monteiro.

Late Magdalenian/Late Glacial or Epipalaeolithic transition (Figure 3). This is a period characterized by reduced visibility and exposure of rocks and motifs not only due to their location within the landscape but also by the incision technique applied to the representations alongside their reduced size. Zoomorphism is subjected to a less naturalistic formalism in this period, thus, originating new shapes and silhouettes (Baptista, 2009), and providing greater predominance to the incision of the multiple trace. The zoomorphic motif under study is a true example of this trend, the body of fusiform morphology is filled by perpendicular lines that around the head area adopt a vertical direction.

The best parallels can be established with the Côa valley, namely with rock 24 located on the Ribeira de Piscos rivermouth and rock 16 at the José Esteves valley (Baptista, 2009). Additionally, on the other side of the border, in Siega Verde, optimal parallels can also be drawn with this particular design (Bueno, Balbín, Alcolea, 2008).

Focusing our attention on the description of the rocks “Santo Antão da Barca” and “Veado do Cabeço do Aguilhão”, both exhibiting semi-naturalistic or sub-naturalistic engravings and still without established parallels in the eastern Trás-os-Montes region, and given their physical proximity, we consider a potential chronological relationship with the same iconographic universe.

In “Santo Antão da Barca”, we identified five zoomorphic drawings associated with diverse picking and dimple techniques and representing roe deer or deer specimens, with 3 of the animals being part of the same small group (Figure 4). All the panels follow the river downstream, which is particularly relevant for



their interpretation. The location is also a relevant factor to take into consideration, as it corresponds to the best pedestrian connection point existing between both margins in lower rainfall periods; therefore, performing an optimal spot for the animals' water supply practices.

From the 5 identified zoomorphic representations, one stands out due to the concentration of its picked elements around the inner part of the body, thus, generating a sense of prominent depth and providing the design with volume. This representation suggests a female during pregnancy. In reality, adult males seem to be absent from this interesting group interpreted as a matriarchal setting and comprising an adult female, her daughter and granddaughter or daughter from the previous year. We know that males and females occupy different geographical areas throughout the year. If we take into consideration that this group depicts a female during pregnancy and/or her youngsters, while acknowledging that the births in this particular species occur between May and June, we may conclude that the figurines are representing the springtime season (Figueiredo, Neves, 2013).

Further downstream, on "Veado do Cabeço do Aguilhão" rock, there is a representation of a male deer facing the upstream river and looking towards the rock we just described (Figure 5). The animal representation leaves us with no doubt that we are dealing with a male. Similar to the previous case, the engraving itself is revealing of the time of the year represented by the majestic deer. The animal antlers grow annually, they reach their peak size in July and maintain them until October and November. The neck picking, the forequarters and the snout are further concentrated and represented at a deeper level, providing the

Figure 3. Rocha de Pedra de Asma 7, according to Xavier, Figueiredo and Neves, 2013. Photo by Adriano Borges, composition by Renata Morais.

animal's body parts with a darker shade (Figueiredo, Silva, 2013). We know that between the autumn and winter periods, the deer's coat changes and exhibits a plain stain on the tail and a darker tone on the neck (Gomes, 2010). Although the tail representation is somehow confusing, we are certain that it is clearly facing upwards. This particular representation of the tail only occurs in two circumstances: when the animal is running or when it is pre-mating, an event only occurring between October and December. Lastly, the stretched neck and the snout may suggest the brahma period, featured by an intensity and volume of the male deer roar when building and defending its habitats.

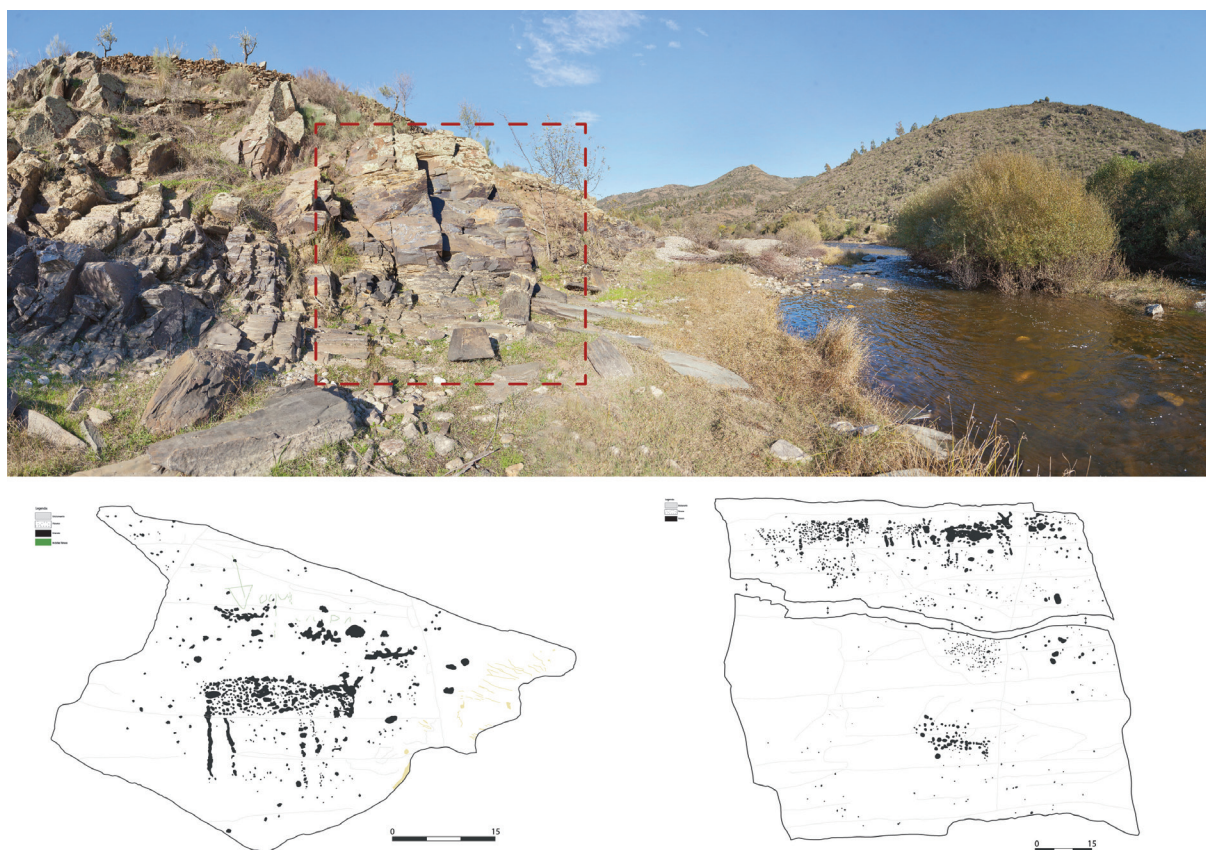
The proximity of both rocks from the river caudal is responsible for their submersion by Sabor waters on certain periods. The hydrography of eastern Trás-os-Montes and its climatic irregularities reveal us that the hydrographical basins, as the one in Sabor, are accentuated by sharp overturns, mainly during winter months when the river caudal increases considerably. 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 the river level rises and begins to decrease in the springtime, when the new-borns come. This reality has also been observed at the Tagus valley, where the intentional engraving of certain rocks in specific seasons was studied, while considering the different river caudal periods (Gomes, 2004).

When attempting to assign chronologies to both rocks, some challenges emerged. Only focusing on the engraving technique, the best parallels are drawn with the Côa valley, especially due to their geographical proximity; however, it is with the Tagus valley engravings that these two outcrops have more in common in terms of their main stylistic features.

The zoomorphic narrative is a staple feature of the Côa valley rock art, with several panels featuring equids, bovines, caprids and cervids. In terms of existing cervids at the Côa valley, an animal mainly represented from the Magdalenian period onwards (Baptista, 1999), the ones presenting wider similarities with the themes under study are the deer on Rock 1 at the Cabrões valley and the deer from Rock 33 in Canada do Inferno, the latter registering an Epipalaeolithic chronology (Luís, 2009). As an example of the complexity in assigning chronologies, let us take the Cabrões valley cervid and its several chronological interpretations as an example: Baptista (1999, 2009) framed the design upon the iconographic universe of the transition art in the Holocene period; Varela Gomes (2005-2006), aiming to be more rigorous, included it in the Epipalaeolithic period, and Jean Clottes (2008), attributed a much older chronology to the motif, allocating it to the Solutrean period. In this last chronological attribution, it was only considered the head movement (abstruse design) and fully disregarded the motif archaeological context and periods, which are very well documented for the Côa valley Palaeolithic cycles.

As previously suggested, it is outside Trás-os-Montes and Beira Alta that the motifs in the "Santo Antão da Barca" and "Veado do Cabeço do Aguilhão" rocks find their most obvious analogies. We have to acknowledge the strong connection existing in terms of style and technology between the quadrupeds under study and the Tagus valley deer. There are two main chronologies considered for the Tagus valley art. The first, established by Martinho Baptista, is based upon existing engravings in S. Simão and divides the Tagus art into three distinct stages (Stage I, II and III) spanning between the Upper Neolithic and the Final Bronze Age (Baptista, Martins, Serrão, 1978). According to the author, the presence of deer motifs is manifested in all three stages. Varela Gomes, on the other hand, and fully based upon the Anati proposals for the Gallic Art, organized the Tagus Art in six distinct periods, and only the first three include cervids, extending from the Epipalaeolithic to the Neolithic periods (Gomes, 2010; Garcês, 2008-2009). Our analysis have concluded that the cervids under study exhibit a strong parallelism with the Tagus art deer from Stage II – static stylized (initial Neolithic) and Stage III – dynamic stylized (Middle Neolithic), as suggested by the latter researcher.

Returning to the regions of Trás-os-Montes and Beiras, we observed that the rocks under study also exhibit interesting parallels with painting techniques. Examples would be Forno da Velha, Fraga



d'Aia and the megalithic monument entitled Orca dos Juncais (e.g. Figueiredo and Baptista, 2010; Jorge, Baptista, Sanches, 1988).

4. DISCUSSING RESULTS

In a recent work, we apply a statistical analysis to the schematic painting technique existing in northeast Trás-os-Montes, in order to improve the understanding of this phenomenon dynamic and be able to discuss it while considering several other precepts (Figueiredo, 2013). In the study of the rocks in question, we were mainly interested in two of the developed approach lines, the ones linked with the long chronological sequence of the represented motifs and the community continuity existing in this territory. Effectively, and widening our scale of analysis outwards, the motifs under study have parallels with schematic paintings and the neighbouring regions of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro.

There are two main reasons why these 3 rocks have a special relevance for the overall study of rock art at the Sabor valley and the entire eastern part of Trás-os-Montes. The first is related with the rock “Pedra de Asma 7” and its outcrop being an unequivocal example of Late Glacial art, referring to a transition period of the climatic era known as the Holocene. Therefore, we are dealing with a unique representation from a period when art is still extremely difficult to characterize, hence, recognise and properly contextualize in Trás-os-Montes in general and the Sabor valley in particular. The second reason is equally linked with the challenges in featuring engraved motifs from recent pre-History. However, and in contrast with the majority of engraved rocks existing at the valley, both

Figure 4. Santo Antão da Barca, according to Figueiredo and Neves, 2013. Photo by Adriano Borges, composition by Renata Morais.



Figure 5. Veado do Cabeço do Aguilhão, according to Figueiredo and Silva, 2013. Photo by Adriano Borges, composition by Renata Morais.

the “Veado da Cabeça do Aguilhão” and “Santo Antão da Braca” rocks include designs that are easily assigned to this period. The circumstance of these 3 rocks being geographically bounded and neighbours of wider archaeological sites, such as Foz do Medal Fluvial Terrace and Quinta de Crestelos settlement, where engraved plaques with Upper Palaeolithic, Proto-History and History chronologies have been uncovered, is also pertinent.

We would like to stress two ideas that seemed rather important in the overall analysis we are aiming to develop. On the one hand, the idea that rock art is a central and independent information source in the exploitation of settlement patterns (e.g. Cruz Berrocal, Vicent García, 2007) and, on the other, the fact that it exhibits a privilege materiality for the study of continuities exceeding the classical temporal boundaries and the evolutionary schemes where different eras gradually progress (e.g. González Rubial, 2012).

While developing the idea of a graphical and community *continuum*, the documentation related with a wide Palaeolithic sequence including azilien and later chronologies figures led to the proposal of Style V based on the Palaeolithic artistic styles developed by A. Leroi-Gourhan (Bueno, Balbín, Alcolea, 2008), in which figurines with naturalistic and schematic elements dominate images of hunters-gatherers living between 9.500-7.000 BP and probably also between 7.000-4.000 BP (Bueno, Balbín, 2012). The adoption of Style V begins with the assumption that no rupture between the Palaeolithic art and subsequent artistic manifestations existed: “thus, we cannot refer the disappearance of Palaeolithic patterns, but instead suggest a progressive modification combining naturalistic elements with more abstract and geometric designs that are gradually associated with the presence of the human figure” (Bueno, Balbín, Alcolea, 2008).

This population *continuum* is well documented in the archaeological sites located in Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro. An example is Prazo located in Vila Nova de Foz Côa, and referring to a site where several archaeological campaigns identified a series of pre-historic habitats that overlap from a stratigraphic point of view and register Upper Palaeolithic, Epipalaeolithic-Mesolithic, Mesolithic and Late Neolithic chronologies (Monteiro-Rodrigues, Figueiral, López Sáez, 2008). Aiming to avoid the debate regarding the different approaches supporting, on the one hand, a trans-cultural diffusion model and, on the other, a colonialist

model for the Neolithic groups located in the region, we believe the “capillary model” is the one that better adapts to the reality we observed (Figueiredo, 2013).

If all 3 rocks under study suggest that a population hiatus should not be considered for this region between the Palaeolithic and the Neolithic, in contrast, the represented motifs, mainly the cervids, reveal a strong and complex bond between the engravings and the paintings. Moreover, and more important than the geographical or physical boundaries existing in the different Late Glacial manifestations depending on them being painted or engraved, are the chronological connections. If Late Glacial rock art techniques are considered, we should also consider the engravings that are subsequent to the paintings. As referred by Bueno and Balbín (2003) and Bueno (2008), this argument is linked with naturalism and schematic concepts, where paintings are understood to be older naturalist expressions when compared to engravings that are considered more recent and schematic. The cervids under study clearly reveal that engravings can be as “naturalistic” as paintings and might have similar or even earlier chronologies. In terms of the cervid representations and regardless of them being engraved and/or painted, there is the idea that the protagonists of the latest Palaeolithic engraved stages, essentially referring to cervids, were also the most common themes in post-Palaeolithic periods, implying the existence of an interesting nexus between the Palaeolithic and post-Palaeolithic animal designs (Bueno, 2008).

As all 3 rocks under study belong to a period when the human communities began a gradual process of shifting mentalities intrinsically associated with climatic variations and the continuous domestication of nature, we believe the represented themes and their location within the landscape shaped the new spaces and the new times. Spaces started to mark passageways, the exploitation of resources, and the motifs that can be interpreted as the symbols of the continuous cyclic renewal. We are mainly referring to the representation of cervids and the fact that their periodically renewed antlers symbolize fertility, growth rhythms and rebirths (Chevalier, Gheerbrant, 1994), all central themes in the lives of these communities.

5. CONCLUSION

The present paper was focused in detailing and promoting 3 of the most important findings in open-air rock art identified at the Sabor valley. Rock art at the Sabor valley exhibits unique and unusual features, its representations are directly linked with the transition era and recent pre-History, a period registering greater challenges in terms of characterization and the subsequent study of its art. In order to surpass these limitations, we analysed the rocks in terms of motifs and location in space, while establishing regional and supra-regional parallels, in order to improve the overall understanding of the communities roaming this land between the Epipalaeolithic-Mesolithic and the Neolithic-Chalcolithic. Additionally, we believe that the approached broadly graphic continuum is also revealing of a population *continuum*, which should, for the time being, be understood on a supra-regional level and on a wider scale of analysis.

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