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**NOTE ON AN ARTICLE PUBLISHED IN COALITION NO. 11, JANUARY 2006.**

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The previous issue of COALITION featured an article by Robert G. Bednarik entitled "A global perspective of rock art protection" on which he chastens Portuguese archaeology in general and rock art researchers and managers in particular with some serious accusations. The paragraph in question is the following:

"The most severe confrontations IFRAO has had with state heritage agencies were those in Portugal, first in the Cõa valley (Bednarik 1995), later in the Guadiana valley (Arcà et al. 2001; Bednarik 2004), where these agencies were exposed as intellectually corrupt and incompetent. This has led to major remedial action in that country." Robert G. Bednarik, "A global perspective of rock art protection", COALITION, No.11 January 2006, p. 3.

Bednarik is an Australian autodidact researcher that has devoted his efforts to the vast field of rock art, as one can see in the Australian Rock Art Research Association, Inc. webpage (<http://mc2.vicnet.net.au/home/aura/web/index.html>). Nearly all the numerous articles in this site, covering a wide range of issues related to rock art research (from

“Lichenometry” to “Taphonomic logic for dummies” or from “The earliest evidence of palaeoart” to “Metamorphology - the scientific version of archaeology”), are written by Bednarik the president of the Association. When in 1994, the Côa Valley rock art was discovered, EDP – the power company that was building a dam near the mouth of the Côa River that would submerge a great number of engraved outcrops – invited him (together with the Canadian Watchman and the Americans Phillips and Dorn – later, Dorn admitted that his conclusions were wrong and that the engravings were in fact of Pleistocene age [Dorn 2000]) to try and date the Côa rock art. Bednarik developed a technique called Microerosion to date rock art that he had been testing in Australia and Siberia. Bednarik’s results pointed to a very modern chronology of the engravings as opposed to the reports of all European rock art experts that categorically integrated most of the imagery in the larger corpus of Western European Upper Palaeolithic rock art. His conclusions of a very recent chronology for the Côa rock art were challenged and the shortcomings of the Microerosion technique demonstrated (see, for instance, Pope 2000 or Zilhão 1995b). All major rock art experts recognized that the proposed Upper Palaeolithic chronology was correct. For instance, Bahn, Balbín, Lorblanchet, Ripoll, Sacchi and Villaverde signed a report (Bahn et al. 1997) attesting to the importance and age of the engravings that was instrumental in the inscription by UNESCO of the Prehistoric Rock Art Sites in the Côa Valley in the World Heritage List (UNESCO 1999). From this moment on, Bednarik engaged in a bitter and obsessive crusade for the re-establishment of the ‘truth’ and denigration of Portuguese archaeology and of the PAVC and CNART (the National Center for Rock Art). Most notably, his preferential target was João Zilhão, the first Director of the Instituto Português de Arqueologia (IPA) of which the former institutions are dependent.

Bednarik is entitled to his views and opinions insofar as they don’t enter the realm of the gratuitous insult or calumny susceptible even, as one might note, of legal action. If we examine Bednarik’s paragraph we immediately notice one of the preferred tactics to establish as ‘hard fact’ a set of calumnies based on hearsay and invented or fabricated evidences; that of tangling crossed references. For

instance, in his own article that Bednarik quotes (Bednarik 2004a) as the base for calling Portuguese state agencies incompetent and intellectual corrupt, nothing leads to that conclusion and the author doesn’t give any hint on that direction. Readers that haven’t examined that paper in reading the last issue of COALITION might have ended up with the idea that it is an established ‘fact’, since it “led to major remedial action in that country”. Nothing can be further from the truth; in fact this illustrates the use of the cross referencing tactic. Whenever Bednarik or one of his associates wants to state as an ‘established truth’ that state agencies in Portugal are intellectually corrupt and incompetent they just have to quote his COALITION article! If one has the trouble of reading all that has been produced by Bednarik or by his associates, most of the times under the shielding ‘umbrella’ of IFRAO (International Federation of Rock Art Associations), on the Côa matter, he will find that his works are all filled with this cross referencing technique that frequently, for the less trained eye, has the merit of turning controversial and not all proved ‘facts’ in the most crystalline of truths.

The paragraph in question also displays another of the usual ambiguities that the Australian author resorts to when trying to present his case the most ‘truthful’ way possible. In that paragraph Bednarik calls incompetent and intellectual corrupt to state heritage agencies in Portugal. To know precisely who those agencies are, one must read his quoted article (Bednarik 2004a)!... COALITION readers when examining that article (Bednarik 2004) and also Zilhão’s reply (2004a, b) will immediately understand the personal nature, on Bednarik’s part, of the quarrel between the two, namely in the institution of a crusade in the name of science against the Côa and João Zilhão, whom he accuses of a series of misdeeds in the Côa and Alqueva affairs. But it is precisely that article Bednarik quotes in order to classify Portuguese state agencies – where the PAVC is integrated –, and that he in the COALITION article never names, as incompetent and intellectually corrupt!

We conclude this note by expressing the hope that the following list of references can be useful for COALITION readers. Most of the fundamental papers, which we strongly recommend readers to examine in order to

fully understand this whole affair, are available online. References quoted in the text will also appear in the list. We also supply a throughout yet incomplete list of references pertaining to scientific papers by Portuguese and foreign scholars and researchers, displaying the research done in the Cõa on land management, conservation of the corpus of rock art, chronology and documentation of the rock art and identification of land settling patterns in the Upper Palaeolithic and other periods. References of Bednarik's and Watchman's works on which these authors defy the widely accepted chronology for the Cõa Valley rock art are also supplied. All links were working when this note was sent to the COALITION editor. We also recommend a visit to the Park's website at <http://www.ipa.min-cultura.pt/coa/>.

We will also try to save the bother to Bednarik and suggest a retort to this note. Something along the lines of: "the huge majority of the papers in this list and all that has been said here is nothing more than state or stale propaganda", as Bednarik (2003b) himself or as one of his associates (Abreu 2003) call it.

Nevertheless, COALITION readers have now indication on where to access comprehensive information regarding this whole matter, so that they might decide for themselves on questions of incompetence, intellectual corruption and also stale, state or corporative propaganda.

#### Fundamental readings:

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