

An abstract black line drawing on a dark gray background, depicting a profile of a face and neck. The lines are expressive and sketchy, with some areas filled with stippling. The face is oriented towards the right, and the neck extends downwards.

LIMITLESS ART

CÔA &
SIEGA
VERDE

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EXHIBITION

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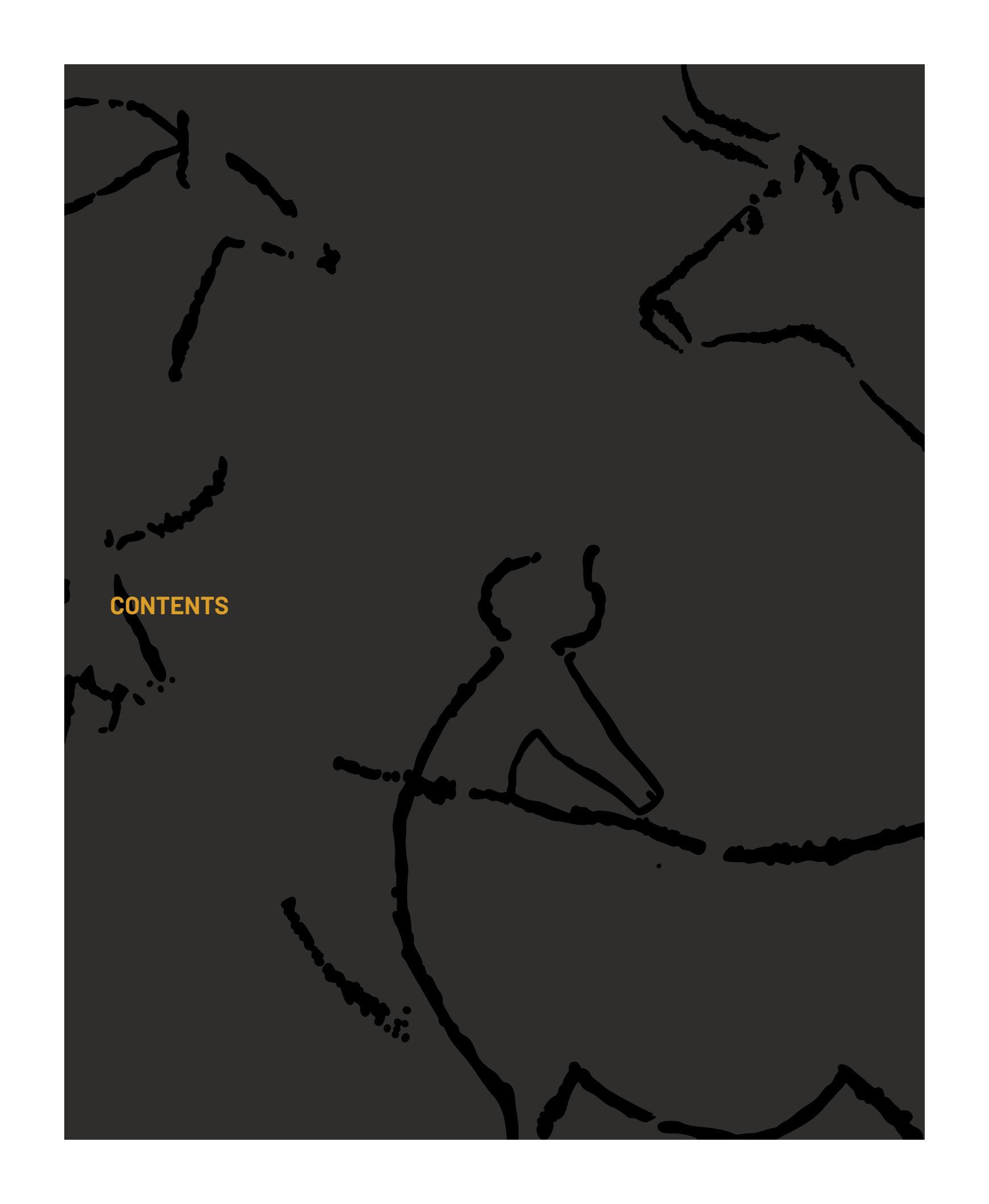
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In memoriam a Bruno Navarro



LIMITLESS ART

CÔA &
SIEGA
VERDE

The background of the entire page is a dark gray. Overlaid on this background are several abstract, hand-drawn black lines. These lines vary in thickness and style, some appearing as simple strokes while others form more complex, branching structures. One prominent line starts near the top left, curves downwards, and then branches out towards the bottom right. Another line starts near the top right and curves downwards. A third line starts near the middle left and curves downwards. A fourth line starts near the bottom left and curves upwards. A fifth line starts near the bottom right and curves upwards. The overall effect is a minimalist, artistic composition.

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**DISTRIBUTION AND CONTEXTUALISATION OF OPEN-AIR
PALAEOLITHIC ART OF THE CÔA AND SIEGA VERDE ENSEMBLES**

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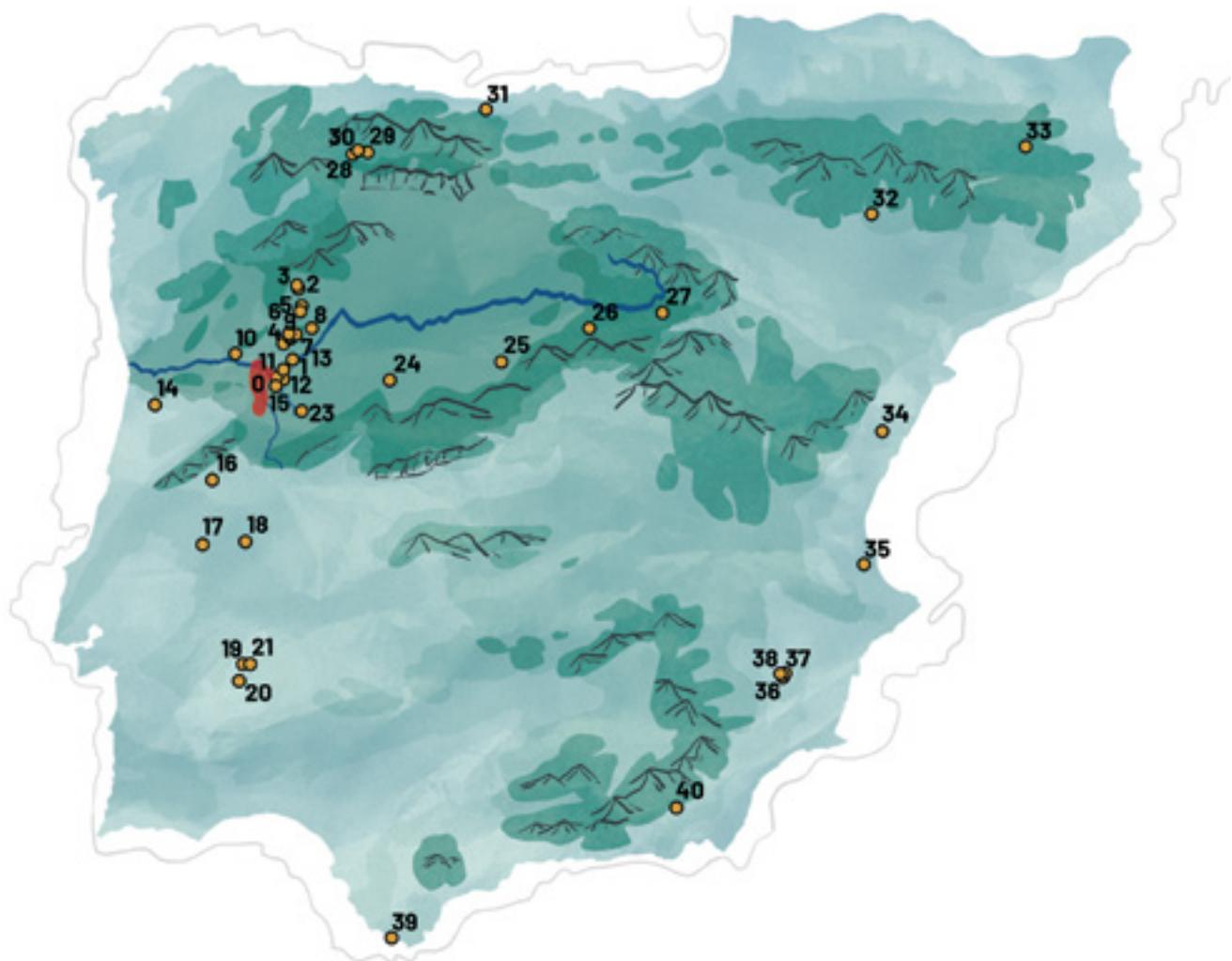
The association between Palaeolithic art and caves conditioned its territorial presence. Needless to say, this characteristic meant that Palaeolithic art could only be found in those areas where caves were located. Acceptance of this claim effectively ruled out the majority of European regions where the terrain had other lithological features, where there were neither limestone nor caves. The assumption of this principle not only eliminated the possibility of art in most of the territory, but also the existence of open-air art in the Palaeolithic epoch.

However, in 1906, Breuil and Cartailhac acknowledged the possible existence of open-air Palaeolithic art, given that engravings had a greater chance than the paintings of surviving until modern times, although this depended on the type of rock, the depth of the grooves and the climate of the regions they were located in. Later, A. Laming-Emperaire and A. Leroi-Gourhan posited the existence of a decorated zone at the entrance to the caves, known as the outer sanctuary, although this is not exactly open-air art. They believed that Palaeolithic art could receive light from the exterior but within the cavernous environment.

This conceptual difficulty remained unresolved until 1981 when the Portuguese team from the University of Oporto discovered the Mazouco site. Following this discovery, and in particular in the wake of the controversy surrounding the Côa sites, traces of conservatism and inertia remained that resisted the acceptance of an undisputable fact: the existence of open-air Palaeolithic art.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

As stated above, open-air Palaeolithic art was first recognised in Mazouco in 1981. From then on, it was possible to assess the findings in Domingo García, with a horse that was already known, Piedras Blancas, Fornols Haut, Siega Verde and Côa. These sites were concentrated mainly on the Portuguese-Spanish bor-



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Fig. 1. Map with distribution of open-air Palaeolithic art sites in the Iberian Peninsula and related sites to put them into context.

der, although it spread as far as the French Pyrenees and the peaks of Almería. The reason was apparently clear. The rock support was schist and greywacke, which were particularly abundant in this area.

Yet the rock support could also differ. Indeed, other supports have been identified, including granite in Faia in the south of the Côa and quartzite in La Grajera, Extremadura. Nevertheless, the characteristics of schist – its hardness,

compactness and engravable planes – make it the preferred choice. It is no coincidence that there is a particular concentration of artistic forms in those areas where schist and greywacke abound, although this is not an essential condition.

THE CONCEPT OF OPEN-AIR ART

Although our intention here is not to discuss the name of this art concept, we must refer to its possible cultural implications. Our initial definition should be based on a negative perception; in other words, all those examples that are not found inside caves. In other words, all examples that receive direct exterior light and are visible from outside, therefore presenting a lack of darkness, mystery and difficulty to access.

If this is the case, open-air art has a series of intermediate forms that are found neither completely indoors nor outdoors. Instead, they appear under rock shelters and overhangs; in other words, in the open-air, but partly sheltered from the elements.

There are also figures in rock shelters and shallow caves, whose function was the same as that of the caverns, but notably more abundant throughout the territory. The Iberian Peninsula is rich in these intermediate forms.

LOCATION WITHIN THE LANDSCAPE

The location patterns of Palaeolithic art forms are simple and found repeatedly in open-air art. In the Côa, as in other locations, this layout has been the object of extensive study. Palaeolithic graphic sites are found mainly in river fords and the surrounding areas, as well as in the hills that dominate the landscape. There are slight variants, but the essence of the pattern is repeated, sometimes accompanied by coeval occupation sites.

The inhabited sites can be recognised if there has been sufficient prior documentation, as in the case of the Côa ensemble. High ground and fords are suitable for dwelling in and decorating. They all concentrate suitable stone slabs, always located in accessible and recognisable spaces.

In the case of the intermediate forms, namely shallow caves and rock shelters, their presence depends on the nature of the relief, as they require suitable rock supports. Where possible, the location of intermediate Palaeolithic figures often requires high ground or a command of the surrounding area, overlooking the surroundings, a characteristic that is common to many sites in Andalusia or the Levante region. The majority of the decorated sites can be recognised from a considerable distance.

This does not occur in the case of cave art, which is dependent on the conformation of the interior limestone. We are still unaware of the nature of the exterior signalling of these types of sites, although it must have existed. There may well have been objects that were visible from outside, natural shapes, etc.



Fig. 2. Main horse at the Mazouco site in Freixo de Espada à Cinta (Photograph by Rodrigo de Balbín).

WHAT WE HAVE

As mentioned previously, the Iberian Peninsula is home to an abundance of open-air forms along the Portuguese-Spanish border, and particularly in the Douro basin. This reflects the current state of our knowledge, whilst also opening up possibilities for future study.

The first site to be discovered was Mazouco, in Freixo da Espada à Cinta, near the Aldeadávila reservoir, which was built between 1958 and 1965. The site was known to the local villagers, including Nelson Rebanda, who reported its existence to Professor Susana O. Jorge from Oporto University. She eventually led the

research team, who, despite their initial lack of experience in Palaeolithic art, was able to comprehend its antiquity.

The site we know is the remains of what must have been a far larger one, which in all likelihood occupied the lower areas of the River Douro, which is now underwater. We may well be forgiven for thinking that this is a site on high ground, overlooking the river area. However, this image is distorted by the reservoir.

Its discovery and assessment were the basis for the study of the Domingo García ensembles of the southern fields of the province of Segovia, featuring a pecked horse that has been known since 1970. The site was carefully studied by the team from the University of Valladolid and later by one of us (RB) and the team from the Spanish National Distance Learning University (UNED in its Spanish initials). The location leaves no room for doubt, even though the San Isidro hill is only part of a larger site that extends as far as Coca. In the spaces older than the elevation of the Central System, traces of the ancient foldings can be found that revealed schist surfaces of the Primary Age. These surfaces were used to create engravings during the Palaeolithic and later epochs over a considerable period of time. The worn remains of an ensemble that was far larger can be seen, damaged by the construction of holiday homes in the surroundings. An outstanding ensemble of engravings remains, made up more of post-Palaeolithic examples, which has not yet been assessed. Today there are eight spaces inventoried as containing Palaeolithic art.

The possibility had arisen of a further assessment of Palaeolithic art, not without its setbacks and difficulties, yet which would eventually present a strong argument for the interpretation of the oldest example of human graphic representation.

It was within such a context that in 1983, the Fornols Haut site was discovered in French Catalonia, studied by D. Sacchi. Again, we find the remains

of a larger site, with an engraved surface featuring finely traced birds and caprids (ibexes and chamois) that are hard to make out. This graphic discourse normally unfolds on more than one stone page, and indeed, this must have been the case in Fornols. Its location complies with the model of art sites located on high ground, dominating a large surface area below.

Around the same time, another chance discovery would be made: Piedras Blancas in the Sierra de los Filabres mountain range in Almería, studied by J. Martínez. This discovery broadened the geographical horizon of open-air art, extending it as far as the southern Mediterranean. This site lies at an altitude of 1,300

metres, facing the northern foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountain range, and affording views of the bay of Almería. It is, of course, another example of a site located on high ground, overlooking a vast expanse of land that stretched as far as the sea.

The first published reference is that of a single Palaeolithic figure of a horse; however, in 2008, a number of additional engravings were also published by the researcher responsible of the site. These new images were discovered by one of us (RB).

The late eighties saw the start of systematic research in Spanish and Portuguese territories, leading to major advances. In the case of Siega Verde, discovered in 1988, it was located thanks to the surveying work of Manuel Santoja, at the time director of Salamanca Museum, who was drawing up province's archaeological inventory. The discovery of an engraved horse led to the invitation of one of us (RB) to organise a team to study the site.

A short time later, and as part of a project to build a hydroelectric dam, Nelson Rebanda surveyed the neighbouring Côa River, parallel to the Águeda River – on the banks of which lies Siega Verde –, both tributaries of the Douro. Despite a series of difficulties, one of the results of his surveying work was the discovery of the Côa art ensemble in late 1991. The findings were made public at the end of 1994 and the first scientific articles were published in 1995.

Siega Verde developed more rapidly, due to the work carried out on site and its smaller dimensions, more manageable than those of the Portuguese ensemble, which is more a set of sites than merely a single one. Siega Verde was fully published in 2006, whilst the most exhaustive study to date on the Côa was published in 2019. The Spanish site was included on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2010, as an extension of the Portuguese site. The connection between the two has been upheld over time, both in graphic and scientific terms. From the start, Foz Côa attracted greater media attention, even generating a



Fig. 3. Bulls, canine, horse and sign from panel 32 at Siega Verde (Photograph by Rodrigo de Balbín).



Fig. 4. Ibexes from panel 3 of Quinta da Barca. (Photograph by André Tomás Santos; Côa Parque Foundation).



Fig. 5. Painted auroch heads at Faia, Côa. (Fotografia de Rodrigo de Balbín). (Photograph by Rodrigo de Balbín).

popular reaction for heritage defence that is a benchmark within its genre. This, together with the financial interests of the company that owned the thwarted reservoir, led to an inflated conflict of interests (see 4-1). Siega Verde remained in the background of this controversy and of the UNESCO declaration – like a distant cousin to a major cultural and social phenomenon.

Although differences may exist between them, both sites share a common pattern featuring aspects that indicate a lesser or greater predominance of each over the ages. However, both sites might have actually been connected over time, perhaps forming a single territorial group. The difference between the Foz Côa and Siega Verde sites is their scale. While the Spanish site has a decorated space measuring just over 1 km, the Côa art is distributed around 60 sites located in an area extending for 17 km along its boundaries and various Douro tributaries. In turn, Siega Verde has a single concentrated area and sole technical variation.

The dwelling places of the Côa Valley have been documented in considerable detail, some featuring decorated walls within its boundaries, such as Fariseu. In Faia, lying in the south of the site, there are also paintings on granite rock that confirm the fragmentary remains found in Siega Verde. All the sites known in both ensembles share close connections with the river and its fords, in landscapes that are familiar to and used by all travellers.

After Côa, the pace and number of discoveries have been perhaps less abundant than some of us expected. These findings have depended on the intensity of the work carried out in

each area. In northern Portugal, the sites that have been discovered include Sampaio, Pousadouro, Ribeira da Sardinha, Fraga Escrevida, Foz do Medal (portable art), Pedra d'Asma 7, Cabeço do Aguilhão, Passadeiro, Parada (all in the Sabor Valley), Foz Tua (Tua Valley), Redor do Porco (Águeda Valley), Fraga do Gato (Ribeira do Mosteiro), Vau (Vouga Valley, portable art) and Martoiros at the interfluvium between Côa and Águeda, portable art) and on the Spanish side, Arroyo de las Almas (Águeda Valley), La Salud (Tormes River) and Villalba (portable art, Soria). They almost all follow the fluvial pattern, in accessible areas that may once again include dwelling places that have remain undiscovered.

Foz do Medal stands out somewhat in this respect, because the majority of the pieces can be considered portable, although there are some whose size makes them similar to rock art panels.

The Villalba plaque can be considered unique within the field of Palaeolithic art, as it is an elongated object, probably retoucher, which appeared in isolation and without apparent context on the plains of southern Soria. The discovery of the portable art of Foz do Medal, on the opposite side of the Douro basin, and more recently the pieces on Martoiros and Vau, shed further light, whilst at the same time preserving its uniqueness and isolation on the Castilian flatlands. They are forms associated with the end of the Upper Palaeolithic, which are superimposed within a reduced area and repeat the patterns of the larger open-air rocks.



Fig. 6. Engraved plaque of Vau, Vouga valley. (Photograph by Fernando Barbosa; Côa Parque Foundation).



Fig. 7. Detail of the plaque of Villalba de Almazán, Soria. (Photograph by Rodrigo de Balbín).



Fig. 8. Paintings at La Grajera 2, Santiago de Alcántara, Cáceres (Photograph by Rodrigo de Balbín).

FROM THE TAGUS TO THE GUADIANA

The geographic model we are dealing with has extended southwards. We have sites on high ground and others near river courses, scattered particularly along and around the Douro. Traditionally, the south of the Central System has been considered to be of less value in term of ancient cultural representations, and this is particularly true in the case of Palaeolithic art. During the 1970s, a large Portuguese team surveyed the banks of the River Tagus. They discovered a large open-air art site, most of which today lies under a reservoir. At the turn of the century, the researchers put forward the hypothesis that part of the engravings dated back to the Palaeolithic, a claim that today is far more substantiated.

The Tagus basin is also home to Barroca and Ocreza, guaranteeing the antiquity of some of the figures of Gardete and Fratel we have referred to. Although it has not yet been studied in depth, there is another major site located on the Portuguese and Spanish border, on the banks of the River Erjas, which in all likelihood continues in Segura, in Extremadura. Not far away, in Santiago de Alcántara, we find La Grajera, a site that conserves open-air Palaeolithic paintings on quartzite panels. In all these cases, the fluvial model is again repeated.

The discovery of the Côa ensemble halted Portugal's most ambitious hydraulic project, which logically sought to secure hydrological independence from its Spanish neighbour. Following years of interruption, the country's needs remained unchanged, and therefore a reservoir was built on a stretch of the River Guadiana in Alqueva, between Alentejo and Badajoz. A mixed team was then organised to survey the riverbanks. For reasons that remain a mystery, the engraved images of the Spanish sector were concentrated in the site of Molino Manzán, whilst the Portuguese images were scattered over a wider expanse. Figures dating back to the Upper Palaeolithic were located on both sides, with a particular concentration at the Molino Manzán site, which makes of it an example of open-air art that was spreading towards Andalusia. As mentioned above, the Piedras Blancas site in Almería was already known, but the sites of Molino Manzán in Cheles and Porto Portel and Moinhola in the Portuguese municipalities of Reguengos de Monsaraz and Alandroal marked a return to the fluvial model we have described, further evidence of the considerable Palaeolithic population settled inland, where humans were clearly present at all times.

BETWEEN CAVES AND THE OPEN-AIR

As discussed earlier, the extremes of the Upper Palaeolithic art can be found inside the caves and in the open-air. In this case, we are concerned with the latter, which features the same elements as in the caves, albeit exposed to daylight.

In this sense, we can find examples of Palaeolithic art throughout the Iberian Peninsula, providing a broad vision of the spread of humankind through its art. Whilst the open-air had broken the boundaries of Palaeolithic cave art, art on rock shelters, or semi-exterior, would now do the same with the boundaries formed by rivers and schist.

In a variety of spaces, not necessarily limited to limestone, we find rock shelters as well as panels suitable for decoration, protected in part from the elements by shallow spaces, always illuminated by daylight. These are the intermediate forms that filled the territories that once were lacking in ancient art forms. Our knowledge remains limited, although we have gleaned the outline that in all likelihood will be completed in the future.

The north is home to shallow caves huddled around river basins such as the Nalón (Asturias), with emblematic sites such as Lluera 1 and 2, La Viña and Santo Adriano. Moving on to Cantabria, we find Chufín Cave; the exterior features engravings similar to those of Asturias, although the interior is decorated with paintings. Western Asturias has an abundance of schist, a rock which, as we have already stated, is an excellent support for the conservation of Palaeolithic engravings. The area has not yet been surveyed, although the probability of discovering open-air art is considerable.

The interior of the Iberian Peninsula is home to the Estebanvela site, a rock shelter with portable elements at the entrance located in the province of Segovia. The objects are decorated with images of animals and patterns that clearly date back to the end of the Upper Palaeolithic. The entrance to the site of Fuente del Trucho, in Aragón, close to the Pyrenees, shares similar characteristics, with pecked

reindeer and horses dating back to the same period. In this case, and as with other open-air spaces, the sequence begins with Palaeolithic art, before continuing over time, indicating a graphic, cultural and human continuity. The same could be said of Côa, Siega Verde and other elaborately decorated spaces such as the Tagus.

OPEN-AIR PALAEOLITHIC ART IN THE SPANISH LEVANTE REGION

The east of the Iberian Peninsula is known in particular for Levantine art, whose earlier discoveries have been the object of extensive debate. Our knowledge of Palaeolithic cave art in this area is constantly growing, with examples documented from Catalonia to Andalusia. Particular mention can be made of sites such as Molí del Salt, Cova de la Font Major de L'Espluga de Francolí, Parpalló, Meravelles, El Comte or Cova Fosca. In essence, we are speaking of Palaeolithic settlements where open-air forms represent a natural consequence.

However, ancient art forms have received scant attention in the eastern areas of the Iberian Peninsula, especially after Levantine art started to be considered as post-Palaeolithic. This opinion is widely held by research groups, making it almost impossible to date the open-air art forms to the Pleistocene epoch. Yet opinions took a different turn from 2001 onwards, following the discovery of Palaeolithic-style engravings on the open-air walls of the Abric d'en Meliá site, lying in the north of the province of Castellón within the most traditional area of Levantine art. The finding of engravings on one of the Levante walls was in itself unique enough, but in addition, researchers made the ground-breaking claim that they corresponded to the Palaeolithic. Although those images may belong to a final phase in the cycle, the recognition of extremely ancient art forms in the area was a breakthrough in the understanding of Levantine art, previously rooted in traditional concepts that were difficult to change. The presence of Palaeolithic open-air engravings in the Levante region is further evidence of the dispersed and continued open-air use of symbols in truly distant times.

Murcia is located in the east of the Iberian Peninsula and we know of at least three sites that feature Palaeolithic symbols in the semi open-air locations we are addressing here. Jorge, Las Cabras and Arco are open-air sites in shallow rock shelters and featuring clearly ancient paintings. Despite the lack of documented Palaeolithic evidence in the area, these examples clearly indicate that the system continued over time and that in all likelihood, the future will yield greater and better evidence.

THE ANDALUSIAN SOUTH

The Cieza model shares common characteristics with Andalusia, judging by its rock shelters, the Palaeolithic decoration and the continuity of decoration, which is even more in evidence in the south of the Iberian Peninsula. Ambrosio is a cave located in Almería on a site with paintings and engravings at the entrance, clearly exposed to the daylight. On this occasion, there is no doubt surrounding the Palaeolithic dating of this Solutrean site.

In Andalusia, the number of small rock shelters with long-lasting symbols is particularly striking. They are concentrated particularly around the Strait, on sites such as La Horadada, El Ciervo, Las Palomas, Atlanterra and El Realillo. These rock shelters recall the Gorham and Saint Michael caves in Gibraltar, although they form a type of rock shelters with abundant paintings and a clear post-Palaeolithic continuity. Their relatively recent discovery is attributable to the tireless work and dedication of L. Bergman.

The existence of pre-historic rock art in North Africa has long been known, documented by authors of the stature of Frobenius and Flamand. The fact that they are located outside caves and outside Europe meant that they were automatically catalogued as corresponding to the post-Palaeolithic epoch. Palaeolithic art in the northern Mediterranean was supposed to be found inside caves, in contrast to the later open-air manifestations in Europe and Africa.

New discoveries in the Nile Valley, in particular Qurta and Wadi Abu Subeira, have revealed the existence of Palaeolithic forms in the north of the continent. In the former case, the use of the OSL dating method produced dates of 19,000 years ago for engravings similar in style to the European Upper Palaeolithic. As was to be expected, the boundary of the Straits of Gibraltar has collapsed, and we now have Palaeolithic symbols on both its sides as well as in the open-air.

One of the finest examples indicating the cultural ties between both shores of the Mediterranean is Vencejo Moro cave, on the high ground of Tarifa and facing the Djebel Musa in Morocco. It features a number of good-sized engravings of horses, and a bovine located in a hollow in the rock. The outline of the largest horse was first engraved and then painted with red pigment, giving us a fair indication of what could have been the typical characteristics of open-air art. The view of the Strait gives a clear idea of the relationship that must always have existed and that is reflected in Palaeolithic art.

We have a tendency to limit human behaviour and to use it to create boundaries. Palaeolithic art is the system employed by our ancestors to express their fundamental concerns, either in caves or in the open-air. The latter form must have been more common than the first, despite our long upheld convictions to the contrary. For thousands of years, these external forms, which were both visible and patent to the groups of the time, marked the territory and its human presence in the Iberian Peninsula, North Africa and, almost certainly, in many sites in Europe, which we are only recently beginning to discover. Examples include Fornols Haut in France or Hünscruck and Abri Allerberg in Germany.

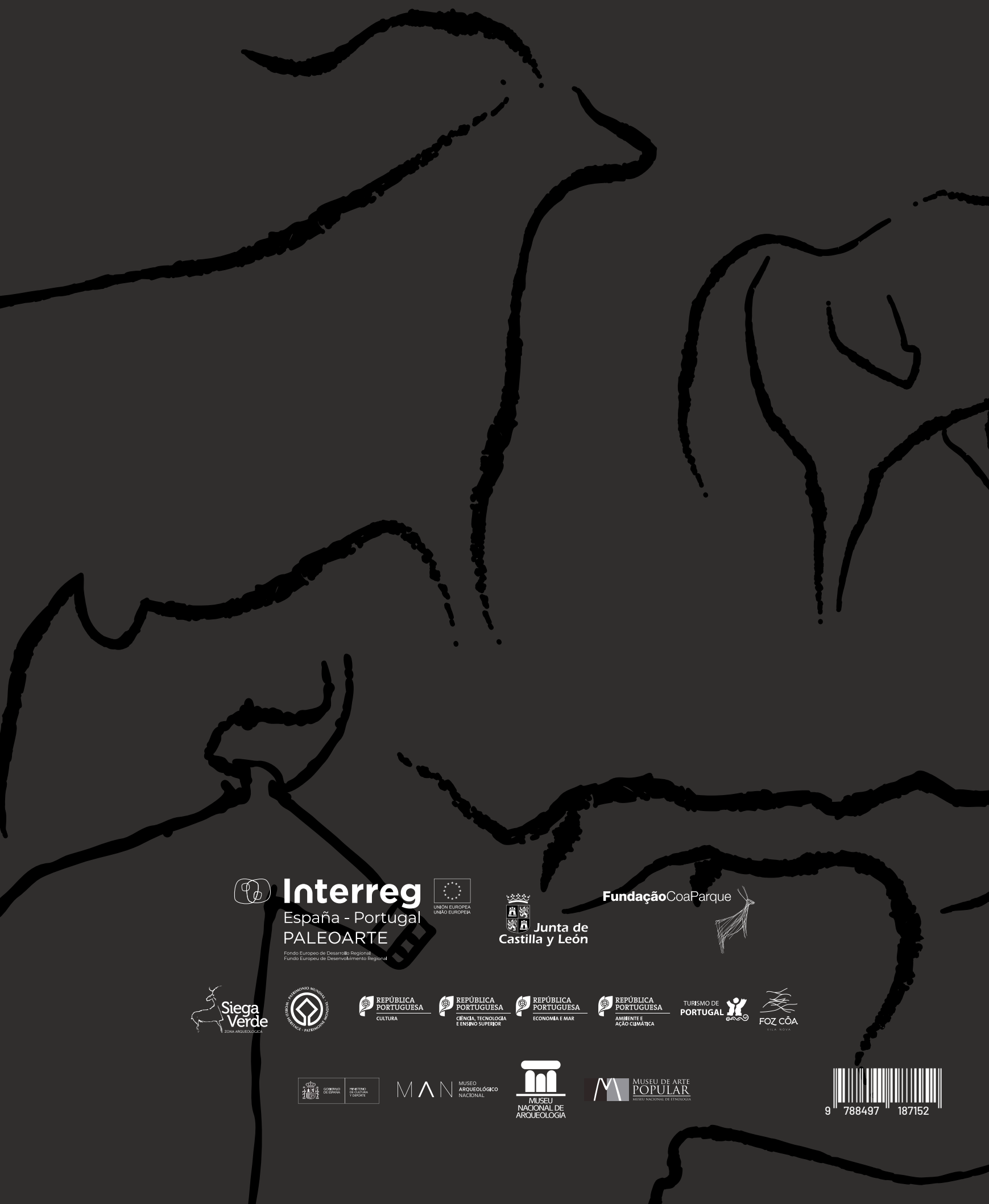
To date, the Iberian Peninsula is known to be the geographical area with the greatest concentration of open-air Palaeolithic art. However, the future looks set to bring major new discoveries in other spaces, both in Europe and elsewhere.

Open-air Palaeolithic art must be considered as a form of expression that abounded during this epoch and was present in all areas as a fundamental cultural representation of its time. The forms we see tend to be the same in all sites, what varies are their number, organisation, sequence of images, its associations and the accompanying signs and elements. Indeed, it is these variations that provide the differentiation between them, forming the hallmarks of each group within their demarcations.

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