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LAND MARKS - A NEW APPROACH TO THE ROCK ART OF TRÁS-OS-MONTES, NORTHERN PORTUGAL

by

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Summary: The authors present three case studies of rock art in Trás-os-Montes (Northeastern Portugal) in order to illustrate some of the ways in which rock art was located in the ancient landscape and some of the reasons why this art might have been made. A special attention is also paid to relations of this art with the human populations that might have used it through time. The appropriation of these places by the Christian religion is focused in relation to some of the rock art sites surveyed by the authors.

Key-words: Landscape archaeology; rock art; land-use.

Resumo: Os autores apresentam três áreas com arte rupestre em Trás-os-Montes, com o objectivo de ilustrar alguns dos modos como a arte rupestre se localizava nas antigas paisagens, bem como algumas das razões pelas quais essa arte pode ter sido produzida. Um aspecto importante é o das relações dessa arte com as populações que, ao longo do tempo, a teriam utilizado. Também se aborda a apropriação, pela religião cristã, de alguns dos sítios da arte rupestre analisados pelos autores.

Palavras-chave: Arqueologia da paisagem; arte rupestre; utilização da terra.

INTRODUCTION

Studies of prehistoric rock art have generally followed the same procedures as analyses of portable artefacts. They have been concerned with the identification of different styles and with investigating their distribution and sequence. Yet rock art possesses certain distinctive features which offer the potential for a more ambitious analysis. Our paper illustrates this argument, using some evidence from north-east Portugal (Fig. 1).

Rock art has a number of features which distinguish it from most of the other forms of material culture studied by archaeologists. Taken together, these provide the basis for a new approach.

1. Rocks decorated by both paintings and carvings are commonly located in relation to natural resources that could have played an important role in the prehistoric pattern of settlement, including areas of pasture, arable land and fresh water. On this level these images may have helped to establish territorial rights. In Galicia, for example, petroglyphs are commonly found around damp, well watered basins in the uplands (branhas) or along the paths leading between them (Bradley, Criado & Fábregas 1995).

2. Rock art may also be located in relation to significant places in the wider landscape, including settlements, viewpoints or striking rock formations. We can identify this pattern in the British Isles, where the simpler petroglyphs can be associated with occupation sites, whilst the more complex motifs are found in positions which command extensive views – both patterns were found by field survey in Strath Tay, in Scotland. At the same time, the decorated rocks may be relatively accessible or inaccessible. They may occupy prominent positions in the landscape or they may have been hidden from casual scrutiny. In north-east England the most complex images are on the more conspicuous rocks, such as Roughting Linn, whilst the simpler rock carvings can be difficult to find, like those around Wooler, Northumberland¹.

3. At a regional level the relationship between rock art and the natural topography may shed light on prehistoric perceptions of the landscape. This is particularly true in those regions with large groups of carved or painted surfaces. Taken together, these comprise a system which extends well beyond the placing of the individual sites. For example, in Galicia different images seem to have been created according to their location in the wider pattern of settlement. Thus circular and other simple motifs may be found on inconspicuous rocks, close to settled areas, and stags may be drawn on the outer limits of the settled land, as happens at Muros. Drawings depicting weapons, human figures or hunting “scenes” are located in still more remote positions, on prominent outcrops, and sometimes on steeply sloping panels, like that at Castriño da Conxo, Galicia (Bradley, Criado & Fábregas 1995).

4. A number of the factors influencing the location of rock art could have been important in several different periods. As a result, the same places might be marked by rock art of quite different ages, and sometimes this could have happened entirely by chance. A graphic instance of this pattern is found in the Galician landscape where a number of rock carvings depicting red deer are accompanied by painted inscriptions which restrict the right to hunt in the same areas today. In archaeological terms this process can result in the paradoxical situation that paintings or carvings of quite different ages might be found together. This may

¹ For details of the British sites see Bradley 1997.

have happened because the same basic features were important in more than one period. Such factors might include paths, springs, cultivated land and pasture.

5. Unlike most forms of material culture studied by archaeologists, prehistoric rock art remains visible to later generations. It is rarely covered over and it cannot be removed from circulation like the contents of graves or hoards. It shares this characteristic with monumental architecture. The sheer durability of this evidence means that later generations may reinterpret these sites. In the case of paintings or carvings they may even renew the original images or add new elements of their own. As a result, older panels of rock art may be reused by people with very different beliefs from those who first created them. This process could result in a kind of “continuity” that would be impossible to achieve with portable artefacts. An example of this process is the selection of prehistoric rock carvings in Perthshire, eastern Scotland, as early medieval memorials. In other cases, of course, the significance of particular locations may have been preserved over the generations.

This paper builds on these characteristics of rock art. It is an attempt to extend the topographical approach to this evidence, which has already been used in Galicia, Britain and Scandinavia, to the distinctive images found in north-east Portugal. These have generally been studied in a more conventional manner. It considers a series of decorated surfaces which have been attributed to two traditions: a tradition of carving natural outcrops which so far is best documented in Galicia², and the paintings and carvings which exhibit the characteristics of so called “Schematic Art”. The latter style, also includes paintings and carvings and extends to most other areas of the Iberian Peninsula. In this article we shall compare sites in both these styles in relation to their position in the landscape.

Other contrasts are important too. This paper compares a group of paintings with smaller groups of carvings, all of which have been documented by two of the authors. It also contrasts one group with a fairly secure chronology with another whose history may be more complex as it involves a period of reuse. Lastly, it considers the way in which both main groups of sites, and the places associated with them, were reinterpreted as sanctuaries in the Christian era.

THE MATERIAL STUDIED

The following sites are considered in this paper: a large complex of painted cliffs, caves and rock shelters on Passos/Santa Comba Mountain (Mirandela,

² This type of art is also known from the Portuguese Atlantic coast, namely in the Minho and Douro Litoral Provinces.

Bragança), a series of petroglyphs at Fragas da Lapa/Vale de Espinheiros (Miranda do Douro, Bragança) and a larger number of carved rocks in the Chaves basin (Chaves). All three groups can be analysed in terms of the features set out in the introduction to this paper.

1. Passos/Santa Comba Mountain (Fig 2)

This is an area of high ground which forms a conspicuous landmark over a considerable area. The mountain also commands extensive views in all directions. Towards its summit there is an open settlement (Mãe d'Água) dating from the Copper Age. A number of similar prehistoric settlements can be seen from the mountaintop, one of them, Crasto de Palheiros (Murça), comprising several monumental structures including two massive walls and towers. There were also a number of occupied caves and rock shelters on Passos/Santa Comba Mountain. All the prehistoric art consists of paintings in the style known as "Schematic Art", and these are generally found on cliffs or rock outcrops high above the valleys radiating from the central massif. Almost all these sites command views extending into the lowlands. It would have been possible to decorate other caves or shelters that faced into the high ground, but for the most part this does not seem to have happened.³

Within this complex we can recognise a striking contrast between the rock shelters that seem to have been occupied during the prehistoric period and those with evidence of paintings. With the exception of the largest rock shelter on the mountain, Buraco da Pala, those with evidence of habitation do not appear to have been decorated. By contrast, the painted rock shelters show no evidence for the accumulation of sediments in their interior and have not produced any artefacts. It seems as if the two groups of sites have quite different characteristics. For the most part the decoration consists of simple geometric or abstract forms, although Shelter 2 at Regato das Bouças does include semi-naturalistic and schematic human figures.

There is only one exception to this pattern. Buraco da Pala is the largest shelter of all those on the mountain and seems to have been occupied over a lengthy period from the late sixth to the late third millennium BC, though not necessarily continuously. It included two small panels of abstract motifs. The shelter contained a complex series of deposits and was used for large-scale food storage during the third millennium. Buraco da Pala is located at the base of a cliff on the south-eastern side of a natural amphitheatre, and is beneath the most conspicuous outcrop on the entire mountain. The cave cannot be seen from most

³ For further information on this issue see Sanches 1996 and 1997.

parts of the high ground but it can be recognised from the valley below.

Regato das Bouças, the second group of decorated sites, is on the north-eastern side of the mountain. It contrasts sharply with Buraco da Pala. The principal examples are located in quite remote positions in the face of a cliff and are more difficult to reach, especially shelters numbers 3 and 1. In Casinhas de Nossa Senhora (shelter number 3) the decoration covers larger areas than it does on the other sites and even extends to the ceiling and to the natural cliff outside and above its entrance. It would have been difficult and possibly dangerous to have painted these surfaces. The images are in a different range of colours from those at other sites on the mountain. The paintings are entirely abstract and include a number of motifs that are not found anywhere else in this complex. Among them are suns or stars⁴. There are two more groups, one located on the north side of the mountain (Ribeira da Cabreira) and the other to its south (Ribeira da Pousada). In both these groups the decorated panels face into the lowlands.

The usual way of studying these paintings would be by recording all these images and comparing them with those found in other parts of Iberia. That remains a worthwhile objective, but it would leave out some of the most striking features of this remarkable complex. These can only be identified by studying the relationship between these sites and the natural topography.

Certain observations seem to be particularly important, and all provide vital clues to the distinctive character of the rock art of Passos/Santa Comba Mountain. First, there seems to be a contrast between those caves with evidence of domestic occupation and the locations that had been painted. With just one exception, Buraco da Pala, where the paintings are small and inconspicuous, the sites with evidence of domestic activity do not appear to have been decorated. By contrast, the painted sites lack any archaeological deposits and are not associated with artefacts. This suggests that the painted caves may have had a specialised character.

That idea is supported by the choice of sites for decoration, for these seem to have favoured striking features of the natural topography: shelters, cliffs and impressive outcrops. Some of these occupy inconspicuous positions within these areas and would not have been discovered by chance. Others were in remote places which it would have been hard to reach. The same pattern is emphasised by the character of the paintings themselves. The most complex decorated surfaces are less accessible than the others and it would have been quite difficult to create some of these images or to visit them afterwards.

Finally, nearly all the paintings seem to have been directed towards the

⁴ Also the occupation of this shelter number 3 seems to have started at the same time as the Neolithic occupation of the mountain. The paintings seem to have resulted from the continuous ritualisation of this shelter from the early fifth mil. to the late third mil. BC (Sanches 1996, 1997).

lowlands even though there were other, undecorated caves that were orientated towards the mountaintop. Given the way in which Passos/Santa Comba Mountain dominates the surrounding region, it seems possible that it formed a central focus for the population of a larger area. The great cave of Buraco da Pala dominates the view of the mountain from the south-east, but can hardly be observed from the higher ground. Similarly, the other decorated caves are found beside the main routes leading into the central massif. Both of the most prominent points on the mountaintop (Santa Comba and Passos) have Christian associations and are visited by pilgrims even today; in fact in 1985 Buraco da Pala was converted into a shrine consecrated by the Bishop of Miranda/Bragança. Pilgrimage to the newly instituted shrine was stopped in 1986 due to the archaeological value of the site. The other prominent site, Santa Comba, is also a focus for modern pilgrimage which takes place every year on September the 8th. Perhaps the modern use of the mountain provides a useful analogy for the prehistoric situation, as the siting of the paintings in the landscape might suggest. We shall return to this question later in the paper.

2. Fragas da Lapa/Vale de Espinheiros (Fig 3)

If the paintings on Passos/Santa Comba Mountain can be interpreted in terms of ritual activity, the petroglyphs of Fragas da Lapa/Vale de Espinheiros seem to be integrated into the pattern of settlement. They may also be related more closely to the "megalithic" and "Galician" styles of rock art (Sanches 1997).

The carved rocks are distributed along a shallow valley with a river, Ribeira das Veigas. The Fragas da Lapa group is located c. 400m north of the Vale de Espinheiros complex. The valley contains an extensive area of damp pasture and is overlooked on one side by a dyke of tilted rock which provides a series of natural shelters. Apart from Fragas da Lapa, none of these shelters forms a conspicuous feature of the landscape or can be seen from far away.

Two groups of rock carvings are relevant to this paper. The first consists of numerous cup marks, which are mainly associated with two of the rock shelters (shelters numbers 2 and 5 at Vale de Espinheiros). In both cases they are found inside these features and distributed across the rear wall and the floor. They can also be found on at least two other sites where they occur on the surface above similar shelters. Such simple carvings cannot be dated accurately, but pieces of worked quartz are certainly distributed along the valley floor and on the surrounding slopes.

The second group of petroglyphs incorporates a series of more complex designs, comprising anthropomorphs, spirals, meanders and complex curvilinear

motifs. These are found at two of the Vale de Espinheiros shelters and at Fragas da Lapa where the carvings immediately above the rock shelter incorporate a number of cup marks. Again their precise chronology is uncertain. Excavation carried out in the Fragas da Lapa shelters revealed an artificial platform, built in a similar way to the local barrows. On this platform was a burnt area, containing animal bones, worked quartz, grinding stones and sherds of plain pottery in a similar fabric to those found in megalithic tombs in Trás-os-Montes. This evidence suggests a possible ritual use of these Fragas da Lapa shelters (Sanches 1985-6; Sanches 1997).

Although the curvilinear carvings are distantly related in style to both megalithic and Galician petroglyphs, a much closer comparison can be made between the siting of these features in the landscape. Both the local barrows and the Fragas da Lapa/Vale de Espinheiros shelters are closely related to well watered pasture in an otherwise rather desiccated landscape⁵; in a similar way the Galician rock carvings overlook the edge of extensive area of well watered pasture (Bradley, Criado & Fábregas 1995). The Fragas da Lapa/Vale de Espinheiros shelters occupy inconspicuous positions in relation to the wider topography and may be mainly associated with rather ephemeral activity, indicated by the distribution of worked quartz. At a more detailed level, the presence of cupmarks on the floors of two of the rock shelters recalls the evidence from the high ground of Barbanza in Galicia. In contrast to the situation on Passos/Santa Comba Mountain, the rock art on this site seems to be closely integrated into the wider pattern of settlement.

3. Chaves (Fig 4)

The petroglyphs found near to Chaves are more numerous than those just described and they are found in a wider range of natural settings. Unfortunately, they are still more difficult to date, as some of the motifs include what is clearly Christian imagery⁶. On one level they exhibit some of the contrasts that we have identified between Fragas da Lapa/Vale de Espinheiros and Passos/Santa Comba Mountain. On another, they may illustrate the extent to which earlier carvings were adapted and reused during the historical period.

The rock carvings can be divided into two basic groups. The first, Sanjurge, is found mainly on the lower ground on the western side of the basin. This group

⁵ On issues related to the local barrows see Sanches (1992: 59/78) and Sanches (1997: 167).

⁶ The sites being considered are described in the Field Survey Report (Santos 1994) carried out within the "Génese e Consolidação do Sistema Agro-pastoril em Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro" JNICT sponsored project (1993/5), co-ordinated by S. O. Jorge.

combines four sites: Lage Escorregadia, Penêdo das Quintas, Penêdo de Vale Salgueiro and Outeiro Machado. All these sites have just one carved rock. Like the carvings at Fragas da Lapa/Vale de Espinheiros, these are also associated with areas of well watered pasture. The carvings are usually found on the most conspicuous rocks in the immediate vicinity and can occur beside the paths leading through the modern landscape. Their distribution is limited to the lowlying ground close to streams. Although the Outeiro Machado site is included within the Sanjurge group, this contains a wider range of carving than the other sites and commands a more extensive view over the surrounding area.

Most of the motifs are cup marks and hooks, but on Penêdo de Vale Salgueiro and Outeiro Machado these are found together with carvings of crosses⁷. Although the locations of these petroglyphs resemble those of prehistoric carvings in Galicia, it may be that some of them were not created until the Christian era when they may reflect a similar process of indicating significant points in the landscape. Even the cup marks present problems as it is known that in Galicia similar motifs were still being used to mark territorial boundaries in recent times; in the mediaeval period carvings of crosses were used in the same way (F. J. Costas Goberna, pers comm). We shall come back to these issues later in this paper.

The second main group of petroglyphs at Chaves is located on the other northeast side of the Chaves basin, on higher ground and on larger and sometimes much more conspicuous outcrops. Two sites are the well known complex at Tripe and Outeiro do Salto⁸. They are situated in prominent positions. Again they command an enormous view. This complex is intervisible with the Neolithic/Copper Age settlement of Vinha da Soutilha⁹, and commands an extensive view over the entire Chaves basin. Although cup marks are found on both these rock outcrops, there are many other motifs as well. Some of these belong to the repertoire of "Schematic Art", whilst the rock carvings at Tripe also include occasional cups and rings of "Galician" type, although these take unusually simple forms.

At first sight the contrast between these two groups of carvings recalls the striking contrasts between the rock carvings on Passos/Santa Comba Mountain and those at Fragas da Lapa/Vale de Espinheiros. With the exception of Outeiro Machado (Sanjurge, Chaves), where the unusual repertoire of the simpler Sanjurge rocks can be found together with more complex figures, it can be said that the

⁷ Outeiro Machado has a enormous variety of motifs whose styles might extend from prehistory to modern times. For more information on this rock see Santos Júnior 1940.

⁸ On these sites see Baptista 1983/84.

⁹ On issues related to the prehistoric settlement in the chaves basin see Jorge 1986.

simpler motifs occur in the lowlands close to productive areas of grazing land, whilst the complex images are on the high ground, overlooking the surrounding area, and, in the case of Outeiro do Salto, associated with massive rock outcrops. The distinctive character of the sites on the high ground is emphasised by the fact that one of the carved rocks at Outeiro do Salto has an almost vertical face when seen from below and is quite difficult to climb. Also, the carvings at Tripe include a number of anthropomorphs which resemble those painted in caves (for example, Pala Pinta and Pena Róias in Trás-os-Montes). Tripe is usually interpreted as a prehistoric sanctuary.

USE AND REUSE

At the beginning of this paper we suggested that the sheer durability of rock art means that later generations might reinterpret these sites, creating an impression of cultural "continuity". In Northern Portugal this might be closely related to several aspects of communal life and also to the Christianisation of the territory.

Although it seems as if the simpler motifs occur in the lowlands close to productive areas of grazing land, whilst the more complex images are on the high ground overlooking the surrounding area, this interpretation is not without problems, for not all the petroglyphs on these sites need be of prehistoric date. Outeiro Machado includes a number of carvings of crosses, and there are more examples at Tripe, where it seems possible that some of the motifs attributed to "Schematic Art" have actually been recut. In one case a petroglyph has been quarried from the outcrop. On the back there is a well cut cross.

According to C. A. Ferreira de Almeida, as well as the Christian rituals/services related to the parish church (Igreja paroquial), there are other ways of taming supernatural and pagan forces. We find the building of chapels, the inscription of carved crosses, or of other symbols, in the places where evil forces might reside. Such places are usually cross-roads, the tops of hills or mountains and conspicuous outcrops (Almeida 1981: 207). Both Almeida (1981) and Baptista (1983/4: 76) refer to the writings of S. Martinho de Dume (sec V)¹⁰ who exhorts the villagers to Christianise the places associated with the pagan cult of rocks. Baptista (op. cit.) also refers to the early Christian Church Councils as giving people instructions on how to fight the animistic cults still alive in Northern Portugal in the early Middle Ages. All these actions reflect the imposition of a specifically Christian identity on the landscape.

¹⁰ Dume, S. Martinho, *De Castigatione Rusticorum*, cit in Almeida (1981: 207).

Distinct territories came into being through the movement of people through that landscape. Place acquired names and particular routes and boundaries took on a new significance¹¹. Belarmino Afonso documents the custom, still practised in North-eastern Portugal, of marking field and *freguesias*¹² boundaries. Once a year, usually at Carnival day, people go to the places with the boundary marks to verify their condition and position. Where necessary, they re-cut these symbols or even add new ones: cup marks and crosses are the most frequently used¹³ (Afonso 1993). Another feature that may be relevant is the use of rock carvings in traditional games. Some of the cup marks and rectangular motifs may have been used in board games used by lonely shepherds in order to pass their time. In fact, before the discovery of the archaeological value of Fragas da Lapa, the central motif of rock number 3, a quadrangular figure with a segmented inner space, was being used by local children to play a form of board game called *Necrinhas*, while they were tending sheep. This was the only motif that was visible at the time, as the others were covered by lichens. A similar situation is documented in Galicia (Costas Goberna 1984).

We shall now look at the evidence for Christianisation of the landscape in the Chaves basin and on Passos/Santa Comba Mountain. The information for the Chaves area is more dispersed and less well known than that for Passos/Santa Comba Mountain. We shall therefore consider the sites at Chaves first.

It is difficult to interpret the evidence from Outeiro Machado, but there is a possible context for the reuse of older rock carvings at Tripe and Outeiro do Salto, for not far from the latter sites there is a Christian sanctuary (Santiago chapel) which is used for pilgrimage once a year. However, information collected from people of the neighbouring village of Mairos revealed the chapel was built only in 1922. The place was chosen because it commanded a good view over the surrounding area (in fact over most of the Chaves basin) and could be seen from a wide distance¹⁴.

At Chaves there are a few other petroglyphs overlooking the basin. One of these sites (Penêdo das Cruzes) includes the same mixture of cup marks and crosses as those on the lower ground. A further rock carving provides what is probably the clearest illustration of the processes that were at work in the area. This is Fraga das Passadas where the petroglyphs are found on a large expanse

¹¹ On the subsistence related and symbolic uses of these vicinal territories see Fernandez de Rota, J. A. (1984: 167/267) and Lison Tolosana, C. (1991: 85/100).

¹² Civil Parishes.

¹³ All the other motifs presented by Belarmino Afonso are also schematic figures (Afonso 1993: 98).

¹⁴ Information supplied by Firmino Aires. It should be noticed that the same wide visual range is true for the two rock art sites, Tripe and Outeiro do Salto.

of sloping rock exposed within the limits of an old cobbled path. Four main motifs are found here – footprints, hoofprints, horseshoes and cup marks – and virtually all of them follow the alignment of the path, although they seem to run in both directions.

The Fraga das Passadas' carvings present several features of interest. There are great differences of weathering between individual motifs, suggesting that they were created over a considerable period of time. Two of the freshest carvings of footprints are enclosed by a frame and bear an inscription dating them to the eighteenth or nineteenth century. Others should be considerably older. The one anomaly is where individual footprints extend at right angles to the road, and in this case it is clear that the heels take the form of distinct cup marks; other cup marks are scattered across the carved surface. The most likely explanation for the misalignment of these motifs is that their position was dictated by the presence of two already existing cups which were interpreted as heel prints when the motifs were reused.

Again it is impossible to date the oldest cup marks on the rock, but in this case there is some information on the context in which they were chosen for reuse. The local interpretation of Fraga das Passadas places it within a Christian context, for the footprints and tracks of animals represent the path taken by the Holy Family on the flight into Egypt. This is perhaps the clearest instance of a process that may have taken place on other sites around Chaves¹⁵.

On the Passos/Santa Comba Mountain we find a clearer instance of these processes at work. Both of the most prominent peaks once had their own Christian pilgrimage/religious centre. The example on top of Passos mountain (Buraco da Pala) was closed down in 1986, but Santa Comba (Fig. 2) remains in use. It should also be noted that as far as the oral history of the local population goes, the origin of this chapel is related to the *Reconquista*, i.e., the period in the history of Portugal when the Christian armies gradually conquered territory from the Muslim kingdoms. In fact, when visiting the chapel one might recognise an Arabic look to some of the architectural details¹⁶.

The local oral tradition relates the chapel to the following legend.

¹⁵ According to information collected from the inhabitants of the village of Noval, freguesia of Soutelo (Chaves) referred to the so called Virgin Mary footprints that once existed near the village entrance but these were covered when the road to it was repaired. It should also be noted that Martinho Baptista refers to three such a footprints in Tripe, placing them in a later phase of the site (Baptista 1983/84: 77).

¹⁶ The foundation date for this chapel is unknown.

"When the Moorish King conquered the village of Lamas de Orelhão, he built his castle on a top of Passos/Santa Comba Mountain (this peak is nowadays called King of Orelhão Castle). The Moorish king fell in love with a local Christian shepherdess named Comba. The Moorish king wanted her for his harem, but she was not willing. One day Comba and her brother Leonardo were tending the animals close to the Passos summit when the King showed up on his horse. He tried to persuade her to go with him, but Comba managed to trick him into falling asleep by getting him to lay his head on her lap. But the King woke up when Comba and Leonardo were trying to escape and pursued them on his horse. Comba and Leonardo ran towards another mountain top, but got themselves trapped: in front of them there was only the precipice. Seeing herself in a desperate situation, Comba invoked the help of God. He answered by making the rock open, and through this crack she entered, never to be seen again. As soon as the shepherdess was in the rock it closed, making the Moorish king angry. He plunged his sword into the rock that bled and forced his horse to stamp on it, leaving its hoofprints. Turning his fury to Leonardo, he killed him and threw his dead body into a well that has never dried up since. The chapel was built in memory of this Christian girl who preferred death to belonging to an Infidel."¹⁷

To celebrate this Saint people from all the villages surrounding the Passos/Santa Comba Mountain¹⁸ go once a year to the Santa Comba chapel. This takes place at the end of the harvest in September. The main requests to the Saint are for protection for the animals that are part of the household. Payment to the Saint is made through offerings of animals such as goats, sheep, chickens and rabbits (which are later sold for the benefit of the chapel); cereals, namely rye and wheat¹⁹, are also stored in wooden granaries next to the chapel. People used to go on foot or on horseback to the mountaintop. The payments to Santa Comba were usually transported by packhorses or oxcarts; nowadays they are carried by car.

Those who take part in the pilgrimage spend the entire day on the mountain top. The villages where they live are not only divided by the mountain (in certain cases), they sometimes belong to different administrative divisions (ex: *Distrito* and *Concelho*). People bring food with them for the day, and the main meal that takes

¹⁷ This legend has several versions and the one presented was supplied in April 1998 by Agripino Franqueiro (born in Passos village) and his wife Beatriz Franqueiro (born in Lamas de Orelhão village).

¹⁸ All the villages are located in the lowlands. There is no settlement on the Mountain. Rather it acts as a huge communal ground (*baldio*) used by all the surrounding villages for pasture and wood. In times of bad harvests the villagers can also use the Mountain slopes for small scale cultivation. Passos/Santa Comba mountain also reveals its exceptional character: usually, each village has its own *baldio*. In this case the *baldio* which constitutes the entire Mountain is owned and used by several villages.

¹⁹ The pilgrimage to Santiago chapel in Mairos has the same purposes and same forms of payment.

place after the religious celebration is a communal one: the food is shared between everybody as one group, independently of kinship ties or village of origin²⁰.

A closer look to the pilgrimage shows us that besides the religious motives that might have led people to participate and go to Santa Comba, there are also very important socio-economic factors. This is a special occasion for arranging marriages, for seeing relatives or friends who live on the other side of the mountain, and for the buying, selling or the barter of goods and properties²¹. The social role of this gathering is further more exemplified by the football pitch on the top of the mountain, near the chapel which is used only once a year in that pilgrimage day.

FINAL REMARKS

These three case studies have illustrated some of the ways in which rock art was located in the ancient landscape and some of the reasons why it might have been made. It has also emphasised the manner in which these images could be appropriated or reinterpreted by later generations. That process of marking the land was clearly of considerable significance, and it deserves more attention from archaeologists.

In the introduction to this paper we listed five distinctive features of prehistoric and later rock art and sought to show how different this medium was from other kinds of material culture. We illustrated those observations with brief examples taken from existing work in Galicia and the British Isles. In this article we have employed the same framework to investigate the rock art of Trás-os-Montes. Our observations encourage us to take a new approach to this important material.

The first suggestion was that rock art might usefully be studied in relation to natural resources; in that sense it might even have acted as a territorial system. This might have been the case in two of the areas studied here, for there is a very close relationship between the siting of the petroglyphs at Fragas da Lapa/Vale de Espinheiros and Chaves and areas of well watered pasture in an otherwise rather dry environment. At Fragas da Lapa/Vale de Espinheiros this interpretation is supported by the presence of rock shelters on the site and by the discovery of worked quartz.

²⁰ A mid-day meal is also an element present in the Santiago pilgrimage in Mairos, but the food is not shared communally like in Stª Comba: the families, though together in the same place eat as individual groups.

²¹ Communication between the different villages is easier nowadays than it was a couple of decades ago: the phone, the better roads and public transport have diminished the way in which the mountain used to divide otherwise socially and economically related communities.

Secondly, we suggested that a significant relationship might exist between particular kinds of natural location and particular forms of rock art. Again that proposition is supported by the evidence from Trás-os-Montes. The simple cup-marked rocks were generally on the lower ground, in areas that might have been used for settlement, whilst it was the prominent cliffs, caves and rock outcrops on the hills and mountains where more complex images were created. Some of those sites, like Tripe, were conspicuous and easy to identify but others seem to have been hidden. On Passos/Santa Comba Mountain some of the paintings were in remote and inaccessible positions.

Our third point was concerned with wider perceptions of the ancient landscape. This is more difficult to discuss, but the evidence from Passos/Santa Comba Mountains does suggest certain clues. This is one case in which different kinds of rock painting seem to be distributed according to their positions in the wider landscape. Thus there are only small panels of rock art in the one inhabited cave, Buraco da Pala, whilst more complex images are found in those which do not seem to have been occupied. The widest range of images occurs in the caves that were most difficult to reach, and it was here that the paintings were created in the widest variety of colours. Thus it seems as if there was a significant relationship between the nature of the rock art and the character of the natural topography.

The fourth observation concerned the possibility that similar distributions of petroglyphs could be created in more than one period because the same resources were used at different times. This is one possible interpretation of the mixture of cup marks and Christian symbols among the low-lying carvings at Chaves which were located in an area of pasture. On the other hand, it is just as likely that the two groups of motifs were contemporary with one another. This is a problem which needs more attention in the future. The important point is to remember that similar methods of marking significant resources may have been employed more than once. The problems of studying rock art extend into the historical period.

Lastly, there is the conscious reuse of rock art sites. This is apparent in two of our study areas. A number of sites around Chaves are decorated with Christian symbols and in the case of the "sanctuary" at Tripe there is possible evidence for a later phase of carving on the rock outcrop. The less conspicuous site of Fraga das Passadas provides a further instance of this process, and in this case it is possible to interpret the later carvings in terms of a biblical narrative. It seems interesting that Passos/Santa Comba Mountain has become a focus for Christian pilgrimage where not only religious issues are at stake. In fact we have pointed out that the ritual visit to Santa Comba cannot be understood without taking a wider perspective. The last phase of the prehistoric occupation at Buraco da Pala is as a place for storage, where rituals were performed by people from nearby

communities (Sanches 1996 and 1997). Perhaps a parallel can be drawn between the prehistoric use of the mountain and the modern one, symbolised by the Santa Comba pilgrimage. Both sites seem to have, or to have had, a specific role in terms of social reproduction, and both were symbolically inscribed with rock art: the paintings still visible today in Buraco da Pala, and the carvings of hoofprints at Santa Comba whose memory lives on in oral tradition.

We began this paper by saying that rock art had been studied according to the same methods as portable artefacts. This is somewhat paradoxical for by its very nature it is fixed in one place in the landscape. We suggest that this feature provides an alternative starting point for research. Perhaps rock art would be better understood if it were investigated through the techniques of landscape archaeology. Our work in Trás-os-Montes suggests some of the possibilities, but there must be many more.

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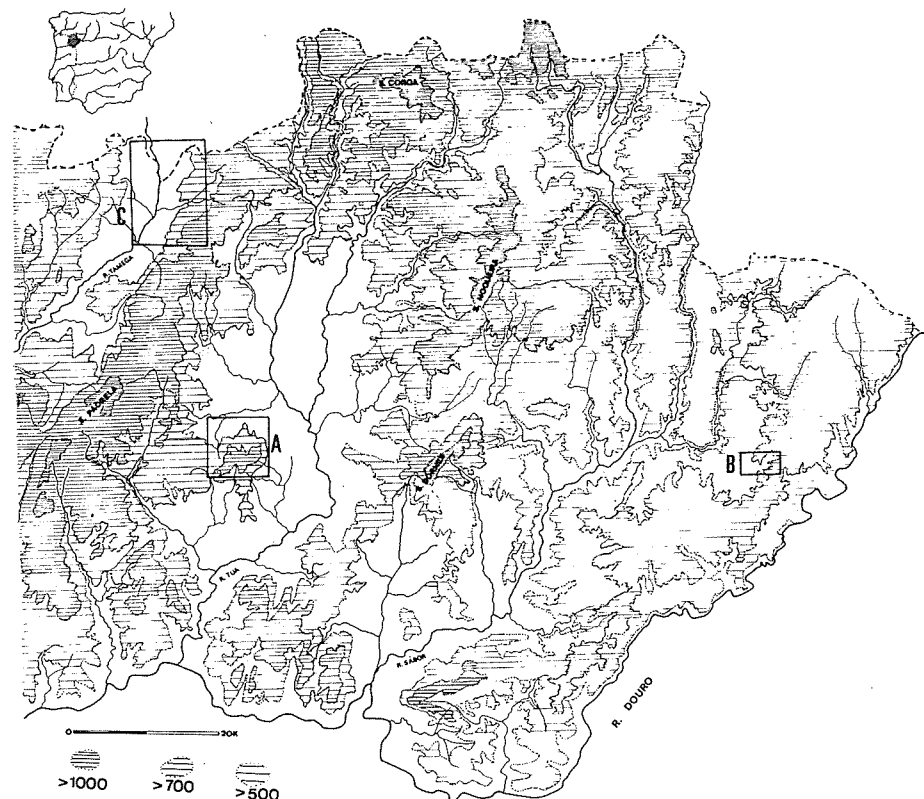


Fig 1 - The area of study: Trás-os-Montes, Northern Portugal. A - Passos/Santa Comba mountain; B - Fragas da Lapa/Vale Espinheiros; C - Chaves Basin.

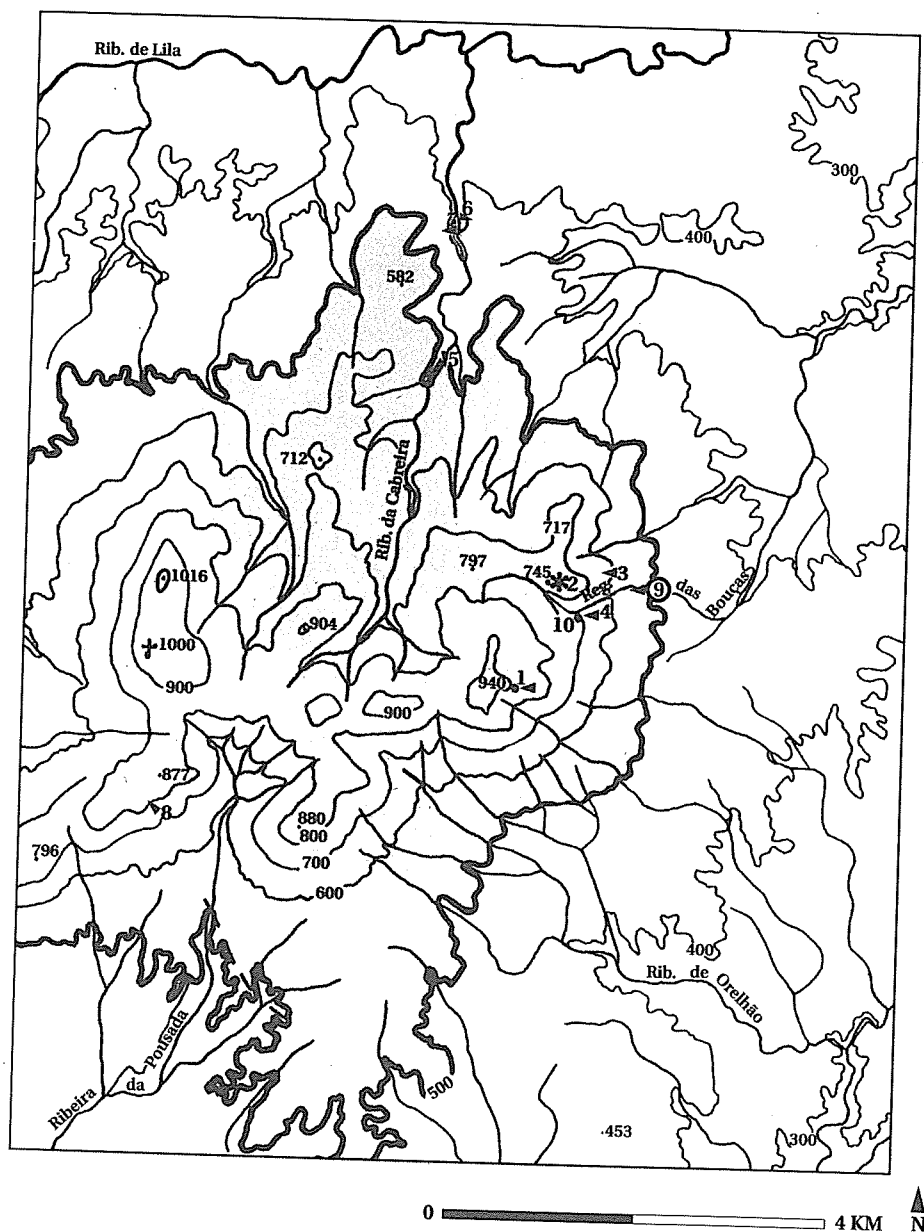


Fig 2 – Map of Passos/Santa Comba mountain with the location of the rock art sites. ▼ Shelter with rock art. ● Shelter with prehistoric occupation. * Prehistoric settlement. † Sta. Comba chapel. 1. Buraco da Pala; 2. Mãe d'Água; 3. Regato das Bouças (shelter 1); 4. Regato das Bouças (shelter 2); 5. Ribeira da Cabreira (shelter 1); 6. Ribeira da Cabreira (shelter 3); 7. Ribeira da Cabreira (shelter 11); 8. Ribeira da Pousada (shelter 6); 9. Regato das Bouças (shelters 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8); 10. Regato das Bouças (shelter "A").

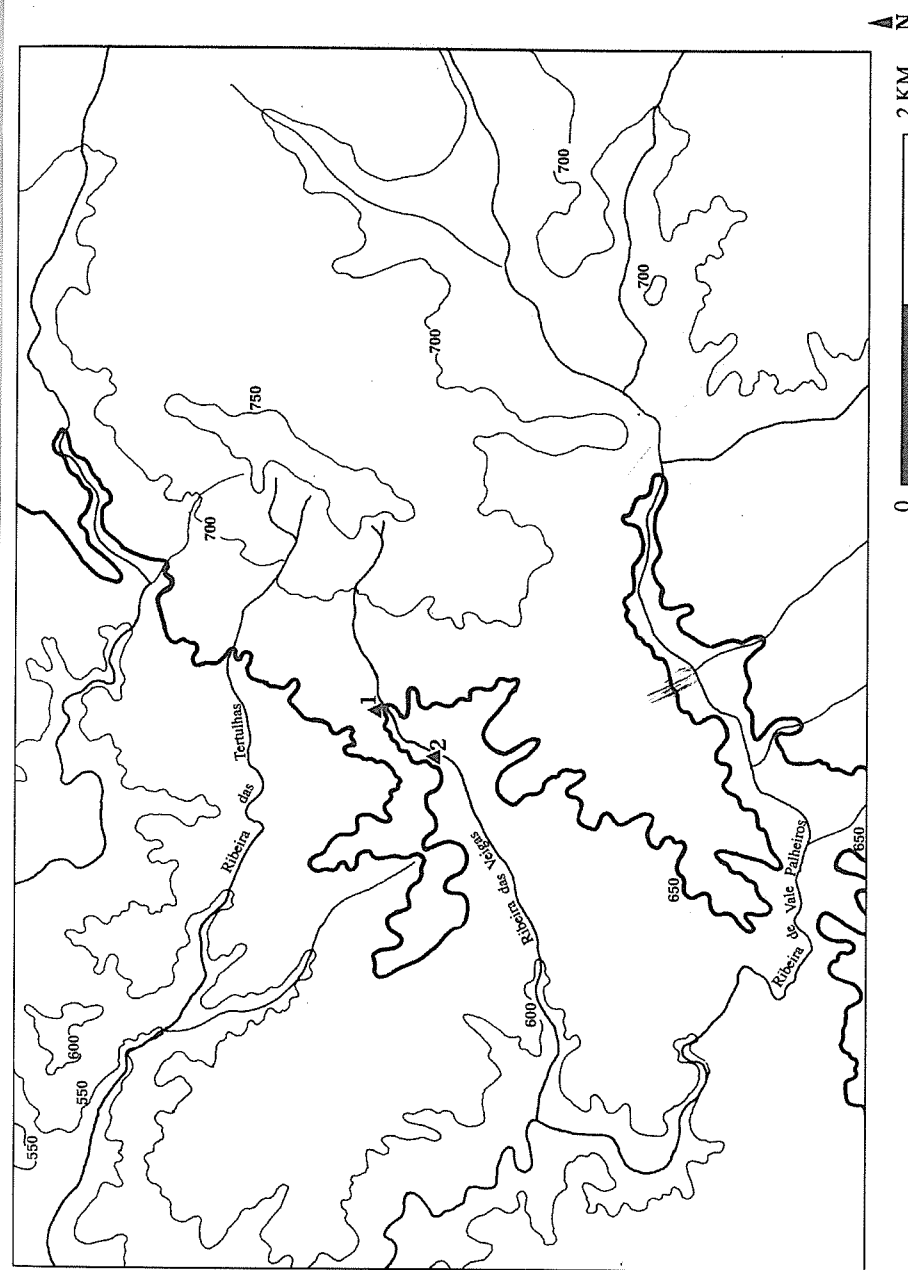


Fig 3 – Map of Fragas da Lapa/vale de Espinheiros area with rock art location.
▼ Shelter with rock art. 1. Fragas da Lapa; 2. Vale de Espinheiros.

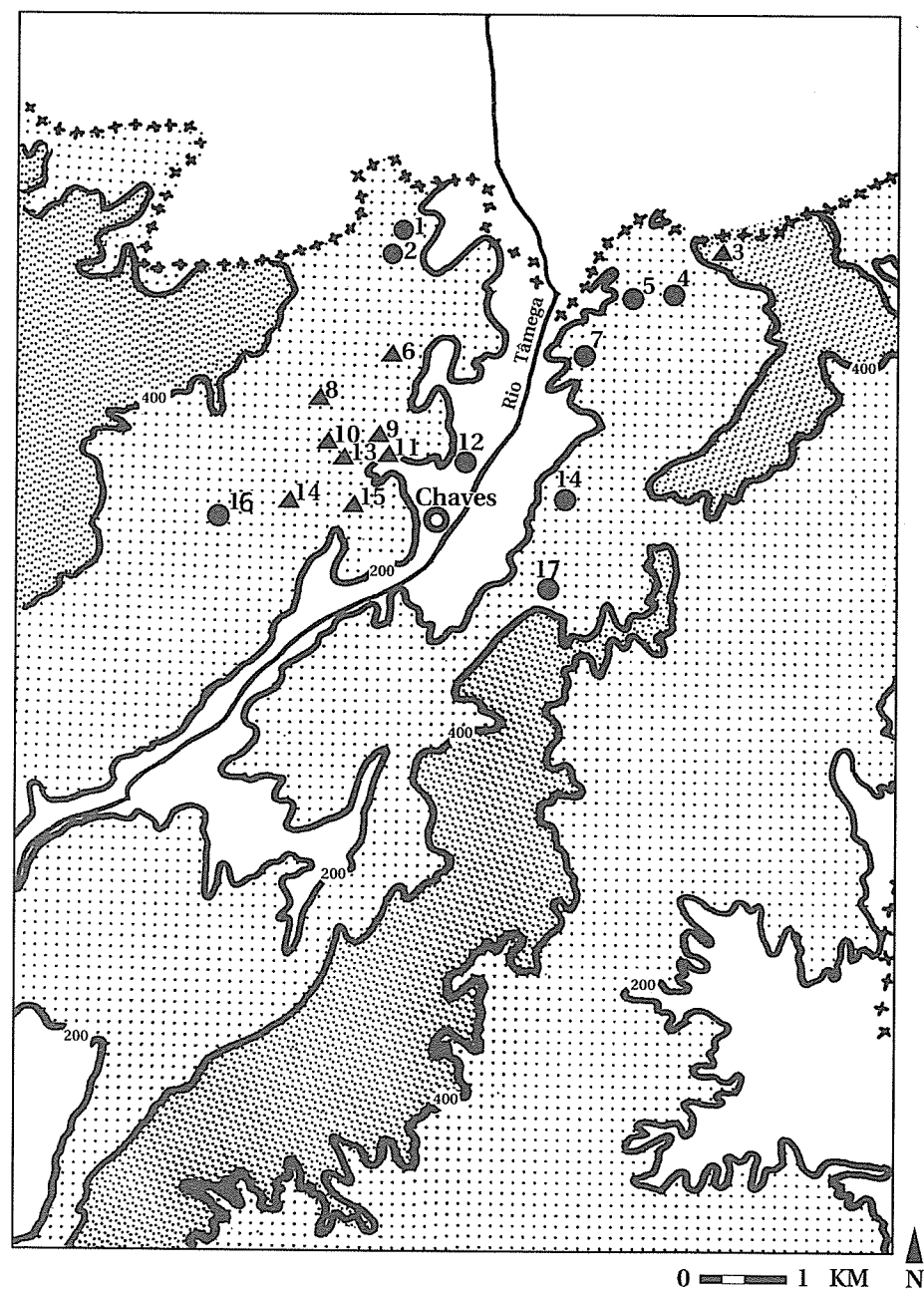


Fig 4 – Map of Chaves basin with rock art location. ▼ Rock art. ● Prehistoric settlement.
1. Alvorinha; 2. Campo Redondo; 3. Tripe and Outeiro do Salto; 4. Vinha da Soutilha; 5. Pitorca;
6. Fraga das Passadas; 7. Albagueira; 8. Penêdo das Cruzes; 9. Penêdo das Quintas; 10. Lage
Escorregadia; 11. Penêdo de Vale Salgueiro; 12. Alto de Stª Ana; 13. Lugar do Calhão; 14. Souto/
Corgo; 15. Outeiro Machado; 16. Pastoria; 17. S. Lourenço.