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THE ROCK ENGRAVINGS OF PENEDO DO MATRIMÓNIO, IN CAMPO DE CAPARINHO, VILAR DE PERDIZES, MONTALEGRE (NORTHERN PORTUGAL)

por

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Abstract: This article discusses the rock engravings popularly known as Penedo do Matrimónio. They lie within the archaeological group at Campo de Caparinho in the parish of Vilar de Perdizes, municipality of Montalegre, and were surveyed at the end of 2002 and in September 2003.

Penedo do Matrimónio may be seen as a ceremonial site in which two anthropomorphic representations, one male and the other female, in association with possible weapons and a particular depression in the rock base, suggest rituals associated with human fertility. The sanctuary is located in an area containing important archaeological remains, in which there are also other rock engravings, a monument under a *tumulus* and several places where ceramic and lithic artefacts have been found, all of which can generally be dated between the Neolithic and the Bronze Age.

Key-words: Northern Portugal; Late prehistory; rock engravings.

Resumo: Este trabalho dá a conhecer as gravuras rupestres denominadas popularmente por Penedo do Matrimónio cujos levantamentos foram realizados durante os finais de 2002 e o mês de Setembro de 2003, no complexo arqueológico de Campo de Caparinho, freguesia de Vilar de Perdizes, concelho de Montalegre.

O Penedo do Matrimónio pode considerar-se um local cerimonial onde duas representações antropomórficas, uma masculina e outra feminina, em associação com possíveis armas e determinadas depressões no suporte rochoso, indiciam rituais associados à fertilidade humana. Este santuário localiza-se em área de importantes vestígios arqueológicos, onde ocorrem outras gravuras rupestres, um monumento sob *tumulus* e diversos locais de acumulação de artefactos cerâmicos e líticos inseríveis genericamente desde o Neolítico até à Idade do Bronze.

Palavras-chave: Norte de Portugal; Pré-história recente; gravuras rupestres.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Discovered by Sr. Augusto Martins, of Vilar de Perdizes, at the end of the 1970s, Penedo do Matrimónio was brought to the attention of the parish priest of Vilar de Perdizes, António Lourenço Fontes, who subsequently publicised it in various articles for a local newspaper (FONTES, 1990a; 1990b). A visit to the engravings made afterwards by R. Colmenero resulted in a short publication (COLMENERO, 1991). Later, L. Fontes (1992) noticed the site as part of his work the archaeological inventory of the Montalegre municipality.

On 28th May 2002, during a visit to the site in the company of the parish priest, we were told about other engravings, particularly an outcrop covered with numerous cup-marks and furrows on a platform to the west of Penedo do Matrimónio (engraving 1) and an engraved upright forming part of a boundary wall to the west-southwest of Penedo do Matrimónio. We made a brief survey of the area at the time, and saw newly-discovered engravings as well as several areas with scattered pottery remains dating from later northern Portuguese pre-history.

Given the archaeological importance of the area and the fact that it was common practice for local people to deepen the furrows at Penedo do Matrimónio with pieces of tile and small stones, we decided to proceed with a preliminary survey and recording of the area of the engravings in 2002, and therefore informed the Macedo de Cavaleiros delegation of the *Instituto Português de Arqueologia* of our intentions. In January 2003, we made a formal request to the Institute for more detailed archaeological work to commence and in September of the same year we began a new study of the area surrounding the Penedo do Matrimónio, carrying out small probes in the area surrounding the engravings in order to obtain more accurate chronological-cultural dating¹. We excavated a monument under a *tumulus* (BETTENCOURT, *et alii* 2004) and an area in which pottery and lithic remains had accumulated on the surface. We are referring here to Tomb 1 at Campo de Caparinho and to Crista de Caparinho (Fig. 3).

2. LOCATION AND GEOMORPHOLOGICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT

Campo de Caparinho is in the province of Trás-os-Montes, in the district of Vila Real. It is part of the parish of S. Miguel (Vilar de Perdizes) in the municipality

¹ Students on the History-Archaeology degree course at the University of the Minho, particularly André Mota Veiga, Andreia Silva, Hugo Cardoso, Luciano Vilas Boas and Maria João Amorim, collaborated in this work.

of Montalegre, in an area which borders on Spain (Fig. 1). It occupies a considerable area, with Penedo² do Matrimónio itself corresponding to a series of flat outcrops in an area containing a chaotic mass of stones on the western bank of the River Assureira, a tributary of the Tâmega.

According to Sheet n° 20 of the “*Carta Militar de Portugal*” (Military Map of Portugal, scale 1: 25 000), the geographical coordinates are as follows (Fig. 2):

Latitude: 41° 51' 55" N (GW)

Longitude: 7° 35' 12" W

Altitude: 710/700m

According to the *Carta Geológica de Portugal* (Geological Map of Portugal), scale 1:50 000, n°. 2-D (Vilar de Perdizes), the rock substrate in the area is composed of medium to thick grained alkaline granite containing two micas, and has many surface outcrops, occasionally forming caves.

Penedo do Matrimónio is located in an area between two water-courses flowing into the River Assureira which, after running through an enclosed valley, changes here to flow northwards through an undulating landscape. Curiously enough, a well-known local geological accident – the *Olas* – also lies in this area. A mass of granite blocks, some of which are hundreds of metres long, have fallen onto the river bed, meaning that the river flows underground at this point and can be crossed during the summer months.

The vegetation cover in the area is mainly open and shrub-like, although there are also some woodland areas containing trees typical of the local climate, such as oak and chestnut. Shrub vegetation consists of asphodel, wild garlic, rosemary, ferns, broom, camomile, broomrape, rock rose, brambles, gorse and heather. Some walls and terraces were built here during the period of intensive agricultural activity that lasted into the mid-20th century, and there is still a grove of cultivated chestnut trees nearby. A herdsman's hut to the south of Penedo do Matrimónio indicates that animal husbandry was also important in the area up until the last century.

Access to the area is difficult, but it can be reached via the main road that runs from Vilar de Perdizes towards Santa Marinha chapel, taking a right turn onto a cart-track at Pardelhas.

3. PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PENEDO DO MATRIMÓNIO

Given that the choice of a “special” place is the first sign of deliberate human action, we must detail the specific characteristics of Penedo do Matrimónio-

² “Penedo” in Portuguese can mean a standing rock, particularly a *granitic* rock.

nio, particularly its form, orientation and specific features within the context in which it is located.

Despite the highly irregular mass of boulders on the eastern slope of the River Assureira, the area consists mainly of a relatively flat collection of rocks lying northeast-southeast and separated by natural fissures. To the southwest there is a rectangular depression, approximately 1.70m long, 0.60m wide and 0.40cm deep, running from west to east but with a slight inclination from north to south. This depression backs onto the boulder bearing the oldest of the engravings, which also has the same west-east inclination and is raised in the centre. Interestingly, it is in this raised area that the engravings are found (Fig. 4, 5 and 8).

The most recent engravings are to the northeast of this granite agglomeration, at the end of a roughly rectangular-shaped boulder below the area where early engravings can be seen. The granite in this outcrop is thicker-grained than the other examples.

4. METHODOLOGY

Work began with an initial photographic survey, followed by an environmental description of the area. Subsequently, the surface of the surrounding area was cleared: recent fires enabled this task to be carried out easily.

The rock, which was not covered with fungus, was simply cleaned with a brush, photographed at various different times of the day over several days, and full and cross-sectional drawings were made, using a scale of 1: 10.

At the same time, a general topographical survey of Campo de Caparinho on a scale of 1: 1000 was carried out, together with a partial survey of the area containing the engravings, on a scale of 1: 200.

The recording of the engravings was carried out using crystal plastic cut into rectangles measuring 70cm by 50cm, each of which had a 3cm frame in order to facilitate superimposition. Acetate pens of different colours and thicknesses were used for tracing. Black was used for what we considered to be the earlier, anthropic engravings. Red was used for the fissures and other irregularities in the outcrop and blue for the outline of the rock itself. The deepest of the furrows were traced with a solid line, whilst dotted lines represented the less visible ones or those we considered more problematic in terms of human design.

The tracing was done at various different times of the day and completed or corrected by night-time observations. The whole set of tasks resulted in two full recordings and three partial recordings of the areas that were the most difficult to interpret.

5. DESCRIPTION OF THE ENGRAVINGS

5.1. Description by theme

Penedo do Matrimónio may be subdivided into two very distinct areas, one containing pre-historic engravings and the other engravings from historical times.

The oldest of the engravings are found on the highest section of the outcrop and represent two semi-naturalistic anthropomorphic figures: the larger of the two is male, followed by a smaller female, in association and aligned, in general terms, in a north-south direction according to the axis of their bodies (Fig. 6 and 9).

The male figure, which is 42cm high and has a markedly circular head, seems to be wearing a hat or headdress. The trunk is rectangular, ending with a representation of a very prominent sexual organ which is dilated at the end. The raised stylised arms are long (50cm) and the fingers of the large hands are splayed apart. The left hand has five fingers. The legs, portrayed as parallel to each other, are also stylised, as are the large feet with the five very prominent toes. There appears to be an arched line associated with the right hand, which has only three or four fingers, that is difficult to interpret but could be considered an element that "frames" the composition at the top. Regardless of whether it may be an artefact or the representation of some natural or supernatural force, it is still basically a feature which indicates that the mythographical narrative begins here, runs downwards and is left open at the other end. At the end of each foot, there is a cup mark and a roughly-triangular shaped item, maybe a weapon with a triangular blade, such as a dagger, measuring 19.5cm to 14cm in length and 9.5cm to 6.5cm at its widest point.

The female figure, which is 36cm high, also has a markedly circular head, with lateral appendices that may represent ears, the hairline or jewellery. The trunk is also circular. On it, in asymmetrical fashion, two small circles are engraved which we interpret as representations of the breasts. The sexual organ is clearly displayed, from a frontal perspective as if the legs were apart. The rounded shape of the trunk and the dilated sexual organ suggest pregnancy or the importance of the sex organs in fertility. The arms, which are 40cm long, are also raised and end in large hands, with three to five fingers on each one. The legs, represented by two parallel furrows, end in large feet with five stylised toes. At the end of each foot there are small circles connected to roughly triangular representations, sometimes with a central vein, which we interpret as possible daggers³. They measure 18cm to 16.4cm in length and 7.5cm to 6.9cm at their widest point.

³ In fact, in rock iconography a "representation" may be more directly linked to a concept than a real model, which may explain the schematic design of these possible weapons. This also seems to be the case at

There is another peripheral engraving, roughly 4.60m to the northeast of the prehistoric engravings, in the shape of a cross with a kind of offset circle at the top, which seems to be a crude representation of a chrismon. It is 31.5cm long by 17.30cm at its widest point and has been engraved into poor quality granite that contains a large amount of quartz and lies below the base area for the prehistoric engravings. It is found on a separate outcrop but belongs to the same set of rocks, so that there is a spatial relationship between them (Fig. 4 and 10).

5.2. Technical description

The earliest engravings were executed using a pecked technique involving indirect percussion. The original pecked engraving was broad. In some areas of the bodies there is evidence of recent abrasion.

The depth and width of the furrows is different in different parts of the engravings: we only measured the deeper areas

<i>Male figure</i>	<i>Width (cm)</i>	<i>Depth of furrows (mm)</i>
Arch	1cm – 2.5cm	between 1mm and 5mm
Face	between 0.6cm and 0.9cm	0.5mm
Right arm	between 1.1cm and 1.6cm	0.5mm
Fingers of right hand	0.8cm to 1.4cm	between 0.4mm and 0.5mm
Left arm	1.5cm	0.5mm
Fingers of left hand	between 1.1cm and 1.5cm	between 0.4mm and 0.5mm
Right-hand side of trunk	between 1.4cm and 2.6cm	0.9mm
Left hand side of trunk	between 0.8cm and 1.9cm	0.9mm
Sex organ	0.6cm on average	0.3mm
Right leg	between 0.8cm and 1.7cm	0.5mm
Toes of right foot	between 0.7cm and 1.2cm	0.6mm
Left leg	between 0.5cm and 1cm	0.5cm
Toes of left leg	between 0.4cm and 1.1cm	0.5mm x 0.6mm
Circles on right-hand side	between 0.8cm and 1.7cm	0.5mm
Triangle on right-hand side	between 1cm and 1.9cm	0.1mm to 0.6mm
Circle on left-hand side	between 0.4cm and 1.2cm	0.2mm to 0.4mm
Triangle on left-hand side	between 0.4cm and 1.2cm	0.3mm to 0.4mm

Pedra Escrita/Fraga dos Fusos in Sortes (Trás-os-Montes) where, in engravings created by abrasion, simple lines are associated with lozenge shapes that have circular handles (SANCHES 1997: 214) that may also be interpreted as weapons, even though their “design” bears no resemblance to any of the known metallic models.

<i>Female figure</i>	<i>Width (cm)</i>	<i>Depth of furrows (mm)</i>
Face	0.6cm	0.6mm
Right arm	between 1.7cm and 1.9cm	0.6mm
Fingers of right hand	0.6cm to 1.3cm	between 0.5mm and 0.6mm
Left arm	0.6cm to 1.6cm	0.5mm
Fingers of left hand	between 0.5cm and 1cm	between 0.4mm and 0.5mm
Right-hand side of trunk	between 0.5cm and 0.8cm	0.5mm
Left-hand side of trunk	between 0.7cm and 1.5cm	0.6mm
Breasts	between 0.5 cm and 0.7cm	0.5mm
Sex organ	between 0.7 cm and 1.8cm	14mm (maximum)
Right leg	between 0.6cm and 0.8cm	0.7mm
Toes of tight foot	between 0.6cm and 0.9cm	0.3mm to 0.6mm
Left leg	between 0.8cm and 1.2cm	0.7mm
Toes of left foot	between 0.5cm and 1.2cm	0.5mm
Cup mark on right	2.4cm	0.9mm
Triangle on right	between 0.8cm and 1.2cm	0.7mm
Cup mark on left	2.3cm	0.9mm
Triangle on left	between 0.5cm and 1.2cm	0.9mm

The triangular engravings were partially made by the pecked technique which at times gave them a segmented appearance.

The cross-shaped engraving was executed by abrasion and is not as deep as the previous examples.

<i>Cross</i>	<i>Width (cm)</i>	<i>Depth of furrows (mm)</i>
Upper section	between 1.6cm and 3.4cm	0.2mm to 0.3mm
Right arm	0.7cm	0.3mm
Left arm	0.5cm	0.3 to 0.4mm
Intersection	-	0.4mm
Lower section	0.4cm	0.2mm
Base	0.6cm	0.7mm

The engravings are in reasonable condition.

6. SOME CONSIDERATIONS

Since we do not know the deeper meaning, the actors directly involved, or the rituals that were carried out, there is, in fact, very little we can say about these places, with their profoundly symbolic significance. However, by making connections between the cultural and spatial contexts in which these manifestations have been developed, that is through the physical and environmental characteristics of the place, and using the data from the intensive survey, the excavation of layers in the vicinity and the themes of the engravings, we may attempt to find some means of understanding the phenomena.

Although it is difficult to classify the Penedo do Matrimónio stylistically, a careful study of its context enables us to establish some interesting links between fertility, stone, water, the sun and the moon, and to note the strong links between these religious and symbolic places and the primordial elements of nature, a common factor in traditional societies where the boundaries between nature and culture/socialisation⁴ are strongly arbitrary.

If the representation in itself cannot be considered a scene in the literal (representational) sense of the term, since there is no spatial framework, or scenario, in which the "action" can occur, the choice of location aims to evoke this absent space. The action itself, which is strongly sexual, or possibly reproductive, is suggested rather than described, both by the emphasis given to the *expressionist* representation of the sexual organs and by the identical posture of both figures who are, *simultaneously* raising their hands, as if taking part in a joint action. Possible rituals associated with human fertility are also suggested by the rectangular depression in the rock, with its sunset-sunrise orientation, that backs onto the engraved panel. This feature, in the form of a "suggested bed", is unique in the outcrops of the area, and probably influenced its choice as a particularly symbolic place.

Space, which is absent in the representation, may be understood by the physical setting, particularly by the morphology and orientation of the engraved panel within the context of the irregular mass of rocks which make up the group.

An isolated place was chosen, relatively well-hidden within the mass of rocks on the western bank of the river and very probably hidden by the trees that would have stood there in primitive times⁵, and these are conditions that would seem appropriate for the privacy needed for fertility rituals.

⁴ P. Descola (2001), within the context of what is known as the "anthropology of nature", prefers to use the term "socialisation" for traditional societies rather than "culture", due to the ontological opposition implicit in the latter term in relation to nature in the modern Western world.

⁵ This hypothesis can only be confirmed by a palynological analysis, in the surrounding area, which will be carried out in the future.

The sound of the River Assureira is an omnipresent feature, and we should therefore include sound within the "scenario". Moreover, this connection with water, as the creator and renewer of life, may be even more significant, since there is a spring just a few hundred metres southeast of Penedo do Matrimónio.

Another framework which relates action with time (albeit mythical), is the relationship of the engravings to the sun and the moon: the sun at its hottest and brightest at midday and the moon in its most powerful phase, when it is full.

Since it faces south, at the height of midday the sun's rays fall directly onto the surface of the rock which, due to the presence of thick-grained elements of quartz and mica, gives off a tremendous heat. Nor should the association with the moon be ignored, since the light of the full moon appearing from behind the mountain in the east falls directly onto the rectangular depression in the outcrop next to the anthropomorphic engravings. As this area of the rock has a larger proportion of mica as its mineral component, it appears to shine more brightly in the moonlight. In the experiment we carried out on the night of the full moon of September 2003, it could be seen that anyone lying in the depression, in the one direction possible, due its inclination, is immediately "bathed" in clearly visible moonlight.

Bearing in mind the characteristics of the place, it may be considered an emotionally charged area where, in addition to fertility rituals, special petitions were also made. This is implied by the position of the arms and hands of the figures, which suggest that they are invoking the vital forces of nature.

It is difficult to explain the triangular symbols at the end of the feet of each of the figures. Were they prophylactic offerings to ensure fertility or a safe birth? If so, it would not be unreasonable to see them as metallic objects, possibly triangular daggers, maybe with rounded handles and therefore *itens* whose social and symbolic value would enhance the value of the offering. Or were they a weapons cache linked to the world of conflict, evoking human pain, suffering and danger⁶? In this case, how do we connect the iconographic indicators of sexuality and fertility with the world of conflict?

The reasons why the female figure is associated with a possible rounded dagger handle represented by a cup mark and the male figure with one that is identified by a circle also still need to be explained.

⁶ In Mont Bègo, region of the French Alps there are 2 examples of rock art in which this kind of weapon can be seen, near the head of the anthropomorphic figures interpreted as the "*Chef de tribu*" and "*Sorcier*". In "*Sorcier*'s" case, the weapons extend laterally from open hands with distinct fingers, at the end of arms which are raised in a similar pose to that of the figures at Campo de Caparinho, although here the triangles/weapons are associated with the feet of the figures. In the Alps, weapons evoked thunderstorms (seen as terrifying and destructive) and were associated with the "primordial divine pair" (LUMLEY 1995: 341-42), in a metaphorical representation/interpretation that is clearly different from the one under consideration here.

Parallels with this type of engraving are rare in the northeast of the Peninsular, i.e. in Atlantic rock art, in which anthropomorphic representations display great formal variety and are stylistically different from the ones under consideration here, even when they are associated with weapons, as is the case at Pedra das Ferraduras, Cotobade (PEÑA SANTOS & REY GARCIA, 2001).

Anthropomorphic representations with rounded heads, large hands and phallic symbolism are only known in neighbouring Galicia, at A Siribela IX (Tourón, Pontecaldelas, Pontevedra)⁷.

Motifs associated with pregnancy are also uncommon in the rock art of the northeast of the Peninsula. In this context, we have only met the same theme in a roughly naturalistic anthropomorphic figure in Panel 2 of the Fragas da Lapa shelters (Atenor, Miranda do Douro), which has contours that suggest pregnancy. However, the style is completely different, since there the pregnancy is indicated by a large belly, shown in profile and with no indication of the reproductive organ. The Fragas da Lapa site is a sanctuary consisting of six schist panels with mainly abstract motifs, overlooking the Veigas stream in the Sabor basin. It is difficult to classify stylistically (SANCHES, 1992) but ultimately seems to have associations with the megalithic phenomenon of the 4th millennium BC (SANCHES, 1997: 166-167).

There are also very few parallels with what we have interpreted as possible triangular daggers with rounded handles, although they do exist in Auga da Laxe I (Vincios, Gondomar, Pontevedra), Poza da Lagoa II and Primadorno I (Silleda, Pontevedra), in association with halberds, which enables us to place these sanctuaries within the Late Chalcolithic period and the beginning of the Bronze Age (COSTAS GOBERNA, 1984; PEÑA SANTOS & REY GARCIA, 2001). Rounded handled daggers also occur in Pedralonga.

Taking into account the iconographic motifs of Penedos Grandes (associated with human fertility), the presence of the presumed daggers and the visual relationship with Crista de Caparinho, where there are engravings and spoils that we believe date from the Chalcolithic era (DINIS *et alii*, 2004), we may place the creation of this sanctuary within a chronological-cultural period which would possibly have as its *terminus post quem* the regional Late Chalcolithic period (in the mid-3rd millennium BC). However, we do not exclude the possibility that this place maintained a special significance, as a place belonging to a "mythical past", in later times,

⁷ An engraving rock, popularly known as "Mão do Homem" in the municipality of Vila Real (PARENTE 2002, 2003) with the representations of incompletely arms and large hands similar to "Penedo do Matrimónio" was recently recorded (ABREU *et alii*, 2004). However, in "Mão do Homem" the engravings display another schematic figures within a completely different composition.

very probably until historical times, so that it was therefore considered necessary to Christianise it.

This was achieved by engraving a Christian symbol, a cross, using a distinctive technique. Cumulatively it has a distinctively different orientation from that of the older anthropomorphic engravings, and it occupies a peripheral location in relation to the main theme. It may have been executed in Late Roman or Suevi-Visigothic times, when chrismons were common, although fertility cults associated with rocks or other animist forces still existed until very recent times in the north east of the Peninsula.

Whilst there are no systematic studies on the subject which cover Northern Portugal, the authors of this article have at least found a significant reference to the "Pedra Maria" in Felgueiras (ESPÍRITO SANTO, s/d: 31)⁸ and a work which gives an overview of the Galician context and refers to the existence of eighteen sanctuaries dedicated to fertility, some of which had been abandoned by the 18th century whilst others were still in use in the 1980s (CARRO OTERO & MASA VAZQUEZ, 1981: 247), a visible reminder of ancient animist rituals. In these sanctuaries, fertility is acquired through contact with natural forces, such as stone, water or the influence of the moon on certain days. It is interesting that the sexual act is performed on rocks: this "...sucede sempre quando este adopta, natural ou artificialmente, lo que llamamos 'forma sugerida' (cama)"⁹ (CARRO OTERO & MASA VAZQUEZ, 1981: 247). It should also be noted that in some places women lay down in the moonlight to ensure a safe birth. In addition, these fertility cults are associated with cults of the dead, which these authors explain by the theory of 'transmigration of souls'. It is not uncommon to find, in the vicinity of these sanctuaries, Christian chapels or churches as a form of acculturation of these rituals.

It should also be noted that, in addition to the cross at Penedo do Matrimónio, the Chapel of Santa Marinha was built a few hundred metres to the north. According to local people, it is associated with protecting the vine, a fact which is interesting since this cult is also linked to fertility.

⁸ According to the author, women thought to be infertile would walk around this phallic-shaped stone and touch it.

⁹ "... always happens when the rock has what we may call a 'suggested from' (a bed), either natural or artificial".

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Fig. 1 – Map of the area in the north of Portugal.

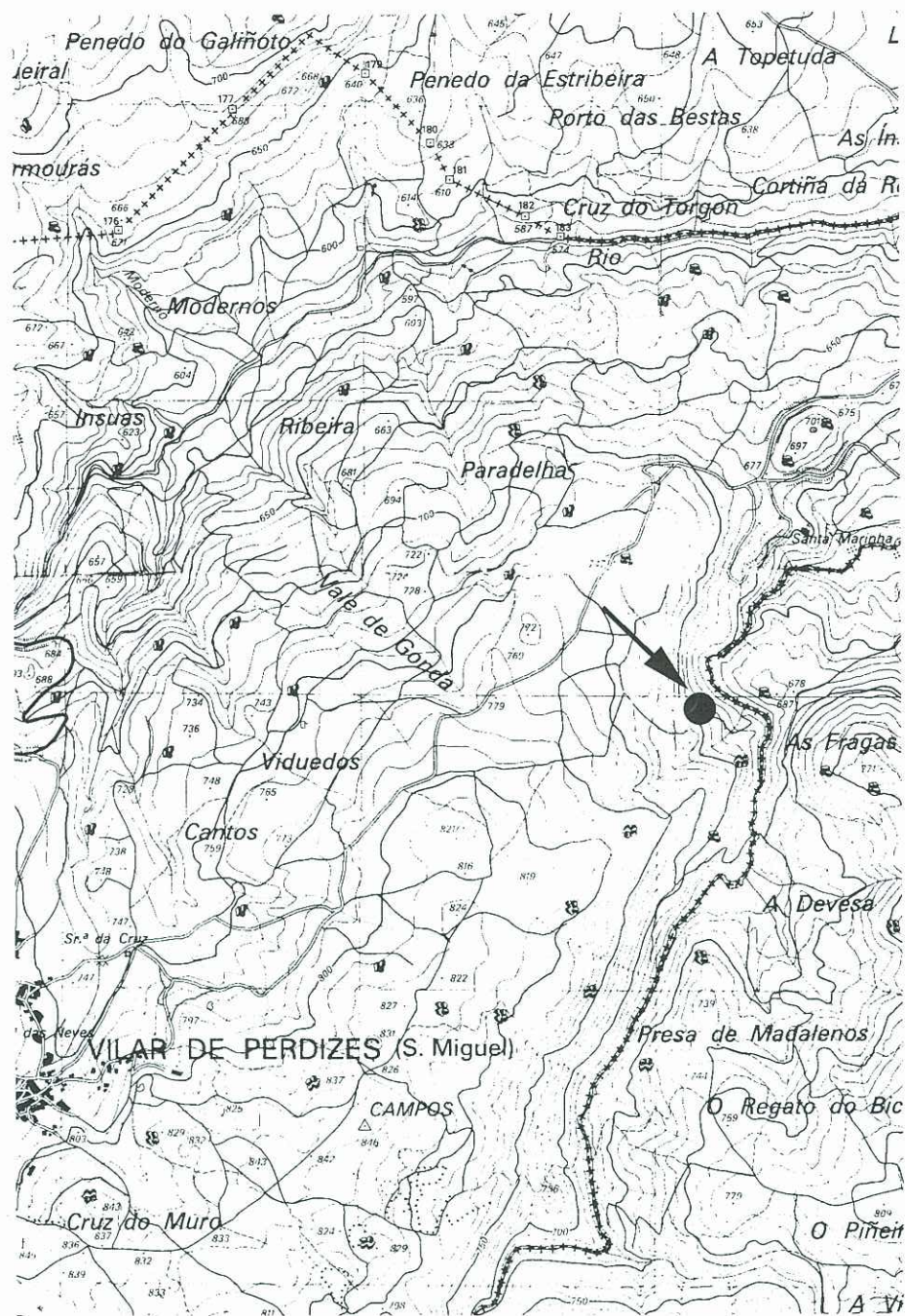


Fig. 2 - Location on the Military Map of Portugal (Scale: 1:25 000).

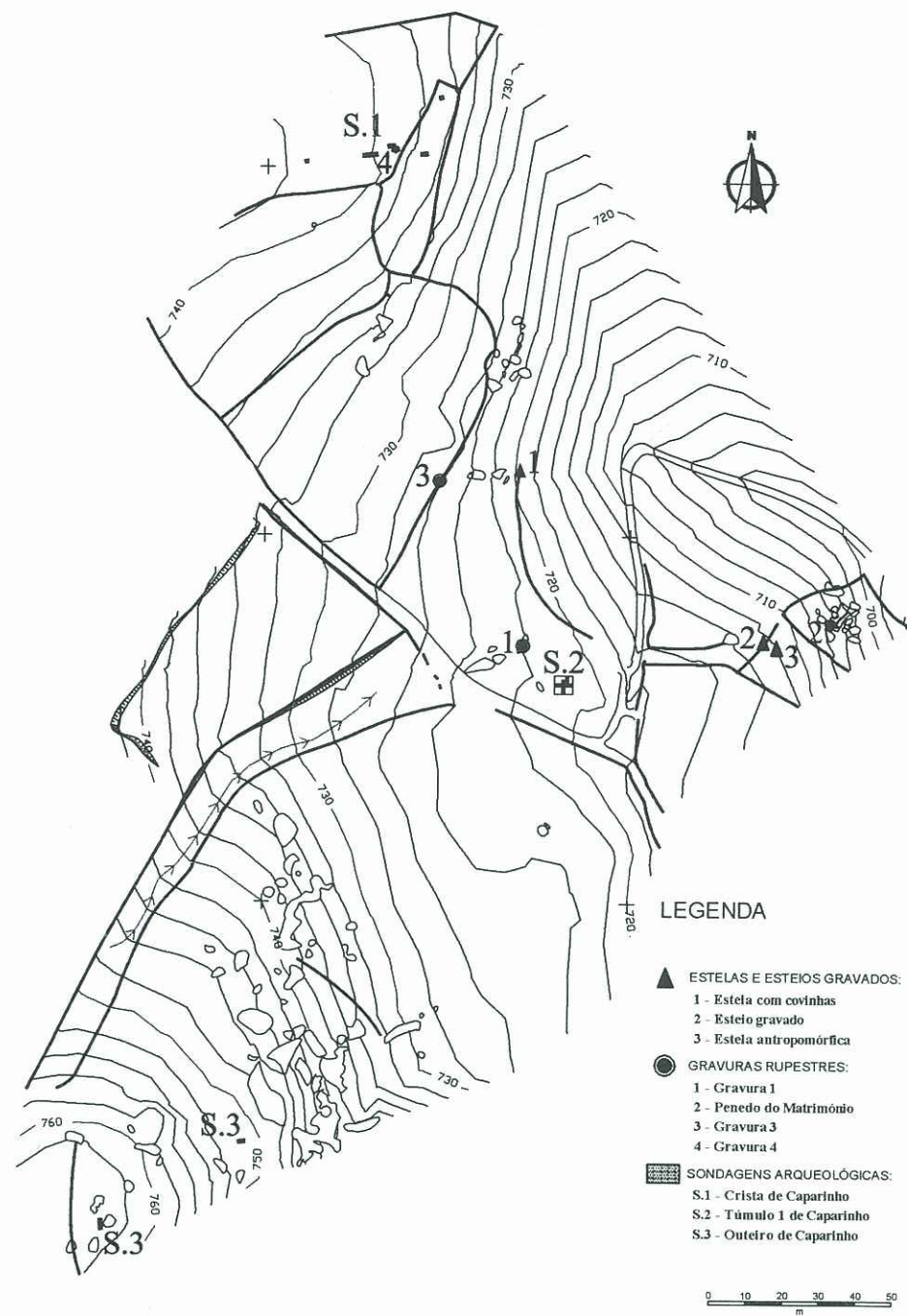


Fig. 3 - Topographical survey of the area with the location of the different archaeological finds.

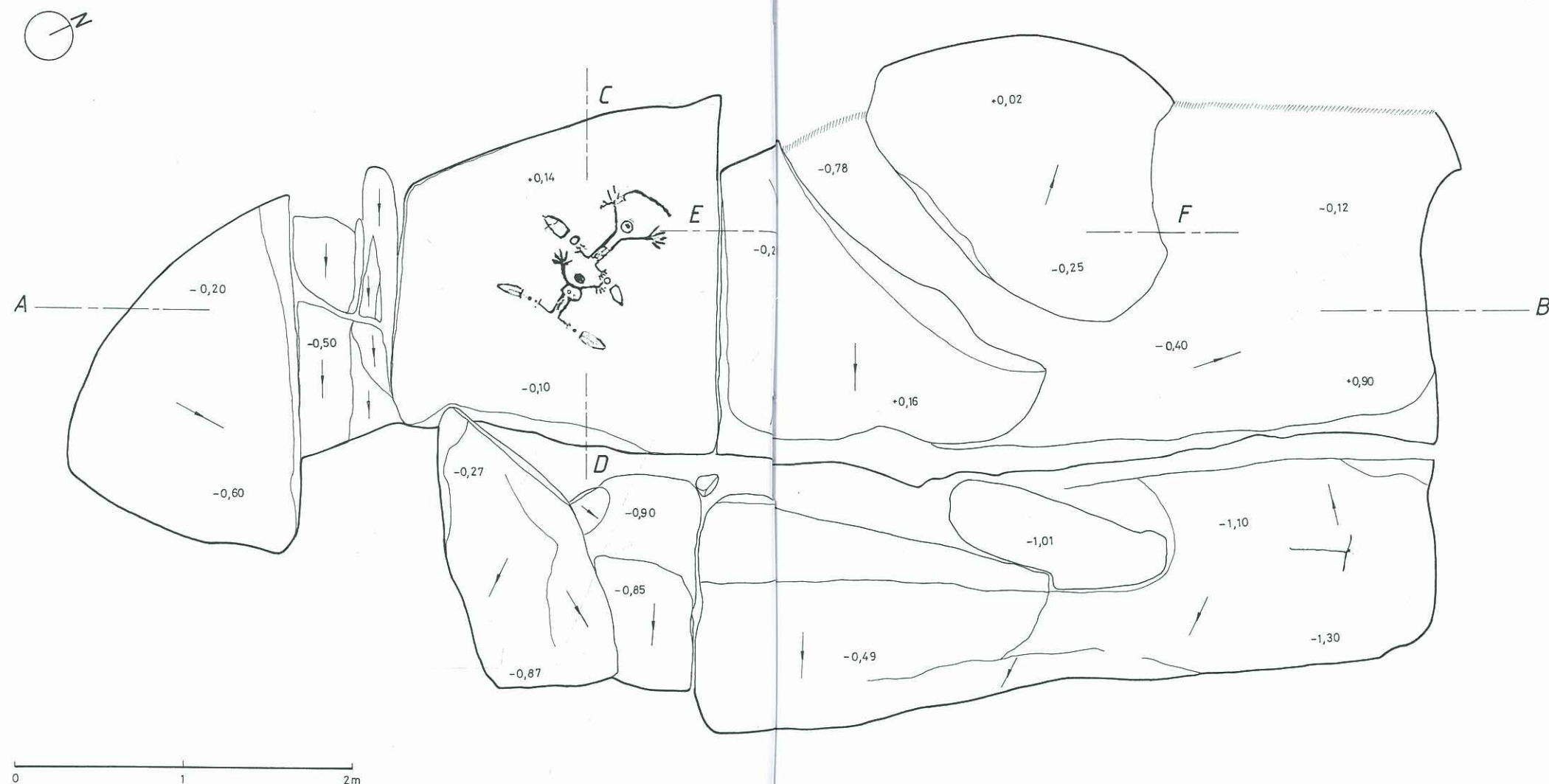
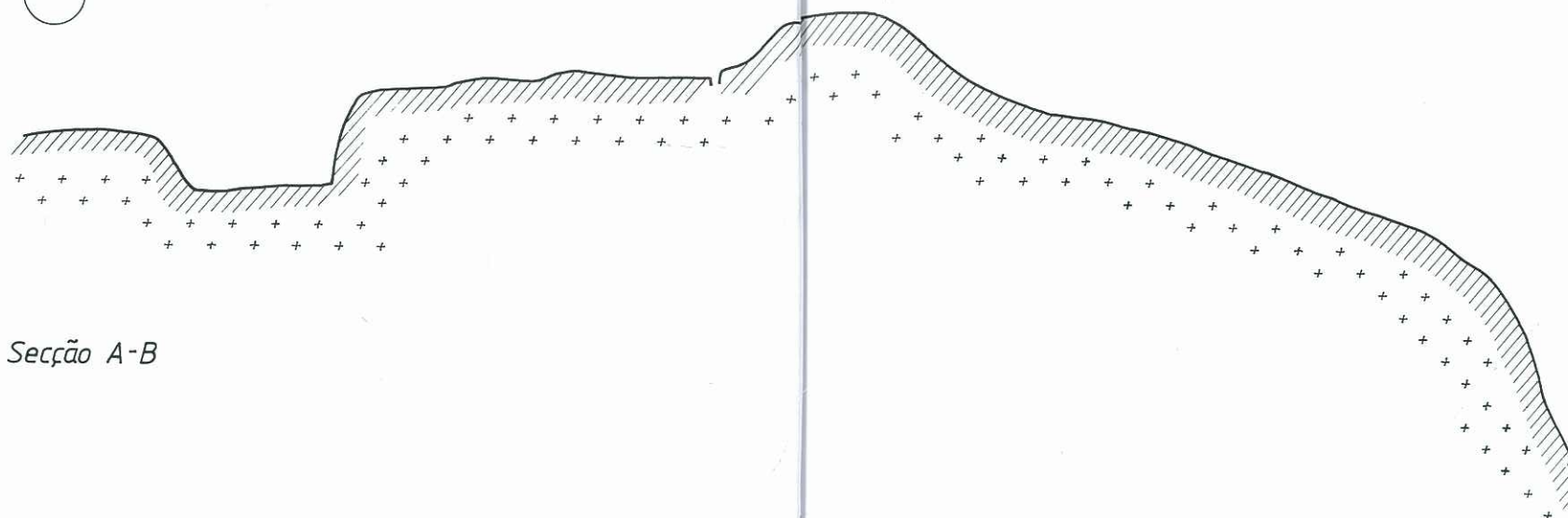
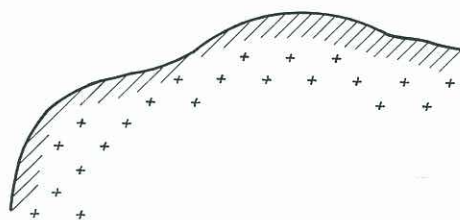


Fig. 4 – Scale drawing of the Penedo of Matrimónio.



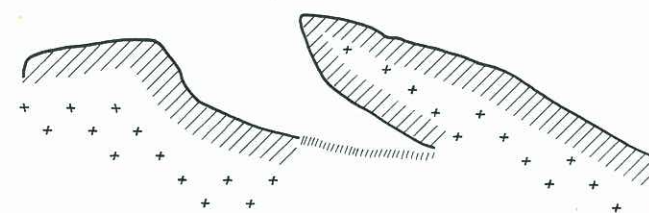
Secção A-B



Secção C-D



Fig. 5 – Sections of the Penedo of Matrimónio.



Secção E-F

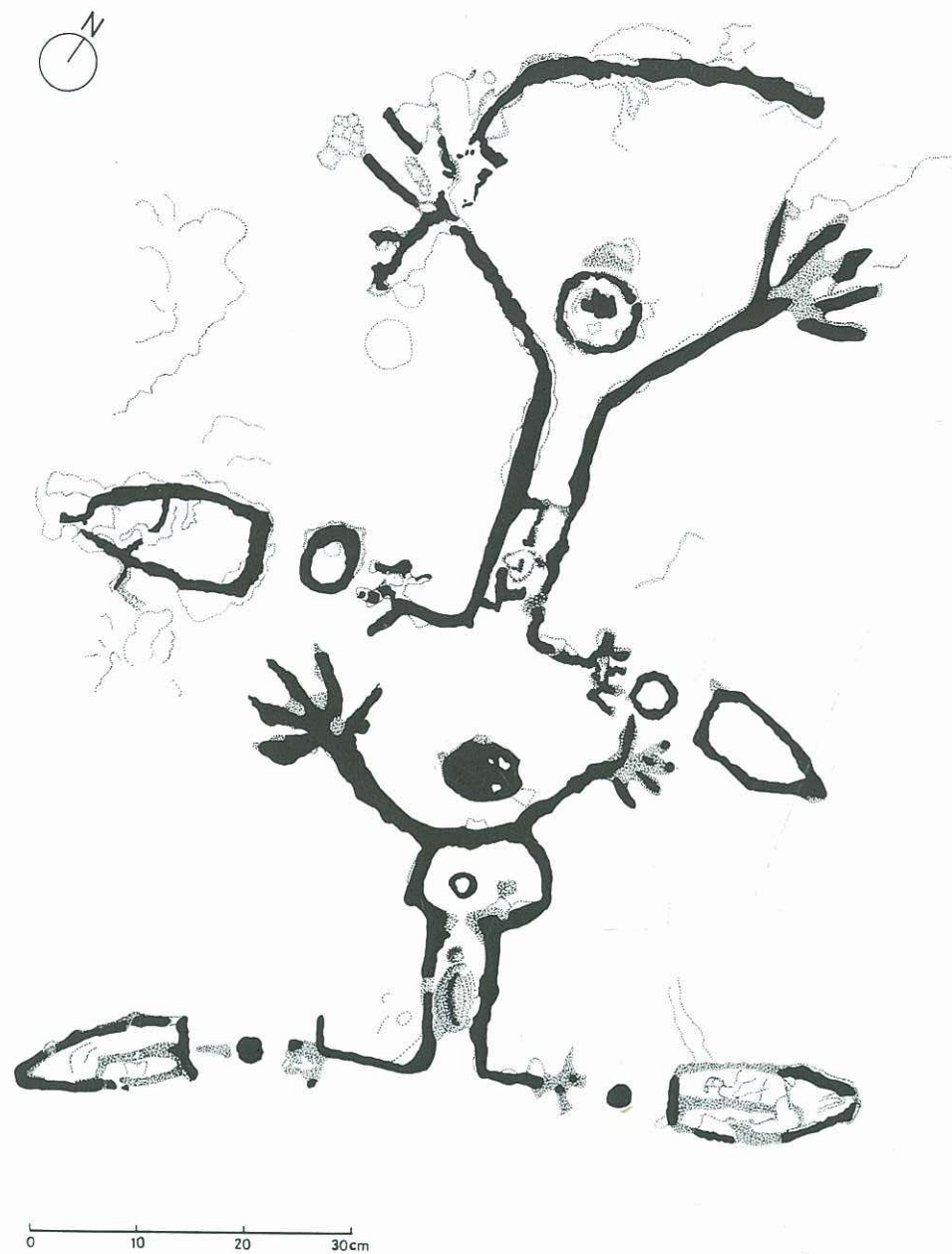


Fig. 6 – Drawing of the engravings (Drawing by Amélia Fernandes).



Fig. 7 – General photograph of the area of the Assureira valley (South).

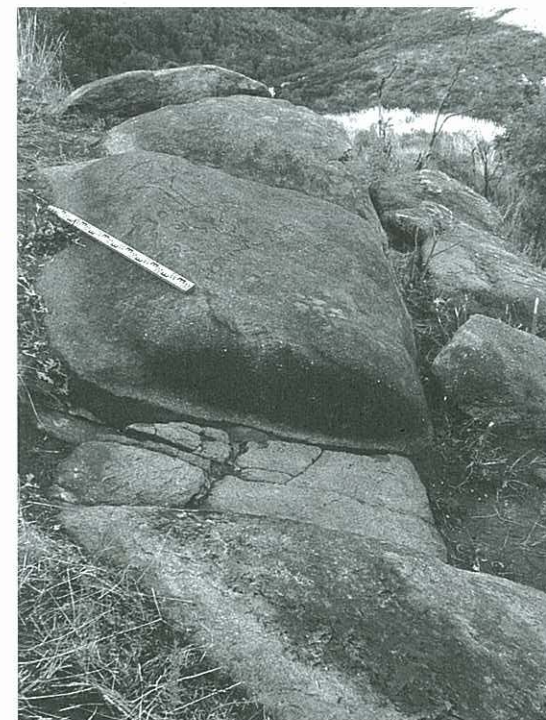


Fig. 8 – General photograph of the Penedo of Matrimónio.



Fig. 9 – Detail of the engravings.



Fig. 10 – Detail of the cross.