

## CERAMICS WITH OCULATE DECORATION FROM THE MIDDLE AND LOWER DOURO BASIN

### *Cerâmicas con decoración oculada de la cuenca del Bajo y Medio Duero*

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Recepción: 5/06/2024; Revisión: 16/09/2024; Aceptación: 3/12/2024

**ABSTRACT:** This study analyses the ceramics with oculate decoration known from the lower and middle Douro basin, focusing on their contexts and emphasising the stylistic substratum in which they are found, in order to understand their relationship with local imagery. We therefore analysed the oculate ceramics in their context of provenance, their connection with other materialities, their distribution in the territory and dissemination over time. In this way, we sought to access the assimilation processes of an allogenic motif, of peninsular circulation, at the scale of the site and taking into account its social role. It seems that the oculate motif on ceramics –a symbol with a high ideological content– was: 1) reinterpreted locally, following the dominant decorative schemes; 2) first came into circulation in significant places within the sphere of the symbolic system and only later, in the second half of the 3rd millennium BC, did it spread throughout the residential places, which may correspond to a change in its social status or meaning. Thus, we have emphasised the agency of the oculate ceramics in the power discourses that shaped the symbolic system of the Chalcolithic.

**Key words:** Sun-eye Motif; Neolithic-Chalcolithic; Contexts; Iconography; Dissemination; Assimilation; Symbolic System.

**RESUMEN:** Este estudio analiza las cerâmicas con decoración oculada conocidas en la cuenca del Bajo y Medio Duero, centrándose en sus contextos y enfatizando el sustrato estilístico en el que se inscriben, con el fin de comprender su relación con la iconografía local. Se analizan las cerâmicas en su contexto de procedencia, su relación con otras materialidades, su distribución en el territorio y su difusión en el tiempo. El objetivo ha sido acceder a los procesos de asimilación de un motivo alógeno, de circulación peninsular, a la escala del yacimiento y teniendo en cuenta su función social. Se ha podido constatar que en la cerâmica el motivo oculado, un símbolo de gran carga ideológica, fue reinterpretado localmente, de acuerdo con los programas decorativos dominantes. También se ha observado que circuló primeramente en lugares relevantes dentro del sistema simbólico y solo más tarde, en la segunda mitad del III milenio a. C., se extendió a las esferas habitacionales, lo que puede corresponder a un cambio de su estatus social o de su significado. Así pues, se ha puesto de relieve la participación de la cerâmica oculada en los discursos de poder que configuraron el sistema simbólico del Calcolítico.

**Palabras clave:** motivo ojos-sol; Neolítico-Calcolítico; contextos; iconografía; difusión; asimilación; sistema simbólico.

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The oculte motif in prehistoric ceramics has been a somewhat recurrent theme in archaeological historiography, and is usually part of the range of symbolic materials from the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods. Approaches have therefore focused on the assumption that they are deeply related to magical-religious practices, an interpretation largely based on the exceptional nature of these items. The oculte is present in the vast peninsular territory in various materials and contexts, with a long diachrony of use (Martín Socas and Camalich, 1982: 285; Bueno and Soler, 2021)<sup>2</sup>. It is characterised by a great formalism in the way it was represented, and can be easily recognised even from more schematic figurations.

The formal attributes of the oculates consist of different elements that, whether they are represented or not, always refer to the central component, the eyes, even when they are not depicted. The eye sockets are generally represented by circumferences, with or without an epicentric point indicating the pupil or the iris, but they can also only be represented by a mere dot or even an asterisk. The circumference may have rays, interpreted as eyelashes, and the supraciliary arches, or eyebrows, generally consist of arched lines or perpendicular strokes that simulate facial hair. There may be a central vertical axis separating the eyes, sometimes connected to the supraciliary arches, forming an elongated 'r' that corresponds to the nose, and there may also be lateral arches. One of the most distinctive elements

of the oculates are the infraciliary arches, known as facial tattoos. Sometimes, the motif is framed on the side and/or at the top by –arched or zigzag– lines representing the hair. Solar representations, also known as 'sun-eyes', are part of this figurative universe. Sometimes there seems to be a (con)fusion between the two motifs, and it is not clear whether they are distinct symbols or whether there is even a correspondence between the two. In this paper, we will adopt the double terminology –'oculates' for the more complex motifs and 'soliforms' for the rayed circumferences, but assuming a confluence of meanings–. Thus, as a starting point, we recognise that oculates and soliforms refer to the same idea, a discussion that is suspended for now so that we can return to it in the final notes.

The different ways of combining and displaying its constituent elements make each oculte a unique motif. Even so, there are common traits that allow us to recognise regional idiosyncrasies. Susana Lopes differentiates two focal areas with distinctive characteristics. The Southeast –in Almería region– has an exuberant style, in which the oculte motif is valued above all else, associated with the representation of the facial tattoo and other iconographic elements –geometric and/or naturalistic schematic motifs– which converge in a metope sequence towards it. The Southwest –Alentejo and Algarve– is characterised by a baroque representation of the eyes and, sometimes, of the facial tattoo, but is associated with simpler decorative schemes, with a linear tendency<sup>3</sup>. Research confirms the strong link between the oculates with the southern territories, although it is a motif of wide diffusion and acceptance, which circulated through all the regions of the peninsula.

Traditionally interpreted as a mythological manifestation of the Neolithic 'mother goddess', of Mediterranean origin, there are new theoretical approaches today, although the narrative of a

<sup>1</sup> This study was funded by FCT-Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (SFRH/BD/129089/2017). Acknowledgements: to Professor M. de J. Sanches, for her willingness to exchange ideas, for her suggestions on the text and for providing new information. To Dr. F. Fabián García, for his generous availability to clarify doubts and, in particular, for providing unpublished data on some of the contexts. To N. Gonçalves, for producing the map. Despite all the support provided, all the content of this text is the sole responsibility of the author.

<sup>2</sup> Also Lejarza, A.: *Difusión de los oculados durante el Neolítico y el Calcolítico en la península ibérica*. Master's Thesis submitted in 2018 at the UNED (Spain).

<sup>3</sup> Jorge, S.: *Povoados da Pré-História recente da região de Chaves-Vila Pouca de Aguiar (Trás-os-Montes Ocidental): bases para o conhecimento do IIIº e princípios do IIº milénios AC no Norte de Portugal*. Doctoral Thesis submitted to the Universidade do Porto, 1986, p. 383.

pan-Iberian mythology that spans different identity territories is still very much present. Therefore, there is a predominant perspective that we are dealing with an idea common to the vast peninsular territory, in which the oculates are seen as ambassadors of an ideology shared by the communities, carrying with them a coded message (Martín So-cas and Camalich, 1982: 274; Soler and Barciela, 2018: 202). Nevertheless, it is worth asking whether or not the symbolic content remains unchanged, regardless of the medium, the formal attributes, or the contexts in which it appears. And if, over time, the oculte underwent conceptual reconfigurations. It is also important to consider the way in which this symbol was spread. This had to necessarily be negotiated and accepted by the communities, but we cannot assume from the outset that the propagation of the symbol necessarily corresponds to the dissemination of a possible myth that the oculte materialises or of any supposed ritual that accompanies it (Hulin, 1989: 95). Symbols are instruments of communication and knowledge, structuring specific symbolic systems and structured by them (Bourdieu, 2018 [2011]: 6-7), and although it is accepted that the oculte carries an underlying meaning, which does not necessarily have a uniform conceptual value among communities, and can rather be re-interpreted by them, the possibility of its polysemy is also recognised. It is reasonable, thus, to question whether the diversity of contexts with oculte ceramics is correlated with an equivalent multiplicity of social practices that incorporated them, maintaining a possible inherent meaning, or even whether they could take on different social roles depending on the places in which they were handled. In that sense, we sought to understand whether the formal attributes of the oculte –i.e. the different typologies of the symbol– are related to particular contexts and/or varied practices, to recognise whether the imagery worked as a distinctive element of the different performing places.

Human societies in the period we are dealing with found themselves in a dynamic of increasing territorialisation and ideological appropriation of the landscape, as a result of the broad process

of consolidation of the agro-pastoral system, demographic growth along with identity affirmation. The occupation of the territory became more widespread and diversified, through the establishment of a network of significant places that would be constitutive of their own identities and cosmologies, and not merely containers for action, meanings, resources, things and people. The emergence of material culture studies in recent decades has emphasised the agency of things and their active role in conceptualising places. Material culture cannot be understood as a passive receptor of meaning, but rather as intervening in the intermediation and regulation of social relations (Thomas, 2006).

The analysis of the material remains of the Past must consider the connections between materials and contexts and between the materials themselves, by fully assuming the dialectical dimension of this relationship in which one acquires meaning in its connection with the other. This study is thus rooted in the idea that oculte ceramic actively participated in social practices, acquiring meaning in the specific context in which they were inserted and, reciprocally, giving meaning to that same context. Therefore, the contextual analysis of the oculte ceramics was prioritised. We tried to examine how the ceramics were used, in which contexts they were used, and the relationships they established with and within the materialities as a whole, in order to understand the social role they played in each archaeological site. Is it possible to relate its social role to the type of archaeological site in which they were exhumed? With regard to the process of dissemination and assimilation, it was crucial to analyse the relationship between the oculte motif and the decorative schemes of the ceramic assemblages in which it is inserted. Did the oculte motif represent a disruption in the prevailing imagery or, on the contrary, did it integrate into the ceramic style of the communities? Finally, in order to understand the evolution of the oculte motif in the territory we are studying, we analysed the known chronologies for the provenance contexts of these ceramics. When did they appear in the territory and how did they spread? Can the process of dissemination of



FIG. 1. Lower and Middle Douro Basin, with the identification of the archaeological sites of provenance of the oculte-soliform pottery: 1) Chã do Castro; 2) Senhora da Penha; 3) Vinha da Soutilha; 4) São Lourenço; 5) Crasto de Palheiros; 6) Buraco da Pala; 7) Orca do Picoto do Vasco; 8) Castelo Velho de Freixo de Numão; 9) Las Pozas; 10) Los Bajos; 11) Los Paradores de Castrogonzalo; 12) El Fonsario; 13) Los Cercados; 14) Pico del Castro; 15) Los Itueros; 16) El Tomillar; 17) Aldeagordillo; 18) Cerro de La Cabeza; 19) Prado de Las Cruces.

the oculte ceramics be connected to the social role they played over time? The aim was to access the agency of this material, its social function and role as a power statement in the Chalcolithic symbolic system.

## 2. The contexts of oculte ceramics in the Middle and Lower Douro

The first note regarding the oculte ceramics is its extreme rarity. It is, throughout the peninsular territory, an exceptional item –due to the limited number of known examples, but also due to the contexts

in which it appears and the materials with which it is associated–, and the ceramics known in the mid-lower Douro basin are particularly scarce and mainly restricted to pottery and to schematic and megalithic art, with few examples known on other types of medium (Sanches *et al.*, 2021: 85)<sup>4</sup>.

There are 28 known pieces of this type of pottery, which came from 19 archaeological sites that are very heterogeneous (Figs. 1 and 7). They have not been studied with the same intensity, some being subject to several excavation campaigns, others being known only through prospecting activities or

<sup>4</sup> Cf. also Lejarza, *op. cit.* n. 2.

short interventions. Thus, the knowledge we have today about them is very uneven and is strongly conditioned by the circumstances in which the discourses were produced. In this text, we followed the interpretation of the authors who studied them, taking into account both their morphology and spatial implantation, but also the materials exhumed in them and the web of relationships between contexts and their materialities.

The biggest challenge we face in this matter is the way we categorise archaeological realities that refer to ontological conceptions far removed from modern Western thought. Although some categories are part of the lexicon of our discourse—such as the dichotomies domestic-ritual or symbolic-functional—, for purposes of effective communication, they must be clarified. The conceptual boundaries of prehistoric communities were characterised by great fluidity, therefore, the ‘domestic’ and the ‘symbolic’ certainly merged in many spheres of action, both integrating everyday life in a *continuum* (Bradley, 2003: 12; Verhoeven, 2011: 124). The human living places we deal with display significant contextual variability, they materialise a multiplicity of practices—connected to the different (in our contemporary and compartmentalising view) dimensions of communities’ life—that coexist in time and space. But this does not mean that there are no practices, contexts and places dedicated exclusively to the symbolic dimension, for which reason we chose to refer to degrees of ritualisation inherent to different social areas.

The category ‘settlements’ applies to residential sites, although there may also be contexts with a votive character in them. Likewise, walled or ditched ‘enclosures’ are monumental and multifunctional places delimited by distinctive architectural devices which contain habitation areas and contexts that, whether domestic or not, reflect other dimensions, disconnected from ‘basic’ needs of human life. These are gathering places with a long and complex biography, under permanent mutation and architectural reconfiguration. The dolmens, particularly the larger ones, have also revealed complex biographies, resulting from long periods of use and reuse

in some cases, especially during the Chalcolithic or even the Bronze Age. More than merely funerary sites, they were places where communities gathered, whose social and even identity function was later replaced by monumental enclosures.

There are few situations in that it is possible to fully understand the contexts in which these materialities were amortised, thereby making it difficult to understand the practices they would have integrated. The uncertainty concerns particularly the settlements, where the largest number of items was found. There are nine settlements with oculate ceramics included in our study. Overall, these are sites where small communities lived and practiced an agropastoral economy, some of which may have operated seasonally and in network with other places. The vast majority of these settlements are located at high altitudes or are prominent in the landscape, generally in areas that are naturally protected by large rock formations. Aldeagordillo and Cerro de La Cabeza were converted into necropolises in the final phase of their occupation, and it is also possible that the settlement of El Tomillar occurred in a phase prior to the burials. However, the oculate ceramics from these sites come from residential contexts. The material culture exhumed in these settlements is mostly connected to routine, domestic activities, however, although these were primarily residential sites, it is likely that ceremonial practices took place there and even that they enclosed demarcated areas, specifically connected to the symbolic dimension of community life—or even that domestic activities had a ritual character—. There are some materials worth highlighting that refer probably to those ‘special’ practices, specifically the human skulls identified inside huts in Aldeagordillo and Los Itueros. These could be depositions or elements that performed a symbolic role, constituting ‘domestic shrines’, since the manipulation of human bones as relics was common practice among prehistoric societies. The data does not allow us to determine with certainty whether the ceramics with oculate decoration were manipulated and deposited in discrete, differentiated places within the settlements. In only two cases was it possible to recognise

the incorporation of these ceramics in delimited areas, specifically inside a hut in Pico del Castro and inside pits and a possible hut in El Tomillar, but we can't quite understand whether it's the result of discarding or structured, intentional depositions.

It is also difficult to correlate these ceramics with other materials, exceptional or not. We know that oculate ceramics were present at the same time that rare or exogenous raw materials were being used more systematically, such as variscite in El Tomillar and Vinha da Soutilha, and the presence of finished copper pieces and even traces of local metallurgical production are recognised in Aldeagordillo, Cerro de La Cabeza, El Tomillar, Pico del Castro, São Lourenço and Vinha da Soutilha. Also noteworthy is the discovery of a spindle whorl with schematic decoration of an anthropomorph and an animal, interpreted as a pastoral scene, in Los Itueros.

El Fonsario is the only one of the sites that has not been excavated, so it cannot be properly characterised. Whether it was a settlement or an enclosure, it would have been a special place, considering the exceptional material culture collected on the surface, among which the limestone vessel stands out.

Pottery with oculate decoration was found in four ditched enclosures –Las Pozas, Los Bajos, Los Paradores de Castrogonzalo and Los Cercados (?)– and in two walled enclosures –Crasto de Palheiros and Castelo Velho de Freixo de Numão–. Ditched enclosures are characterised above all by the concentration of pits excavated in the ground and remains of domestic buildings delimited by concentric ditches, continuous or not, whose dispersion does not follow an apparent functional organisation. The pits vary greatly in size and morphology, and their function has been widely debated. They may have been built for different purposes and may even have had different functionalities over time, from storing cereals and other foods to the structured deposition of 'things', as seen in Las Pozas –namely parts of cattle in pits 1 and 4–<sup>5</sup>. Depositions

<sup>5</sup> García Barrios, A. S.: *Los inicios de la Edad del Cobre en el Valle Medio del Duero. Una aproximación a los modos de vida en el centro de la Meseta en los albores de la Metalurgia*. Doctoral thesis submitted to the Universidad de Valladolid, 2007, pp. 218-220.

were not exclusive to pits, being present in other types of contexts, namely ditches, an example of which is possibly the A2/AS Structure of Los Cercados. Oculate ceramics are present both inside pits –Los Bajos and Los Paradores de Castrogonzalo– and inside ditches –Las Pozas and Los Cercados (?)<sup>6</sup>, where there is evidence of the manipulation of these kind of pottery in ritual activities (García Barrios, 2005)<sup>7</sup>. Thus, oculate ceramics could be part of ceremonial/ritual practices, corresponding to normalised and stereotyped behaviours, such as the structured deposition of different materialities as part of the living experience and conceptualisation of that *loci*. Walled enclosures are situated in high altitude locations that incorporate habitation areas as such, but also contexts limited to practices of an essentially ceremonial nature. Crasto de Palheiros and Castelo Velho de Freixo de Numão contain intentional depositions of several materialities and present areas with an exceptional material culture. Oculate ceramic appears in segregated, special contexts, in which some social practices occur that are exclusive to these areas –the Upper Platform in Crasto de Palheiros and the Intermediate Platform in Castelo Velho–. Both enclosures were occupied for long periods of time, which is why it is believed that their own social purposes could have been re-configured over time.

Contrary to the trend of the remaining peninsular regions, burial sites have a very low representation in this assemblage, with only two cases –Orca do Picoto do Vasco and Prado de Las Cruces–. In Orca do Picoto do Vasco, the pottery featuring a soliform was in the atrium, in a sealed context after its short use. One of the orthostats of the chamber shows a representation of a heliomorph,

<sup>6</sup> Although some authors refer to the excavated structures at Los Cercados as pits, we have chosen to follow the interpretation of J. Herrán, who was responsible for the archaeological interventions carried out in the 1980s. Given its morphology and size, this author considers the A2/AS structure to be a segment of a ditch (personal communication in Esparza *et al.*, 2008: 39).

<sup>7</sup> Also García Barrios, *op. cit.* n. 5, pp. 222-227.

similar to the soliform on the ceramic<sup>8</sup>. The ceramic with oculate decoration from the Prado de las Cruces dolmen, on the other hand, was collected inside the monument's chamber, whose contexts had been greatly disturbed by subsequent use. The few archaeological materials collected, both in the chamber and in the corridor, were therefore very mixed up, as a result of the long use of this monument at different times in prehistory. It is therefore uncertain which of these periods the oculate relates to. More recent data in the research of this type of contexts reveal that a wide range of activities were carried out also in the areas surrounding the monuments, including ceremonialised social practices not related to death. We cannot exclude the hypothesis that the manipulation of oculate pottery took place as part of such practices, and was subsequently incorporated into the interior of the dolmens, since in neither case is it possible to correlate the oculate ceramics with the burials. These are, by definition, special contexts in the life of communities, given to the social and economic investment they embody, especially during the Neolithic, since other spaces for community aggregation emerged in the 3rd millennium BC.

Finally, pottery with oculate decoration were identified in two sites that do not fit into the typologies already presented –Senhora da Penha and Buraco da Pala–. These are places of occasional or cyclical use, with an important social value, where non-routine, ceremonial practices were carried out, that included the manipulation and structured deposition of materials, which are generally rare and of restricted circulation.

It can, therefore, be recognised that ceramics with oculate decoration are found in a wide variety of places of human activity, with a clear preference for non-funerary contexts. This is, in fact, a trend that can be seen in the other materialities, as there is scarce and little diversity in the assemblages found in burial places, where pottery –particularly

decorated pottery– is almost absent. In fact, settlements and enclosures are the chosen contexts for 'discourse-bearing' material culture, specifically ceramics (Sanches, 1997)<sup>9</sup>.

### 3. The oculate motif in ceramics and its relationship with local and regional imagery

The territory under analysis is vast and have asymmetries at various degrees. It soon integrated supra-regional interactions and actively participated in the dynamics of movement of people and things. This network deepened in the 3rd millennium BC and can be attested to by the presence of exogenous objects in the region and in the incorporation, by local communities, of ideas and practices from other territories. Oculate ceramics in this territory tend to be associated with rare materials, with restricted circulation –not necessarily imported materials–, remains of copper or metal work, Bell Beakers, variscite, gold, and other materials.

This period was characterised by a greater consolidation of local and regional identities, which was also mirrored in pottery styles. The latter, in itself, does not directly echo the various identities, but is a reflection of a mosaic of human groups that certainly differed from one another, with identity boundaries being quite fluid at this time. There is a common background of Neolithic tradition, which continues throughout the Chalcolithic with different intensities and on which distinctive decorative styles were developed from the beginning of the 3rd millennium BC or even at the end of the 4th millennium. In the coastal region up to the River Tâmega, approximately, incised metope ceramics –of 'Penha' type– played an active and quite striking role, especially from the middle of the 3rd millennium BC, while the more inland region, including the Portuguese Alto Douro, was mainly characterised by combed printed decorations, which would have played an equivalent role in terms of identity

<sup>8</sup> Cruz, D.: *O Alto Paiva: megalitismo, diversidade tumular e práticas rituais durante a Pré-História recente*. Doctoral thesis submitted to the Univ. de Coimbra, 2001, fig. 72; p. 104.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. also Jorge, *op. cit.* n. 3.

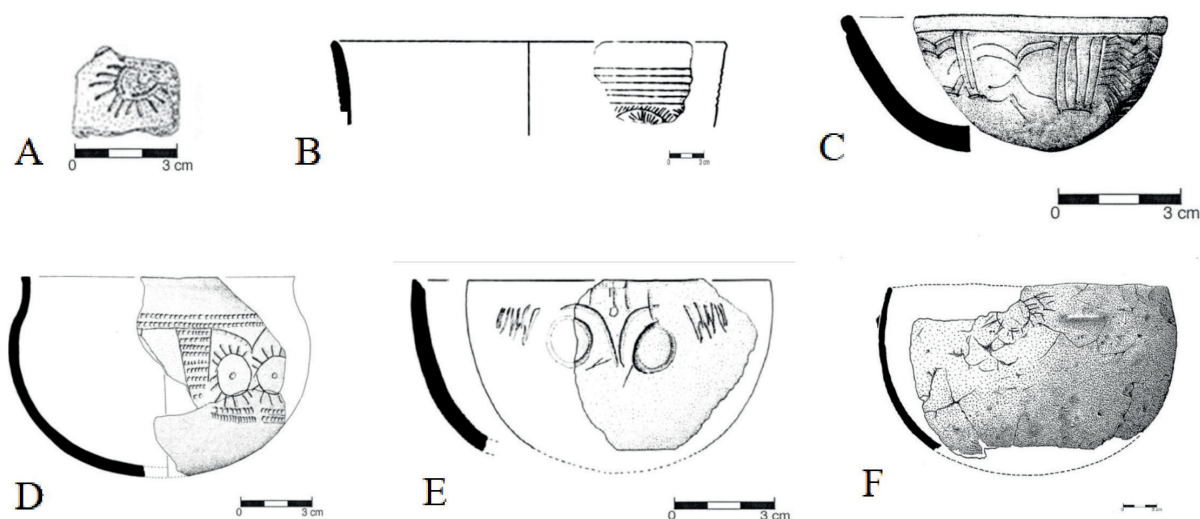


FIG. 2. *Oculated-soliform pottery from: A) Chã do Castro, Amares (adapted from Jorge, 1980: fig. 8, n. 1); B) Senhora da Penha, Guimarães (adapted from Silva and Santos, 1988/89: fig. 15); C) Vinha da Soutilha, Chaves (adapted from Jorge, 1980: vol. II, fig. LXXI); D) São Lourenço, Chaves (adapted from Jorge, 1980: vol. II, fig. CVI); E) Buraco da Pala, Mirandela (adapted from Sanches, 1997: vol. I, fig. XX); F) Orca do Picoto do Vasco, Vila Nova de Paiva (adapted from Cruz, op. cit. n. 8, fig. 74, n. 1).*

consolidation (Sanches, 1997; Lopes and Betten-court, 2017: 470)<sup>10</sup>.

The western region of Trás-os-Montes has a very distinctive iconographic identity. The settlements and enclosures feature ceramic assemblages characterised by a very high percentage of decorated pottery –around 80-90 %–, an extremely diverse decorative style and, particularly in a more consolidated phase of the Chalcolithic, a highly baroque decorative feature. Nonetheless, there are some variations that mirror local stylistic identities (Sanches, 1997)<sup>11</sup>.

In the far east of the Trás-os-Montes region and in the contiguous province of Zamora, the conservative styles of the oldest and more frequent Chalcolithic background, of Neolithic tradition, remained dominant for a longer time. This fact may be due to a greater attachment to the more conservative styles and consequently a higher resistance to exogenous elements and more innovative imagery. However, there are few archaeological sites known

that can be reliably integrated in the second half of the 3rd millennium in the province of Zamora, so it is not possible, at this stage, to make any firm assumptions regarding the stylistic evolution of ceramics.

Communities locally incorporated widely circulated ideas and practices in diverse and creative ways. This can be seen in the assimilation of the Bell Beaker phenomenon in the region, with the formation of local Bell Beaker styles (Sanches and Barbosa, 2018), and is also the case with oculate ceramics, which cover different stylistic territories. Despite the intrinsic standardisation of the oculate motif, there is a certain variability in the way it is represented in the mid-lower Douro basin, which is also, but not only, related to the iconographic substrate in which it is inserted. A large majority of the ceramics is very fragmented, making it impossible to identify all the constitutive elements of the oculate motif. It is even more difficult to recognise the decorative schemes that accompanied it. However, in Castelo Velho de Freixo de Numão, Vinha da Soutilha, São Lourenço, Cerro de La Cabeza, Las Pozas, Senhora da Penha and Pico del Castro it can

<sup>10</sup> Cf. also Jorge, *op. cit.* n. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. also Jorge, *op. cit.* n. 3.

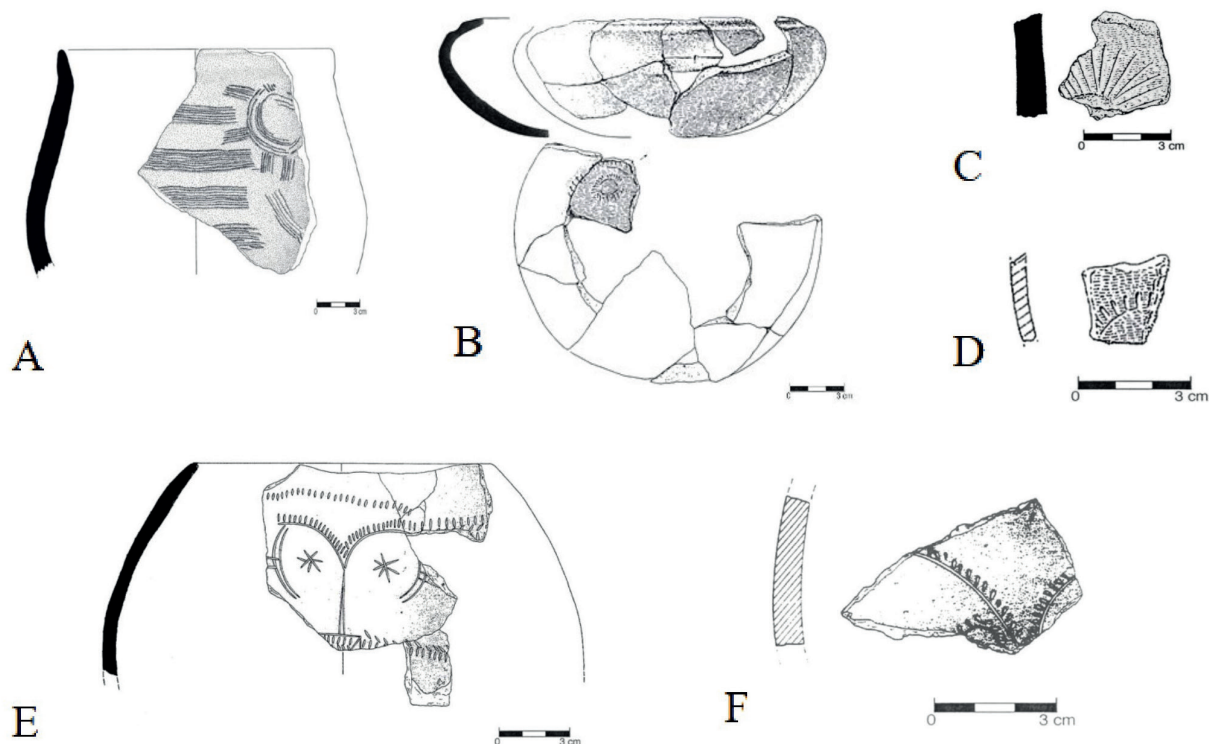


FIG. 3. A) Castelo Velho de Freixo de Numão, Vila Nova de Foz Côa (adapted from Lopes, 2019: 378); B) Las Pozas, Casaseca de Las Chanas (adapted from Del Val, op. cit. n. 13, fig. 36); C) Las Pozas, Casaseca de Las Chanas (adapted from Del Val, op. cit. n. 13, fig. 38); D) Los Bajos, Vecilla de Trasmonte (adapted from Pérez et al., 1991: 171); E) Los Paradores de Castrogonzalo, Castrogonzalo (adapted from Domínguez, 1991: 204); F) Los Paradores de Castrogonzalo (adapted from García Barrios, op. cit. n. 5, fig. IV, n. 5).

be seen that, as well as the fact that the oculate was made using the technique most commonly used in each of the sites, there was a clear intention to ‘make this motif their own’ by adapting it to the dominant decorative styles in the respective ceramic assemblages. We shall analyse some examples in more detail. The Vinha da Soutilha motif was perfectly integrated into the metope decorative scheme and transfigured into local imagery (Fig. 2c). The motif from São Lourenço was executed using a variety of techniques that are very common in the representation of triangles in this settlement –incision + stamping + ‘drag-and-stab’– (Fig. 2d). The Castelo Velho sample, the only known motif executed by combed printing, was integrated into what is the most common decorative scheme –Type IV–

in layer 3, from where it came (Lopes, 2019)<sup>12</sup> (Fig. 3A). There is, therefore, the acceptance and appropriation of a transregional symbol, but one that is incorporated into the current iconographic discourse. Although studies on ceramics technology, including analyses of clay provenance, are still scarce, the evidence points to the generalisation of domestic production in the centre and northwest of the Iberian Peninsula (Díaz-del-Río, 2006: 71–72). Naturally, the fusion of an allogenic motif such as the oculate with locally based imagery reinforces the idea of local production of these ceramics.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. also Baptista, L.: *A Cerâmica do Interior do Recinto de Castelo Velho de Freixo de Numão. Contributos Para a Interpretação de Contextos de Uso*. Master’s Thesis submitted to the Univ. do Porto in 2003.

The analysis of the dispersion map of oculate ceramics allowed us to observe that there are two areas without any known examples of this type of pottery (Fig. 1). The Portuguese region east of the River Tua, despite having undergone recent open area excavations as a result of work carried out as part of the construction of the Sabor dam, as well as other older work carried out mainly by Maria de Jesus Sanches, presents a void that must be highlighted. A similar situation occurs with regard to Bell Beaker ceramics, since only local styles are found in this region, in a single known site –Lorga de Dine, in Vinhais– (Sanches and Barbosa, 2018). It is important to emphasise, as mentioned, that this is a more conservative region from the point of view of ceramic stylistics, which may explain the absence of oculate ceramics and classic Bell Beaker styles. The other area without any known examples is Salamanca. However, there may be reasons of an archaeographic nature that justify this void. This is a region where archaeological research has focused much more heavily on funerary contexts and less in residential contexts, therefore, this is a natural absence.

Despite the gaps in spatial dispersion, oculate ceramics are present in territories where different stylistic traditions prevail –in areas with more conservative stylistic behaviour, where incised triangles

or grooved decorations are dominant, but also in areas that incorporated more innovative styles, such as metope schemes and combed impressions. It is also present in areas whose ceramic assemblages show high percentages and a great diversity of decorations, but also in areas with sparse presence of decorated ceramics.

The analysis of the map also allows us to identify a concentration of oculate pottery in the Ávila region, where, despite natural archaeographic challenges, it is possible to determine the existence of two types of oculates. Apart from the fact that the provenance contexts are similar in terms of morphology and spatial location, the oculate motifs in this region have unique features. One of the types is characterised by a very heavy representation of the supraciliary arches, with a very accentuated curvature, and marked by abundant incised lines in the upper part, without the eye socket being depicted. All decoration is incised (Figs. 4E; 4G; 4H and 5A-B). The other type is characterised by a soliform representation, with stamped rays (Figs. 4F and 5C-D). The piece from Prado de Las Cruces differs from the others, which may be due to the fact that this site is more closely related to the Salamanca Megalithism or possibly to a chronological disparity (Fig. 5E).

The vessels from Los Cercados deserve special mention as they portray faces with eyes, eyebrows,

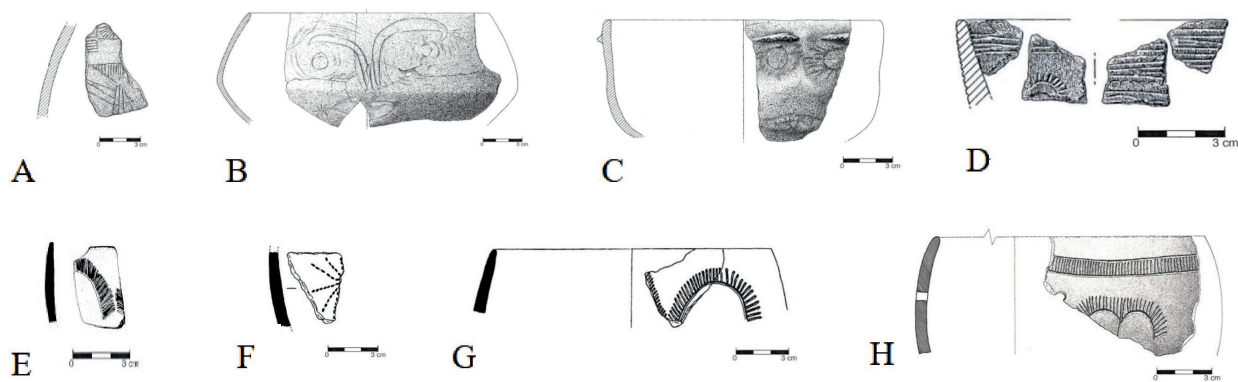


FIG. 4. A) *El Fonsario, Villafila* (adapted from Villalobos, 2013: 133); B) *Los Cercados, Mucientes* (adapted from García Barrios, op. cit. n. 5: 249); C) *Los Cercados, Mucientes* (adapted from García Barrios, op. cit. n. 5: 249); D) *Pico del Castro, Quintanilla de Arriba* (adapted from Rodríguez, 2007: 140); E) *Aldeagordillo, Ávila* (adapted from Eiroa, 1973: 241); F) *Aldeagordillo, Ávila* (adapted from Fabián, 2006: 68); G) *Los Itueros, Santa María del Arroyo* (adapted from Fabián, 2006: 211); H) *Los Itueros, Santa María del Arroyo* (adapted from Fabián, 1995: 168).

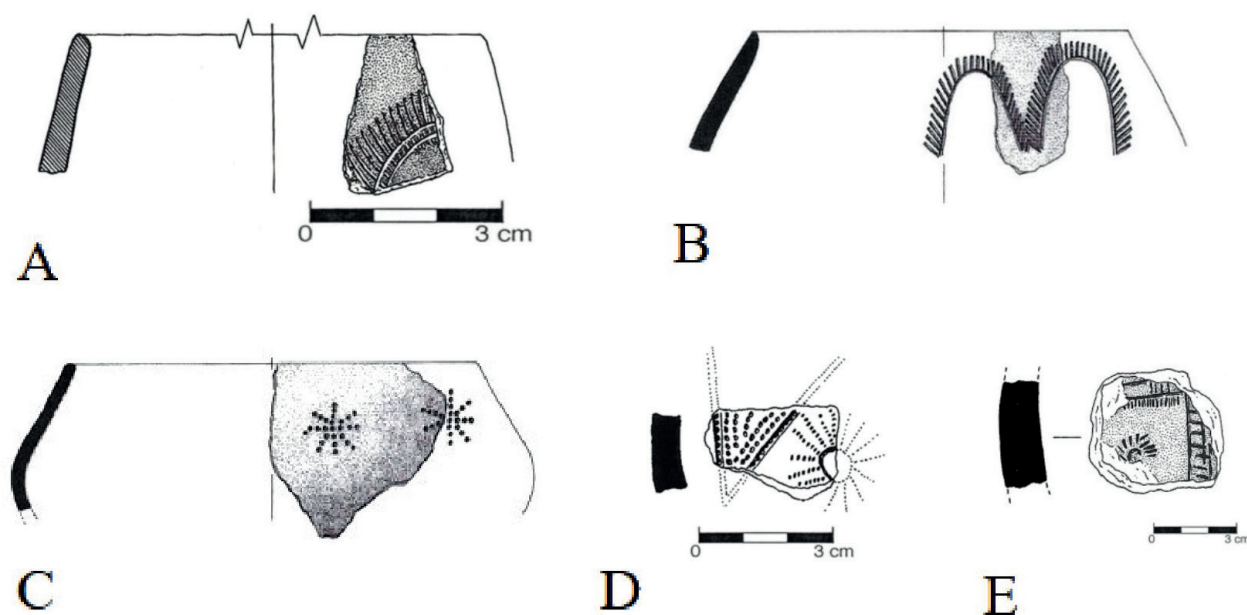


FIG. 5. A) *El Tomillar, Bercial de Zapardiel* (adapted from Fabián, 1995: 99); B) *El Tomillar, Bercial de Zapardiel* (adapted from Fabián, 2009: 32); C) *El Tomillar, Bercial de Zapardiel* (adapted from Fabián, 2009: 32); D) *Cerro de La Cabeza, Ávila de Los Caballeros* (adapted from Fabián, 2006: 95); E) *Dolmen del Prado de Las Cruces, Ávila* (adapted from Fabián, 1997: 60).

mouths, possibly teeth and noses (Fig. 4B-C), a degree of detail that we don't see in other ceramics. Despite far removed from the standardisation found in oculate ceramics from the Iberian Peninsula, the vessels from Los Cercados show an attempt to emulate a trans-regional iconographic model (García Barrios, 2005: 252).

Some of the motifs found north of the Douro, perhaps because they are more complete, display a somewhat familiar appearance. These are the ones from Los Paradores de Castrogonzalo, Las Pozas, Buraco da Pala, São Lourenço and Vinha da Soutilha, due to the hybrid nature of the motifs. In fact, unlike the examples from Los Cercados, which are clearly anthropomorphic, these seem to represent birds, specifically strigiform ones. It is inevitable to mention the oculate masks from Regato das Bouças, –namely its shelters 11 and 15– in Serra de Passos (Sanches *et al.*, 2016; 2021: 86). Aside from providing the most extraordinary expression of the oculate motif north of the Tagus, its hybridity is reflected not only in the characteristics of the oculate

faces, but also in the figures' bodies themselves: arms that evoke bird feathers/wings and extremities in the shape of a bird's paw. This hybrid imagery is present in an incomplete schist plaque from Cabeço da Mina, where, in addition to the 't'-shaped ocular face, anthropomorphs with 'aviform' arms are depicted (Sanches *et al.*, 2021: 83). The same similarity was pointed out for oculates represented on other types of materials, namely the engraved schist plaques from Alentejo (Negro *et al.*, 2022).

Also seen in Serra de Passos is the so-called 'facial tattoo', one of the most distinctive elements of the oculate figure. We can only recognise this element in the ceramic pieces from São Lourenço, Vinha da Soutilha and, possibly, in one of the vessels from Los Cercados.

Due to the incompleteness of the motifs, there are few pieces in which it is possible to determine whether the soliform is represented alone or in pairs (clearly referring to the eyes in these cases). Both situations are also known in rock art. In addition to the aforementioned Regato das Bouças (specifically

its shelter 3), we should also mention the Pala Pinta shelter, in Alijó –in Lower Tua valley– (Sanches, 2017). These motifs have a hybrid character, both soliform and oculated, as they appear in pairs, with lines connecting them<sup>13</sup>.

#### 4. The chronology of oculate ceramics in the territory under analysis

The periodisation of Late Prehistory in our research area has been constantly under consideration by researchers who systematically study this region (Lopes and Bettencourt, 2017). Although, from a strictly processual point of view, there is a moment of rupture in this territory, identified somewhere around the end of the 4th millennium BC, marking the end of what is known as the Late Neolithic and the beginning of the Chalcolithic, it is more difficult to define the end of the Chalcolithic and the beginning of the Bronze Age. As we shall see, the Douro basin does not show uniformity in terms of the rhythms of transition.

The analysis of the chronology of the oculate pottery considered in this study presents some challenges that are no stranger to archaeological research. On the one hand, there are contexts whose dates have a very distant time span and on the other hand, the dates does not always refer to the exact provenance context of the oculate ceramics (Fig. 6). It is, therefore, necessary to consider several elements, especially the stratigraphic relationships and the materialities that make up the contexts. We draw especially attention on pottery style, specifically on decoration, since change does not act so visibly on morphology, which tends to be more standardised and constant. Decoration should not be seen as separate from form, as “... both comprise a functional and aesthetic unity...” (Sanches, 1997: 175, author’s translation). However, because there has been a high degree of stability overall in terms of morphology, and because the forms that can be identified with oculate decoration within the scope

of this study are the more traditional local forms, we have not taken this element into account, as it does not seem as relevant as imagery for our purposes. In our area of analysis, chronologically long-lived forms predominate, heirs to the common background of the Late Neolithic period. These are mainly large bowls, globular and semi-globular forms, with variations depending on the region.

Since the absolute dates available, along with the inherent archaeographic problems of the research, make it difficult to establish discrete phases for the contexts we are analysing, we chose to focus on more extended periods. With the exception of Orca do Picoto do Vasco, which can be assigned to the Mid Neolithic, and whose container has a discrete soliform representation, all other contexts are framed in the Chalcolithic. Therefore, we adopted only two moments within the Chalcolithic, as this seems to be a safer criterion and one that is applicable to the analysis we intend to develop: the first half of the 3rd millennium and the second half of the 3rd millennium BC.

The oculate motif in Orca do Picoto do Vasco is formally very similar to the one represented on Slab c6. According to Domingos Cruz, the monument was built, used and condemned in a short period of time, in the first third of the 4th millennium BC<sup>14</sup>. Like the pottery with soliform decoration, most of the <sup>14</sup>C dates from this monument come from contexts under its condemnation structure. Therefore, it is safe to say that both representations are chronologically correlated and fit into the first three centuries of the 4th millenium BC, as the reuse of the monument occurs at the end of the Bronze Age, at a time when the imagery of societies was different. However, we believe that, in this case, the oculate motif is related to the imagery of Neolithic communities seen in megalithic art –even taking into account the reproduction of the same motif on the chamber’s slab–, and that it is not connected to the mythography of the sun-eye motif that later spread throughout the peninsula. The Prado de Las Cruces dolmen, on the other hand, is more difficult to

<sup>13</sup> Personal information from M. de J. Sanches.

<sup>14</sup> Cruz, *op. cit.* n. 8, p. 104.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE	CONTEXT	LAB. REFERENCES	CONVENTIONAL DATE (BP)	CALIBRATED DATE (2 $\sigma$ ) (CAL BC)
Aldeagordillo	Oldest layer (settlement): G-13	Beta-83084	4320 $\pm$ 70	3326-2698
	Layer of occupation (settlement): H-4	Beta-83085	4100 $\pm$ 80	2878-2475
	Layer of occupation (settlement): H-4	GrN-19168	4115 $\pm$ 20	2860-2578
Buraco da Pala	Layer I: E5-1-Silo 9	ICEN-310	4120 $\pm$ 80	2887-2475
	Layer I: E5-1-Silo 9	ICEN-311	4120 $\pm$ 50	2876-2502
	Layer I: D6-1-Silo 11	GrN-19101	3955 $\pm$ 25	2569-2347
Castelo Velho de Freixo de Numão	Layer 3 - Square 111 (inside a struct. with human remains)	GrN -23512	4020 $\pm$ 100	2876-2290
	Layer 3 - Square 19 (Intermediate Platform)	CSIC-1706	4073 $\pm$ 45	2860-2472
	Layer 3 - Square H6 (Intermediate Platform)	Ua-17648	3850 $\pm$ 75	2492-2041
Cerro de La Cabeza	Burial 1 (collect.)-indiv. 3*	Beta-109830	4020 $\pm$ 50	2848-2353
	Burial 2*	Beta-109828	4010 $\pm$ 50	2843-2348
	Burial 1 (collect.)-indiv. 4*	Beta-109827	3970 $\pm$ 50	2621-2297
	Burial 4*	Beta-109831	3850 $\pm$ 60	2469-2141
	Burial 3*	Beta-109829	3820 $\pm$ 60	2463-2056
Crasto de Palheiros	PSN-Lx. 40.1	Ua-22284	4035 $\pm$ 45	2847-2463
El Tomillar	Pit 13 (burials)*	Beta-154455	3970 $\pm$ 70	2840-2208
	Pit 13 (burials)*	Beta-154454	3960 $\pm$ 40	2574-2309
	Pit 1 (burials)*	GrN-17345	3830 $\pm$ 95	2567-1983
	Pit 3 (underlying layer)	GrN-18875	3925 $\pm$ 40	2566-2290
	Pit 1 (burials)*	GrN-17344	3780 $\pm$ 100	2471-1934
Las Pozas	Bottom of the silo	GrN-12125	4425 $\pm$ 35	3330-2920
	Bottom of the ditch	GrN-12126	4425 $\pm$ 30	3320-2920
	Sealing of the ditch	GrN-12127	4075 $\pm$ 30	2850-2490
Los Bajos	Unknown	Beta-64524	4280 $\pm$ 70	3095-2632
Los Cercados	Pit A3	GrN-13594	3970 $\pm$ 60	2830-2237
Los Itueros	Sector 1 (ib)	I-16150	4120 $\pm$ 130	3011-2297
	Sector 1 (ia)	Beta-83088	3960 $\pm$ 90	2853-2151
	Sector 1 (ib)	I-16149	3850 $\pm$ 100	2574-2028
Orca do Picoto do Vasco	Sq. J8; bottom of intrat. corridor, under condemn. struct.	CSIC -1221	5160 $\pm$ 42	4151-3804
	Sq. J8; bottom of intrat. corridor, under condemn. struct.	GrN-22443	5140 $\pm$ 40	4043-3801
	Sq. J8; bottom of intrat. corridor, under condemn. struct.	CSIC-1328	5124 $\pm$ 30	4032-3802
	Sq. I8; bottom of the vestibule	GrN-22817	5100 $\pm$ 60	4041-3712
	Sq. J8; bottom of intrat. corridor, under condemn. struct.	OXA-6910	4930 $\pm$ 60	3941-3539
	Sq. J8; under condemn. struct.	OXA-6959	4790 $\pm$ 55	3651-3378
	Sq. J8; bottom of intrat. corridor, under condemn. struct.	CSIC -1199	4988 $\pm$ 31	3935-3654
Pico del Castro	Interior of a negative structure (post hole)	GrN-15897	3750 $\pm$ 60	2400-1972
Senhora da Penha	On a clay pavement	AA63061	4102 $\pm$ 42	2871-2497
Vinha da Soutilha	Sector A-Fireplace 3, Layer 3	UGRA 176	4730 $\pm$ 200	3946-2931
	Sector A-Burning Structure 3, Layer 3	Ly 3377	4690 $\pm$ 140	3765-3021
	Sector A-Fireplace 1, Layer 3	UGRA 133	4650 $\pm$ 150	3703-2926
	Sector A-M, Layer 3	UGRA 178	4370 $\pm$ 140	3527-2475

FIG. 6. Radiocarbon dating from contexts with oculate-soliform decoration on pottery from the Mid-Lower Douro basin. Dates were calibrated using software CALIB 8.2 [www program] at <http://calib.org>, accessed 28/1/21 [www Document]. (<https://www.mendeley.com/catalogue/cd30f499-d471-3bdc-a95d-5506bc4c0117/>; accessed 9/14/23). Stuiver and Reimer, 1993, 2021. \* They date the burials, not the previous occupation.

frame chronologically, as it was reused at different times, from the Late Neolithic to the Late Bronze Age, presenting archaeological materials from different periods mixed together. The Chalcolithic was the time of most intense use, with which Fabián (1997: 53) relates the oculate ceramic. However, we must bear in mind that it was actually in a disturbed context.

The Senhora da Penha oculate is also of uncertain chronology. The  $^{14}\text{C}$  date confirms that the probable provenience area of the potsherd –near the Senhora da Penha Chapel– was occupied in the first half of the 3rd millennium BC. However, it is not possible to correlate the dating context with the oculate ceramic, whose precise provenance is unknown. The fact that the oculate motif is part of an incised metope decorative scheme ensures that it is fully set in Chalcolithic, since the origin of this decoration can be traced back to the beginning of the 3rd millennium BC (Lopes and Bettencourt, 2017: 470). The Buraco da Pala rock-shelter, on the other hand, has discrete dates for its layer I that integrate the oculate motif in the second quarter of the 3rd millennium BC. This is part of the figurative universe of the Regato das Bouças oculates, whose stylistic parallels are also “generically located within the Chalcolithic (3rd millennium BC), examples of which are Penas Róias or Cachão da Rapa”. It should be noted that this is the only location where sun-eye motifs are known throughout the Serra de Passos so far (Sanches *et al.*, 2016: 90 and 97; 2021: 83).

Analysis of the stratigraphic relationships and the construction process of Crasto de Palheiros reveal that the use and final amortization of the oculate ceramic took place before the condemnation of the Upper Platform, at a time that was generally contemporary with layer I of Buraco da Pala. Although the stratigraphic context does not allow us to clearly define which of the constructive moments the soliform ceramic is connected to, we can infer that it wasn't later than the range between 2860 and 2500 BC, the moment after which the condemnation of the Upper Platform is supposed to have taken place, and to which the two dates considered

valid obtained from the Internal Unit refer. It is also assumed, above all for reasons of constructive operability, that the Lower Platform began to be occupied at the same time as the construction of the Upper Slope –preceding the construction of the stone paving–, a moment dated in the time period between 2860/2700 and 2470 BC. The early chronology attributed to the Upper Platform contexts, specifically those in the Northern sector, is confirmed by the fact that the more traditional decorative styles prevail among the ceramics in this area (Sanches, 2008). With regard to the Castelo Velho enclosure, its most intense occupation is materialised in layer 3, whose available radiocarbon dates fall within the 3rd millennium BC. One of the dates –CSIC-1706– from the Intermediate Platform, where the oculate pottery was exhumed, refers to the first half of the 3rd millennium BC and corresponds to the first phase of the formation of layer 3. Another date –Ua-17648–, in turn, relates to the second phase of the formation of that layer (Jorge and Rubinos, 2002: 90-91). Since we do not know which of these phases, within layer 3, the oculate ceramic is related to, it is difficult to propose a reliable chronology for its use in the Castelo Velho enclosure.

The ditched enclosures in the province of Zamora have several similarities in terms of both their architectural morphology and the archaeological materials exhumed there. From a cultural point of view, they form part of the so-called ‘Las Pozas Horizon’, which traditionally refers to the first half of the 3rd millennium BC – = Pre-Beaker Copper Age –c. 3000-2400 BC– (Delibes *et al.*, 2015). This is characterised by a strong link to the older Chalcolithic background, also present in north-eastern Portugal. Globular forms and simple decorations under the rim of incised and grooved lines are the most common at the three sites, followed by inverted triangles. Also noteworthy is the presence of *morillos* and the low percentage of decorated pottery in the corresponding assemblages. The available  $^{14}\text{C}$  dates, from Las Pozas and Los Bajos, are consistent with each other and with the material culture, therefore we can accept a general contemporaneity

for the three sites, within the first half of the 3rd millennium BC. Los Cercados relates to the innermost reality of the northern Meseta, also marked by globular shapes, but with a more accentuated scarcity of ceramic decorations –the so-called ‘Los Cercados Horizon’, referring also to the first half of the 3rd millennium BC. The decorations consist mainly of incised triangles filled with dots and grooved bands under the rim. In fact, pottery is mostly undecorated in this enclosure and is mainly concentrated in Structure A2/AS. Although the absolute dating available does not come from this structure, but from Pit A3, it is consistent with the archaeological materials exhumed there, which are culturally connected with the regional Chalcolithic. The margin of error is too wide and does not allow us to place this occupation into a discrete moment. García Barrios believes that Structure A2/AS was used over a long period of time, since the three layers with votive depositions were interspersed with sediments not related to ritual practices<sup>15</sup>.

El Fonsario only allows us a chronological approach through material culture. This seems to be fully integrated into the aforementioned ‘Las Pozas Horizon’, given the strong affinities with the materials exhumed in known contexts of the province of Zamora, namely the enclosures included in this study. We therefore assume, as Villalobos does, that it fits into the first half of the 3rd millennium BC (Villalobos, 2013).

The settlement of Chã do Castro, for which we do not have absolute dates, seems to belong to the cultural world of the second half of the 3rd millennium BC, even taking into account that, in regard the pottery, there is a great homogeneity with Layer III of Vinha da Soutilha and with Layer II of São Lourenço, both integrated in that same period. At these layers from the Chaves region, there is a strong presence of incised metope decorations, whose representation increases compared to previous periods. Also present in these layers are inverted triangles under the rim –Type II– and garlands –Type VI–, which only appear in Vinha da Soutilha

II and III and in São Lourenço II<sup>16</sup>. Moreover, there are probably truncated cone shapes in Chã do Castro, which suggests that this settlement is part of a more advanced phase of the regional Chalcolithic.

The prehistoric occupation of Pico del Castro is dated to the second half of the 3rd millennium BC, already in the transition to the Bronze Age, and is compatible with the archaeological materials exhumed at the site. The settlements in the Ávila region, on the other hand, and despite the difficulties encountered in defining the chronological moments of domestic occupation, reveal a cultural homogeneity which, combined with the absolute dates available and the analysis of the stratigraphy, allows us to place the contexts of provenance of the oculate ceramics in the second half of the 3rd millennium BC with some degree of reliability, probably in the late Chalcolithic, as argued by Francisco Fabián. As mentioned above, these sites reveal strong affinities at various levels and have cultural traits that connect them with the Early Bronze ambiance in this region. The original characteristics of these oculates may be related to the chronological divergence, but they may also be the result of somewhat marginal condition of these sites within the northern Meseta, which may have given them a distinctive character.

The process of dissemination of oculate ceramics seems to have followed a pattern that is linked to the social role that the different sites performed at any given time. Although a soliform ceramic has been identified in a context integrated in the first quarter of the 4th millennium BC, in the Orca do Picoto do Vasco, as has been said, it must not be part of the mythographic languages that the sun-eye motif embodies and which probably spread from the south-east of the Iberian Peninsula. Traditional historiography points to it as the region of origin of the oculate-soliform motifs, which arose within the first producer societies. According to this hypothesis, the focus would be on the current provinces of Córdoba, Granada and Málaga, with a close diachronic and synchronic relationship between oculate and soliform motifs. These representations

<sup>15</sup> García Barrios, *op. cit.* n. 5, p. 227.







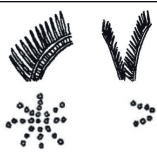


<sup>16</sup> Jorge, *op. cit.* n. 3, p. 692.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE	MUNICIPALITY AND DISTRICT / PROVINCE	TPOLOGY OF SITE	CONTEXT	MOTIF(S)	BIBLIOGRAPHY
Chã do Castro	Amares / Braga	hilltop settlement	Sector I, extra wall área; unknown stratigraphic layer- perhaps at embankment layer or part of the lower layers		Jorge, 1980
Senhora da Penha	Guimarães / Braga	place of deposition and ritual amortization of 'things'	Area of natural corridor linking Sra da Penha Chapel with Monte Pio IX (probably)		Silva and Santos, 1988/89; Bettencourt <i>et al.</i> , 2003
Vinha da Soutilha	Chaves / Vila Real	hilltop settlement	Sector A- Layer III		Jorge, <i>op. cit.</i> n. 3
São Lourenço	Chaves / Vila Real	hilltop settlement	Sector II- Layer II		Jorge, <i>op. cit.</i> n. 3
Crasto de Palheiros	Murça / Vila Real	walled enclosure	Upper North Embankment- surface layer (GE 0); a revolving context in which archaeological material from different phases of occupation is mixed; its origin could be the platform itself		Sanches, 2008; Sanches <i>et al.</i> , 2021; Pérez*
Buraco da Pala	Mirandela / Bragança	place for amortization and ritual consumption of food	Layer I-D2. Between the rock formations (bottom right, near the entrance to the shelter)		Sanches, 1997; Sanches <i>et al.</i> , 2021
Orca do Picoto do Vasco	Vila Nova de Paiva / Viseu	dolmen	Atrium, at base level, under the slabs of the condemned structure		Cruz, <i>op. cit.</i> n. 8
Castelo Velho de Freixo de Numão	Vila Nova Foz Côa / Guarda	walled enclosure	Intermediate platform, entrance to Bastion 2- Layer 3		Jorge and Rubinos, 2002; Lopes, 2019; Baptista, <i>op. cit.</i> n. 12
Las Pozas	Casaseca de Las Chanas / Zamora	ditched enclosure	Southern precinct ditch fill- Layer viB		Del Val, 1992 and **; García, 2013
Los Bajos	Vecilla de Trasmonte / Zamora	ditched enclosure	Pit AX-76 (CRAS)- central area of the precinct; Layer III; a narrow pit that appears to have been filled evenly and homogeneously at a single moment in time		Pérez <i>et al.</i> , 1991; Larrén, 1999; Strato***

\* Pérez, A.: *Estudo do material cerâmico e seus contextos na Plataforma Superior do Crasto de Palheiros (Murça). Contribución para a interpretación da ocupación Calcolítica do Recinto Superior*. Master's thesis submitted in 2018 to the Univ. of Porto.

\*\* Del Val, J.: *El Calcolítico Precampaniforme en el Occidente de la Meseta. El yacimiento 'Las Pozas' (Zamora)*. Graduate Dissertation submitted in 1983 at the Univ. of Valladolid.

FIG. 7. Archaeological sites with oculate ceramics in Mid-Lower Douro basin.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE	MUNICIPALITY AND DISTRICT / PROVINCE	TPOLOGY OF SITE	CONTEXT	MOTIF(S)	BIBLIOGRAPHY
Los Paradores de Castrogonzalo	Castrogonzalo / Zamora	ditched enclosure	Sector B- filling of Pit 23		Domínguez, 1991
El Fonsario	Villafáfila / Zamora	undetermined	Surface		Villalobos, 2013
Los Cercados	Mucientes / Valladolid	ditched enclosure	Structure A2/AS (ditch?), Layer 3D		Delibes <i>et al.</i> , 1995; García Barrios, <i>op. cit.</i> n. 5; Herrán****
Pico del Castro	Quintanilla de Arriba / Valladolid	hilltop settlement	Inside the hut- Layer IV (north edge of Trench 1, outside the medieval structure)		Rodríguez, 2007
Aldeagordillo	Ávila / Ávila	hilltop settlement / necropolis (later)	Settlement- Layer II		Eiroa, 1973; Fabián, 1995, 2006 and personal information by Fabián
Los Itueros	Santa María del Arroyo / Ávila	hilltop settlement	Sector 1		Fabián, 1995, 2006; García Barrios, <i>op. cit.</i> n. 5; and personal information by Fabián
El Tomillar *****	Bercial de Zapardiel / Ávila	settlement with burial pits (later?)	Surface, Structure 28 (possible hut) and pits 23 e 29		Fabián, 1995; 2009 and personal information by Fabián
Cerro de La Cabeza	Ávila de Los Caballeros / Ávila	settlement with burial pits, (later)	Surface revolved sediments- settlement		Fabián, 2006
Prado de Las Cruces	Ávila / Ávila	corridor dolmen	Chamber		Fabián, 1997, 2006

\*\*\* STRATO: *Excavación arqueológica de urgencia en el yacimiento 'Los Bajos'. Vecilla de Trasmonte, Zamora. 2.ª Fase.* Unpublished report submitted in 1993 to Junta de Castilla y León, Zamora.

\*\*\*\* Herrán, J.: *El yacimiento calcolítico de Los Cercados en Mucientes. Sobre los comienzos de la metalurgia en el valle medio del Duero.* Graduate Dissertation submitted in 1986 at the Univ. de Valladolid.

\*\*\*\*\* In addition to the fragments whose images are presented here, there are other known oculate ceramics from El Tomillar (from pits 23 and 29). These oculate consist only of the representation of eyebrows, with no eyes inside. Personal information from F. Fabián García.

FIG. 7. *Archaeological sites with oculate ceramics in Mid-Lower Douro basin (cont.).*

developed in the middle of the 6th and 5th millennia BC, the oldest being those from Cueva de Malalmuerzo –a soliform motif whose dates place it in the middle/end of the 6th millennium BC– and from Cueva de los Murciélagos, an oculate, also dated to the 6th millennium BC, although this comes from a less reliable context. From the south-east, it spread to the north-east of the Peninsula from the last third of the 4th millennium BC, and around 2850 BC to the west –Alentejo and Lisbon regions–, from where it left for the Douro basin<sup>17</sup>. We can't exclude the possibility of the north-east being the region of origin of the oculate, but this is a less viable scenario. In any case, it's exogenous origin is accepted.

The Buraco da Pala rock-shelter, Crasto de Palheiros, Las Pozas, Los Bajos, Los Paradores de Castrogonzalo, and probably El Fonsario fall within the first half of the 3rd millennium BC. Castelo Velho de Freixo de Numão, Senhora da Penha, Los Cercados, and possibly Dolmen del Prado de Las Cruces are placed in the 3rd millennium BC, although it is not possible to specify the moment. Aldeagordillo, El Tomillar, Los Itueros, El Cerro de La Cabeza, Chã do Castro, Vinha da Soutilha, São Lourenço, and Pico del Castro are assigned to the second half of the millennium.

We can therefore see that oculate ceramics were initially present in the main gathering centres, places of power staging and identity consolidation. Both the funerary monuments, in the 4th millennium BC, and the monumental enclosures, from the 3rd millennium BC onwards, are architectural constructions that required a great deal of work by the communities, and are therefore important ideological devices, along with others such as Senhora da Penha and Buraco da Pala, as well as places with schematic art. Oculate ceramics appear in enclosures –where the amortisation contexts are best known– in segregated zones, differentiated from the other areas of the sites in which they are located. Also in Serra de Passos, where more than 150 panels with schematic painting are known, the sun-eye motifs

are confined to a single area, the Regato das Bouças. The motifs painted in Serra de Passos were probably executed somewhere “... within a chronological period that we would set between the end of the 5th/beginning of the 4th millennium and the middle of the 3rd millennium BC” (Sanches *et al.*, 2016: 97, author's translation). It wasn't until the second half of the 3rd millennium that oculate ceramics entered the ‘domestic circuit’, in which case there was a change in its *status* or even in its meaning. The use of these ceramic pieces in the settlements does not reveal the same contextual exclusivity, so we can infer that the practices they now integrate no longer require –such– restricted areas and obey other types of social norms.

## 5. Final considerations

The oculate motif had a long diachrony of use throughout the Iberian Peninsula, but also in the Douro basin. Whether the radiating core was in the Northeast or Southeast, its diffusion from the 6th/5th millennium BC reached the northern Meseta at the beginning of the 3rd millennium and remained there until the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC.

Its dispersal throughout the vast territory of the peninsula reveals the intensification of the networks, which expanded particularly from the 3rd millennium BC onward. It, therefore, integrates very different cultural realities. The fact that this motif has demonstrably broken down different regional identities leads us to admit a possible link between communities on an inter-regional scale and some scholars even suggest that these materialities represent similar ideas –that despite the symbols present a certain heterogeneity in their formal attributes and appear on a wide variety of medium, they kept their meaning intact, so, there is conceptual uniformity among the oculates (Bécares, 1990)–. There are nuances in the interpretation of the wide dissemination of this motif. The existence of iconographic parallels among regions that differ

<sup>17</sup> Lejarza, *op. cit.* n. 2, pp. 61-62.

from each other in terms of identity is no guarantee that, when travelling, the motif keeps its symbolic content unchanged. Nor does it mean that, as it is the materialisation of a community's mythological thought, the myth travels unscathed by re-interpretations by the groups that receive it.

We are not in a position to properly understand the relationship between the soliform and the oculate. Do these correspond to distinct mythographic languages or are they just facies of a global superstructure shared by peninsular communities? From a conceptual point of view, there may be a certain overlap in meaning; if not always, they may have merged into a wide-ranging symbol that would definitively mark the peninsular Chalcolithic, as a result of its natural evolution. We believe that, in fact, there is a common ontology that, when materialised in different regions, takes on variations, transfiguring itself in different manners. On a peninsular scale there is, indeed, a superstructure that encompasses Neolithic and Chalcolithic societies –interconnected communities that constitute themselves as collective entity, which produces and is reciprocally produced by a shared cosmology–. Therefore, on that broader scale, the oculate/sun-eye motif kept an intrinsic symbolic value, globally referring to a common idea. But the Iberian Peninsula was still a mosaic made up of different regional identities, with asymmetries at several degrees, whose individualities were even emphasised through material culture.

By definition, symbols have a high capacity to extend and penetrate human life, being able to acquire a multiplicity of meanings and levels of significance, depending on the contexts in which they are inserted or manipulated (Foster, 1994: 367; Vallverdú, 2008: 37). Thus, in the process of syncretism that inherently accompanies their dispersion, they can adapt to the mythographic language of local or regional communities. The spread of the oculate motif seen in the mid-lower Douro basin took place in a permanent dialogue between figurative grammars. The social consensus required for the acceptance of this symbol translated into the

intentional fusion of the oculate motif with the locally dominant decorative schemes, which is why it accompanies the stylistic variability that characterises this region's pottery. However, this is not merely a fusion of imagery, free from repercussions on a symbolic level, since iconographic language played, in these societies, a relevant social role. The acceptance of an innovation in magical-religious thought requires negotiation and change in the meaning of that innovation or the system in which it is integrated, which necessarily requires the validation of the community (Hodder, 1982: 202; Hulin, 1989: 92). This validation translates into a re-interpretation of the symbol –possible adjustments in the meaning of this trans-regional symbol, in order to mould it to the mythographic practices of the group–. On a time scale, it can also undergo transformations in meaning and internal evolutions in its social role within each community.

We have recognised that oculate ceramics can be found in a multiplicity of contexts and can therefore be related to different practices, according to the diversity of meanings they can take on. Analysing the presence of the various constituent elements of the oculate –such as the representation– or not –of eyebrows, facial tattoos, rayed circles, the pupil, the central vertical axis, or the 'T'–, i.e., the different styles of the oculate motif, in the various archaeological sites, we note that the distribution is very even across all the site typologies. It is therefore not possible to establish a relationship between the style of oculate and the type of archaeological site. Consequently, our analysis leads us to reject the hypothesis that the formal attributes of the oculates are related to a possible intentionality in conceptually separate staging places with different functionalities in the life of the communities through imagery.

The oculate symbol gave the object a strong symbolic meaning and did not necessarily required to be visible to those involved in such practices, as suggested by the bowl from Las Pozas whose oculate motif lays at its bottom. The fact that it is a mobile object allows this type of materiality to circulate through different contexts, which is in accordance

with a living experience marked by movement, by the permanent mediation between things and places, connected in a network through the circulation, fragmentation and deposition of ‘things’ (Thomas, 1999; Blanco, 2015; Lopes, 2019: 380). This language expressed in actions and gestures, in repetition and cyclicity, is also present in the architectural practice. A practice closely linked to a way of life that depends on stability and continuity, something that was conferred on them by the continuous process of building and rebuilding monuments (which acted as a way of strengthening ties between people and between communities). Monumentality is, intrinsically, an expression of durability and permanence and, as such, a factor in promoting social stability and self-regulation.

The period we are dealing with is characterised by the re-demarcation of the landscape and the restructuring of identity, in which new scenic arenas are created that embody a new way of inhabiting space. Collective investment, which during the 5th and 4th millennia was directed towards the construction of large funerary monuments, shifted in the 3rd millennium BC to the construction of monumental sites with multiple functions, which consolidated symbolic systems of territory appropriation. Some megalithic monuments continued to be used during this period, but their construction was clearly in decline, revealing a symbolic and cognitive reorganisation that transferred the symbolologies of the funerary world to the ‘world of the living’.

The implementation of these collective projects corresponded to moments of aggregation with a particularly active role in the reproduction of social relationships. Architecture as a practice is in itself a metaphor of the social structure, which invokes materialities that are also embedded with a symbolic content that frames and is framed by the community’s cosmological worldview. In that sense, the conceptualisation of the place brings together the materialities that, in this intimate link with the context, acquire and attribute meaning reciprocally. They are mutually constructed, so that the meaning of one is not dissociated from the meaning of the

other (Foster, 1994; Miller, 1994). It is within this framework of permanent dialogue between architectural practice and the manipulation of ‘things’ that the oculate ceramics found in these contexts should be integrated. As we have seen, these ceramics have been identified in contexts in which it is generally associated with special and rare materials with restricted circulation, often in structured depositions. These are materialities whose agency contributed to the consolidation of the place’s identity and that of the community itself.

The peninsular territory was deeply fragmented into various categories, not necessarily overlapping. The economic and symbolic management of the territory was carried out through the establishment of different *loci* that were interconnected in a network of places and which only acquire meaning through this intermediation. Those places played several roles at different times and, together, promoted the cohesion of the social whole. The monumentalisation of the landscape has become a central element in the social fabric, through the construction and maintenance of enclosures and other aggregate *loci* related to rock paintings and engravings— cut the dashes concentration (Sanches, 2017). With the methodology applied, we have tried to translate the different functions that the sites performed and the degrees of ritualisation that permeated them. Our aim was never to decode the meaning of the oculate motif in ceramics, but rather to question, through the analysis of its contexts, the way in which it was disseminated and, possibly, the social role it took on in different times and spaces. This study allowed us to recognise that the integration of the oculate motif in ceramics developed in two distinct moments, connected to a possible mutation of its social significance. The introduction of the oculate motif probably took place at the beginning of the 3rd millennium or even at the end of the 4th millennium BC at key sites within the symbolic system which, using this type of ceramics, was reproduced and reinforced. The acceptance of an allogenic symbol with a high ideological content takes place in contexts where instances of power legitimise themselves

through the manipulation of materialities. Places that were themselves pivotal within a framework of profound transformations that marked the dawn of the 3rd millennium BC –or even the end of the 4th millennium–.

In a second moment, from the middle of the 3rd millennium onwards, the social role of oculte pottery changed and it began to circulate in places with a different social weight, fundamentally of a residential nature. Does this change correspond to a change in its meaning or just the acquisition of a new social *status*? It certainly remains a symbol of exception, however, it is likely that the ideological potential of oculte ceramics was transferred to other materialities, which in the meantime have begun to circulate among the spheres of power. This is a period in which we are witnessing profound changes, motivated in particular by the adoption of new subsistence models, in which the great bloodlines lose the ability to mobilise large workforces, leading to the abandonment of the construction/maintenance of large enclosures (Delibes *et al.*, 2015: 12). The occupation of the territory follows new strategies, reconfiguring the cultural landscape. Alongside the economic changes, there is a reorganisation of social and ideological control mechanisms and a renewal of equipment, with the adoption of new materialities and new symbols of power.

Regardless of the path or evolution of the oculte in the mid-lower Douro basin, it is a symbol connected to a cosmology with a Neolithic background, which in this territory became fully established in the Chalcolithic. It remained in use on pottery until the end of the 3rd millennium BC, when the transition to the Bronze Age took place. This was a time when a process of fragmentation and regionalisation took place, with profound sociopolitical transformations. Naturally, significant innovations accepted within the social system have repercussions on the symbolic framework, since they are contiguous realities (Hulin, 1989: 93). Neolithic mythology disappears, and these symbols are replaced by others, connected to the new mythologies.

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