

# TATTOOED LANDSCAPES. A REASSESSMENT OF ATLANTIC ART DISTRIBUTION, RESEARCH METHODS AND CHRONOLOGY IN THE LIGHT OF THE DISCOVERY OF A MAJOR ROCK ART ASSEMBLAGE AT MONTE FARO (VALENÇA, PORTUGAL)

## *Paisajes tatuados. Revaloración de la distribución del Arte Atlántico, métodos de investigación y cronología a la luz del hallazgo de un gran conjunto de arte rupestre en Monte Faro (Valença, Portugal)*

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**ABSTRACT:** The Winter 2012 marks the beginning of a pioneer research in Portugal intended to approach Atlantic Art under the theoretical and methodological principles of Landscape Archaeology, targeting a confined geomorphological unit. This paper presents the results of systematic field surveys at Monte Faro, carried out between 2013 and 2015, and announces the discovery of the largest concentration of Atlantic Art sites ever found in this country. This evidence will contribute to reassess the widespread believe in the peripheral character of Atlantic Art in Portugal, if put against the realities found in Galicia, Ireland, England and Scotland. Yet, most importantly, it will allow us to reexamine aspects that have been at the forefront of Atlantic Art studies, from chronology to fieldwork methodologies and the application of digital technologies in rock art recording. But we shall also tackle issues that have been lacking in-depth discussion like the question of style, the concept of biogeography and its usefulness in rock art studies, aiming towards a theoretical and methodological revitalization of research on the prehistoric art of Atlantic Europe.

*Key words:* Late Prehistory; rock carvings; Minho valley; Atlantic Art; sociocultural contexts.

**RESUMEN:** El invierno de 2012 marca el inicio de un proyecto de investigación que pretende desarrollar una aproximación al Arte Atlántico en Portugal sobre la base de los principios teóricos y metodológicos de la Arqueología del Paisaje, centrándose en una unidad geomorfológica bien circunscrita. Este artículo presenta los resultados de las campañas de prospección arqueológica en Monte Faro desarrolladas entre 2013 y 2015, que han permitido afirmar que esta es la mayor colección de Arte Atlántico peninsular identificada hasta el momento en territorio portugués. Con este descubrimiento, Portugal puede codearse con los grandes conjuntos que se producen en otras áreas de distribución de esta tradición artística: Galicia, Irlanda, Inglaterra y Escocia, permitiendo diluir gradualmente el papel de región periférica que muchos le han asignado.

Sin embargo, esta investigación permite reexaminar algunos aspectos que han estado en la vanguardia de los estudios sobre Arte Atlántico: la cronología, la aplicación de tecnologías digitales de registro y metodologías

aplicadas al estudio del arte rupestre en el paisaje. También se abordan aspectos que no han merecido una discusión más profunda como el concepto de “estilo”, el recurso a la biogeografía en los estudios de arte rupestre y la relación entre arte rupestre y monumentos megalíticos en contexto peninsular. Nuestro principal objetivo ha sido progresar en el sentido de una revitalización teórica y metodológica de la investigación sobre el arte prehistórico en la Europa Atlántica.

*Palabras clave:* Prehistoria Reciente; grabados; valle del Miño; Arte Atlántico; contextos socioculturales.

## 1. Introduction

Monte Faro rock art belongs to a prehistoric stylistic tradition which we refer to as Atlantic Art. As known, is it commonly displayed as carvings on open-air rock surfaces that spread across specific topographic units. But before describing its main features, it may be worth explaining why do we use of the term “stylistic tradition”. The question of style has not deserved much attention in Atlantic Art studies. Having examined this subject more extensively elsewhere, it is worth stressing, at the outset, that style has more to do with “the ways things are done” (cited in Meskin, 2005: 497) than with form. Thus, the definition of style ought to attend to the interconnection of several elements visible in a work of art (Alves, 2012: 202-203). R. Layton considers the interaction between three formal properties: a) the range of motifs depicted; b) the regularity of shapes; c) the manner in which components are organised into a composition (1991: 150). However, as far as rock art on natural rock formations is concerned, there are other relevant elements to take into account such as the interaction between the motifs and the natural backdrop and the relationship between the site and the wider landscape (Alves, 2012: 202). Under this perspective, both the rock surface and the *locus* are perceived as components of the work of art in their own right. Moreover, following Howard Morphy’s idea that style mediates between past and present productions (1994), style is created with the intention of preserving formal resemblance through time. As it works as a means of communication among members of communities culturally and/or ideologically related, it enhances the continuity of symbolic meaning across generations (Alves, 2012: 203). Hence, the maintenance of a style contributes to the creation of an artistic

tradition, which dynamics and evolution are inextricably linked to the processes of social and cultural change of the different communities who adopted it originally (*ibidem*).

Having established the main components that should be taken into account, we may characterise Atlantic Art stylistically by: a) the broad abstract character of the imagery; b) the repertoire of motifs which include mainly cup-marks, cup-and-rings, curvilinear motifs and wandering lines, organised both in simple or complex arrangements; c) the intimate relationship established between the motifs, the natural backdrop and particular features in the surrounding landscape. Most of these aspects are shared across different regions along the Atlantic façade of Western Europe: north-west Portugal, western Galicia (Spain), Ireland, northern England and Scotland.

Thus, it is probably no coincidence finding that the distribution of this tradition falls on what geographers define as the Atlantic biogeographical region of Europe (Fig. 1). Biogeography is a branch of Geography that may be particularly interesting for the study of human societies in the past, although is not frequently used by archaeologists. It became known in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and results from a genuine interdisciplinary effort. It is the study of both the past and present distribution of living beings on Earth based on the relationship between the physical and biological environments, which brings together the knowledge produced from sciences like Biology, Geology, Ecology, Bioclimatology and Phytosociology (Costa *et al.*, 1998: 6; Spellerberg and Sawyer, 1999: 2). One of the fundamental aims of this discipline is the establishment of typological hierarchical models of the territory known as eco-regions (Costa *et al.*, 1999: 2) based on biomes, i.e. ecological communities sharing climatic

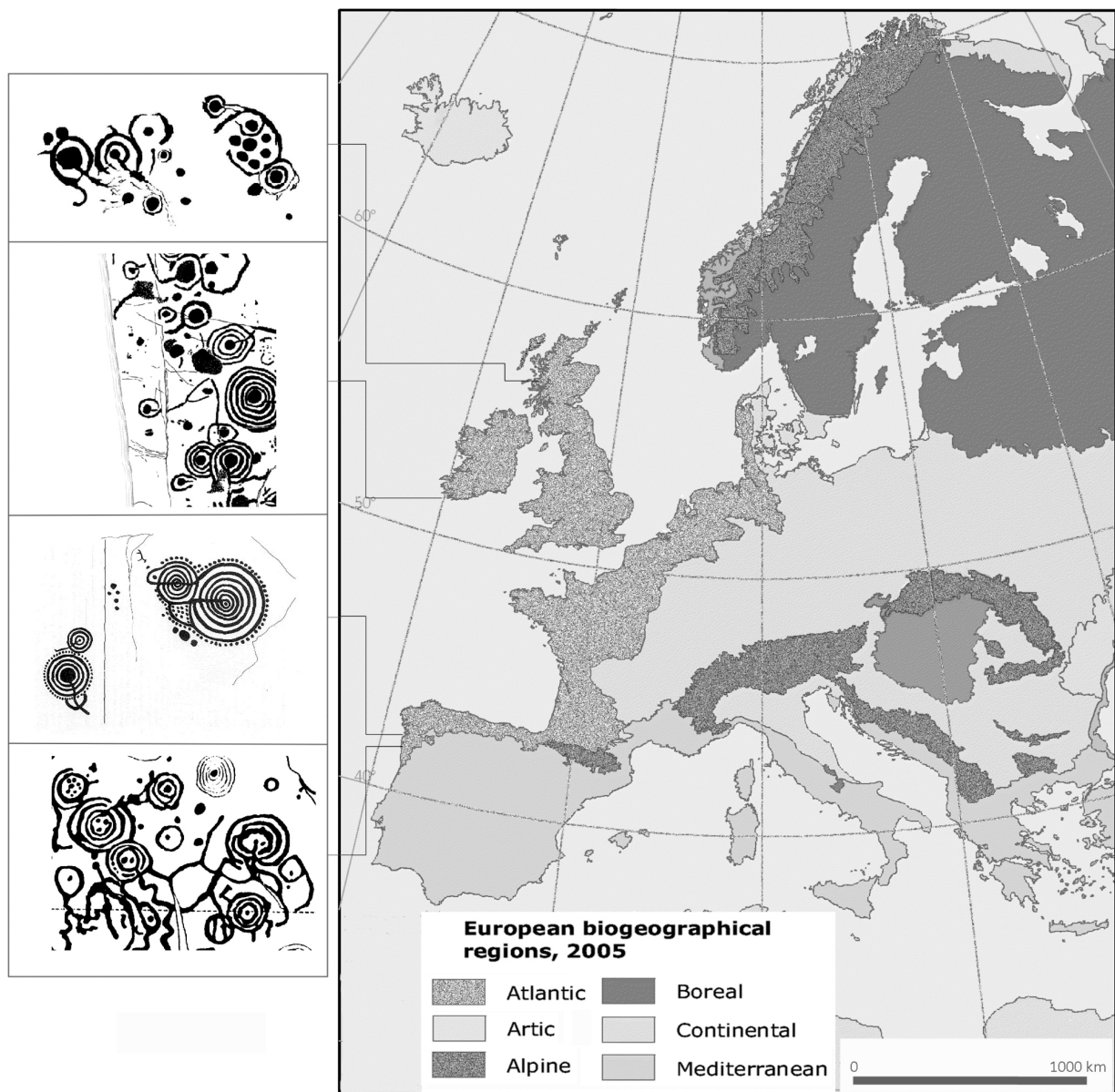


FIG. 1. *General overview of the distribution of the Atlantic Art tradition along the European Atlantic biographical region (adapted from the European Environmental Agency map: <http://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/figures/biogeographical-regions-in-europe-1>).*

conditions and geological features that support species with similar life and adaptation strategies. Hence, biogeographical regions are areas of distribution of plants and animals that have common environmental characteristics throughout. Its interest to human geography rests on the evidence that economic strategies, mechanisms of social order and

cultural landscapes are inextricably bound to the presence of specific biomes. If human adaptation to the environment, to what the land has to offer, lay on the basis of human culture, it may be right to say that the features that characterise a particular biogeographical region are bound to shape the relationship between humans and the natural world.

Those features are likely to impose particular subsistence strategies, the range of resources available, the cycle of plants and animal breeding that mark the rhythm of rural life, the pattern of settlement and also the means by which people make sense of the physical and immaterial properties of the natural world.

That the creation of rock art may echo the symbolic or religious realms of past human societies and that Atlantic Art is intimately related with a particular way of seeing, understanding and acting upon the landscape seems to be uncontested these days (e.g. Bradley, 2000). But to what extent does the confinement of this tradition to the Atlantic biogeographical area may shed light over its origins and over the social, cultural and cognitive mechanisms that originated its adoption across this vast region? This is a critical question that researchers should target after Richard Bradley's groundbreaking work in the 1990s and that may ultimately bring additional evidence to re-think the Prehistory of Western Europe.

The presence of shared stylistic features in open-air rock art across the Atlantic façade is generally



FIG. 2. General distribution of Atlantic Art in Galicia (Spain) and northern Portugal.

acknowledged, yet the most striking indication that it has not been treated as an univocal phenomenon is that it still adopts different designations from region to region. This is certainly due to the sheer weight of long-term regional traditions of research, mostly enclosed within the limits of administrative borders.

The reference to the idea that this is a widespread phenomenon was episodic and short-lived in the literature. In Ireland, MacWhite introduced the term “Atlantic Galician rock art” (1951), in Galicia, S. Lorenzo-Ruza, called it “Galician-Atlantic petroglyphs” (1953) and R. Bradley recovered the concept of “Atlantic Art” or “Atlantic rock art” (1997) which, over the last decade, was adopted by a limited number of authors. In Britain and Ireland, it is still currently called “rock art”, “open-air rock art” or “cup-and-rings” (e.g. Shee Twohig *et al.*, 2010). This is probably due to the absence of another rock art tradition on natural rock formations from which it could be distinguished from as it actually happens in northern Portugal where Schematic Art paintings and Atlantic Art converge (e.g. Alves, 2009)<sup>1</sup>. Yet, in north-west Iberia the situation is surprisingly complex because, to the north, the Atlantic Art tradition is known as “Galician petroglyphs” or the “Galician group of rock art” whereas in Portugal was for many years called “north-western art”, Galician-Portuguese rock art”. In our views, it is more useful to employ the term “Iberian Atlantic Art” because here abstract designs are often accompanied by depictions of animals and, on occasion, by weapon representations. If we accept that it is a long-term tradition it presupposes that it may have evolved autonomously after its initial adoption, incorporating different designs and ideas through time, and this could explain the presence of animal and weapon representations, which are virtually absent from Britain and Ireland.

In truth, the Portuguese assemblage, on the southernmost edge of the distribution, has been largely marginalised for it has been seen as a peripheral

<sup>1</sup> Also cf. Alves, L. B.: *The Movement of Signs. Post-glacial rock art in north-western Iberia* (2 vols.). PhD thesis, presented in 2003 at the University of Reading.

extension of the “Galician petroglyphs” (Baptista, 1983-84; Guitián and Peña, 2007) given the disproportionate number of occurrences known on either side of the border. In fact, the sites were few, isolated and disperse but, from early days, they were known to span c. 150 km to the south of the Galician-Portuguese border (Souto, 1932) (Fig. 2). Also, field research never reached the extraordinary dynamics seen in Galicia where, in 1935, the first published *corpus* included 150 sites with an overall of 250 engraved rocks, mostly concentrated in the province of Pontevedra (Sobrinho, 1935). In contrast, the first global assessment of Portuguese rock art, dated from 1929, included seven sites belonging to what we now call Atlantic Art (Pinto, 1929). In the following decades, Portuguese research did not commit to local or regional field surveys that could result in the discovery of broader assemblages, at a time when urban pressure on coastal regions had still not reached excessive proportions. This certainly explains why in the beginning of the 1990s, the account reached only c. 20 carved rocks, 8 of which had been the object of monographic studies and publication.

With the advent of a new generation of researchers and a growing interest in studying the spatial distribution of rock art, field surveys in the context of salvage projects and occasional findings started to show that carved rocks were not isolated but former part of small clusters. As a consequence, in 2010, the number increased to 36 occurrences.

However, two shortcomings prevented researchers from abandoning the idea of the peripheral nature of Atlantic Art in the Portuguese territory:

- first, the number of sites was still modest;
- second, the absence of a large and geographically confined rock art assemblage, like those occurring north of the border, endured.

We can finally state that 2015 was the year of the full affirmation of Atlantic Art in Portugal, matching the realities known in other regions across the Atlantic façade. This owes much to the results delivered by the production of a new *Corpus* of rock

art in North-western Portugal (<http://www.obit.org/cvarn/apresenta.html>), as part of a project directed by Ana Bettencourt, which fills the current distribution map with over 100 decorated rocks belonging to the Atlantic Art tradition, many of which result from the multiplication of the number of carved rocks around known sites.

The second problem was overcome with the discovery, between 2013 and 2015, of 91 carved rocks at Monte Faro, as part of our current research.

## 2. Setting the background

On the 6th and 7th of January 1979, a group of researchers from the Porto Archaeological Studies Group (GEAP) led by A. Leite da Cunha and E. J. Silva, carried out the first rock art survey on Monte Faro, following a reference in a local newspaper to the presence of “rock paintings” in the area. Although paintings failed to be detected, local informants guided the team to three different locations with conspicuously carved rocks (Cunha and Silva, 1980). Monte dos Fortes, Tapada do Ozão and Monte da Laje. Published information included photos of the first two sites, the monographic study of the third (Silva and Cunha, 1986) and refer to the existence of another six occurrences yet do not provide their exact location. In the late 1990s, the discovery of 25 carved surfaces on the western slope of Monte Faro was announced by Galician rock art surveyors, who occasionally visit this region (Novoa and Sanromán, 1999) and in the following decade, occurrences were also unveiled on the north-eastern slope, including a carved rock containing exclusively animal figures (Novoa and Costas, 2004; Novoa *et al.*, 2006). Although, in most cases, their contents and location are only briefly described, these works indicated that we could expect to find a much wider distribution of rock art.

In the winter 2012, exactly 33 years after the first rock art expedition to Monte Faro, we visited the region in order to assess its potential for future research entailing very specific and

challenging aims<sup>2</sup>. We intended to follow an approach based on the methodological and interpretative principles of Landscape Archaeology which could be seen, at first, as a difficult task for there was no evidence whatsoever of vast assemblages of Atlantic Art carvings in the north of Portugal. Our endeavour in tackling this problem was meant to confirm that this absence was due to biases in investigation, that, for many years

focused on the recording and analysis of individual carved surfaces.

Hence, our study area ought to gather specific conditions, namely, a) to be a relatively confined topographic unit; b) provide high potential for the discovery of a broad number of rock art sites; c) be environmentally well-preserved to insure the good conservation of rock surfaces. Monte Faro met all these conditions.

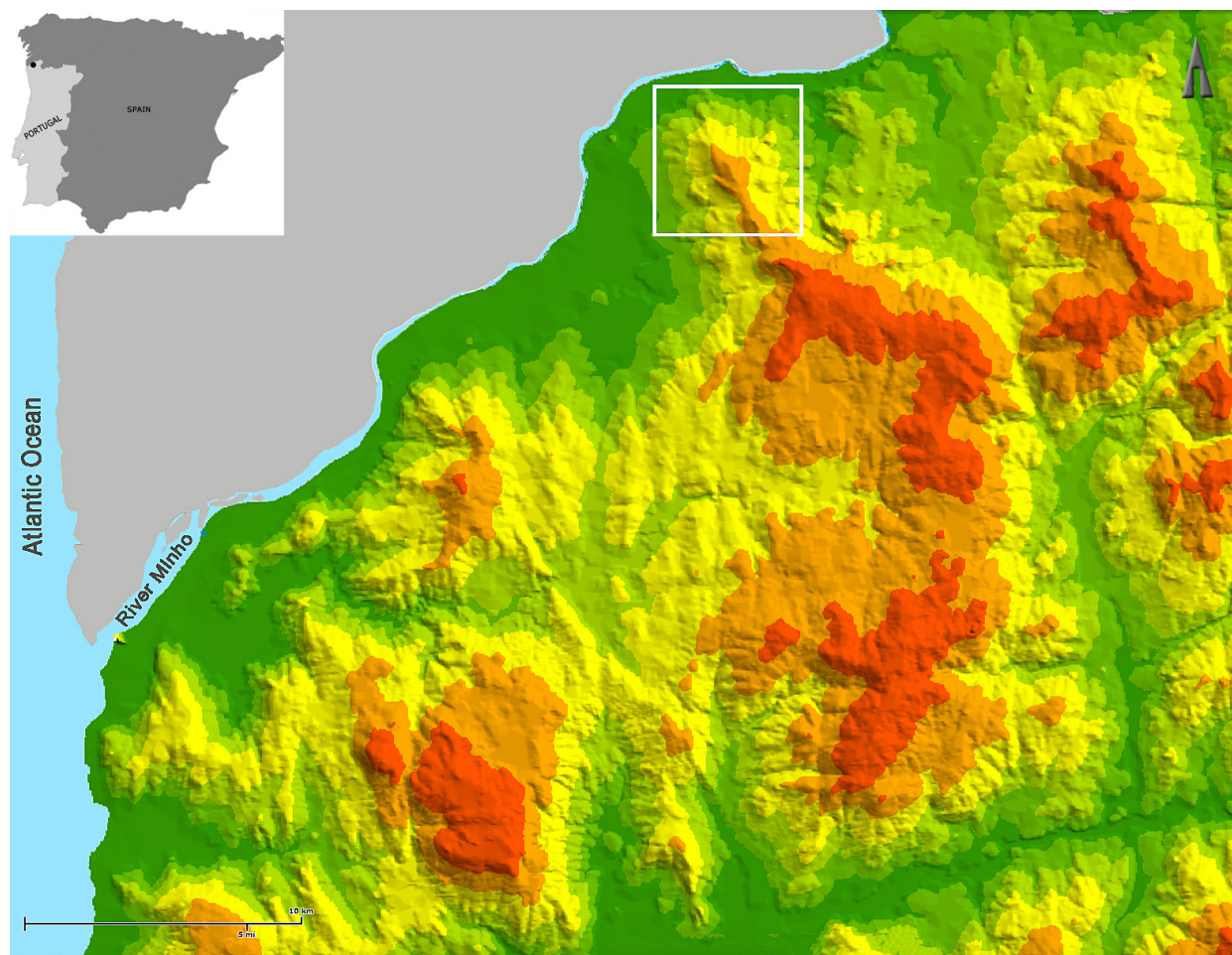


FIG. 3. Location of the study area on the southern banks of river Minho showing the higher ground of Monte Faro and surrounding alluvial terraces (source: <http://geoportal.lneg.pt/geoportal/mapas>).

<sup>2</sup> The project *Gravuras rupestres da Serra do Extremo no contexto da Arte Atlântica do Alto Minho* was carried out as part of the postdoctoral research of one us (LBA) funded by the Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia (FCT)/FSE, between 2009-2015, in which one of the main goals was to study the sociocultural contexts of Atlantic Art in northern Portugal.

The project officially started in 2013, with a small research team, limited to the authors with the kind collaboration of Joana Valdez-Tullett and Hugo Pires, who were responsible for the production of digital tridimensional models of carved rocks.

### 3. The study area

Monte Faro is a conspicuous hill at the northernmost end of a mountain ridge overlooking the valley of river Minho and what is today the

administrative border between Portugal and Galicia (Spain) (Fig. 3). It seems to have been a significant landmark over time, for it is probably no coincidence that this particular hill gathers an unusual number of Christian sanctuaries.



FIG. 4. Views towards the summit of Monte Faro from the upland platform of Fonte Volide.

The study area covers around 26 km<sup>2</sup> and includes the western slopes of an adjacent hill, Monte dos Fortes, the wide natural amphitheatre that opens between the two mounts and the succession of platforms that extend from the higher ground to the alluvial plain.

It is a typical granite landscape of the Atlantic façade of northern Iberia: a mountainous environment easily reached from the Minho valley, providing access to a wide range of complementary natural resources at short distances. Rock outcrops spread across the hillsides, spurs, flat platforms and rocky hills (Fig. 4).

Regarding other categories of archaeological remains, it is worth emphasising the presence of two clusters of megalithic tombs, which have not been excavated or surveyed. The group of Chã do Marco da Quebrada sits on the higher ground that links Monte Faro and Monte dos Fortes and was originally composed of 11 round mounds, five of which have been destroyed in the last 30 years (Cunha and Silva, 1980). At Chã da Fonte Volide there is a group of three round mounds, one of which preserves a chamber's slab *in situ*. There are also two settlements recorded in the Portuguese inventory of

archaeological sites (Endovélico)<sup>3</sup>: Alto do Escarvelhão and Picões, which were not excavated but are provisionally attributed to the Bronze Age and Iron Age.

### 4. Methodology and fieldwork

The design of the fieldwork programme rested on an approach to rock art from the landscape to the rock face and vice-versa (e.g. Alves, 2002, 2003). This implies the constant and consistent examination of the dialectical relationship between the carvings, their natural backdrop, the place and the wider landscape. Empirical tasks included the identification of new sites, collection of primary data for inventory purposes and subsequent production of accurate recordings of the of the rocks art and its setting.

Field surveys obeyed to a strategy built upon the concept of perception, i.e. the physical and sensorial experience of the landscape and the means by which individuals structure and make sense of that

<sup>3</sup> <http://arqueologia.patrimoniocultural.pt/index.php?sid=sitios>.

same experience. Assuming the subjectivity of the method and that the means by which the individual perceives is influenced by his/her own values and past experiences, our



FIG. 5. *These two images of rock 5 of the São Tomé area illustrate the importance of carrying out field surveys under good conditions of light. The photograph on the left was taken in a cloudy day whereas the one on the right was obtained under oblique sunlight.*

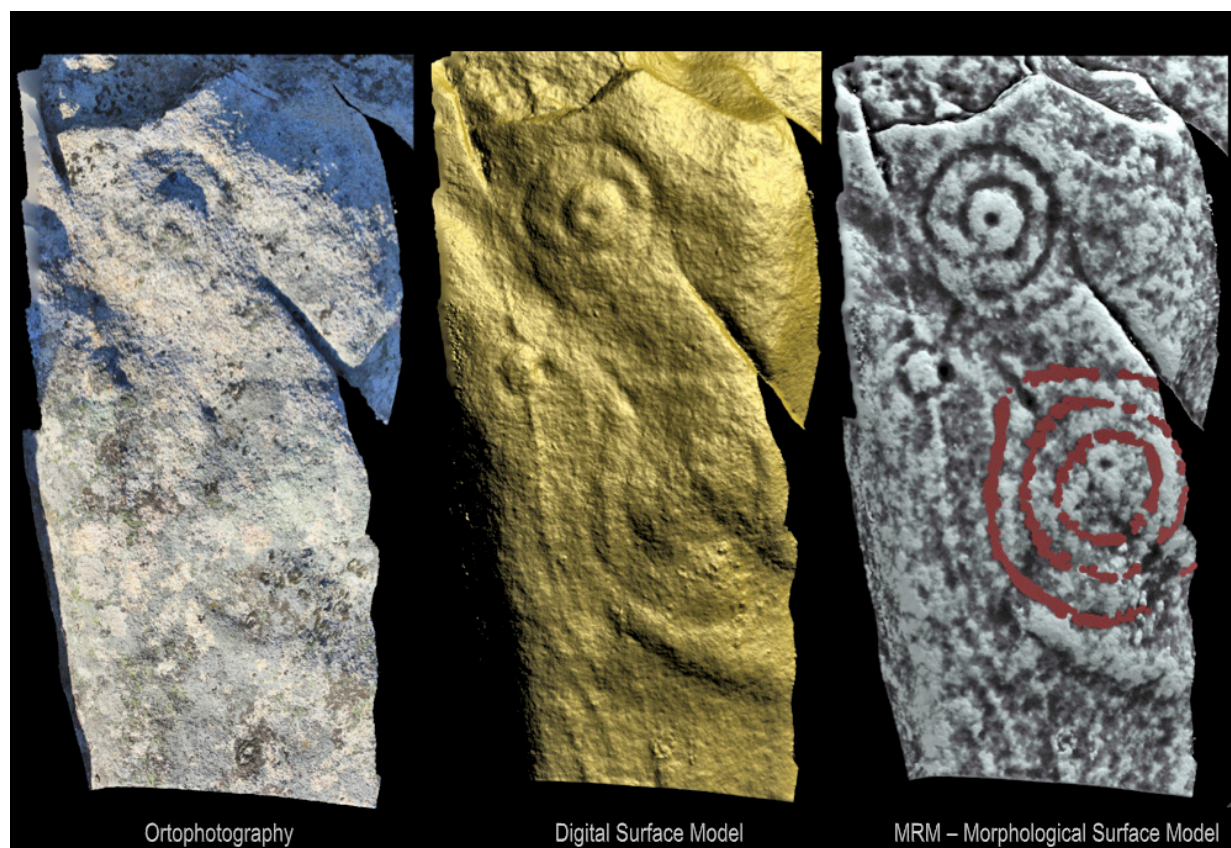


FIG. 6. *The recording of Fonte Volide-rock 1 is one of the most striking examples of the results obtained by the digital tridimensional modelling of the rock art on granite outcrops at Monte Faro; the production of the 3D model by H. Pires revealed a whole set of concentric rings that is virtually invisible in loco, even if seen under oblique light.*



aim was precisely to introduce a humanly-orientated scale of cognition in approaching a particular landscape which was unfamiliar to us and unexplored thoroughly. C. Tilley stated that bodily existence and perception bridges the past and the present because “memories of previous places we have experienced colour present perceptions and how we react to the future and the new” (2004: 12). It is widely known that principles deriving from phenomenological or “sensorial” approaches are often criticised by the lack of objectivity or the absence of complex scientific methods of territorial analysis yet they have been influential in our epistemological approach to rock art (e.g. Alves, 2009). We wanted to actively put them in practice to contrast the results with the outcome of other studies devoted to the analysis of the setting of rock art in the landscape (e.g. Bradley, 1997; Rodríguez, 2012; Santos and Seoane, 2013). This matter will necessarily deserve further attention in future works.

From our knowledge of the character of Atlantic Art in other European areas it was strongly expected that carvings would be clustered in particular areas of Monte Faro. We started by considering the idea that the published sites were not isolated, therefore field surveys started by targeting exposed rock surfaces on the topographical features where they were found (Fig. 7). This task was fundamental for starting to get acquainted with local geology, particularly with the character, behaviour and erosion processes affecting local granite and to its micro-morphological features that may be mistaken for weathered carvings. But it was also crucial for the subsequent decision of moving on to unexplored areas and this was naturally driven by selecting specific features –hilltops, slopes, upland platforms, spurs, ridges– where we could spot rocky lumps or areas of exposed rock from afar. As we started off at Monte dos Fortes, the distances to the areas in sight with the potential for identifying new groups of carvings ranged from 150 m to 750 m. In fact, we found that, with a single exception, all of them accommodated clusters of rock art. Later, P. Novoa’s kindly showed us the rock carvings he already discovered on Monte Faro and,

consequently, new areas of research were opened on the opposite slopes of the mountain.

Surveys targeted severely weathered granite surfaces on the higher ground and, under these circumstances the success of fieldwork requires a well-defined strategy. It was not expected to find a large number of rock surfaces with conspicuous arrangements of motifs that would easily come into sight. On the contrary, we found that a substantial amount of rocks exhibit a single motif and these are difficult to grasp. Quite often it was possible to detect the carvings but is difficult to assess the type of motifs represented.

Hence, field surveys ought to obey to specific procedures and these have to do primarily with lighting conditions. As known, the observation of faded images is improved under oblique lighting, which means that, during the day, ideal conditions are restricted to a few hours in early morning and before sunset. For this reason, we tended to carry out this task during the winter months when the sun is lower in the horizon, providing a slightly longer time range of good lighting conditions (Fig. 5). Nevertheless, double-checking selected areas in different seasons turned out to be very effective. One further constraint had to do with the lichen coverage of granite surfaces that, at times, conceal carvings from view. All this explains why the first stage of this project spanned for 3 years, developed in 6/7 short seasons per year but, as we shall see, this strategy ended up being extremely rewarding.

We also became aware of the difficulties in recording this assemblage by the conventional methods of direct tracing that, when applied to uneven surfaces introduce an unacceptable distortion in planimetric line drawings. Hence, in 2013, we developed a pilot programme of digital tridimensional recording, in which this technology was applied for the first time to a long-term rock art project covering all stages of research. During field surveys were produced sample recordings of severely weathered surfaces to test the presence/absence of carved grooves. This method was also applied with excellent results to arrangements on irregular surfaces and lichen covered surfaces (Fig. 6).

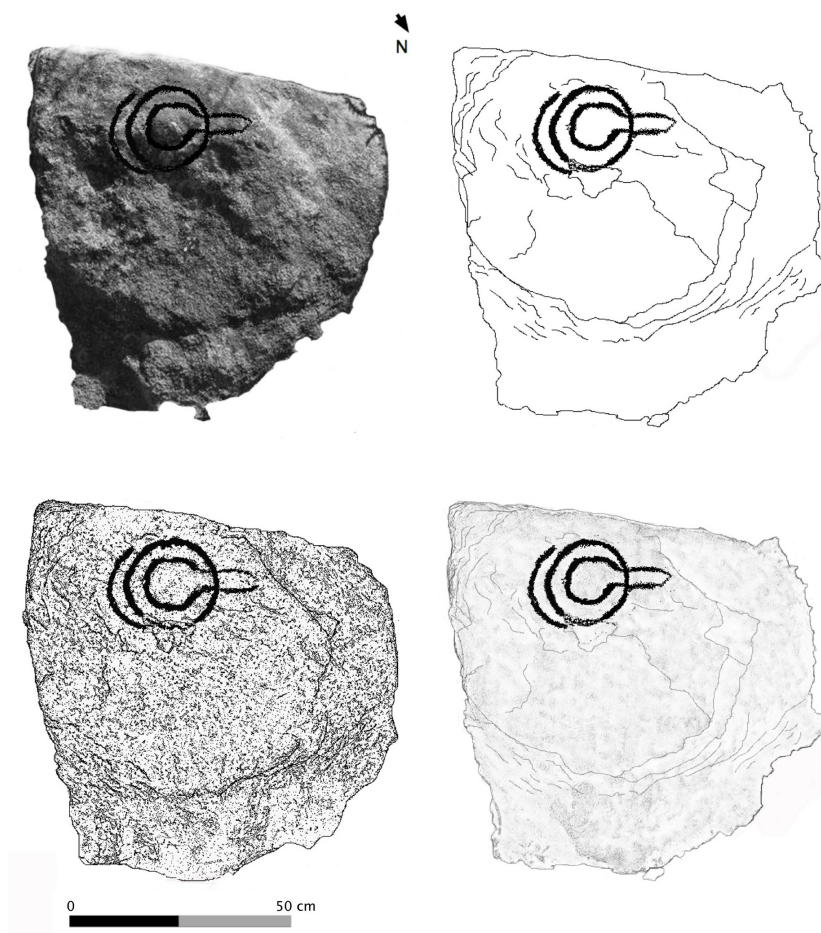


FIG. 7. *Photogrammetry is particularly useful for recording both severely weathered carvings and arrangements placed on lumpy or uneven surfaces where direct tracing produces visual distortion. Drawings from Escaravelhão III-rock 1 were produced from the tridimensional model of the surface and allows us to move on from the traditional line drawings (above, on the right) to reproductions that bring a more accurate view of the natural modeling and texture of the rock and its relationship with carved motifs (below).*

These experiments were intended to establish methodological procedures or a protocol for the identification, recording, graphic documentation and presentation of Atlantic Art, incorporating new digital technologies (Fig. 7). It is important to stress, however, that the application of these novel techniques can not exclude a careful *in loco* analysis of the rock art in order, for instance, and giving a straightforward example, to distinguish between carvings and natural fissures or eroded areas of the rock face.

## 5. An overview of Monte Faro rock art

As mentioned above, field surveys commenced around two of the carved rocks published in 1980<sup>4</sup>, aiming to find whether they were actually sitting in isolation or formed part of larger assemblages.

In the first three days of fieldwork, the results were striking. In the vicinities of Monte da Laje were found six carved rocks and on the western slope of Monte dos Fortes, we soon unveiled the presence of a group of 15 carved rocks, a number that subsequent visits increased to 21, most of them showing cup-and-ring marks.

Amongst the new areas surveyed in the early days, Fonte Volide stands out for it is a large platform on the western slope of Monte dos Fortes, overlooking Monte da Laje. The centre of the basin is occupied by a group of three megalithic tombs and in the immediate surroundings, we discovered three rock surfaces exhibiting cup-and-ring marks at distances as short as 20 m from the round mounds,

therefore establishing a remarkably close visual and physical relationship (Fig. 8).

An account of the chronological evolution of discoveries in the study area demonstrates how the shift in the theoretical approach from a site-focused framework to the application of concepts from Landscape Archaeology may dramatically change

<sup>4</sup> Tapada do Ozão is located in a private property and the dense vegetation cover is a major impediment for the observation of rock surface and, for this reason, we postponed field surveys in the area.



FIG. 8. *Fonte Volide: the occurrence of megalithic tombs and Atlantic Art at such close proximity is unprecedented in northern Portugal.*

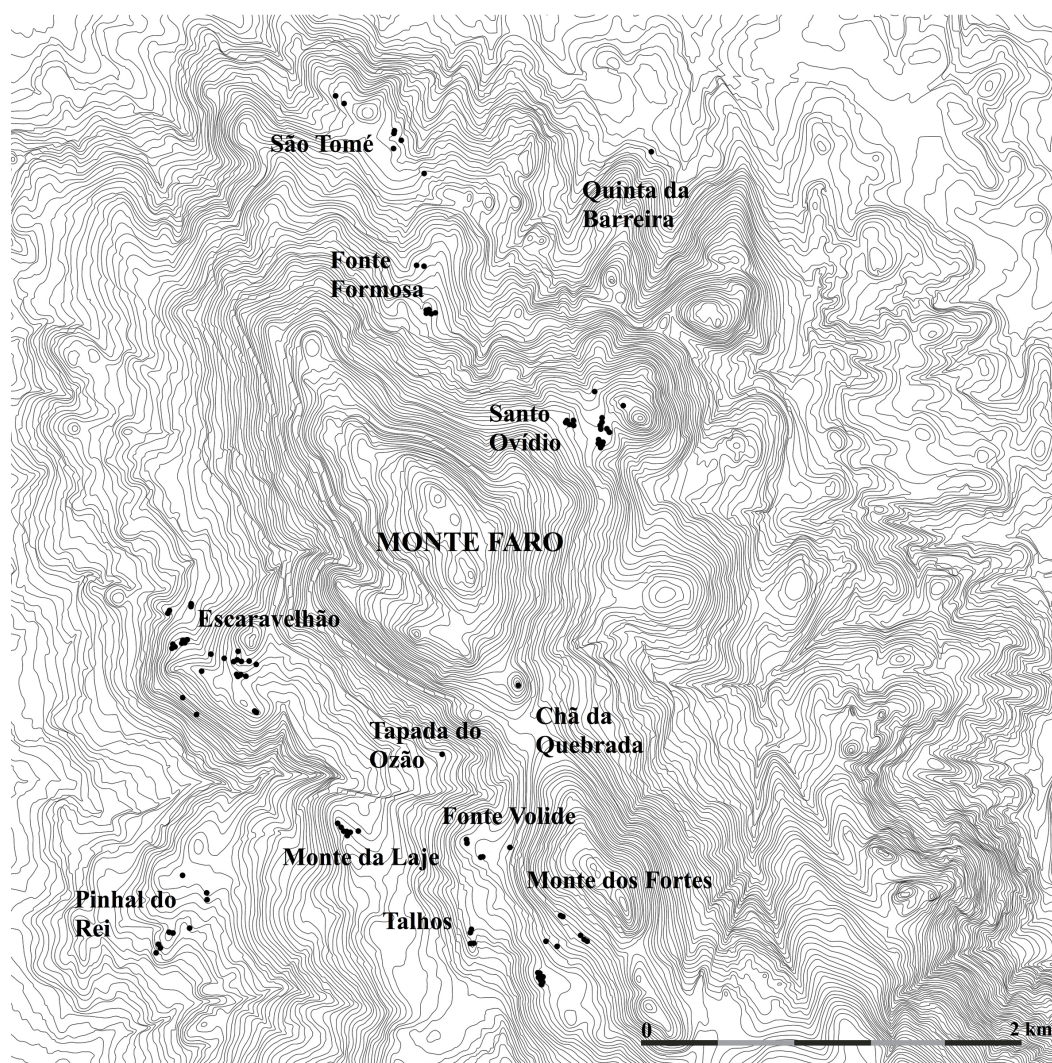


FIG. 9. *Distribution of the rock art at Monte Faro in October 2015.*



FIG. 10. *Santo Ovídeo: rock 14.*

the picture of an area that has been known to contain a restricted number of spectacular individual sites.

In October 2015, the catalogue reached an overall of 122 carved rocks distributed by 12 different sites<sup>5</sup> in an area of 26 km<sup>2</sup> (Alves and Reis, forthcoming) (Fig. 9). These include the carved rocks published in the 1980s and those discovered by Pablo Novoa in his occasional visits to the region.

The assemblage comprises 91 carved rocks dated to Late Prehistory and belonging to the Atlantic Art tradition, 14 surfaces containing exclusively Late Modern/Contemporary carvings and 17 cases whose the chronology is unclear. Most of the latter include rocks displaying single cup-marks or pairs of cup-marks lacking a close spatial relationship with prehistoric carvings. This is a timeless motif in rock art and, in the Iberian context, they should not be strictly attributed to prehistory in whole.

If we look at the reality of rock art in northern Portugal, the number of historical carvings in the area of Monte Faro is, in proportion, relatively small. Here, they mostly concentrate around the

<sup>5</sup> We defined “sites” as clusters of rock carvings that occur at particularly well-defined topographical features, like spurs, hillocks, upland basins or knolls on the hillsides, rocky hilltops, etc. within the larger geomorphological unit that include Monte Faro and Monte dos Fortes; cf. Alves, L. B. and Reis, M.: “As gravuras rupestres do Monte Faro (Valença, Viana do Castelo): um exemplo maior da Arte Atlântica peninsular”, Portugalía, forthcoming.

hilltop chapel devoted to Saint Ovídio, where we find a rare depiction of the façade of a building carved on a slightly leaning surface (Fig. 10). With few exceptions, modern carvings are Latin crosses found at particular locations in the landscape and clearly constitute ancient “boundary markers” (e.g. Alves, 2001) (Fig. 11).

Amongst the rock art whose chronology is unclear feature carved grooves linking deep dilution hollows (Fig. 12). We actually recorded a number of examples of these quite intriguing arrangements, some of which sit close to prehistoric carvings yet rarely occur on surfaces containing other types of motifs.

Prehistoric art was found on 91 carved rocks at 11 sites. Arrangements of circular or curvilinear motifs clearly dominate, as they feature on 63 rock surfaces, endowing a remarkable consistency to this assemblage. The remaining are cup-marked surfaces located in the immediate vicinities of more complex abstract carvings. Cup-marks alone and cup-and-rings appear either as single motifs or inserted in more striking arrangements either on flat and smooth or on utterly lumpy and rugged outcrops



Fig. 11. *Two Latin crosses found on the eastern edge of Fonte Volide platform (highlighted in black on the photograph of the original backdrop).*



FIG. 12. *Escaravelhão v-rock 8*; notice the deep groove linking two natural dilution hollows.

(Fig. 13). It is also interesting to find that single cup-and-ring motifs appear both on small surfaces and on large rock exposures whose surfaces were suitable for assembling a much more elaborate composition,

which is the case of rock 6 at Escaravelhão v (Fig. 13).

As far as it could be observed in the first stages of fieldwork, there seems to be lacking a pattern in terms of the election of “good surfaces for carving”. In fact, when we had a sense of predictability in finding prehistoric carvings, it had more to do with the combination of topographical setting than with rocks being generally flat, low lying, elevated, smooth or rough.

One aspect worth emphasising is the recurrent presence of raised embossed circles that take advantage of the natural modelling of granite surfaces (Fig. 14). This evidence, which is perhaps the strongest stylistic mark of

Monte Faro assemblage, highlights the sculptural character of Atlantic Art and the intimate engagement between motifs and the natural backdrop that we have been arguing to be a relevant feature in

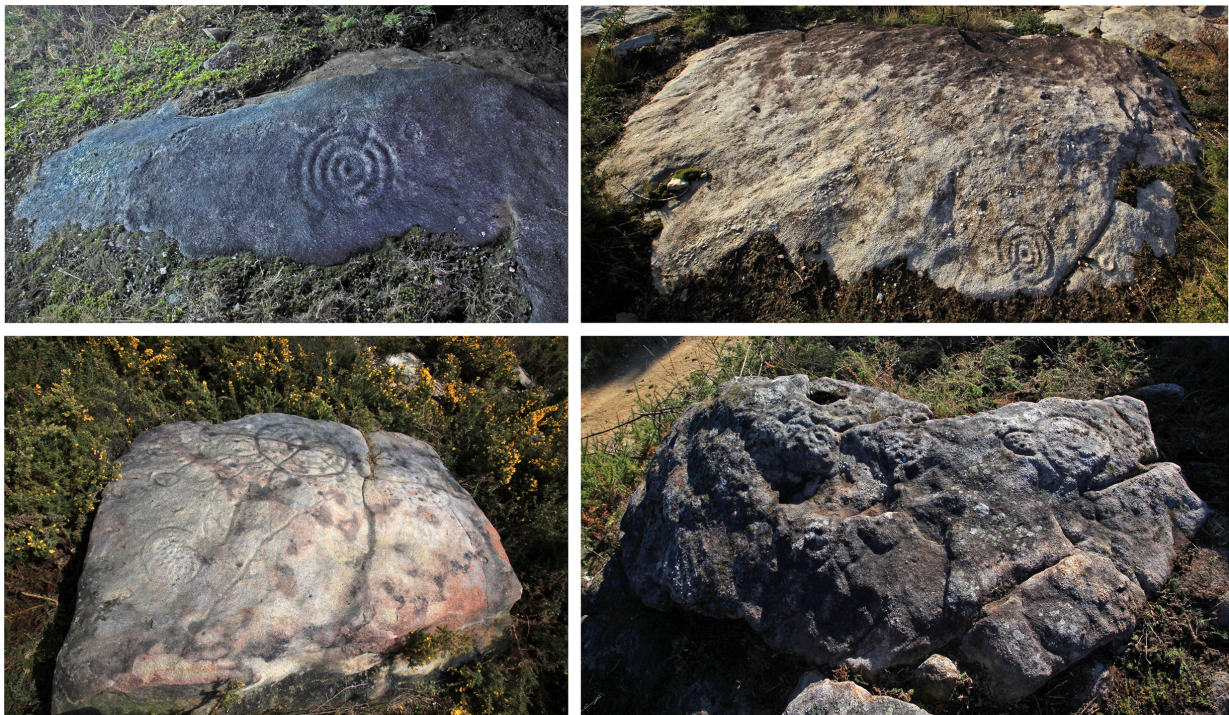


FIG. 13. *At Monte Faro and Monte dos Fortes, circular designs occur either as single motifs or incorporating complex abstract arrangements (clockwise: São Tomé-rock 1; Escaravelhão v-rock 6; Monte dos Fortes 1-rock 3; Escaravelhão VI-rock 2).*

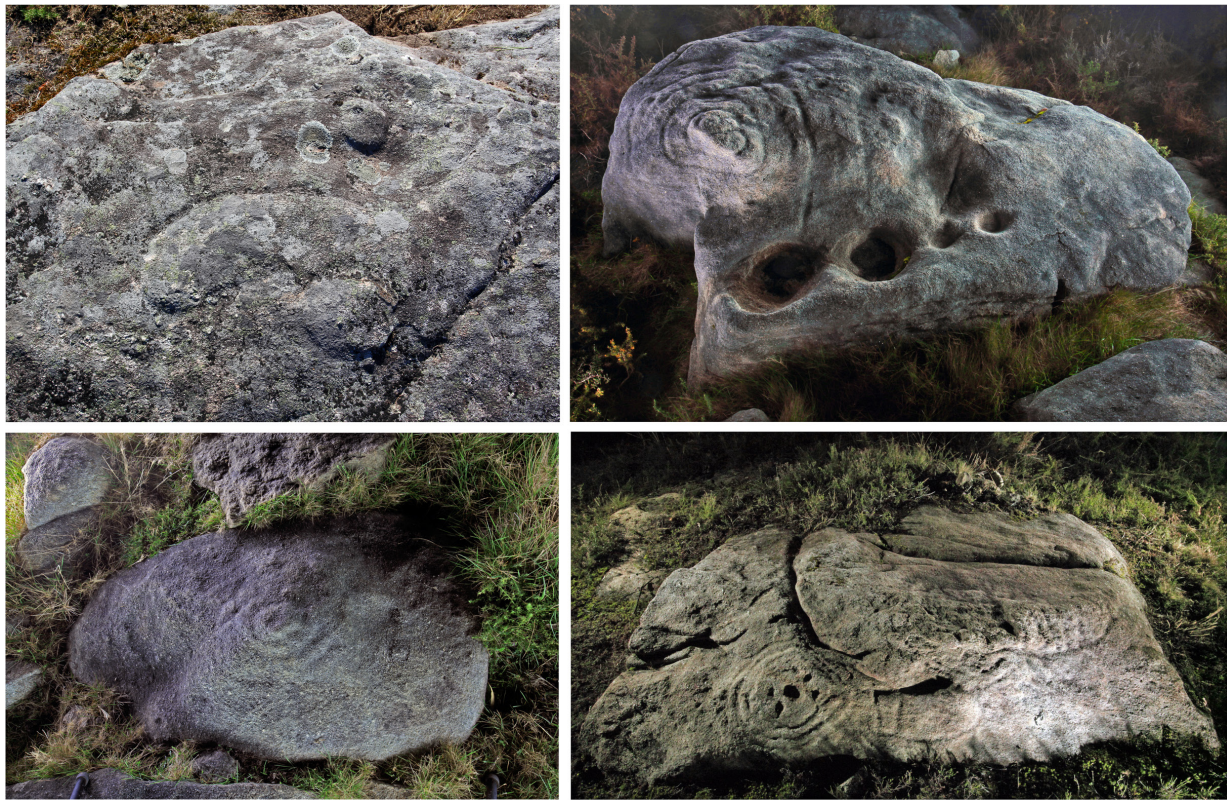


FIG. 14. *There is a considerable number of carved rocks where circular arrangements either adhere to natural lumps or outline concave surfaces of the granite outcrop (clockwise: Monte da Laje-rock 6; Monte dos Fortes II-rock 6; Monte dos Fortes II-rock 7; Escaravelhão VI-rock 3).*

Iberian Atlantic Art (Alves, 2003, 2009, 2012). It is important to note, though briefly, that this finds links with reports from some Atlantic Art sites studied across Atlantic Europe (e.g. Bradley and Watson, 2012; Jones *et al.*, 2011) yet it was also found not to be compelling in others (Shee Twohig *et al.*, 2010). But, in essence, this kind of analysis needs to take into account the specificities of the regional geological backdrop and the various ways in which the creators of rock art interpreted this symbolic language and engaged with the “raw material”.

Between 2013 and 2015 were recorded nine surfaces displaying animal motifs. The majority are subnaturalistic figures, similar to those found at Quinta da Barreira (Novoa and Goberna, 2004) and more frequent in Galicia. Yet there are others depicted in a more stylised manner showing the elementary anatomic features as single grooves (Fig. 15). At times, animals are portrayed as if they were

in motion on the rock surface, like at Fonte Formosa –rock 6, an aspect that was also noticed in Galicia (e.g. Bradley, 1997: pl. 38) (Fig. 15). We found a third stylistic type showing an unfinished animal figure with a long upright body. Actually, there is a striking variety in the design of these motifs in this relatively small geographical area. It will be interesting to analyse, in the near future, the relationship between these different types and the frequency of their association with other classes of motifs.

Weapons or hafted objects are depicted on four rock surfaces, to which we may add an enigmatic depiction of a haft attached to an oblong cavity, carved by a wide fissure on a conspicuous granite outcrop. It is interesting to note that many motifs unveiled in the study area do not obey strictly to the graphic conventions more frequently found in Galicia. Apart from the atypical daggers at Monte da Laje (Silva and Cunha, 1986),



FIG. 15. *Animal figures depicted in different styles at Fonte Formosa-rock 6 (above) and Escaravelhão 1-rock 4 (below).*



FIG. 16. *Hafted object carved at Escaravelhão 1-rock 7.*

the representation of hafted objects recently discovered at Monte Faro do not show the artefacts or objects in detail. They have a roughly oval or trapezoidal shape and the interior is fully and deeply carved (Fig. 16). In Galicia, the large majority of carved hafted objects depict halberds, but we cannot disregard entirely the hypothesis that at least some of those found at Monte Faro represent may stone tools (Fig. 16).

Amongst others, prehistoric designs also include rectangular and square-shaped grids of the type found to overlay cup-and-ring motifs at Bouça do Colado (Baptista, 1981).

## 6. Towards a renewed design of Atlantic Art: distribution, chronology and conceptual arrangement

Rock art research at Monte Faro aimed at changing the picture of Atlantic Art in north-west Portugal, up to now portrayed as minor groups of carved outcrops scattered across a vast territory, by demonstrating that they also concentrate in large numbers on particular geomorphological units. It is right to say that it was entirely unexpected to unveil this remarkable scenario at Monte Faro but it may only be valued to its full extent after the full documentation of the rock art. This is the aim of the second stage of research.

This findings will contribute to assessment of several proposals that have been put forward over the two last decades in different regions of the Atlantic façade, regarding the landscape setting of rock art and its relationship with the location of prehistoric tombs, areas suitable for settlement or particular landscape features (e.g. Bradley, 1997).

The main goal of an approach to rock art under the perspective of Landscape Archaeology should be directed towards a better understanding of the social and cultural contexts in which it was created and evolved through time. However, many of such studies, specially those attempting to explore the

relationship between rock art and settlements dated from a particular period of time, do not usually bring to discussion the fact that analysis may be biased due to the visibility/invisibility of certain typologies of sites in the landscape. A straightforward example in north-western Iberia is the sheer visibility of Late Bronze Age or Iron Age hilltop settlements and the residual information about Neolithic occupation sites, not to speak that from that period, monumental funerary architecture prevails in many regions as the single evidence for human activity.

We showed that there is a striking proximity between prehistoric art and megalithic monuments



at Monte Faro, revealing a clear spatial relationship between monumental architecture and Atlantic Art that has not been in north-western Iberia yet there are numerous examples in other parts of Europe: Loughcrew in Ireland (Shee, 2010) North Northumberland, in England or Galloway in Scotland (e.g. Bradley, 1997). The reason for this may be related to the fact that the traditional chronology for this rock art tradition has been set either in the Bronze Age or between the late 3<sup>rd</sup>-early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC, thus clearly disconnected with the primary use of megalithic tombs dated to the 5<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. This question was brought back to the centre of the debate over the last decade (e.g. Alves, 2014; Fábregas and Rodríguez, 2012; Santos, 2005; Santos, 2012).

In 2003, a reassessment of prehistoric art in north-western Iberian based on the dialectical analysis of the spatial, temporal and conceptual relationships between the different prehistoric traditions that come together in northern Portugal –Atlantic Art, Schematic Art and Megalithic Art– led one of us to propose an earlier origin for Atlantic Art's abstract imagery, setting it back at least to the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC, therefore overlapping with regional Megalithic Art (Alves, 2003, 2009, 2012).

It is also important to stress that curvilinear designs make up the overwhelming majority of carvings at and around Monte Faro and that this is precisely the type of imagery that provides links to rock art contexts in Ireland, northern England and Scotland.

Thus, unveiling the social and cultural contexts of Atlantic Art means dealing with the time where people started to spread indelible marks across the “skin of the land”, embellishing rocks and creating what can be regarded as actual “tattooed landscapes” (Alves, 2012). Even though there is an incipient knowledge of human occupation in the region during the Neolithic, if we consider the hypothesis that the origins of this tradition can be ascribed to the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC, we are able to envisage a scenario at Monte Faro which should not be dissimilar to that proposed by Richard Bradley and other anglo-saxon researchers about the social and economic environment of the communities

responsible of the most ancient arrangements of Atlantic Art outside Iberia. The emergence of Atlantic Art in the British Isles is assigned to the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC which is said to be a period of transition between “mobile economies” essentially based on livestock, incipient agriculture in lowland valleys and where the higher ground was particularly suited for hunting and grazing (Bradley, 1997; Bradley *et al.*, 1993; Jones *et al.*, 2011). At Monte Faro multiple and complementary natural environments can be found at very short distances, meaning that they were bound to be exploited on a daily basis. The areas best suited for cultivation are located in shallow valleys closer to the lowlands whereas hillsides are ideal for pasture. In fact, the higher ground is still used for hunting, gathering, exploitation of woodland resources and, because the physiographic and soil characteristics only allows small-scale cultivation, subsistence relies on cattle grazing which is left largely unattended on the higher ground for long periods, along with semi-wild horses.

In the end of the 5<sup>th</sup>-beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC, the transition to a more sedentary *modus vivendi*, though based on a mobile strategy of exploitation of complementary resources, was accompanied by novel strategies of appropriation of the territory deeply rooted on the social, cultural and symbolic structures developing in the process of transition. Olivia Harris stated that agrarian societies must be oriented towards the past because the land, as the source of life, needs to be tenured as it is intended to be handed on from one generation to the next (1982). It is precisely in this critical period that the dead assume a central role in Western Europe. Community rituals, community tombs, reused and re-opened for three or four hundred years attest a close proximity between the living and the dead (e.g. Cruz, 2001). In this period, the ancestors formed a resource of authority and maintenance of social order by ensuring continuity between generations.

Thus, the construction of megalithic tombs on the upland platforms of Monte Faro made certainly part of this widespread process of materialising the communal appropriation of the landscape by the

people who settled around the mountain and used it as shared ground for hunting, gathering and grazing. The signature of that communal appropriation is firmly sculpted on the land in the form of monumental architecture but also, we believe, in the embellishment of rock outcrops with more or less conspicuous arrangements of abstract designs.

Another observation that stands out from the first stage of fieldwork has to do not only with the diversity in the way motifs are distributed on rock surfaces with different morphological characteristics, but also with the degree of complexity that involves the use and display of circular images. We were able to identify nuances in the ways in which the main designs from the Atlantic Art repertoire were selected and applied on rocks. There are the classical compositions, stereotyped arrangements, repetition of forms, but there is also a remarkable creativity at work in the design of others (Alves, 2012). It is true that many carved rocks might have seen motifs added on through time but the variety in design arrangements or in the range of circular motifs deployed is commonly explained by the idea that they portray different phases in the stylistic sequence. However, despite the fact that we believe that it is not yet possible to offer a chronological sequence of Atlantic Art based on rigorous and consistent arguments, these nuances could also be explained, if only partly, by individual or local group's interpretation of the rather diffuse formal codes underlying this language of signs, as R. Bradley called it (1997).

Apart from testing the validity of proposals related to the topographic setting of simple and complex motifs or their position in relation to the location of prehistoric tombs or particular landscape features, we are also interested in thinking about how the nature of rock art sites relates with ideas of being, experiencing and moving across the land, and how they establish significant relationships with both natural and anthropogenic features, from the landscape to the rock face. In this sense, we share the idea that the significance of Atlantic Art is closely related with the perception and physical experience of the space of everyday life, and particularly

with the perception of the people's landscapes, as B. Bender puts it: a landscape that "operate on different spatial scales, whether horizontally across the surface of the world or vertically –up to the heavens, down to the depths–" (1993: 2).

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