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SPACE OF MEMORY AND REPRESENTATION: BOUÇA DA COVA DA MOURA (ARDEGÃES, MAIA, NORTHWEST OF PORTUGAL) – A CASE STUDY

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Abstract: *Bouça da Cova da Moura is the local place-name attributed to a stretch of a plateau overlooking the Leça valley. Here, Neolithic burial mounds share their landscape setting with scatters of archaeological materials that include Bell Beaker fragments, idols and metalwork. Since these are mostly surface findings, their contexts have not yet been accurately determined. Another significant feature is the presence of prehistoric rock carvings. The plateau may thus be considered a public space, conceptually and physically built over time. Its significance and meanings were certainly created and transmitted through practices of memory construction which are representative of cultural identity and social cohesion.*

Key-words: *North-west Portugal; Late Prehistory; Neolithic tombs; Rock art; Copper Age and Bronze Age sites; Space and memory*

Résumé: *Le site de Bouça da Cova da Moura se trouve sur un plateau faisant face au Rio Leça. On y a identifié des tertres funéraires du Néolithique, auxquels sont associés des zones de concentration d'artefacts, incluant céramiques campaniformes, idoles et mobilier métallique. S'agissant de mobilier de surface, le contexte de ces différentes concentrations n'a pas été déterminé avec attention. Un autre fait significatif est l'apparition de gravures rupestres préhistoriques. On peut considérer le plateau comme un espace publique, qui s'est bâti physiquement et conceptuellement au cours des temps. Son importance et sa signification ont certainement été créées et transmises à travers un certain nombre de pratiques de construction mémorielle, représentatives de l'identité culturelle et de la cohésion sociale.*

Mots-clés: *Nord-ouest du Portugal; Préhistoire récente; Sépultures néolithiques; Art rupestre; Sites du Chalcolithique et de l'Âge du Bronze; Espace et mémoire*

LOCATION, ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

This paper intends to provide a preliminary 'view of ensemble' on a diversity of archaeological remains dated from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age, that concentrate on a restricted area of about 5 ha. In fact, this place, locally known as Bouça da Cova da Moura, corresponds to a section of a wide upland plateau on the fringes of Serra do Bougado. Administratively, it extends from the municipalities of Trofa and Maia, in the district of Porto, yet our study area sits in the parish of Águas Santas (Maia, Porto) (Fig. 8.1a).

The plateau, located about 15 kms from the Atlantic coastline, configures a vast area, roughly trapezoidal in shape, with a north-south orientation, and is delimited by waterlines, except to the north. To the west, Silva Escura stream runs down from Alto do Facho (136 m above sea level) and on the eastern edge, Leandro stream flows from a spring located at São Romão do Coronado (150 m a.s.l.). Both watercourses are tributaries of River Leça, which valley runs on the southern limits of the plateau. At Bouça da Cova da Moura, the higher ground reaches altitudes between 106 m and 120 m a.s.l.

Providing its distinctive position in the landscape, it forms a kind of natural balcony overlooking the confluence of Leandro stream with River Leça. Thus, it commands large views over more distant areas, particularly to the east and the south. In contrast, to the north and the west, the slope of a higher ridge on the plateau physically confines this space. As a result, Bouça da Cova da Moura is, on one hand, ideally exposed to sunlight and, on the other hand, it is protected from the north-western winds.

Geologically, the area is characterised by the presence of non-porphyroid coarse-grained granite with two micas, being muscovite predominant. However, it is interesting to note that rock art sites gather in the areas where granite outcrops show very specific attributes. In fact, they predominantly distributed along an intrusion of fine-grained granite, conventionally designated of aplite. To the north, west and east of the study area, the geology radically changes into an environment dominated by schist and greywacke, composed essentially of migmatite, gneiss and mica schist, a type of formation that seems ideal for the occurrence of tin veins.¹

¹ Carlos Meireles from INETI Porto (Pers. comm.)

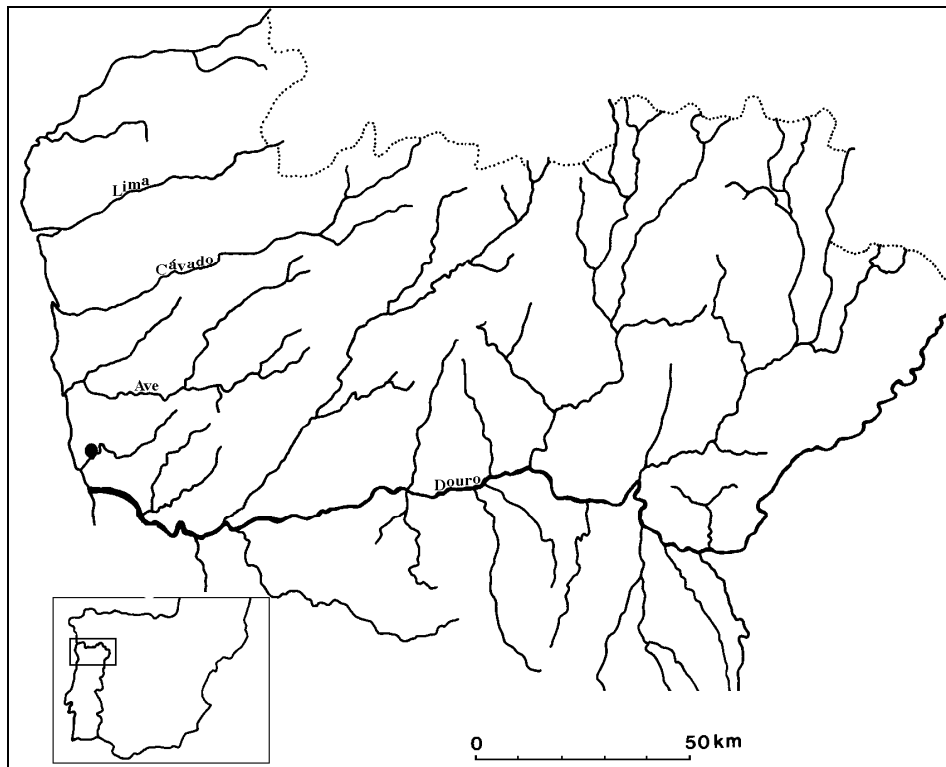


Fig. 8.1a. Location of Bouça da Cova da Moura in north-western Portugal

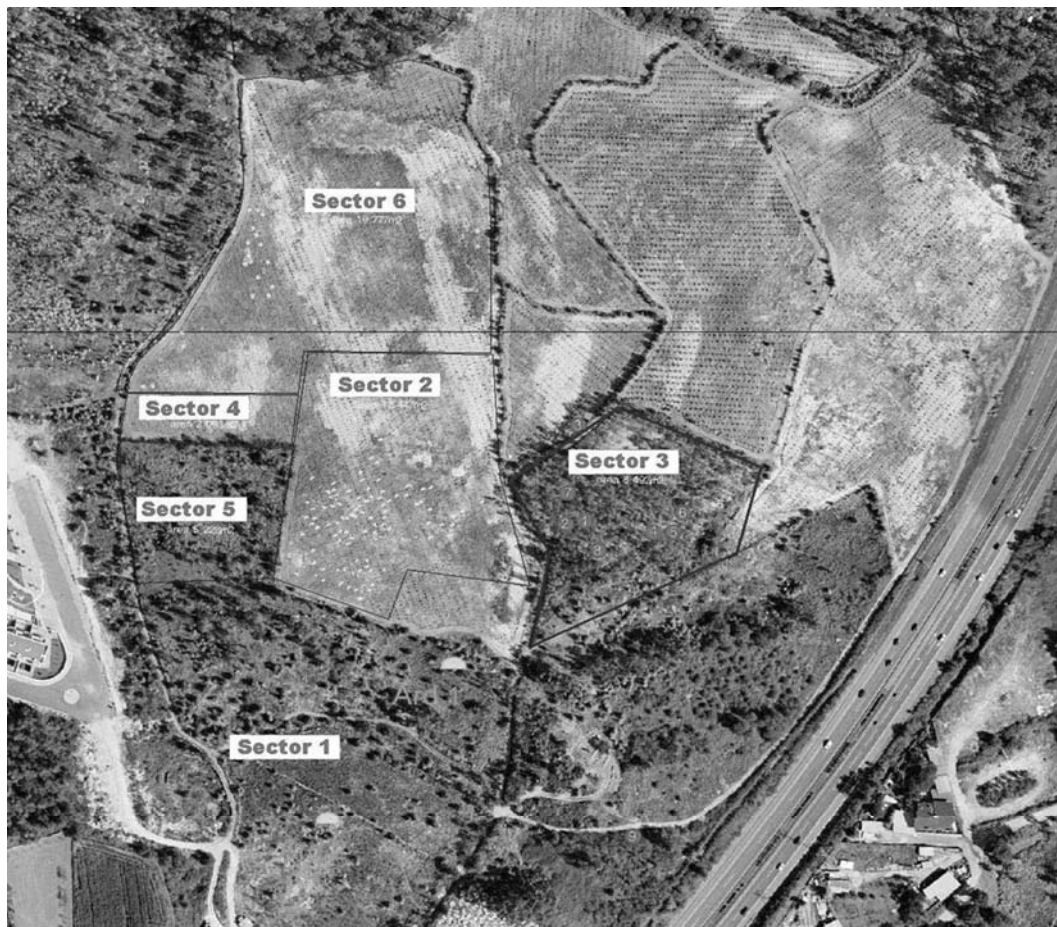


Fig. 8.1b. The study area was divided in 6 sectors according to the characteristics of the archaeological remains identified in field surveys (Photo: Department of Culture, Heritage and Tourism of Maia City Hall)

A significant number of archaeological sites have been recorded in the immediate surroundings of Bouça da Cova da Moura and many of them are actually intervisible. On top of a ridge, to the west of the study area, sit a couple of prehistoric mounds: monuments 1 and 2 of Godêlo. To the north, on a step slope of the heights of Leandro, were recently identified five stone-built structures, which nature is still uncertain, associated with surface findings of pottery and lithic artefacts provisionally dated to the Copper Age. Moreover, there used to be at least two megalithic tombs at Arcos and Montezelo, on the Leandro valley, to the east and north-east of the study area.²

HISTORY OF RESEARCH

Bouça da Cova da Moura is known in the archaeological literature since the 1940s following the discovery of the so-called “Pedra Partida de Ardegães”, a large granite stone, weighting about 4 tons, carved with a conspicuous composition of abstract designs (Santos Júnior 1940: 357; 1963: 119-120; Anati 1968: 103; Twohig 1981; Baptista 1986: 47). The stone, which had been partially quarried by locals, was removed afterwards from its original setting and taken away in 1961 to be exhibited on the hall of the Faculty of Sciences of the University of Porto.³ Despite the interest kindled in the academic milieu, leading to a succession of references and studies, the exact location of the finding was not investigated for many years. In 1999, a group of Galician archaeologists, in an occasional visit to the region, successfully identified its original place with the help of local informants.⁴ This fieldtrip resulted in the discovery of several carved rocks on this hill, some of which have been subsequently recorded by members of our team, others have perhaps been quarried, removed from their original location or simply buried. In fact, between 2003 and 2006, two of us (ATR and RTM) undertook thorough archaeological fieldwork in this area following A. Mendes Côrrea’s early references (1935) who mentioned the occurrence of two megalithic tombs in Ardegães. As a result, prehistoric stone-built tombs and new rock carvings were identified. In November 2004, however, large-scale forestation works (that implied deep ploughing of a vast area of soil) carried out at Bouça da Cova da Moura, unearthed a significant amount of archaeological artefacts, defining at least two different scatters of surface remains. This event justified the development of salvage works that included fieldwalking and excavation, a project co-ordinated by one of us (ATR). Only recently, and given the variety and complexity of the evidence on site, two researchers from

Minho University (AMSB and LBA) joined the project, first as scientific consultants and later as collaborators in the study of these findings. On the basis of our observations so far, this paper aims to present the first results of an on-going study as well as to offer some ideas on the interpretation of this interesting assemblage.

BOUÇA DA COVA DA MOURA: THE DATA

As we mentioned earlier, archaeological remains found at Bouça da Cova da Moura spread out in an area of 5 ha that was divided, for analytical purposes, in 6^s sectors according to their category and distribution (Fig. 8.1b).

Sector 1 corresponds to the southern parts of the study area where we find the most ancient remains on site: two megalithic tombs laying about 100 m apart from each other. According to the Portuguese Survey Map⁶ their U.T.M. co-ordinates (European datum) are: BCM Monument 1: P=4565 – M=536,2 – Altitude: 117 m; BCM Monument 2: P=4564,8 – M=536,2 – Altitude: 117 m. Given their dimensions, both mounds are well visible in the surrounding landscape. Monument 1 is 3,4 m high on the southern side, 1,6 m on the northern side and 30 m in diameter whilst monument 2 is 2,5 m high and 25 m in diameter. In the vicinities of the latter was discovered a worked nodule of siliceous schist with a small hollow produced by the extraction of an *orthoceras* fossil. About 1600 m to the south-east there might have been another mound (monument 3) that was dismantled in the 1980s.⁷ Forestation works carried out in 2004 might also have obliterated another stone-built structure (monument 4) located about 100 m to the north of monument 1. At present, structural evidence in the terrain is scarce. However, in a relatively small area to the east of sector 2, there is a significant concentration of granite blocks, some of which seem to be broken orthostats, as well as a number of considerably large-sized and fragmented querns that might have formed part of a cairn. Amongst the rubble, we recovered a polished stone axe made of amphibolite that shows no signs of having been used as a tool and a pottery fragment displaying impressed decoration and incised triangles. In addition to our field observations made after subsoil disturbance, Mr. Manuel Espinheira, a local landowner, recalls that there used to be a lump in the terrain, on that specific place, of the kind produced by an artificial mound and similar to that he had destroyed in his private property.

Sector 6 corresponds to a vast scatter of archaeological material dated to the Copper Age located on the northern

² Arcos’s monument was dismantled in the 1940s and might have contained slabs with red ochre paintings. Montezelo tomb was excavated between 2005 and 2006, as part of a salvage archaeological project and subsequently destroyed.

³ The carved rock is, since 2000, in exhibition at the Maia’s County Museum (Museu de História e Etnologia da Terra da Maia).

⁴ This event was mentioned in a paper presented to the International Congress of European Rock Art, held in Vigo, in November 1999. We are grateful to the authors for providing us with a copy of the unpublished paper.

⁵ Sector 4 corresponds to an area of recent earthen deposits whereas sector 5, contiguous to sector 6, was not affected by cultivation.

⁶ Carta Militar de Portugal: folha 110, Serviços Cartográficos do Exército – Escala 1: 25 000 – Lisboa: S.C.E.

⁷ A local informant, Mr. Manuel Espinheira from Ardegães, destroyed an ancient stone-built structure in his property. In the occasion of a visit to Bouça da Cova da Moura, he found great similarities between monument 1 and the one he demolished and from which he removed large quantities of stone.

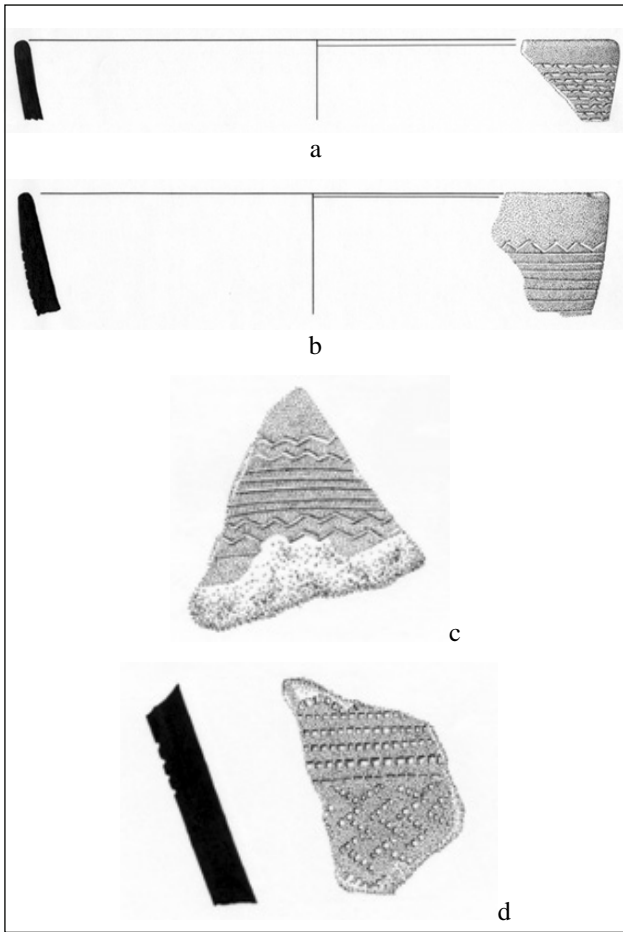


Fig. 8.2.1. Copper Age ceramic assemblage with Bell Beaker decoration (Without scale) (Drawings: Fátima Felicidade)

and north-western parts of the study area. Here, surface findings are mostly composed of pottery yet some exceptional artefacts also occur. The ceramic assemblage includes “Penha” ware as well as a series of Maritime and Linear Bell Beaker vessels⁸ (Fig. 8.2.1). Amongst the lithic artefacts we emphasise the presence of flintwork. A number of flakes and one core were produced of flint of various types, supplied from different sources. It was also recovered, from the soil’s surface, a fragment of a possible cylindrical gold bead (measuring about 1cm in length).

To the west of the study area, on sector 2, another scatter of prehistoric artefacts suggested the presence of a Bronze Age site. This idea that was later corroborated with the excavation of a small trench that unveiled subsoil structures, such as a post-hole delimited with stones and the remains of a clay pavement. The latter seems to have been associated with special activities on site, namely with bronze smelting for it was recovered a drop of binary composition and a nodule of hematite, which presence may be related with the production of red ochre.

⁸ The ceramic assemblage was classified according to the fragment’s fabric, paste, motifs and techniques of decoration.

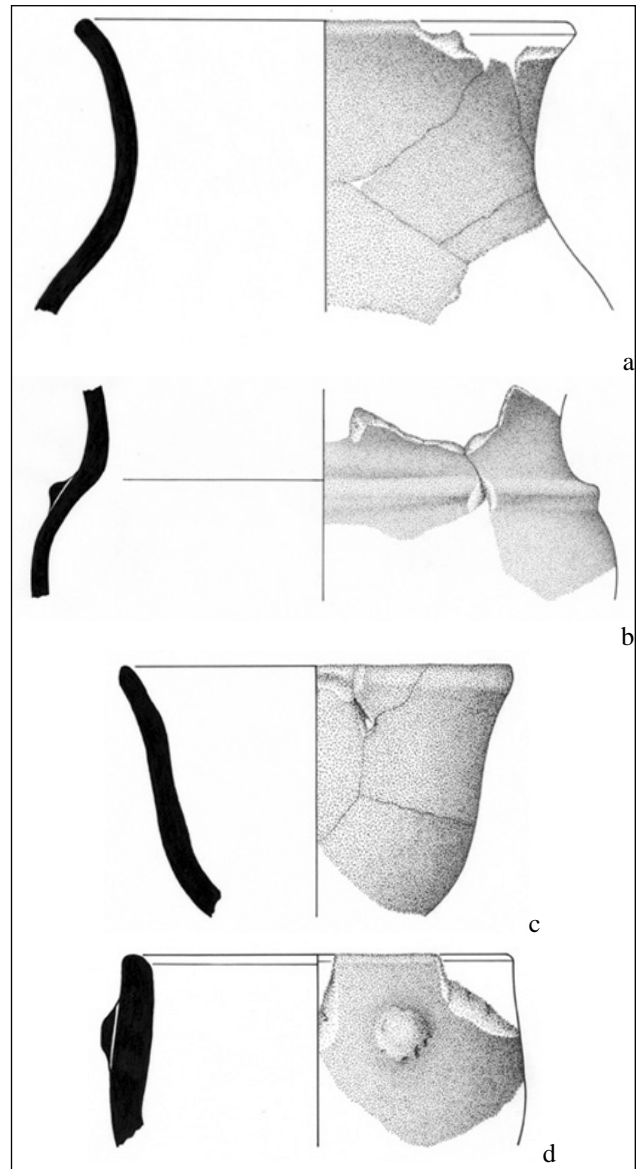


Fig. 8.2.2. Bronze Age vessels and cup-marked stone (Without scale) (Drawings: Fátima Felicidade)

The ceramic assemblage revealed an abundance of plain ware, sherds with plastic decoration associated with both opened and closed vessels and simple flat bases (Fig. 8.2.2.). Yet, the excavated material also included stone tools and ornaments of various types. There is a fragmented piece of slate exhibiting a small hole produced by the extraction of an *orthoceras* fossil (necklace bead?) and a possible polissoir. Also in the area were exhumed two polished stone axes, one produced of amphibolite and the other of hornfels, several quartz crystals, a fragmented flint flake and iron concretions. In addition, it was also found a quartzite pebble engraved with two perpendicular lines and a polished block of granite exhibiting two small circular concavities. Some of the raw material used on site is non-local. For instance, the closest sources of slate and hornfels are found in Valongo region, at a distance of over 10 km from Ardegães.

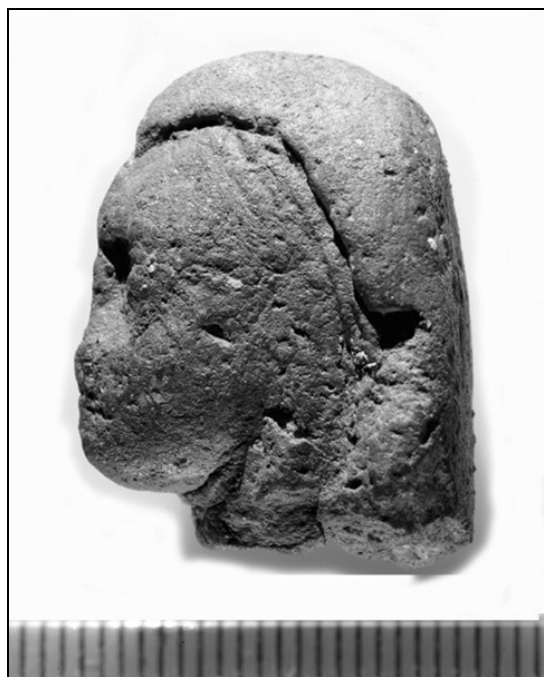


Fig. 8.3a. Side view of the head of a clay statuette discovered on the north-western limits of sector 2, close to sector 6
(Photo: Museu D. Diogo de Sousa, Braga)



Fig. 8.3b. Frontal view of the same piece of the clay statuette
(Photo: Museu D. Diogo de Sousa, Braga)

Moreover, pieces of an ancient clay statuette were found laying on the plough soil, on the north-western limits of sector 2, close to sector 6. One of the fragments recovered corresponds to the head of a human figure, measuring 2,7 cm, broken by the neck. It exhibits an oval face with small depressions marking the eyes and emphasising a little, scarcely prominent, nose. The mouth is simply sketched. The eyebrows and hair are carefully delineated. Covering the back of the head, a veil falls in triangle over the forehead and is tied up with a decorated lace around the neck, revealing part of the straight hair (Fig. 8.3a, 8.3b). This piece of sculpture and one clay fragment recovered nearby that shows a similar composition to the head's raw material, provided the following TL date: 3810 ± 1060 (2860-750 a.C.) and the OSL date: 3720 ± 170 (2790-650 a.C.) (Cardoso *et alii*, forthcoming).

This is a rare item to which we provisionally attribute a southern Iberian affiliation, region where anthropomorphic idols are often found in Late Copper Age contexts, associated with Bell Beakers (Hurtado 1978, 1980, 1981). Hence, the dating evidence – ranging from the end of the 4th millennium BC and the end of the 3rd millennium BC – combined with its wider contexts, provides evidence that allow a provisional association with the archaeological material recovered in sector 6.

Sector 3 comprises an area of about 8.492 square metres, in the vicinities of megalithic mounds. It is, in fact, a hill that rises up to 116 m a.s.l. on the eastern limits of the plateau and commands wide views over the Leandro and Leça valleys, to the east and the south, respectively.

Because the hilltop elevates slightly from the flat surrounding terrain, an observer standing on the hilltop has a privileged sight over Bouça da Cova da Moura, particularly to the burial mounds on sector 1, and beyond. Actually, views extend to the megalithic monuments of Godêlo that sit on top of a higher ridge to the west, over the heights of Leandro to the north, and to the megalithic tomb of Montezelo, to the east. Archaeological evidence on this distinctive natural feature of the plateau is almost exclusively composed of rock art. Yet, a small number of hand-made micaceous pottery, plain ware and a broken quartzite pebble have also been recently found. On the hill where “Pedra Partida de Ardegães” was removed from there is an interesting concentration of rock carvings both on natural outcrops and granite blocks, some of which weighting several tons. A small number of carved rocks were found inserted in modern boundary walls. Although it is quite possible that stone quarrying and forestation works contributed to the destruction of engravings, the fact is that currently the rock art inventory from Bouça da Cova da Moura comprises 12 carved rocks, 10 of which were detected on the hill.⁹

Rock 1 corresponds to the well-known “Pedra Partida de Ardegães”, discovered in the 1930s by Santos Júnior (1963) who excavated a small trench around the site and photographed the stone, near its original setting, on the

⁹ P. Novoa kindly offered us copies of the photographs of many of the carvings identified, in 1995 and 1999, during his visits to Bouça da Cova da Moura / Ardegães. We are very grateful for all the information provided, including an unpublished paper, which was crucial to the systematic review of the data presented in this paper.



Fig. 8.4a. BCM Rock 1 “Pedra Partida de Ardegães” in 1961 (Photo: E. Anati. We are extremely grateful to E. Anati and the Centro Camuno di Studici Preistorici for providing us with high-quality digitised copies of two photographs taken by E. Anati during his visit to Bouça da Cova da Moura, Ardegães, in 1961)

north-western slope of the hill (Fig. 8.4a).¹⁰ Only ten years later the same author published a short reference in an inventory of Portuguese rock art (1940). In 1961, E. Anati visited the site (1968) and, soon afterwards, Santos Júnior organised the transport of the carved rock to Porto where, a few years later, E.S. Twohig carried out accurate recordings for the subsequent publication of a monographic study (1981). The rock shows a complex composition of abstract designs that invades nearly the whole space available on a flat smooth surface. It comprises an extensive grid formed of small squares and rectangles, some of which filled with dots. Inside the grid are found U-shape motifs and, at least, two sets of concentric circles, yet several figures of similar typology assembly in one corner of the composition and seem to be enclosed by an oval line that physically separates this area from the wider grid (Fig. 8.4b). Attending to the character of this composition and engraving techniques, typical of the Atlantic Art tradition in north-western Iberia, it finds its closest parallels in “Pedra Escrita de Serrazes” (São Pedro do Sul, Viseu).

Rock 2 is a granite outcrop slightly elevated from the ground containing carvings of three circles internally divided with radial lines, cup-marks and, possibly, one schematic human figure. This rock used to stand only a few meters from rock 1 as shown in ancient photographs

¹⁰ We are most grateful to Huet Bacelar Gonçalves from the Museum of the Institute of Anthropology “Dr. Mendes Corrêa” for providing us with Santos Júnior’s photographic record.

by Santos Júnior, yet, it is no longer on site. Pablo Novoa and his colleagues have still seen it *in situ* in 1999/2000, but soon afterwards it might have been quarried.¹¹ At present, the place where rocks 1 and 2 original come from is devoid of outcropping granite, in contrast with what can be seen in ancient photographs.

Rock 3 is a considerably large granite block found on the lower parts of the northern slope as part of a boundary wall, probably not far from its original location. The stone was partially quarried into its present shape and shows two decorated panels. Panel 1 (1.85 m x 0,55 m) is a smooth, roughly rectangular surface, carved with a complex composition which design grammar resembles that on Rock 1, although it has been represented in a smaller scale. It exhibits a large grid composed of squares, some of which with internal dots and a spiral occupies one end of the composition (Fig. 8.4c).

Rock 4 is an outcropping surface that sits very close to the top of the hill. The surface slopes slightly to the west and displays a large number of designs that seem to have been added up, over time. The result is a complex stratigraphy of prehistoric and historical motifs that incorporate circular designs, squared-shaped figures, rectangular figures usually classified as representations of board

¹¹ In the occasion of André Ribeiro’s first visit to our study area, in 2003, this rock was no longer on site. However, it is important to investigate, in the near future, whether rock 8 corresponds to a granite block quarried from rock 2.

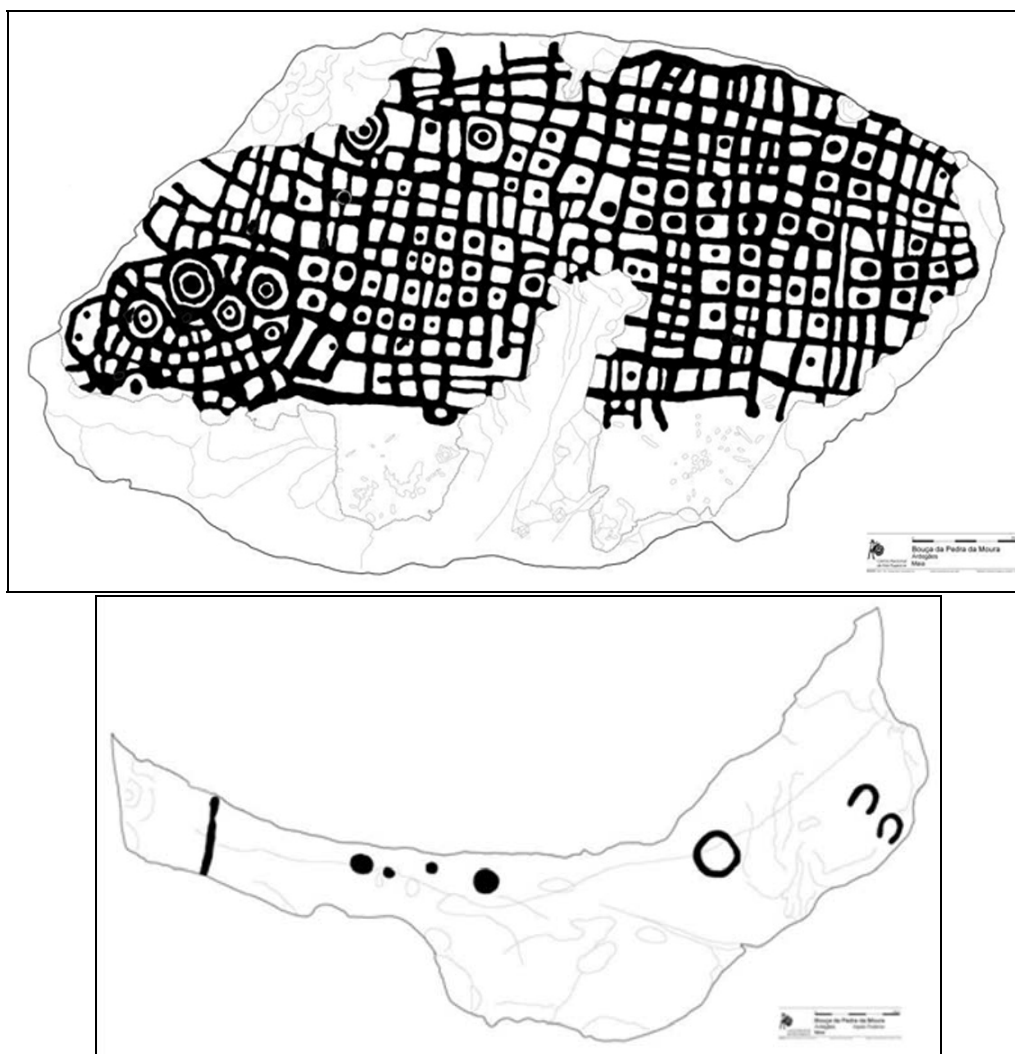


Fig. 8.4b. BCM Rock 1 “Pedra Partida de Ardegães”. Drawing produced by the Portuguese National Centre of Rock Art (CNART) for the Maia County Museum (Museu de História e Etnologia da Terra da Maia), in 2004

games (of the “nine men’s morris” type) and crosses with even-sized lines and small dots in the extremities. One of the circles with central cup-mark and radial lines and one square with round corners internally divided are overlapped by different cross-motifs that show less degree of erosion (Fig. 8.4d).¹²

Rock 5 is a stone block inserted on the boundary wall, a few meters away to the east of rock 4. It comprises a closed U-shaped figure internally divided. Rock 6 corresponds to a rock outcrop on the eastern slope of the hill that exhibits two crosses engraved on a square-shaped panel.¹³ On rock 7, the carvings occur on a low-lying outcrop with a NW/SE axis. Apart from cup-marks and a rectangular figure, the exposed surface exhibits two long grooves produced by the friction of harder implements.

¹² Unfortunately, the carved panel was severely vandalised in recent months and the composition became increasingly difficult to decipher. Novoa and Sanromán recorded this rock in 1999.

¹³ One of these motifs has been severely damaged by hammering in recent months.

The smoothness of their internal surface and the groove’s U-shaped profile indicate that they have been used as stone axes’ polishers¹⁴ (A.M. Baptista, pers. comm.).

Rock 8 is a granite block found on the north-western slope of the hill, sitting amongst others that seem to have resulted from the destruction of a rock outcrop. It exhibits three circles with central cup-mark internally divided by radial lines and several cup-marks. The former show striking similarities with the circular designs recorded on rocks 2 and 4. It is possible that this block belonged to Rock 2, which we know was quarried between 1995 and 2001. Perhaps the remains of the outcrop were removed from its original place and assembled next to the property’s fence.

¹⁴ This information was provided by A.M. Baptista, director of the National Centre of Rock Art (CNART) who visited Pedra Partida de Ardegães’s original location and the remaining carved rocks on hill. His first visit took place in 2004 when a team from CNART was invited by Maia’s County Museum to produce new recordings of “Pedra Partida de Ardegães”.



Fig. 8.4c. BCM Rock 3 was recently found inserted in a boundary wall and exhibits striking similarities with the design grammar of “Pedra Partida de Ardegães”
(Photo: Ana Bettencourt)



Fig. 8.4d. BCM Rock 4 in 1999
(Photo: Pablo Novoa)

In 1999, Novoa Álvarez and Sanromán recorded two more sites on the hill that might have also been destroyed afterwards but that we nonetheless consider in this inventory. Thus, Rock 9 contained a circle internally divided with radial lines on a low-lying granite exposure and Rock 10 showed a cup-and-ring motif carved on a rather inconspicuous convex surface, circular in plan, which was found in the area between the two mounds of sector 1.

The rock art assemblage at Bouça da Cova da Moura covers different stylistic traditions. There are complex compositions of abstract designs that may be attributed to the prehistoric Atlantic Art tradition in north-western Iberia, found namely on rocks 1, 2, 3, 4, 8 and 10. However, rock 4 shows some motifs, like squares with round corners, which commonly appear in close association with rock carvings belonging to the Schematic Art tradition. Moreover, there is evidence for carvings dating from historical periods namely crosses showing little degree of erosion and carvings of board games of the “nine men’s morris” type. Some crosses may be interpreted as boundary markers whereas board games carved on natural outcrops occur frequently in areas that control wide views over the landscape.¹⁵ Notwithstanding the on-going debate on the chronology of Atlantic rock art in northern Iberia and given the difficulties to establish accurate chronological boundaries for individual compositions, we may infer that the Prehistoric rock art sequence on site corresponds, in general terms, to the time span of ancient human occupation at Bouça da Cova da Moura. The creation of the earliest rock art might have been contemporary with the construction of burial mounds. Yet, a process of reweaving of meanings might

¹⁵ In northern Portugal, there are a number of open-air carvings of “nine men’s morris” apparently isolated from other archaeological evidence. One of us (LBA) studied a number of these sites in the Vouga basin and they all seem to have one feature in common: a distinctive position in the terrain that allows a visual control over the landscape, particularly to particular sections of the river Vouga.

have taken place for ancient carvings were certainly well known by the people who subsequently dwelled in that place and who eventually added in new designs around older compositions.¹⁶ Thus, the creation of a rock art site on the hill actively elevated a natural space into a “place”. That *locus* might have been the scenery for special ceremonies and might even have been known by a specific place-name, as it is today.

BOUÇA DA COVA DA MOURA AS SPACE OF MEMORY AND REPRESENTATION

On the light of our preliminary field observations, the characteristics of archaeological remains at Bouça da Cova da Moura seems to conform to a specialised use of space over thousands of years. Around the end of the 5th/beginning of the 4th millennium BC and the end of the 3rd/beginning of the 2nd millennium BC, Bouça da Cova da Moura became a special place where different communities and socio-cultural groups, revisited, marked and altered its original character. This seems to be materialised by means of a multiplicity of solutions adopted over time, from the construction of stone-built tombs in the Neolithic, to the creation of rock art on a distinctive landmark -the hill- to the manipulation and/or deposition of highly symbolic artefacts in the Copper Age and, finally, to the construction of discrete wooden, clay and subsoil structures in the Bronze Age.

The artefact’s assemblage can be interpreted, to a large extent, within the sphere of votive offerings or depositions. To the Neolithic-Copper Age, and presumably associated with burial monuments, we may assign one unused polished stone axe produced of amphibolite. From the

¹⁶ In a recent visit to the site, were recovered, close to a stone wall that physically delimits the hill, a number of fragments of plain ware and sherds of a flat-bottom vessel, material that may be provisionally dated to the Bronze Age.

Copper Age were exhumed numerous Bell Beaker fragments, a clay statuette (idol?) and a possible cylindrical gold bead. From the Bronze Age, we emphasise the evidence associated with bronze smelting, an activity imbued with a magical and symbolic significance at least in its initial stages, polished stone axes, several quartz crystals, flint blade (?) and a nodule of red ochre. It is also possible that, by this time, megalithic tombs were reused or appropriated in symbolic terms as it was discovered, in the vicinities of monument 2, a piece of a schist plaque with a hollow produced by the extraction of a fossil very similar to other unearthed in the excavation in sector 2.

Notwithstanding the early stage of our research, in terms of chronology and analysis of the archaeological evidence we are able to suggest some working hypothesis as to its interpretation, there is, obviously, a wide range of questions to deal with in the future. These have to do, first of all, with how, when and why this natural place inherited a sacred character and, secondly, with the underlying meanings and contexts of the rites and ceremonies that took place there, over time.

Regarding the first issue, it may be interesting to think about how this “place” would have been originally organised. Maybe around natural features in the landscape, the hill in particular, as it actually looks like an artificial mound if seen from the area of the monuments, in sector 1. Could the megalithic mounds be considered the humanly-built counterparts of the natural hill? This idea has been suggested by several authors (e.g. Whittle 1996; Bradley 2000) and, in this specific case, it is also tempting to think in terms of how the construction of artificial scenarios might have added new layers of significance to durable and impressive landscape features. In this respect, it should also be investigated whether the raw material used in the construction of those monuments was quarried from the nearby hill.

Another interesting aspect has to do with the time of the creation of the first rock carvings on the hill as a means of materialising the (previously?) sacred character of that place. Were the great compositions of rocks 1 and 3 contemporary with the construction of megalithic tombs in the vicinities and that from that moment onwards new carvings continued to be added on site? Or could it be that the earliest rock carvings date to later moments in the site’s prehistoric sequence? Some authors have been suggesting that Atlantic art in Galicia and north-west Portugal date to the end of the Copper Age-Early Bronze Age (Peña Santos and Rey Garcia 1993, 2001). In the light of this proposal, ancient rock carvings would be contemporary with the evidence from sector 6 and perhaps sector 2. However, there have also been some proposals that this rock art tradition may find its origins as far back as the 4th millennium BC (Alves 2003). The archaeological evidence from Bouça da Cova da Moura is now central to this debate and future research might help to re-think the chronological sequence of the region’s Atlantic Art tradition.

As a working hypothesis, we admit that the communities responsible for building the earliest monumental architecture on site which physical structure reproduces natural features in the landscape, were also engaged in materialising the symbolism of “the hill” through the production of rock art and perhaps the erection of standing stones. Although it is difficult to analyse the character of superimpositions of rock art motifs in this early stage of research, the construction of the hill’s symbolic arena is likely to have resulted of a long-term and sequential addition of meanings. From the Neolithic to the Bronze Age, ceremonies took place there. The hill could have been perceived as a kind of microcosms, reproducing, in ideological terms, all the actions set on Bouça da Cova da Moura.

We understand that the construction of knowledge in archaeological research is fundamentally grounded on interpretation and necessarily constrained by individual subjectivity. Even though we are incapable of reproducing rites or ceremonies that occurred at Bouça da Cova da Moura and their original meanings, we believe that we need to engage, as scientists looking for contexts, in a permanent questioning on the role of death, the relationship between the living and their ancestors, about the meaning of natural elements, scenarios and landforms, rocks, minerals and the transformation of matter. We believe that the humanly-built scenarios and performances set on this specialised place encompassed an intimate dialogue with the physical environment, ultimately linked with practices aiming to reproduce and express group’s identity and social cohesion.

Yet, if we admit that Bouça da Cova da Moura was a specialised place for over two thousand years, we need to acknowledge that it was maintained symbolically active, this is, imbued with narratives and meanings that were transmitted, from generation to generation, through memory.

P. Connerton, in his book entitled “How Societies Remember” distinguishes, in what he defines as “commemoration”, two different practices in the transmission and construction of memory: inscription, that relates with the construction of public monuments and text writing and incorporation, that relates with ritual practices and the treatment of the body.

Having in mind the dichotomy established by Connerton, the archaeological evidence and our reflections on Bouça da Cova da Moura, it seems that, from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age, communities who frequented this place used both types of practices of memory construction and transmission. Under the first category, inscription, we may include the construction of megalithic tombs and the creation of rock art. These were public monuments that became fixed and stable features in the landscape and could have worked, in the long term, as a platform of ideological stability and permanence amongst the different communities that frequented the place. Under

the second category, incorporation, we could think, on one hand, on the rituals associated with death and ancestors that have taken place in and around stone-built tombs. On the other hand, there are those rituals performed on rock art sites and on the remaining areas where we know that artefacts of great symbolic value were manipulated and/or deposited.

Bouça da Cova da Moura may be understood as the scenario of representation of a mythic universe for local prehistoric communities. In a process that started in the Neolithic, the memory of this *locale* may have been created and perpetuated by means of both practices of inscription (fixed constructions) and incorporation (ceremonies and rites). The more unsteady and movable character of the latter would have contributed to widen up its social range in order to enhance the creation of shared identities and social relationships.¹⁷

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¹⁷ Similar observations were made in the course of investigation at Campo de Caparinho, Assureira valley, in Montalegre, northern Portugal which has been interpreted as a "space of memory" used from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age (Bettencourt 2004, 2006).