



Prehistoric figures of boars in Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro, Portugal

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SUMMARY

Figures of boars, depicted since prehistory, occur throughout the world. In Portugal, statues known as *berrões*, made for the most part during the Iron Age, may portray boars or even pigs. This paper examines prehistoric figures of boars in Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro, Portugal, including that of Carlão in Alijó, in the Vila Real district.

Keywords: Boars, rock-art, zoomorphs, Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro

RIASSUNTO (LA RAFFIGURAZIONE DEL CINGHIALE A TRÁS-OS-MONTES-OS-MONTES E ALTO DOURO, PORTOGALLO)

Il cinghiale è stata rappresentato fin dalla più antica preistoria, in tutto il mondo. In Portogallo, durante l'età del Ferro, statue conosciute come '*berrões*' sembrano raffigurare cinghiali o, forse, maiali. Questo articolo esamina queste figure nelle località di Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro, in particolare quella presenti nella zona di Carlão in Alijó, distretto di Vila Real.

Parole chiave: cinghiale, arte rupestre, zoomorfo, Trás-os-Montes, Alto Douro

*Boulders that look like cliffs, and are altars (...)
Moans that sound like howls, and are prayers (...)
Monsters that look like monsters, and are gods (...)*

Miguel Torga

(Conference at Centro Trasmontano de São Paulo, March 14, 1954)

1. THE ORIGIN OF FIGURES OF WILD BOARS

The relationship between humans and wild boars goes back in time. The value of wild boar or wild pig in human consumption, relates to its acquisition, first by hunting and then domestication. Over millennia the boar gained much prestige—transforming the animal into an “object” of worship and even a true divinity. The issue of recognising and identifying an image as a wild boar or pig remains the same, whether the context is prehistoric, preclassical or even classical.

Studies show people have eaten wild boars ever since the Middle Palaeolithic. In Portugal, finds include bone remains from several Upper Palaeolithic sites. These are in the centre of the country at Lagar Velho, Lapa do Picareiro, Pego do Diabo, and Caldeirão (HOCKETT & HAWS 2009; VALENTE 2004).

Franco-Cantabrian cave art boar figures are scarce. Scholars identified a couple of painted *Sus scrofa* figures on the ceiling of the cave of Altamira in Santillana del Mar, Santander, Spain (BREUIL 1930; BREUIL & OBERMARIER 1935; RICE 1992). Some researchers, hold they are ill-done bison (FREEDOM 1987, LASHERAS CORRUCHAGA & GONZÁLEZ ECHEGARAY 2005) (fig. 1 A). So far, however, there are no figures of this animal among the

Palaeolithic engravings of the Côa Valley and Douro area. Yet, fragments of wild boar bones occur at the site of Fariseu on the left bank of the Côa River. These seem to be from one animal, and one hoof has burn marks. It is very probable people cooked and ate it (GABRIEL & BÉAREZ 2009, pp. 335 e 338).

There is a likely figure at Siega Verde, on the banks of the Águeda River, Ciudad Rodrigo, Salamanca. It is a short-legged shape with a big chest similar to a boar and not a hippopotamus, as published by Alcolea Gonzalez and colleagues (ALCOLEA GONZALEZ *et al.* 1995/1996) (fig. 1 b).

Wild boar may have become more important as a food source from the end of the last glaciation. At this point, large cold climate fauna disappeared. Bone remains of wild boars or pigs exist in the context of the end of the Upper Palaeolithic (HAWS 2003, 2004). These become much more abundant in the following Epi-Palaeolithic / Mesolithic transition period. Such finds turned up at sites like Muge and Buraca Grande in Portugal.

Wild boar seems to have been hunted and their figures appear around the 9th millennium BC. Several engravings (alone or associated with other animals) occur at Göbekli Tepe (that in Turkish means “Mount with Bel-

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ly”), in south Anatolia (SCHMIDT 2010). In the rock-art of Iberia, one can admire a wild boar hunting scene in the Levantine art shelter of El Charco del Agua Amar-ga in Alcañiz, Teruel, Aragon (BELTRAN 1970). Hunters, painted in dark red, use large bows and many arrows seem to strike an animal.

The presence of representations of wild boar increased over the next millennia, occurring in areas distant from each other (CLARK 1977). Some are small scul-ptures like that of Tappeh Sarab in Iran. Others are en-gravings such as those on Valcamonica’s statue-stela in Italy’s central Alps (CASSINI 1994). The increase may relate to an evident growth in consumption of wild boar from the 4th to 3rd millennia BC. The advent of domestication may explain this. Small statues, amu-lets, and wild-boar-shaped vases appear throughout Mesopotamia and many other areas of the fertile cres-cent. Although wild boars were abundant in the Nile Valley, Egypt, most finds from the predynastic period seem to be domestic pigs. The god Set or Seth some-times takes this form.

There are many Chalcolithic remains of wild boar and domesticated pigs in the centre and south of Portugal. Such finds are from sites such as Azambujal (Torres Vedras) and Leceia (Oeiras). In the north, wild boar bones are among the remains of fauna found in plac-es like Castro Palheiros (Murça) and Prazo in Freixo de Numão (V. N. Foz Côa). Teeth and bones suggest Chalcolithic wild boars were larger than Neolithic ones (CARDOSO 2005; ALBARELLA *et al.* 2005).

Besides eating its meat, people also used other parts of the wild boar. Although the skin was rough, it served to make clothing. Modified tusks became ornaments, tools, and even body armour and helmets, like those of the Mycenaean Shaft Graves (EVERSON 2004, pp. 9-10). Small figurines, coins and other objects with images of wild boars were quite common during the Iron Age throughout Europe

Celtic peoples who lived in Europe from 1000 BC seemed to relish wild boar meat (ROWLETT 1994). Thus, it became much-desired hunting prey. Considered fierce and dangerous, it was like a totem animal. Their view was bivalent. The animal was a symbol of cour-age and fertility, as well as one of war and chaos. Its image shows up in the upper part of some carnyx, the bronze trumpet played by Celts. Another representa-tion appears on the famous cauldron of Gundestrup. *Moccus*, the name of one of the gods of the Celtic pan-theon, may derive from the word mukkus or “pig” in proto-Celtic.

In classical Greece, the wild boar was the protagonist of several legends and myths. In one, the goddess Ar-temis sent a beast of extraordinary strength and poten-cy to destroy the city of Calydon. Later on in the story, Aeneus and his companions kill the wild boar. One of the labours of Heracles was to capture the Eryman-thian boar alive. In Homer’s “Odyssey”, the sorceress Circe changes King Odysseus’s companions into pigs and her slaves. Depictions of these and other legends appear on vases, statues, mosaics and other works of art throughout the Greek world. Despite this, these

animals were “unclean” because they ate excrement (Herodotus 484–425 BC). Romans replicated their im-agery throughout their Empire.

Like the Celts, Romans admired the wild boar for its strength and associated it with warriors. They also saw it as an intermediary with the “other world”. Some-times, after eating a wild boar, so the story goes, by magic, one could be reborn. Accounts of these festivi-ties inspired many legends, many of which have lasted until today. How can one forget the final scenes in the French comic books of *Uderzo and Goscinny*, where Asterix, Obelix and their Gauls friends celebrate and sing while eating wild boar.

Romans saw hunting wild boar as a great exercise, one that fortified character, especially in youths. Served at great feasts, the animal was also a sacrifice in vari-ous temples and shrines. Decorated vases and other objects often had figures of such animals. Many Ro-man mosaics depict it dead and alive. Their profusion in Italy and people’s affection for them led powers in Rome and other cities of the Empire to create reserves or *vivaria*. Here, in these fenced areas, wild boars were free to roam. Minders trained some to go to the owner or follow a keeper dressed as Orpheus. Often, owners of *vivaria* animals entered them in hunting games and animal fights. All such events at contests and festivals were for the delight of the rich and powerful.

The XX legion founded by Julius Caesar, which fought against the Cantabrians in Hispania, had a wild boar as a symbol. During the reign of Emperor Claudius, that same legion conquered Britannia and later helped build Hadrian’s Wall. It explains why there are so many images of this animal at Roman sites in England (PIGGOTT & DANIEL 1951).

THE BERRÔES

The word *Berrôes* is one breeders in Portugal use for uncastrated pigs. Many statues in north of the country, known as *berrôes*, date to the last decades of the 1st mil-lennium BC, for many, they suggest a Celtic influence in Portugal and northern Iberia. In Las Cogotas, Card-eñosa, in the province of Ávila, Spain, a *verraco* (boar in Spanish) has an Iberian inscription which translates as “*God Pig Brave Protector of the City of Adorja*”.

In truth, most of these sculptures do depict wild boars. Few of these zoomorph sculptures portray bulls and goats, or, as some researchers say, dogs and bears. Many are life-size, but some are over 1.5 metres long, while others measure only 30 centimetres. Altogether, there are over four hundred images like these on the Iberian Peninsula. These representations of the animal are naturalistic, showing details such as tusks, eyes, and genitals. Alas, few are intact. Most have dam-age on the head, some reduced to only trunk and feet. Many have “cupmarks” on their body or backs. Sev-eral have *polissoir* marks – abraded cuts often made by sharpening knives or other weapons (SANTOS Jr. 1975). The main area of distribution of the *berrôes* extends from the interior of Minho to the centre of the Iberian Plateau and there is a large number of occurrences between the region of Trás-os-Montes and the prov-

ince of Salamanca (fig. 2). Joaquim dos Santos Júnior (1975 a; 1975 b; 1983), who studied the statues in detail, points to almost fifty examples in Portugal (fig. 3).

At Bragança, in the north of Trás-os-Montes, there is a zoomorphic statue known as the “*Porca da Vila*” – the sow of the village (fig. 4). A column of a pillory (*pelourinho*) bores through the centre part of the its body (fig. 5). In Portugal, often pillories are of granite with metal bars on the top and are common sight in the main or most important square of a town and are symbols municipal liberty. The *pelourinho* of Bragança stood in the past in front of the *Domus Municipalis* – the medieval town hall (ALVES 1934, pp. 545-546). Today, visitors can admire the *berrão* of Bragança, on top of a four-step octagonal platform, near the main tower of the castle.

Among the most complete and well-conserved *berrões* are those of Torre de Moncorvo council (fig.6). There a group was found at Olival dos Berrões in Cabanas de Baixo near the confluence of the river Sabor and the ribeira da Vilarça. On the request of José Leite de Vasconcelos, an attempt to protect them, José Augusto Tavares sent them to Lisbon (TAVARES 1895; Vasconcelos 1913). Today, they are still in the National Archeology Museum, in Belém (fig.6).

A dozen of these sculptures are obvious wild boars (with large tusks), but others may represent the domestic breed. Many seem to be males. In fact the more intact ones display male genitals in the lower part of the torso. The famous “*Porca de Murça*” – sow of Murça – (fig.7) is in fact a male because it has testicles (FERNANDES 1993, BETTENCOURT 1996).

In most cases, *berrões* are found isolated. Even so, there are groups with more than five statues. One, at Monte de Santa Luzia, in Freixo de Espada à Cinta, has fifteen and the already referred Olival dos Berrões at Torre de Moncorvo has seven (SANTOS Jr. 1983).

In Portugal, around thirty of these statues came from hillforts (*castros*). One can find several today in churches, chapels or pillories from the historical period (LOPO 1895; SANTOS Júnior 1983; VASCONCELOS 1913). Another *berrão* at Picote, Miranda do Douro, seems to have been *in situ*, in the middle of a circle of stones, with a nine-metre access corridor. Santos Júnior excavated the site in the early 1950s. He found many animal bones, including cattle, goats and, rarer, pigs. Thus, the scholar thought it must have been a place for the cult of the wild boar. He considered it a true totemic-oriented protector god, adored by the *Dragones*, a pre-Celtic tribe that would have lived in the area (SANTOS Júnior 1983).

Authors like José Leite de Vasconcelos (1913) and João Parente (2003) think *berrões* were Celtic deities. Teresa Gamito (2005) associates the cult of the boar with the Castro culture in the *Vettones* area, but says it could predate Celtic influence. As a deity, the wild boar was according to many an interlocutor between humans and gods. The being went between the worlds of the dead and the living. It was common for Romans to take over indigenous cults. In Portugal the cult of *Endovélico* or *Endovelicus*, a multivalent deity that could “negotiate” life and death (VASCONCELOS 1913) could be

an example of that. The roman *Marcus Fannius Augurinus*, in *Ara* (Stela) dedicated to the god *Endovelicus*, carved on the back wild boar. In the sanctuary in honour of *Endovelicus* at São Miguel da Mota, Alandroal, in the Alentejo, there are at least two clear boar statues (fig. 17c) among many recently discovered sculptural pieces (GUERRA *et al.* 2003). In the stela of *Calpurnia Hegestrate* (fig. 8) that was found in the Herdade da Defesa dos Barros, in Avis (Alentejo) in the front, the epigraph dedicated by the father of the seventeen-year-old girl, is surrounded by pilasters and mouldings that allude to the “doors of Hades”. The front has an epigraph with the father of the seventeen-year-old girl dedication surrounded by pilasters and mouldings that allude to the “doors of Hades”. On the left side a dove pecks dusty fruit on a tree with dense foliage and the right one shows a wild boar that appears to forage for food under a tree. These elements all refer to the relationship between this and the other world (GONÇALVES 2007, pp. 348-349; 2013a; 2013b).

THE CASE OF THE *BERRÃO* OF CARLÃO, ALIJÓ

Carlão, a village in the municipality of Alijó, has a possible boar figure. The village lies in the parish of Carlão-Amieiro, where there is the renowned painted shelter of Pala Pinta (SANTOS Jr. 1933) A large vertical engraving can be seen on a granite boulder near the cemetery of the village. The rock lies in front of a hill with the ruins of Castro de Carlão (fig. 9). It has several rough but easy to climb steps that lead from the bottom of the outcrop to the top. Such features are commonplace in other rock sanctuaries like Panóias in the nearby council of Vila Real. (fig. 10).

The engraving is almost one and a half metres long and a metre high. A deep area forms the head and back, and a shallower part, the body (fig. 11). The figure has three short and square legs and show no details like hooves. One can make out a sketch of a fourth leg. The head has a pointed part, a possible representation of the muzzle. A small hole at the other end, close to the base of the rock, may depict a rounded tail. (fig. 10) All this leads us to think it is an engraved wild boar rather like other *berrões* in the region of Trás-os-Montes.

CONCLUSION

Figures of wild boars, though rare in Palaeolithic art, acquired relevance over the millennia. They may reflect the importance this animal came to have in the life of humankind. The qualities of the animal – digging the ground, eating detritus, fierceness and strength – are equally denigrated and respected. They form the base of a transformation and passage from animal to divinity in some Indo-European societies. Even so, other authors uphold it is not the warrior (physical strength) but the priest (spiritual fortitude), often associated with the shaman (CHEVALIER & GHEERBRANT 1994). Life in the forest eating the acorns brings it close to druids and cults linked to nature. It is the animal of excellence and possible sacrifice in some sanctuaries and its role became pivotal in the Iron Age. In Portugal, as in the interior north of the Peninsula, many statues then

represent wild boar and can be associated to gods or other divinities that may predate Celtic influence and continued to be the object of worship in Roman times. *Berrões* and other representations of wild boar would have had a prominent position in cults having possible associations with the passage to the world of the dead and the god Endovelico during the Roman period (GONÇALVES 2013a, 2013b). Carlão's engraved boar may be evidence of certain types of cults carried out

at small rock shrines throughout the north of Portugal during the Iron Age.

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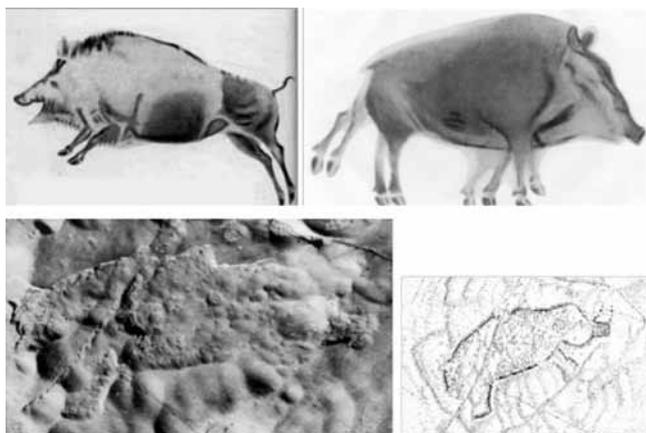
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Fig. 1 - A. Images of the two (n. 14 & 15) possible painted boars from Altamira Cave, Santillana del Mar, Santander in Spain (Watercolours by Henri Breuil - Breuil & Obermaier 1935). B. The possible engraving of a boar at Siega Verde, Agueda, Ciudad Rodrigo, Spain (Balbin Behrmann et al. 1995/1996:102)

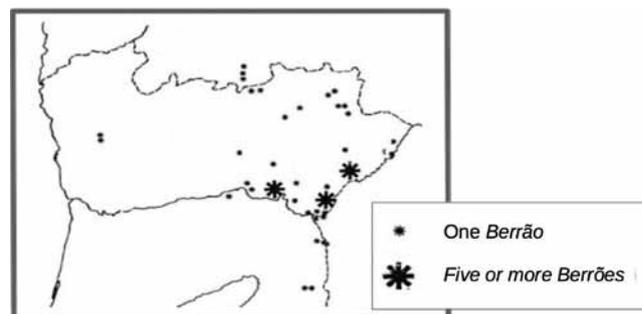


Fig. 2 - Map of the distribution of "berrões" in north Portugal - Minho, Trás-os-Montes, Douro and Beira Alta (adapted from Gamito 1997)



Fig. 3 - Examples of zoomorphic sculpture in the north of Portugal. On top the Berrão de Vila Flor (Photo Câmara de Vila Flor) and below the the Berrão do Adro, today in front of the church of Vila dos Sinos, Mogadouro, both in the Bragança District, Trás-os-Montes region.

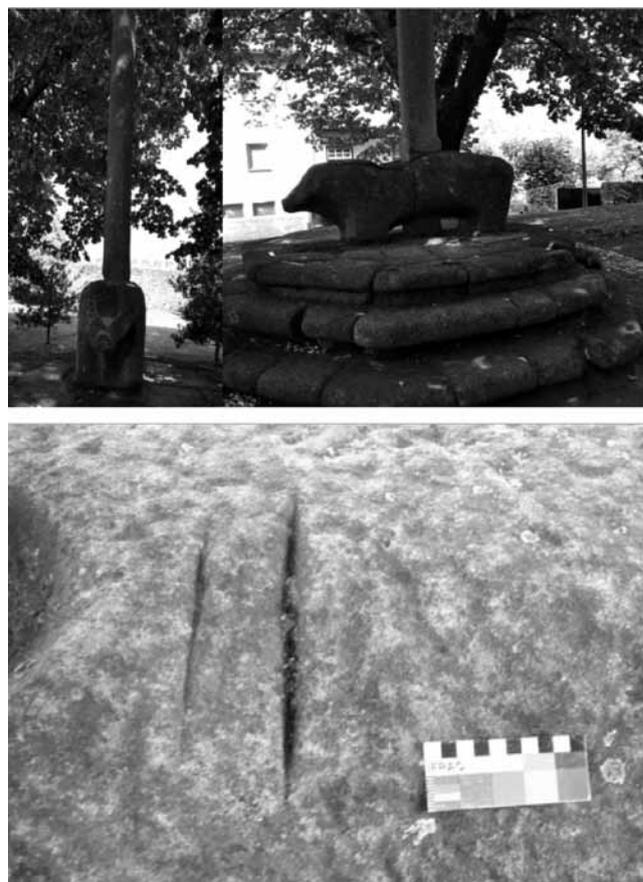


Fig. 4 /5 - The "Porca da Vila" in Bragança. The zoomorphic sculpture with a pillory, probably add the Fifteen century, in the central part of the body. In back the polissoir marks - often made by sharpening knives or other weapons (Photo MSA).



Fig. 6 - One of the well-conserved boar from Cabanas de Baixo, Torre de Moncorvo today at the National Museum of Archaeology in Lisbon, catalogue n.E 5249 (Photo MNA)

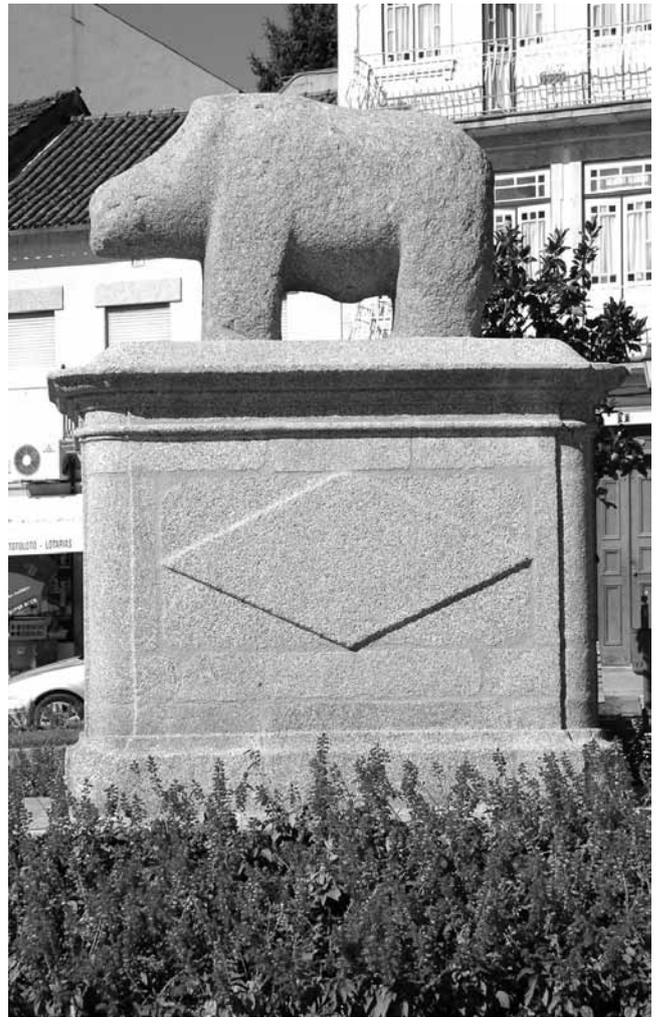


Fig.7 - "A Porca de Murça" - sow of Murça - is in fact a male because it has testicles (photo <https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berrão#/media/Ficheiro:PorcaMurca.jpg>)



Fig. 8 - The stela of Calpurnia Hegesistrate, found in the Herdade da Defesa dos Barros, in Avis (Alentejo). The wild boar between roots, could refer to the infernal world, while the bird, in the upper branches, represents the soul of the dead (Photo MNA).



Fig. 9 - Alijó, Carlão, the rock with the engraved figure of Berrão. (Photo MSA)



Fig. 10 - Alijó, Carlão, several rough but easy to climb steps that lead from the bottom of the outcrop to the top (Photo MSA).



Fig. 11 - Alijó, Carlão, a deep area forms the head and back, and a shallower part, the body of the boar (Photo MSA).