



UNRAVELLING MESSAGES THROUGH THE POST-PALAEOLITHIC ROCK ART OF ST ROMÃO HILL, GUIMARÃES, PORTUGAL

*Cardoso Faria Daniela Dolores**

ABSTRACT - The purpose of this text is to discuss the work developed on Paleolithic rock art located on the Hill of St. Romão in Guimarães, north-west Portugal.

St. Romão Hill (336 m) is a strategic site located on the right bank of the river Ave. From the hill you obtain a wide visual field over the Ave valley and it is also from where you can look north to the Serra do Gerês, north-easterly to the mountains of Cabreira, Alturas and Barroso, and to the south-east Penha Hill.

The study of rock art on this mountain was initiated by Francisco Martins Sarmiento, who in the 19th century reported the existence of signs sculpted in stone, but only in the 21st century, in 1999, was this issue approached again through some work done by the University of Minho. The Society Martins Sarmiento has done more intensive work in the last five years, with prospection work, photographic surveys and charts, of which the collected data are being studied in the ongoing research for a PhD in Quaternary Materials and Cultures in UTAD.

The St. Romão Hill, where the Citânia/Oppidum of Briteiros is still located, is in essence an enchanted place, full of legends and traditions. It is part of a long tradition of the deification of hills, which began in prehistoric times, with the existence of cults, beliefs, superstitions and ancestral rites, which suffered successive mutations, adapting themselves to the people who were successively established there. Neither Romanization nor Christianization managed to erase the roots and legacy of the old ways that ancient people left reflected in their buildings, materials and messages engraved on stones that eventually could be used in magical or religious acts.

It is also worth mentioning that this complex of petroglyphs being studied forms part of so-called Atlantic art and can be inserted in an extensive territory of vast symbolic significance during prehistory. This study may serve as a small contribution in order to obtain more data on the social and cultural identity of our ancestors in this territory and shows the importance of rock art as a source to establish the history or the biography of St. Romão Hill.

RIASSUNTO - Scopo di questo intervento è di affrontare e divulgare il lavoro compiuto nell'ambito dell'arte rupestre paleolitica sulla collina di S. Romão a Guimarães, Portogallo nord-occidentale.

La collina di S. Romão (336 m) rappresenta un sito strategico collocato sulla riva destra del fiume Ave. Dalla cima è possibile avere una vasta visuale sulla valle dell'Ave, e dallo stesso luogo è possibile osservare a nord la Serra do Gerês, a nord-est i monti Cabreira, Alturas e Barroso, e a sud-est la collina Penha.

I primi riferimenti all'arte rupestre su questa altura si devono a Francisco Martins Sarmiento, che nel XIX secolo segnalò l'esistenza di "segni scolpiti nella roccia", ma è solo nel XXI secolo, a partire dal 1999, che tale soggetto è stato di nuovo affrontato attraverso alcuni lavori realizzati dall'Università del Minho. La Società Martins Sarmiento ha fatto un lavoro più intensivo negli ultimi cinque anni, con prospezioni, sondaggi fotografici e carte, e i cui dati raccolti sono attualmente in studio nell'ambito di una ricerca per un dottorato in "Materiali e Culture del Quaternario" presso l'UTAD.

La collina di S. Romão, dove si può ancora osservare la Citânia/Oppidum di Briteiros, è in un luogo essenzialmente d'incanto, ricco di leggende e di tradizioni. Fa parte di una lunga tradizione di divinizzazione delle colline, iniziata in tempi preistorici, con l'esistenza di culti, credenze, superstizioni e riti ancestrali, che hanno subito successive mutazioni, adattandosi ai popoli che si susseguivano nell'abitare la zona. Né la romanizzazione, né la cristianizzazione sono riuscite a cancellare le radici e l'eredità dei vecchi usi che i popoli antichi hanno lasciato riflessi nelle loro costruzioni, materiali e messaggi incisi sulle rocce, che poterono poi essere usati anche per atti di carattere magico e religioso.

Inoltre, è doveroso menzionare che questo complesso di petroglifi, il cui studio è in corso, va collocato nella cosiddetta Arte Atlantica, e può essere inserito in un esteso territorio che ha avuto ampio significato simbolico nel corso della Preistoria. Tale studio può costituire un piccolo contributo al fine di ottenere maggiori dati sull'identità sociale e culturale dei nostri antenati in questo territorio, e mostra l'importanza dell'arte rupestre in quanto fonte per ricostruire la storia o la biografia della collina di S. Romão.

* PhD student of Universidade de Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro - Portugal (UTAD); researcher at Instituto Terra e Memória (ITM) Centro de Estudos Superiores de Mação



INTRODUCTION: ST. ROMÃO HILL'S LOCATION

St Romão Hill is located on Portugal's Northwestern Peninsula, in the Vale do Ave region, Braga district, Guimarães county, between S. Salvador de Briteiros and Donim's villages (river Ave's left bank). It is a strategic place since it is on an elevated place, up to 336m high and 250m wide, from which one can obtain a large view on to the Ave valley and from where one can also observe Gerês ridge in the north, Cabreira's, Alturas' and Barroso ridges in the north-west, and in the south-east Penha Hill (Fig. 1).

Geologically this region is inserted in mountainous chains, granitic in general (Ribeiro 1987), and Briteiros granite is the name of the predominant rock type (geological chart at 1:50.000 scale). In this geographical area there is also a great abundance of river courses. The Agrela creek (which has its source in Sobreposta, S. Salvador de Briteiros' neighbouring village), is also known as Briteiros or Febras, which finally bears the name of Rabelo, on the right bank of the Ave river a little upriver from Caldas' of Taipas (Cardozo 1990: 9-10). The Ave river's source is on Cabreira's ridge and runs about 101 km until it flows, into the Atlantic at Vila do Conde.

All these characteristics permitted several settlement nuclei to be set down in this territory, given the existence of abundant granitic outcrops and water resources.

In this rich territory in the Northwestern Peninsula panorama (for which we have several materialities, like settlements, rock art places, historical documents, toponymic and ethnographic data, legends, popular beliefs and architectural elements), the present investigation work is being carried out on St. Romão's Hill rock art, where the *Citânia de Briteiros* is situated. This work is being developed in a PhD thesis entitled 'Quaternário, Materiais e Culturas', through UTAD (Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro University).

ST. ROMÃO'S HILL OCCUPATION—LONG DIACHRONY

On St. Romão's Hill, the oldest occupation that we have knowledge of, which goes back to the fourth millennium BC (Valdez et al. 2006:79), is suggested to be the Rock of Signs. This is a big panel and is located in the third *Citânia de Briteiros* wall with rock art representations in the Atlantic art style. Also in the *Citânia* surroundings we have information about the presence of megalithic traces, namely some tumuli dispersed though the valley, mentioned by Martins Sarmiento (Sarmiento 1905), ethnographer and archaeologist who researched this geographical area in an intensive way, and others, mapped by Mário Cardozo and Portugal's Geological Chart (Cruz et al. 2011:264).

However, the most relevant occupation in this geographical area and one of the most paradigmatic places of Portuguese archeology is the *Citânia de Briteiros*, which has been quoted in antiquarian texts since the 16th century.

'It is believed that Briteiros has had its genesis during the Bronze Age, although only recently some remains of that period began to emerge in this summit, namely evidence of habitat and a coeval necropolis, with pits dug in the grit' (Valdez et al. 2006: 59). From the same epoch typical petroglyphs of this chronology are dispersed throughout the settlement and its surroundings, namely circular figures, meander shapes, labyrinth shapes and others. However, *Citânia* is more commonly known as a typical place of the Iron Age that was later Romanized, and evidence of it is seen in most of the remains exhumed in the excavations since 1875, when Martins Sarmiento began his archeological work here. This research persisted throughout the 20th century, when Mário Cardozo also did work. At the present time efforts are still being made in order to proceed with this important work.

However, there are traces which show that after the passage of the Romans by this mount, another possible occupation existed, even as brief, as can be seen through the ruins of a chapel with a medieval adjacent necropolis (Cardozo 1968:110).

From the last quarter of the 19th century to the present day numerous archeological works were conducted by Martins Sarmiento and later Mário Cardozo. Cardozo, besides the excavation he conducted, gave a fundamental contribution to there storaction of the ruins in this important settlement. The large amount of exhumed material is very varied in its nature, pottery being the most abundant; in an equally significant number were decorated architectural elements and in a lesser number bronze artefacts, jewellery and coins. These assets are presently exhibited in the archeological museum of the Martins Sarmiento Society and also the *Cultura Castreja Museum* in Briteiros. All these findings helped us to understand how the different communities that lived since immemorial times on St Romão's Hill interacted and perceived it.

This small note about the continuous occupations of St Romão's Hill do not aim to explain exhaustively all the transformations that the hill suffered over thousands of years, but only to establish a brief chronological sequence for the place.

DEIFICATION OF ST ROMÃO'S HILL

Throughout several centuries and especially in the Middle Ages, common people's understanding considered rock art as alluding to the Moorish women who used to live in certain sites, considered magic, sacred

or impenetrable, places where saints walked by, treasure locations, diabolic manifestations, enchantments or witchcraft.

We can find evidence of this interpretation in the toponymy that still remains in our days and which exemplifies it, often relating it to rock art and popular legends.

Around the territory under study there is a multitude of toponyms with these characteristics, a collection made by Martins Sarmiento, from whom we can give examples as follows: Moorish Boulder (Sarmiento 1933), Lady's Boulder (Sarmiento 1933), Stone that talks (Sarmiento 1933), Moorish Sinks (Sarmiento 1899:10,11) Souls Boulder (Sarmiento 1901:19), St Gonçalos' Little Boulder (Sarmiento 1999), St Gonçalos' Little Foot (Sarmiento 1884), Slabs (Sarmiento 1999), Viewpoint (Sarmiento 1999), Signs (Sarmiento 1884), Little Foot Boulder (Sarmiento 1999:87), Puddles Mount (Sarmiento 1999) and Pot Boulder (Sarmiento 1933).

As demonstrated above, the allusions to an ancestral past are frequently associated with 'mythical entities – the mourish women', and in Portugal this kind of naming is used very often to identify the archeological sites (Alves 2011: 76). These terminologies are fundamental for detecting and understanding the past, as memory transmission vehicles, although many of these designations' interpretations could have been altered by historical contexts.

The rock art representation at elected places are also often considered sacred places, of cults which persisted through time, with divinity-associated rituals which were revered in the mountains, woods, streams, lakes, rivers and seas. These places worked as cult locations in the pagan epochs, and with the introduction of Christianity they ended up by cohabiting and fusing with the roman religious structure.

This reflection leads us to think that in the studied territory there are traces of elements related to possible deities accounting for the appearance of an element that can be associated with traces of ritual practices existing in Citânia of Briteiros, St Romão's Hill. During excavations on that site, Martins Sarmiento discovered a feminine statuette in 1876, 46cm tall, of barbarian aspect, with defined breasts and her hands placed on the womb, and it seemed to have some twisted necklaces (torques) on her neck (Fig. 2). This malformed granite sculpture appeared near two circular houses, reconstructed by Martins Sarmiento, and at the time was identified as belonging to the mother-goddesses, (*matres, matrae* or *matronae gallaicae*), from a Celtic origin, givers of abundance (Cardozo 1968:108).

Facing this information, was this image, in this place, considered a goddess, a deity adored until the advent of Christianity? It is known that with the introduction of other cultures at St Romão's Mount, other devotion practices transformed and adapted themselves.

So it would be logical to consider that initially there could have been a cult related to this feminine deity and that this figure was only replaced in a later period by an icon related to Christianity, St Romão, who gave his name to the place. 'It's curious to verify that in Citânia de Briteiros, and in other mounts and places, this hagio-toponym of St Romão is still, in a way, linked to the Roman territorial occupation times, because Romão is a synonym of Roman and of Romanic' (Cardozo 1968:109).

With the introduction of new religious concepts the divinities were replaced, and new temples were built at the same cult sites. There is a kind of a reoccupation of these sites, as in the case of the construction of a medieval chapel linked with St Romão's cult, in Citânia de Briteiros, of which only its ruins remain nowadays (Fig. 3), as well as some graves. At that place we can encounter today a stone crucifix with the following inscription: 'AQUI FOI A / ANTIGA CA/PELA de S. ROMÃO'.

These temple and chapel foundations, in most *castros* (settlements), have had as their purpose to 'make one forget a god or goddess who dominated there, by a thaumaturge of new religion' (Cardozo 1968:107).

More recently, in 1853, as there only existed St Romão's dedicated temple ruins, the people erected a new chapel (Fig. 4), near the previous one. Yet veneration to St Romão is still maintained today through the celebration of a procession in his honour on 9 August (Fig. 5). Beyond this celebration, the people transmit, from generation to generation the history of St Romão's legend and of the Penedo da Moura, among others, connecting the sacred with the profane.

As we can verify, St Romão's Hill was a preferred site for different communities that lived there, and all of them left traces of their beliefs and lives.

ROCK ART AT ST ROMÃO'S HILL

The gathering of legends and traditions conducted by Martins Sarmiento in the 19th century was of great importance for rock art investigation, since he gathered a considerable amount of information through his contact with the population, which still kept many of these stories, memories and testimonies of an ancestral past. It was from this information that many of the engravings were detected by him, and it is a consequence of that that today we have the possibility of locating or relocating these places.



St Romão's Hill, symbolically active through thousands of years, has left several encoded messages engraved in its materialities about the needs of the communities that settled there as well as their possible spiritual and religious lives. Rock art may have been one of the many communication forms that survived, although we know we cannot decode it. However, with archeology's contribution, we try to interpret it, establishing lectures linking the environmental context with these representations.

The habit of creating rock art on certain rocks was continued until very recent times. These decorated surfaces are generally located in prominent topographies, sites of passage, crossroads, etc, and legends are usually connected to 'a pagan past which has to be exorcized from the territory. Because of that, the engravings of crosses, footprints, rosaries, etc., in the rocks, are very frequent, particularly on those that have rock art' (Sanchez 2003:89).

With the St Romão's Hill dispersed rock art we can note a clear relationship between the engravings and the Ave River valley and its creeks, for instance Febras creek. Each rock or rock art nucleus, with a concentration of bigger or smaller engravings, expresses a dynamic that does not suggest a causality. 'The topographic conditions of the rock art locations also condition the actions, observations and interpretations' (Sanchez 2003:95).

The site locations of the engraved panels can give us clues for possible interpretations of the representations on the hillside as well as those encountered inside the settlement; thus several readings can be made. These can be considered territory marks, since they were found in passage sites; they can allude to rituals; they can be representations of the surrounding landscape or even astral representations.

In order to better understand the distribution of these rock art manifestations located on St Romão's Hill we must now present the several locations, followed by a small explanatory synthesis of each of these nuclei: Citânia de Briteiros first wall interior (visits area); Rock of Signs, near the third Citânia wall: Quinta do Paço, between the second and third Citânia walls; Donim 2 (at a few hundred metres below the Citânia, in Donim's village).

CITÂNIA DE BRITEIROS (VISITS AREA)

The 14 engraved surfaces detected so far are located inside the Citânia's visiting area and are distributed along the streets that access the habitation units, in some cases included in the pavements of their courtyards. (Cruz et al. 2011:258).

Most of the rock art manifestations are situated on granitic outcrops of small dimensions, generally disposed horizontally or on inclined surfaces, in most cases looking as if they took advantage of the rock shape in order to elaborate the engraving. On the iconographic repertoire level, the engravings consisted mainly of concentric circles, cup marks, footprints, a double spiral, a spiral (among others not yet determined), all engraved with the pecking technique (Figs. 6, 7).

These rock art manifestations can be classified as being from the Iron Age period, and some possibly even later periods, either because of their motifs typology or the context where they are inserted.

In some rare cases there are also surfaces on which we can observe the coexistence of rock art representations from the Bronze Age and from the Iron Age, sharing the same rock surface with Latin epigraphs.

Penedo dos Sinais (Rock of Signs)

The Penedo dos Sinais rock art nucleus was initially located by Martins Sarmiento, who described and registered it in the 19th century (Sarmiento 1905). This site was only relocated in 2006, and its graphic and photographic recording was conducted in the Universidade do Minho work seminar, in collaboration with CNART (Centro Nacional de Arte Rupestre).

This place is located near the third Citânia wall line, in a place possibly reserved at the time when the settlement was occupied, on a scarp hillside of difficult access. It is a granitic outcrop of irregular appearance, disposed horizontally and divided into two natural panels on which a great number of concentric circles were engraved, with or without a central cup mark, some united by meanders, proto-labyrinthic representations and others (Fig. 8). These representations are included in the so-called technical-stylistic cycle of Atlantic art, referring the hypothetical conception of this engravings and sculptures group to its initial phase, with correspondence with the Neolithic/Chalcolithic final period (Valdez et al.2008:78).

Quinta do Paço (Paço's Farm)

This site was detected in 2006, in the seminar work of the Universidade do Minho archaeology students, and is located between the Citânia de Briteiros second and third walls, a few metres above Penedo dos Sinais.

In this site there are seven panels which were divided by the existing fractures and the engravings are inscribed and distributed by five panels only, placed horizontally.

The granite support where these engravings are placed presents itself as very fractured and in a bad conservation state, revealing, however, a large concentration of engravings performed with the percussion technique.

Most of the motifs here represented are circular figures, similar to the ones found in the Penedo dos Sinais, a footprint and some indeterminate items. Generally their dimensions vary between 22 cm and 33 cm (Fig. 9).

Donim 2

This rock was also detected in 2006 and is located in the middle of an agricultural path (walking trail), at a few hundred metres below Citânia and the half-slope of the valley that descends into Donim. This is a large surface, placed in the horizontal, near the ground, with a very regular appearance (Fig. 10). It is quite eroded, thus presenting some difficulty in perceiving some of the rock art representations, although they can be better seen through the use of near ground light. Unlike the previous ones, this large surface presents itself as mostly unengraved, but we can observe the engraving of a large sexed anthropomorphic in a praying position, concentric circles, cup marks, along with other reticulated traced engravings (possibly a boat). These representations possibly fall into the schematic art cycle (Fig. 11).

All of these above mentioned rock art nuclei were the target of graphic and photographic tracing and are now being studied in the PhD thesis about rock art on St Romão's Hill.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This work is not aimed at creating an extensive account of St Romão's Hill and the communities that settled there. It aims only to present a brief description, analysis and reflection about its successive occupations and in particular presents some data about the rock art located there, for it can be considered as one more element of the several testimonies of our ancestors' lives. Several genetic order factors were referred to, like the geographic area's toponomy, associated with the naming of archeological traces sites (rock art), and belief-related aspects, the practised cult at St Romão's Hill and some legends associated with it were also referred to (St Romão and Penedo da Moura legends).

Hills always were and still are special places all over the world, because of their privileged position, and they have been searched for by man in his unending search for approaching and communicating with God.

The same happens with St Romão's Hill, since it is an elevated place, which combined with the rest of the favourable physical conditions (a strategic place, water resources, raw materials, access to fertile land, communication) provided settlement for the people in this territory through thousands of years.

Given this reflection, has the rock art been a means that man has found to graphically realize his cognitive and symbolic universe? Much has been written on the interpretation of rock art, but we do not possess the code to decipher their messages. This study is in a phase of development, so that what is expected in the future is to obtain more data.

At the moment what we can hold about rock art is that the events in question are not unique to this site, as they fall into a vast territory of symbolic significance during prehistory and correspond mainly with Atlantic art, although some of the representations (the smallest number) relate to schematic art. These designations and classifications are very problematic and there is a long way to go yet.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ALVES L.

2001 Rock art and Enchanted Moors: the significance of rock carvings in the folklore of north-west Iberia, in R.J. Wallis and K. Lymer (eds), *A Permeability of Boundaries? New approaches to the Archaeology of Art, Religion and Folklore*, British Archaeological Reports, International Series S936. Oxford, pp. 71-78

CARDOSO D.

2012 Um olhar sobre os últimos trabalhos desenvolvidos no âmbito da investigação da arte rupestre da Citânia de Briteiros em Guimarães, IV Jornadas de Jovens em Investigação Arqueológica (Atas), vol. I, pp. 163-168.

CARDOZOM.

1968 A capela de S. Romão da Citânia de Briteiros, Sep. Rev. Guimarães, vol. 78, pp. 107-111.

CARDOZO M.

1996 Citânia de Briteiros e Castro de Sabroso – Notícia Descritiva, 13ª edição da Sociedade Martins Sarmiento, Guimarães.

COIMBRA F.

2005c Arte Rupestre e lendas populares, Revista de Portugal, Nova Série, n.º 2, pp. 10-13.

CRUZ G., CARDOSO D.

2011 Arte rupestre de Briteiros. Investigação e possível musealização, V Congresso de Arqueologia do Interior Norte e Centro de Portugal (Atas), Pinhel, pp. 255-271.

LEMOS F, CRUZ G.

2007 Citânia de Briteiros: Povoado proto-histórico, ProtoHistoric Settlement, Guimarães: Sociedade Martins Sarmiento.

RIBEIRO O.

1987 Geografia de Portugal – I. A posição geográfica e o território, vol I, Lisboa.

SANCHES, M. J.

2003 Escrever na paisagem - sentido para as 'artes rupestres', in DCTP/FLUP (ed.) *Arquitectando Espaços. Da Natureza à Metápolis*, Atas da 7ª mesa-Redonda da Primavera, Porto-Coimbra, pp. 85-104.

SARMENTO F.

1884 Materiais para a Arqueologia do concelho de Guimarães, in Revista de Guimarães, vol. 1 (4), pp.161-189.



SARMENTO F.

1899 Materiais para a Arqueologia do concelho de Guimarães, in Revista de Guimarães, vol. 16 (1), pp.5-22.

SARMENTO F.

1901a Materiais para a Arqueologia do concelho de Guimarães, in Revista de Guimarães, vol. 18 (1-2), pp.8-29.

SARMENTO F.

1933 Dispersos: colectânea de artigos publicados, desde 1876 a 1899, sobre Arqueologia, Etnologia, Mitologia, Epigrafia e Arte Pré-Histórica, Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade

SARMENTO M.

1999 Antígua – Apontamentos de Arqueologia, in Sociedade Martins Sarmiento (ed.), Guimarães.

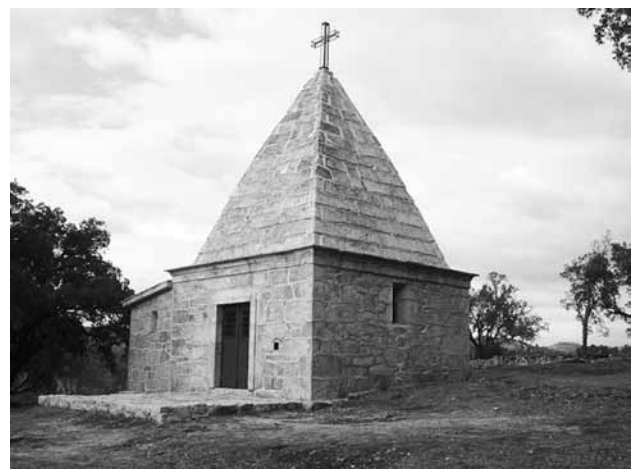
VALDEZ J., OLIVEIRA L.

2006 A arte rupestre da Citânia de Briteiros – o Penedo dos Sinais, um caso atlântico, Revista de Guimarães, vol. 115-116, pp. 51-84.



▲ Fig. 1 - St. Romão's Mount - general view (Sociedade Martins Sarmiento archive)

Fig. 2 - Granite sculpture of a feminine deity from Citânia de Briteiros (Sociedade Martins Sarmiento archive) ►



◀ Fig. 3 - Ruins of St. Romão's Chapel in Citânia de Briteiros ((Sociedade Martins Sarmiento archive)

▲ Fig. 4 - S. Romão Chapel in Citânia de Briteiros (Sociedade Martins Sarmiento archive)



Fig. 5 - Procession in honor to S. Romão at Citânia de Briteiros (avenidacentral@blogspot.com)



Fig. 6 - Pecked double spiral located in the visitable area of Citânia de Briteiros (Daniela Cardoso)

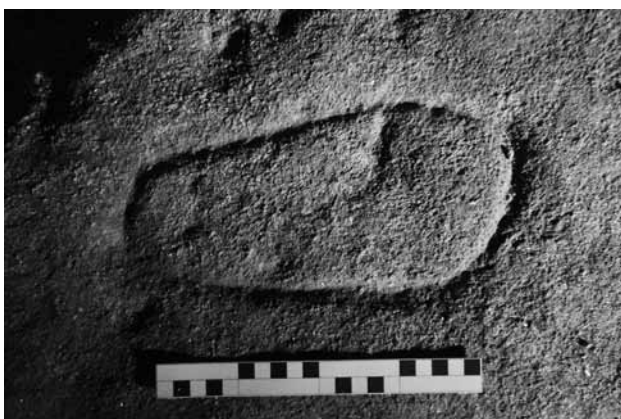


Fig. 7 - Engraved footprint located in the visitable area of Citânia de Briteiros (Daniela Cardoso)



Fig. 8 - General view of the engraved pannels at Penedo dos Sinais located in the 3° wall of Citânia de Briteiros (CNART-Centro Nacional de Arte Rupestre)



Fig. 9 - View general of the pannel 3 of Quinta do Paço located in the 2° wall of Citânia de Briteiros (George Nash)



Fig. 10 - View general of the rock art pannel located in the site Donim 2 (Daniela Cardoso)

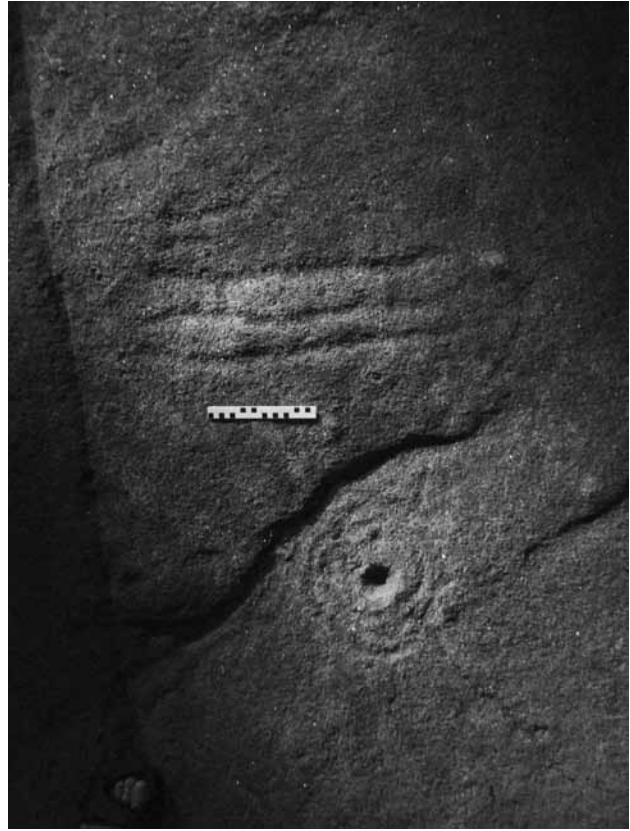


Fig. 11- Detail of the engravings in the site Donim 2 (George Nash)