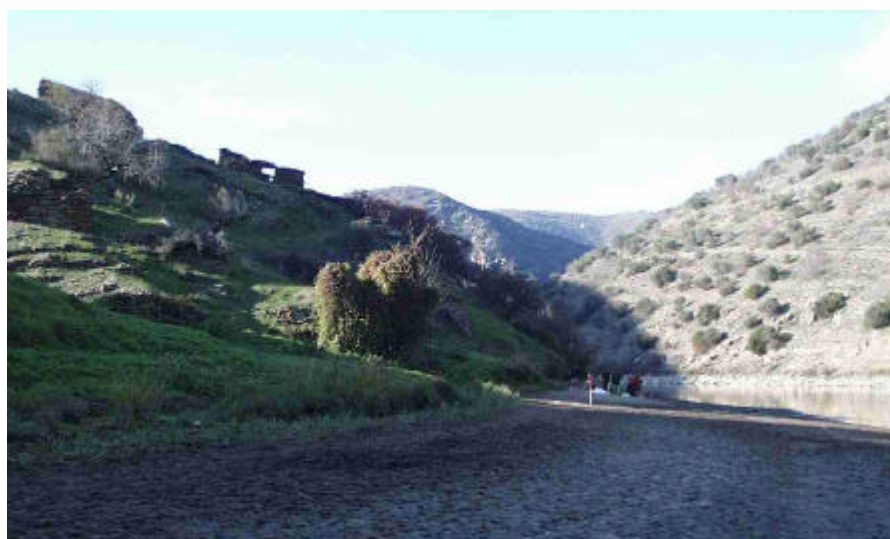


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Archaeologically-dated Paleolithic rock art at Fariseu, C ôa valley

In early December 1999, due to construction work at the site of the new Barca d'Alva international bridge, EDP (Electricidade de Portugal) lowered the water level of the Pocinho dam lake by about 3 meters. Taking advantage of the situation, teams from the Côa Valley Archaeological Park (PAVC) and the National Rock Art Research Center (CNART) surveyed the margins of the Douro and the Côa exposed upstream of Pocinho. On September 7, archaeological testing of a small fluvial beach under the direction of Thierry Aubry revealed a richly decorated panel at the locality of Fariseu. Situated a few hundred meters downstream from the mouth of the Piscos stream, this place was already part of the National Monument of Côa rock art sites because decorated rocks had been found there in 1995.



Fariseu. Upstream view of the beach exposed by the lowering of the Pocinho level and emplacement of the archaeological excavations.

The panel is perpendicular to the river, and was executed on an outcrop that represents the downstream limit of a sequence of Quaternary deposits where sterile fluvial levels alternate with colluvial deposits containing remains of Upper Paleolithic settlements. The 3 meter deep trench also shows that this sequence is capped by Holocene deposits (recent lake-bottom silts and historical, probably medieval, colluvium) of varying thickness.



Fariseu. The archaeological test. The decorated panel is at the right.

At the top, the Quaternary sequence contains a Final Magdalenian of "Carneira type" with thick curved-backed points featuring *sur enclume* retouch. This industrial facies has been dated to circa 10,000 BP, by C14 as well as by TL, at sites in the littoral of Portugal such as Carneira and Bocas. It is also known in the Côa valley as well, particularly at the site of Quinta da Barca Sul, where it has been TL dated to that same period. At Fariseu, the corresponding level contained the first mobiliary art item found in the region: a flat schist pebble engraved on both sides with geometrical stylized animal motifs that have parallels in the Azilian of France.

The lower section of the deposits contains Proto-Solutrean or Gravettian levels which cover the decorated panel, making it possible to date the execution of the rock art to ca. 21,000 BP, or earlier. The abraded grooves and the pecking negatives present the white color characteristic of recent, experimentally induced impacts on surfaces of the same kind of rock. The fact that they are so fresh suggests that the accumulation of the deposits was relatively rapid and, consequently, that all the motifs that make up this complex palimpsest date from a single period.



Fariseu. The buried panel (left sector).



Fariseu. The buried panel (right sector).

The lithic sample collected in the small area tested is not big enough to allow a more precise diagnostic of the assemblage. Norbert Mercier, from the Gif-sur-Yvette Laboratory, collected samples of sediments and burnt quartzites and made the environmental radiation measurements necessary for TL and OSL dating.

The observations already undertaken by the CNART team working at the site under the direction of António Martinho Baptista suggest that, stylistically, the motifs are entirely compatible with the chronology estimated on the basis of the

archaeological material. The species represented are those commonly found in the Côa Paleolithic art, with bovines and equines dominating. The technique of representing the movement through the depiction of two heads on a single body is documented by two excellent figures of horse, one in each of the two sectors of the panel.

The water will rise again to the normal Pocinho level on December 22, 1999, submerging the panel and profiles, which are being adequately protected in the mean time. Archaeological work in this locality will begin again next Summer, in the framework of programmed lowerings of the water level agreed between IPA and EDP.

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