

CUP-MARKS FROM THE NORTHWEST OF THE IBERIAN PAENINSULA

Some “datable” examples

Preliminary note

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Everyone that studies rock art knows well the difficulties in dating the engravings. Among these, cup-marks are specially hard to date, because, for example, in the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula they appear since Prehistory until recent times (COSTAS GOBERNA and NOVOA ÁLVAREZ, 1993). This way, the aim of this article is to present some cases where dating cup-marks can be reached by contextual analysis, obtaining, of course, only a relative chronology. I will not focus in interpreting this symbol, because that was already done, by a preliminary approach, four years ago (COIMBRA, 2001) at the Verbania Congress called “Le incisione rupestri non figurative nell’arco alpino meridionale”, organized by the Museo del Paesaggio. What matters now is trying to date the cup-marks.

But before presenting the referred examples, it’s important to make a short “History” of the cup-mark symbol, in order to understand it better:

The oldest cup-marks that we know about, appear in a stone cover of a child grave in the cave of La Ferrassie (France), dated by Denis Peyrony from the Middle Paleolithic. But possibly the “dots” painted in Paleolithic art have the same value, or meaning, of the pecked cup-marks. The same goes to the dots present in Copper Age rock paintings from several regions in the Iberian Peninsula.

In the Neolithic, cup-marks appear associated to megaliths, seeming to be related to a funerary context. They can be seen also on menhirs, for example in the South of Portugal. During Bronze Age, the depiction of this symbol is very developed, being the motif present everywhere in European Rock Art (COIMBRA, 2005). During Iron Age, the peoples from the Hillforts from the Northwest of the Iberian Peninsula still use it very commonly in their fortified villages, as it happens in Roriz (Barcelos), Briteiros (Guimarães), S. Lourenço (Esposende), Mozinho (Penafiel), Sanfins (Paços de Ferreira), among others in Portugal, and also in S. Tecla (La Guardia) and Tortoreos (As Neves) both in Pontevedra (Galicia, Spain).

In this article I will present only eight examples of cup-marked rocks, from different archaeological sites in the Northwest of the Iberian Peninsula. They have a serial number in order to make its description easier:

1 – Laje dos Sinais (Barcelos, Portugal)

“Laje dos Sinais” is a Portuguese name for Rock of the Signs. As a matter of fact, one can find several “signs” on this rock, and, among them, there are three aligned cup-marks associated to concentric circles (COIMBRA, 2003). In the North West of the Iberian Peninsula there are countless examples of this association (PEÑA SANTOS, 1979; VASQUEZ VARELA, 1990; FABREGAS VALCARCE, PEÑA SANTOS and COSTAS GOBERNA, 2000). Nowadays, usually, the researchers that study the rock art from this region consider it from the end of the III millenium BC / beginning of

the II Millenium BC (PEÑA SANTOS, COSTAS GOBERNA, and HIDALGO CUÑARRO, 1996). Antonio Beltran argues that this art belongs to peoples that know metal work and burials in megaliths (BELTRAN MARTINEZ, 1998).

Since the last eight years, several researchers have been relating some petroglyphs from the North West of the Iberian Peninsula with megalithic art (COSTAS GOBERNA and PEREIRA GARCIA 1996-97; PEÑA SANTOS and REY GARCÍA, 1997). This association seems also to be the case of Laje dos Sinais, wich has some engravings very similar to Irish Megalithic Art that don' t appear in the rest of the region (COIMBRA, 2005). However, according to a personal information from Rey Garcia, recently there was found in Galicia (Spain) another rock with engravings similar to those from Laje dos Sinais.

2 – Cup-marks from Mogor (Marín, Pontevedra, Spain)

Mogor is a well known place among the Galician rock art, because of the famous labyrinth. But, besides this symbol, the place has other interesting rocks with engravings like cup-marks associated to concentric circles (Fig. 1). This association, in this rock, occur in a deeper way than in the previous example, because in Mogor the cup-marks appear even between the rings of the circles and not only in its centre or outside these motifs, like in Laje dos Sinais.

The image that I present here is from a rock that has a flat surface, parallel to the ground, with geometric motifs, datable from Early Bronze Age. Gallician rock art researchers usually consider these engraved flat surfaces as having a deep symbolism (PEÑA SANTOS and REY GARCIA, 1993). There are many other examples of this kind, but the limit for this article doesn' t allow to mention them here.

3 – Rock from Chã de Arefe, (Barcelos, Portugal)

This rock has the particularity of being placed over a megalithic *tumulus*, not yet excavated. It presents seventeen cup-marks and was put there possibly after or during the construction of the monument. Near by, there's an important necropolis from Early Bronze Age, with tombs constructed with very large round rocks forming the shape of an "U". Very curiously, in the center of this rock from Chã de Arefe, one can see a kind of an "U" made by seven cup-marks (Fig. 2). Could it be the depiction of one of the *tumuli*?

As I already refered, cup-marks appear sometimes associated with megaliths. These monuments, build in Neolithic times, were used again in Portugal untill Bronze Age. So, this rock can be possibly related to this period, because it' s over a tumulus and seems to depict one of the tombs of the near necropolis. However let' s make clear that it' s only a possibility.

4 – Cup-marks from S. Tecla Hillfort (La Guardia, Pontevedra, Spain)

S. Tecla is a native village occupied in the end of the 1st century BC. However there are signs of earlier human presence, constituted by several carved rocks with spirals, concentric circles, cup-marks and channels.

Most of the carvings are surely older than the buildings, since they continue under the walls (Fig. 3) and that' s what happens with some cup-marks (COSTAS GOBERNA, 1988). This way, the 1st century BC is the *terminus ante quem* for dating these cup-marks.

As I already referred, several *Castros* (Hillforts) from the North West of the Iberian Peninsula have cup-marked rocks on their living areas. These examples probably belong to Iron Age or to late Bronze Age, which is the beginning of the occupation of these settlements.

5 – Rock 1 from Roriz Hillfort (Barcelos, Portugal)

This *Castro* has six rocks with cup-marks around its living area (COIMBRA, 2005). Some rocks have only cup-marks, one of them has a big channel and Rock 1 has eight cup-marks associated with three footprints (Fig. 4). This association also happens outside hillforts, as for example in the rock known as “Pegadinhas de S. Gonçalo” (the little footprints of Saint Gonçalo), in Penafiel (Oporto District) and in the Rock of Saint Eufémia in Terras de Bouro (Braga District), among other examples. The popular religious mind still sees on both of them the passage of the two saints that left their footprints on the rocks. Usually the footprints in Portugal are dated from Late Bronze Age until Late Iron Age (GOMES and MONTEIRO, 1977). This way, the cup-marks that appear on this Rock 1 can have the same chronology. Let's refer that Roriz Hillfort was excavated by archaeologists from Oporto University that found ceramics from Late Bronze Age (ALMEIDA, 1997).

6 – Panoias Sanctuary (Vila Real, Portugal)

Panoias is a sanctuary from the Roman Period, built in an area with very large rocks during the end of the 2nd century AD / beginning of the 3rd century AD by *Gaius C. Calpurnius Rufinus*. In some of the rocks there are carved stairs, rectangular or circular cavities and inscriptions that allow us to know the rituals that took place in the sanctuary and the gods to whom they were dedicated. But there are other rocks that still show cup-marks and channels, certainly from a previous sanctuary (Fig. 5). Well, if the Roman buildings were made in the end of the 2nd century AD, this is a *terminus ante quem* for dating those engravings that must be from Iron Age or from Bronze Age.

This Protohistoric or Prehistoric sanctuary didn't receive yet the attention that it deserves and I must refer that the place was never excavated, not even by classical archaeologists. I also believe that the cup-marks were not yet published, because the publications about Panoias always refer only the Roman evidences.

7 – “Altar” from Guifões Hillfort (Oporto, Portugal)

In 2001, at the conference of Verbania, I already referred this “altar” regarding interpretive subjects. Now I will approach it under a chronological point of view.

According to the archaeologist that found this piece, it was discovered inside a building that could be or a house or a construction for meetings (SANTOS, 1962). This example is not considered rock art, but has fourteen cup-marks pecked on a granite block that looks like a Roman ara (COIMBRA, 2001: Fig. 3). But there are no examples like this one in the Roman Period, and, in spite J. N. Santos doesn't give any information about artefacts or stratigraphy related to this “altar”, it may be considered as a Late Iron Age piece for ritual and symbolic purposes. Once more, one can observe the deep importance of cup-marks in the symbolic thought of Iron Age peoples. The same happens in the next and last example:

8 – Stone from Briteiros Hillfort (Guimarães, Portugal)

This stone belongs to a Late Iron Age building used for ritual baths, and, in spite of not being considered rock art, it presents, in the interior surface, three cup-marks, a circle with an inner cross and another curious motif (Fig. 6). The chronology of this kind of monuments, that appear in several Iron Age Hillforts from the North West of the Iberian Peninsula, was a matter for a long discussion between several archaeologists. But now, after the excavation of some of them, that were found well conserved, most of the researchers point to a chronology of construction between the middle 2nd century BC and the end of the 1st century BC. This way, the cup-marks carved on this stone may have the same dating and, once more, it's possible to establish a *terminus ante quem* for this motif.

This example is very important for the study of cup-marks, because it shows that they were still in use, in the end of Iron Age, with a symbolic meaning. Today is usually accepted that the buildings like this one from Briteiros were used for ritual baths, by brotherhoods of young warriors and were dedicated to certain deities.

Final note

Due to the limit for each article of this conference I decided to present only eight examples, from a geographic area with similar cultures, that are approached in a very synthetic way, and not to refer cup-marks on megaliths that appear in other regions. From these eight examples, under a relative chronology, three are prehistoric and five are protohistoric. This way I stress on this second period, because there's a characteristic rock art from the Culture of the *Castros* (Hillforts) whose systematic study was never made. The themes of this rock art are usually cup-marks, channels, footprints and sometimes spirals. Usually the archaeologists that excavate the Hillforts don't pay much attention to these engravings, because most of the times they are concerned with other subjects.

In the first (and only at the moment) *corpus* about Portuguese Rock Art, made in 1942, J. R. Santos Júnior refers that he decided not to mention the rocks with only cup-marks (SANTOS, 1942), as if this symbol was a minor one. But I think that it's time to change this idea and start to study the cup-marks that appear more and more in the Hillforts and in other places from the North West of the Iberian Peninsula. Fortunately, the conferences about cup-marks that have been organized since 2001, in the North of Italy, are a decisive contribute to the systematic study of this motif. In a parallel movement, several publications (SANSONI, MARRETTA and LENTINI, 2001; SOLANO and MARRETTA, 2004), among others also from Northern Italy, begin to create an important database about this symbol.

Let's hope that this interest may spread to other countries, specially to Portugal and North of Spain, because there's an area with many examples of rocks with cup-marks that can be dated in a relative chronology.

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Fig. 5 – Cup-marks and channels from Panóias.

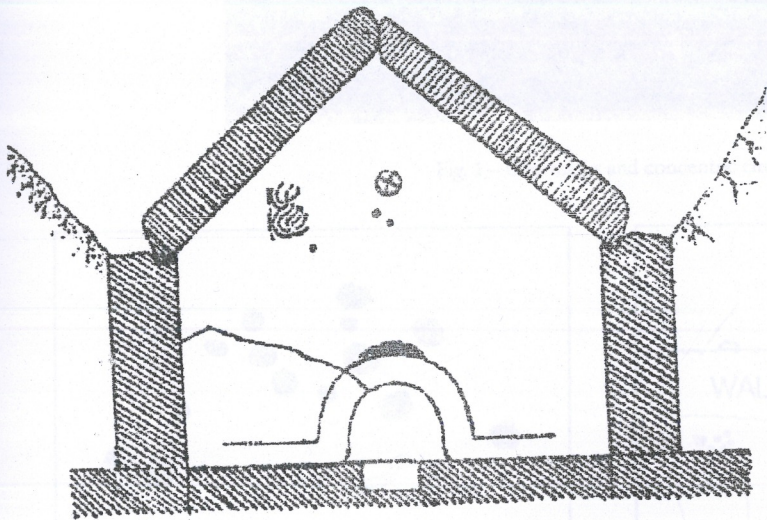


Fig. 6 – Stone with three cup-marks, from Briteiros Hillfort, interior surface. (After CARDOZO, 1931-1932).



Fig.6 A – External surface of Briteiros' Stone

FIGURES



Fig. 1 – Cup-marks and concentric circles from Mogor.

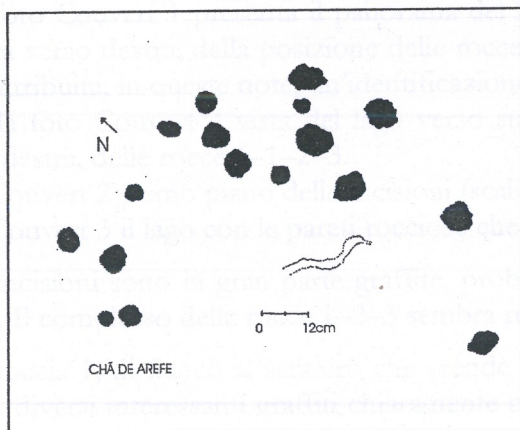


Fig. 2 – Chã de Arefe.

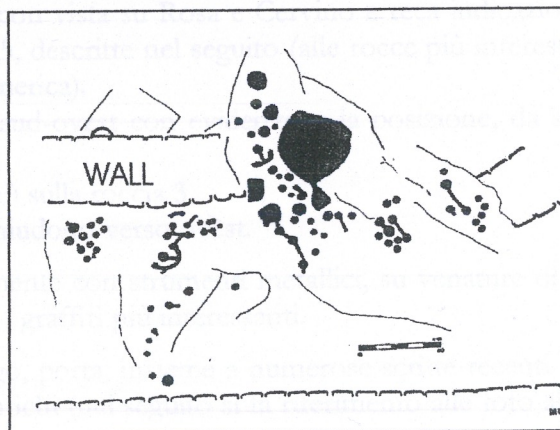


Fig. 3 – Santa Tecla Hillfort (After COSTAS GOBERNA and NOVOA ALVAREZ, 1993).

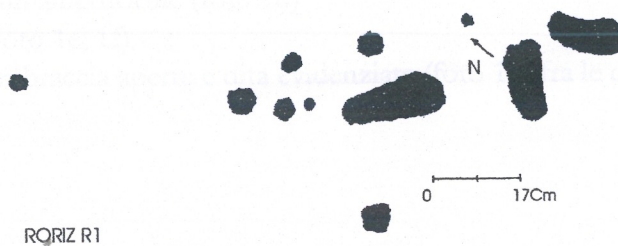


Fig. 4 – Rock 1 from Roriz Hillfort