
The Post-Palaeolithic rock art of the cave Algar da Água (Alvaiázere, Portugal)

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Résumé

Abstract:

Algar da Água (literally "Cave of the Water") is a small cave in the municipality of Alvaiázere, in Central Portugal. After Escoural, it's the second Portuguese cave with rock art manifestations and so far it's the only case in Portugal with Post-Palaeolithic rock art produced by incision.

Recent archaeological excavations in *Algar da Água*, coordinated by one of the authors (A. Figueiredo), identified two levels of human occupation, one from Late Prehistory/Protohistory and other from the Roman Period, revealing lithic tools and pottery of different chronologies, besides other artefacts. Not so far from this cave there's a Protohistoric fortified settlement, being all these archaeological contexts taken in consideration regarding the study presented in this communication.

Despite being a small cave, the walls of *Algar da Água* reveal several examples of rock art produced with different techniques. There are some paintings with red pigments representing schematic anthropomorphic figures. The other engravings were made by carving, using incision, pecking, abrasion and scraping. The motifs produced by incision constitute the majority of rock art examples in the cave, existing cases with a very thin groove (filiform) and others with a larger and deeper groove, which was produced by abrasion, overlapping, in some examples, the filiform engravings.

The pecking technique was used only to carve a group of three chevrons and scraping produced a small spiral and a half circle.

The rock art of *Algar da Água* is basically constituted by geometric figures, abstract motifs and a few schematic anthropomorphic figures. There's also a possible pre-Roman inscription.

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The recording of the art from this cave was done by two methods: photogrammetry and tracing with markers over plastic sheets. The first method allowed later enhancing the engravings with software leading to a better understanding of the figures, mainly in the case of the paintings, where the software D-Stretch was used. The tracing made possible to observe several superimpositions in what concerns the incised motifs.

Several modern signatures overlap what seem to be earlier incised engravings, which are presently very difficult to understand. This way, this cave must be protected against vandalism, what is one of the aims of a larger ongoing research project, where the study of the rock art is included.

Mots-Clés: Cave art, paintings, engravings, central Portugal, schematic anthropomorphic figures