



How were prehistoric monument builders influenced by their surroundings?

Atlantic Europe is the zone *par excellence* of megalithic monuments which encompasses a wide range of earthen and stone constructions from impressive stone circles to modest chambered tombs. A single basic concept lies behind this volume: that the intrinsic qualities encountered within the diverse landscapes of Atlantic Europe both informed the settings chosen for the monuments and played a role in determining their form and visual appearance. This, in part, derives from the use of local materials and the manner in which they were displayed within the monuments: for example how stone, clearly taken from the local geology, was visibly incorporated. Yet we may go further than this in some instances and propose that the nature of local land-forms itself both attracted monuments, providing meaningful or dramatic settings, and offered a series of ideas which played some part in influencing the form of those monuments themselves.

Monuments and Landscape in Atlantic Europe goes significantly beyond the limits of the existing debate by inviting archaeologists from different countries within the Atlantic zone to examine the relationship between landscape features and prehistoric monuments in their specialist regions. By placing the issue within a broader regional and intellectual context, the authors illustrate the diversity of current archaeological ideas and approaches converging around this central theme. The regions represented include Britain, France, Ireland, Iberia and Scandinavia. The result constitutes a remarkable testament to the convergence of conceptual approaches to prehistoric monuments in the diverse landscapes and diverse intellectual traditions of Atlantic Europe.

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MONUMENTS AND LANDSCAPE

IN ATLANTIC EUROPE

PERCEPTION AND SOCIETY DURING THE NEOLITHIC AND EARLY BRONZE AGE

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3 Castanheiro do Vento and the significance of monumental Copper and Bronze Age sites in northern Portugal

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António Sá Coixão and Leonor Sousa Pereira*

Archaeological research on the prehistory of northern Portugal began in a scientific manner only some twenty-five years ago. The region, comprising the three provinces of Minho, Douro Litoral and Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro, is an immense territory covering over 20,000 km² from the Galician border in the north to the municipalities (*concelhos* in Portuguese) on the left (southern) bank of the River Douro in the south. Research since 1975 has focused on three principal domains: megalithic tombs and cemeteries; 'settlements'; and rock-art sites. This work has established the general framework of the Neolithic, Copper and Bronze Ages, both in chronological and distributional terms. The entire time period covers more than 4,000 years, from the end of the 6th millennium to the beginning of the 1st millennium BC. It is clear, however, that an enormous task has still to be accomplished to compensate for the lack of research before the mid 1970s. A particularly urgent requirement is the establishment of closer connections between the evidence from northern Portugal and that from Galicia and the Northern Meseta, the adjacent areas of Spain. The prehistory of north-west Iberia needs also to be placed more clearly in its palaeoenvironmental setting.

One of the most promising aspects of recent research is that which attempts to combine tombs, 'settlements' (sometimes walled and in prominent locations, sometimes not), and rock-art sites in the same enquiry. Such studies consider the developing dialogue between communities and the natural and built environment in terms of monumental behaviour throughout the lengthy 'domestication' of the landscape during late prehistory, from the introduction of herding and agriculture to the consolidation of ranked societies in the Iron Age and Roman periods. This leads us to ask why communities in certain periods invested so much labour in 'burial' places, and how these related to 'living' sites. On the other hand, while settlements were practically invisible in certain periods, in others they were conspicuously monumental. This dichotomy between burial and living

sites, however, was probably meaningless in prehistory. More interesting is to look at the territory as a whole, with its natural geomorphological characteristics, and the transformations that human action produced on it through time, by adding new features to those already existing.

In certain periods, or in certain aspects, these transformations were minimal; at other times, or in other activity domains, the desire to build a cultural landscape was considerable. From a social and cognitive standpoint, we must consider the possible meanings of these different cycles of human action in the landscape. What was the significance of the 'graphic behaviour' of communities that marked certain outcrops with different motifs? What kinds of mental map were being elaborated and negotiated at each point of time and space, and what was their social role in the creation and legitimation of a new social order, or in the maintenance of the status quo?

These important questions may not be solved in the short term, but must nonetheless constantly be kept in mind. Our immediate concern is to approach monumental sites with the minimum of academic preconceptions. The focus in the present study is hilltop enclosures of the Copper and Bronze Age. Their duration in time, the considerable input of energy they represent (not only in their construction, but in the constant maintenance they required), their prominent position in the landscape – everything suggests that these sites were in some way 'central places', performing a broad variety of roles. As archaeologists, our first task is to reconstruct the specific architectural history of each enclosure. As social scientists, our ultimate goal is to seek to understand their contribution to the continuously negotiated process of the structuration of communities. What role did these sites play in the construction of landscapes, in the creation and recreation of cognitive maps, and, finally, in the broader world-vision of these communities? Architecture, as monumental behaviour, was then, as it is now, a way of creating an enduring order, a microcosmos articulating with a general model of the cosmos. To build was to repeat a creative act, but was also to experience (both physically and psychically) a significant environment.

It is against this background that we may turn now to the example of a specific archaeological zone.

The study area

Some twenty years ago, one of us (ASC) began a systematic archaeological survey of the Freixo de Numão area; later, this research was extended geographically, first to the territory of the municipality of Vila Nova de Foz Côa as a whole and, in the 1990s, beyond that. One of the consequences of this work was the discovery in the late 1980s of the prehistoric sites of Castelo Velho (near Freixo de Numão) and Castanheiro do Vento (near Horta do Douro). Both are located on prominent hills in an area of schist geology, and are visible from afar. Before excavation, the surface of these sites was covered by large numbers of small stones and other indications that appeared likely to be related to significant underlying remains of stone structures such as walls. Together with the presence of prehistoric pottery,

these observations suggested that these were the first obvious 'fortified settlements' of the Copper Age to be recognised in the north of Portugal.

The Portuguese Cultural Heritage Institute (IPPC, now IPPAR) judged that these sites deserved to be studied and protected, and so invited Susana Oliveira Jorge of the Faculty of Arts, University of Porto, to undertake research at Castelo Velho in 1989. This was a fortunate moment to begin the study because it prevented these sites – or at least their summits, the parts with the most obvious monumental remains – from being extensively trenched for the planting of eucalyptus, a practice which has caused the destruction of archaeological evidence on an enormous scale all over Portugal.

Eleven campaigns of excavation have so far been carried out in Castelo Velho. A better future now seems to be promised for the site, since the former owner (the Swedish company CELBI) donated the land to the Portuguese state in 2000. IPPAR has now taken charge of it, and a new programme of study and restoration is in preparation for 2001 and beyond.

In 1998 the original project – focused mainly on Castelo Velho and the Freixo de Numão area – was reviewed, and a revised programme approved by the Portuguese Institute of Archaeology (IPA). This included the excavation of Castanheiro do Vento, to provide comparison for the richness of the evidence recovered at Castelo Velho. Although the material conditions have only allowed us to spend the equivalent of a month of research there between 1998 and 2000, Castanheiro do Vento already deserves to be more widely known by the archaeological community. Its huge surface area, and the good state of preservation of many structures, clearly indicate that its study, conservation and restoration (together with that of Castelo Velho) will be an important landmark in the knowledge of the later prehistory of the Portuguese Upper Douro.

The aim of this research is to understand the functions of these monumental places, going beyond the traditional military clichés suggested by the expression 'fortified sites', in order to establish how the territories of the local Copper and Bronze Age communities were organised. We hope then to integrate into this general picture other archaeological features of the landscape: for example, smaller sites, settlements, rock-art sites, statue-menhirs and standing stones. Our ultimate objective is to understand how the region was successively occupied by communities of hunter-gatherers, cultivators and herders – how it was connected to the more general world of the interior of the Iberian Peninsula, and the Douro basin in particular. But in the meantime, at a more practical level, another important goal is the presentation of Castelo Velho and Castanheiro do Vento as places that will attract specialist and non-specialist visitors alike. It should be noted that these sites – and others currently being studied by other archaeologists – are in the vicinity of the well-known Cõa Valley rock-art complex (the only Portuguese archaeological monument classified by UNESCO as a World Heritage Area). Visitor itineraries, including places of interest other than the Palaeolithic and Iron Age rock engravings, are essential for the development of cultural tourism in a region which is still often seen as being off the beaten track.

Portugal is a country in which people and resources are excessively concentrated near the coast rather than inland. In our view, the development of archaeological knowledge can be joined to issues of development in general as the dual inextricably intertwined goals and justifications for this work, which is being undertaken both in and for the Portuguese interior.

Castanheiro do Vento

Castanheiro do Vento is in the *freguesia* (parish) of Horta do Douro, in the municipality of Vila Nova de Foz Côa, Guarda district (coordinates: 41° 3' 49" North; 7° 19' 18" West Greenwich) (Figures 3.1 and 3.2). From it, one has views across a wide landscape, which includes the Ribeira da Teja (an important watercourse and tributary of the Douro) to the east, and to the north some significant landmarks on neighbouring elevations, such as the Castelo de Numão (a walled medieval village where prehistoric objects are often found) and Senhora do Viso, a peak with a chapel, where potsherds of Bronze Age type have been unearthed.

The site is located next to the village of Horta do Douro, on the upper part of a roughly circular schist hill at c.730 metres above sea level. For convenience it can be considered to lie within the curve of the 720 metre contour, which means that it probably extends for more than 200 metres north-south. It is crossed by several tracks used by local farmers, but fortunately these have avoided the core of the northern part, the most monumental and stoniest area of the site (Figure 3.3). The southern part has been extensively disturbed by agriculture, and potsherds, fragments of granite grindstones and other artefacts are frequently found on the surface, but we do not know the real magnitude of the destruction, nor from where exactly all these dispersed materials came. There do not appear to be any important stone structures in this southern area, such as walls, but they may have been partially or totally eliminated by ploughing and digging. At the southern edge of this plateau there is a geodesic landmark (723 metres).

The higher of the two monumental areas, at an elevation of c.724–730 metres, is the northern one. Relatively flat, it is covered by shrub vegetation, with at certain points considerable accumulations of small stones, clearly the result of the destruction and removal of ancient structures. At first sight there appears to be a large subcircular enclosure with a diameter of approximately 100 metres. Remains of walls or other linear structures made of superimposed schist slabs are visible from outside the area (i.e. viewed from the zone now disturbed by ploughing). The contour curves on the topographic plan show clearly that the northern side would have been the most monumental: that is, it could have included some sort of 'façade', conceived to impress those who looked at or approached the site from the north. This hypothetical feature will be the object of research in future excavation campaigns. Inside the 'enclosure', at one of its highest points, there is a particularly substantial accumulation of stones and slabs, elliptical in shape and measuring c.10 × 7 metres. Its archaeological significance is unknown, but it may correspond to the remains of a kind of tower, like the one known at Castelo Velho.

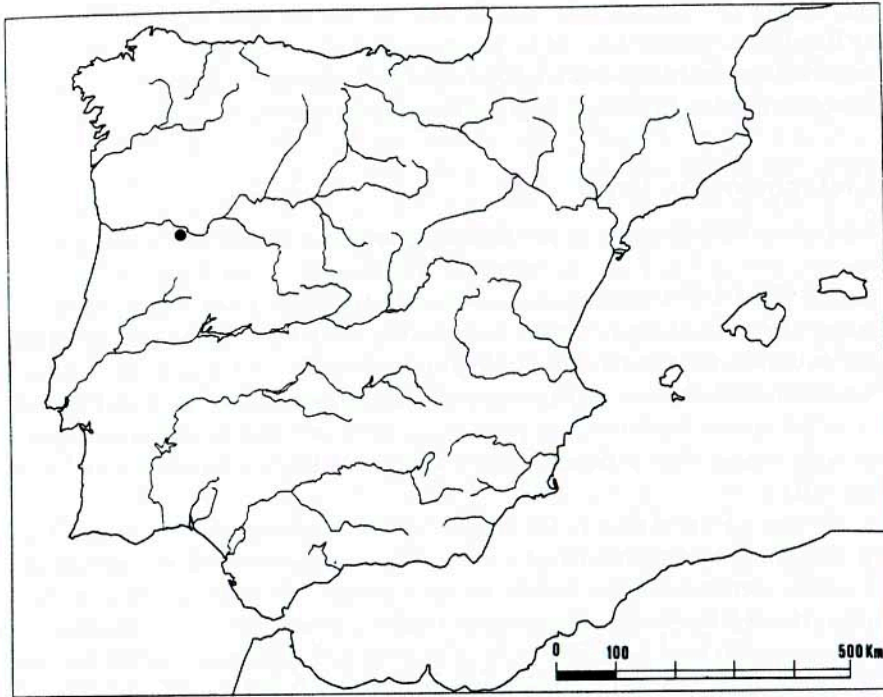


Figure 3.1 Map of the Iberian Peninsula showing location of Castanheiro do Vento.



Figure 3.2 Castanheiro do Vento, from the north-west.

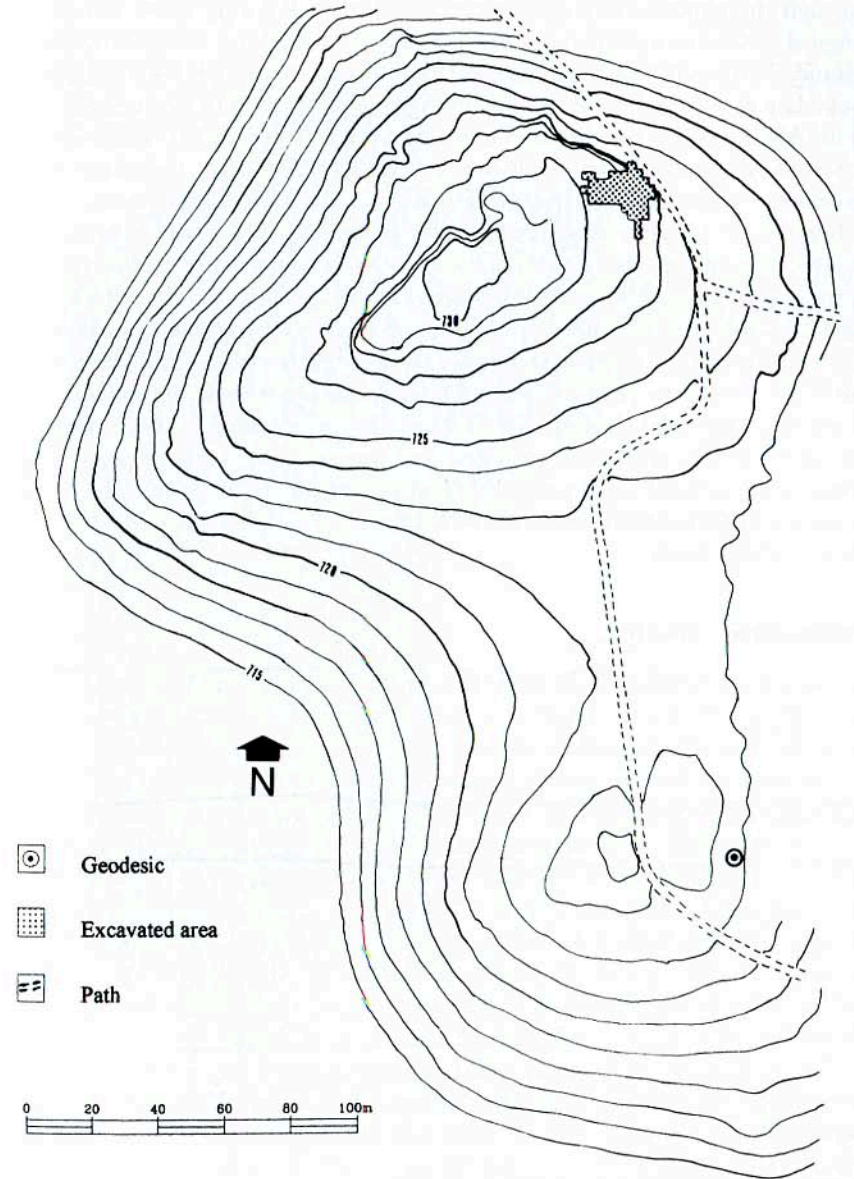


Figure 3.3 The hilltop of Castanheiro do Vento showing topography and location of excavations.

The ground around this summit has been considerably disturbed, particularly through the experimental planting of eucalyptus. We shall never know the original surface area of the monument, and to what extent it covered the slopes around. This means that it is impossible to estimate its visual effect on those who looked up at it from the valleys or from the hills below the site. Fortunately, one of us (ASC) was able to intervene at the last minute, stopping the machines just at the moment when they were about to do here what that they have done elsewhere – completely remove every vestige of past human occupation.

It is nonetheless clear to us that Castanheiro do Vento was designed to be seen at a distance, and acted as a material device to show to everyone the importance of those who lived there, and/or the activities, daily or occasional, which were carried out there. That effect would have been most striking for those looking at it from the east and north-east. It is also obvious that the site visually dominated the fertile land of the Ribeira da Teja valley. To the south-west, the valley of the Torto river (another tributary of the Douro) lies quite close (*c.*2.5km), allowing easy access to the river in that direction, but arguments for a special connection between the site and the Torto basin must be considered tenuous, since to the north-west of Castanheiro do Vento a chain of hills neatly separates the site from the rest of that basin.

Preliminary results

As excavations began only in 1998, the study of this large site is still in its early days. The methodology adopted is open area excavation, exposing the stone structures beneath the surface in order to understand the general design of the architecture, its 'history' and its transformations over time. Deeper excavation only takes place once this first study has been completed; for the moment, this second stage of the work has only been applied to the two 'bastions' (rounded structures associated with a wall) that will be described below. As a result, we have not yet been able to identify a clear Bronze Age occupation layer (such as is present at Castelo Velho), distinct from those of the Chalcolithic (Copper Age) period. We believe nonetheless that the site was occupied during the Bronze Age, on the basis of artefacts that have been recovered, including pottery, but the exact chronology of Castanheiro do Vento has still to be defined.

The potential archaeological area has been surveyed and marked out in a rectangle of 37,500 m² (250 m N–S × 150 m E–W), giving 9,375 excavation units (squares) of 2 × 2 metres. Of those units, only a small percentage (*c.*0.61 per cent) have so far been studied (1998–2000: 58 units = 232 m²), all of them located in a single area in the north-eastern corner of the site, beside the track which leads up the hill (Figure 3.4). In the majority of those units that have been studied, work has been limited to clearance of the vegetation cover and removal of the topsoil.

The roots of a variety of holm-oak which cover the site penetrate deeply to the base of the archaeological deposits and are very difficult to remove, often destroying or seriously damaging the more superficial structures. It is thus very hard to clean a single excavation unit in order to record the stone elements that

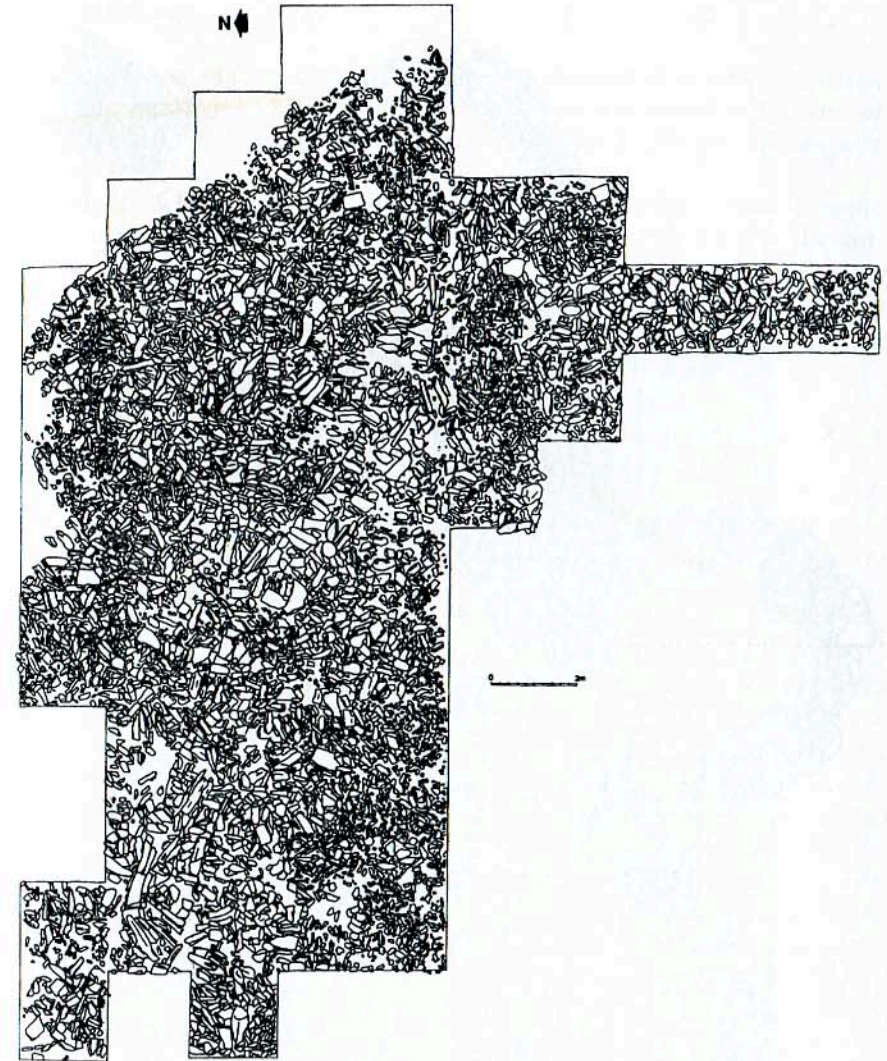


Figure 3.4 Plan of the excavated area at the end of the 2000 campaign.

it contains. In addition, the schist used in the construction is fragile, especially when the clay that was employed as a kind of mortar has disappeared through erosion. The loss of this clay bonding element, coupled with root action, has caused structures to break up and their constituent parts to be scattered. This means that only the more monumental structures are likely to be preserved, and it is these that attract our attention, deflecting it from other aspects which could be equally valuable for an understanding of the site as a whole in all its complexity.

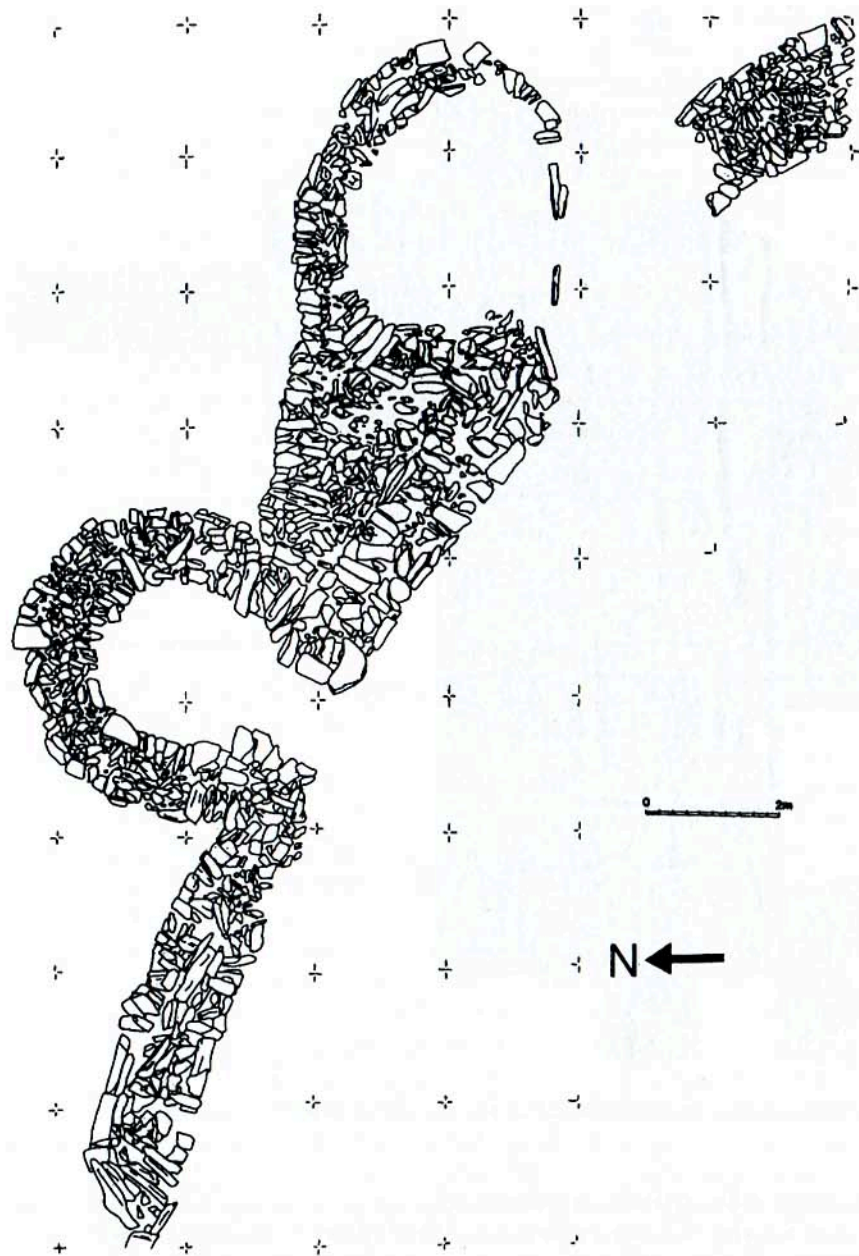


Figure 3.5 The principal structures within the excavated area: bastions A and B and dry-stone wall.

The most important structures revealed in the excavation area (Figure 3.5) were as follows:

- A long wall of Chalcolithic date, with an average width of only 1.2 metres, running north–east/south–west. This wall may correspond to the external boundary of the main enclosure of this part of the site, but it is still too early to be certain.
- To the north of this wall, and close to it, two Chalcolithic bastions, some 3 metres apart: bastion A to the west and bastion B (Figure 3.6) to the east.



Figure 3.6 Excavations in progress (2000), with bastion B in the foreground.

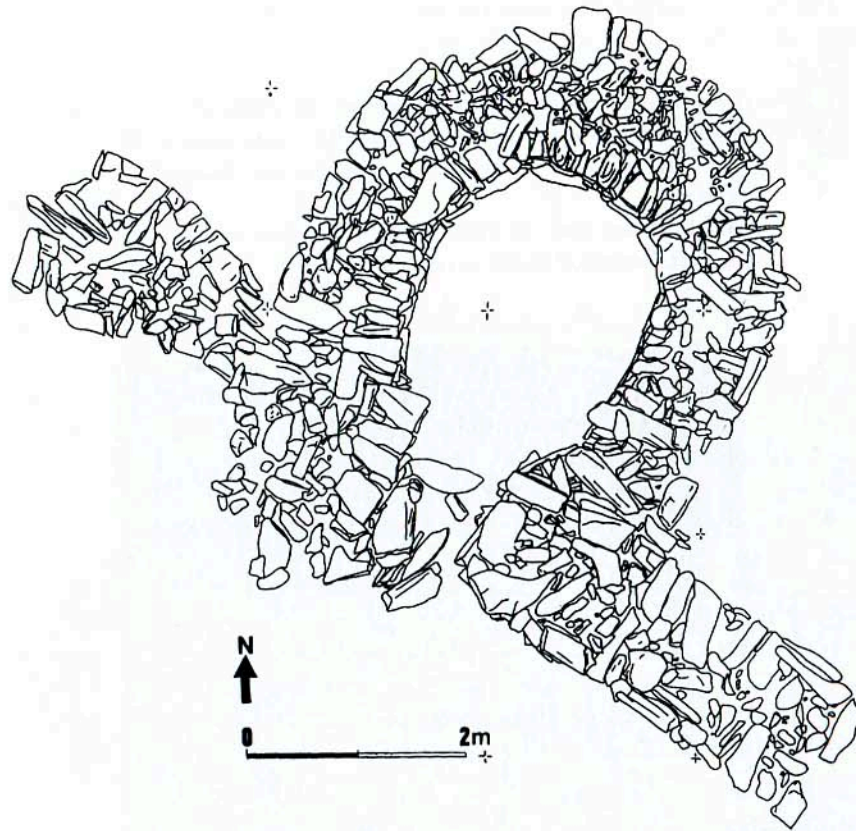


Figure 3.7 Plan of bastion A.

The former is certainly connected to the wall, and the latter may also be connected. Bastion A has a regular, elliptical outline (Figure 3.7); its entrance to the south corresponds with a break in the long wall mentioned above. Bastion B is more irregular than A, and has clearly undergone several transformations. Within it were a number of 'stelae', aligned and facing east. The excavation of this bastion is still in progress, but it is already certain that its present state is the result of works which extended over several periods. Beneath the stelae was a layer which appeared to underlie the floor of the bastion.

- In a subsequent stage, bastions A and B were linked by a new linear alignment of stones, and by a massive structure starting from the northern edge of bastion B and covering the eastern end of bastion A. This shows that bastion A was already partially ruined (or was partially demolished) when the new structure was built. This massive structure completely fills the triangular space thus created between the two bastions and the wall. In fact, this modification seems to be part of a different design from that of the wall and

bastions, and was probably undertaken at a time when they were no longer considered important.

- The transformations which affected bastion B are also noticeable on its southern edge. Both the edge of the bastion and the part of the 'boundary wall' which should be present there are difficult to recognise, probably because the area was used as a kiln or furnace: many of the schist fragments have been altered in colour and texture by heat.

Among the artefacts recovered at the site are abundant quantities of handmade pottery. Some of this has parallels in the vessels from both the Chalcolithic and Bronze Age occupation at Castelo Velho. Pottery decorated with wavy line motifs executed with a multi-toothed, comb-like instrument (*decoreção penteada*) is very common, and may be dated to both periods. In general, however, Chalcolithic and Bronze Age pottery differ considerably from each other. It is only in the Bronze Age, for example, that there is plastic decoration, the use of handles, and flat bases.

Other finds include clay 'loom weights', granite grindstones (both querns and rubbers), and quartzite river pebbles (for heating, or as hammers). Quartz hammers were probably used for shaping the schist during construction. On the other hand, polished stone is rare, as are beads and flaked stone: there are no arrowheads, no blades, and no microliths, though some cutting tools were made of quartz. There may also have been some metallurgical activity: fragments of schist had been exposed to temperatures intense enough in extreme cases to alter the stone completely, suggesting that these fragments formed part of a furnace.

Conclusion

Those unfamiliar with this particular area and its archaeology may consider the description of the results given above to be overly detailed. They do, however, form the background of our main concern, that is, the interpretation of general processes of development. Our long-term aim is to understand the logic of the occupation and the transformation of the territory by human communities. But we should not confuse that major goal with the evidence currently available, which despite a decade of work on the region remains relatively meagre. It is not possible to generalise from locally established facts as if they might be applied to an entire region; nor do we propose to use what are only hypotheses, based on inference, as certainties in order to reach a higher level of interpretation.

In a seminal paper, it was shown how fragile is current knowledge of the so-called fortified settlements of the Copper Age in the Iberian Peninsula (Jorge 1994). From highly heterogeneous data, prehistorians have repeated general interpretations which themselves were not based on sound evidence, or which were based on an oversimplification of the available evidence. These sites have successively been interpreted as colonies established in indigenous territory by metal prospectors, or as local fortresses designed to protect an elite (those able to control the metal resources) from their poorer neighbours. They have always

been the focus of researchers' attention, as if the Chalcolithic landscape was composed only of famous rocky sites, poised in prominent positions. Even if we accept the 'colony model', or the 'fortified settlement model', both imply that only a minority 'lived' in these prestigious places, and it remains therefore to be established where the everyday settlements of the majority of the population are to be found. To our knowledge, only one person in Portugal – the late Nuno C. Santos – has explored this dimension, scanning the territory of Portuguese Estremadura in search of all available information on Chalcolithic occupation.

It is obvious that no firm conclusions will be possible until an entire region – such as the area south of the Douro, between its tributaries the Torto and the Côa – has been studied in detail, with documentation of all types of sites presumed to date from the Copper Age, a period of roughly 1,000 years' duration. Considering the whole of this territory and its Chalcolithic occupation (in the broadest sense, including all the material remains of human activity of this period), it is clear that Castanheiro do Vento and Castelo Velho should be regarded as exceptions rather than the rule, i.e. as extraordinary sites, not only by virtue of their prominent position in the landscape, but also in the input of energy needed for their conception, construction and maintenance. The majority of the population certainly lived lower down near the valleys, taking advantage of the proximity of abundant water, fertile soil, wild fauna and flora, and, moreover, of more favourable weather (we know from our field experience the discomforts associated with the uplands!). Lower-lying locations have been more affected by modern activity, and are therefore less visible in the archaeological record, but we have discovered some traces, and more would appear if survey effort were increased. If monumental sites like Castanheiro do Vento and Castelo Velho were not places at which to live, save for a minority in charge of their conservation; if they were not walled villages or hamlets; if we assume that societies did not exist in a state of endemic war that forced them to take permanent refuge in these upland locations; why then was so much architectural effort concentrated in works that apparently served no purpose?

To understand the context, we must step back a little from such a primarily functionalist view and realise that some questions are too simplistic to be useful, being only projections into the past of our practical mentality of today. We need also to recall that, throughout history, humankind has always reserved its greatest effort for 'non-utilitarian' works such as passage graves, burial mounds, megalithic monuments, pyramids and churches. When we look at monumental enclosures like Castanheiro do Vento we need to rid ourselves of what we could call the 'medieval castle syndrome' – the idea, common in children's stories, that the only solution for a menaced community was to seek refuge behind walls and endure a siege, whether short or prolonged. It is clear that defensive enclosures could only have any practical utility in relation to other military and logistic practices, where they were just a part of a whole technical and social context of managing states of war or conflict. In fact, most enclosures have more to do with the symbolic division of space, between domestic and wild, between settlement

and nature, between inside and outside, or between a secure domain and an insecure one – but in a psychological sense.

It is easy to forget that we are dealing with the results of actions by symbol-using individuals like ourselves – people with a reflective consciousness, a system of values, a need to organise the entire space around them, both at the material and at the explanatory levels. That is the 'function' of architecture, be it minimal (using mainly the natural topography) or monumental (involving considerable projects of transformation): to install an order in nature, an order which is in accordance with a representation of the world and of society. Outside that order, we are lost.

Thus the answer to the simplistic enquiry as to why such effort was expended could be that monuments such as Castanheiro do Vento were communal symbols of wealth, marks of identity in the territory, places where people joined together at certain times of the year. It is probable that an elite lived there, or controlled the actions that could take place there, or assured the safe-keeping of goods held there, including stored food or prestige items. In periods of conflict, these enclosures could have been used to assemble those who felt themselves menaced. But this was not their permanent role. They were material devices, points of reference, to be seen at a distance, just like the parish churches of recent times – announcing both to locals and to strangers that they were in a particular territory.

In certain ways, furthermore, these Chalcolithic monuments assumed the 'identity function' of the former megalithic cemeteries of the Middle and Late Neolithic (5th–4th millennia BC); and indeed that is the main reason that we do not find important (monumental) funerary monuments in this region during the Chalcolithic. Visible tombs and settlements are mutually exclusive, because they accomplished different roles: in the Middle and Late Neolithic, tombs were to be seen and to be enduring features, settlements to be perishable structures. In the Chalcolithic the opposite was the case: the tombs (at least the majority) were invisible, as were ordinary settlements; the exceptions were the idealised, monumental 'settlements', placed in elevated positions, again so as to be seen in their impressive settings. The ideology had changed; the locus of the monumental had turned from the dead (or *some* of the dead: the ancestors) to the living, from after-life to 'daily' life – not the daily life of the common people, but probably an idealised life connected with the elites, or with chiefly ancestors.

This also implies a significant difference in terms of architectural effort and planning. A megalithic cemetery like Aboboreira (Porto district) or Castro Laboreiro (district of Viana do Castelo) has an additive logic; that is, the monuments in it were built one by one. The cemetery was certainly not randomly formed, but it did not have a strictly pre-established plan or design, concentrated in a continuous, limited space, such as we find at Castanheiro do Vento or Castelo Velho. Thus, while considerable further work must be undertaken before we can progress further in interpreting this type of Chalcolithic site, we believe that they deserve henceforth to be regarded as an important step in the history of monumental effort and creative imagination in south-west Europe. They are very impressive places; it is unfair to condemn them to oblivion, increasing decay, or even rapid destruction – fates that have already befallen too many of them.

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4 The architecture of the natural world: rock art in western Iberia

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Prehistoric rock art has long fascinated scholars by its spectacular visual display and the opacity of its intrinsic meaning. Research on Iberian rock art has hitherto been heavily dominated by study of the formal characteristics of the depictions (whether paintings or carvings), by discussions over chronology and terminology, and by an exhaustive effort to build rigid typological frameworks. Although the accurate recording of rock art and the documentation of its formal traits are crucial for the understanding of individual sites, interpretation must go well beyond such issues. Rock-art recording needs to be seen as the foundation of a complex construction, built on layered platforms of interpretation and framed by a diversity of theoretical pillars. Such a procedure will induce a more idiosyncratic approach to the essential constituents of the phenomenon – iconography, style and techniques – and their relationship with the natural backdrop.

Recent years have seen the emergence of innovative theoretical approaches to Iberian rock art (e.g. Bradley 1997; Bradley *et al.* 1995). The introduction of landscape archaeology has been paramount in widening the range of questions to which our object of study can be subjected. This approach is sustained by methodological procedures that incite a view from above, located at a considerable distance from questions related to the formal ‘act’ upon the rock-face. They privilege the analysis of distribution patterns, the relationship between the siting of the rock art, the spaces of the living and the dead, land tenure and access to natural resources. In addition, attention is paid to the way in which the physical attributes of the terrain, such as the position of geomorphological features or pathways of movement across the land, interact with the rock art to create an intelligible landscape.

The present study aims to achieve a more holistic approach by complementing the ‘view from above’ provided by the external variables used in landscape archaeology with a ‘view from within’ which incorporates concepts and inferences commonly used in rock-art studies based on informed methods of analysis (Chippindale and Taçon 1998, 6–7). The objective is to switch the focus from the most visible element of the phenomenon – the depiction – to aspects that have hitherto been peripheral to Iberian rock-art studies. Recent research outside western Europe, particularly in areas where the ethnohistorical record assists