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Front cover: Catarina Bertilsson (Fig. 13.2) Three palstaves associated with cupmarks and foot images at Järrestad, RAÄ 13, Scania. *Back cover:* J. L. Galovart and J. Costas (Fig. 5.12) 'Plastic' or 'fluid' appearance of circular combinations carved on the petroglyphs of Monte Tetón (Tomiño, Pontevedra).

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Walking on the stones of years. Some remarks on the north-west Iberian rock art

R. Fábregas Valcarce and C. Rodríguez-Rellán

Had you talked to the winds of time? [...] Had you walked on the stones of years? 'Stones of years' (Emerson, Lake & Palmer, © 1971 Atlantic Recording Corporation)

Over the last two decades, the traditional descriptive paradigm has given way to other views focusing on the relationship between petroglyphs and prehistoric landscapes, seeking to understand that artistic phenomenon in the framework of societies undergoing deep socioeconomic changes and altering environments.

We shall review, in the light of recent discoveries, aspects such as the chronology of the regional rock art, the audience it was meant to address and the archaeological context of the carved rocks. Going beyond the perception of rock art as a mediating element, open to the different communities inhabiting the land, we acknowledge its possible role as an active agent through which human groups might negotiate their own identity and association with the surrounding space. The relationship between petroglyphs and landscape would be a dialectic one, so that a variety of factors could regulate access and the reading of the decorated panels, perhaps restricting these to certain individuals or sectors of a given community. Lastly, parallels in the rock art from other areas of Atlantic Europe may be just another example of the circulation along the seaways of goods, ideas and people, at least from the Early Neolithic.

KEYWORDS: Galician rock art, Chalcolithic, Bronze Age, landscape, audience, archaeological context, Atlantic connections

The state of the art

Nearly 150 years have passed since the first scientific observations of the Galician petroglyphs, leading to an endless flow of references and the construction of a catalogue – by no means definitive – of over 3000 sites known today. This was not just a local endeavour: renowned foreign archaeologists such as H. Obermaier (1925), E. MacWhite (1951), E. Anati (1968) and, recently, R. Bradley (1997) have given this topic attention, often producing interpretations that significantly advanced the subject, if sometimes with a degree of controversy.

Up to the last decade of the twentieth century, petroglyphs were seen as little more than artistic objects and were analysed in total isolation from their place in the landscape and the society that had produced them. In the last two decades, there has been an effort towards more sociological approaches, and attempts to view rock art in context, relating it to contemporary sites and examining its position in the wider landscape (Peña and Rey 2001; Bradley *et al.* 1994). The recent discovery of Galician petroglyphs in rock shelters has changed views on the relationship between these manifestations and the surrounding space, and led to reflections on their actual audiences and the role petroglyphs played in the shaping of local identities (Fábregas and Rodríguez 2012a).

The repertoire of the Galician petroglyphs is dominated by geometric images (Table 5.1): circular combinations, cupmarks and series of lines often joining the first two motifs. These are precisely the designs shared with regions like Ireland or Britain and with similar chronologies, as

Table 5.1. Main motifs in several catalogues of Galician rock art. García and Peña's sample comes from the whole Pontevedra province while Vázquez lists sites from the four Galician provinces.

Garcia & Peña		Vázquez		
(1980)*		(2006)*		
Cupmarks	89.56%	Circular	78.62%	
		combinations		
Circular	75.57%	Cupmarks 62.		
combinations				
Zoomorphs	19.84%	Zoomorphs	12.82%	
Weapons	3.81%	Weapons	3.37%	
Labyrinths	0.76%	Labyrinths	1.98%	
*Over 500	rocks	*Over 1006 rocks		
North Barbanza		Deza Region*		
Peninsula*		-		
Cupmarks	52.40%	Cupmarks	72.83%	
Zoomorphs	omorphs 37.20%		41.30%	
-		combinations		
Circular	36.99%	Weapons	5.43%	
combinations		*		
Weapons	2.47%	Zoomorphs	_	
Labyrinths 0.62% Labyrinths		Labyrinths	_	
*164 rocks		*92 rocks		

noted below. But there is also a more idiosyncratic group, carved in a semi-naturalistic style, where zoomorphs (nearly always deer) play the main role, joined by less common representations of weapons (mainly daggers and halberds), 'idols', anthropomorphs and occasional scenes of horse-(and, sometimes, deer) riding. The geographical distribution of these two 'groups' is not homogeneous: the geometric section is present in the western half of the Galician and north Portuguese regions (although a growing number of finds have been reported further to the east of Galicia in recent years). As for the animal representations, they cluster around the rias (deep sea inlets on the south-western coast of Galicia) and diminish as we move further inland (Fig. 5.1), a pattern shared with other figurative carvings, with the notable exception of the metal weapons that, being comparatively few in number, may also be found significantly inland.

Drawing up a chronological framework for open-air rock art is a daunting task, particularly in north-west Iberia, where the combined soil and climatic conditions are especially detrimental to the preservation of organic remains. The challenges have led to an approach focusing on three aspects: the existence of certain engraved motifs with known parallels in the archaeological record; comparison with similar examples from other areas; and, lastly, the archaeological information recovered at the foot of the carved panels or in the immediate surroundings.

As for the first source of information, there are two major problems: being in the open, carved rocks were susceptible to being modified and additions could be ongoing, sometimes lasting several millennia; furthermore, those representations



Fig. 5.1. Distribution of figurative (blue) and geometric (red) art.

of 'real objects' (therefore archaeologically datable) are but a tiny minority within the catalogue of petroglyphs. That is precisely the case with the 'idols', halberds and daggers, and also with the riding scenes. In short (Fábregas and Rodríguez 2012b), idols can be traced back to 3300 BC, while metal weapons are ascribed to the second half of the third millennium BC. The chronology of horse riding-which is represented in a number of Galician petroglyphs - is controversial (Fábregas et al. 2011) but it seems reasonable to assume that it was present in Iberia by the transition between the third and second millennia BC. Equally troublesome is the dating of the more widespread and Atlantic motifs, the circular combinations, whose roots could lie in the regional megalithic art, as shown by occasional finds. Also ambiguous is the dating of the cup-marks, closely associated with the megaliths, but certainly carved right through to historic periods. Nevertheless, they tend to occur on the same panels with circular combinations and deer. The images of metal weapons are quite often associated with the hard core of the Galician petroglyphs (more than 50% of the time), therefore reinforcing the attribution of at least a significant part of the Galician petroglyphs to the third millennium BC. At any rate, correlation analyses are moderately reliable only in those areas, such as the Barbanza peninsula (A Coruña), where a systematic inventory and recording has been carried out.

Most attempts at a chronological contextualisation of the petroglyphs through archaeological excavation achieved only limited success, probably due to the shallow depth of the soils in the vicinity of most petroglyphs and the aggressive post-depositional processes that have taken place. Often nothing more than a few hammerstones and small quantities of Chalcolithic sherds were recovered, and stone-settings with artefacts were only reported in two cases, with structures or radiocarbon datings corresponding to 4000–3700 BC and the third millennium respectively (Table 5.2). After the

Rock-art site	Motifs engraved	Material sets	Structures	C ¹⁴ Dates (cal BC)	Reference
Gurita I	Deer, sun	Hammer-stones	_	_	(Rodríguez 2009)
Foxa da Vella	Halberds, daggers, circular combinations, animals, etc.	Hammer-stones	-	_	(César 2009)
Os Mouchos	Deer, horses, humans, circular combinations, etc.	Hammer-stones	-	_	(Bonilla 2009)
As Campurras	Cupmarks	Quartz & quartzite industries, Neolithic sherds	Low bank, hut foundations, stone paving, stela, post- holes	4075–3750 3950–3500 4070–3790	(Villar 2008)
O Betote	Cupmarks	Quartz & flint industries, Chalcolithic & Early Bronze Age sherds	Stone circle, ditches, fire structures	_	(Cano 2008)
Os Carballos	Deer, circular combinations	Quartz industries, undiagnostic sherds	Post-holes, small ditch, possible stone paving	2140–1880 1740–1520 800–540 760–410 540–360 510–380	(Santos, 2010; Kaal <i>et al.</i> 2011)
O Viveiro	Querns	Quartz industries, hammer-stones, <i>mano</i> & modern pottery	-	_	(Mañana and Seoane 2008)
Devesa do Rei	Reticulated motif, cup-marks	Quartz industries, hammer-stones & modern pottery	Possible stone paving	_	(Mañana and Seoane 2008)
Pedra das Procesions	Halberds, daggers, scutiforms	Quartz & quartzite lithic industries	-	-	(Vázquez, 2005)
A Ferradura	Podomorphs, horseshoes, circles	Bell-beaker sherds	-	-	(Seoane-Veiga <i>et al.</i> 2011)
A Cabeciña	Circular combinations	Quartz & quartize industries, Hammer- stones, etc.	-	_	(F. Carrera, pers. comm.)
A Pedreira	Cupmarks and lines	Ground-stone axe preform	-	-	(J. Costas pers. comm.)
Os Sagueiros*	Cupmarks	Early Bronze Age pottery sherds, including Bell-beaker	-	_	(Fábregas et al. 2003)
Monte de San Miguel*	Cupmarks	Early Bronze Age pottery sherds	-	_	(Fábregas et al. 2003)
Poza da Lagoa*	Halberds, daggers, circular combinations,	Quartz lithic industries, Early Bronze Age sherds	-	2140-1950	(Fábregas 2010)
Coto da Fenteira*	Circular combinations, cupmarks	Chalcolithic & Bronze Age sherds, quartz lithic industries	-	2885–2620 2700–2295 1970–1615 1835–1425	(Fábregas 2010)

Table 5.2. Archaeological evidence found in close contact to Galician petroglyphs. Those references marked (*) correspond to material scatters within a 200 m radius of the decorated rock.



Fig. 5.2. Chronological framework for Galician rock art.

excavation at Os Carballos (Pontevedra), the engravings were dated as late as the first millennium BC (Santos and Seoane 2010), an interpretation based – in our opinion (Fábregas and Rodríguez 2012c) – on flimsy evidence that otherwise ignored dates and features that could support an elaboration of the 2140–1880 BC timespan.

Assessing the cultural link between the carved rocks and the material scatters nearby must be done with caution, for contemporaneity does not necessarily follow from spatial coexistence. Nevertheless, the available evidence in a 200 m radius from the carved sites (diagnostic sherds or radiocarbon dates) points again to a period roughly spanning from 2700 to 1600 BC. Interestingly, this temporal range fits in with that suggested by work done in Britain, where cup-and-ring marked stones are dated to the late third/early second millennium BC in Clava (Scotland) (Bradley 2000), very much like those found on the cist slab from Witton Gilbert (England) (Beckensall 2012). Earlier dates – in the first half of the third millennium BC - for these geometric images are postulated at the Boyne valley megaliths (Bradley 2007; Sheridan 2012), consistent with those obtained from decorated outcrops at Torbhlaren (Scotland) and Backstone Beck (England).

Thus, the main carving episodes in Galicia would have taken place from 3000 to 1600 BC (Fig. 5.2). Still, this is also a long standing phenomenon, with motifs that arguably have Neolithic roots going back to the 4000 BC and, likewise, there are indications that, long after their inception, some carved surfaces retained a degree of significance up to the Late Bronze Age or the Iron Age, and even historical times.

Rock art and other archaeological phenomena

Considering the possible Final Neolithic to Bronze Age chronology of most Galician petroglyphs, it is interesting to

explore the relationship with other contemporary, in theory, archaeological sites such as mounds and domestic places. Petroglyphs generally cluster in positions mid-way down slopes, at intermediate altitudes (62% between 100–300 m in northern Barbanza, for instance), but there is still some uncertainty about which areas of the landscape were preferred for settlement during Galician late prehistory: most researchers favour the coastal plain and mid-slope valleys while the peaks and elevations – the 'megalithic space' – would have been less densely occupied (Fábregas 2010; Peña and Rey 2001).

One may wonder whether the areas with petroglyphs had a sacred character that excluded domestic activities, but in our view a 'restrictive' concept of ritual would not be enforced at the time: the latter having a polymorphic nature, materialising in many different ways, ranging from those ceremonies of local, informal and ephemeral character to others highly organised and encoded that may be simultaneously sacred and secular (Insoll 2004). New archaeological evidence shows the capillarity between both spheres during recent prehistory in north-west Spain: presence of 'megalithic idols' in domestic contexts (Bonilla et al. 2006), patterns of division of the living space conceptually similar to those reported in the megalithic mounds (Gianotti et al. 2011) or the seeming coexistence of apparently ritual and domestic spaces within a site (Bradley et al. 2005). The ever-growing number of material scatters (mostly corresponding to 3000–1600 BC) near the decorated outcrops reinforce our scepticism about a rigid separation of everyday and 'special' spheres.

Petroglyphs and mounds tend to occupy different parts of the landscape (Fábregas 2010) since the latter are mostly situated on the top of the high areas or sierras. Nevertheless, this spatial dichotomy becomes ambiguous in a fine-tuned analysis since both phenomena show a more or less significant presence beyond their respective hard-



Fig. 5.3. Spatial relationship between the petroglyph and the mound of Cacharelas (Porto do Son, A Coruña): the first is located on the limit of the visibility of the latter.

core distribution. During the later phases of the Galician megalithic phenomenon (third millennium BC), mounds tend to grow smaller and to occupy lower areas, like the mid-slopes or even the valleys (Fábregas and Vilaseco 2011), the sectors of the landscape where petroglyphs form denser clusters.

The relationship between mounds and certain rock art motifs, such as cupmarks, has been repeatedly pointed out (Villoch 1995), showing how, in many cases, the latter are near the limits of their visibility (Fig. 5.3), playing a kind of liminal role for the megaliths. In some cases, cupmarks are engraved on the stones forming the chamber or the external cuirass. This connection can be also extended, though in a less clear-cut way, to other geometrical motifs such as circles and circular combinations, which sometimes occur near the mounds, and even form part of them.

There are also some tantalising coincidences in the way the decorated panels are organised, or in specific scenes. For example, on the rocks of Pozo Ventura (Poio, Pontevedra) or Coto da Braña 3 (Cotobade, Pontevedra) there is a distribution of circular combinations and U-box images that recall strikingly those on the slabs of Breton or Irish megaliths, including a definite *horror vacui*. But these similarities can also be traced in the case of complex scenes: a good example might be the hunting episodes displayed on the petroglyph of Pedra Xestosa (Laxe, A Coruña) (Rodríguez *et al.* 2010) and on the paintings of the dolmen of Orca dos Juncais (Viseu, Portugal) (Fig. 5.4). Both seem to represent scenes of a collaborative deer hunt by humans



Fig. 5.4. Deer hunting scenes of Pedra Xestosa petroglyph (Laxe, A Coruña) [a] and Orca dos Juncais passage-grave (Viseu, Portugal) [b]. Both display armed human figures (red), dogs (blue) and a possible representation of an idol or protective divinity (yellow).

Fig. 5.5. Main least-cost paths and location of petroglyphs in the northern sector of Porto do Son. The dissociation between a number of rock art sites and paths can be observed.



Fig. 5.6. Visibility from As Laxiñas petroglyph (Carnota, A Coruña) and theoretical viewshed obtained with GRASS GIS using a 5 m resolution LIDAR map.

and dogs, but there is a figure – more difficult to perceive in Pedra Xestosa due to the weathering – interpreted as some kind of protective deity, also found in other petroglyphs displaying this type of scene (Santos 2005).

An obvious explanation could be that the open-air and the megalithic examples are coeval and shared a common set of beliefs. Or, perhaps, those few cases in the open being but a relic of an ideological background, rooted in the local Neolithic that in later times still retained part of its original allure, much in the same way as postulated for the decorations in some EBA cists (Penedo and Fábregas 1997). Other writers (Bueno *et al.* 2010) have observed the great transversality of particular themes or images in the Iberian post-palaeolithic art, without necessarily keeping the original set of meanings attached to them.

Landscape, perceptibility and audiences

Being in the open, Galician rock art has often been considered as a phenomenon whose contemplation would be little restricted, acting as some kind of 'intergroup' communication mechanism - a sort of code of signals or messages - designed to mediate in the use of the landscape, establishing preferential or exclusive access to specific spaces with an economic and/or symbolic significance. Petroglyphs would be linked to the 'geography of movement', their location analysed in terms of proximity to key transit points, such as cols or mountain ridges, and also to small basins providing shelter, water and pasture over the year (Bradley 1997). This proposal needs qualification: research in the north of the Barbanza Peninsula showed that only 47% of the 164 rock art sites are located near major pathways (Fig. 5.5) or resource-rich areas and, even then, the visual relationship is not always obvious, for in many cases petroglyphs are barely perceptible from the latter.

The interaction between Galician petroglyphs and the landscape is basically mediated through two parameters: visibility and perceptibility. The first, referring to the amount of space seen from a specific petroglyph, depends almost exclusively on the place where this is located. Visibility can be restricted to a close area surrounding the petroglyph or, otherwise, extended to medium or even long distances (Fig. 5.6). This divergence could point to a different role of the petroglyphs: the first disposition implies a close-range 'control' of the space; in the latter it is exerted from afar, so the interaction would be less obvious and, maybe, more symbolic.

As to perceptibility, the analyses usually focused on rock size and inclination, identifying the petroglyphs displayed on vertical surfaces as the more perceptible (Peña and Rey 2001) (Fig. 5.7). Most carvings are done on horizontal exposures (57% of the cases against 7% on vertical in northern Barbanza, for example) and thus would be less conspicuous. Yet other characteristics must be considered:



Fig. 5.7. Deer engraved on a vertical surface in Outeiro Campelos (Porto do Son, A Coruña).

leaving aside the as yet unproven possibility of the carvings also being painted, there are other ways to fine-tune the perceptibility of the engravings, for instance, taking advantage of the sharp contrast in colour between freshly made grooves (lighter) and the untouched granite (usually dark grey). Periodic refreshing of the engravings would keep that contrast for some time. On the contrary, the selection of light-toned granite rocks would make the contemplation of the carvings more difficult, since perception is highly dependent on the sunlight at certain times of the day (or the year, sometimes). In some petroglyphs the varying position of the sun would result in different 'readings' of the panels, probably changing the messages conveyed, too. Other conditions may have an influence as well: the rain sometimes slightly changes the colour and brightness of the granitic outcrops, and also, when a wet surface catches the light, the carved images may appear raised (Fig. 5.8).

With few exceptions (Bradley 2009), the analysis of audience in the Galician petroglyphs was limited to the perceptibility of the panel or to the eventual existence of enough room for people to gather beside it. This would be the case of the so-called 'Panoply Rocks', particularly huge petroglyphs displaying several types of weapons (daggers, halberds, so-called shields) often linked to aggregation rituals (Vázquez 2000). Otherwise, the fact that rock art is located mainly outdoors led to the assumption that petroglyphs were easily perceived and virtually accessible to anyone going about the prehistoric landscape.

The discovery of petroglyphs within rock shelters may challenge that view: some contain typical motifs of the Galician open air rock art, such as circles or animals (Fábregas and Rodríguez 2012a) (Fig. 5.9). Obviously, this kind of sites would impose restrictions on the number of observers, but it is just possible that the rest saw their access



Fig. 5.8. Geometric figures at As Laxiñas (Carnota, A Coruña); there is also a dagger clearly perceptible only at a specific time or, otherwise, by watering the surface of the rock.

regulated too, as discussed below. Some decorated rocks were meant to be conspicuous and others intended to go unnoticed, hidden except for a few eyes. Even the sites close to pathways or areas of economic importance might have been virtually invisible to people unaware of their existence: probably those who were not part of the community (or communities) responsible for their engraving.

On the other hand, it is also commonly accepted that the understanding of meanings of rock art would have largely depended on the domain of culturally-mediated processes. Therefore, symbolic or mental restrictions for the viewing of rock art might have been almost as effective as physical constraints. Not only would it be important for the command of the symbols and scenes displayed, but also the control of the '*mise-en-scene*': a set of physical, mental and emotional activities including the approach to the rock, standing by it or the sequence in which the motifs and scenes should be viewed (Tilley 2008), and even knowing the proper conditions for doing so vis-à-vis weather and illumination.

The local individuals unfamiliar with the procedures would be, in that respect, much as outsiders. Thus, 'being in on the secret' might be a requisite to full membership in the group and the expertise or right to transfer it a possible source of power or prestige. Furthermore, this knowledge could have been updated over a lifetime, so an individual's perception of a petroglyph could have changed over time. So, the significance of a petroglyph might have varied according to its audiences, depending not only on whether they belonged to the community responsible for its engraving but also on the status of the observers within the group or even on the different stages through which a specific individual passed and also the concrete circumstances at the time of the observation. This is why we would rather talk of audiences instead of audience.



Fig. 5.9. Petroglyphs inside rock shelters.

Not all of the petroglyphs allow for the same level of freedom in the observers: while a horizontal engraving could be viewed and visualised in different ways and maybe invited a more active participation, requiring the audiences to move around or find the right place to see the images, the vertical petroglyphs usually have a clear and favoured way of observing them. The latter often display motifs and scenes reputedly 'easier to understand' (weapons, hunting scenes, etc.), suggesting that these panels were intended for a broader audience with a more passive role.

Interaction between a community and the petroglyphs should not be viewed only as the activities taking place around the carvings, but as a sum of events that could have begun with walking to them. Territories can often be understood as a set of specific places with a special significance for the community, rather than an abstract space with clear boundaries, and the visit to the carvings could be seen as a symbolic act in itself, helping to structure the experiences of the places where they are located, binding and ordering them in a specific way, possibly typified by the past members of the group (Tilley 1994). In recent times such an interaction is recorded in northern Portugal where outcrops, sometimes displaying engravings, were regularly visited during community rituals in which the name and stories related with each place were transmitted to the young people as a way to introduce them to the knowledge about the territory (Afonso 1993).

The accumulation of different types and styles of engravings on certain rocks might relate to the tendency of human groups to settle the same places recurrently, even across millennia. It is observed in both funerary and domestic spheres during Galician prehistory (Fábregas and Vilaseco 2011; Bonilla *et al.* 2006) and can last into the Iron Age, since several hill-forts share the space with petroglyphs, a practice sometimes interpreted as the reclaiming of old ritual places (González-Ruibal 2006). However, we could see these episodes more as a resignification – probably with a different conception from the original – of specific monuments than as an argument for the general persistence of the symbolic importance of petroglyphs, since, for example, the relationship between hill-forts and rock art is far from being univocal, including indifference or even destruction.

From parades to visions

Galician petroglyphs are presumably a polysemous phenomenon not just because of their fairly wide chronology and iconographic variety but by the changing character of their audiences, too. Otherwise, the material evidence recovered by the decorated rocks is not conclusive in terms of the actions eventually related to their execution or 'use'. Also we must bear in mind that most interpretations on the role of the carvings rely on the figurative motifs, a spectacular but minority section of the corpus. A good example of this would be the aforementioned 'Panoply Rocks', arguably considered foci for gatherings of warriors (Vázquez 2000), although no hard proof has resulted from excavations in the vicinity.

Some authors (Vázquez 2000; Tilley 2008) have suggested that the engraving of metal weapons would indicate an obsession with metal as a prestige good and the wish to obtain it. But the daggers and halberds do not require a higher consumption of metal than axes or much more technical expertise (Rovira 2004), and yet they are hegemonic on the petroglyphs, unlike flat axes or Palmela points, which are absent from the panels in spite of being more common in the archaeological record. Moreover, the small quantity and sparse distribution of Galician ores, together with a limited and reputedly domestic production, does not support control of the metal production by specific communities or social groups (Comendador 1997). A further hint that the representations of weapons would have little to do with their presumed value as metal is given by their frequent association with images of objects traditionally interpreted as shields (but also as masks or even chariots), probably made of perishable materials (Fig. 5.10) and, therefore, possibly with little economic value.

The engraving of metallic objects as a possible metaphor of their ritual deposition (Bradley 1998) might be suggested by the occasional find of metal objects at the outcrops, the spatial proximity between metal hoards and petroglyphs displaying weapons (Fábregas *et al.* 2009), or even by the way these artefacts are set on some panels, such as O Ramallal (Campo Lameiro, Pontevedra) (Fig. 5.10). Actually, the acts of laying or engraving metal weapons



Fig. 5.10. a) Daggers in O Ramallal (Campo Lameiro, Pontevedra), represented in a way that suggests their deposition in a hoard. Images of possible shields made of perishable materials in the petroglyphs of b) Coto Cornellal P20 (Agolada, Pontevedra) and c) Auga da Laxe (Gondomar, Pontevedra).

might be conceptually akin: in the first case returning the metal to nature, where it belongs (Alves and Comendador 2009) or, alternatively, to the world of spirits by drawing them on the rock.

Still, there are obvious differences between metal hoards and petroglyphs displaying weapons: while accepting that both elements could underline the symbolic importance of particular places, such as outcrops, it seems that the first unlike some of the latter – were apparently intended to go unnoticed (Vilaça 2006). Moreover, 70% of hoarded objects or isolated finds in Galicia and northern Portugal are flat axes (Comendador 1997), conspicuously absent from the petroglyphs. That dominance could point to their economic and symbolic value: they demand larger quantities of metal but also are among the few artefacts that were 'translated' from stone into metal and, possibly, inherited earlier social practices as well. Here, it is worth mentioning the recent find of a ground axe rough-out during the excavation at the petroglyph of A Pedreira (J. Costas pers. comm.) or the high number of casual findings of stone axes, not easily explained by simple losses. Furthermore, the possibility of axes acting as surrogates of the human body, and therefore buried in the ground, as suggested for the Scottish Early Bronze Age (Jones 2001), should not be ruled out.

Finally, a simple explanation for the presence of specific



Fig. 5.11. Halberds, dagger and idol (red) in the Coto das Laxas petroglyph.

metal objects on the Galician petroglyphs is that they represented the social importance of the male and the symbolic connotations of conflict and violence. Nevertheless, this hypothesis does not explain the absence of the most common metal weapons in the archaeological record, the Palmela points; it also assumes that flat axes were not used in combat, a circumstance far from demonstrated. The daggers, halberds and shields on petroglyphs stress the role of close combat; the presence of stone mace-heads and bipennes among the grave goods in some third millennium Galician mounds could be read in the same way. The experimental use of bronze halberds and daggers point to the special skills required (O'Flaherty 2007; Kristiansen 2002), favouring the emergence of a specialised, socially-prestigious body of warriors for whom these weapons would be symbols of power. Halberds in particular are more effective in single fights, perhaps highly ritualised and codified contests between champions with few casualties. That would not prevent occasional large-scale and bloodier clashes, where the number of victims could be high (Jantzen et al. 2011).

The emphasis on close-range weaponry in Galician rock art could be read as praise to hand-to-hand combat and much the same could be said about the hunting of deer with spears, at the expense of 'safer' methods involving the use of arrows. Nevertheless, in the second case, a more prosaic explanation could be the greater effectiveness of spears when employed against large game, as ethnographic data seem to suggest (Rodríguez *et al.* 2010).

Almost no human figure is associated with depictions of weapons (just one case, possibly a later addition), perhaps

an exercise of metonymy: the warrior was implicit in the image of his weapon, as could be the case, too, in certain hunting scenes where only the spears are shown (Rodríguez *et al.* 2010). We might talk about synecdoche since, as J. Rodríguez (2012) suggests for warrior statues of the Galician Iron Age, weapons probably were not mere objects but part of the warrior's body; thus, their loss could mean forfeiting this social condition. Elements such as arrowheads, more 'impersonal' and subject to accidental loss, failed to convey the message as strongly as daggers and halberds, despite bows actually playing an important role in armed conflict, as archaeological and ethnographic data indicate (Petrequin and Petrequin 1990).

The occasional association of weapons and idols (Fig. 5.11) could emphasise the protective role of the first, both to warriors and community, considering that the latter are usually represented on petroglyphs as mediators in situations of danger and anxiety for the group and its members, such as hunting scenes (Santos 2005; Rodríguez *et al.* 2010), or located in spaces of 'liminality' such as at the entrance of burial mounds. Thus, it would make more sense to reproduce weapons with a balanced offensive-defensive nature than others with a more clearly aggressive role, such as arrowheads. The primacy of the armed individuals would not lie in their coercive capacity but, rather, on their role in the defence of the community, or that would at least be the intended message.

Peña and Rey (2001) have remarked upon the biased worldview represented in Galician petroglyphs, dominated in its naturalistic section by male-oriented themes such as hunting or war, together with the frequent occurrence of stags with exaggerated antlers; meanwhile, everyday activities, traditionally attributed to women, are apparently absent. This observation is not inconsistent with other archaeological data but, leaving aside the pitfalls of such a straightforward reading of those images, we cannot exclude the possibility that the vast majority of geometric images might have a whole range of significations not so genderbiased, and this 'automatic assignment' to masculinity should be viewed with caution, as some authors have argued for in other areas of the Iberian Peninsula (Díaz-Andreu 1998).

We commented above how, in many cases, petroglyphs must have been an ideological resource meant basically for each community's consumption: only its members (or just some of them) would be in on the secret as to what the messages conveyed or the stories associated with the panels and, no less important, could locate the carved rocks. That self-imposed restriction is particularly neat in the case of the petroglyphs within rock shelters, hardly large enough to hold more than a few individuals at a time. Eventually, the sensorial deprivation, combined with the use of drugs, could lead to states of trance, perhaps linked to the execution of certain motifs such as series of lines, cupmarks or circular combinations.

The 'neuropsychological model', originally focused on foragers' art (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1988), has been also applied to late prehistoric images in western Europe (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1993; Bradley 1997; 2009; Wallis 2009). The common occurrence of geometric motifs was linked to hallucinations – 'phosphenes' or 'entoptic images' – experienced by the so-called 'shamans' during trances induced by drugs or other mechanisms. These hallucinations are accompanied by a range of sensations, from floating to tunnel vision (Dronfield 1996), that might be perceived as a 'dreamtime' or a 'temporary death', giving access to the world of spirits (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1988; Chippindale *et al.* 2000).

There are elements suggesting that 'Altered States of Consciousness' (ASC) might be at play in Galician rock art. The rising number of decorated rock shelters (Fábregas and Rodríguez 2012a) whose limited room and lack of domestic use could hint at the notion of cavities as places of special symbolism, maybe a gate to the spirit realm (Lewis-Williams 2012). The identification of hyoscyamine in a quern carved on the stone floor of one of these rock shelters (Pena Cavada, Pontevedra) (Fábregas 2010) could support the link between the execution of certain carvings and ASC, this time induced by the intake of drugs. Hyoscyamine is a potent alkaloid, present in plants of the Solanaceae family, such as Datura stramonium, mandrake or belladonna, causing hallucinations, euphoria, amnesia or even coma and death (Stella et al. 2010). It is worth noting that at this site, a number of cupmarks (one of the typical entoptic images)



Fig. 5.12. 'Plastic' or 'fluid' appearance of circular combinations carved on the petroglyphs of Ozão (Valença do Minho, Portugal) and Monte Tetón (Tomiño, Pontevedra) (photographs: J. L. Galovart and J. Costas).

were found and, also, the roof of the cavity was full of deep hollows created by natural erosion.

Associated with ASC is often the perception of the rock surface as 'fluid', a flexible membrane separating different planes of reality (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1990). Both artificial and natural features – engravings of circles and spirals but also cracks and fissures – would act as gates into other worlds (Dronfield 1996; Jones 2007; Wallis 2009). This view could be present in some petroglyphs where circular combinations show a plastic quality, adapting themselves to the bulges of the stone (Fig. 5.12), eventually going over the edge of the panel as though melting down (Bradley and Fábregas 1998). The notion of 'passing through' may be assessed in A Cabeciña (Oia, Pontevedra): here several circular combinations are found, some starting from a crack while another surges beneath a vertical block with a natural hole (Fig. 5.13), thus opening up the possibility of a ritual



Fig. 5.13. A Cabeciña (Oia, Pontevedra), a petroglyph displaying several circular combinations, one surging beneath a large block with a natural hole. Several examples of the relationship between circles and rock fissures can be seen in this site.

performance where going through that orifice would be a metaphor for getting into the rock itself.

The aforementioned views might be consistent with the 26 findings of metal objects inside fissures of outcrops – some of them displaying carvings – recorded in north-west Iberia (Alves and Comendador 2009). Somehow, traditional legends among Galician peasantry share these conceptions: numerous references not just to mounds and hill-forts, but also 'hollow rocks' (usually tafoni) as lairs for 'mouros' and other mythological creatures, often keeping treasures. These beliefs are behind the destruction of several petroglyphs, as happened in Auga dos Cebros (Oia, Pontevedra) or, possibly, in Rego de Corzo (Porto do Son, A Coruña) (Fig. 5.14).

A wide range of meanings has been proposed for geometric motifs, from solar representations to traps or water (Peña and Rey 2001). The spatial relationship between petroglyphs and watercourses has been repeatedly noted and we feel that this link could also be conceptual: some carvings occur beside natural basins (Fábregas and Rodríguez 2012a) that, full of rainwater, would contribute to the realism of



Fig. 5.14. Ship of Auga dos Cebros (Oia, Pontevedra), blown up with dynamite in the early twentieth century to find the treasure that would be hidden inside the rock. One of the circular combinations of Rego de Corzo (Porto do Son, A Coruña), heavily hammered, probably with a similar goal.

the scene, giving it movement and even sonority (Fig. 5.15). Other times water or other liquids could have been used to 'interact' with the rock during rituals, 'activating' or making more perceptible specific motifs and changing the message transmitted to the audience (Fig. 5.8), as has been suggested for some megaliths and petroglyphs of the British Isles (Fowler and Cummings 2003; Wallis 2009).

The interpretation of the circular combinations as representing water might have to do with ASC too: a number of references describe the floating sensation experienced during the trance as swimming or being submerged in water (Chippindale *et al.* 2000). Carving circles might evoke a 'liquefaction' of the rock surface as a way to plunge into the world of spirits. Laying down metal objects in cracks of the rocks (some displaying precisely circular combinations) would be conceptually related with their deposition in rivers, a common practice in the Late Bronze Age but, according to the spatial link between EBA metal finds and water courses,



Fig. 5.15. Petroglyphs of Insuela (Porto do Son, A Coruña) and Coto Cornellal P11 (Agolada, Pontevedra). A relationship between engravings (zoomorphs, circles and cup-marks) and basins is apparent on both sites. These natural features would give a peculiar outlook (and maybe meaning) to the rock when filled with rainwater.

traceable to earlier periods (Alves and Comendador 2009). Thus, it is possible that in some cases circular combinations acted as a symbolic equivalent to the water while in other cases were a simple representation of water.

Much as it is tempting to relate certain features of the Galician petroglyphs to the 'neuropsychological model', we must be cautious both on theoretical (Cruz 2011) and practical grounds. Geometric rock art certainly exists among populations who do not practise 'shamanism' (Dronfield 1996) and many experiences traditionally attributed to the ASC are, actually, difficult to attain by using the majority of drugs (Hodgson 2006). 'Shamanism' is very difficult to ascertain archaeologically and our study area is no exception; also, psychotropic substances are seldom found or their relationship with the carvings is not incontestable. Finally, we lack hard evidence of the existence of ritual specialists during Galician late prehistory, beyond some instances, such as the inclusion of big quartz crystals among

the grave goods that could arguably signal 'shamanistic' practices (VanPool 2009).

Moving about

As one of the three 'finisterres' in south-west Europe, the Galician territory has been considered a significant stage in the sea routes connecting different regions of the western Atlantic coast, such as Brittany, Ireland and Britain. For decades now, a host of authors spoke of mutual influxes or contacts between those regions in late prehistory, based on formal analogies in the material culture, be that megalithic art, open-air petroglyphs or metal items (MacWhite 1951; Cassen and Vaquero 2003; Schuhmaher 2002). Recent research has brought about new evidence: the distribution analysis of Alpine axes (Fábregas *et al.* 2012) showed the presence of these artefacts both in Brittany, the British Isles and northern Iberia since, at least, 4000 BC; Neolithic

exchanges are also indicated by the documentation of variscite beads from Palazuelos de las Cuevas (Zamora, Spain) in two Breton mounds (Querré *et al.* 2008). Research into the cockle-decorated Bell Beakers again points to the existence of a sphere of interaction in the area throughout the third millennium BC (Prieto-Martínez and Salanova 2009), a notion consistent with the reputedly Iberian origin of copper artefacts recovered, together with Bell Beakers, from the burial of the Amesbury Archer (Fitzpatrick 2004).

As to the open-air rock art of Galicia and the British Isles, we have noticed (Fábregas and Bradley 1999) that, in spite of the striking difference represented by the presence of zoomorphs in the Galician art, there are remarkable coincidences about the geometric group and its internal organisation in the panels. All agree on the usual rejection of the more conspicuous outcrops and the generic link with the patterns of occupation and exploitation of territory, but in Galicia the most elevated areas, where mounds are denser, have the simpler art, if any, whereas in Britain it is just the opposite. Summing up, a similar grammar underlies the rock art of both areas, but in each case the factual expression takes a very different course.

Fredell (2010) suggests the possible existence of contacts – fuelled perhaps by the tin trade – between Galicia and Sweden during the first millennium BC, based on the association deer+sun reported in the rock art of both regions. We see two major problems: no hard proof exists in Galicia of such a late chronology for these representations and, secondly, that association is already present in several Iberian 'Symbolic' Bell Beakers from the end of the third millennium (Garrido and Muñoz 2000). Moreover, the assumption that circular motifs (and cupmarks) are solar representations is far from demonstrated and, anyway, only one clear sun depiction exists in the whole body of Galician rock art.

The growing evidence of interaction among several regions of the European Atlantic Façade during late prehistory, along with new information about the mobility of individuals (Evans *et al.* 2006), makes thinkable that similarities between the Galician rock art and that of Ireland and Britain are rooted in more or less sporadic contacts between these areas, although their nature and significance is far from established.

The discovery of rock art in the Ons Island, 4 km off the coast of the Ría de Pontevedra, proves that the prehistoric communities of Galicia undertook coastal navigation from, at least, the third millennium BC, probably using small wooden canoes similar to those of the Iron Age found in the Limia River (Alves and Rieth 2007). Furthermore, the presence of megalithic mounds, rock art and domestic sites in points commanding the crossing of the Rías (thus avoiding long detours) (Rodríguez *et al.* forthcoming), might be further proof of the importance of short sea trips for these communities. Deep-sea voyages are another matter:

the links between northern Iberia and Brittany have been frequently explained as the result of direct contacts between 'finisterres', avoiding the dangerous coast of the Bay of Biscay (Cunliffe 2004); but this option, as is the case of direct contact with the British Isles, would have made it necessary to navigate without visual contact of the coast for much more than 48 hours (Naveiro 1991), demanding seafaring vessels and good skills of navigation. Thus, coastal navigation seems more likely, even considering the dangers of the coast and, accepting the existence of contacts between Britain and northern Iberia during the main rock carving episode, it seems more reasonable that these would have occurred via 'ports of call' such as Brittany.

It is true, however, that we are taking a pragmatic approach to the question of sea travel in south-west Atlantic Europe, but we should consider the eventually transcendent character of those trips. After all, there are many sources (literary, ethnographic, mythological) pointing towards the symbolic connotations associated with such perilous journeys, designed to alleviate the fear that was naturally inspired by the prospect of long distance travel. And, in this framework of thought, we might keep in mind that most evidence gathered on Atlantic seafaring has more to do with the exceptional than with the day-to-day existence, be that so-called prestige items (Beakers, copper weapons), art or people directly associated with these.

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