

# PHOENICIANS IN THE AZORES, MYTH OR REALITY?

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We present here some data resulting from two visits made in August 2010 to the Islands of Corvo (Occidental group) and Terceira (Central group), in the Azores archipelago, located in the centre of the Atlantic. An important complex of various types of undetermined structures was discovered excavated in the rock. Some are of the *hypogeum* type, probably pre-Portuguese, and in some cases may have been used until now to protect the animals from inclement weather. These monuments are undated and have not been properly excavated in part due to the apparent absence of archaeological material. We encountered several pieces of archaeological and ethnographical evidence of great importance for our understanding of the History of the Archipelago. These had never before been registered.

This research project will be developed with the various participating universities and respective councils. We hope to “characterize” and record these structures in 2011.

We have detected a complex of archaeological sites where monuments excavated in the rock are of especial interest. They are usually designated as hypogea.

The first site is located on a natural road leading to the top of Mount Brazil, where the present road was built. It stands between two mounts designated by Mount Brazil, in Terceira Island. (Fig. 1, 2) The monument is excavated in the soft rock (volcanic tuff). A small entrance (Fig. 3) measuring about 1,60 m leads to a chamber of about 5,50 m, with a small structure in the upper part reminiscent of a

small “altar”. (Fig.4) Some marks or furrows excavated on the inside on both sides of the monument might be the remains of a system for closing off the monument. Some vestiges of a bench are noticeable inside, lengthwise, which is a frequent feature in some hypogea from the Iron Age of Minorca (Spain). The height of the monument’s entrance is no greater than 1,60 m, with its centre reaching a maximum 2,00 m, descending towards the area of the possible “altar”. The monument has an oblong and uterine shape, which is characteristic of several late Bronze Age and Iron Age Mediterranean cultures, for example the necropolis in Sardinia, North Africa, Southern Spain, Ibiza, and Portugal with the “Corredor dos Mouros” (Ribeiro, N. M. DA C. and Huttu, J.;1998:99-111), and in Tomar regarding the presence of an altar. At the summit of this little mountain called Monte Brazil, overlooking the bay of Angra do Heroísmo on the island of Terceira, we discovered a platform called “Pico do Facho” used in the XIXth and XXth centuries as a military observation post and where military shelters had been constructed. In the vicinity we found a complex of open air structures, excavated in the rock, (Fig.5) in the shape of “seats” (Fig.6), perhaps altars, and troughs associated with channels. The existence of several post holes excavated in the volcanic rock is quite clear. (Fig.7) These vestiges extend on an area of at least 80 meters long. (Fig.8,9,10) They probably correspond to a sanctuary of a type common in Iron Age “Lusitania”. Examples are “Cadeiras dos Mouros” near the town of Tomar, and Panoias – Vila real, in the Nogueira Valley, which was still in use in the Roman period.



The second area is designated "Ribeira do Portal do Carro", and is situated, along a river in the interior of Corvo Island, where there is a complex of more than 20 structures of the hypogeum type excavated in the soft rock. (Fig.11) Their dimensions vary. They can be very large and reach up to 1,80 m deep and 1,60 m high. They stand at various heights along the riverbank. Some are still sealed by small blocks of stone. On the hillside on the right bank stand a number of other monuments constituted by artificial mounds, where we can see still untouched small chambers, revealing the existence of small "tumuli" (Fig.12).

The third area is situated in the interior of Corvo Island 100 m, along the river Fonte Fria's right bank, (Fig.13) in an area, according to the local population, uncultivated both today and in the past, stand several dozens of well preserved structures of the hypogeum type. A few of these, the smallest ones near the river, had been reused in the course of time, the last phase being for keeping swine, after the construction of small walls. (Fig.14) There are various kinds of chambers, some are very large - more than 1,80 m deep and more than 1,60 m high. They stand at various heights along the riverbank. Some are still sealed by small blocks of stone. (Fig. 15,16)

These monuments have no access corridor, otherwise called *διάδρομος* (diadromos), and show parallels with those found in various Iron Age Mediterranean cultures dated to the IXth to the IIIrd centuries BC. The best-known examples belong to the following cultures: Phoenician/Carthaginian, Etruscan (the Banditaccia Necropolis located in the area of Cerveteri), Hellenic, Egyptian (mainly in the Ptolemaic Dynasty and the Macedonian Dynasty of 305 to 30 BC), *Talayot* (on the islands of Majorca and Minorca - Necropolis of Cuevas de Cala Morell, Calescoves etc.) and Sardinian.

We can nonetheless link this presence to the famous equestrian statue and the inscription found on Corvo Island at the time of the settlement. Corvo's equestrian statue was made of stone and represented a human figure on a horse, pointing an arm to the West. It was allegedly found in a monument northwest of the volcano's summit on that Island in the Azores archipelago, when the island was discovered in the XVIth century. The description of this discovery was first related by the chronicler for the Portuguese kingdom Damião de Góis (1502-1574): "... a stone statue standing on a slab, representing a man on top of a bone horse, and the man dressed in a rain cape, without hat, with one hand on the horse's mane, and the right arm stretched out, with all the fingers clutched except the second finger, known in Latin as the index, pointed towards the west. This image, made of one single piece of stone, was then sketched on the orders of King Manuel by his servant and draughtsman Duarte d'Armas. After seeing the drawing, the King sent a skilful man, born in the city of Oporto and well travelled in France and Italy, to the Island, equipped with tools to remove the antiquity. When he returned with it, the man told the King he had found the statue destroyed by a tempest that had occurred during winter. But the truth is that it was broken due to poor workmanship; and they brought pieces of it, namely: the head of a man and his right arm with the hand, and a leg, and the horses' head, a folded and raised foot, and part of a leg; everything remained a few days in the king's wardrobe, but what was done of these things, or where they ended up, I could not discover." (Chronicles of Prince D. João, chapter IX, 1567).

The chronicler also refers to the recipient's captain, Pêro da Fonseca, present in Flores and Corvo Islands in 1529, about the discovery: "... I heard from the locals that in the rock, below where the statue used to be, were engraved some letters in the same



*stone of the rock; and because the place where this inscription was, was dangerous to reach, some men were sent down, well tied up with ropes, and imprinted the letters that were not yet erased by time in some wax that was taken for that effect; however, the letters moulded in the wax were already worn out, nearly shapeless, and for that reason, or maybe because the assistance only had knowledge of Latin letters, and even this one imperfectly, no one present at the scene managed to make sense of what the letters meant, nor what letters they were."*

As we already mentioned, Duarte d'Armas, who had been previously ordered by the King to draw the fortresses at the frontier with Spain, was sent to execute a sketch of the statue, unfortunately subsequently lost.

Other people also refer to the monument. Father Gaspar Frutuoso (1522-1591), born in the Azores on the island of São Miguel, wrote around 1590, in volume VII of "Saudades da Terra": "... the figure of a large man of stone, standing on a slab or support, and in the stone were sculpted some letters, and some people say that his hand was pointing north-northeast or northeast, as if pointing to the great coast of the Terra dos Bacalhaus [Terra Nova, Newfoundland]; some say he was pointing southwest, as if indicating the Indias de Castela [Antilles] and the great coast of America with two extended fingers, and in the other three, that he had folded, were some letters, Chaldean, Hebrew or Greek, or from some other nation, that no one knew how to read, and the locals and the one from Flores Island said to be: Jesus forward. In their opinion the builders were Carthaginians, as they travelled these parts... and returning from the Antilles, they would have left this stone monument with the letters as marks and signs of what they had discovered back there."

We wonder: are these references a myth, or political machinations? Whatever they are, with what intention were they created?

However, the doubts concerning their veracity may disappear thanks to a new discovery made in the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century. An interesting claim from the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century could be associated with our recent discovery: a "treasure" of Punic and Hellenic coins from Cyrenaican (Lybia) dated to the IV<sup>th</sup> century BC (more precisely to 320 – 300 BC). This treasure was supposedly found in 1749, (Fig.17) following a severe storm on Corvo Island which churned up sediments associated with a structure located by the beach. The first scientific reference to these coins was made by the Swedish numismatist Johann Frans Podolyn. He published an article entitled "Some notes on the voyages of the Ancients, based on several Carthaginian and Cyrenaican coins found in 1749 on one of the Azores' islands" in the "Göteborgske Wetenskap og Witterhets Samlingar" (1778, vol. I, p.106). According to this author, in 1749, "after various days of tempestuous sea from the west, part of the structure of a ruined stone building was left exposed, and a broken black clay pot was discovered containing a great number of coins." These coins were then taken to a nearby convent, probably the Franciscan convent of São Boaventura in Santa Cruz on Flores Island, and then distributed among several people. Some coins were sent to Lisbon and from there to the historian and priest Enrique Flórez de Setién y Huidobro, of the Santo Agostinho Order, in Madrid. The number of coins found in the pot is unknown, and we do not know how many were sent to Lisbon. Father Flórez is said to have received nine, which he subsequently studied and described. Two were gold and five copper Carthaginian coins, and the other two, copper Cyrenaican coins. Father Flórez donated the coins to Podolyn when he visited Madrid in 1761, informing him that these coins "represented the different types found on Corvo Island" and that they



were the best preserved in the collection. This article was published together with drawings of the coins. Podolyn stated that with the exception of the gold ones, these coins were not rare. But what is remarkable is *where* they were discovered, as we have no knowledge of the presence of Carthaginians in the Azores.

According to Alfredo Martin (Martin, Alfredo Mederos and Cobo, Gabriel Escrivano 2000:92), this treasure could be associated with a return route between Canary-Azores-Portugal, called "*volta pelo largo*", or return via the open sea, an opinion shared by other investigators (Isserlin, 1984:32; Manfredi, 1993:113,115; Millán, 1998:138).

It was also recently published an inscription that was found near the sea, on Terceira Island (Praia da Vitória) and that according to the autor it is a language of the Southwest. (Sauren, Herbert, 2011:1-60)

Finally we would like to state that Professor Isserlin conducted four excavations in Corvo in 1983, enabling him to collect some ceramic material. He did not visit some of the interior areas of the Island.

We hope to see the realization of an international congress in the Azores on Archaeology and the Atlantic navigations as soon as 2012/2013.

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**Figure 1 –Map archaeological sites, Terceira Island**

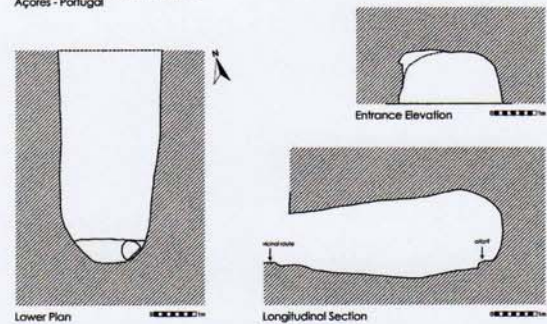


**Figure 2 - Monte Brazil hipogeum, monument entrance**



**Figure 3 - Monte Brazil hipogeum monument entrance**

Hipogeu, Monte Brasil, Ilha Terceira  
Açores - Portugal



**Figure 4 - -Hipogeum -Monte Brasil – plants**



**Figure 5 - Structures excavated in the rock, site Pico do Facho.**



**Figure 6 - Seats - Site -Pico do Facho**



**Figure 7 - Several post holes - Site Pico do Facho**



Serra do Facho - Monte Brazil  
Ilha Terceira - Azores  
Part 1

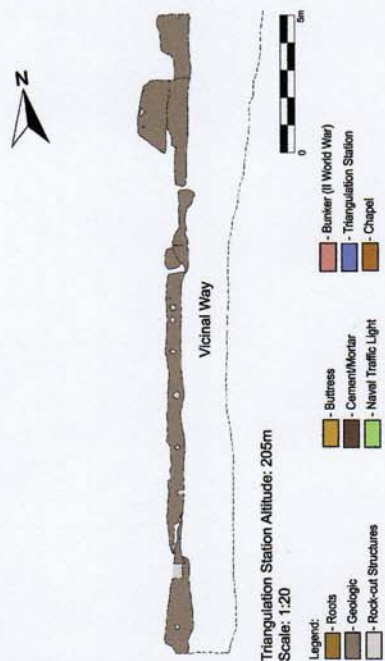


Figure 8 - Azores - Serra do Facho - Part 1 - Plants

Serra do Facho - Monte Brazil  
Ilha Terceira - Azores  
Part 2

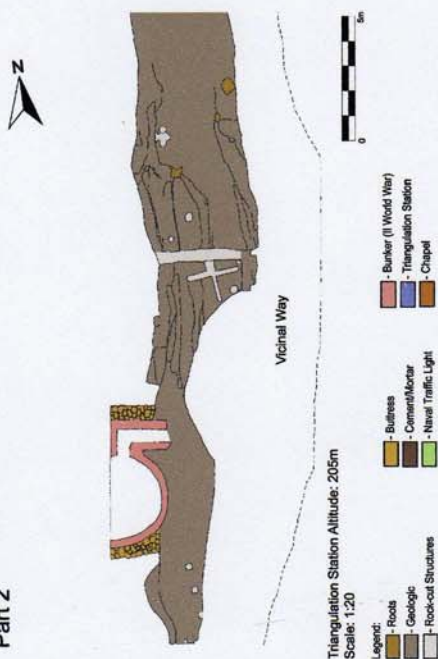


Figure 9 - Azores - Serra do Facho - Part 2 - Plants

Serra do Facho - Monte Brazil  
Ilha Terceira - Azores  
Part 3

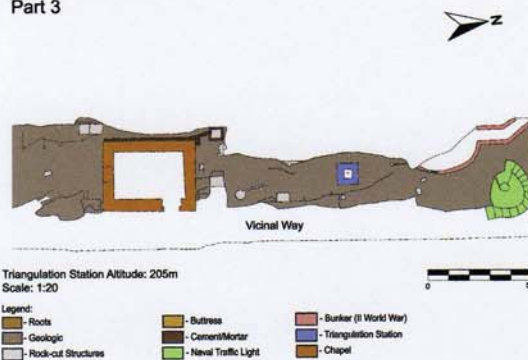


Figure 10 - Açores - Serra do Facho - Part 3 - Plants



Figure 11 - Portal do Carro site



Figure 12 - -Untouched small chambers. Portal do Carro Site



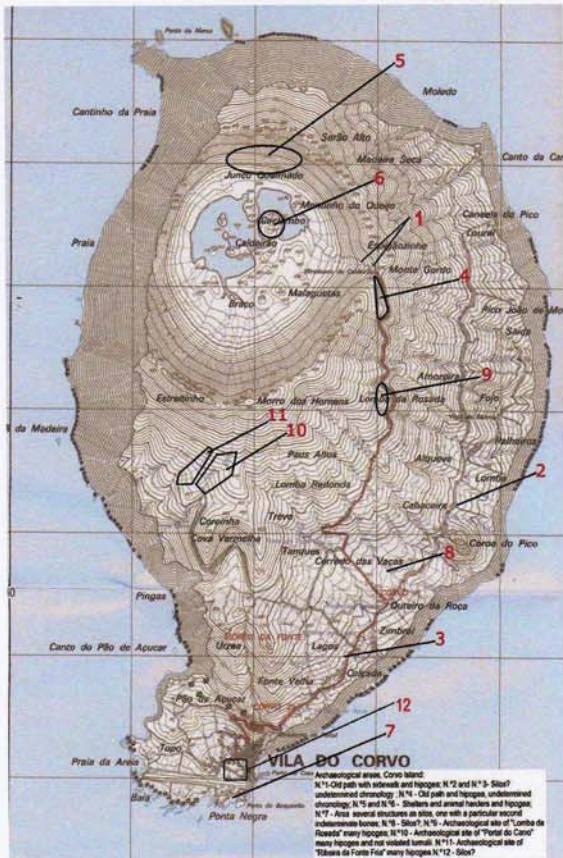


Figure 13 - Location of archaeological sites in Corvo Island



Figure 14 - Structure reused –Fonte Fria site



Figure 15 - Fonte Fria site,hipogea



Figure 16 - Fonte Fria site, Hipogea

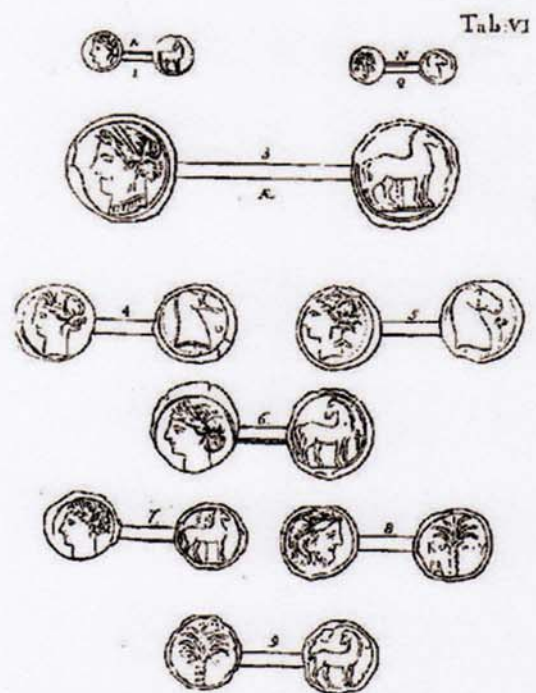


Fig. 17 -Coins issued by the eighteenth century numismatist Podolyn