

**ZOOMORPHIC ART IN THE OPEN AIR ROCK ART COMPLEX OF THE CEIRA AND
ALVA RIVERS BASINS AND ADJACENT UNHAIS RIVER BASIN – PORTUGAL**
**A ARTE ZOOMÓRFICA NO COMPLEXO DA ARTE RUPESTRE AO AR LIVRE DAS
BACIAS DOS RIOS CEIRA E ALVA E ÁREAS FRONTEIRAS COM A BACIA DO RIO
UNHAIS - PORTUGAL**

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Resumo.

Os trabalhos arqueológicos desenvolvidos pela Associação Portuguesa de Investigação Arqueológica desde 1998 no centro de Portugal, nas áreas das Bacias Hidrográfica dos Rios Ceira e Alva e áreas fronteiras com a Bacia do Rio Unhais, permitiram inventariar mais de 35.000 gravuras, por 700 lajes gravadas com arte rupestre, divididas em 10 grandes núcleos com gravuras, nomeadamente: áreas do Concelho de Góis e Serra da Lousã; área da Serra do Açor; área da Serra da Cebola; área da Serra do Chiqueiro; área das nascentes do Rio Ceira e Serras de Arouca/Silva; área de Vide e Ribeira do Alvôco; área de Sobral de São Miguel; área do Pereiro; área da Serra das Pedras Lavradas/Alvoaça. Sendo a representação zoomórfica um dos temas mais interessantes deste contexto e estando representadas várias fases artísticas, distintas como: o naturalismo estático, o naturalismo dinâmico, seguindo-se a arte esquemática já na Idade dos Metais. A fase mais antiga remonta muito provavelmente ao final do Paleolítico Superior (Magdalenense Superior) e ao Epipaleolítico, com base nos artefactos recolhidos e na análise estilística efectuada. A representação do Homem, associado com animal está igualmente presente e poderá retratar igualmente um conjunto de possíveis cultos xamânicos ou totémicos e possíveis relações com a natureza, nomeadamente os Rios, nascentes e as montanhas.



Since 1998, the Portuguese Association for Archaeological Investigation has been inventorying more than 35.000 new engravings from central Portugal, more specifically in the hydrological basins of the Ceira, Alva and neighbouring Unhais rivers. These engravings were found on 700 slabs from 11 large regions (Fig. 1):

1. Góis and Serra da Lousã
2. Serra da Cebola (Piódão – Arganil, Sobral de S. Miguel – Covilhã, Unhais-o-Velho-Pampilhosa da Serra)
3. Arouca/Silva – sources of the Ceira River (Unhais-o-Velho, Fajão-Pampilhosa da Serra)
4. Vide and Ribeira do Alvôco (Vide and Teixeira-Seia)
5. Serra do Açor (Piódão-Arganil)
6. Pedras Lavradas and Serra da Alvoaça (Erada-Covilhã and Teixeira-Seia)
7. Vale das Figueiras, Gondufo, Valera and Cabeço Solheiro (Vide-Seia)
8. Serra do Chiqueiro (Pampilhosa da Serra and Covilhã)
9. Serra da Abuceira (Covilhã)
10. Sobral de São Miguel (Covilhã)
11. Pereiro (Covilhã)

Concentrations of these engraved schist slabs are found mainly in mountainous areas, for example in the Serra da Cebola, Serra do Açor, Pedras Lavradas, often above 1300 meters. It is possible to find isolated slabs overlooking enclosed valleys, precipices and waterways.

Even though they only represent less than 1% of the total, zoomorphic and snake-like engravings are among the most interesting subjects. Their symbolism and associations with other engravings make these panels some of the richest artistic assemblages of the collection.

Various artistic phases are represented such as: static naturalism, dynamic naturalism followed by schematic art already in the Age of Metals. The oldest phase most probably dates to the end of the Upper Palaeolithic

(Upper Magdalenian) and to the Epipalaeolithic, represented with slab 29 from Serra do Chiqueiro - Pampilhosa da Serra. It shows several quadrupeds engraved with small hammered dots and subsequent incision by abrasion. One of the animals can be identified as an aurochs moving with a great sense of naturalism (Fig. 2).

On the banks of the river Ceira, near its sources in the Covanca region, more zoomorphic representations of a naturalistic type can be found. These include two possible bovids in confrontation (Fig. 3), engraved in the small dot hammering technique. At Aldeia Velha - Góis, a quadruped, possibly a caprid, seems to be associated with an anthropomorphic figure (Fig. 4), possibly a shaman “dressed” with what looks like the caprid skin. It is difficult to determine with certainty if these two engravings are distinct or not due to the patina and the lichens present on the schist surface. The engraving technique was fine incision. More recent engravings, such as two pentagrams, are also to be found on the slab.

The artefacts collected in the course of archaeological prospecting such as burins (quartz crystal) in the Chiqueiro area (slab 29) with wear marks, and flint points found in shelters in the region of Casal da Lapa - Pampilhosa da Serra, corroborate the antiquity of human occupation in the area.

The representation of Man associated with animals is also found in this region, as for example on slab n° 373 from the Serra de Cebola where a ginete (small horse), is associated with an anthropomorphic figure, probably dating to the Iron Age and engraved using the hammering technique followed by abrasion (Fig. 5). This man/animal association is also present on slab n° 133 from Serra da Abuceira/Portela da Casa Branca – Covilhã (Fig. 6), the engravings having been done by hammering followed by abrasion.

The representation of hybrid beings and small quadrupeds associated with meanders might portray possible shamanistic or totemic cults

and mythological scenes or spiritual paths. They indicate an important relation with nature and the observation of its rivers, sources, mountains and sky, for example at the site of Freixieiros in Chás de Égua – Arganil, with engravings made by hammering followed by abrasion (Fig. 7) (RIBEIRO, N.M.C.,2006).

In this general context appear a large number of engravings from historical periods - Roman to modern times. These were often imitations resulting from the observation of older engravings.

Snake-like motives may be associated with water ways, sources or meanders. They decorate dozens of slabs found mainly at the sources of the river Ceira, or between rivers, like at Outeiro dos Bardos II site, slab 225 in the Açor Mountain region (Fig. 8). Most of them were engraved using the hammering method with a hard striker possibly made of quartzite, followed in some cases by rotating abrasion, especially to create cup marks. These motives also appear in association with foot-like shapes, cup marks and figures with open arms possibly representing worshipers, for example on slabs nº 55 and nº 57 in Pedras Lavradas (Fig. 9 and Fig. 10).

Representations of birds are also found in this area, namely in the region of Pedra Letreira, Góis, using the incision process (Fig. 11), and in Serra da Abuceira, using hammering followed by abrasion (Fig. 12).

Arachnids such as scorpions are also represented (Fig. 13), for example on the slab “Rasa dos Mouros” in Teixeira, near the Alvôco river, associated with anthropomorphic figures, pectiniform (comb-like) elements (Fig. 14), circles and feet shapes, engraved using the hammering technique followed in some cases by abrasion.

Of the various types of existing zoomorphic figures, we also identified cervids, sometimes very stylised and present on slab nº 48 in Bulde - Pedras Lavradas, engraved by incision and abrasion (Fig. 15).

In an analysis of the distribution of the zoomorphs in the study area we can establish that these representations are closely linked to the only possible paths, along mountain ridge lines, in an approximate north/south axis, from the Tagus river towards the Serra da Estrela and the Côa river. The engraved panels from the Zêzere in the Barroca region and in the Serra do Chiqueiro are examples of these paths and evidence for this link.

The same natural routes, used by animals, would have been first used by hunter-gatherers and later as transhumance paths. The same phenomenon was observed in the Meseta Espanhola (R.GRANDE DEL BRIO, 1991: 84 and 85) and made clear since the Late Palaeolithic/Neolithic, with its apogee in the Bronze/Iron Ages, with dozens of funerary monuments of the mamoa (mound) type, generally coexisting with rock art. They were recently discovered along these same mountain ridge paths, for example along ridges in the Serra do Açor/Cebola and in the Serra do Cabeço Rainha (Sertão/Oleiros), and among concentrations of engraved slabs in the medium to high altitude regions of Casegas, Erada, Sobral de São Miguel and S. Jorge da Beira in the municipality of Covilhã.

Some of these routes, documented since the XIIth century (1186) in the Covilhã Charter, passed through the Serra da Gardunha and crossed the Tagus river in the area of Vila Velha do Ródão (Fig. 16), towards the Alentejo (RIBEIRO, O. 1940-41:254). The hypothesis of the Sever Basin being associated with transhumance routes linking the region of Beira Baixa to the Meseta Espanhola is already mentioned in OLIVEIRA, J. 1995:636. These potential links also help to understand the rock art of the Tagus valley and the Guadiana, being abstract parts of the same phenomenon, which can only be analysed as a whole, never as an isolated or regional phenomenon.

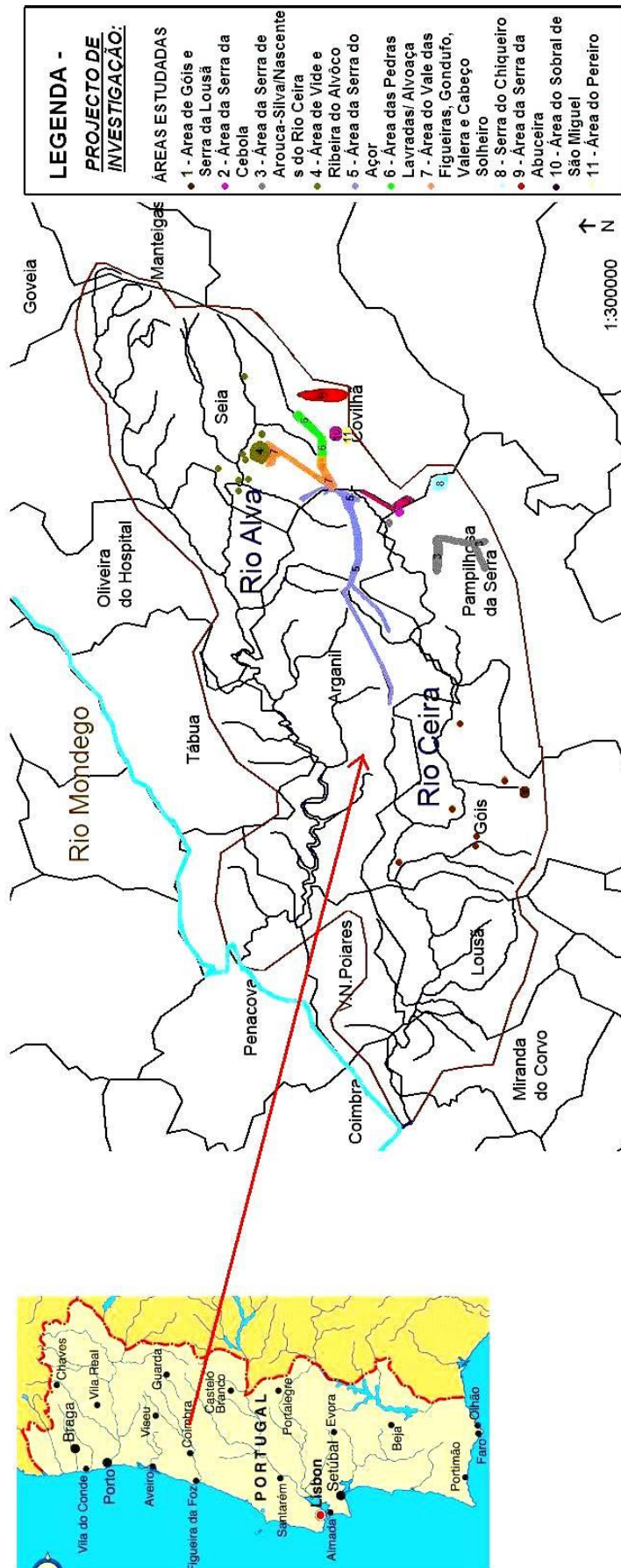


Fig. 1 – Map of the 11 large concentrations of rock art in the basins of the Ceira and Alva rivers, and neighbouring Unhais river.

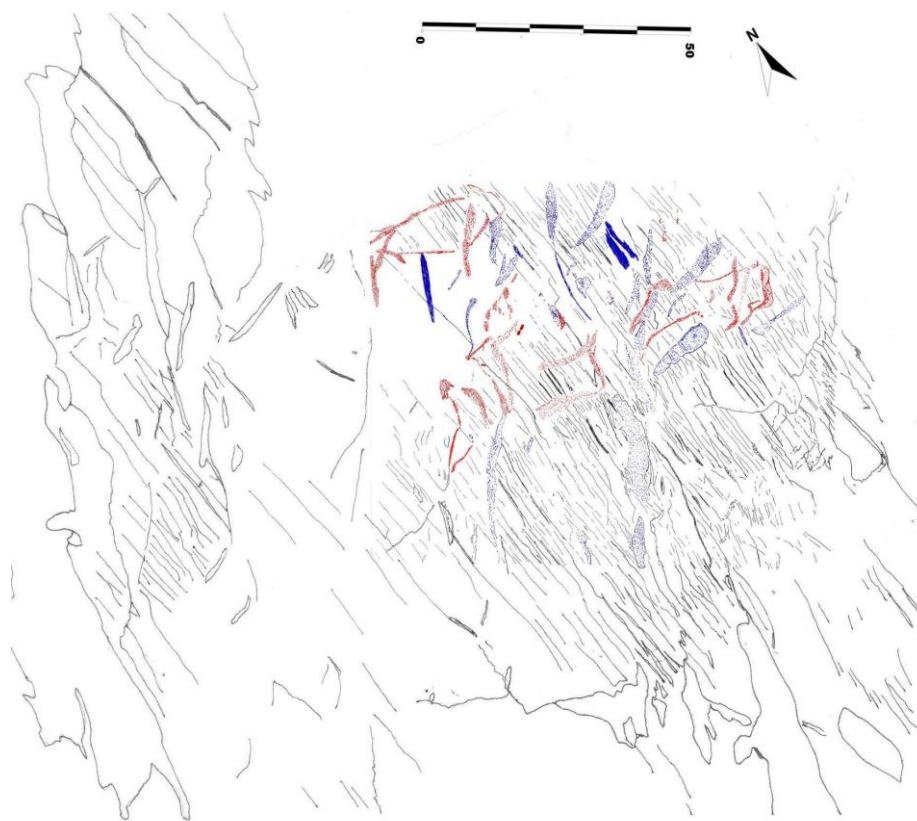


Fig. 2 – Naturalistic representation of an aurochs in movement on part of slab n° 29, Serra do Chiqueiro.

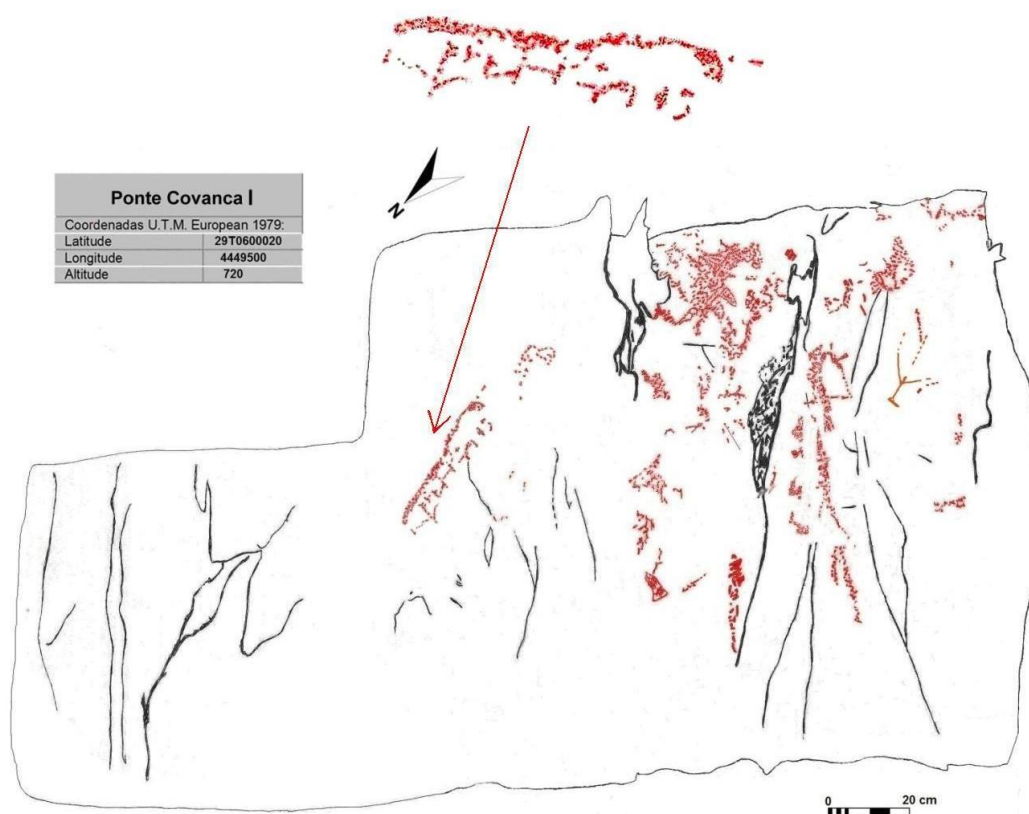


Fig. 3 – Naturalistic representation of zoomorphic elements, namely two possible bovids in confrontation, right bank of the Ceira river – Covanca – Pampilhosa da Serra.

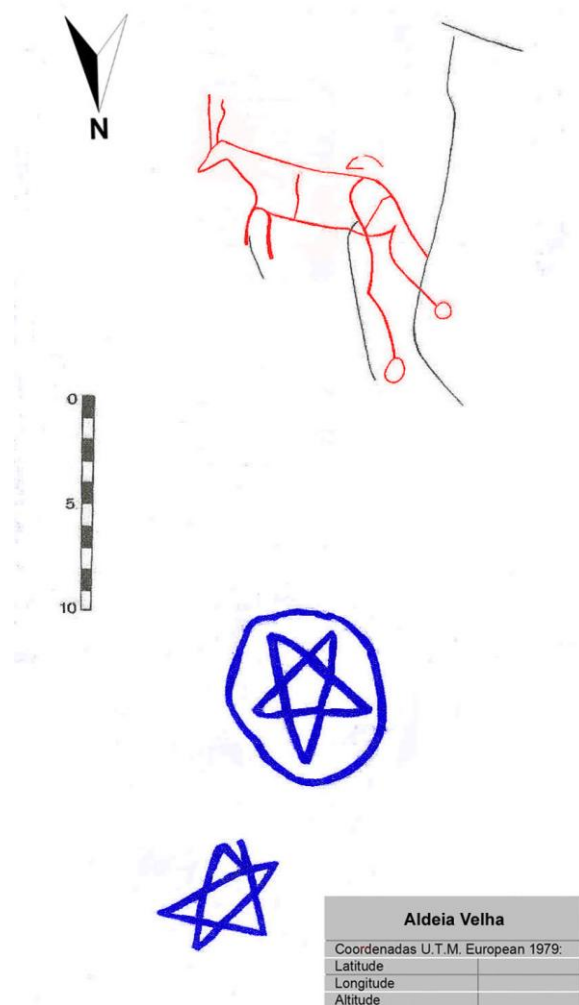


Fig. 4 – Representation of a quadruped, possibly a caprid, associated with an anthropomorphic figure - Aldeia Velha – Góis

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Fig. 5 – Equid associated with an anthropomorphic figure, quite probably from the Iron Age, representing a ginete (small horse).



Fig. 6 – Representation of the man/animal relationship figured on the Serra da Abuceira/Portela da Casa Branca – Covilhã slab nº 133.



Fig. 7 – Representation of meanders associated with zoomorphic elements, possibly a totemic cult, Freixeiros em Chás de Égua – Arganil.



Fig. 8 – Representation of cup marks, foot-like shapes, anthropomorphic figures, slab nº 13 Serra do Chiqueiro Pampilhosa da Serra.



Fig. 9 – Representation of worshipers associated with snake-like elements, slabs nº 55 and nº 57 in Pedras Lavradas.

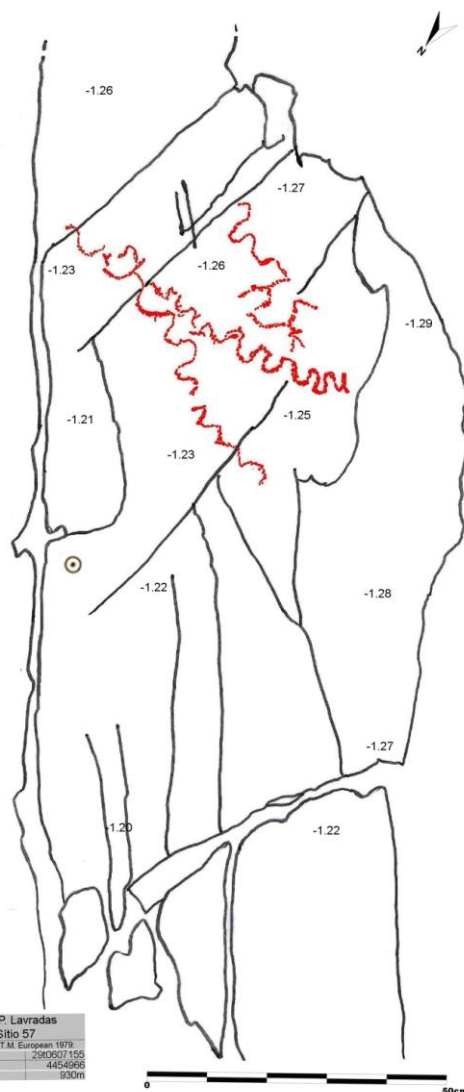


Fig. 10 – Representation of worshipers associated with snake-like elements, slabs nº 55 and nº 57 in Pedras Lavradas.



Fig. 11 – Representation of a bird, Pedra Letreira region in Góis.

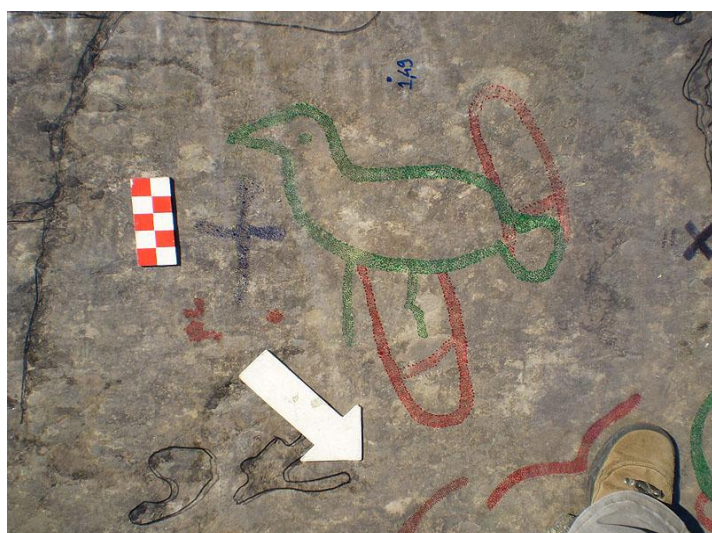


Fig. 12 – Representation of a bird, Serra da Abuceira - Covilhã.

Fig. 13 – Representation of scorpions, slab “Rasa dos Mouros” – Teixeira.

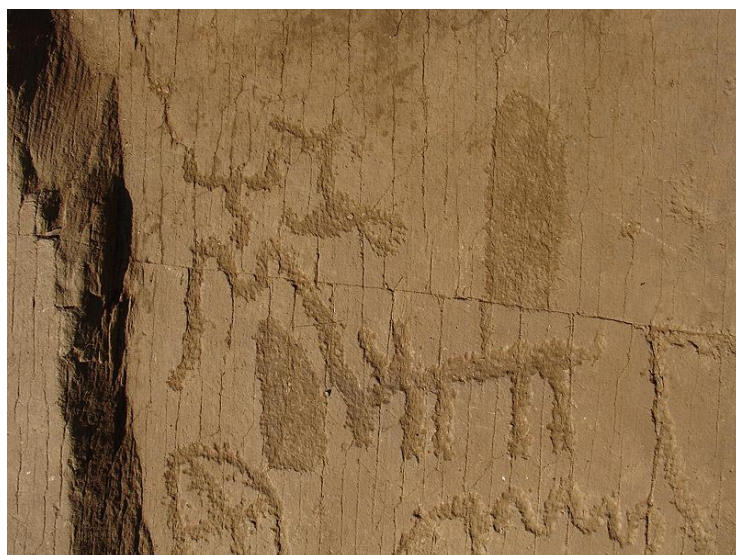




Fig. 14 – Representation of anthropomorphic figures associated with pectiniformes, circles and foot-like shapes, slab “Rasa dos Mouros” – Teixeira.

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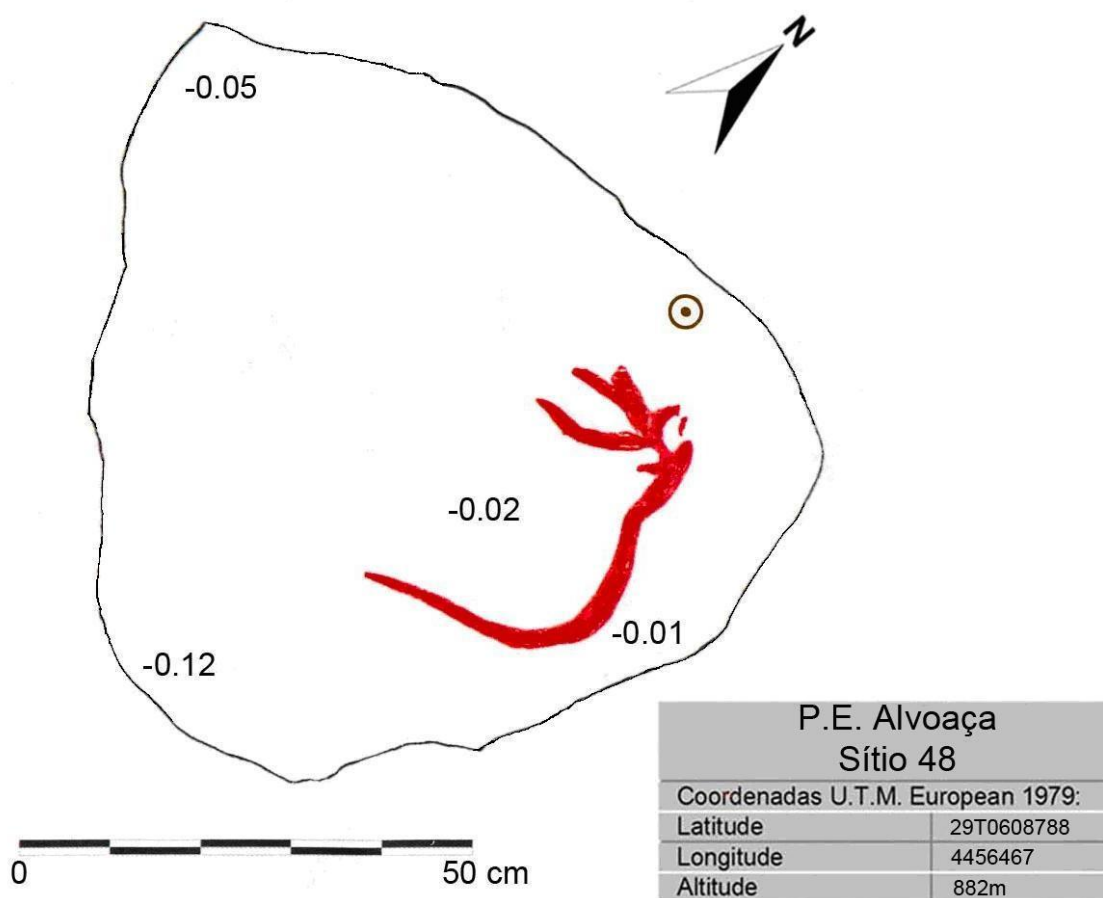


Fig. 15 – Representation of a much stylised cervid, present on slab n° 48 in Bulde - Pedras Lavradas.

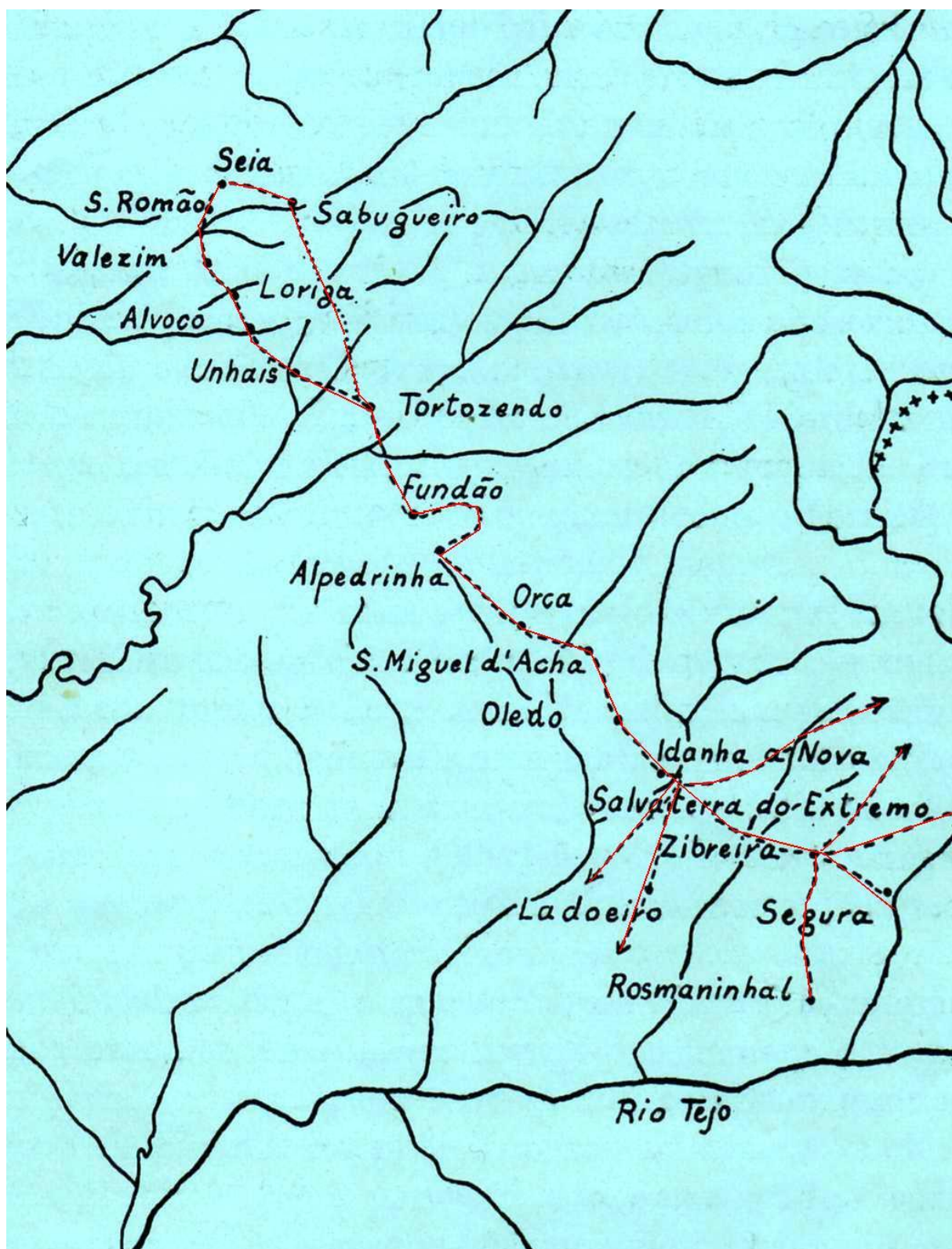


Fig. 16 – Route map of the transhumance path leading from the Alentejo to the Serra da Estrela (RIBEIRO, O. 1940-41:254).

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