that attribution squarely, having studied the Vale da Casa site near Vermelhosa, and deciding that it was conclusion that the rock art at this site is of the Iron Age (Abreu et al. 2000), having the courage to this site, whose recording of the same motifs is of much better quality, also first reported Palaeolithic motifs, which prompts me to ask: how can a Palaeolithic motif be younger than an Iron Age one? do know, having inspected the superimposition sequence, that the zoomorph is the younger of the have two straight horns, and whatever it may be intended to depict, I would never claim to know that. I questions: how does he know the meaning and age of either motif? The superimposed quadruped may poor rendering of panel 1 at Vermelhosa, showing two motifs, a rider with a superimposed zoomorph, All markings on that panel, and especially the anthropomorph, were incised with metal. Baptista offers a the 2000 or so finely engraved lines on this panel and could not find a single line made with a stone tool. Baptista depicts panel 2 of Ribeira de Piscos, with its phallic human figure. I have spent hours scanning specialising in Palaeolithic art and himself an artist of considerable experience, looked at the panel and These zoomorphs were clearly incised with a metal tool. Michael Eastham, a British rock art scholar and redeposited as a colluvial. If they contain stone tools and occur at rock art panels, they could iconographic or behavioural conventions of the alien interpreter. be made. Moreover, there is a danger that older deposits from the slopes have been transported down European inability to appreciate that the iconic content of alien arts must not be interpreted in accordance with the These zoomorphs resemble the facies typical of the Gredos ibex (Cervus dama dama lusitanica) which is the species. Nor is there a typical Pleistocene specimen among the thousands more animal depictions at Examples at that site. This naming is pure fantasy, it has no factual basis whatsoever. We have no idea in what attitude people of the Neolithic Hansen reports that ibex from Portugal. It is requisite to ask what the name of this magazine refers to. It alludes to the very common rock art motifs that are thought among all the communities of the Upper Palaeolithic, but it is not one of those species. It is a representative of the Late Pre-Pleistocene fauna of the Iberian Peninsula presents the advocates of a Pleistocene age with a conundrum. The overwhelming majority of the zoomorphs at all these sites present straight and equine motifs. The bovine resemble Spanish fighting bulls, with their distinctive, curved-forward pointed horns. The horse-like figures are often badly drawn, not at all in Palaeolithic style, and they even occur in huge number on a recently built 2-km-long stone wall near Siega Verde (Hansen 1997). Bearing in mind that the Siega Verde art cannot possibly imitate the huge former river terrace at that site, which we know to be post-Roman, there is no hope of finding any Palaeolithic art examples at that site. Another scientific discipline, geology, arrives at the same conclusion, and Baptista’s (2000) oversight in citing the findings of Portuguese geologists is relevant. All the open air sites of so-called Palaeolithic rock art occur on the same types of rock, schists or schists, lightly metamorphosed facies that under atmospheric hydration revert to their former state, mudstone, and then disintegrate readily. Schists and slates retreat at roughly half the rate of limestone, and we know that unprotected petroglyphs on limestone survive almost never beyond 2000 years. At Siega Verde, a surface retreat of 30 mm per 100 years was measured on a historical surface, immediately next to petroglyphs. Schist and slate are very soft rocks, readily subjected to fluvial wear, and both the Cova Agueda and Aveuda valleys experience rapid erosion and down-cutting from the coarse quartz sands and angular quartz cobbles. The Siega Verde petroglyphs are therefore in the presence of a detached layer of soil, and being among the much of the rock art is also still flooded annually. In these environments of periodic high kinetic energy, sharp abrasive action in combination with very soft rocks it is impossible for petroglyphs to survive for any great length of time. The case of the ibex could be a typical example. Daniel Wyrwoll (2000) reports that Hansen reports that ibex from Portugal. It is requisite to ask what the name of this magazine refers to. 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Baptista also presents the recently excavated rock art at Fariseu, which had been under the water of the Pocinho dam for many years. The panel had become covered by strata of lake sediment, no more than 17 years old, containing a colluvium of material that had been washed or had fallen down the slope above the site, as clearly stated in the initial report (Anonymous 2000). It was claimed that this colluvium contained some stone tools, but bearing in mind the distinctly secondary nature of such sediments, they are of no consequence in dating the rock art. (A colluvium is a loose deposit of rock debris formed at the base of a cliff or slope.) Baptista illustrates the right side Fariseu panel, which is unfortunate, as the left panel (Figure 2) comprises the beautiful horse figure with a distinct bridle across its muzzle (Abreu and Baptista 1983: 63). Baptista presents a detailed discussion of the complex cultural sequence of the Côa rock art he has constructed. There are images he places in the Gravettian, the Solutrean, the Magdalenian. But we have no aurochs or horse remains from northern Portugal from these periods. Bearing in mind that during the glacial peak, the climate had been arctic, it is very doubtful that the species Baptista believes to recognise in the art then actually existed in the region. The simple fact, however, is that far more than half of Côa’s 1000 or so petroglyphs consist of historical motifs, such as inscriptions, dates, crucifixion scenes, and nearby animal outlines, incised with metal tools, are in mint condition. 

Baptista presents (2000: 19), two dates from the 18th century are almost indecipherable, while the sections excavated at Quinta da Barca, showing the occurrence of ceramics down to bedrock, yet Baptista claims a Palaeolithic age for the site. (After Zilhão et al. 1997.)

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...
we have even pictures of Roman aurochs, and they resemble Palaeolithic pictures of these bovids very closely. The valley has been used extensively for mining since Roman times, and it is most transparent that all rock art sites coincide with or cluster around the remains of historical mill buildings. This applies in both the Côa valley and at the Siega Verde site, and is hardly a coincidence. And we know that the millers used pointed steel rods to roughen their millstones, that the marks of these tools resemble those on the petroglyphs, and that the type of weathering that occurs on mill stones do their work. Most of the Côa rock art is of recent centuries and of similar age as the many dates and inscriptions, this is self-evident (Figure 4). Some no doubt dates back as far as Roman times, and the older petroglyphs, sometimes are certainly not any Palaeolithic style, may even be of Pre-Roman times. It is a fascinating corpus of rock art, and far more interesting than Palaeolithic rock art. Which it is evidently not.

One cannot prove conclusively that there is no Palaeolithic rock art in the Côa valley, but all the scientific evidence for direct dating has so far resulted in late Holocene datings, as in the case of the sediments (Bednarik 1995b; Watchman 1995, 1996). The probability that someone will one day demonstrate a Palaeolithic age for one of these sites will always remain, but it is an extremely slim probability. So far we have only experienced state stylistic argument based on wishful thinking, and a great silence about archaeological dating results from rock art sites. Until Baptista and Zilhão present their stylistic argument in a precise format enabling their opponents to test each claim on its own merits, no realistic basis for debate exists. Until they present all dating results, particularly those that differed very much from their hopes and wishes, there is no archaeology of the Côa valley one can productively discuss. The failure to join the discipline why they are not prepared to help saving the much greater rock art on the Guadiana in southern Portugal, their shrill claims about the Côa valley will continue to sound hollow. After all, there is several times as much rock art on the Guadiana than on the Côa. The Guadiana corpus with its 600 sites, to be inundated by a huge dam, constitutes one of the three largest single concentrations of rock art in all of Europe, being of the magnitude of Val Camonica and Mount Iêgo. Zilhão has sharply opposed the endeavours of international organisations to save the Guadiana rock art, and has severely damaged the prospects of their campaign. He has angrily rejected the right of the UISSP to become involved in the campaign (Zilhão 2001), and he has repeatedly attacked the IFRAO over its petition and other actions to save the huge Guadiana rock art corpus.

From separating the sheep from the goats (or whatever might be depicted in the rock art), for I have no particular preferences we have suddenly come to separating those who save or protect rock art from those who preside over its destruction. Baptista has a long career in the latter, considering his involvement and implication in the destruction of large parts of the ‘Côa’ rock art during the early 1980s, which he recorded instead of saving it. The age of the rock art of Portugal is not remotely as important, I would argue, as is its preservation. How does Baptista reconcile his and Zilhão’s opposition to the campaign to save the massive Guadiana rock art complex with his responsibility as Director of the National Centre of Rock Art? Does he think it is the role of his taxpayer-funded position to facilitate the wholesale destruction of Portuguese rock art, or is it only the Guadiana rock art he allows to be destroyed? Recently the National Centre of Rock Art was even charged of having burned some of the 4,000 petroglyphs found in the Guadiana area. What are we to say to Professor João Zilhão, the Director of the Portuguese Institute of Archaeology, and to Dr António Martinho Baptista, the Director of the National Centre of Rock Art when they facilitate the total destruction of their country’s largest corpus of rock art, and one of Europe’s greatest rock art monuments?

REFERENCES


Figure 4. A selection of quite typical petroglyphs from the Côa valley. All discussions of this corpus pass over the fact in silence that most Côa rock art does not remotely resemble Palaeolithic art, but consists of motifs such as these, and dates beginning with about A.D. 1729. These kinds of motifs are frequently older than the naturalistic content, even in petroglyphs of the ‘Côa’ rock art.


