

# ROCK ART AT S. GONÇALO HILL, BARCELOS (NW PORTUGAL), AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF A STRUCTURAL PLACE IN THE PREHISTORIC LANDSCAPE

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Images in stone  
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## INTRODUCTION

In 2012 the first engravings were discovered at hill of S. Gonçalo, due to occasional prospection works performed by the City Hall Archaeological Cabinet. Since 2015 this entity developed the systematic inventory of the rock art identified at the hill, mainly with two objectives: update the Archaeological County Map and classify the archaeological set of rock art as Property of Public Interest. At this scope, all the occurrences were photographed during daytime, and surveying photogrammetric works were accomplished. The morphological analysis to the engraved surfaces was done using *Meshlab* software.

Despite all the work developed, this rock art data is practically unpublished, since only some engraved outcrops were referred within different purposes (Brochado, 2014; Sampaio and Brochado, 2015; Magalhães, 2016; Santos-Estévez *et al.*, 2016). Thus, this poster pretends to display the findings in its physical and archaeological context, identifying different engraved styles and add some generic considerations about its chronology and purposes. This will allow a better knowledge about the North-western rock art, potentiating its patrimonial value, and allowing its transformation in a touristic resource.

## THE HILL OF S. GONÇALO

The hill of S. Gonçalo occupies the western uttermost of the council of Barcelos, district of Braga (Northwest of Portugal), between the rivers Neiva (at North) and Cávado (at South). It is an impressive hill whose conical shaped summit reaches 485 meters of maximum altitude. Detached from the surroundings, especially at Northwest, West, Southwest and South, has steeply slopes from 390 meters onwards. By its East-Northeast side there are some platforms that allow an easy access to the top, difficult from other quadrants. This hill includes several water sources that feed the above mentioned river basins, so as plenty granitic outcrops (Figs. 1 and 7).



Fig. 1 Location of the hill of S. Gonçalo in Iberia Peninsula and in the North-west of Portugal.

## THE ROCK ART

The inventory confirms 42 engraved outcrops distributed by different levelled platforms at the hill of S. Gonçalo, concretely at Northwest, West, Southwest and East-Southeast, between 190 and 380 meters (Fig. 7). Recently, a new outcrop was discovered at the hill summit, yet not inventoried.

The findings were distributed for several nucleuses, whose designation obeys to local place names. We are referring the nucleuses of Chãs de Palme; Cresto/Crasto; Curro 1; Curro 2; Estreito; Laje das Cruzes; and Penedos Gordos.

Ichnographically speaking, there are engraved outcrops including only cups and rings, like the ones located in the vicinities of the megalithic necropolis of Ferração (Fig. 7, nºs 20 and 21). However, between lower altitudes (Fig. 7, nºs 30 and 31) and the upper platform (Fig. 7, nº 24), the major number of engraving correspond to abstract motifs formed by cups and rings and clouds of points surrounded by grooves, considered as Atlantic Art manifestations (Figs. 2, 3 and 4). Reticulated motifs also occur, either associated to Atlantic Art (Fig. 7, nº 30) or appearing isolated (Figs. 5 and 7, nº7).

Occupying a peripheral position in relation to the circular compositions of Penedos Gordos (Fig. 7, nº 41), a schematic composition denouncing motion including a cervid and an anthropomorph was engraved, associated to a probable bow and arrow (Fig. 4 e 7, nº 41).

There is also an engraved outcrop that includes halberds and daggers (Fig. 6 e 7, nº 12), an outcrop with a footprint, several low relief mills (often associated to Atlantic Art), and an outcrop with a cruciform, a crosier and an inscription.

## DATA DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATIONS

According to the contextualized set of available data we can add some considerations about the Atlantic Rock Art present at the Hill of S. Gonçalo, specifically: 1) these manifestations are located in places easily accessible from lower platforms, within a natural corridor of circulation, and concentrated between 350 and 380 meters of altitude, in a level positioned immediately before the steep slopes that accede to the hill top; 2) it is in this liminal place that the engraved outcrop appear frequently associated to little granitic hills, but surrounding a most prominent and conical shaped hill detached in the central platform, as being part of a mnemonic of the own hill; 3) in the hill summit engravings and engraved motifs are scarce, perpetrating a preferential location to Atlantic Art verified in a wider number of sites all over the Portuguese Northwest, hypothetically indicating its high symbolic value and some social prescriptions in relation to its access; 4) within this stylistic group that we chronologically situate between the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> millenniums BC, a deer hunt scene was depicted, which we also associate to an older chronology; 5) posteriorly, in a borderline outcrop located at the platform immediately above the steep slopes, a set of weapons was engraved, which may correspond, among other meanings, to a symbolic appropriation, or to a celebration of this space during the Early Bronze Age, and to a mnemonic offering to this mythical place of the ancestors; 6) during the Bronze or even Iron Age this place was “marked” with a footprint (a feet of an initiated that reached the pretended place during initiation rites?), materializing new senses to a place riddled of stories, although distant from the remaining archaeological contexts.

Synthesizing, the set of identified data present at the hill of S. Gonçalo allow hypothesizing its large diachronic use and meaning, and the longevity of its importance as a structural place in the landscape of local prehistoric inhabitants, that is, an “*axis mundus*” in the sense of Eliade (2006). Its symbolic importance remained in folk memory, as one can identify in local toponymy from Christian origin, in the construction of the chapel of S. Vicente in the Northeast slope, documented during the twelfth century, by the construction of two chapels in the North-Northwest slope, and by the construction of the chapel in honour to S. Gonçalo at the hill summit, in ruins during the eighteenth century.



Fig. 2. Cresto 2.

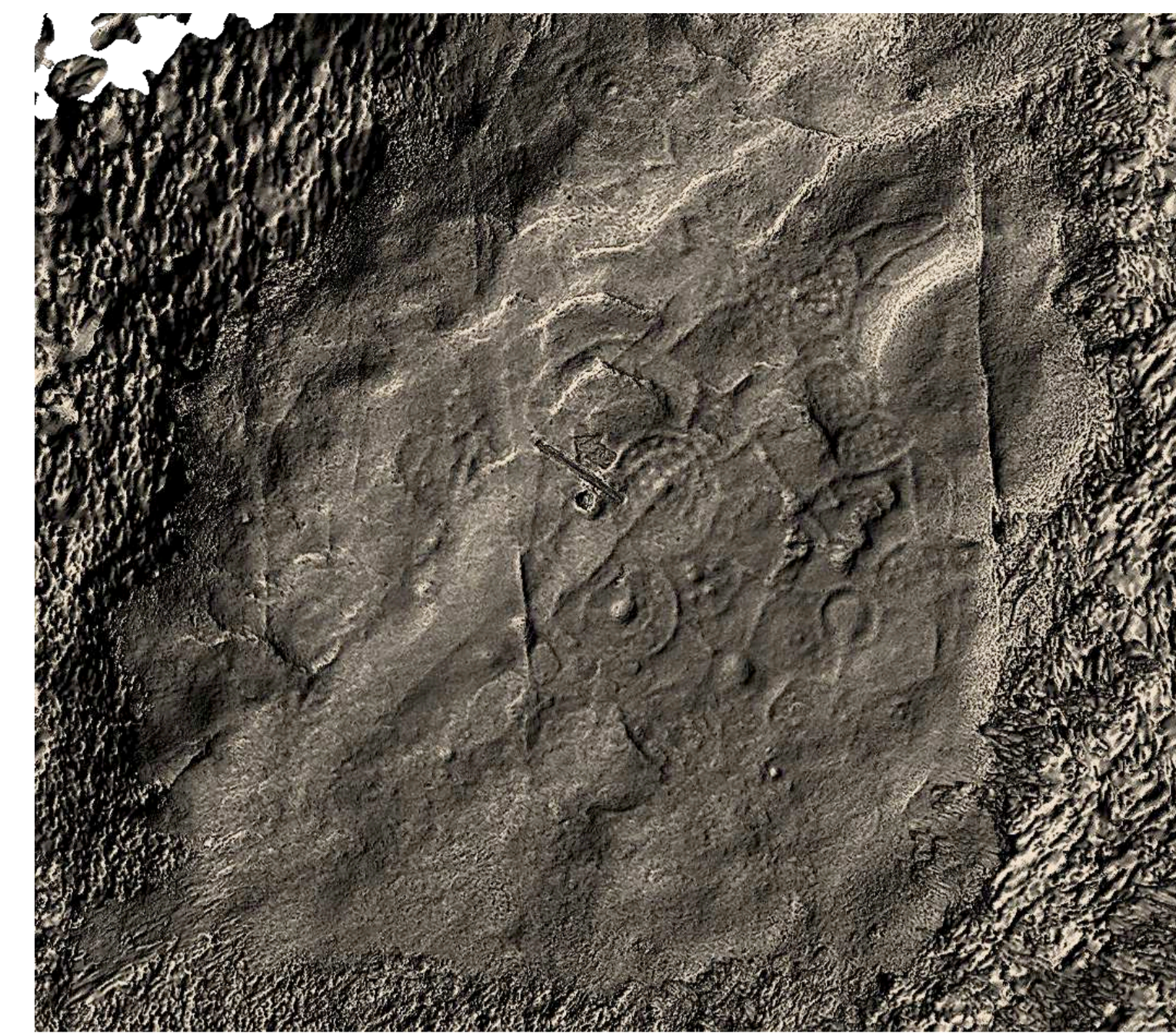


Fig. 3. Chãs de Palme.



Fig. 4. Penedos Gordos (Fig. 7, nº 41).

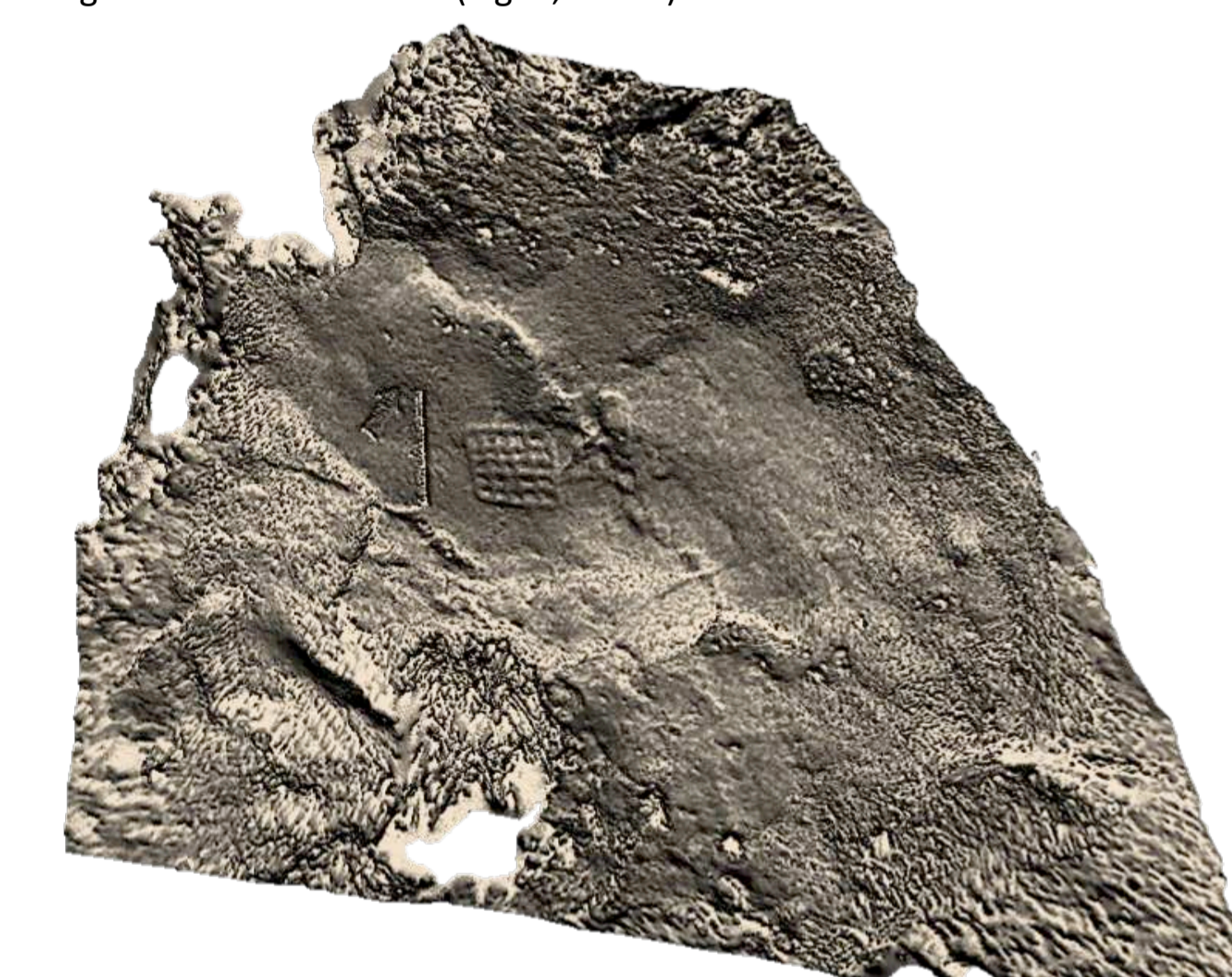


Fig. 5. Laje das Cruzes 2 (Fig. 7, nº 7).



Fig. 6. Laje das Cruzes 1 (Fig. 7, nº 12).

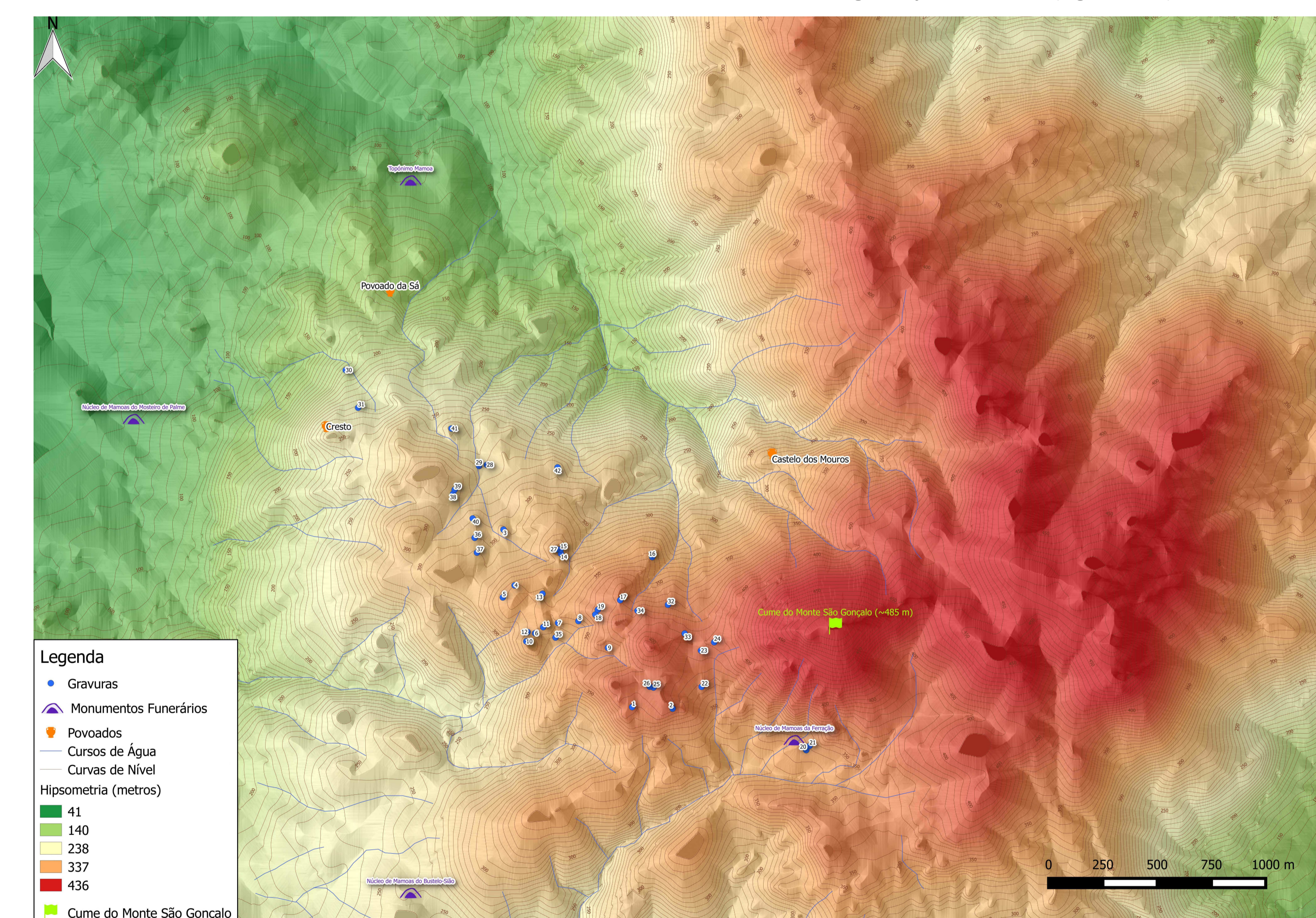


Fig. 7. Rock engravings spatial distribution at the hill of S. Gonçalo (blue dots) and other archaeological sites (megalithic monuments and Bronze Age and Iron Age settlements).

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