

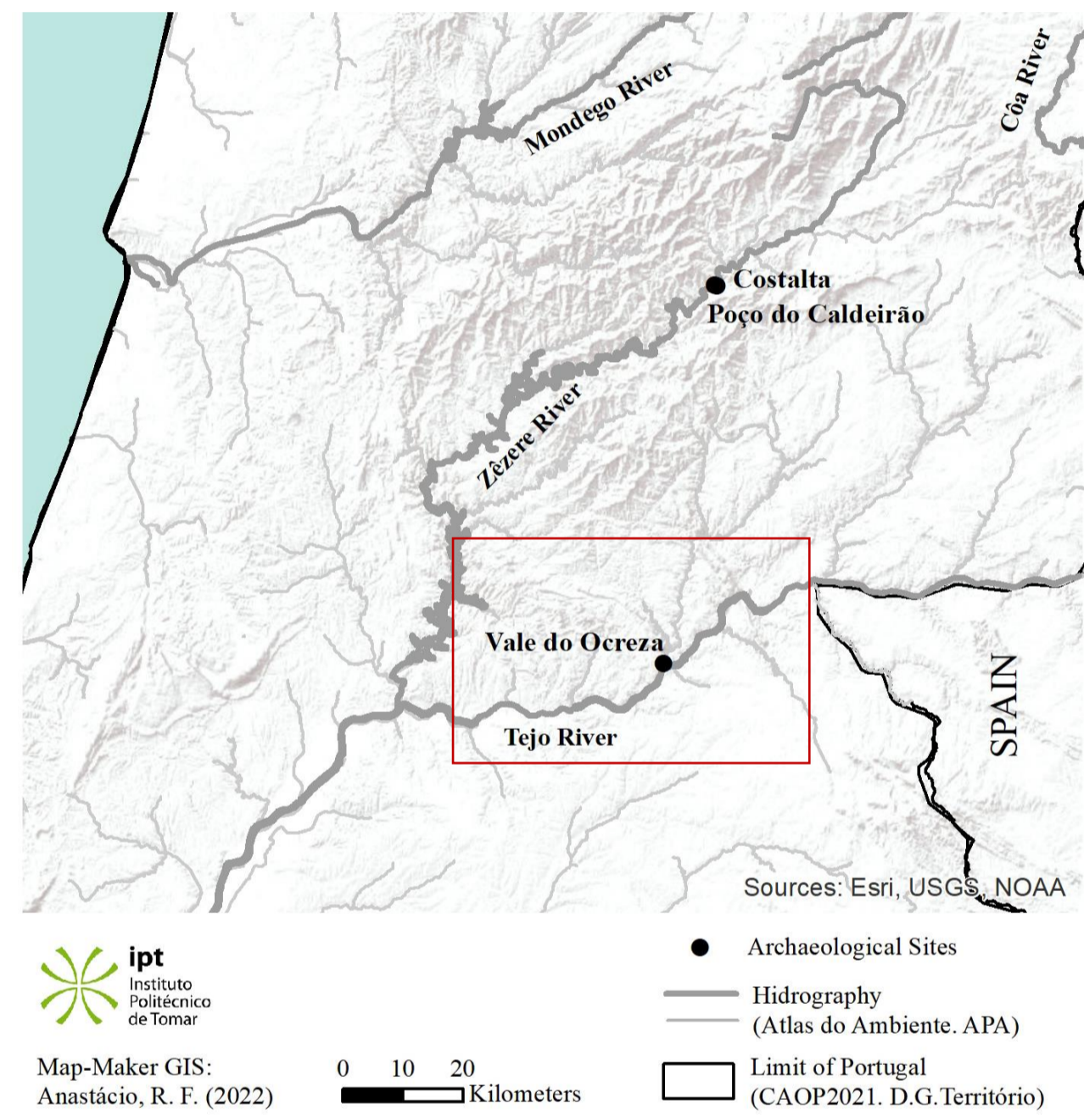
## THE OCREZA VALLEY PALAEOLITHIC ROCK ART (THE OCREZART PROJECT)

Dionysios Danelatos<sup>1,2,3</sup>, Telmo Pereira<sup>1,2,5,6</sup>, Hipólito Giraldo Collado<sup>1,2,3,7</sup>, Hugo Gomes<sup>1,2,3</sup>, George Nash<sup>1,2,3,8</sup>, Luiz Oosterbeek<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>, Sara Garcês<sup>1,2,3</sup>

1. Polytechnic Institute of Tomar, Portugal  
2. Geosciences Centre, University of Coimbra, Portugal  
3. Earth and Memory Institute, Mação, Portugal  
4. Museum of Prehistoric Art and the Sacred Tagus Valley, Mação, Portugal  
5. Autonomous University of Lisbon, Portugal  
6. UNIARQ, Archaeology Centre of the University of Lisbon, Portugal  
7. Heritage & Art Research Group, Extremadura University, Badajoz and Cáceres, Spain  
8. Department of Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology, University of Liverpool, England

### 1. Introduction

Open-air Upper Palaeolithic rock art in Western Iberia tends to gravitate toward major rivers and their tributaries, particularly favoring the preservation of exposed schist surfaces. Notably, a concentration of panels featuring engraved zoomorphic representations emerges predominantly within the Douro and Guadiana basins. In contrast, the Tagus River, presumed to have played a pivotal role in the last hunter-gatherer and the first agricultural and shepherd communities across millennia, exhibits scarce examples of such artistic expressions. However, recent discoveries spanning 2021 to 2023 in the Ocreza Valley challenge the previous narrative, suggesting a need to widen the geographic scope of exploration. These findings underscore a substantial human presence and a distinctive form of artistic expression dating back to the Gravettian-Solutrean periods. The Ocreza Valley (a tributary of the Tagus river), with its trove of archaeological treasures, beckons for a renewed focus, beckoning researchers to delve deeper into the historical interplay between human communities and the evocative artistry etched upon the canvas of exposed schist surfaces.



### 2. Objectives

To treat the problem of the current view of Upper Palaeolithic archaeological remains in Ocreza from the art perspective it is necessary to:

- Examine the existence of Upper Palaeolithic rock art in the Lower Tagus Basin.
- Attempt to provide a chronological framework.
- Question the role of Tagus river and its tributaries during Upper Palaeolithic.

### 3. Materials and Methods

In the heart of Portugal, Upper Palaeolithic zoomorphic art graces two distinct locales: the Valleys of Zêzere and Ocreza. Until the inception of the OcrezArt project in 2021, aimed at both identifying rock art and expanding Palaeolithic research within the Tagus Valley Rock Art Complex, the count of panels remained restricted to a mere three: Vale da Rovinhosa (Ocreza River) (1), Costalta and Poço do Caldeirão (Zêzere river) (2) (Baptista, 2001; 2004; Danelatos, 2022).

In an attempt for contextualization and to check whether more Palaeolithic panels exist on the area of interest, the research proceeded with following methodology:

- Excavation campaign at the Vale da Rovinhosa (2021)
- Field survey (prospection) at the Ocreza Valley (2023)
- Use of updated documentation methods (Digital photography, Digital tracings, 3D modelling, GIS database)
- Bibliographic review and stylistic comparisons.



### 4. Results

-The excavation campaign and the field survey brought to light two new panels.

-Updated documentation techniques aimed the research: 1) enhancing the identification of zoomorphic figures, superimpositions and distinguishing the different techniques applied from the prehistoric artist(s?) (pecking, incision), 2) digitally preserving the the artifacts, 3) saving the precise coordinates.

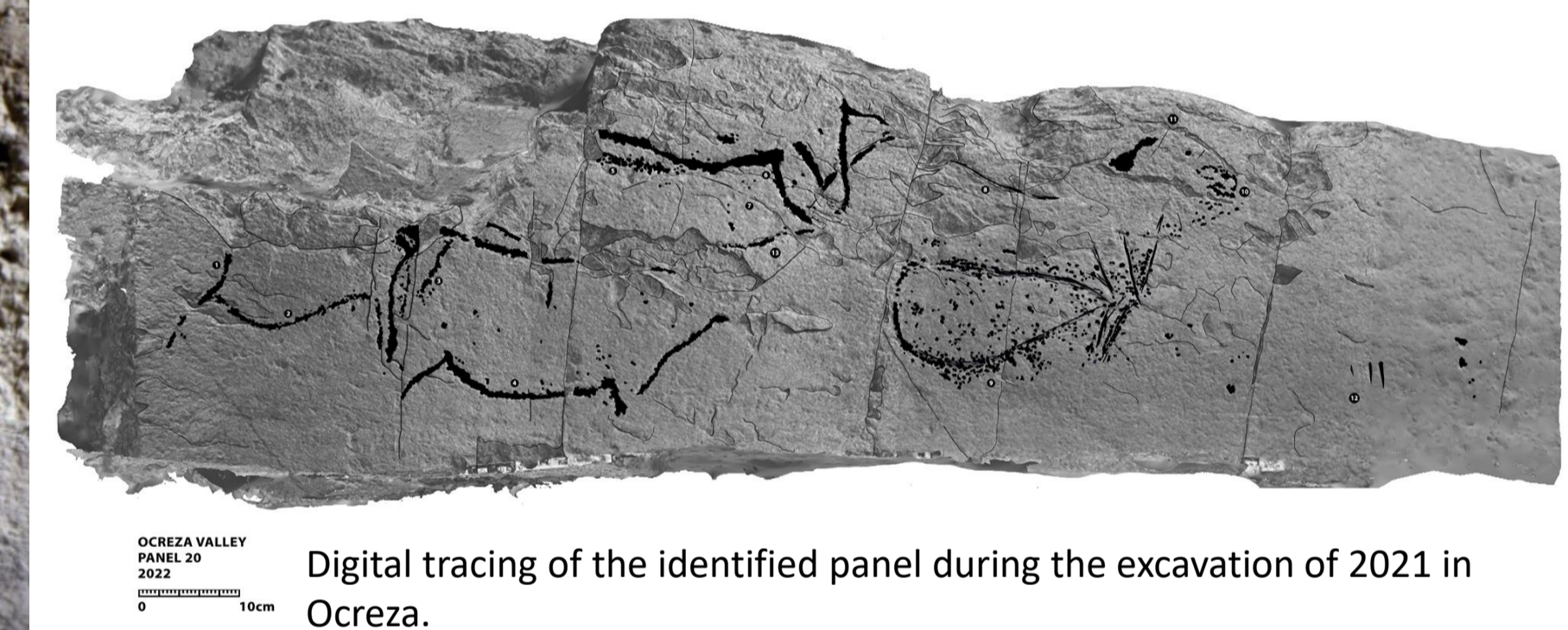
-The Upper Palaeolithic age of the art in Ocreza was suggested according to the naturalistic style of the depictions that it is generally attributed to Gravettian-Solutrean chronologies.

-There is a repetition of the distributional pattern for the creation of rock art with the selection of vertical and subvertical schist surfaces close by the rivers' currents.

### 5. Discussion

Despite still low in numbers, Upper Palaeolithic rock art is evident in Tagus. Based on the state-of-the-art, stylistic comparisons argue in a favour of a broad influence and possible relations with other major Palaeolithic rock art clusters and sites of the Peninsula, like Côa Valley, Siega Verde, Ardales and Pileta (Baptista, 2001; 2004; Santos, 2017; Reis, 2021; Danelatos, 2022). Tagus was a noteworthy passage and a habitat rich in resources linking through its tributaries the disperse hunter-gatherer communities between the Atlantic to the Pyrenees, and from Douro to the Southern coastal part.

The spatial distribution and "scarcity" can be briefly explained by research trends (i.e. limited systematic surveys, excavations, research focus etc.) and preservation issues influenced by anthropogenic and natural variables (for example the construction of dams and sedimentation processes on fluvial environments). Nevertheless, the new panels support the idea of a new prominent complex with Upper Palaeolithic art in Western Iberia.



### 6. Final considerations

To understand better the role of Tagus for the Upper Palaeolithic communities and the until now dubious "scarcity" it is necessary to examine the transition of Upper Palaeolithic art in the territories between the Tagus and Guadiana rivers with special focus on the Lower Tagus basin. This must be done extensively while taking into consideration the distribution, context, style and chronology of the rock art. Therefore, it is highly important to continue the thorough investigation of the OcrezArt project and to support relevant future projects at the area.

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