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**REVISITING THE CASTS FROM THE TAGUS VALEY (PORTUGAL):
A POSSIBLE MEGALITHIC ENCLOSURE DEPICTION IN ROCK ART**

**REVISIÓN DE LAS ESCAYOLAS DEL VALLE DE TAGUS (PORTUGAL):
UNA POSIBLE DEPENDENCIA MEGALÍTICA EN EL ARTE PREHISTÓRICO**

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Abstract

The author analyses some engravings from Rock 132 of Fratel (Tagus Valley), which could constitute the representation of a megalithic enclosure datable from the Neolithic/Calcolithic, as those that exist, not so far, in Alentejo. In fact, although that rock is currently submerged by the waters of the dam of Fratel, the existence of a latex cast done in the 70' allows studying the mentioned engravings, which reveal a great typological similarity regarding the plan of the enclosure from Monte do Olival 1, having the engravings from Rock 132 also the representation of the gates, as it happens at enclosures such as Perdigões, Xancra and Chez-Reine (France). Other cases of what seems to be the representation of prehistoric architectonic elements in rock art are also analyzed. The author makes also a comparison between the plans of ditched enclosures from Spain and the UK and some rock art images.

Keywords

Fratel – Megalithic enclosures – Rock art – Architectonic representation

Resumen

El autor analiza algunos grabados de la roca 132 de Fratel (Valle del Tajo), que podrían constituir la representación de un recinto megalítico datable desde el Neolítico/Calcolítico, como los que existen, no lejos, en Alentejo. De hecho, aunque esa roca actualmente sea sumergida por las aguas de la presa de Fratel, la existencia de un molde de látex, hecho en los años 70, permite estudiar los grabados mencionados, que revelan una gran similitud tipológica con respecto al plan del recinto del Monte Olival 1, teniendo los grabados de la roca 132 también la representación de las puertas, como sucede en recintos tales como Perdigões, Xancra y Chez-Reine (Francia). Se analizan aún otros casos de lo que parece ser la representación de elementos arquitectónicos prehistóricos en el arte rupestre. El autor también hace una comparación entre los planes de recintos de fosos de España y del Reino Unido y algunas imágenes de arte rupestre.

Palabras Claves

Fratel – Recintos megalíticos – Arte rupestre – Representación arquitectónica

Introductory note

This article analyses an engraving from Rock 132 of Fratel (Tagus Valley, Portugal), that may constitute the representation of a ditched or a walled enclosure, dating from Late Neolithic/Early Copper Age. Despite this rock being currently submerged by the waters of the dam of Fratel, we had access to its engravings, which were reproduced in a latex cast done in the 70.

In fact it is thanks to this type of casts, done in that period, that the rock art from the Portuguese Tagus Valley is a little better known, since about 80% to 90% of the engravings are submerged since 1974 due to the construction of the dam.

In the present, from this important rock art complex, only “survives” above water the site of São Simão, in the municipality of Nisa and the site of Gardete, in the municipality of Vila Velha de Ródão, staying this one outside of the flooded area.

In this article we first make some remarks about ditched enclosures in Portugal, then we discuss the engraving from Rock 132 of Fratel as a possible representation of one of those monuments and, in the end, we approach other European ditched enclosures, comparing some of their plans with rock art images.

1.- Ditched enclosures in Portugal

In the last years the number of ditched enclosures referenced in Portugal has been increasing in an extraordinary way¹.

This type of prehistoric architectonic remains constitute an important contribute for understanding the Neolithic and Calcolithic communities from southern Portugal and their social dynamics, having interesting parallels in Spain. In fact, the construction of ditched enclosures is a phenomenon of European dimension².

Most of the Portuguese examples are located in Alentejo, existing also a few cases in other regions such as Algarve, Ribatejo, Estremadura, Beira Litoral and Douro Litoral³.

¹ H. Becker, H. Valera, A. C. y P. Castanheira, “Monte do Olival 1 (Ferreira do Alentejo, Beja): magnetometria de céσιο num recinto de fossos do 3º milénio a. C.”. *Apontamentos de Arqueologia e Património*, 8, (2012) 11–17; A. C. Valera, “Map of walled and ditched enclosures”. 2013a. <http://portugueseenclosures.blogspot.pt/p/map-of-enclosures.html> Accessed in 28 of January of 2017; A. C. Valera, “Drawing” ditched enclosures”. 2013b. <http://portugueseenclosures.blogspot.pt/search/label/depictions> Accessed in 28 of January of 2017; A. C. Valera, “Iberian causewayed enclosures”. (2015) 51. <http://portugueseenclosures.blogspot.pt/search/label/causewayed%20enclosures> Accessed in 13 of February of 2017; A. C. Valera, “Breve apontamento sobre a dimensão cosmogónica dos recintos de fossos da Pré-história Recente no Interior Alentejano”. *Cadernos do Endovélico*, 1. (2013c) 51-63; A. C. Valera y H. Becker, “Cosmologia e recintos de fossos da Pré-história Recente: resultados da prospecção geofísica em Xancra (Cuba, Beja). *Apontamentos de Arqueologia e Património*, 7, (2011) 23-32; A. C. Valera y T. do Pereiro, “Novos recintos de fossos no sul de Portugal: o Google Earth como ferramenta de prospecção sistemática. In, *Arqueologia em Portugal. 150 anos*. Lisboa: Associação dos Arqueólogos Portugueses, (2013) 345–350.

² V. Jiménez-Jáimez, “The Unsuspected Circles. On the Late Recognition of Southern Iberian Neolithic and Calcolithic Ditched Enclosures”. *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, 81, (2015) 179-198.

³ A. C. Valera, “Map of walled and ditched enclosures”...

As it's possible to observe in figure 1, the location of Fratel is not far from a group of ditched enclosures from Alentejo.

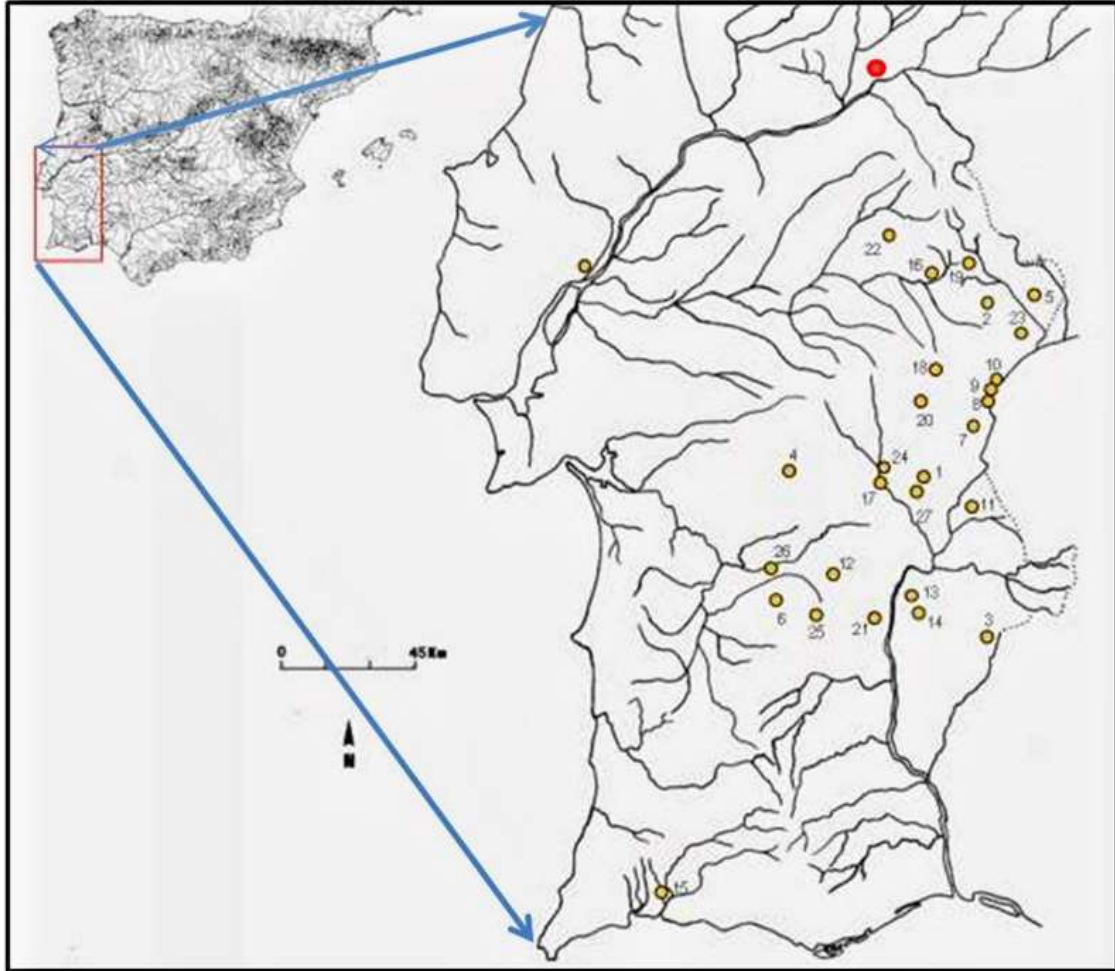


Figure1

Yellow dots: ditched enclosures from the south of Portugal. Red dot: location of Fratel (Adapted from Valera, 2013a)

A structural analysis of the engraving from R. 132 of Fratel, compared with the plan, obtained by magnetogram, from the enclosure of Monte do Olival 1 leads to remarkable similarities. Indeed, in the enclosure's plan it's possible to observe four concentric circles of ditches and an external area with gates (Fig. 2). In the engraving, there are four concentric circles and the depiction of the same type of external area with the gates (Fig. 3) of what could be most probably a ditched or walled enclosure from that region.

It must be mentioned that in Fratel there's a walled enclosure at the site of Charneca de Fratel, not far from the area of Rock 132, which was the subject of preliminary excavations not being possible yet to understand its complete plan⁴. The only

⁴ J. Soares, "O povoado da Charneca de Fratel e o Neolítico Final - Calcolítico da região Ródão - Nisa. Notícia Preliminar". Alto Tejo, 2. (1988) 3-6.

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available publication, so far, regarding this archaeological site mentions an entry, defended by a large semicircular bastion⁵.

Another engraving from the Tagus valley, available on a cast from Rock 69A of Cachão do Algarve, deserves some considerations due to its uniqueness and interest for the subject approached in this article. It consists in a circle with a smaller half circle (Fig.4), having a similar typology of the engraving from Rock 132 of Fratel.

Obviously this figure doesn't have the same striking visual aspect that has the engraving from Rock 132 of Fratel with the concentric lines but, nevertheless, it must be at least referred here, since its typology is not very usual.



Figure 2
Plan from Monte do Olival 1. (Adapted from Becker *et al.*, 2012)

⁵ J. Soares, "O povoado da Charneca de Fratel..."

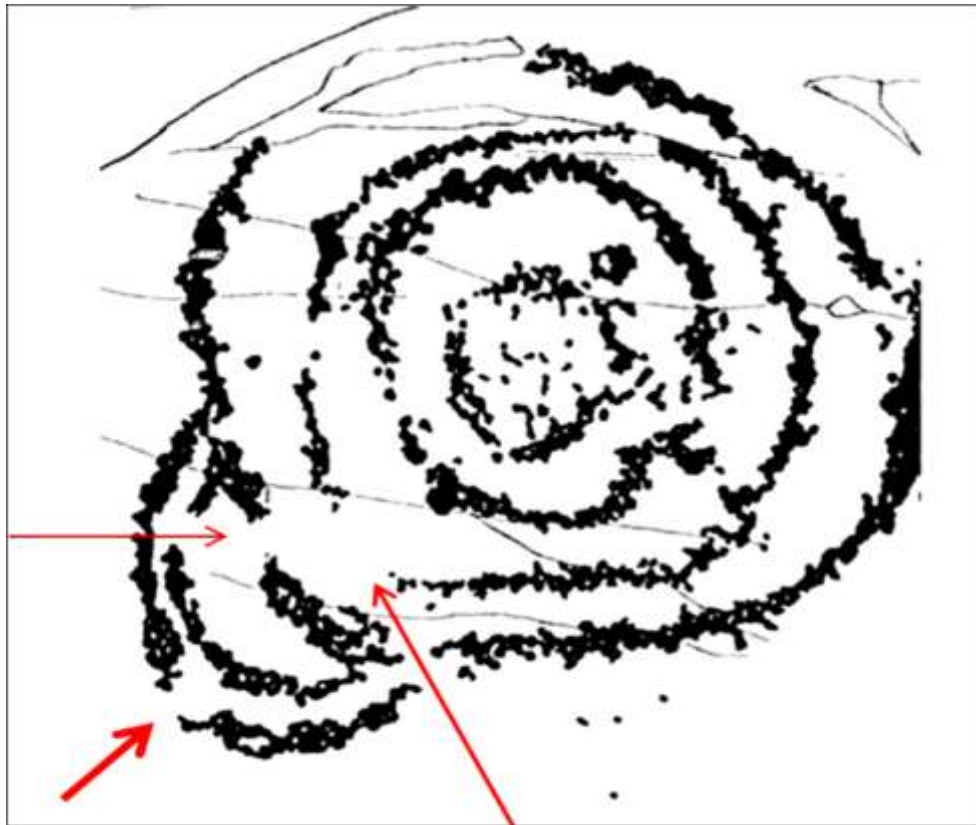


Figure 3
Engraving from R. 132 of Fratel. (Adapted from Ridel, 2009)



Figure 4
Rock 69A from Cachão do Algarve, Tagus Valley. (After, Ridel, 2009)

2.- Discussion

One of the earliest representations of architectonic elements in prehistoric art appears at Çatal Hüyük, in Turkey, dating from the late VII millennium BCE, where a wall painting in the shrine VII.14 depicts the houses of the village, with an erupting volcano in the background⁶.

In Rock 40 from Pià d'Ort (Valcamonica) there's a topographic representation that, according to U. Sansoni and S. Gavaldo⁷, seems to display a Calcolithic agricultural settlement.

Also in Valcamonica there are many examples of houses from the Iron Age depicted in the rock art of areas such as Naquane, Foppe di Nadro, Campanine di Cimbergo and others, that even the most distracted visitor can easily observe.

Therefore, if "profane" architectonic elements such as the previous examples are represented on art, it makes sense that places with a certain ritual character as the ditched enclosures also can be represented in prehistoric art. In fact as A. Oswald⁸ wrote about prehistoric enclosures, "the construction of an artificial boundary around an area, creating a distinction between 'inside' and 'outside', private and public, human and wild, and perhaps sacred and profane, was to prove a profound social and architectural development".

According to Valera⁹, the engraving on Rock 132 from Fratel is truly similar with a ditched enclosure, having a gate with its "crab claws", remembering the external gates of Perdigões, Xancra and many others from France as, for example, the case from the enclosure of Chez-Reine (Fig. 5).

In Portugal there are other cases of what seems to be the representation of architectonic prehistoric elements in rock art. For example, a rock with engravings from Reguengo Grande (Lourinhã) has one figure of a half circle intersected by two parallel lines, being according to I. Mateus and S. Mateus¹⁰, the depiction of a funerary enclosure. In this case, the circle could represent a chamber and the parallel lines could stand for the corridor of a *tholos* that existed about 200 meters and meanwhile unfortunately destroyed. On another rock nearby there's an interesting figure that could represent also a megalithic enclosure (Fig. 6). Similar representations appear on a menhir from the Almendres cromlech (Fig. 7).

Furthermore, according to personal information from Manuel Calado, the plan of the "hut-tower" of Miguéns 3 (Alandroal) has a "replica" on a nearby rock engraving.

⁶ J. Mellaart, Çatal Huyuk: A Neolithic Town in Anatolia. London: Thames and Hudson. (1967) 131-134. Fig. 59.

⁷ U. Sansoni y S. Gavaldo, L'arte rupestre del Pià d'Ort. La vicenda di un santuario preistorico alpino. Capo di Ponte: Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici (1995) 59.

⁸ A. Oswald, "Causewayed enclosures". Introductions to Heritage Assets (London: English Heritage, 2011), 2.

⁹ A. C. Valera, "Drawing" ditched enclosures"...

¹⁰ I. Mateus y S. Mateus, "Recinto Megalítico do casal Leitão. Reguengo Grande (Lourinhã). Al-Madan, Il Série, 16. (2008) 38-44. Fig. 5.

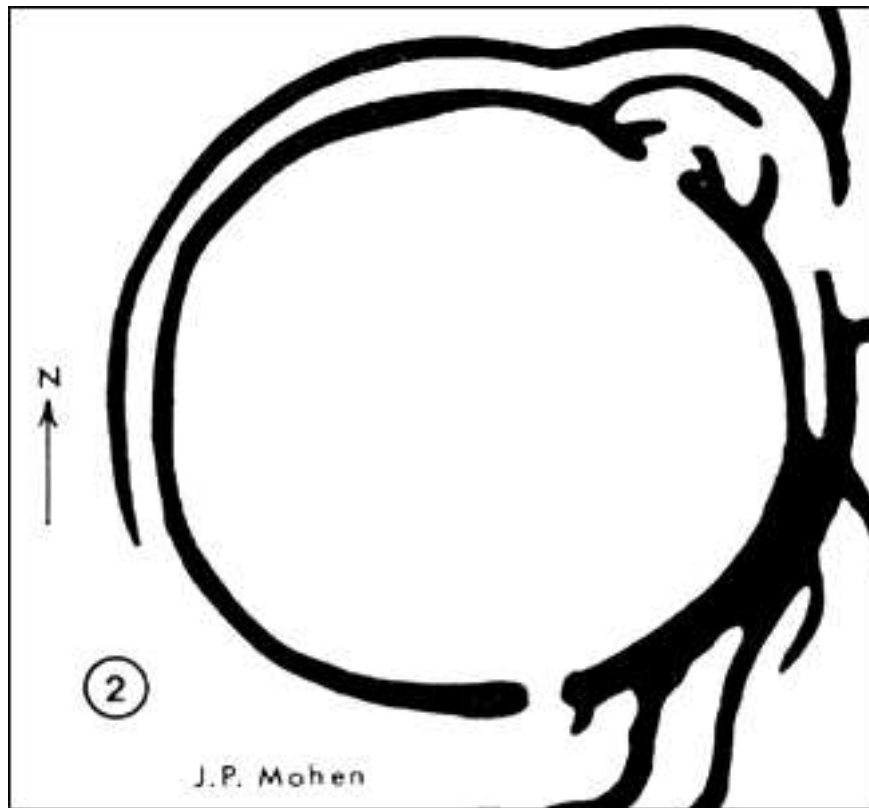


Figure 5

Enclosure of Chez-Reine with the gates perfectly seen. (After Mohen, apud Valera, 2013a)

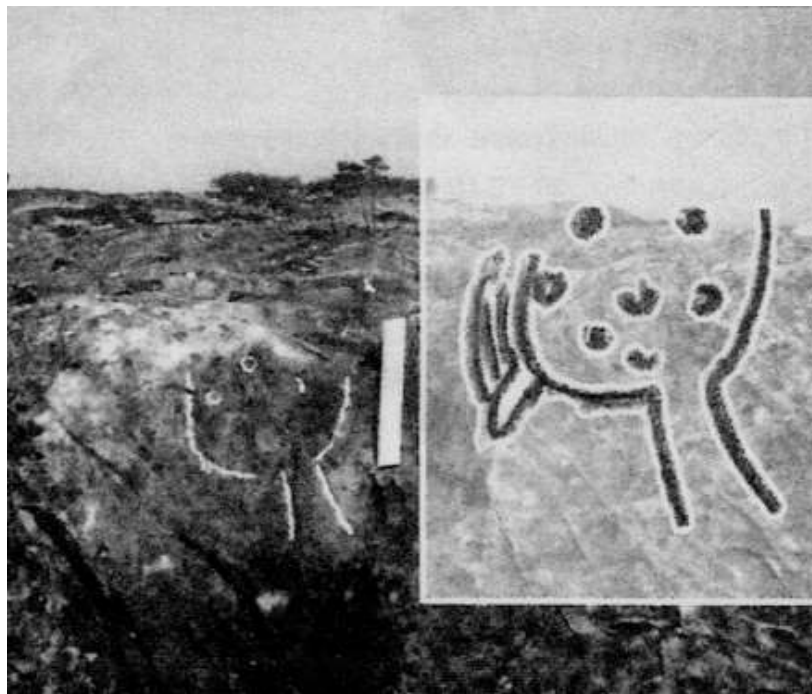


Figure 6

Engraving from Reguengo Grande. (After Mateus & Mateus, 2008)



Figure 7

Decorated menhir from Almendres. Night photo with artificial light. (Photo: F. Coimbra)

3.- Other European ditched enclosures

Neolithic ditched enclosures “appear to be widely distributed, in diverse forms, across Central and Western Europe, and from the Mediterranean area to Scandinavia”¹¹. Besides other similarities regarding these enclosures, many of them reveal a circular or oval tendency of their layout, being constituted sometimes by concentric circular or oval forms. In this sense, several engravings from the Tagus Valley have a similar typology with these enclosures. It’s what happens, for example, with engravings from Rock 119A of S. Simão, Rock 27 of Cachão do Algarve, Rock 129 of Fratel and Rock 14 of Ocreza, which have a similar “typology” respectively with the enclosures of Windmill Hill, Caseton de la Era (Valladolid), Robin Hood’s Ball (Wilts) and Briar Hill (Northants) (Fig. 8).

¹¹ V. Jiménez-Jaimes, “The Unsuspected Circles. On the Late Recognition... 179.

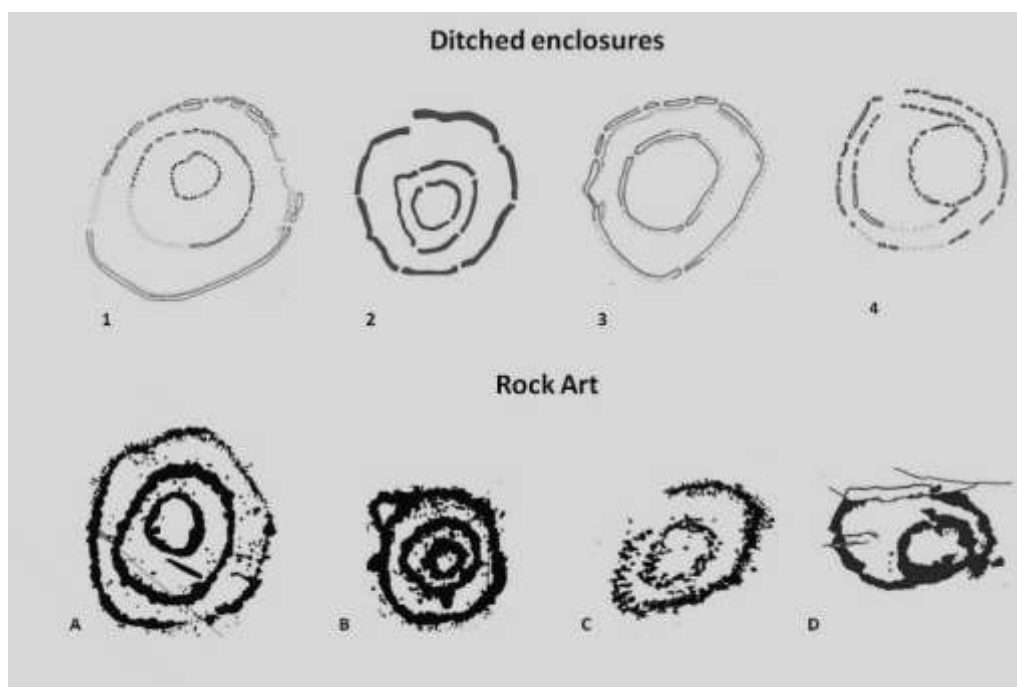


Figure 8

Similarities between ditched enclosures and rock art engravings. 1. Windmill Hill (After Causewayed enclosures, 2008); 2. Caseton de la Era (After Jimenez, 2015); 3. Robin Hood's Ball; 4. Briar Hill (After Causewayed enclosures, 2008); A. Rock 119A of S. Simão (After Gomes, 1990); B. Rock 27 of Cachão do Algarve (After Gomes, 1983); C. Rock 129 of Fratel (After Ridel, 2009); D. Rock 14 of Ocreza (After Ridel, 2009)

Obviously this doesn't mean that the mentioned engravings represent always ditched enclosures. However, the comparison between enclosures "becomes much more intriguing when considering the 4th Millennium BC southern Iberian landscape as a whole, for it shows many of the features which characterize the landscapes of the period in other regions: pit sites, megaliths, lithic scatters, rock art, etc"¹².

4. Final note

According to P. Díaz del Río¹³ many, if not all the enclosures, were used for the development of seasonal social activities, such as feasts, magical-religious rituals, exchange of raw materials and reproduction, joining relatively mobile dispersed groups. They "talk about Neolithic ideologies, as holistic expressions of the communities that built them"¹⁴.

¹² V. Jiménez-Jaimes, "The Unsuspected Circles. On the Late Recognition... 180.

¹³ P. Díaz-del-Río, "Recintos de fosos del III milenio a.C. en la meseta peninsular". *Trabajos de Prehistoria*, 60, nº 2, (2003) 61-78.

¹⁴ A. C. Valera, "Iberian causewayed enclosures"... 51.

In the Iberian Peninsula, besides the Portuguese examples, there are several ditched enclosures in Spain, in regions such as the Douro Valley¹⁵ and in the south of the country. Some of these southern enclosures “were often located in river basins like those of Guadiana and Guadalquivir”¹⁶.

According to Jimenez-Jaimez¹⁷, in Iberia the practice of monumentalizing extensive areas by circumscribing them with ditches lasted for a long time. Therefore this tradition could have been represented in rock art, being Rock 132 of Fratel an example of it, bringing also a new clue for future rock art studies at least in the Iberian Peninsula.

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¹⁵ G. Delibes, M. Crespo, J. Fernández, J. L. Herrán y J. A. Rodríguez, “Un recinto de fosos calcolítico en el Valle Medio del Duero: El Casetón de la Era (Villalba de Los Alcores, Valladolid). In Actas de las IV Jornadas sobre Patrimonio Arqueológico de la Comunidad de Madrid. Madrid: Dirección General de Patrimonio Histórico/ Comunidad de Madrid (2010) 239–47; M. García García, “Las Pozas (Casaseca de las Chanas, Zamora): dos nuevos recintos de fosos calcolíticos en el Valle del Duero”. Trabajos de Prehistoria, 70, (2013) 175-184.

¹⁶ V. Jiménez-Jaimez y J. E. Márquez Romero, “Prehistoric ditched enclosures and necropolises in Southern Iberia: a diachronic overview. In V. Ard y L. Pillot (eds.), Giants in the Landscape: Monumentality and Territories in the European Neolithic. Oxford: Proceedings of the XVII UISPP World Congress. Archaeopress, (2016) 60.

¹⁷ V. Jiménez-Jaimez, “The Unsuspected Circles. On the Late Recognition...”

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