Background to the project

The excavation described in this paper formed part of a larger project investigating the character of Schematic Art in north-west Iberia and comparing it with Galician rock art. The work was mainly concerned with the locations of a series of decorated panels on either side of the border between Portugal and Spain and suggested that the sites with Schematic Art were usually less accessible than those with the other style of petroglyphs (Bradley and Fábregas, 1999; Bradley, 2002). They may have played a more specialised role during the Copper Age and Early Bronze Age.

The places with evidence of Schematic Art included hilltop settlements and walled enclosures. Among these was El Pedroso where there are at least three decorated caves. Here a fortified enclosure was being investigated by Germán Delibes and Jorge de Santiago. The fieldwork described in this article took place at their invitation and represents a contribution to the continuing programme of investigation on the site, funded by the Junta de Castilla y León.
The cave and the hillfort

The hillfort of El Pedroso forms part of a wider series of stone-built monuments whose distribution extends across the western parts of the Iberian Peninsula (Jorge, 1998 and 2003). It occupies an isolated granite hill above the River Manzanas which marks the frontier between Trás-os-Montes in Portugal and Castilla y León in Spain (Figure 1). The site is closely related to the hilly country to the west, but also overlooks the edge of the Northern Meseta. In that sense it occupies a natural border. The hill fort is bounded by two discontinuous walls, supplemented by monumental entrances and several towers (Delibes et al., 1995). There are stone roundhouses in the interior which are associated with radiocarbon dates in the mid third millennium BC.

Large numbers of slate arrowheads were made in this part of the site. Beneath the defences is a cave decorated with cup marks, and outside the enclosure are a series of terraces associated with domestic activity of Chalcolithic date.

Plate 1 - General view of the granite tor and the cave at El Pedroso.

Plate 2 - The cairn on top of the granite tor at El Pedroso
On the south-east side of the hill there is an outcrop which resembles a partially-collapsed tor (Holmes 1965; Goudie 2004, p. 1054). It rises above the entrance to a decorated cave (Plate 1). Weathering has opened some joints in the granite into prominent fissures and the outcrop is surmounted by an enormous angular block from which other pieces have become detached in fairly recent geological time. The cave consists of two wide fissures at right angles to one another, and its roof of several large angular rocks which have fallen from above. Gaps between the blocks and fissures communicating with the surface mean that water and sediment could have entered the cave from the higher ground. A second cave, decorated with cup marks, is located beneath the same rock formation. Both are bounded by a rubble enclosure that incorporates a cairn (Plate 2). The monument is visible from the defences of the hill fort.

The rock carvings (Figures 2-4)

Unlike most sites with Schematic Art, the principal cave combines geological and purely cultural elements. It overlooks an artificial terrace, bounded on either side by massive boulders which have fallen down the mountainside (Plate 3). The lower limit of this feature is defined by a wall built in the same style as the hill fort defences. Together these create a natural amphitheatre dominated by the brightly coloured face of the outcrop. There may have been a second terrace immediately below the stone wall, but it has been badly disturbed.

The trapezoidal entrance to the cave is covered by a natural capstone and may once have been blocked. This cannot be proved, but the ramp of boulders which leads up to the entrance includes some exceptionally large pieces of granite (Plate 4). It provides access to a long chamber which is faintly illuminated by an opening in the eastern wall. Inside the cave are several panels of rock art which were recorded by 1: 1 scale drawings on transparent film. The petroglyphs were traced with the aid of artificial lighting (see Baptista and Varela Gomes, 1997).

On entering the first chamber it is clear that the right hand wall is covered with randomly scattered circular and elongated hollows. The oblong marks are larger than the others and tend to concentrate closer to the entrance. The cup marks are scattered around them. They seem to have been pecked into this panel over a long period of time. There is one concentration of cup marks in the right hand half of the panel where it faces anyone leaving the inner chamber of the cave. An exceptional feature of Panel 1 is a cross motif close to the upper left hand corner of the panel. This could be a later addition.

The left hand wall of the first chamber is embellished with similar motifs, but they are further from the entrance and have a more structured distribution. Some are organised in rows, and the composition is framed by two horizontal fissures. The nature of the designs in the outer chamber seems to be deliberately ambiguous, since they resemble the natural hollows that occur on flat exposures of granite on the hilltop at El Pedroso. There is some variation in the sizes and shapes of the images inside this part of the cave, and the incautious observer may be uncertain of their anthropogenic origin.

Halfway between these two panels is a narrow window that leads into the deepest chamber. Access may have been limited still further by a carefully built blocking of rubble; it would be unsafe to investigate this feature by excavation. Entering the inner chamber involves considerable effort, and people would have passed through this opening one at a time. An observer looking into this chamber faces two walls which are entirely carved with iconic figures, illuminated by sunlight through a small opening in the ceiling. Space is very restricted in the deepest part of the cave and the carved images contrast with the simple designs found towards the exterior. Here there is an emphasis on the human figure, and this is reinforced by the depiction of hand prints on the back wall. These motifs are accompanied by complex geometric designs, mainly square or rectangular grids. On Panel 3, the prehistoric images are mainly on the central and left-hand sections of the decorated surface where they are visible with natural light. The panel is dominated by a figure composed of three schematic anthropomorphs. Here two smaller figures flank a larger one and are linked by a horizontal groove that represents their arms. The human figures in the inner chamber are characterised by static postures.
Plate 3 - General view of the granite terrace outside the decorated cave after initial clearance

Plate 4 - The entrance to the decorated cave, showing the deposit of rubble which may originally have served as blocking.

Fig. 2 - Details of panels 1 & 2 inside the decorated cave
Fig. 3 - Details of panels 3 & 4 inside the decorated cave

Fig. 4 - Details of panels 5 - 8 inside the decorated cave
The types represented include 'phi-motifs' and anthropomorphs with raised arms, but the most schematic of these figures were represented by a simple cross. These forms may have appealed to later generations who entered the cave long after its original significance had been forgotten. Some of the carvings were recut, and new designs overlapped with the older ones or were inserted in the spaces in between them. There is a medieval radiocarbon date from this part of the cave, and it seems possible that it was employed as a cult site during that period. Perhaps the cave acquired its local name of Casa del Moro in the belief that it was the dwelling place of supernatural beings.

Most of engraved crosses seem to post-date the prehistoric images and are located in the poorly lit parts of the chamber. Not only are they rather isolated in relation to the ancient imagery, they are carved in a crude technique that is similar to the many graffiti on the site. It is also clear that some composite motifs in Panel 5 result from the incorporation of new elements into older designs. This is attested by the way in which lines with an uneven groove impinge on the top of some of the 'phi-figures'. A cross was apparently added to one of the principal designs, and others were perhaps recut in the process of reworking the older images. Even so, the first carvings were clearly prehistoric, even if some of the more conspicuous designs were added later.

Objectives and field methodology

The terrace and the cave were cleared of vegetation and surveyed in 1998, and excavation took place at the site between 1998 and 2000. This ran in parallel with the early stages of fieldwork on the hill fort and its surroundings. The project was conducted on a small scale and aimed to investigate the context of the decorated panels. It had four specific objectives:

• To establish whether there were any deposits of artefacts in the filling of the cave beneath both series of rock carvings. If so, it would be important to compare the composition of the two assemblages.

• To relate any artefacts from the interior of the cave to the sequence of deposits in the terrace outside it.

• To ascertain the character and chronology of any activities associated with the cave and the external terrace.

• To establish the character of any structures that were built in front of the cave mouth.

The lower terrace was too disturbed for excavation to provide much information. Similarly, the cairn and the enclosure around the rock outcrop were planned but left unexcavated.

Because of the unusual character of the site, the excavation was conducted on the smallest scale consistent with these objectives. This involved the following methods:

• The excavation of no more than 50% of the remaining sediments beneath the carvings in each chamber of the cave.

• Excavation of the external terrace on a large enough scale to locate any houses of similar proportions to those within the defences. Again more than half the deposits were left intact.

• Investigation of the terrace wall to record its construction and its stratigraphic relationship to other features.

Taphonomy

The site had been altered by a variety of natural and anthropogenic processes which affected the character of the surviving evidence. For that reason they were investigated in the field by Professor Martin Bell, followed by the analysis of selected soil samples at the University of Reading.

Large areas of the hill at El Pedroso consist of bare rock from which any soil cover has been lost. That is hardly surprising as the surviving sediments are finegrained and susceptible to erosion. Much of
this material has been lost through the action of wind and rain and has accumulated on the valley floor below the site. The cave itself is vulnerable to the elements because there is an opening in the mantle of granite boulders that forms its roof. The filling of the cave was shallow and did not show any clear stratigraphic divisions. This is confirmed by thin sectioning of the basal deposits in the inner chamber. Some material may even have been flushed from the cave through joints and fissures permeating the granite, and the problem has been made worse by the activities of animals which have disturbed the top ten centimetres of the filling.

The external terrace originated as one of a series of natural steps in the mountainside. It may originally have consisted of bare rock because any soil would have washed down the slope. It was the construction of a massive wall along the outer edge of the terrace that created a sediment trap and allowed the deposits to accumulate. Their formation might have been influenced by activity on top of the hill, but this cannot be proved. Whilst the deposits on the platform may have accumulated through natural processes, they certainly provided the surfaces on which large numbers of artefacts were deposited.

At the same time the stratigraphic sequence was made more complicated by other factors. The filling of the terrace showed a similar soil profile to those in modern road cuttings elsewhere on the hill. Thus some of the horizons observed on the terrace would seem to be at least partly of pedological origin. At the same time the surface of the platform was buried beneath two deposits of soil and rubble originating in a nearby rock fissure and the mouth of the cave respectively. These were probably the result of local landslides. It is not clear when they had formed but this could have happened relatively recently. They contained large numbers of displaced artefacts which create an inverse stratigraphy. Lastly, the surface of the platform had been cultivated in recent times and was overgrown with trees and bushes. As a result its upper levels were badly disturbed.

This analysis set limits on what could be achieved by excavation. It meant that the distribution of artefacts between the excavated parts of the cave was likely to be more informative than their depth in the surviving sediments. The existence of a metre-high blocking in between the two chambers is important here, for it would have prevented artefacts from washing out of the rear of the cave. This work also suggested that the lower levels of the external terrace would retain much more integrity than the surface deposits which had been affected by landslides as well as modern cultivation. Because the sediments had formed through erosion of the hillside, it might be difficult to identify specific soil horizons. On the other hand, it would be important to define any concentrations of artefacts or structural features which might reflect episodes of increased activity on the surface of the terrace.

**The sequence on the terrace (Figures 5 and 6; Plate 5)**

The terrace was investigated by two trenches and by a narrow section through its retaining wall. The upper trench was excavated down to the bedrock, but in the lower trench only two sections, each a metre wide, were fully excavated and the remaining part was left intact to preserve the remains of a stone platform found in the course of this work.

Underneath the terrace the bedrock was rather uneven. Its gradient changed in different parts of the excavated area and its surface was sometimes broken by natural fissures or concealed by granite boulders which had been too large to move. Perhaps more important, the lower limit of the terrace was characterised by a sudden break of slope. This was enhanced by a massive wall built out of large stone blocks approximately a metre long. Behind that wall it seems as if the uneven ground surface was levelled by a deposit of rubble which built up against its base.

The filling of the terrace consisted of eroded soil and of boulders which may have fallen down the hillside. This process was punctuated by deposits of cultural material, in particular large quantities of pottery, pieces of burnt clay and fragments of daub. Some of the pottery refitted between different contexts, emphasising the mobile character of the sediments. For the most part the groups of artefacts were not characterised by sharp breaks in the stratigraphy. Rather, there were three levels at which artefacts occurred in unusual quantities, perhaps suggesting episodes in which the site was used more intensively. Although the surface of the terrace had been disturbed by cultivation, the first intact deposit included large numbers of sherds which were lying flat as if they had been deposited on a ground surface. This material was particularly well preserved and it seems as if it had been rapidly covered by eroding sediments.
There was very little structural evidence associated with these deposits, but in the lower trench there was a small slab-lined pit with another slab on its base (Plate 6). This was associated with a distinct area of burnt soil which also included a large piece of burnt daub set upright in the subsoil. It was interpreted as possibly the base of an oven. There were no signs of the carefully constructed walls, hearths and floors associated with the buildings in the hill fort and it seems most unlikely that there had been anything similar on this part of the site. The excavation was sufficiently extensive to eliminate the possibility that structures of this kind had existed elsewhere on the terrace (Figure 5).

It is important to emphasise the distinctive character of this evidence. With the exception of the layer of rubble immediately behind the terrace wall there is no sign that people had created artificial surfaces on which to work. Nor is there anything to suggest a uniform distribution of material across the surface of the terrace. Rather, human activity varied in intensity over time and its focus may have shifted from one part of the site to another. It was not necessarily continuous, and it may be more appropriate to think in terms of episodes during which the terrace was used rather than any discrete phases. Nevertheless it seems as if the deposition of artefacts intensified over time, although the details of this development are obscured by disturbance to the upper levels.

There was one clear exception to this general trend (Figure 6). This was the building of a rubble platform at the lower end of the terrace where it was superimposed on the existing wall. It had originally projected out across the terrace edge, but much of the structure had been robbed, leaving the large granite blocks which marked this part of its perimeter. The platform was probably oval rather than circular and measured approximately four and a half metres by five.

The structure was poorly preserved. Not only had some of the stone been removed, its upper level had been damaged by growing trees. Even so it is clear that it had a level surface of rubble defined by a modest boulder kerb. Only where it extended outside the terrace wall were larger blocks used to define its outer limit. There were no signs of any superstructure, but the disturbed sediments that immediately overlay the platform contained fragments of burnt clay and a considerable concentration of daub which
had also been burnt. It seems likely that a wooden structure had been built on top of the platform and had been destroyed by fire. A wheat grain preserved in one of these pieces of daub produced a radiocarbon date between 2700 and 2350 BC and most probably between 2650 and 2450 BC (Figure 7). A large number of artefacts were found in the disturbed levels overlying this structure, suggesting that activity on the terrace may have continued for some time after the platform had gone out of use.

Excavation inside the cave (Figures 5 and 6)

Two small areas were investigated inside the cave, the first in the more accessible chamber associated with cup marks and the second in the rear chamber which is characterised by Schematic Art. The floor of the cave included deposits of massive granite boulders and areas where the natural bedrock came to the surface, meaning that there were only two places in which significant deposits of sediments still remained. Each of these was investigated on a small scale, leaving approximately half this material intact.

There were minor differences between the excavated sediments in these two areas, but in both cases it is clear that no stratigraphic sequence could be inferred. In the first chamber the sediments had accumulated over a level of fallen rocks, but it is clear that those stones had reached their present position long before the prehistoric use of this chamber began. That is because of the distinctive character of the rubble which had clearly fallen from the wall. It was the newly exposed surface that was decorated with cup marks. The sediments contained a large number of artefacts. The boulders in this deposit became larger with depth, probably because they had sunk through the friable silts. The same process may apply to some of the artefacts found in these levels. An indication of the degree of disturbance is provided by the carbonised acorns discovered in the excavation. One of them came from the bottom of this deposit. It returned a radiocarbon date which most probably falls between 2290 and 2020 BC. This is later than a similar sample from the upper levels of the same excavation whose date most likely falls between 2460 and 2120 BC (Figure 7).

The sediments in the inner chamber overlay the natural bedrock. These were significantly finer than their counterparts in the other excavation and included more roots and fewer stones. The cave contained an
extraordinary quantity of artefacts, but the sediments were exposed to water coming in through the roof. One radiocarbon sample is associated with this deposit. This was an oak twig which was found at the same level as the prehistoric artefacts, but its date is most probably between AD 1400 and 1520 (Figure 7). Again it was impossible to identify a stratigraphic sequence.

![Fig. 7 - Calibrated radiocarbon dates from the cave sanctuary. A: carbonised cereal from burnt daub overlying the external platform; B: carbonised acorn from the upper filling of the first chamber of the cave; C: carbonised acorn from the lower filling of the first chamber of the cave; D: carbonised oak twig from the lower filling of the second chamber of the cave.](image)

The excavated material (Figures 8 and 9)

How were the artefacts found in the terrace related to those from the cave, and how much evidence is there for a chronological sequence on the site? Here the main source of evidence must be the successive levels in the terrace, for the contents of the cave may have been modified after they were first deposited.

There do seem to be certain fixed points. The most important was the construction of a rubble platform that overlay the retaining wall of the terrace. The material in the lower levels of that terrace is obviously earlier in date. Despite considerable disturbance, it is also possible to suggest that some of the excavated artefacts were later than that platform. There is also the evidence provided by the most diagnostic artefacts from the excavation and, to some extent, by the radiocarbon dates.

The one date from a secure context is for a wheat grain embedded in a piece of burnt daub which seems to have formed part of the superstructure of the platform. Its most probable range is between 2650 and 2450 BC. This was a short-lived sample which is unlikely to be residual and so it provides a terminus ante quem for the construction of both the platform and the terrace wall. The two prehistoric dates from the cave do not come from secure contexts but they provide some indication that activity on the site continued into the late third millennium BC. This is more clearly documented by a series of Maritime and Linear Bell Beaker sherds, most of which were found in the levels overlying the rubble platform, and by a fine barbed and tanged arrowhead from the first chamber of the cave. Even later activity may be indicated by the finding of a Palmela Point in the other chamber. Parts of a Proto-Cogotas vessel were represented by sherds associated with the superficial levels of the terrace.

The successive levels of the terrace also provide indications of a ceramic sequence. The frequency of flat-bottomed vessels increased significantly in the upper levels of both trenches. This has important implications for the interpretation of the cave where there is a certain contrast between the contents of the
two chambers. Although plain vessels were found in both, the proportion of pots with flat bases was significantly higher in the rear chamber and there were fewer decorated sherds. Although the use of both parts of the cave must have overlapped, this raises the possibility that this part of the site played a more important role towards the end of the sequence. The later levels of the terrace may have been used at the same time.

**Fig 8** - Selected artefacts from the excavation. 1: rim sherd of a cheese strainer, from the terrace; 2: stone bead, from the terrace; 3: Palmela Point from the inner chamber of the cave; 4: fragment of copper, from the inner chamber of the cave; 5: flint arrowhead, from the outer chamber of the cave; 6: sherd with incised decoration, from the terrace; 7: sherd with incised decoration, from the terrace; 8: linear Bell Beaker sherd, from the terrace; 9: sherd decorated with incised triangles, from the terrace.
To sum up, the cave and the associated terrace at El Pedroso could have seen a long period of human activity. The ceramic evidence cannot be considered in detail until work on other parts of the mountain is complete, but already it is clear that its use spans parts of the Copper Age and the Early Bronze Age. The terrace had certainly formed by about the middle of the third millennium BC when a stone platform was built and its superstructure was destroyed by fire. The same area contained a small group of Bell Beaker sherds which should be of about the same age, and yet the surface of the platform also included parts of a Proto-Cogotas vessel which can be assigned to the seventeenth or sixteenth centuries BC, as well as other sherds which may date from that period (Delibes and Fernández 1981; Blasco et al. 1995). The first chamber of the cave contained a barbed and tanged arrowhead of non-local material which should be contemporary with the Beaker pottery, but the carbonised acorns from its filling have dates in the later third millennium BC. The other chamber included a Palmela Point, a type whose chronology extends into the Early Bronze Age (Harrison 1974). Several other fragments of copper came from both parts of the cave. The technique of working the metal was quite sophisticated and it seems unlikely that any of these pieces belong to an early stage in the development of local metalworking (Delibes et al., 1996). There was no evidence of any bronze artefacts on the site.
It is not clear whether all the components of the site were used at the same time as one another, but there are a few differences between the excavated ceramics from these different contexts. Bell Beakers have not been found in any part of the cave, and on the terrace they are confined to the later layers, especially those overlying the platform. The later levels outside the cave also contain a ceramic assemblage that has most in common with the finds from the inner chamber.

**Activities on the site**

Although there are a number of artificial terraces outside the hill fort, this one stood out from the others for several reasons. It was located within a rubble enclosure which also incorporated the rock outcrop and the cave. That cave was unusually large and had a complex layout. The granite outcrop was particularly conspicuous and overlooked a natural amphitheatre, which was enhanced by the building of the terrace wall in a similar technique to the defences of the hill fort. Excavation has shown that no houses had been built on this part of the site. The latter point is emphasised by the very small quantity of clay daub associated with deposits on the terrace, compared with those on the hilltop. The only exception was the material associated with the rubble platform, and it seems as if this structure lacks any counterpart elsewhere at El Pedroso. Did the excavated assemblage have an equally unusual character? What kinds of activities were associated with the use of the terrace, and did they extend to the decorated cave?

There is considerable evidence for the preparation of food. The deposits in the terrace contained a number of querns, and analysis of the associated phytoliths showed that they had been used to process two kinds of wheat (*Triticum dicoccum* and *Triticum aestivum*) as well as acorns. A carbonised wheat grain was identified in the burnt daub overlying the platform, and there were burnt acorns in the first chamber of the cave. The excavated material included fragments of two cheese strainers from the superficial deposits, and there was also a *morillo* which is usually interpreted as evidence of cooking. The small fragments of clay daub found in the lower levels of the terrace in both the excavated areas might have come from hearths, or perhaps from small ovens as they were in a different fabric from the massive fragments associated with the surface of the platform. They preserved the imprints of a wooden framework. More important, in both trenches the material of the terrace was associated with large ceramic vessels which could have been used for the storage or preparation of considerable amounts of food. Attempts to determine the contents of the pottery by chemical analysis proved to be unsuccessful. Querns were considerably more important in the upper levels of the terrace and others were lying on the surface over this part of the site. Again this suggests that the processing of food became increasingly significant over time.

There was also evidence of artefact production. A quern fragment from the lower filling of the terrace had been used for grinding haemetite. This could have been done for a variety of reasons, from the treatment of the dead or the decoration of the cave to such mundane activities as processing hides or fixing the hafts on stone tools. It is not certain whether pottery had been made on the site itself, but scientific analysis showed that all the material, from the decorated vessels to the coarse ware, had the same composition. That also applies to the Bell Beakers from the excavation. The finds also included a clay weight and two stone weights which might provide evidence of weaving. Alternatively they could have been employed as net sinkers in the river below the site.

There is no direct evidence of metalworking, but a number of fragments of copper were found in the cave: an environment in which they were likely to survive. Stone artefacts were more abundant and here there is much clearer evidence of production. Axes were made from local raw material and preforms were found in the excavation. There was a whetstone from the lowest level of the terrace and a polissoir from its surface. Arrowheads were made here too, and again the excavation of the terrace produced both finished and unfinished examples made of slate; unworked slate was also found in the deposits making up the terrace. The scale of production was modest compared with the evidence from the arrowhead and axe workshops in the hill fort. There was also evidence for the expedient knapping of local chert and quartz. This seems to have increased in frequency over time, perhaps suggesting that more activity was taking place here or that a growing number of people may have been present on the site.

The stone platform also belongs to a developed stage of the sequence, although this part of the excavated area remained in use after it had apparently been destroyed by fire. This is clear from the evidence of scorching in the surrounding sediments. It is difficult to work out the form of any structure here. The platform possessed a boulder kerb, but only the part which projected beyond the terrace wall
was retained by substantial stones. They were quite different from the house walls on the hilltop. Unlike those habitations, the platform was oval rather than circular and there was no evidence of any post holes. It was overlain by a concentration of burnt daub which contained the imprints of rounded posts up to 5 cm in diameter. The best preserved daub was 4 cm thick and included pieces which were both flat and slightly curving. They had been burnt to the consistency of coarse pottery and must have been fired to a high temperature. The superstructure of the platform could have taken many forms but one possibility is that it provided the site for one or more large ovens.

How does all this evidence compare with that from the excavation of the cave? The first point to make is that Bell Beaker pottery was entirely absent here and that the evidence for stone working was significantly reduced in this area. Although there were finished and unfinished arrowheads near the entrance, they were not present in unusual numbers. By contrast, both the chambers included an extraordinary quantity of pottery. This was most frequent in the relatively inaccessible back chamber where the high proportion of plain vessels was in marked contrast to the predilection for elaborate decoration on the cave walls. Pottery occurred here to the virtual exclusion of other kinds of artefacts.

There were three unusual items from these contexts. In the first chamber there was a barbed and tanged arrowhead. It was of exceptional quality, although it had been damaged, and was made from non-local raw material. In the filling of the other chamber there were a variscite bead and a Palmela Point, the only piece of finished metalwork from the excavation. Metalwork of this kind is often associated with human remains and its presence in the cave raises the possibility that it originally accompanied a burial that no longer survives. The fine arrowhead found close to the entrance might have been associated with another grave. Excavation of a cup-marked cave underneath the hill fort identified a small group of metalwork which might also have been grave goods.

Taking these different observations together, it is possible to identify several important developments during the use of the site. The terrace was clearly established at an early stage as people utilised the natural amphitheatre outside the cave mouth. The first chamber of the cave, with its panels of cup marks, may have been used at this time and resembles the other decorated caves that have been found at El Pedroso. It contains a similar assemblage to the material discovered in the terrace, but provides significantly less evidence of stone working. No structures were associated with the deepest deposits in that terrace and the small quantities of daub that were found there do not suggest that it contained many hearths or ovens. The excavated material is not unlike that associated with a domestic site.

Later developments took a distinctive form. A considerable stone platform was built across the terrace wall and was associated with a structure of uncertain type that seems to have been destroyed by fire. The same part of the excavated area contained nearly all the sherds of Bell Beaker. There was evidence for an increase in human activity, illustrated by a greater density of lithic debitage. There were a much larger number of querns and there may have been changes in the ceramic assemblage which saw the deposition of more flat-bottomed pots. These developments could be linked with one another, as the large amounts of daub found over the platform might have been associated with ovens and the preparation of food. The extraordinary number of artefacts in the later layers certainly suggests that more people were coming to this part of the site.

Although the contents of the two chambers of the cave overlap, there are hints of a similar development here. The density of finds in the second chamber is much greater than it is in the part associated with cup marks, and again the ceramics from these two contexts show certain differences. There are more flat-bottomed vessels from the chamber embellished with Schematic Art and fewer decorated sherds. It might suggest that this part of the cave was used for longer or with a greater intensity than the more accessible area near to the entrance. Such a development could have run in parallel with increasing activity on the external terrace and suggests that the inner part of this complex assumed a more specialised role over time. That would be consistent with the elaborate decoration on its walls. The process may even have culminated in the deposition of burials in one or both of the chambers. It is unfortunate that there is no dating evidence for the blocking in the passage which communicates between the two parts of the cave, nor is it clear whether the entrance had ever been closed. On the other hand, there is ceramic evidence to suggest that activity on the site may have continued, with or without a hiatus, until the Proto-Cogotas phase.

**Discussion**
The developments described in this paper are certainly consistent with the proposition that Schematic Art played a significant role in prehistoric society. The excavation of the cave and its external terrace at El Pedroso may even show that it took on a more specialised role over time. It remains to be seen quite how those distinctive developments are related to the history of the hillfort where fieldwork is still continuing, but they certainly seem to justify the title of this paper. How were they related to wider developments in the archaeology of north-west Iberia?

There are several levels on which to make this comparison. The most striking features of El Pedroso seem to be the following:

- the use of the cave at roughly the same time as a hilltop settlement;
- the occurrence of several panels of Schematic Art;
- the selection of a striking rock formation for the 'sanctuary';
- the creation of an artificial terrace;
- and the building of a stone platform whose superstructure seems to have been set on fire.

All these elements are found on other sites.

The association between a hilltop settlement and a decorated cave or rock shelter has been suggested at several places in northern Portugal and Spain, although the chronological relationship between them is not always clear. In Zamora, however, an example may be the hilltop settlement and the decorated rock shelter at El Castillon, Santa Clara de Tabara. Here the motifs painted in red ochre include sets of bars and several human figures (Gómez, 1993, pp. 188-9).

The designs in the inner chamber at El Pedroso are typical of the later stages of the Schematic Art tradition (Bacelar Alves, 2003, pp. 413-17) and are particularly close to those associated with the natural amphitheatre at Gião, which include grids, 'phi-figures', and anthropomorphs with raised or curved arms. Animals are not represented on either site. Comparable designs also occur in rock shelters and even in the local passage graves. For example, rectangular grids were carved on the back slab of the Dolmen de Areita, located close to the border between Beira Alta and Trás-os-Montes (Gomes et al., 1998, pp. 33-93). Schematic human figures were painted on the megalithic tomb of El Moreco in the more distant province of Burgos where the design makes striking use of angular lines like those at El Pedroso (Delibes and Rojo, 1989, p. 51). These drawings are dated to the Late Neolithic. A further link between Schematic Art and burial monuments is found at Vale da Casa, not far from the confluence of the River Côa and the Douro Valley. Burial cists were discovered in front of panels of rock art decorated with schematic human figures (Baptista, 1983). One of the skeletons has a radiocarbon date in the Copper Age (Cruz, 1998, p. 160).

These comparisons suggest links between the rock carvings at El Pedroso and other examples in northern Iberia. Another chain of connections concerns the rock formation that overlooks the decorated cave. This can be recognised from a considerable distance but in terms of the local topography it provides the backdrop to a natural amphitheatre. In general way it recalls some of the prominent cliffs and outcrops where Schematic Art has been found, but it is also a characteristic of the excavated sites at Crasto de Palheiros and Fraga da Pena, both of which include artificial terraces and stone walls (Sanches 2001 and 2003; Valera, 2000). The enclosure at Crasto de Palheiros defines the limit of a massive rock outcrop with a steep cliff on one side (Sanches, 2001 and 2003). This provides a striking landmark.

The same is true of Fraga da Pena where two small enclosures built against the base of the rock contained a specialised artefact assemblage. Other terraces were constructed outside the walled enclosure at Castelo Velho (Jorge 1999, 2002 and 2003).

It is the latter site which provides the best comparison for the stone platform excavated at El Pedroso. It was built in a similar manner and, allowing for the amount of disturbance experienced by the structure described in this paper, the two features resemble one another on the ground. The comparison goes even further for the platform at Castelo Velho had a wooden superstructure which had been set on fire. This preserved a series of deposits of human bone, whereas nothing similar could have survived in the
acid soil of El Pedroso. The burnt daub at El Pedroso may suggest that these platforms had been used in
different ways, but the close resemblance between them remains extremely striking. Again the evidence
suggests that they played a specialised role.

In other respects the 'sanctuary' at El Pedroso does have a distinctive character. That is because of
the way in which the main cave has a terrace in front of its entrance and is contained within a larger
enclosure incorporating a cairn. There is a striking contrast between the decoration in its two chambers.
Indeed, the very word 'chamber' suggests another connotation, for this arrangement recalls the
characteristic layout of a passage grave (Bradley, 2002). The terrace with its stone wall would be the
equivalent of a forecourt, the first compartment could be compared with the entrance passage, whilst the
inaccessible area that was decorated with Schematic Art would be equivalent to a burial chamber
beneath a mound or cairn. This comparison goes even further, for the cup marks associated with the
entrance recall those found in chambered tombs, which sometimes occupy equivalent positions. More
important, the most complex designs occupy the deepest space, as they often do in megalithic art.

There are obvious limits to this comparison. The repertoire of megalithic art shows a certain overlap
with Schematic Art in the north of Iberia, but this is not to suggest that this complex at El Pedroso was
contemporary with the construction of passage graves. Rather, tombs of some antiquity were still present
in the landscape and some of them were reused for human burials. That is mainly a feature of the Bell
Beaker phase, but it shows that the interiors of these monuments were still accessible (Delibes and
Santonja, 1987). The people who came to El Pedroso would have been familiar with such sites and could
have been influenced by their distinctive architecture. It is in that sense that the sanctuary may be
regarded as a 'natural' passage grave.

Lastly, the site provides evidence for a striking interplay between two groups of carved designs with a
wider distribution in north-west Iberia: cup marks in the accessible first chamber and Schematic Art
towards the back of the cave which it is more difficult to reach. The Schematic designs have close
parallels at the upland site of Gião which has been interpreted as a sanctuary. They have also been
found in caves and rock shelters which are sometimes in remote places associated with prominent
landmarks. Their chronology is difficult to establish. Cup marks are even harder to date, but enough have
been found in archaeological contents to demonstrate that these two groups of images could have been
used together. That is rather revealing as the distribution of these simple motifs extends into more
accessible locations on the lower ground. It would be wrong to make too much of this distinction, but it
raises the possibility that the organisation of the carved panels at El Pedroso reflects the same concerns.
The cave may have formed a microcosm of the wider country around it (Bradley, 2002).

During the last few years students of prehistoric art have considered the place of decorated caves in
the landscape. At El Pedroso there may be a case for investigating the landscape in the cave.

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