

"Circling Around: past societies, connectivity and rock art practices in Atlantic Europe".

By Joana Valdez-Tullett

Abstract:

Cup-marks, rings and other circular iconography was being extensively carved on open-air outcrops and boulders across many landscapes of Atlantic Europe during the 4th and 3rd millennia BC, namely Portugal and Spain, Britain and Ireland. This carving tradition is widely known as Atlantic Art, a term coined in the 1940s by Irish researcher Eóin MacWhite, who firstly identified similarities between the rock art of Ireland and Galicia (Spain). The expression was later popularised in the 1990s with the seminal work of Richard Bradley, having largely replaced more regional terms such as 'British Rock Art' or 'Galician Group of Rock Art', which showed just how fragmented the study of these engravings was, despite some formal unity of the evidence. In fact, identical motifs can be found repeated across distant geographic regions in the Atlantic façade, suggesting that the imagery was somehow transmitted from region to region at some point in prehistory. Although a number of authors hinted at the possibility of connectivity and relationships between the countries in which the motifs can be found, little is still known about how this cultural transmission was processed.

This seminar will explore Atlantic Rock Art's differences and similarities across the various regions where it can be found, assessing the unity of the phenomenon – from its relationship with the landscape to the detailed analysis of the motifs. The approach was based on a multiscale and multidisciplinary methodology, which enabled a dynamic perspective of an extensive set of empirical data. This approach revealed an intricate network of relationships and connectivity between regions that were far apart during prehistory, but connected through the common understanding of a rock art tradition, consolidated in the carving of thousands of rocks across Atlantic Europe. In addition, regional preferences were identified, demonstrating the different cultural and social backgrounds of the various communities engaging with the practice.