

Further lessons in integrity

A final reply to Robert Bednarik

João Zilhão

I believe that the previously published exchange (*Public Archaeology* 3(3)) sufficed to establish Bednarik's lack of credibility. Another rectification of the distortions, errors and omissions that feature as prominently in Bednarik's response as they did in the original paper is, therefore, not needed. For the most part, in any case, his response is simple reiteration, especially concerning the Guadiana River/Alqueva Dam situation. I dealt with the latter extensively in my first reply, to which I refer the reader; there is nothing to add.

Where issues of fact are concerned, I will simply note three relevant developments that both post-date and illuminate the previous exchange. On the scientific front, results from the combined OSL/TL (optically stimulated luminescence/thermoluminescence) dating of burnt artefacts contained in the sediments covering Panel 1 at the site of Fariseu are now available; they prove that the engravings in that rock face pre-date 15,000 BP (Aubry, Mercier and Valladas, personal communication, 27 April 2004). These results do not resolve the debate on whether the style of those engravings is more consistent with a late Solutrean/early Magdalenian age (cf. Baptista, 1999) or with a late Gravettian/early Solutrean age (cf. Baptista, 2001; Guy, 2002; Zilhão, 2003). However, they should be sufficient to close the debate on the general Upper Paleolithic age of the Côa Valley's stylistically Paleolithic petroglyphs.

The other two developments relate to Portuguese public archaeology. The same government whose 2002 actions against the IPA (Instituto Português de Arqueologia) Bednarik found so commendable has now officially abandoned the planned merger

between IPA (the state agency managing the country's archaeological heritage) and IPPAR (Instituto Português do Património Arquitectónico, the state agency managing the country's historical monuments) (Canelas, 2004; Henriques, 2004). The new Minister of Culture of that government, appointed in a July 2004 cabinet reshuffle, declared upon visiting the Côa Valley Park that 'she had the highest possible opinion' of the quality and importance of the rock engravings and that 'the design, implementation and management of the Archaeological Park is exemplary' (Garcias, 2004).

Hopefully, these developments mean that the value of the site and of its heritage management policy are now accepted across the whole of the Portuguese political spectrum, including those partisan forces that, in 1994, were behind the construction of a hydroelectric dam that would have flooded what is now the World Heritage site of the Côa Valley. Hopefully, these developments also mean that fishers in murky waters will have fewer opportunities to use party politics to undermine the teams and structures put in place since 1996 for the study and preservation of the rock art of the area.

Since Bednarik now focuses on integrity, I should also point out the following:

1. In response to my exposure of his dealings with EDP (Electricidade de Portugal, the company building the hydroelectrical dam that, if completed, would have flooded the Côa Valley rock art sites), Bednarik states that he had never solicited a consultancy contract. A copy of the letter written by Bednarik soliciting such a contract from EDP was widely divulged at the time of the events (1995) and I can provide further copies

upon request; one such copy is in the possession of the editor of *Public Archaeology*. That letter does not clarify the issue of fees, nor the issue of travel and per diem expenses, which in any case Bednarik does not deny were covered by the contractor. Given Bednarik's record on matters of fact, clarification of the issue of money must await disclosure of the appropriate documentation by EDP's accounting department.

2. I have never said that IFRAO *was* a bunch of loonies. It is a matter of public record, because the media quoted me correctly, that I believe that IFRAO *is run* by a bunch of loonies. I contend that Bednarik's behaviour does not contradict this opinion.
3. Bednarik's use and abuse of personal attacks based on unsubstantiated evidence are well known in the world of rock art. I also have on file ample evidence of his use of deceit in a variety of situations, not only in Portugal but also in other countries, namely Australia and Germany.
4. Bednarik's campaign against myself and Portuguese archaeologists is but a part, even if a prominent one, of his broader antagonism towards archaeology as a profession, well apparent in his diatribe about public archaeologists' supposed lack of accountability. In this context, readers may find it useful to know that, early in his 'career' (1976), Bednarik undertook unlicensed excavations at the Gudenushöhle, the major Paleolithic cave site of his native country, Austria, resulting in the loss to science of extant deposits left by 19th-century researchers (Neugebauer-Maresch, 1999).

As part of his campaign, Bednarik also harasses me regularly with unsolicited, and unanswered, email. The last such message is reproduced here as Appendix 1, received on 30 July 2004, and addressed to me with a copy to the editor of *Public Archaeology*. The informed reader will have no trouble in diagnosing the nature of the mental machinery that produced such a text. Similarly it will not be difficult to identify the historical precedents of Bednarik's 'recant or suffer' threat. I believe this evidence should suffice to close the file on Bednarik's credentials in both Science and Integrity.

APPENDIX 1

De: 'Robert Bednarik'
<robertbednarik@hotmail.com>
Para: <joao.zilhao@netcabo.pt>
Cc: <tcnnea@ucl.ac.uk>
Enviado: sexta-feira, 30 de Julho de 2004 8:15
Assunto: Public Archaeology

My dear Joao,

I must apologise for having neglected our correspondence for several months, but be assured that you are often in my thoughts. I am just completing my response to you in PA.

Many thanks for the friendly acknowledgement, the nicest thing you have said to me since June 1995, when you thanked me profusely for my great support for the Coa campaign.

As I assured you before, there is absolutely nothing personal in my critiques of your involvement with rock art. It is simply my job to ensure that you never get to work with rock art again, and I do this in the best way I can. I can understand that you are unhappy with it, but please understand that we are even more unhappy with what you have done to Portuguese rock art. But at the personal level we can always remain friends, and I do regard you as a kind of friend.

Can I then ask you to, in your PA reply to my reply, focus on the issues, and not tell us what you think of the Third Reich or the Stolen Generation, or that I try to occupy the moral high ground. I occupy that position in any case, I have no need to secure it. The issues we are meant to discuss are the destruction of rock art sites in Portugal, and in your case specifically the destruction of the scientific integrity of the Coa rock art and the complete destruction of the Guadiana rock art. Please don't respond like a politician, but instead reconsider: was your emphatic support for the Guadiana dam really such a good idea? Was your scrubbing of the Coa petroglyphs really a good idea? I have no interest in making you look bad, but you must help me a little. It would look great if, in your response, you could concede that, in retrospect



and with the clarity of hindsight, there were things that you would do differently.

It would look good on paper and it would give me a reason to ease *off*. If you continue with your state of denial I have no choice but to continue pursuing you – which is really not what I want. I would much rather visit you and sit down with a bottle of Portuguese red and talk about how silly we have been.

Robert

ENDNOTE

In the previous exchange, the year 2001 is given four times in pages 177–178 as the date for events that happened after the Portuguese elections of March 2002. The correct year for such events is of course 2002: May 4, 2002, for the media reports on the intended IPA/IPPAR merger; May 6th, 2002, for my resignation as director of IPA; 2002 as the year for which IPA's website forum can be used as a source to measure the reputation of public archaeology in Portugal; and May 14th and May 21st, 2002, as the dates for the student demonstrations against the proposed IPA/IPPAR merger.

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