

Article

# New Representations of “Chariots” in the Rock Art of Extremadura and Some Considerations of the Archaeological Context

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**Abstract:** Depictions of “chariots” could be considered almost exceptional in the field of schematic rock art of the Iberian Peninsula. Their presence usually generates some discussions among researchers who are dedicated to the study of this artistic cycle to some extent.

**Keywords:** rock art; “chariots”; engravings; Extremadura; Spain; archeological context

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## 1. Introduction

This article presents two new locations: The shelter of Covacho (Oliva de Mérida, province of Badajoz) and the La Roca de los Carros located in Campanario municipal district (Province of Badajoz). Both locations have documented motifs, painted at the first site and engraved at the second and can be included in this typology and possibly add new viewpoints to the scientific discussion raised about them

## 2. New Representations of “Chariots” in Extremadura (Spain)

### 2.1. The Shelter of El Covacho (Oliva de Mérida)

It is located in the northeastern end of *Sierra de la Garza*, a small rocky outcrop that along with *La Sierra de la Oliva* and *La Sierra del Conde*, creates a mountainous alignment of quartzite crests

with an Hercynian orientation (SE-NW) along the southeastern territory. Its slopes contain an important area of Mediterranean forest where holm oaks and cork oaks alternate with scrubland (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Overview of the crest where the group is located in sheltered places.

The sheltered place of El Covacho and three other sheltered places (El Mirador, El Rincón and El Caballo) form a small group of schematic rock art sites, which are integrated into a wide range of sites located in the so-called central mountains in the province of Badajoz. Sierras de Arroyo, Alange, San Juan Bueno, Sierra Grande, Sierra Pino and Sierra de Hornachos are the most outstanding of more than a hundred sites with schematic rock art, most of which are painted (Collado, 1997).

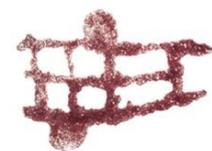
*El Covacho* is a small hollow with a triangular access of about 2.5 meters high by 2.15 meters as the maximum depth. In this hollow, three painted panels with schematic representations are located, but we will focus on one of them, the so-called “panel 1”. It is located on the left of the entrance, on a quartz surface of 50 cm. high and 29 cm. maximum wide and 90 cm above the current ground of the shelter. It is orientated  $329^\circ$  towards NW and shows a  $28^\circ$  slight overhanging inclination.

The scene is organized by a vertical composition crowned at the top with a rectangular motif with two small appendixes on the top left. Below this motif there are three aligned anthropomorphic figures. The one on the left side is incomplete because of a flake on the rock, and the other two are completely preserved, allowing us to observe figures in which the head, the arched arms, the trunk, the legs and the male sex are clearly represented. On the left side of the anthropomorphic figures there is a very lost circular pattern, and on the right, there are remains of two small strokes affected by a possible runoff

that caused discoloration and the transport of pigment. This is a process that also has affected the human figure located on the right side in the uniform spot of pigment.

Below this group of figures, there is the motif on which we focus our attention. We have interpreted it as a “chariot” without a pole, with a compartmentalized rectangular box and with two appendages that overhang on the right side. In spite of using an upper perspective view, the wheels are clearly recognizable above and below the box. The upper wheel is more recognizable than the wheel that is located below, which is positioned slightly to the left and in badly preserved condition. The typology of these wheels (solid or with spokes), is difficult to define because we can only distinguish a big central point at the end of the shaft on the wheel above the box. On the right, slightly below the “chariot” there are two small strokes slanting to the extreme right.

The panel is completed in the lower portion with an outstanding anchor shaped figure framed above and below by two horizontal lines (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Tracing of panel 1 in the shelter of El Covacho and detail of the figure of the cart (right).

## 2.2. *La Roca de Los CARROS (Campanario)*

This new location is situated in La Serena, a large plain located in central, eastern Badajoz province, crossed by Guadiana, Guadamez and Zújar river basins. Nowadays, these basins are very different from their original appearance because of the construction of a large number of dams along their old beds. Tributary rivers such as Tamujoso Stream or Guadalefra Stream flow on these beds. This entire geographical context surrounds the set of engraved rock art discovered in this area.

*La Serena* region is a steppe landscape where the grazing land alternates with non-irrigated land. It constitutes one of the most significant ecosystems in the Iberian Peninsula where the most important species such as the bustard, the little bustard, the crane and the lesser kestrel find an appropriate place to hibernate and reproduce.

All of this area has slate formations so-called in the region as “Dogs teeth”, because of a geological result of the erosive action of time over the old Precambrian slate and greywacke rocks.

Over these surfaces, prospecting and documenting promoted by the regional administration since 2005, led to the locating of several hundreds of engraved stones. (Collado and García, 2007).

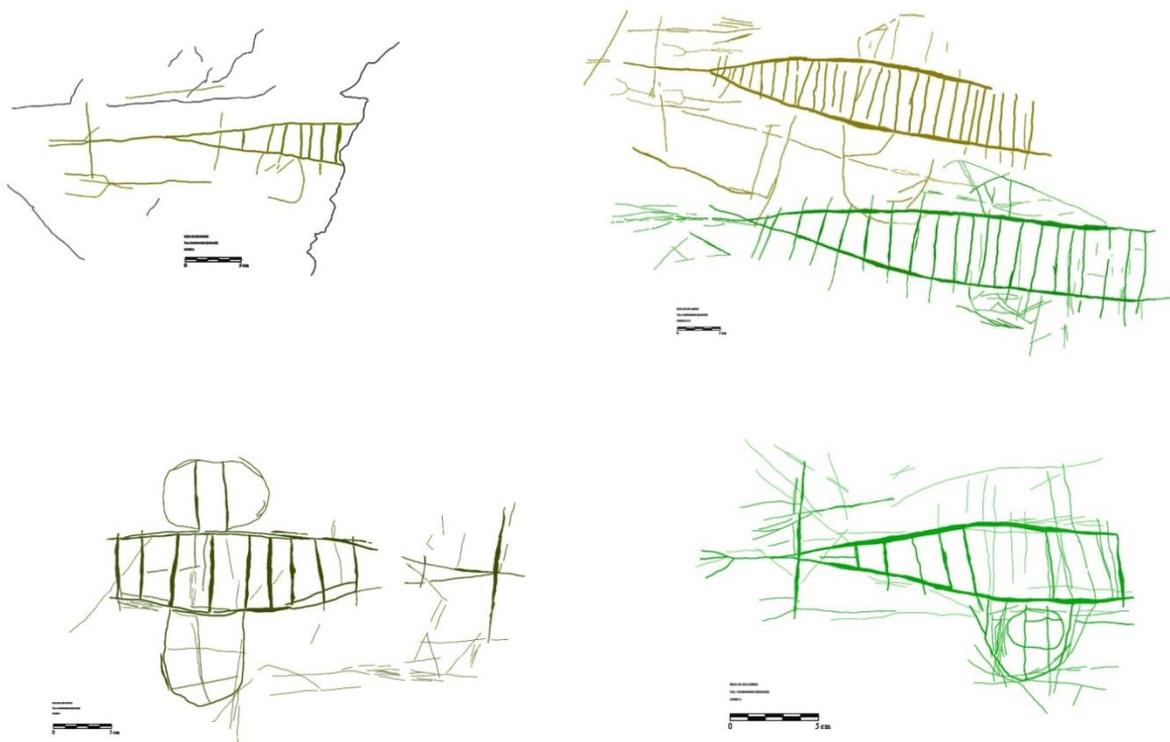
This art is symbolic and geometric, along with the presence of naturalistic elements (weapons, animals, shields, *etc.*) and the representation of small saucepans that appears either superimposed or under the other motifs in panels. It was made using only the engraved technique, with the preferential use of thick incised strokes, and to a lesser extent, it used the pecking technique and the filiform stroke. It is in an artistic cycle different from the schematic art and should be dated between the end of the Bronze Age up to the Iron Age (first and second periods), until Roman Period. It was identified in the west of the Iberian Peninsula (Sevillano, 1991; Simoes, Arca, Ludwig and Fossati, 2000; Batata, Coimbra and Gaspar, 2004; Batata and Gaspar, 2009) and seldom identified south of the Tajo River basin. The presence of this engraved group confirms the spread of these motifs and it supposes the appreciation of rock art in the Iron Age as an independent and singular artistic cycle of schematic rock art in contrast with the traditional idea of rock art in Neolithic and Bronze Age periods (Collado, 2009: 319–322).

*La Roca de los Carros* was located and documented during the works conducted by Arturo Dominguez in 2007. It is on an elongated, slate surface and almost flat, 8.10 meters long by 3.20 meters of maximum width, and oriented to the west (270°). It is on the top of a hillock restricted by a small riverbed of seasonal waters that flows into *Gualalefra* Stream. This small stream is visible from the site, as it is the *Cañada Real Leonesa* (traditional path for seasonal migration of livestock) and it is connected with the *Camino de las Cruces* (Figure 3).

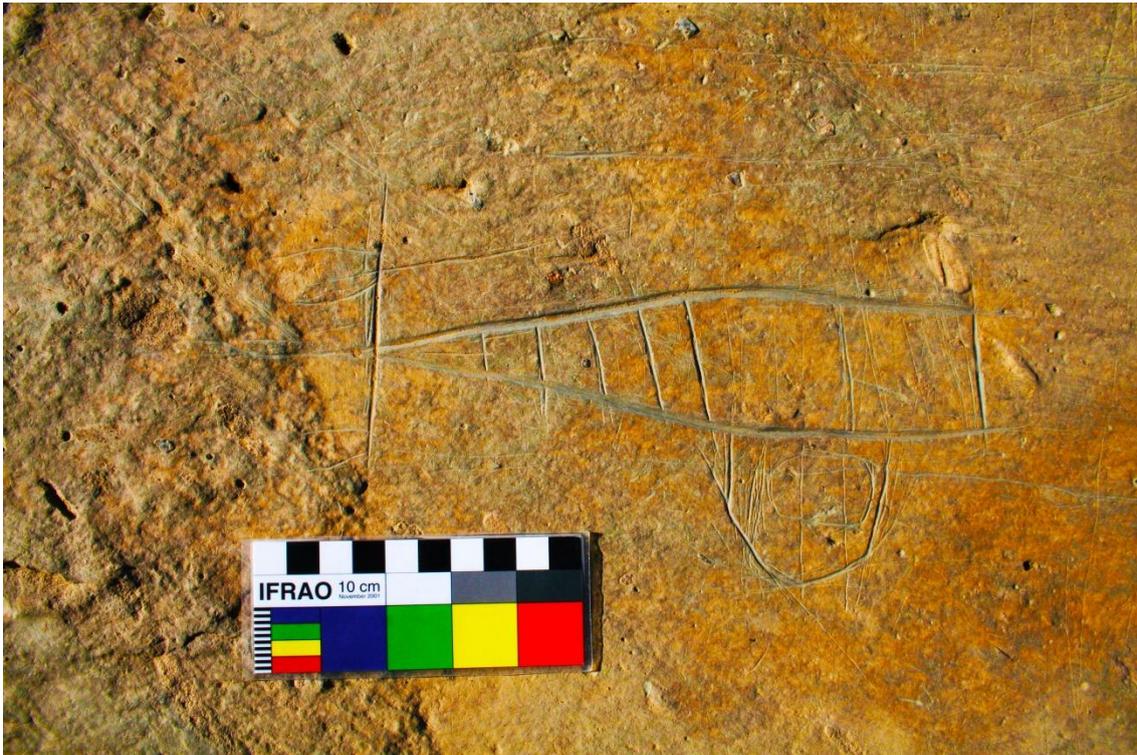
This surface has representations of an important figurative group that has almost fifty figures made with the thick stroke incising technique, filiform strokes, and to a much lesser extent the pecking technique. We focus our attention on a group of figures that clearly represents “chariots” (Figure 4). These studied figures, firstly were engraved as a sketch, with a shallow linear filiform stroke, that later was deeply engraved in order to highlight some parts of the drawing in which the author wanted to give more importance (especially: box, pole, and wheels). It is possible to see important changes, such as corrections, in the process of making a strong engraving, and also too many small, thin lines that can be considered as complements to the “chariot”; but most of them are “sketch marks”, made during the work of the whole piece.



**Figure 3.** Location and overview of La Roca de los Carros (Campanario).



**Figure 4.** “Chariot” depictions in *La Roca de los Carros* (Campanario). “Chariot” 1 (upper left); “chariots” 2 and 3 (upper right);” Chariot” 4 (lower left); “Chariot” 5 (lower right).



**Figure 5.** Image of the “chariot” n° 5 from La Roca de los Carros (Campanario).



**Figure 6.** Detail of the draught animals in the chariot n° 5.

Probably, the morphology of the “chariots” from this site has connections with a pattern previously defined, which is always repeated in all the studied examples. This pattern always shows the importance of the box for the transport of freight that is solved in a simple way with two convergent lines, which can

be marked on the drawing or can be extended in the axle or on the pole. The whole box is compartmentalized by transverse strokes, more or less thick, and on both sides of the box. Because of the perspective used by the author of the engravings, there are solid wheels, without spokes (it was excluded from picture number 1 because it is incomplete, and number 5 because it only represented one wheel) (Figure 5). The pole axels, except the one in number 3, is a line placed across like a yoke in all the figures, and as an exception, they were represented on both sides of the schematic figures of draught animals, probably bovid (Figure 6). These bovines are drawn just with a simple linear stroke that makes a curve with the shape of a “U” or a “V” to indicate the horns. In this sense, it is possible to appreciate that in some of the “chariots” (nº 1, 2, 3, and 5) the pole finishes in a small separation of the strokes, which makes us think that there can possibly be a third draught animal on the extreme front of the axle. No element was documented that related to animal control, the steering, or the reins.

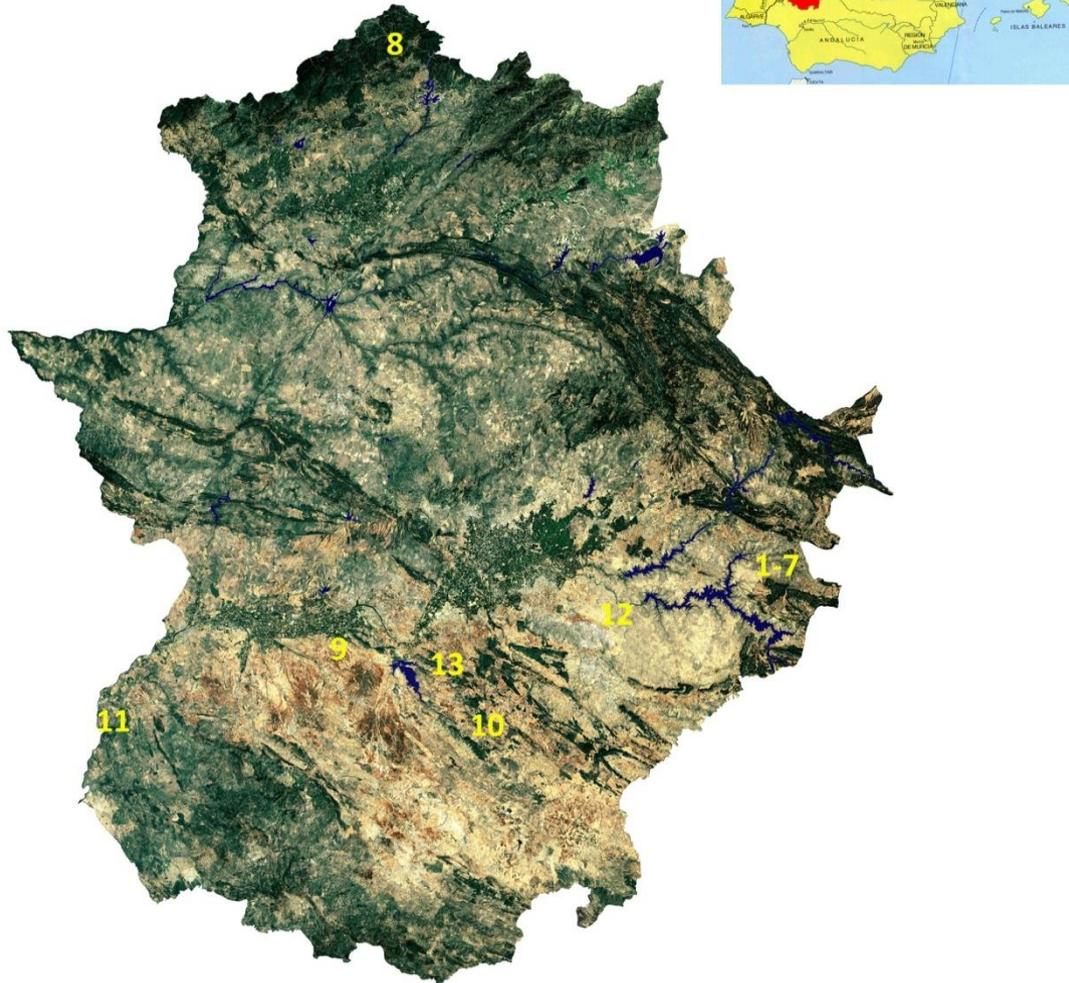
### **3. The “Chariots” of Oliva de Mérida and Campanario in the Context of “Chariots” Represented in the Schematic Rock Art of Extremadura (Spain)**

Depictions of “chariots” could be considered almost exceptional in the field of schematic rock art of the Iberian Peninsula and their presence usually generates some discussions (Collado, 2000; Baldellou *et al.*, 1996; Gutierrez and Avello, 1986; Becares, 1994, Fernández-Miranda and Olmos, 1986). The region of Extremadura is the place where more representations of rock art “chariots” have been found in connection with other rock art images in the Iberian Peninsula (Figure 7). Some of them had been studied together in a previous work (Collado, 2009) (Figure 8: 1–11) that we take up again, adding new examples and making a comparative study with the motifs represented in the shelter of El Covacho (Figure 8: 13) and La Roca de los Carros (Figure 8: 12).

A first analysis allows for the establishment of some analogies and differences. Perspective is used in the figures by splitting the wheels and putting them on each side of the box, is used in the group of Peñalsordo (Figure 8: 1–7), in the “chariots” from Molino Mazánez (Figure 8: 11), and in the newly documented motifs from El Covacho in Oliva de Mérida (Figure 8: 13) and in the La Roca de los Carros, in Campanario (Figure 8: 12). However, the motif of Sierrapino (Figure 8: 10) uses an angular perspective putting the wheel and the inferiorly drawn animal slightly in advance than the superior, achieving depth more feeling, and even movement. This movement contrasts with the hieratic graphemes from Arroyo de San Serván (Figure 8: 9) and Vegas de Coria (Figure 8: 8) despite the lateral perspective.

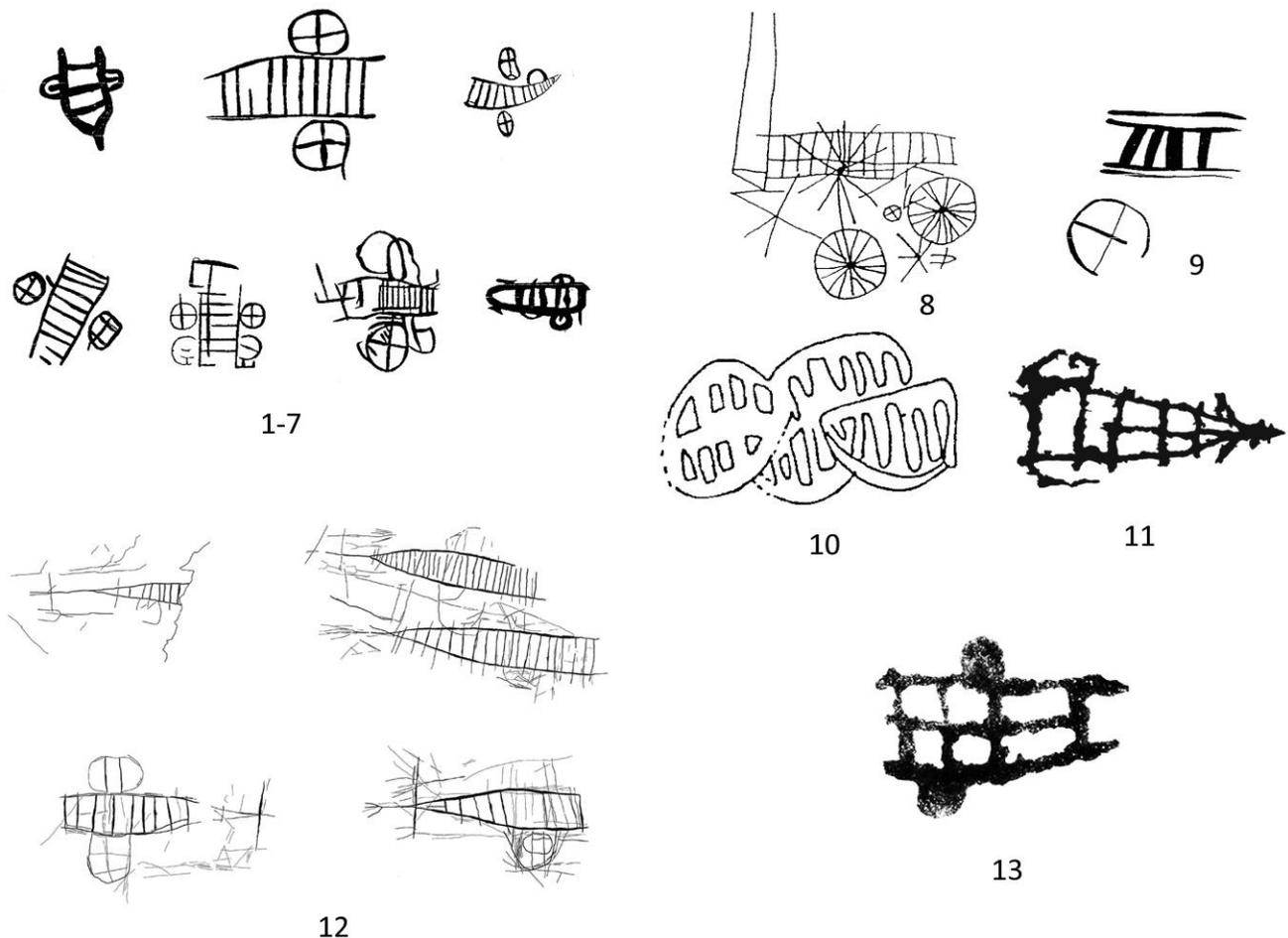
Typologically, the “chariots” studied by Breuil in *Peñalsordo* (Figure 8: 1–7), the “chariot” represented in *Abrigo de Juan de Arroyo in San Serván* (Figure 8: 9), the one in *Vegas de Coria* (Figure 8: 8) and the “chariots” engraved in *Campanario* (Figure 8: 12), present a box with a ladder shape, in one case the box is open in the front and on the back, and in the other case the box has a truncated-pyramide shape joined to the axle in one of the extremities. In the representation of *Sierrapinos* (Figure 8: 10) the box does not appear, although it can be possible that the box was only a horizontal platform where freight was put. The box of the “chariots” from *Oliva de Mérida* (Figure 8: 13) and *Molino Manzánez* (Figure 8: 11), independently of its morphology, has a rectangular shape for the first, and a triangular shape for the second one. They are clearly divided from a central axis that is different to the one used in the other engravings.

**DISTRIBUCIÓN DE LAS REPRESENTACIONES  
DE CARROS EN EL ARTE RUPESTRE DE  
LA REGIÓN DE EXTREMADURA (ESPAÑA)**



**Figure 7.** Distribution of “chariots” figures in Extremadura rock art.

Regarding the wheels, the solid ones used in the transport “chariots” take an example from the “chariot” from Sierrapino (Figure 8: 10), which is depicted in the right panel from the shelter X of Peñalsordo (inferior left) (Figure 8: 4), in the depictions of the La Roca de los Carros (Figure 8: 12) and probably in the chariot from Molino Mazánez (Figure 8: 11), although the lack of internal details do not let us emphatically confirm this aspect. Probably we can consider the wheels in the “chariots” from Oliva de Mérida as solid ones (Figure 8: 13), shelter V from Los Buitres (upper left) (Figure 8: 1) and those of the small oval “chariot” from the shelter X of Peñalsordo (lower right) (Figure 8: 5–7). The rest of the “chariots”, except the one from Vegas de Coria, in Cáceres (Figure 8: 8), have wheels with spokes making a cross, which gives them the strong appearance of a freight transport.



**Figure 8.** “chariots” in Extremadura rock art: 1–7 (Shelter V and X from Los Buitres Peñalsordo, taken from Bécars, 1994); 8 (Vegas de Coria, taken from Sevillano, 1991); 9 (Shelter of San Juan, San Serván, taken from León y García-Verdugo, 1983); 10 (Sierrapino, Hornachos, taken from Collado, 2000); 11 (Molino Manzánuez, Alconchel-Cheles, taken from Collado, 2006); 12 (Roca de los Carros, Campanario); 13 (El Covacho, Oliva de Mérida).

Finally, the most important novelty is the presence of draught animals because it adds to these iconographic, documented motifs in Campanario (Figure 8: 12). Until now, only the Sierrapinos “chariot” (Figure 8: 10) showed animals and the rest of the studied figures were reduced to depictions of the box, wheels and sometimes the pole. As considered before, the strong schematism of the animals in the “chariots” from Campanario (Figure 8: 12) and Sierrapino (Figure 8: 10), do not allow us to be assured of the species, but in attending to the horn shapes of “U” or “V” used in La Roca de los Carros (Figure 8: 12), it is not dismissed that they could be the type seem on the kind of oxen, usually used for these type of “chariots”. Much more undefined is the identification of the animals represented on the pole from the “chariot” of Sierrapinos (Figure 8: 10). The animals are depicted as two figures with a comb shape, but without revealing any anatomical detail. Although unlike the “chariots” of Campanario (Figure 8: 12), in this “chariot” can be seen a curved line that starts in the front of the lower animal and continues until the box, and could be considered a depiction of a rein used to control the pole.

#### 4. Conclusions

Studies on the “chariots” origin in the Iberian Peninsula are clearly linked with the “chariot” depictions that appear in Warrior’s Stelae with a major presence in the peninsular SW. The relationship between these figures and the “chariots” documented in shelters and rock carvings on which we’re focusing is minimally known. For Warrior’s Stelae “chariot” depictions, various authors propose two possible access routes. These are the Central European way, which is linked to the Late Bronze Atlantic or the Eastern Mediterranean way, which is linked to the Middle/Final Helladic period, all, in any case, during the second half of the second millennium BC (Mederos, 2008: 446). Although, from our point of view, it is a reductionist option, especially considering the clear presence of “chariots” in the northern Europe prehistoric rock art (Norway and Sweden) (Pétrequin *et al.* 2006) from the Final Neolithic period and, incontestably, from Chalcolithic age (2500–2400) for chariot’s depictions in Valcamonica (Fedele 2006: 50) or Mont Bego (Saulieu and Serres 2006: 73–74).

The early evidence from Europe allows us to take into consideration the presence of “chariots” in the schematic rock art in the Iberian Peninsula (Neolithic/Bronze Final) (Acosta, 1984; Baldellou, 1987; Bendala, 1977; Breuil, 1933; Collado, 1995; Collado *et al.*, 1997). We believe that an advanced chronology for these kinds of figures is acceptable in connection with the motifs and stylistic criteria (such as the use of lateral perspective for anthropomorphic figures, the presence of horned headdresses, pistiliformes swords, shields, *etc.*). These stylistic criteria and the cited iconography allow us to make a connection between the schematic rock art and the iconography from Warrior’s Stelae. This would be the indigenous contribution for the iconographic elements that in the Warrior’s Stelae obviously should be considered from Central European or Mediterranean influences. (Mederos, 2008).

After previous considerations, the comparative analysis between the different representations of “chariots” documented until now in the rock art in Extremadura, we can highlight that important differences exist of the same motif despite having a widespread and normalized iconography. In this sense, each author used a different criterion, characteristic and style, and that is the reason why sometimes the box the pole or the type of wheels is emphasized. A variety of “chariots” such as at *Peñalsordo*, *Oliva de Mérida*, *Molino Mazánez*, *Sierrapino* and *Arroyo de San Serván* (Figure 8), can be dated to the last periods of schematic rock art (Collado, 2009b:106) during the Final Bronze Age (1400–1000 B.C.); or during the First Iron Age (1000–500 B.C.); and to a lesser extend during the Second Iron Age until Roman Period, to a new way to understand rock art, understanding changes in all aspects: technical, stylistic, thematic, *etc.* It allows the emergence of an artistic style that has his own personality, but is not yet defined and is different from the schematic cycle, but is heir to it. This we can prove in the depictions studied in *La Roca de los Carros* or in the motif from *Las Vegas de Coria*, which belongs to this new period of rock art dated between the First and the Second Iron Age and whose precedent are the painted and engraved motifs of the schematic cycle.

#### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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