

The Adiantetea class on the cliffs of SW Portugal and of the Azores

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with 1 figure and 3 tables

Abstract. Communities in the Adiantetea class are characterized by the way in which they present a double synusial structure whereby vascular plants usually depend upon the macro and regional climate, while the bryophytes do not. On the sea cliffs of SW Portugal this vegetation seems to be fairly independent of rainfall and temperature and, on the other hand, more conditioned by a particular geomorphological evolution which allows for rainwater to circulate. Water supplies are therefore continuous throughout the year. Owing to the proximity of the sea, the water has also a high saline content. These communities are mainly composed of *Adiantum capillus-veneris* and *Samolus valerandi* as well as two relatively abundant bryophytes (*Didymodon spadiceus* and *Eurhynchium speciosum*). The fact that this seems to be an original community, when compared with the rest of the Adiantetea communities, allows a new association to be proposed: *Didymodon spadicei-Adiantetum capilli-veneris*. ass. nov, which is endemic to SW Portugal.

On the basalt cliffs of the Azores islands, strongly influenced by a marine microclimate, a second new association was singled out: *Dicrano scottiani-Adiantetum capilli-veneris*. ass. nov, which is endemic to this area.

Introduction

Vegetation of the class Adiantetea is known for its fairly scarce, isolated occurrence (DEIL 1994). It comes as a surprise to learn that this kind of vegetation may be found in many places, growing on the sea cliffs of SW Alentejo (the lower Alentejo coastline between Sines and São Vicente) as well as to the north of Lisbon. As we shall demonstrate, a particular system of water circulation ensures permanent water flow and the survival and coexistence of large carpets of hydrophilic mosses and vascular plants, typical of the Adiantetea class. The Mediterranean climate has none of the qualities favouring the development of these communities outside environments that are fairly shady and have a consistently high level of moisture. As a rule, Mediterranean climates are not propitious to such environments because they suffer from relatively long dry spells. On the other hand, the amount of total annual rainfall in Southern Portugal is fairly low and water courses dry up during the summer. It is not common, therefore,

to find places where water runs down rocky faces throughout the whole year, setting up a favourable biotope for the development of *Adiantetea* communities.

The following aims were drawn up for the present study:

1. Identify the mechanisms through which continual flows of water are ensured on the cliffs of SW Alentejo (the lower Alentejo coastline between Sines and São Vicente) and why there is always water available even in summer.
2. To study the floral composition of the *Adiantetea* growing on the cliffs and check upon the existence of an original species combination within the class and a comparison with the SW Mediterranean and Macaronesia context.
3. To analyse contact communities and the importance of transgressive species which affect the flora composition of *Adiantetea*, mostly on the fringes of the bryophyte beds.

Method

In order to achieve the aims set out above, the biotopes of SW Alentejo where *Adiantetea* communities could be found were inspected throughout. Relevés following the methods proposed by Braun-Blanquet (1964) were drawn taking into account the specific nature of these communities.

In compiling the relevés, care was taken to restrict the areas covered by the inventory so as to minimize the "interference" caused by the transgressive species, thus reducing the rate at which they were present in both number and diversity in the records.

A study was also undertaken at bryophytic level in this area so that the final study would reflect results together with the vascular and non-vascular levels from a synusial point of view (DEIL 1995, 1996, 1998).

In this study, therefore, no analysis was made of the fine spatial variation within the bryophytic level which, generally speaking, characterizes the half-cave environment, frequently situated in the rocky walls of the sea cliffs of SW Alentejo.

Accordingly, a temporal and spatial geomorphological and geological study was carried out. Regarding the spatial side of the study, the morphological and vertical lithological variation of the cliff was studied in order to understand the way in which the infiltration, accumulation, circulation and resurgence of water happened, mainly on cliff faces. Moreover, the morphological study took into account the importance of fracture lines and intrusive dykes typical of schistose and quartzite material in cliffs, when defining the cracks and cavities where the microclimate is favourable to the growth of communities belonging to the *Adiantetea*.

Where temporal aspects were concerned, a study was undertaken in order to shed light on the main events leading to the present lithostratigraphic build-up seen in cliffs. The lithostratigraphic layers, associated with the morphology of contact surfaces between the different strata, are the main

factors explaining permanent water sources in places where the *Adiantetea* grow.

Geomorphological study

The western coastline of Portugal leading southwards from Pego Beach down to the Algarve is mostly made up of cliffs. Lithologically, the cliffs here may be classed in two groups. To the north of Sines, the sandstone cliffs predominate; they are unstable and form gullies owing to subaerial erosion and are not suitable for the *Adiantetea* bryophytes, not even for the fern *Adiantum capillus-veneris*. *Adiantetea* communities only manage to grow on relatively stable rocky walls which are not prone to any significant rate of erosion as is the case of the Costa da Galé sandstone cliffs to the north of Sines. South of Sines, the cliffs are much more complex and as a rule, there is a vertical differentiation made up of two distinct sectors. The lower sector, which is normally composed of more than 50% cliff height, is made up of the oldest rock (mainly palaeozoic schist, quartzite, and dykes of quartz) which is hard and relatively stable and where half-caves are formed giving shelter to the *Adiantetea* type of vegetation. The higher parts of the cliffs are usually sandstone types (sands, sandstone and conglomerates weakly held together) and raised beaches with rounded pebbles that are sometimes very large. These are predominantly of Quaternary age (dating from the end of the Tertiary and into the Quaternary), with the exception of the consolidated sandstones, is not nearly as hard as the lower section and is therefore easily attacked by subaerial erosion which causes serious instability and a tendency to form gullies. Some of the lithological formations showing these features are highly permeable and are extremely important sites supplying running water.

Hydrological circulation

As was seen in the preceding section, the coastal platform carved in Palaeozoic rock, is covered with materials that as a rule are highly permeable. This explains the fact that almost all the rainwater falling in autumn and winter immediately infiltrates through the sand dunes without being washed away at surface. Percolated water seeps deeper and comes into contact with the surface of the coastal platform carved into the Palaeozoic rock. Extensive watertables are therefore formed at the Red Formation in contact with the Palaeozoic rock. Owing to the way the coastal platform made up of Palaeozoic material generally slopes towards the northwest, water is drained in the direction of the coastline. In its movements westwards, this water finds the coastal cliffs where it collects into permanent springs. Water normally drips down the rock walls but waterfalls are not common, unless they are the micro-waterfalls occurring in the irregular surfaces of the cliffs. The permanent nature of these watercourses even during the summer is remarkable for an area with a Mediterranean climate that has a long dry season and an annual rainfall of only 500–700 mm.

Chemical qualities of the flow water

According to the data shown in Table 1, the water flowing in the cliffs in SW Portugal is obviously oligosodic and has a high pH although it contains an average amount of Ca^{2+} . The high salinity is caused by saline sea-spray carrying the sodium ion (Na^+) inland and depositing it on the top of the sand. The rainwater dissolves the salt and then begins to flow to the depths. In this way, the water becomes salt-enriched although its salinity is proportional the amount of rainfall. Upon analyzing Table 1, it will be seen that there is a difference in the amounts of salinity seemingly caused by the cliff's exposure to the prevailing winds. Therefore, cliffs located along Salto Beach were found to have a lower salinity because they are sheltered from the North winds (which predominate during spring and summer). The Barcas Beach cliffs facing west have an average saline count. The Almogrove Beach cliffs, which are directly exposed to the North wind, have a higher salinity (Table 1).

Although the calcium content is never very high, two sources may explain its presence:

- a) Calcium enriched content from shell fragments contained in the Holocene dunes situated above the Pliopleistocene complex (RAMOS 2004). At times these fragments may account for more than 50 % of the mineral composition.

Table 1. Chemical qualities of the flow water.

	A	B	C
Parameters			
pH	8,0	8,0	7,8
Conductivity (at 25 °C) mS/cm	0,74	0,51	1,00
Calcium (Ca^{2+}) mg/l	33,88	33,66	16,10
Magnesium (Mg^{2+}) mg/l	16,40	10,00	24,40
Sodium (Na^+) mg/l	71,00	48,00	144,00
Boride (B^-) mg/l	0,10	0,19	0,10
Chloride (Cl^-) mg/l	141,84	81,56	219,85
Carbonate (CO_3^{2-}) mg/l	L. traces	None	None
Bicarbonate (CO_3H^-) mg/l	79,30	79,30	42,70
Sulphates (SO_4^{2-}) mg/l	42,80	Traces	39,09
Solids in suspension	Traces	L. traces	Traces
Iron (Fe) mg/l	0,0027	0,0092	0,0036
Manganese (Mn) mg/l	0,0004	0,0003	0,0002
Nitrates (NO_3^-) mg/l	4,6	7,9	29,6
Saturation rate	-0,15	-0,24	-1,02
Cause of adjusted sodium absorption	2,25	1,65	4,16

- A – Cliffs at Porto das Barcas (Vila Nova de Milfontes) – Odemira. Western exposure.
 B – Cliffs at Almogrove Beach (Vila Nova de Milfontes) – Odemira. North-Western exposure.
 C – Cliffs at Salto Beach (Porto Covo) – Sines. South-Western exposure.

b) Calcium enriched content from dunes and sand consolidated with limestone cement situated on the coastal platform, which has developed on cliff tops heading inland. Associated with high calcium content is also the high bicarbonate content in the water solution.

The presence of some nitrates, mainly in the water flowing on the cliffs at Praia do Salto, is the result of infiltration from farmlands situated on the coastal platform.

Flora and vegetation

The microtopography of the cliffs is paramount in the spatial organization of the vegetal communities growing around dripping water. As a whole, plant communities form a *Microgeosigmetum* that is heavily reliant on exposure, the thickness of the micro-soils, slopes and water-flow conditions. In general, there are three kinds of biotopes (Fig. 1).

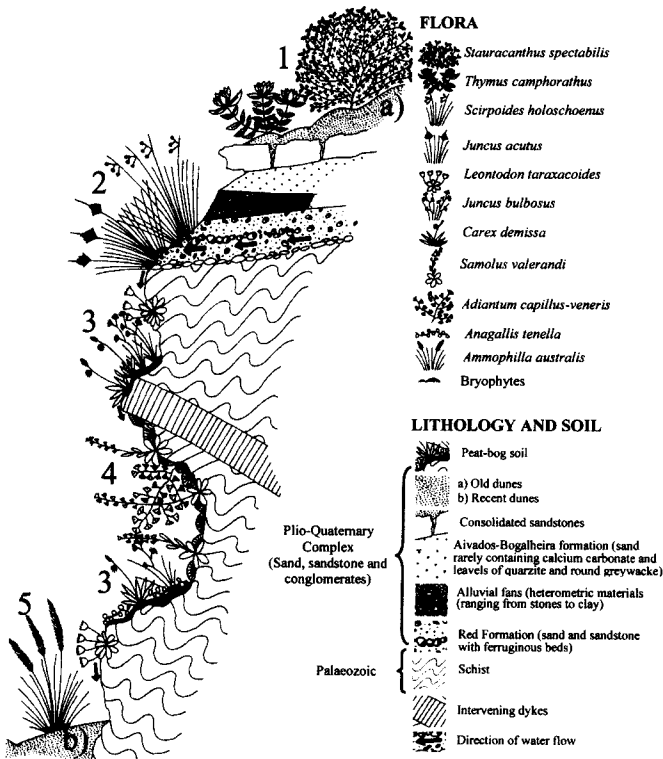


Fig. 1. Mosaic of vegetation communities typical of the SW Alentejo sea cliffs with permanent soaking water. 1 - *Thymo camphorati-Stauracanthum spectabilis*; 2 - *Holoschoeno-Juncetum acuti*; 3 - *Anagallido tenellae-Juncetum bulbosi*; 4 - *Didymodon spadicei-Adiantetum capilli-veneris*; 5 - *Loto cretici-Amphiphiletum australis*.

- a) The water springs are generally situated in the Red Formation, which is in contact with the platform surface carved out of the Palaeozoic rock. In these places, the sand is always very moist and there are colonies of *Juncus acutus* and *Scirpoides holoschoenus* ssp. *holoschoenus* (Holo-schoeno-Juncetum acuti), often in almost pure communities.
- b) On the rocky ceilings and the inner walls of the cracks and half-caves, the shade favours the growth an *Adiantetea* community.
- c) In the lower section consisting of half-caves and rocky microplatforms on the walls of the cliffs where the slope is not so sharp, there is a build-up of peat-bog microsoil which hosts a *Scheuchzerio-Caricetea fuscae* community.

***Scirpoides holoschoenus* ssp. *holoschoenus* rush-communities**

The rush-dominated biotope is very frequent and always hosts extremely simple flora compositions, predominantly *Scirpoides holoschoenus* ssp. *holoschoenus* and *Juncus acutus* (Fig. 1). Its hold on the cliff depends upon soil that is both moist and deep enough. The water springs coming from sources in the Red Formation sands, are the only places providing such conditions due to the fact that thereafter, the water starts trickling down the cliff and the soil is not thick enough to sustain the community's growth.

Peat-bog vegetation

On the microplatforms or the parts of the cliff-face which are less steep and where organic matter may build up, permanently soaked microsoils may be formed. These biotopes are colonized by vegetation belonging to the *Scheuchzerio-Caricetea fuscae* namely a poorer version of the *Anagallido tenellae-Juncetum bulbosi*, a community that is found growing in some of the moist inter-dune hollows in peat-bog areas more towards the inland. On the cliffs, *Anagallido tenellae-Juncetum bulbosi* is dominated by *Carex demissa*, *Juncus bulbosus* and *Anagallis tenella* together with *Leontodon taraxacoides*, *Leontodon longirostris* and *Leontodon tuberosus*, the three latter being much more in evidence. Apart from being found in the Boreal-Alpine areas, the boggy oligotrophic plains also have their own vegetation communities belonging to the *Anagallido tenellae-Juncetum bulbosi* in some of the permanently moist hollows and cliffs along the sandy Alentejo coastline. Their existence is proved by the presence of species such as *Anagallis tenella*, *Juncus bulbosus*, *Isolepis cernua*, *Arnica montana* ssp. *atlantica*, *Rhynchospora rugosa*, *Wahlenbergia hederacea*, *Scutellaria minor* and *Pinguicula lusitanica*. The association these plants have with a permanent water source seems evident in itself, despite the fact that this sort of situation is hard to find in the Mediterranean. Nevertheless, provided water is plentiful, temperature is not a hindrance and in this way communities of the *Scheuchzerio-Caricetea fuscae* class manage to colonize thermo-Mediterranean areas. In the same

way, it should be mentioned that the bryophytes found are much more frequent in northern or mountainous regions with temperate boreal climates, such as *Didymodon spadiceus* and *Eurhynchium speciosum* DIERSSEN (2001).

The Bryo-pterodophytic communities – *Didymodon spadicei-Adiantetum capilli-veneris*

Although relatively rare in areas where they are normally found, there is unusually dense vegetation belonging to the Adiantetea class on the sea-cliffs of SW Alentejo, due to the numerous springs flowing there. As a rule, the Adiantetea communities grow on rocky cliff walls down which calcium-rich water slowly drips. Their dependency on calcium-rich water explains that most of these vegetation communities thrive in limestone environments (with limestone outcrops). Despite being frequently associated with limestone soils, the south-west Adiantetea is found on cliffs which are carved out of predominantly acidic material. Nevertheless, the water running down the cliffs contains sodium bicarbonate and as such, hosts bryo-pterodophytic communities of the Adiantetea class. In comparison with the continental communities, the sea-cliff communities are in an original biotope owing to the high saline content of the water flow. Regarding its flora, the differentiation of the coastal community is witnessed by two hygrophytic mosses: *Didymodon spadiceus*, which only grows in this place in Portugal (regional characteristic; a territorial endemism) (SÉRGIO et al. 2006) and *Eurhynchium speciosum*, a fairly rare species in Portugal (SÉRGIO et al. 1994), although on the SW sea cliffs they are found very frequently. An almost total predominance of *Samolus valerandi* is also noticeable, when compared with the published communities in Portugal (see LOPES 2001 – Table 4.12 page 207). This predominance is also evident inland (see Table 3). It should be pointed out that, taking into account the presence of *Eucladium verticillatum* in most of the inventories drawn up, this community has some similarities with the associations described by DÍAZ et al. (1982) for the Iberian Peninsula's south-eastern mountains. However, both are synecologically and chorologically distinct. Moreover, *Didymodon spadiceus* and *Eurhynchium speciosum* act as territorial characteristics of *Didymodon spadicei-Adiantetum capilli-veneris*.

Based on the original nature of the flora and biotope and also its territorial singularity, a new vegetation community is described as belonging to the Adiantetea class (*Didymodon spadicei-Adiantetum capilli-veneris* ass. nova hoc loco typus relevé 5, Table 2). According to studies undertaken, this new community has been found here and there on the sea cliffs of western Portugal from the Praia de São Julião (Ericeira – to the north of Lisbon) to the Cape of São Vicente.

Apart from the taxa referred to in the relevés of the *Didymodon spadicei-Adiantetum capilli-veneris*, characteristic species of the class Scheuchzerio-Caricetea fuscae were also found although their appearance in the bryophyte Adiantetea communities are not at all usual. They are more commonly seen in areas where half-caves are not so visible

Table 2. *Didymodon spadicei*-*Adiantetum capilli-veneris* ass. nov. (*Adiantion capilli-veneris*; *Adiantetalia capilli-veneris*; *Adiantetetea*).

Numerical order	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
Sampling area (m ²)	0,5	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	1	4	5	5	2	2	1	
Degree of coverage (%)	80	50	60	50	80	60	60	80	50	45	50	60	50	60	70	
Characteristics of association and higher units																
<i>Adiantum capillus-veneris</i>	2	3	3	3	4	3	2	3	2	1	2	2	2	3	2	
<i>Samolus valerandi</i>	2	3	2	1	2	3	3	3	3	1	2	2	2	2	3	
<i>Eurhynchium speciosum</i>	.	+	2	.	3	.	.	2	+	.	2	2	2	1	2	
<i>Didymodon spadiceus</i>	.	+	1	1	2	.	.	.	.	+	1	1	+	2	1
<i>Eucladium verticillatum</i>	+	1	+	.	+	1	.	+	+	.	.	.	+	1	.	
Companions																
<i>Leontodon longirostris</i>	1	2	+	1	1	2	1	+	1	2	2	1	1	1	2	
<i>Leontodon taraxacoides</i>	1	1	+	+	+	1	+	+	1	2	1	1	2	+	1	
<i>Anagallis tenella</i>	.	1	+	.	1	+	+	+	2	2	1	+	1	.	.	
<i>Carex demissa</i>	+	.	.	1	1	.	+	1	1	1	1	1	+	1	2	
<i>Apium repens</i>	.	+	1	+	+	1	.	+	+	1	.	1	.	.	+	
<i>Daucus halophilus</i>	+	+	+	+	.	+	+	+	+	.	.	.	.	+	.
<i>Scirpus pseudo-setaceus</i>	2	1	1	1	+	.	.	.	.	1	1	.	.	1	.
<i>Crithmum maritimum</i>	+	.	+	+	.	+	+	+	+	.	.	.	.	+	.
<i>Schoenus nigricans</i>	+	.	.	.	.	+	1	+	+	.	.	.	.	.	.
<i>Dactylis marina</i>	+	.	+	+	+	.	+	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
<i>Isoplepis cernua</i>	.	.	.	.	.	+	2	.	+	.	1	.	.	2	1
<i>Hydrocotyle vulgaris</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1	2	.	.	.	.
<i>Holcus lanatus</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1	+	.	.	.	.
<i>Polypogon maritimus</i>	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1	.	.	.	.
<i>Hypericum humifusum</i>	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
<i>Juncus bulbosus</i>	.	.	.	.	+	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	+	.
<i>Calendula algarbiensis</i>	.	.	.	.	+	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.

Localities: 1, 2, 3 - Barcas Beach (Vila Nova de Mil Fontes); 4, 5 - Salto Beach (Porto Covo); 6, 7, 8, 9 - Almogrove Beach; 10, 11, 12 - Porto Covinho Beach; 13, 14 - Malhão Beach; 15 - Julião Beach (Ericeira).

(they are flatter) and where transgressive plants may penetrate the *Adiantetetea* more easily. Nevertheless, even in places where half-caves and cracks are more visible, it is always possible to find transgressive species as the cliffs generally face westwards and the sun's rays are projected at an angle so that most of the half-caves and cracks are bathed in sunlight until dusk.

Table 3 is a synthetic table of associations included in the *Adiantetetea* vegetation class found in the Iberian Peninsula, Morocco and the Madeira, Azores and Canary Islands. *Didymodon spadicei*-*Adiantetum capilli-veneris* stands out as an independent, floristically well circumscribed community. Moreover, the later association and the Moroccan *Adiantetetea*-*Hypericum naudiniani* exhibit similar habitat features (schist rock cliffs). Nevertheless, their distinct floristic combinations correlated with distinct biogeographical contexts supports their syntaxonomical independence.

As documented by table 3, a new Azorean association can also be separated: *Dicrano scottiani*-*Adiantetum capilli-veneris* (Lüpnitz ex Deil 1996) J. C. Costa, Aguiar, Fernández-Prieto, Neto, Capelo & Sérgio stat. novus (*basion.*: *Conocephalo-Woodwardietum radicans* Brullo 1986 *dicranetosum scottiani* Lüpnitz ex Deil 1996, in Deil

Eucladio-*Adiantetum*: 1 Braun-Blanquet & Bolòs (1950), 2 Bolòs & Molinier (1958), 3 Bolòs (1967), 4 Varo & Fernandez Casa (1970), 5 Hübschmann von (1971), 6 Mateo (1983), 7 Deil (1996), 8 Pinto Gomes (1998), 9 Lopes (2001); 10 Gaspar (2003), 11 Costa et al. (2004), Eucladio-*Adiantetum* *cratoneuretosum* *commutati*: 12 Ros & Guerra (1987), 13 Vives (1964), Eucladio-*Adiantetum* *hypericetosum* *androsaemi*: 14 (Br.-Bl. 1967); Eucladio-*Adiantetum* *pinguiculosum* *dertosanensis*: 15 O. Bolòs (1967), Eucladio-*Adiantetum* *asplenietosum* *maritimi*: 16 Diaz Gonzalez, (1976) *Trachelio-Adiantetum*: 17 Bolòs (1957), 18 Bolòs (1967), 19 Esteve Chueca & Fernandez Casas (1972), 20 Sanchez & Gil (1982), 21 Deil (1996), 22 Lopes (2001), 23 Crespo et al. (1990) *Trachelio-Adiantetum* *hypericetosum* *metroi*: 24 Deil (1996); *Conocephalo-Woodwardietum* *radicantis*: 25: Brullo et al. (1989) 26: Brullo et al. (2002); *Dicrano scottiani-Adiantetum*: 27 Lüpnitz (1975); *Cardaminetum caldeirari*: 28 Lüpnitz (1975); *Adiantum-Hypericetum* *pubescentis*: 29 Varo & Fernando Casas (1970), 30 Deil (1996); *Lyperetum canariensis*: 31 Sunding (1972); *Adiantum-Hypericetum* *coadunati*: 32 Sunding (1972); *Adiantum-Hypericetum* *naudiniani*: 33 Deil (1996); *Adiantum-Hypericetum* *naudiniani* *philonotidetosum* *fontanae*: 34 Deil (1996); *Didymodon spadicei-Adiantetum*: 35 Neto et al. *hoc loc*; *Pinguiculetum valisneriifoliae*: 36 Heywood (1953); Eucladio-*Pinguiculetum* *mundi*: 37 Diaz et al. (1982); *Hyperico nummulari-Pinguiculetum* *coenocantabricae*: 38 Díaz et. al. (1982), 39 Rivas-Martínez et al. (1984), 40 Herrera (1988) *Adiantum capilli-veneris-Pinguiculetum* *longifoliae*: 41 Rivas-Martínez et al. 1991; *Southbyo tophaceae-Pinguiculetum* *dertosensis*: 42 Asensi & Diaz-Garretas (2002).

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