

RECENT PREHISTORY ENCLOSURES & FUNERARY PRACTICES: SOME REMARKS.

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Throughout European Recent Prehistory, there was an evident relationship between monumental enclosures and the deposition of human remains. It is true that, at least in the Neolithic of Western Europe, death was *ubiquitous*, that is, rituals of death were not anchored to any particular kind of context, but they moved between contexts (Thomas 2000). However, there is a particularly strong and intriguing connection between human bones and Prehistoric enclosures that undoubtedly deserves close attention. Moreover, the questions that arise from this relation have not been systematised yet, let alone explicitly formulated. This is why the celebration of a meeting on the matter, organised by ERA Arqueologia and the Gulbenkian Foundation and held in Lisbon (November 2012), was fully justified.

In this concluding chapter, we will highlight and explore what we think are the two main topics discussed in such conference and compiled in the present volume: 'Recent Prehistory Enclosures', on one side, and 'Funerary practices', on the other, thus coinciding with the meeting title. We will finish with a few comments of our own on both issues.

1. PREHISTORIC ENCLOSURES.

Regarding prehistoric enclosures, this volume shows, once again, the extraordinary magnitude of the phenomenon. Contributions, which concern sites from several chronological and geographical contexts, extend even further the validity of A. Whittle's claim, who in 1977 wrote: "*enclosures with ditches and banks were a feature of Neolithic cultures in western Europe from the end of the Linear Pottery culture onwards*" (Whittle 1977: 329). The inherent large scale of this phenomenon seems to be both geographical and chronological: it appears to be a long-lasting tradition in prehistoric Europe, beginning in the Early Neolithic of the Mediterranean and Danubian areas (sixth millennium BC), and nearly reaching the Bronze Age in other regions (late third millennium BC). The conference in Lisbon that motivated this volume included examples from Romania (*Turdaş*; presented at the conference by C. Suciú) to Britain (in Whittle and in Gibson, this volume), and from Denmark (*Sarup*; presented at the conference by N. Andersen) to Italy (*Conelle di Arcevia*; in Cazzella & Recchia, this volume). At the same time, diversity is an underlying theme, with specific building techniques, regional variations and particularities in the meaning of sites. Both ditched (e.g. *La Pijotilla*; presented at the conference by V. Hurtado & C. Odriozola) and walled (e.g. *Castelo Velho*; in Jorge) enclosures are represented.

In this context, it is important to underline that between the sixth and the third millennia BC, and particularly in the fourth and third millennia, a considerable number of ditched and walled enclosures were built in the Iberian Peninsula. It is clear to us that the common patterns and variability identified in European enclosures have to be taken into account when studying Iberian enclosures, and vice versa. However, despite their abundance and the huge size of some of them, references to Iberian enclosures have been, for the most part, scarce, partial or inaccurate in meetings and collective works on the matter. We have been writing about this for more than twelve years now (Márquez-Romero 2001, 2003, 2004, 2006; Márquez-Romero & Jiménez-Jáimez 2010a, 2010b, 2013a, 2013b), so we are glad to see that this conference finally achieved what we were asking for through our writings: Spanish and Portuguese researchers exchanging ideas about prehistoric enclosures with scholars from a range of other European regions. Some of the research undertaken in the last few years in Iberia is represented in this compilation. Examples are *Castelo Velho* (in Jorge), *Perdigões* (in Valera *et al.*), *Camino de las Yeseras* (in Ríos *et al.*), *Porto Torrão* (in Rodrigues), *Valencina* (presented at the conference by García Sanjuán), *Zambujal* (in Kunst) and *Leceia* (in Cardoso & Waterman).

Aspects often mentioned are chronology and temporality, which is unsurprising since they lie at the heart of all narratives of the past. Worth highlighting here is the ‘Gathering Time’ project, led by A. Whittle, which has recently achieved great success by applying bayesian statistical methods to radiocarbon dates for a high number of sites in Britain (Whittle *et al.* 2011). A. Gibson’s paper revolves around a new and improved Neolithic sequence in Britain, arguing for the introduction of a new period on the light of the evidence from burials and enclosures: the Middle Neolithic. Finally, smaller scale temporalities received some deserved attention thanks to the paper presented at the conference (although not included in the volume) by N. Andersen, who demonstrated the importance of the practice of recutting old ditches at Sarup, in Denmark.

In his paper, A. Whittle stresses the need for multi-scalar approaches to temporality in Archaeology, using Neolithic enclosures as an example of the possibilities of research strategies that account both for what, following J. Brewer, he calls ‘microhistory’ or ‘refuge history’, and the more traditional long term view or ‘prospect history’. At the same time, Valera *et al.* argue for the acknowledgement of differences between specific sites (a form of microhistory) while recognising the existence of common ontologies (a form of prospect history). Precisely because we agree with these views, it appears to us remarkable that the discussion about function and meaning of European prehistoric enclosures is almost non-existent among the papers, as it was during the meeting itself. It is definitely not due to an homogeneity of views: seemingly every researcher has a different way of conceiving what enclosures were, why they were built and what they meant for prehistoric societies. Thus, while some enclosures are interpreted as permanent settlements (e.g. Cardoso & Waterman; Cazzella & Recchia), others are viewed as places for a series of economic activities (e.g. Ríos *et al.*), as places where local identity was reinforced (e.g. Jorge) or even as sanctuaries (Spatzier *et al.*). Likewise, the enclosing structures themselves are conceived in a variety of ways, including defensive systems (e.g. Cardoso & Waterman; Cazzella & Recchia) and symbolic boundaries (e.g. Zeeb-Lanz).

The papers presented, for the most part, are very much locally-focused, and the variability we mentioned earlier surely plays a part on it. Certainly not all enclosures must have been built for the same reasons or served the same purposes. But the fact remains that the interpretations in this volume take very different stances on the economic, social and symbolic role of the enclosures researched, even when facing similar archaeological evidences. Moreover, the positions probably should be more explicit, better defined and more open to discussion. What is a settlement? What is a sanctuary? Which specific events and practices linked certain places with the construction of collective identities?

2. FUNERARY PRACTICES.

There are multiple ways of seeing the variability in the location, distribution, position and character of human bones at prehistoric enclosures. All of them, however, ultimately depend on how we define what ‘funerary’ means and what the implications of describing certain human actions as ‘funerary practices’ are, or even if we use such category at all. As with the notion of enclosure, different papers in the present volume have employed different concepts of funerary. It should not surprise us, then, that authors have looked at similar evidence in dissimilar ways.

A majority of the contributors have opted for the inclusion of all human osteological remains in a single category, that of ‘funerary practice’, while trying to make sense of the diversity identified by arguing that, in the course of funerary rituals, individuals received different treatments. That is the case, for example, of F. Rodrigues’ paper on funerary practices at Porto Torrão. By contrast, Valera *et al.* suggest that instead of basing our interpretations on *a priori* concepts such as ‘funerary rituals’, we should look more closely at the particularities of meaning of specific human remains in their context.

In the present book, the variability observed is often reduced to two types of funerary practices:

- **Normalised funerary practices.** Human remains are deposited in conventional or recurrent ways and positions, usually with clearly identifiable grave goods, within distinguishable, somewhat standard funerary containers (megalithic tombs, corbel dome tombs, hypogea), all of which suggesting a normalisation of funerary rituals.
- **Non-normalised funerary practices.** Human bodies or body parts are deposited within pits and ditches, or between the stones forming the enclosure walls, in a myriad of different states and positions, seldom repeated. The association of osteological remains with dedicated grave goods is not evident, and instead human remains appear in close proximity to animal bones and objects of all kinds, often fragmented: pottery, lithic tools, bone tools, etc.

According to the different authors, the funerary treatment of at least *some* dead, then, was not normalised. For some this could also mean that only certain individuals were formally buried (those involved in normalised rituals), while others received no funerary treatment at all (e.g. Ríos *et al.*). The criteria which informed the heterogeneous handling of the bodies of individual men, women and children as regards funerary rituals have not, for the most part, received much attention. One exception is the work of Spatzier *et al.* analysing the peculiar distribution of human bones at *Pömmelte-Zackmünde*. In their paper, the authors distinguish between ‘regular graves’ (normalised) and ‘deviant burials’ (non-normalised), and suggest that the former served as formal burial places for persons of high social status, whereas the latter are shafts where other people’s corpses were ‘discarded’, possibly after acts of ‘ritual killing’.

A smaller number of contributors indicate that some human bones were not deposited as part of funerary rituals, but as acts in the process of other types of rituals. Amongst those, the proposed cases of human sacrifices at Central European sites stand out: the astonishing ‘pit enclosure’ of *Herxheim* (Zeeb-Lanz) and the aforementioned henge-like enclosure of *Pömmelte-Zackmünde* (Spatzier *et al.*). The latter also make reference to the deposition of bones and body parts as “*ancestral objects, trophies, or apotropaic devices*”.

A common reference is the existence or not of specific funerary areas. For example, L. García Sanjuán’s paper on Valencina, presented at the conference, rejected the notion of a dual organisation of the site consisting of ‘settlement area vs necropolis area’, given the scattered character of human remains across the site. At Camino de las Yeseras, however, Ríos *et al.* argue that, while some human bones were recovered within the fillings of the enclosing ditches, others were kept apart and outside the successive ditches, suggesting the existence of a somewhat dedicated funerary area, although not necessarily contemporaneous with the enclosures themselves. Likewise, V. Hurtado and C. Odriozola described in their presentation at the conference the concentration of human remains in certain areas of the very large site of La Pijotilla (paper not included in this compilation). By contrast, Valera *et al.* point out that this aspect would vary from site to site and over time.

3. SOME REMARKS ON FUNERARY PRACTICES AND PREHISTORIC ENCLOSURES.

In what follows, we would like to explain our position on the issues of enclosure and funerary ritual.

Concerning the first topic, ‘**prehistoric enclosures**’, and in accordance with the variability of the archaeological evidence in a vast chronological and geographical frame of reference such as which has been considered here, we necessarily have to restrict our assertions to the subset of monuments we have focused on in our research so far: Iberian Neolithic and Chalcolithic ditched enclosures (Márquez-Romero & Jiménez-Jáimez 2010a, 2010b, 2013a, 2013b). Generally speaking, we concur with recent accounts, most of them coming from Britain and referred to Neolithic causewayed enclosures (to name just a few, Edmonds 1993; Thomas 1999; Whittle *et al.* 1999; Oswald *et al.* 2001), that there is little evidence of continuous, uninterrupted occupation at those places, especially during the IV millennium and the early III millennium BC. We have also questioned the defensive character of the enclosing ditches (Márquez-Romero & Jiménez-Jáimez 2012). In short, we have consistently argued against the traditional interpretation of Iberian ditched enclosures as stable, permanent

settlements, even proto-urban centres, with robust defensive systems and inhabited by fully sedentary populations. Instead, we base our stance on five pillars: mobility/gathering, construction, cosmogenesis, monumentalisation and deposition.

- **Mobility/gathering.** On the basis of the available data, we believe that the establishment of permanent settlements and a substantial dependency on intensive agricultural activities that attached people to the land did not occur in Iberia until relatively late in the Prehistoric sequence. In other words, that there is no clear evidence of generalised sedentism during the Late Neolithic and a good part of the Iberian Chalcolithic. In this context, monumental enclosures may have played an important social role as places for intermittent or periodic aggregation of groups characterised with a variable degree of residential and logistic mobility.
- **Construction.** The considerable effort invested, plus the organisational needs that their construction entailed, prompt us to think that the process of construction itself must have had a profound effect in the way social relations were conceived and transformed over time.
- **Cosmogenesis.** To limit something is to create a cosmos. Through the act of cosmogenesis the undefined space becomes ordered and clarified, and a dialectic between inside and outside is created (Bachelard 1994: 250-270). Given that ditches created boundaries, they may have helped bring people together, generate identities and build a sense of community. But as limits, they may have also brought about exclusion: a certain change of status – a passage – may have been required for access to the inside.
- **Monumentalisation.** The manifest disproportion between the enclosed area of many late prehistoric European enclosures and the amount of space which, in principle, would be required for most activities in prehistoric societies, suggests that one of the purposes of prehistoric enclosures was the monumentalisation of an area. This impression is reinforced sometimes by the magnitude of their architectural constituents (e.g. ditches).
- **Deposition.** Ritualised depositional practices in pits and ditches were common, and involved a wide variety of artefacts and ecofacts, both in special ceremonies and as part of the routinised tasks of daily life (Thomas 1999; Whittle *et al.* 1999). In a sense, Neolithic and Chalcolithic ditched enclosures were just glorified (enclosed, monumentalised) pit sites.

This is not to imply, by any means, that we see these places as ‘sanctuaries’ of some sort. In our view, it is unlikely that a conceptual and physical separation between discernible sacred and profane spheres of action, so typical of Western contemporary societies, would be applicable to most Neolithic-Chalcolithic European communities (Brück 1999; Bradley 2005). Instead, we conceive these enclosures as public places where a multiplicity of activities (economic, social and ritual; mundane and exceptional) may have been performed during and in between episodes of gathering, and which should be understood as part of the daily practices of these peoples, regardless of how infrequent or exceptional they may appear at times (Márquez-Romero 2003: 277-278).

Regarding the issue of ‘**funerary practices**’, as pointed out above, in many of the papers of the volume, and particularly in those referring to Iberian sites, two contrasting situations are recurrent. The first one is the discovery of human remains in dedicated containers, accompanied with what archaeologists have traditionally termed grave goods. The second one is the recording of complete bodies and body parts or isolated bones recovered from ditches, pits, walls and other non-dedicated contexts, which in turn appears to be a rather diverse phenomenon. Of course, there are grey areas, but overall the differences could be indicative of two or more distinctive practices or behaviours in the past. Hence, the informative potential of such regularities in the archaeological record should not be undervalued. Archaeologists today, for the most part, struggle to find satisfactory classificatory schemes and even words to refer to these patterns, a sign that they do not fit the preconceptions of the present (funerary practices). Perhaps is the concept of funerary itself what must be put into question, instead of the archaeological evidence.

Traditionally, ‘funerary’ in archaeology seems to have been identified with ‘burial’, and this in turn with culturally specific sets of ritual actions aimed at enabling or facilitating the journey to the afterlife following death. The problem is that,

“although excavators normally assume that the recovery of human remains attests to the fact of a burial, there are other strategies which operate with reference to the human corpse and which will result in similar archaeological deposits” (Barrett 1994: 51). The handling and deposition of human remains can be the consequence of multiple activities and occurrences, and the end product of a variety of purposes. Obviously, rites of passage in which the deceased travel from the world of the living to the world of the dead are responsible for many osteological assemblages, but also are human sacrifices, punishment involving execution and/or post-mortem dismemberment, violent conflict and different kinds of pollution, from epidemics to other types of social and symbolic dangers or lack of purity. To this we should add other ideas and practices involving bodies and body parts as objects. As J. Sofaer has written, bodies and body parts are material, so they can be bought, sold, stolen, exchanged and inherited like any other object (Sofaer 2006: 63-64). Hence, human remains can be given as gifts, exchanged as commodities and offered as votive goods. Scholars like C. Gosden and Y. Marshall (1999) have suggested that objects of all kinds often acquire special status or relevance through their biography, that is, where they came from, who they belonged to, etc. Some examples of these ways of conceiving human bones as objects with their own biographies are relics, heirlooms and trophies of war.

We acknowledge, therefore, that the range of social dynamics that could in theory lead to the deposition of human remains at prehistoric enclosures is much broader than the conventional notion of ‘funerary’ allows. Because of this, subsuming all these possibilities under the unifying category of ‘funerary’, understood as related exclusively to the transition of the dead from this world to the next, might be counterproductive. Should we then abandon the notion of ‘funerary’ altogether?

Paraphrasing George E.P. Box, we could say that, essentially, all concepts are wrong, but some are useful. What this means is that certain categories might be more convenient than others, even if they are merely to be considered provisional, open-ended constructs, adequate solely for particular purposes under specific conditions. Whether we call these contexts ‘funerary’, or not, it is probably a matter of personal preference or convenience, and will always be subject to discussion. To facilitate debate, categories need to be defined as unambiguously as possible.

For the time being, and for pragmatic reasons, we will keep the term funerary and will not even attempt to redefine it. We will, however, restrict its use to only a subset of all the contexts in which human remains are found, i.e. those which more evidently appear to be the result of rituals concerning the journey of the dead to the afterlife. In our view, given the normalised character of funerary rituals in many ethnographic accounts, for an archaeological deposit to be considered funerary, it should possess most of the following characteristics:

- **Human remains.** In funerary spaces, human remains are a necessity, not a contingency, with the obvious exception of cenotaphs.
- **Position.** When complete and articulated, human skeletons tend to appear in some kind of standard or conventional position and/or orientation, often in concordance with astrological principles.
- **Container.** A dedicated container with some kind of normalised shape, size and building technique.
- **Grave goods.** By that we mean an assemblage of items which can directly be associated with individual bodies. We specifically refer here to objects deliberately deposited to accompany the deceased in his/her transition to the world of the dead, following existing guidelines or traditions.
- **Centrality of the human remains.** The human body has to be the most important element of the rite, its *raison d'être*, the centre of attention. That should be reflected in a dominant position within the funerary container, in quantitative, or especially, qualitative terms.

This definition includes a wide range of archaeological assemblages, such as megalithic portal tombs or urn pits. It is a simplistic idealisation that not always will find correspondence in the complexities of reality. Indeed, few contexts will

unmistakably fulfil all these criteria. But it is useful in that it also clearly leaves out a multitude of contexts; namely, those in which human remains are one of a multiplicity of elements that have been deposited, and in which they might not even be the most important or relevant items in the assemblages. This is the case of most pits, ditches and walls at prehistoric enclosures. Often, the presence of human remains does not appear to be essential, but *contingent* upon other conditions being met; they may or may not be there. Whether or not these contexts relate to rites of passage marking the transition of the deceased or their body parts from the world of living to the world of dead is very much unclear; the bones that they contain could have participated at some point in funerary rites, but the formation of the archaeological deposits can hardly be exclusively attributed to that. In consequence, our position is that perhaps non-normalised osteological assemblages found at prehistoric enclosures (ditches, pits, walls...) should not be considered funerary by default, at least not all of them. Maybe they could be better understood if thought from a point of view other than the traditional anthropocentric approach; not as the product of funerary rituals, but as material elements involved, alongside many other objects, in recurrent and widespread depositional acts (Márquez-Romero 2004: 134; see also Valera *et al.* in this volume).

Ultimately, we may not be able to distinguish a pit containing human remains from a proper burial. But we should not mistake a ditched enclosure or a pit site, where pits with human bones are the exception and not the rule, and their arrangement is not normalised, for a necropolis or cemetery. Regardless of the validity of our definitions above, the main questions remain: of all human bones found at prehistoric enclosures, which ones were deposited there as part of funerary rites? Those which did not, how and why were they deposited in such spaces?

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