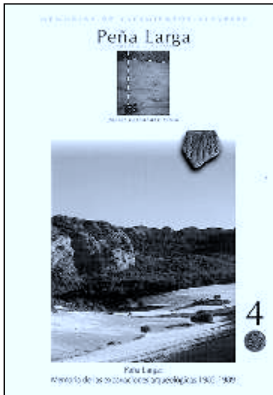


Reseña

puesta en común de las investigaciones recientes sobre el tema y que ahora tiene adecuado broche en la publicación a que hemos dedicado nuestra atención en estas líneas.

Manuel Martín-Bueno



EXCAVACIONES en el abrigo de Peña Larga (Cripán-Alava) / Javier Fernández Eraso ; con la colaboración de: Alfredo Ollero...[et al.]
Vitoria-Gasteiz : Arabako Foru Aldundia = Diputación Foral de Alava, 1997. - 190 p. : il. ; 29 cm. - (Memorias de yacimientos alaveses ; 4)
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There is little left to say about this publication following Professor Ignacio Barandiarán's magnificent prologue (pp. 9-11), in which he takes the opportunity to question the perception that exists about the work of historians in Spanish Archaeology. The work of Javier Fernández Eraso and his colleagues is a welcome ray of sunshine at a time when pure archaeological research (which provides neither money, nor the opportunity to hold public office, nor figures high on the list of priorities of a political party) is in a bleak situation. I must agree with Dr. Barandiarán when he takes exception to so much "theorising" and to "self-satisfied and doctrinaire modern archaeologists" compared with the "sober, serious and exact work" of Javier Fernández Eraso.

After a careful study of the text I can only be in complete agreement with Ignacio Barandiarán. In this country there is a surfeit of theoretical archaeologists, heritage managers, stuffed-shirts and sellers of Archaeology. It is disgraceful that there are so few articles such as this dedicated to Peña Larga Shelter.

It seems to me that F. Eraso's text is fundamental to the study of the process of Neolithization in the region of the Iberian Peninsula, as was recently noted by Pablo Arias in his book about the origins of the Atlantic Neolithic (1997). We can believe in this process because of the four archaeological levels in the stratigraphic sequence so well highlighted at Peña Larga, which stretches from Old Neolithic to the Bronze Age. Finally, to the North of the Ebro we have –well contextualised– cordial pottery, radiocarbon dates (between 5280 and 3014 cal. BC) and an exhaustive work describing the depositional processes of the site and the archaeological material including the anthropological and palaeoecological viewpoint. To summarise, this is a rigorous work of investigation with an interdisciplinary approach which should form part of any university library or centre of investigation.

Without doubt Peña Larga will be –and is already– a point of reference for the recent Prehistory of the Basque Country. For those of us who have on repeated occasions considered the Prehistory of the Basque country from a distance (in this case from this Galician

Finisterre or, to borrow the title of C. J. Cela's book, looking "From the Miño to the Bidasoa") there have always been real difficulties of understanding. Archaeological literature told us of a Basque country divided by a Atlantic-Mediterranean line which marked the territories of two racially and culturally distinct groups. But, this cultural demarcation proposed by J. M^a Apellániz and transformed into his groups of Santimamiñe and Los Husos has always seemed too rigid given that the sites of both groups so often overlap.

In 1988, coinciding with the last fieldworks in Peña Larga, Ana Cava wrote that the Neolithic was "one of the unclearest periods in Basque Prehistory and the Cantabric Region". To add to the work already done by Ana Cava herself, Ignacio Barandiarán and more recently A. Alday, there is now the work of Fernández Eraso to throw more light onto the picture. In this sense Peña Larga is more probably a site of the Santimamiñe group rather than the Los Husos group, even though it is situated geographically in the orbit of the latter.

Before the articles on Peña Larga our information about the early phases of the Neolithic were skimpy: for example the discovery of a single fragment of pottery with a cordial decoration in Arenaza Cave. According to Apellániz "with this evidence the chronological and cultural system of the Santimamiñe group begins to unfold". However, a single fragment cannot carry too much weight, above all because its local context is not clear. But, the discovery of cordial pottery in Peña Larga is a different case, because now the classic theory of a delayed Neolithization begins to collapse under its own weight. Peña Larga is related to the chronostratigraphic sequences such as Zatoya Cave and La Peña Shelter, both in Navarre. At these two sites the Neolithic levels can be placed at the beginning of the Sixth Millennium, that is to say a little earlier than level IV, with cordial, of Peña Larga which is situated at the end of the Fifth – start of the Fourth Millennium.

Another aspect to comment on is the socioeconomic data which contributes to the excavation at Peña Larga. Until now in the Basque Country we have depended on authors such as J. Altuna, P. Castañón or K. Mariezkurrena. It seemed that in the early stages of the Neolithic process, coastal fishing, hunting and general gathering activities were still of great importance, compared to the rare incidence of domesticated animals (cattle, pigs and sheep). It was only at the Later Neolithic and specially at Chalcolithic that hunting was overtaken by farming; mostly sheep and cattle. And we only have a consistent dog presence in the sites at Marizulo, Arenaza and Santimamiñe. But as J. Altuna suggested in his classic book about the history of animal domestication in the Basque Country (1980), the introduction of farming and agriculture must be considered as relatively late, not arriving before the end of the Fourth Millennium. This fact is of great importance for a better understanding of the Neolithization of the Cantabric region.

If I had to select an aspect of the site with specific importance, excepting that of the chronological sequence of the strata at Peña Larga from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age, I would highlight the discovery of cordial decoration. This fact is referred to by Bernardo Martí Oliver in his most recent published paper about the Prehistory of the Iberian Peninsula (Ariel Prehistoria 1998, p. 182): "Special importance has been given to the presence of cordial pottery in Peña Larga Shelter (...) that would seem to prove an earlier neolithization in the higher regions of the Ebro in relation to the Mediterranean zone".

I will finish by referring to Dr. Barandiarán's prologue, when he considers the excavation at Peña Larga as data which will allow an "explanation and knowledge of prehistoric culture in this corner of Western Europe" (p. 11). And in the words of Santiago Ramón y Cajal: "The facts if well observed, will remain, even if the interpretations change".

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