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C72 - Space, Memory and Identity in the European Bronze Age

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CONCEPTUALISING SPACE AND PLACE ON THE ROLE OF AGENCY, MEMORY AND IDENTITY IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF SPACE FROM THE UPPER PALAEOLITHIC TO THE IRON AGE IN EUROPE: AN INTRODUCTION

Ana M.S. BETTENCOURT, M. Jesus SANCHES,
Lara Bacelar ALVES & Ramón FÁBREGAS VALCARCE

“...Past peoples knowingly inhabited landscape that were palimpsests of previous occupations. Sites were built on sites; landscapes were occupied and reoccupied time and again. Rarely was this a meaningless or innocent reuse. Like us, past peoples observed and interpreted traces of more distant pasts to serve the needs and interests of their present lives”

(Van Dyke & Alcock 2003)

INTRODUCTION

This volume represents the proceedings of two sessions of the XV Congress of the UISPP, held in Lisbon in September 2006. The session entitled “Places, Memory and Identity in the European Bronze Acts”, was chaired and organised by A.M.S. Bettencourt and L. Bacelar Alves whereas that on “*The creation of ‘significant places’ and ‘landscapes’ in the Northwestern half of the Iberia, during the Pre and Proto-historic times. Theoretical, recording and interpretation issues from case studies in this region*” was organised by M.J. Sanches and R. Fábregas Valcarce.

The papers included in this book encompass a wide temporal span from Prehistory to the Iron Age and embrace an extensive territory from Western to Central parts of Europe, with particular focus on the Iberian Peninsula. Contrasting with a rather customary editorial propensity towards the alignment of univocal theoretical perspectives in thematic books on European Archaeology and Prehistory, in this book the reader will find pluralism. Aiming to avoid the dissolution of the dialogue between different theoretical perspectives, this volume offers contrasting approaches on the interpretation of Space and Place. Throughout, the reader will be able to find a wide range of influencing perspectives from neo-marxist, to processualist, phenomenological and contextual. Nonetheless, all authors share a common interest: the interpretation of the role of spaces, places and the collective agency in the construction of society. In other words, they all attempt to interpret the social role of different places, an aspect that is deeply related with the creation, maintenance or alteration of the social memory, identity and power.

PLACES AND MEMORY

Considering the common aim of these papers, there are two guiding concepts – Place and Memory – that should be defined at the outset, and the relationship between

them examined. Hence, we consider Place as a space that becomes commemorative or special through the incorporation of meanings, histories and narratives, usually related with Past events, either real or recreated, by local communities. In this sense, Place is an ubiquitous concept that can either correspond to a site that was built or physically altered (and materialised by more or less monumental architectures), or to natural elements like hills, estuaries, valleys, rivers, rock outcrops, caves, shelters, crevices, trees, etc. (e.g. Bradley 2000, 2006), which value and meaning may be encapsulated in invisible, untouchable, and indelible ways as, for instance, in oral traditions. Regarding the former, the construction of artificial settings helps archaeological research to progress. Yet, the perception of the latter as highly significant places is difficult to assess in the absence of physical remainders of human actions.

Another issue that seems important to address here is the *creation of places*, aspect that cannot be dissociated from the mechanisms of construction and transmission of social memory. Memory is a collective phenomenon that, as Basso argues, corresponds to a collective notion about what is thought to have occurred in the Past, allowing to create and bear a sense of communal and individual identity (1996). According to the same author, it is through memories and of a network of associations in a process that he calls ‘interanimation’ that the historical ties between the communities and a particular natural space are created. As Feld & Basso (1996)¹ states “*Places, meanings, and memories are intertwined to create what some authors have termed a ‘sense of place’*”.

But being social memory an active process that involves actions of recollection, recreation, renewal, reinvention and even of forgetfulness, it is able to be used as a source of political legitimacy either by groups aiming to legitimate and naturalise their authority (Alcock 2002 in Van Dyke & Alcock 2003). Through time, places are opened to changes of meaning or even changes of the

¹ In Van Dyke & Alcock 2003.

myths they were originally associated with (Joyce 2003), thus becoming what Joyce & Hendon (2000 in Joyce 2003) describe as “multivocal places”.

Thus, places are permanently open to reinterpretation through recreation acts since, as R. Bradley says “the remaking of the past in the past was both a creative act and an interpretation” (2003). Hence, archaeologists should inhibit themselves to create lineal narratives in the interpretation of a particular place (*Ibid*), although the study of the long duration of such places may allow us to become aware of processes of cultural continuity and discontinuities. These ideas are at the foundations of some of the papers included in this volume that privilege diachronic analysis. This is the case of P. Bueno Ramirez *et al.* who explore the relationship between metal, weapon representations, statues and stela from the 3rd and 2nd millennia BC, in Iberia, as a means of appropriation of cultural and natural landscapes of the Neolithic. Pedro V. Castro Martínez *et al.* draw attention to the presence of recurring or exceptional activities in different types of settlement (both open and fortified) of the “Los Millares Horizon”, in South-eastern Iberia, in order to bring forward hypotheses about changes of the political organization of domestic groups, between the end of the 4th to the end of the 3rd millennia BC. Mechthild Freudenberg, brings the case study of the mound of Husby (Northern Germany) and analyses the ways in which this place was maintained symbolically active from the time of its construction in the 2nd millennium BC, up to the Iron Age and Roman period. Under this perspective, we also highlight the contribution of André T. Ribeiro *et al.* on the place of Bouça of the Cova da Moura (North-West Portugal), Beatriz Comendador Rey’s paper on the estuary of the Ulla (Galicia, North-West Spain), António Silva and Joana Leite’s on the site of Cidade (North-West Portugal) and that of Angel Villa Valdez about Chao Samartín (Asturias, Northern Spain) that reflect or question the ways in which the past was used and maintained in the long term at particular places.

Notwithstanding, it is important to stress that, within the scope of each community, there would have been multiple places that were certainly not regarded as separate fixed entities but as dimensions of a whole pattern of social experience. Studies on the interaction of different places demands a transversal perspective, which was attempted by Ana M.S. Bettencourt who deals with aspects concerning funerary rituals and the dead in close association with metallic deposits, rock art and settlements from the Bronze Age in NW Iberia. Also, Beatriz Comendador Rey establishes relationships between rock art sites and deposits of metalwork in watery and dry-land environments in Galicia, during the Bronze Age.

Other studies in this volume, inspired by phenomenological perspectives, value the role of emotions and of the emotional states ‘attached’ to places that are also embedded in the construction of the memory (Tilley

1994; Thomas 1993, 1996). The ‘retrieval’ of social memory is intimately associated with “the experience of place”, that encompasses, amongst others, sensory experiences, which are significant in the recognition, ‘recollection’ or in the reflection of how landscapes and constructions were perceived and represented by individuals in the past (Thomas 1993). This matter is pursued in contributions dealing with rock art in central and northern Portugal, ranging from the Upper Palaeolithic Art in the Côa valley, in the study by António M. Baptista and André T. Santos, to the Atlantic Art site of Lapaça, examined by J. Teixeira and the Neolithic graphic manifestations in megalithic tombs, in the paper by M. Jesus Sanches.

MATERIALITIES, MEMORY AND IDENTITY

Alongside the study of places, it is equally important to analyse the role of specific objects or representations, imbued with symbolic and religious significance, in the study of the variability of memory construction bearing social and cultural meaning (Hodder 1982, Gell 1998). We may include, under this category, the production of visual imagery both on natural rock formations and megalithic tombs, the role of metallic objects or the manipulation of human bones, which may have been used for commemorative purposes (Barrett 1988), or may have incited the creation of “new” memories. Two papers in this volume attempt to interpret the role of the corpse in the construction of identity during the Bronze Age, in different parts of Europe: Ana Bettencourt’s contribution focuses on North-western Iberia whereas Kim Jong-II’s deals with evidence from Central Europe. M.J. Sanches argues that the foundations of “communitarian identities” of Neolithic groups in North-western Iberia may be unveiled through the type and associations of visual imagery placed inside megalithic tombs as part of the construction process. In these monuments, the deposition of corpses, ‘objects’ and visual imagery are part of social actions intended to create scenarios that simultaneously incorporate, maintain or rework aspects related to the memory and identity of local or regional communities. In addition, J.C. Senna-Martinez, *et al.* and João M. Perpétuo e Filipe J.C. Santos examine the role of metallurgy, metalwork and graphic representations of metal artefacts in the consolidation of power and the creation and maintenance of social networks in the Bronze Age. In this respect, the idea that the control of ‘objects of memory’ and memory itself is a component of power (Lillios 2003) has been widened by R. Bradley who considers that “*it would be wrong to restrict the argument to this approach. As Whitley (2002) has pointed out, not all antiquities were associated with ancestor or with sources of political power. Many were linked instead with the supernatural, and often they were feared*” (2003). Hence, one of the major challenges of contemporary research is the interpretation of ‘intentions’ or actions inherent to the use of places, spaces and the manipulation of other materialities within the scope of the investigation

of processes of memory transmission, creation and maintenance of identity and power. As J. Barrett states “societies have never existed without the people who made the conditions of a given society possible, and these people were themselves social beings” and further acknowledges that “the point (...) is not to recognize that an action has occurred because we find the record of that action, but to understand something of the performance of that action, the means of its execution, and its historical context” (2001).

Finally, two papers included in this volume draw upon new archaeological evidence regarding open-air rock art and funerary contexts in Prehistoric Europe. Although setting at some distance from the main issues discussed throughout, they also provide us with important information on international research projects. This is the case of the paper by R. Fábregas Valcarce *et al.* that deals with recently discovered rock art sites in Northern Galicia (Spain) and examines their landscape setting, and Otto Mathias Wilbertz’s contribution on a research project aiming the inventory of Bronze Age oblong and keyhole-shaped burial ditches in Central and Western Europe.

The papers included in this book were organised in three main sections: the first part (chapters 2-6) is devoted to the social role of the dead; the second (chapters 7-14) comprises studies on depositions of both visual symbols on rocks and symbolic artefacts; the third part (chapters 15-17) brings three case studies that deal with dwelling areas and other architectural settings for the living. Lastly, we ought to admit that the preparation of this volume has taken longer than expected for a variety of reasons. All the papers were received in the course of the year 2007 and little updating has been carried out. However, the amount of primary information included here, the substantive variety of the analysis and perspectives, and the rather uncommon event of gathering studies from the extreme west and central parts of Europe, improving the exchange of information between these regions, justifies this edition.

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