

Rendering Death: Ideological and Archaeological Narratives from Recent Prehistory (Iberia)

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The faces of death: from the Bronze to the Iron Age, between the North and the South of the Portuguese territory

Raquel Vilaça

On the trail of death

The funerary practices of the late Bronze Age, such as of Iron Age, are not well known in the Central Western and Northwestern regions of the Iberian Peninsula, as well as generally, in its Atlantic façade. So begins a text which 14 years ago assessed and discussed the then available information from Portuguese central territory and neighbouring areas (Vilaça & Cruz, 1999).

This synthesis, perhaps insufficiently disclosed, but yet still a constant quoting source in several papers, was part of a project²² which produced new data of which most are published and others are about to be published.

Despite the new contributions, whether arising from the project itself or from the studies conducted by other researchers, the general lines put forward in that text have not undergone deep alterations with respect to the Central Region. Two main conclusions were then presented: on the one hand, and in contrast with the then dominant discourses, it was shown that there was mortuary material evidences with their own spaces, although not always easy to identify; and on the other hand, that there was the need to recognise diversity, i.e. not regularity, within funeral practices and rites of the late Bronze Age (Vilaça & Cruz, 1999: 84).

Therefore, if any norm is perceptible, it is precisely the absence of it, either by the variability of spaces, structures, materials and rituals coexisting in time - although not in the same spaces - with inhumations and incinerations, or by a tendency towards a certain invisibility through which death does (not) express itself, what by definition leaves room for multiple hypotheses.

In face of the identification of new burial structures and the increasing value given to previously known situations, it was also sought to demonstrate that the assumed absence or rarity of burial spaces in the late Bronze Age of the Atlantic façade was rather a result of directly introduced general interpretations from extra peninsular Atlantic façade (a tendency for water deposition and incineration practices, for example), than actually from the almost unknown, although present, Portuguese empirical evidences. Moreover, the important

works developed by Philine Kalb and Martin Höck in Viseu area had already refuted the claim that there were no burials from this period in Portugal (Kalb & Höck, 1979).

That synthesis also emphasised that, besides the need for systematic research in this field, the analysis could not restrict itself to a classical perspective in which death was understood as being confined to formalised inhumations and incinerations, of burials in spaces designed or reused for this purpose and properly accompanied by the so-called “grave goods” (Vilaça, 1999: 180; Vilaça & Cruz, 1999: 76). Death and its rituals go far beyond.

It should be noted that it is also crucial to view the death phenomenon in those archaic societies not as a moment, but as a process developed in several actions translated through funerary ceremonies, with distinctive times, scenarios and players. In reality, human existence involves three (and not two) phases: life, death and the transition from one to the other. Burial structures and funerary spaces are only part, and not necessarily the most important one, of a chain of passage rituals probably composing several scenarios: some, materialised in actions, which sometimes have left traces, others bodily, or based in bodily actions (postures, songs, prayers, dances, gestures, looks, etc.), vanished in the very moment, becoming lost memories that barely fit into Archaeology.

This is the first challenge presented by the regional and chronologic research study of death. It is an “evasive”, inexpressive and often invisible death occasionally dispersed and certainly not always protected and ultimately with multiple facets and disguises whose track, when present, translates into different and even unexpected situations. And it is also the first certainty: the communities reacted with diverse answers to the unavoidable power of death.

The second challenge, from which it depends, is obviously the absolute need to further develop and multiply research projects focused on these problems as available well-characterised data and contexts are not sufficient and merely suggest some clues that should be further explored. However, the abominable situation of the world known to us, and that we feel very close in our daily life, greatly limits and restricts the creation and materialisation of ambitious, time-consuming, expensive projects. Meanwhile, it is necessary to go through other paths, trying to explore the available information. Recently, in another paper (Vilaça, in press), we have revised longstanding findings and contexts of quite different interest because some only provide concise

²² This investigation project, entitled “Práticas Funerárias e/ou Culturais dos Finais da Idade do Bronze na Beira Alta” (“Funerary and/or Cultic Practices from Late Bronze Age in Beira Alta”), was approved by the Portuguese Archaeological Institute in 1998, continuing another, started in 1993. Coordinated, the latter by Domingos Cruz and the former by the authors of this paper, developed within CEPBA (Centro de Estudos Pré-Históricos da Beira Alta / Centre for Prehistoric Studies of Beira Alta), with a considerable amount of participants, among researchers and students, linked to several institutions.

information,²³ while others, such as Paranho incineration necropolis (Tondela) (Coelho, 1925; Cruz, *et al.*, 1997), provide rather interesting information.

Let us focus on other issues, starting with the prevalence of traditions and the resistance to change.

Marks of ancestry

Among the various actions and reactions to death by the late Bronze Age communities in the space and time under analysis are those who translate a link with the past, or if you like, a continuity of the past in (their) present, highlighting traditions and roots that were naturally re-interpreted, filtered and shaped by time (to use the Marguerite Yourcenar's familiar metaphor).

The most significant manifestation of this phenomenon is the symbolic and physical appropriation of ancient spaces, places and contexts, in other words, pre-existing structures that we may systematise in at least three types of situations.

The first corresponds to cave reutilisation as long-lasting funerary spaces. Although with several problems still to be clarified (Vilaça, *in press*), it is likely that certain communities continued to bury their relatives in caves as their ancestors had done before within a certain line of continuity that seems to be underlying.

The second includes situations where old structures, with or without alterations, are reused. In this set we may include the reuse of megalithic monuments with all the symbolic power that they always had across time – phenomenon present in several areas and whose investigation has seen, in the last few years, a renewed interest (v.g. García Sanjuan, 2005 and several subsequent texts, among other authors).

In Beira Alta, one of them is the Rapadouro 1 (Pendilhe), monument from which rectangular chamber some human bones were gathered with traces of having been submitted to fire (Cruz, 2001: 111-113; 185). Another is monument 2 of Fonte da Malga (Côta, Viseu), featuring a simple chamber, in which tumulus a cist was inserted corresponding to a secondary burial dated from late Bronze Age (Kalb & Höck, 1979; Kalb, 1994).

Other possible traces of the re-utilisation of ancient megalithic monuments correspond to findings of dispersed materials, such as those in Orca do Picoto do Vasco (Pendilhe) (Cruz, 2001: 186 and fig. 74-3), which may point to mere visits without an effective reuse, i.e. formalised, either in the Late Bronze Age or in the Iron Age.

If we move from Beira onto Portuguese Estremadura, we are confronted with a more complex situation, where the funerary structures resemble tholos with Late Bronze Age materials. Whether these correspond to reuses of Calcolithic spaces or are rather directly articulated with its construction, is a pertinent question.

This issue, discussed in due time (Vilaça & Cruz, 1999: 80) was worthy of attention among the case study revisions, as happened with Roça do Casal do Meio (Sesimbra) (Cardoso, 1999-2000: 400-405; 2000b) which we had the opportunity to be commented on (Vilaça and Cunha, 2005). The re-examination of the monument within the on-going project, “Valorisation of Archaeological Heritage as part of the application: Arrábida to World Heritage”²⁴ should bring new contributions, namely related to their construction chronology and ritualisation of the monument's surrounding areas.

The person in charge of the excavation had admitted it might have been an indigenous structure of tholos type reused in the Late Bronze Age (Spindler, *et al.*, 1973-74: 117-118), - hypothesis that would later be valorised (Belén, *et al.*, 1991: 237). The issue is not, however, of unequivocal reading, because it also referred the collection, at the monument's construction level, of ceramic fragments matching a carinated bowl, typical of the Late Bronze Age (Spindler, *et al.*, 1973-74: 124 and 149). But it is important to note that on the assumption that it has been reused to house the two inhumed men around the 10th century BC, it must also be assumed that a complete “past cleaning” of the chamber contents has also been done, of which there are no remains (or perhaps any hasn't survived) (Vilaça & Cunha, 2005).

The third situation includes cases where a new construction is made, especially small tumuli, but in areas adjacent to or in the vicinity of the old monuments which are not directly reused as sacred places. In this case, the process is of a distinct nature, in which the same sites are changed and take on new, more complex scenarios, while maintaining the ancestral symbolism of the place. Paraphrasing David Fontijn, we may say that “mounds attracted mounds” (Fontijn, 2007: 73). This seems to have been the strategy of diverse human groups, as it was possible to ascertain in some Beira Alta contexts.

One of the more emblematic and thoroughly studied cases is in the Sr.^a da Ouvida (Castro Daire) extensive plateau. About three dozens of small tumuli of different chronology (between about 1450/1400 and 800 BC) and also mounds of bigger size and volume embody a true “sacred field” (Cruz & Vilaça, 1999). Five of those monuments have been digged up and no cist- or pit-like structures have been found; instead there were slabs, blocks and bedrock natural depressions defining central areas. The clear presence, although minimal, of burned

²³ It is the case of the apparent association of inhumation burials to metallic artifacts as registered in Casal de Santo Amaro (Sintra) and Vendas das Figueiras (Penela), as well as the cultic-funerary utilisation of some caves from the wide karstic spots developed in the coastal area of the western Atlantic façade of the Iberian Peninsula.

²⁴ We have collaborated in the project led by the Association of Setúbal Municipalities as scientific consultants of the Palimpsesto/Arqueohoje Consortium for archaeological and conservation/restoration works.



Figure 11.1: General view from Sr.^a da Ouvida with the location of tumuli 13, 12, 11 and 10; hermitage in background (according to Cruz & Vilaça).

wood remains under some tumuli allowed hypothesising that it would belong to remains of pyre incinerations carried out in the vicinity.

Another example can be observed in the necropolis of the eight monuments in Fonte da Malga (Viseu), two of which are megalithic. There is a double situation here: a cist in the tumulus of monument 2 alongside new non-megalithic monuments such as monument 1, with a diameter of 6m, which had a small central cist surrounded by cairn bounded by a stone circle, also assigned to the

Late Bronze Age, based on the ceramic fragment collected there (Kalb & Höck, 1979).

Therefore, concerning its past, certain communities from final Bronze Age also expressed themselves in death in variable ways. Some have conferred and reinforced the importance of the symbolic meaning of old places with distinct solutions, bringing multiple temporalities together. These are places whose temporality is in essence “a temporality of sequence” (Lucas, 2005: 39).

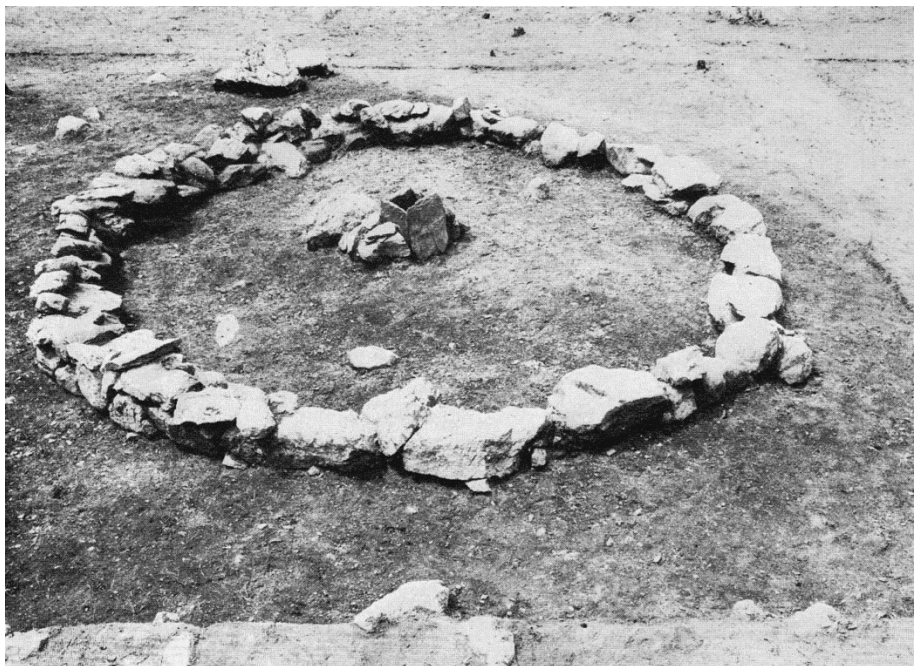


Figure 11.2: Monument 1 of Fonte da Malga after excavation (according Kalb and Höck).

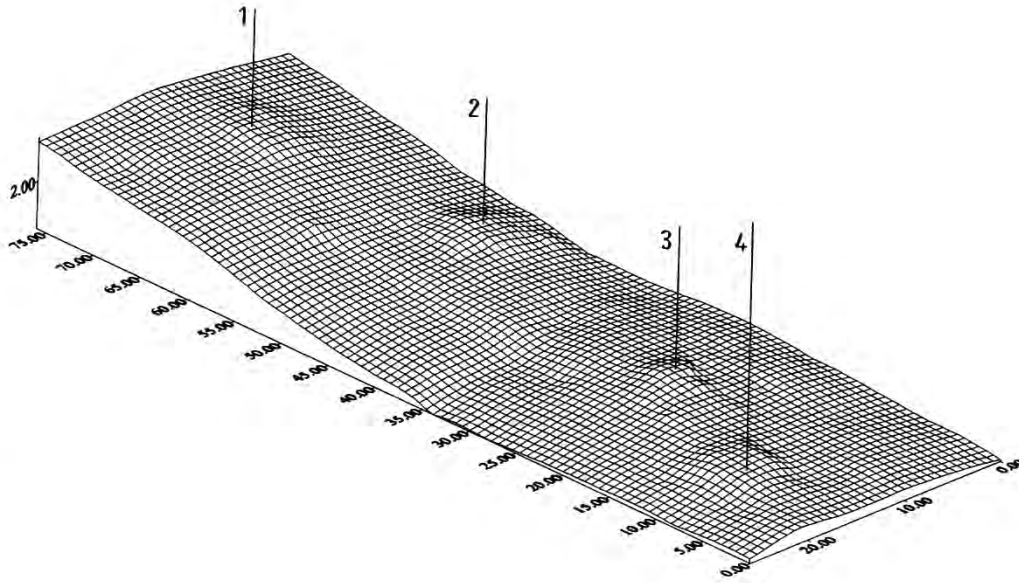


Figure 11.3: Signaling of Tumuli 1, 2, 3 and 4 of Pousadão, in W/SW – E/NE direction (according to Cruz, *et al.*).

Gravestone Landscapes

Small tumuli like those we have just mentioned may also occur, actually more frequently, in areas where no traces of dolmens (or elder structures) are found, as is observed, for example, in the four monuments in Pousadão (Vila Nova de Paiva) (Cruz, *et al.*, 2000).

Thus, and in parallel with the phenomenon described in the previous section, other occurrences like this one, are materialised by the creation of new clusters, that suggests a parallel dynamic, at least from late Middle Bronze Age to early Late Bronze Age, now guided by the appropriation of new territories. Undoubtedly, “the Bronze Age communities did not limit themselves to the re-utilisation of old tombs”. As Domingos Cruz noted, “they also have their own solutions consisting in building non monumental tumuli” (Cruz, 2001: 266).

In summary, the phenomenon is characterised as follows: small tumuli standing on ridges and platforms overlooking the valley with reduced diameters and volumes, i.e. with low impact on the topographical landscape, but marked by the bichromatic contrast from the recurrent use of quartz pebbles as tumuli covers, which certainly also had high symbolic power. In some cases, looking for increased spatial marking, people seem to have privileged the proximity to natural bedrocks, as occurred in Pousadão, settled along a significant series of granite outcrops in a symbiosis where culture and nature mix together; the structures and contents are highly variable, with pits, cists, cist structures, central areas defined by pebbles, ashes, charcoal, vases and vase fragments, fire traces, etc., This variability is sometimes present in the same set, which may indicate complex

rituals shared among several buildings with different functions, specifically related to funeral and other ritual activities in the context of practices associated with death (Cruz and Vilaça, 1999: 159; Cruz, *et al.*, 2000).

This final aspect is important as it seems to reflect actions and gestures, perhaps complementary, towards different places of the same necropolis or funerary-ritual complex. The case of the Casinha Derribada tumuli group is particularly suggestive in this respect (Cruz, *et al.*, 1998).

Hence, tumuli are not built up to house the dead. They are empty tombs, cenotaphs, without bodies or even traces of their remains, inhumed or cremated. But they would have served as ceremonial spaces connected with those. The communities invest in death memorials but not explicitly in its preservation.

The chronology is set for some cases: we face a constructive phenomenon that may date back to the Early Bronze, as Serra da Muna (Viseu) monument 2 case (Cruz, *et al.*, 1998 a), but dates mainly from the end of the Middle Bronze or Late Bronze Age, as revealed by monument 3 of Casinha Derribada (Viseu) (XV-XII centuries BC) (Cruz, *et al.*, 1998 b) and Senhora da Ouvida 7 (Castro Daire) (XIV-XII centuries BC) (Cruz & Vilaça, 1999).

However, the question of chronology is an aspect that deserves further research, admitting the possibility that some may have persisted to the Iron Age (Santos & Marques, 2007: 40), or even to historical periods (Middle Age). Actually, similar constructions from other peninsular areas such as some of the over 1100 registered in the Pyrenean region (Peñalver, 2005: 302) also fit in

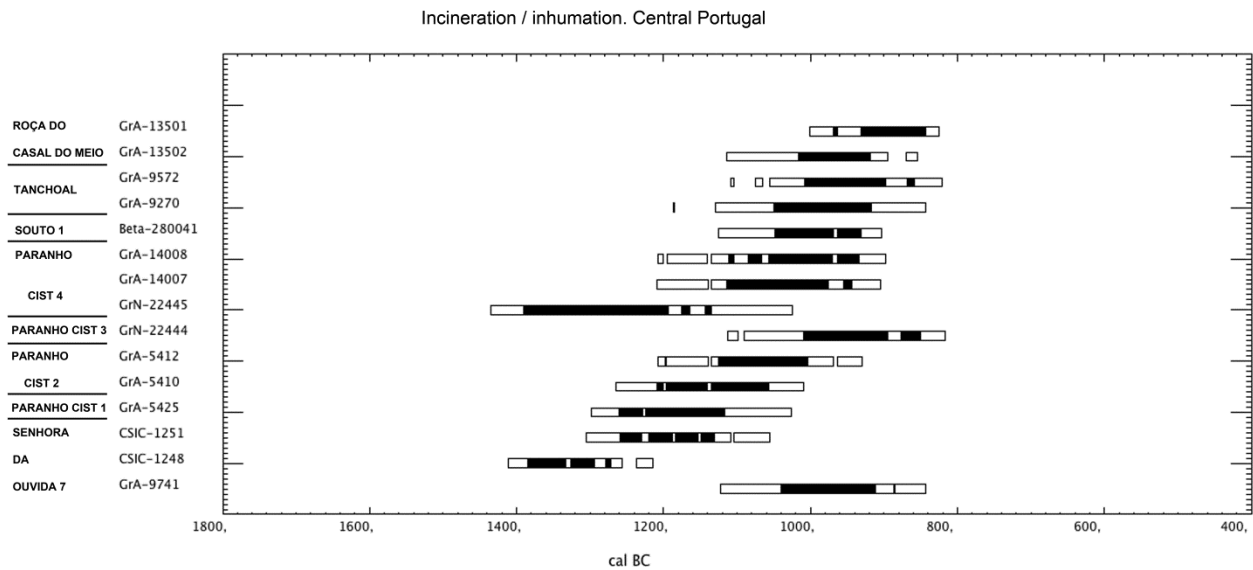


Chart 11.1: Graphics dates:

Carbon 14 dates related with funerary contexts from Central Portugal late Bronze Age.

(“Radiocarbon Calibration Program rev. 6.1.0”, Stuiver, M. et Reiner, P.J., 1998, *Radiocarbon* 35, 215-230; Reimer et al., 2009). PJ Reimer, MGL Baillie, E Bard, A Bayliss, JW Beck, PG Blackwell, # C Bronk Ramsey, CE Buck, GS Burr, RL Edwards, M Friedrich, PM Grootes, # TP Guilderson, I Hajdas, TJ Heaton, AG Hogg, KA Hughen, KF Kaiser, B Kromer, # FG McCormac, SW Manning, RW Reimer, DA Richards, JR Southon, S Talamo, # CSM Turney, J van der Plicht, CE Weyhenmeyer (2009) *Radiocarbon* 51:1111-1150.
Roça do Casal do Meio: GrA-13501 and GrA-13502; Tanchoal: GrA-9572 and GrA-9270; Souto 1: Beta-280041; Paranho, cist 4: GrA-14008; Paranho, cist 4: GrA-14007; Paranho, cist 4: GrA-22445; Paranho, cist 3: GrA-22444; Paranho, cist 2: GrA-5412; Paranho, cist 2: GrA-5410; Paranho, cist 1: GrA-5425; Senhora da Ouvida 7: GrA-1251, GrA-1248 and GrA-9741.

these chronologies. It is quite possible that the phenomenon is set through a remarkable time span, what also might help to understand the diversity of situations, which do not have thus to be understandable merely by different functions and cultural traditions, nor whatsoever by different economic, social, political and ideological organisation (Cruz, *et al.*, 1998 b: 51).

Alongside these small monuments with tumuli, another reality seems to be adopted: small monuments or enclosures have also been built but without tumuli. The best example excavated is Travessa da Lameira de Lobos (Cujó, Castro Daire), flat monument externally defined by a circle of firmly embedded stones (Cruz & Vilaça, 1999: 132; Cruz, 2001: 331).

Although with all the differences, namely the type of internal structures, this solution of physically and symbolically demarking the death space by a stone ring was adopted in other occasions such as in Paranho, where a “circular line of stones sealing the enclosure” was to be found (Coelho, 1925: 14). Also with differences that we must acknowledge, slabs placed originally in vertical position and juxtaposed (Cardoso, *et al.*, 1998: 328 e 331) also defined two subcircular structures of Monte de São Domingos (Malpica do Tejo, Castelo Branco).

It should also be noted that these stone circles intended to protect the dead might integrate other symbolic markers such as spellers marked in some slabs, as observed in Travessa Lameira de Lobos, with almost all the slabs

decorated either with reticulated compositions or with semi-circles (Santos & Marques, 2007: 39).

The presence of decorated slabs in funerary-ritual structures from Late Bronze Age was known from Casinha Derribada 3 (Mundão, Viseu), which central pit with four deposited vases was covered by slab engraved with reticulate (Cruz, *et al.*, 1998b) iconographic matrix that, hypothetically, could be assumed as a metaphor for a web or net symbolically protective of the world of the dead.

More certain is the need to carry on the research on this type of monuments which, as seen in these reflections and despite certain cross-cutting features, incorporate multiple situations in the most varied domains. And the truth is that behind an apparent similarity, or an illusory similitude, the solutions appear to have been diverse.

Also, it cannot be emphasised enough that, among all those constructive realities, structures exist that are not strictly or exclusively funerary, although they may be related with mortuary rituals and evoke highly complex ceremonials (Vilaça & Cruz, 1999: 87). Despite not having a precise chronology, the interesting case of the small structure of Vale de Mós 1 (Oleiros), recently excavated (Caninas, *et al.*, 2009), featuring a stone pavement surrounded by a peripheral stony ring almost as defining a sort of open platform and which has precisely not shown any evidence of incineration practices fits into

these acting scenarios of ritual nature connected with death.

On the other hand, after the first discovery and characterisation of several nuclei from the Viseu/Vila Nova de Paiva/Castro Daire region with some sets (or elements of sets) excavated and systematised in due time (Cruz, 2001), many other groups of small tumuli have been found in Aveiro, Coimbra, Guarda and Castelo Branco district (Caninas, *et al.*, 2008; 2009).

The power of fire

The importance of fire rituals directly or indirectly associated with funerary practices in Central Portugal Bronze Age materialises in many different ways.

The assertion of incineration does not merely translate a ritual change. It is mostly a different paradigm of understanding the materiality of human body which loses importance once it is totally or partially destroyed and not necessarily deposited in its whole or even in part. The focus of attention seems to be transferred from the physical body to its vestigial or immaterial memory, preserved through other practices.

It also does not translate abandonment of other practices, like the inhumation rituals present in Roça do Casal do Meio, in Casal de Santo Amaro, or in Medronhal (Condeixa-a-Nova) cave. It is not possible to know if this temporal bi-ritualism (XI/X-VIII centuries BC) would have been practised by culturally distinctive or related communities, nor if any of them prevailed in the following centuries in Central Portugal.

In another way, the idea that incineration would be dated from Late Bronze and would go exclusive or fundamentally paired with the “Urnfield” question has to be put in perspective. In European terms, it’s well known that incineration was practised since at least the Early Neolithic (Zammit, 1991: 70, among others), being certain that it would have become common practice mainly, and in certain regions (e.g. Hungry, England), from the Early Bronze Age onwards (Harding, 2003: 120).

At peninsular level, the existence of three independent cores in Late Bronze Age – Early Iron Age with respect to the adoption of incineration practices continues to be recognised: one continental, from Catalonia, connected with the “Urnfield” phenomenon; one Mediterranean, Phoenician and/or pre-Phoenician; one Atlantic, arrived by maritime way, as well as the latter (Pellicer Catalán, 2008).

The Atlantic origin for the Northwest of Iberia had been previously sustained by Ana Bettencourt, who referred the phenomenon back to the Middle Bronze (Bettencourt, 1995: 113), chronology recently corrected by the researcher herself due to new evidences, pointing towards Late Calcolithic (Bettencourt & Meijide, 2009).

The possibility of a fourth origin in the Iberian Peninsula itself, of a multipolar nature, without excluding the others, must not be neglected because it is also necessary to recognise, beyond the unequivocal chronologic discrepancies, that there is not uniformity even in the incineration ritual. Taking the example of a single necropolis, Les Moreres (Crevillante, Alicante), five different forms of incineration dating from the IX-VII centuries BC can be observed, the digger in charge proposing an autochthonous origin to this ritual, from Calcolithic (González Prats, 2002: 391).

How the question is framed is perhaps impeding it from being fully understood. This is because not all that is new comes from outside, nor everything we know is adopted, nor the problem itself is reduced to the binomial inhumation-incineration. Nor can we approach the problem through radical assumptions of replacing the former by the latter (Vilaça, *et al.*, 1999: 17). Among these two stadiums, there is room for a third or another one which, while not corresponding to formal incinerations, uses and handles fire in inhumation practices.

Actually, the material - and symbolic – power of fire acting over the bodies must not be confounded exclusively with body incineration practices, with or without subsequent recollection (total or partial) at urn, pit, small pit, etc. Skeletal remains partially burned or with fire traces have been collected in megalithic monuments as witnessed, for example, by Bola de Cera (Marvão) dolmen (Oliveira, 1998: 448 e 451). These are not mere inhumations; nor incinerations as normally understood. They are both simultaneously, with the fire making the difference, but unable to assert themselves.

The question is very much about the fact that fire rituals are not confined to funerary practices directly and exclusively referred to the dead. Beyond them, and with them, fire manipulation must have been much more recurrent than we think, including without protection and fireguard (e.g. spread ashes in land or thrown to water), which makes it often difficult to circumscribe the specific nature of its use.

Thus, it is the re-conceptualisation of the concepts of incineration, cremation and fire rituals that must be put on the table.

In central Portugal the problem of funerary practices of fire rituals is an open theme. There are no clear pieces of evidence so far to allow its association with megalithic contexts. Some clues point to, as early testimonies, the middle of the II millennium BC, as indicated by the traces identified in Serra da Muna (Viseu) monument 2 (Cruz, *et al.*, 1998 a), but it is possible that cases further back in time may come to be identified. Anyway, more consistent evidences only appear in final Bronze Age contexts.

Undoubtedly, the identification and posterior valorisation of Paranho necropolis, as mentioned in the beginning of this paper, is a fundamental reference and a good

example of recollection in urn of burned remains, human bones and also artifacts, namely in bronze, as revealed by cist 2's container (Cruz, 1997: 90).

This practice of using a ceramic container to receive human cremation remains, accompanied or not by objects also submitted to fire, is known in other parts of the Portuguese territory, with suggestive distribution along the River Tagus and undoubtedly as a cultural mark of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age.

The “Tagus Line”

In the Southern frontier of the region under analysis in this paper is a line gathering some of the most interesting testimonies of incinerations dated from the final Bronze Age or beginning of the next phase. On the whole they are not well known but, their geographical incidence suggests they must have some significance. They cannot obviously be dissociated from the river history as a privileged fluvial-maritime communication hub between the Western Atlantic and the continental inland (Vilaça, 1995: 410-411; Vilaça, *et al.*, 1998: 38; Vilaça & Arruda, 2004: 39) or from the assumed diffusion of incineration rituals through that inland and continental route advocated by some researchers.

Among those pieces of evidence are Monte de São Domingos (Malpica do Tejo, Castelo Branco) where two subcircular structures were identified, one of them with

an urn appearing to have contained only human bones (Cardoso, *et al.*, 1998).

Walking downstream is the interesting case of mamoa 1 of Souto (Bioucas, Souto, Abrantes) (Cruz, *et al.*, 2011), already recorded. It is an urn placed in a small pit with bone remains from incineration, as well as metal fragments (possible bracelet), perhaps burned with the body, inside of which was a second container also with ashes and human bone remains, plus other organic elements such as seeds. These elements were found in the central area of the small tumulus (6m diameter and about 50cm high) built with pebbles, i.e., the non-monumental tomb construction tradition has been used.

Souto 1, another case of a Late Bronze Age incineration, as revealed by the examination of materials and radiocarbon dating (1125-903 cal BC) (Cruz, 2011: 146), is also one more case of funerary deposition with bone remains collected in urn, although with a spatial structure quite different from those found in Paranho and Monte de São Domingos.

Continuing the path through the Middle Tagus, we arrive at Alpiarça, a region where important testimonies can be found which are regularly referred to in the bibliography as “Alpiarça urnfield”, since the first findings dated from 1916 (main references gathered in Vilaça, *et al.*, 1999). It is at least the well-known polynucleated cemeteries of Cabeço da Bruxa, Tanchoal and Meijão whose



Figure 11.4: Urns with calcined bones from Paranho necropolis (Photo by R. Vilaça).

importance goes far beyond them, despite the way most of the data have reached the present day.

There are still many outstanding issues to be clarified, but it is obvious that this is a completely different case, not only because of the particularity of the constructions and spatial organisation of mortuary deposits, but also because it gathers heterogeneous situations, including at chronological level. The Alpiarça necropolis and burials, revealing some affinities with certain contexts of the so-called “Qurénima group” systematised in due time (Lorrio, 2008), are well worth a joint in-depth reassessment.

Concerning only the Portuguese Tagus, beyond the Monte de S. Domingos, Souto 1, Tanchoal, Meijão and Cabeço da Bruxa cases, with objective and minimally safe data, other indicators (unfortunately very badly known) might, as working hypothesis, be associated with the problem under discussion. We refer to presumable funerary depositions related to incineration practices in Quinta da Alorna (Almeirim), where a carinated vase with handle was gathered in unknown circumstances (Schubart, 1971: 166); in Salvaterra, a necropolis has been recorded (Savory, 1951: 375); in Almoester, also a necropolis, from where a complete vase²⁵ of cylindrical neck is known (Savory, 1951: 375; Spindler, *et al.*, 1973-74: 129); in Santarém (without precise location) referred to as necropolis and burials (Savory, 1951: 375; Spindler, *et al.*, 1973-74: 144).



Figure 11.5: Urn with ashes and bracelets from Tanchoal necropolis (Photo by A. Roldão, ICBAS).

This information does not certainly offer very safe data in most of the cases but the geographical concentration of the finds and its proximity to Alpiarça must have some meaning that deserves further investigation, beginning with its confirmation and proceeding to the chronological assignment.

A source of controversy since the moment of the identification of the first testimonies in the 20's of the last century, the question of Alpiarça funerary world

chronology is not completely answered. As known, the only radiocarbon dates are of one of Tanchoal contexts and put it between middle XI century BC and early IX century BC (Vilaça, *et al.*, 1999). Thus, in its whole, the various necropolises might and should express wider spectrum chronological parameters, since final Bronze to Early Iron Age.

The German researchers working in the area had already claimed a higher antiquity to Cabeço da Bruxa necropolis relative to Tanchoal and Meijão, considering the difference between the two legacies (Kalb & Höck, 1981-82). And the identification, among the collection in “Casa Museu dos Patudos”, of several bowl fragments from “tomb F” (as Gustavo Marques called it²⁶), at Alto do Castelo (Alpiarça) habitat, not only raises new questions at chronological level (including the “Orientalizing” problematic), as well as interesting problems at spatial organisation level, with death “invading” the spaces of the living. These issues as well as the settlement/necropolis binomial problematic (with some interesting data to value) on the Late Bronze Age cannot, however, be developed here due to text size constraints.

In short, the whole area of the Portuguese Middle Tagus involving both banks, with all the known data and still to be explored, both in the field of funerary practices and the settlement in general, seems to be one of the strategic regions for the study of social dynamics of the Bronze and Iron Ages within the Portuguese territory and peninsular reach due to the problems involved.

On the other hand, and despite the specificities of the reported cases, from the way they were spatially implemented and materialised (with or without reference markers) to the types of structures and depositions of the cremated remains, whether or not associated with materials, there is a common denominator, i.e., the recollection of ceramic containers of the cremated remains (only bones or bones and metallic materials) as a specific practice which consolidated at the turn of the millennium.

Although not exclusive from this region, the Tagus Valley seems to have been a privileged region in what concerns the transmission of this new ritual. But, while varying from case to case, the solutions known reflect (and this is the most important) the creative potential of communities. Also here, and albeit within a general common frame defined by the incineration ritual (this one also without tight norms), what stands out are the specificities of each situation. For each case a different approach. The diversity seems to reflect the coexistence of traditions such as small tomb structures like those in Souto 1 alongside with the assimilation of another concept of burial marked by total (?) invisibility and

²⁵ It is worth mentioning the particularity of the vase having traces of perforation in the middle of the bulge, maybe of funerary matrix. About the use of perforated vases in funerary contexts see Vilaça and Cruz, 1999: 87, nota 33.

²⁶ Unique manuscript records by Gustavo Marques are available for consultation in “Casa Museu dos Patudos”. We thank its Director, Dr. Nuno Prates, the permission granted. The materials are being studied by a team coordinated by our colleague Ana Margarida Arruda.

(apparent) absence of structured and independent spaces for each urn, as it seems to have occurred in Alpiarça.

The public, unburied and unprotected death

At this point, and going back to the beginning, it seems clear that in final Bronze Age death did not disappear from the archaeological record in Portuguese central territory. It is present, materialises in many different ways, and sometimes comes disguised, as illustrated by the above mentioned examples. When it doesn't come, what inevitably drags us to the field of non-demonstrable archaeology, there is still room for other working hypotheses.

In addition to inhumation, there are the incineration and the use of fire rituals with manifestations that are clearly differentiated but not always easy to recover. But perhaps fire has not always been the only responsible for the new forms of "communicating" with death and of instilling in it a marked invisibility.

As we have already stressed, death to these societies without writing wouldn't be an ephemeral fact circumscribed to the purely biological domain, rather a "rite of separation" implying a long and complex process of separation from the body until its transformation, disposal and deposition. Or rather also of exhibition.

The practice of exhibiting bodies in scenarios that left no traces is admitted as a very likely hypothesis (Vilaça & Cruz, 1999: 76; Vilaça, 2000: 40). And, contrarily to those rituals with safeguarded inhumations and incinerations, this one has no protection but though it is visible and consequently public. The admissibility of such a subtle ritual, either as a form of final disposal of the bodies (i.e., without burial) or as pre-depositional practice, albeit prolonged, an intermission for the body-handling ritual, results from some considerations.

From all these considerations mention should be made to the one that suggests the disarticulation of human bones maybe the last link of a prolonged process where death was temporarily exposed and subject to a final fragmentation.

This phenomenon, interestingly discussed by Joana Brück in several works (e.g. Brück, 1995: 247; 253, 257), translates not only a new type of practices that are not exactly funerary but involve human remains but also, and

most important, a different approach to death and the human body. It is a fragmented broken death redistributed by different contexts, which gains mobility and starts accompanying the living, instead of them (re)worshipping cyclically in proper spaces. The body is transformed into a good which circulates among people and among places (Fowler, 2004: 40), playing like any other object, an active role in reproduction and social renegotiation.

It is known that body exhibition was a ritual, practised by ancient Iberia Peninsula populations, as Vaceus and Celt Iberian, as attested in written (Claudio Eliano X, 22; Silio Itálico Guerra Púnica, III, 340-343) and iconographic sources, where bodies and warriors are devoured by vultures (Alfayé Villa, 2008: 296; Sopeña, 2005: 381).

The display of dead bodies, as recently remembered (Esparza et al., 2012: 115), was also practised in other periods and places from the Greek "Obscure Centuries" to Black Africa, from the 1880's North American prairies to Indian Parsi (Tillier, 2009: 8). The dead were exposed to natural elements to allow their return to nature, on the top of trees or on platforms, conventionally called "platform-tombs" or "air-burials" (Fahlander & Oestigaard, 2008: 6).

Therefore, if it is certain that these and those data cannot be directly imported to the peninsular world of 3000 years ago, the truth is that the origin of corpse display rituals may have been much more ancient. In this sense, it seems to attest the strong arguments (e.g. evidence of dog bites) used by the Spanish colleagues in that study to prove that the exposure of dead bodies was the norm among the Cogotas I communities.

While unburied and exposed, death acquires, as mentioned before, unequivocal public character - propitious for the involvement of the various social players, thus contributing to reinforce the communitarian identity. However, as its display is inversely proportional to its perennity, it would also be brief, setting ephemeral "funerary landscapes", that we can only suppose. It seems that the more public the death; the more difficult it is to capture the subtlety of its nature. Once the bodies have disappeared, the memory of the deceased is the only thing that subsists.

And every dead person should have had a place to inhabit, or to remember... we know, however, that just a few had it.

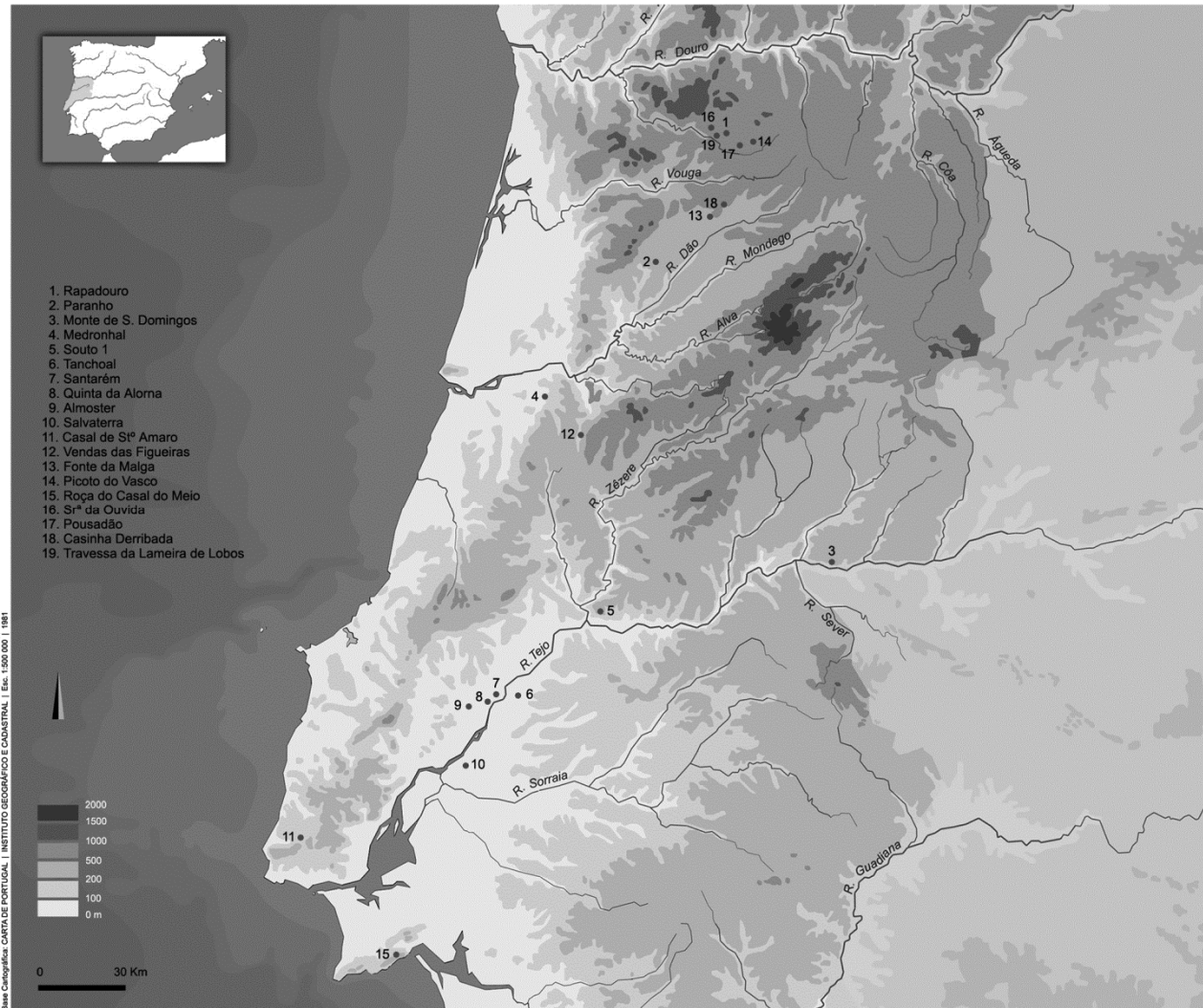


Figure 11.6: Sites referred to in the text (approximate location).

The memory (in / of) the places

In final Bronze Age there seems to be an unequivocal tendency for a real disidentification of the body and, in particular, the triumph of a different paradigm in understanding the materiality of human body which devalues and loses existence, once it is totally or partially destroyed, namely by fire, being only partly deposited, possibly dismembered, dispersed, unburied. But if the dead body seems to have been physically devalued that was not the case with the dead - they remain in another way.

The focus of attention is thus transferred from physical body to the memory of it, which is collectively and socially preserved through other rituals, other material forms, other references. Let us say that, while the physical body is eliminated, the social body is constructed and invented through memory. The social, collective, common, shared memory is, however, a short-term memory, which is extended by means of different strategies.

Among them, and at all times, monument construction stands out and with it the commemorative ceremonies

(Connerton, 1999: 8, 47, 81). The implantation of a hallmark (stele, monolith, statue-menhir, etc.) in a place with meaning, or upon which meaning is conferred by introducing this new scenic element was practised in remote times in the Portuguese Central territory.²⁷ Also in this respect we must distinguish inland areas, where this is observed, from coastal areas, where they are unknown so far and where the strategies would have been different.

In those societies without writing, such practice must have been particularly assertive and perennial, because it was engraved in stone - procedure used by the communities to record time and their own history, i.e., knowledge of (and with) its past (Vilaça, 2011: 8). This self-acknowledgement as a social reproducer of memory of sense of place, of belonging, of identification should entail actions - commemorative ceremonies - involving the communities, including the neighbouring ones. The entities that are represented or evoked assume, from this perspective, a collective value and the place where they are inserted become a 'meeting point' and a forum for the

²⁷ Among others, look up more recently Cardoso, 2011; Cruz and Santos, 2011.

reproduction of sociability which is cyclically (re)visited (Vilaça, *et al.*, 2011: 310).

The communities identify themselves not only with and in the place where they have their dead, but equally with the place where their dead, i.e., their ancestors, could be remembered. Therefore, the place of the dead is also the place where they are evoked socially, communitarianly and publicly. Without signalling the burials, of which there are no direct evidences in the area under analysis (and almost none in the others, but yet still existing), the steles and statue-menhir from the final Bronze Age assume, however, a potentially para-funerary character, in the sense that power and death, ancestry and memory may be confounded, or meet together. Standing in passage or border areas, or in meeting places for neighbours, sometimes under the towering gaze of the village which is not far,²⁸ the final Bronze Age steles, without being specifically funeral, cannot be excluded from the death discussion problem.

Final notes: the “faces of death”

From the elements described (or remembered) and the comments developed in this text, we may conclude that as certain as death is the archaeological evidence of its presence in central Portugal in final Bronze Age, as demonstrated by the various radiocarbon datings (Chart 12.1), despite the generic trend to a certain “dematerialisation” of the human body.

And it is equally certain that, in this region, it was expressed in a variable, irregular form without a general rule. The bi-ritualism – inhumation and incineration – is one of the most expressive elements in this domain, but many others were herein underlined. Such is the case with the indelible presence of small thousand-year tumuli shaping true “patrimonialised” landscapes.

We have focussed on data, questions, working hypotheses, diverse practices and identitarian discourses, some more linked to the past, others assuming real breakthroughs in terms of space, contexts and rituals.

Nor have we dwelled on the detail that would have merited the question of the so-called “grave goods”, which is little exuberant, scarce and even absent from some known contexts. Death seems to be less “objectified”. Or has it repeatedly been so in deposits, especially metallic? When present, most of the assets are ceramics and some metal that, at the time, was marginal in explicit funerary context.

As known, this was instead left apart in other types of context, the so-called “deposits”. Yet still, the metal is present in funerary burials as diverse as Paranho, Roça do Casal do Meio, Alpiarça, Medronhal, Souto 1, etc. And it does not exclude gold, as suggested by the Casal de Santo Amaro necklace. In all of them metallic personal

adornments predominate, which reflects the importance of the individual as a person. The presence of weapons is negligible, which contrasts with the preference for personal adornment and ornamentation, especially bracelets (some of them also submitted to fire), revealing well that certain materials would have carried higher semiotic weight than others.

From the social point of view, the trend towards an individual treatment of death with an increasing personal mark is unequivocal. Even so, cemeteries with different burials prevail, perhaps of relatives. The parental relations seem to be thus dominant. But we cannot discard other types of relationships such as bonds of loyalty, which would come to mark the following periods. Investigating the problematic of the so-called “dead for accompaniment” (Testart, 2009), either voluntary or imposed by social precepts, is open field for debate as is the case with the two men burial from Roça do Casal do Meio.

In summary, the communities have given diverse responses to the challenge of death. It is not easy to find the motives for such different behaviours and attitudes towards death. Environmental constraints and different economies, traditions, beliefs and influences, social, age and gender precepts, “marital status” – a married woman distinguishes herself from another who is single and a woman who became a mother differs from all the others – types of death (accidental, natural, inflicted, in action); times of change, when the “Other” was firmly affirmed including by its presence, by increasing travels and contacts: here are some hypotheses to be explored, case by case, which determined what to do with and how to dispose of the human body, materially inert but with an enormous symbolic power.

Therefore, it is crucial to go on researching because data and contexts will never be sufficient to get closer to understanding how the living dealt with their dead, conceived the world and created their own mindset.

It is also in this sense that we do not subscribe an absolute “archaeology of the dead”, but of the living (even if death is the centre of concern) focusing on their actions, options, illusions and social strategies. In its worldview, death is ubiquitous. And, in central Portugal, it expresses in a wide variety of ways.

²⁸ Case of Telhado stele (Fundão), study in progress by the author, João Mendes Rosa and Joana Bizarro.

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