

Projectile points as signs of violence in collective burials during the 4th and the 3rd millennia cal. BC in the North-East of the Iberian peninsula

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Summary. During the Late Neolithic and the Chalcolithic in the NE of the Iberian Peninsula two main changes in the burials take place with respect to the previous period: the appearance of collective burials and the high proportion of projectile points among the tools recovered inside the monuments. What is the meaning of these projectile points? Without ruling out the possibility that some of these points were intentionally deposited, stressing the symbolic relevance of these hunting/war tools, we think that many of them must have entered the burial place inside the bodies of the deceased people, indicating human violence. We analyse three collective burials showing many signs of violence: some points inserted in the human bones, other points broken by impact, some traumatic fractures in skulls, etc. We think that the violence observed in these burials can be characterised as systematic and organised, showing the social importance of war in this period.

Résumé. Pendant le Néolithique supérieur et le Chalcolithique au NE de la Péninsule Ibérique les sépultures ont expérimenté deux changements principales en rapport avec la période précédente: l'apparition des sépultures collectives et la proportion élevée des pointes de projectiles parmi les outils récupérés à l'intérieur de ces monuments. Quel est la signification de ces pointes de projectiles? Sans exclure la possibilité de qu'une partie des pointes furent déposés intentionnellement, en soulignant le symbolisme de ces outils de chasse ou de guerre, nous pensons que la plupart d'elles ont du être introduites dans les sépultures à l'intérieur des corps des morts, en indiquant violence humaine. Nous analysons trois sépultures collectives qui montrent quelques évidences de violence: des pointes insérées dans les os humaines, des autres cassées par impact, quelques fractures traumatiques aux crânes, etc. Nous pensons que les évidences de violence observées à ces sépultures peuvent être caractérisées comme systématiques et organisées, en montrant l'importance sociale de la guerre à cette période.

Key words: Neolithic, Chalcolithic, Iberian Peninsula, arrowheads, violence.

Introduction

At the end of the 5th millennium cal. BC, in the NE of the Iberian Peninsula, people were buried in individual graves and offering deposits accompanied the bodies (i.e. sites of Los Cascajos, in Navarre or Bobila Madurell, in Catalonia). Among these offerings we can find several types of tools (sickle elements, blades for working hide, wood, butchery, etc., microliths used as projectile tips, endscrapers for softening hides, etc.). The correlation between the activities represented in the tools and the individuals in the graves showed the existence of a certain division of labour by age and gender. During the 4th millennium cal. BC, at the Late Neolithic and Chalcolithic, two main changes in funerary practices took place: individuals were buried in collective graves (hypogea, artificial caves, megaliths) and arrowheads became the most common tools recovered in these contexts. What is the meaning of the prevalence of arrowheads among the tools deposited in the graves?

We have carried out analysis on the arrowheads recovered at three collective graves located in the NE of

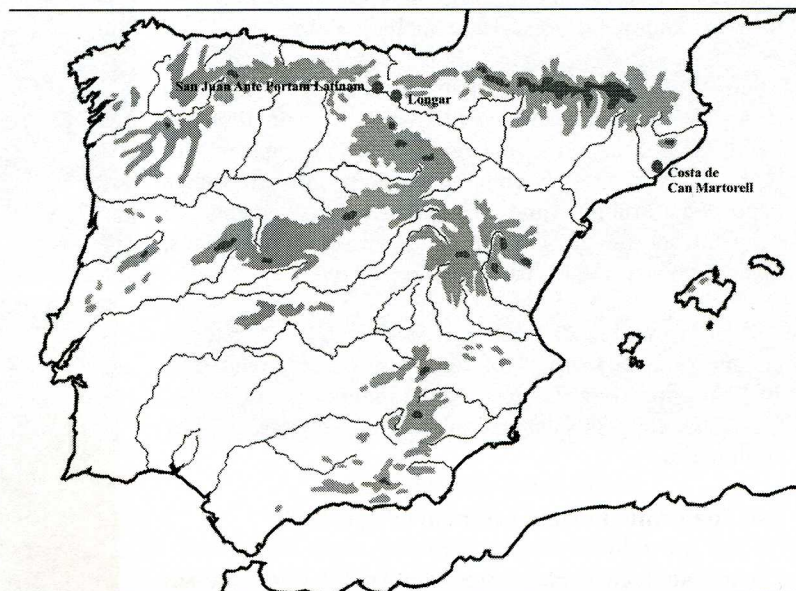


Fig. 1: Location map.

the Iberian Peninsula (Fig. 1): 1) the hypogeum of Longar, located in Navarre and dated to 2500 BC; 2) the approximately contemporary rockshelter of San Juan Ante Portam Latinam, located in Alava (Vegas 1999, p.3) The megalith of Can Martorell, in Catalonia, dated to 2500 cal. BC (Mestres i Torres 2003).

