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ARCHAEOLOGY AND DESERTIFICATION IN THE VERA BASIN (ALMERÍA, SOUTH-EAST SPAIN)

Pedro Castro, Sylvia Gili, Vicente Lull, Rafael Micó, Cristina Rihuete, Roberto Risch and Ma. Encarna Sanahuja Yll

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Abstract: Field research and predictive modelling of global warming and desertification by environmental scientists in the Mediterranean has concentrated on the short term. In this paper, it is argued that collaboration between the historical sciences, especially archaeology, and the environmental sciences can provide a longer-term perspective on desertification in the Mediterranean. Such collaboration has taken place recently in the Vera basin (Almería, south-east Spain), with the financial support of the European Union. Details of the archaeological and historical sequences of occupation in the basin are given, before presenting the main trends in demography, settlement and political systems from 4000 BC until the present day. This is followed by details of the long-term record of degradation in the Vera basin. The paper concludes by using the long-term record to propose recommendations for the future management of this landscape.

Keywords: archaeology, demography, desertification, long-term perspective, political systems, settlement, south-east Spain

INTRODUCTION

In their recent, edited book on *Mediterranean Desertification and Land Use*, Jane Brandt and John Thornes (1996:xvii) list changes which have taken place in 'traditional' Mediterranean societies and landscapes since the middle of the twentieth century. These changes include the migration of people from rural areas to the cities, the expansion of the tourist industry in coastal areas, the modernization and intensification of land use (focusing on tree crops and vegetables under various forms of irrigation), the abandonment of land used for extensive agriculture and pastoralism, and increased demand for water (for both tourism and irrigation). These changes respond to the economic needs of late twentieth-century nation

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dise and information as positive. Today the appearance of wealth which means obtaining certain (prestige?) merchandise with wide market circulation continues to hide the material conditions of life existing in contemporary society.

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BOOK NOTES

Rethinking the Neolithic from Iberian Archaeology

Almudena Hernando, *Los primeros agricultores de la Península Ibérica. Una historiografía crítica del Neolítico*. (Madrid: Editorial Síntesis, 1999, 315 pp.)

This book manages to be both a work of diffusion and synthesis. It contains a surprising amount of information, is of good quality and has a firmly interpretative character, making it a notable piece of research. I therefore believe it should be obligatory reading for all students of the Neolithic, not just in the Iberian Peninsula.

The book contains four chapters. The first revises the concept of the Neolithic, as well as the concepts of Epipaleolithic and Mesolithic. The second revises the historiography of the Neolithic period in the Iberian Peninsula from the nineteenth century to the 1980s. The third chapter describes state-of-the-art studies about the Neolithic, dealing

with the period from the early 1980s to the present day. The fourth contains a section dealing with the historical significance of the Neolithic, another outlining deficiencies in investigations, and finally a refreshing and critical section which revises the present-day cultural meaning of the Neolithic.

The author discusses recent works concerning the concept of the Neolithic and Neolithization, and falls in line with the current interpretive trend of it being more a state of mind than a cultural moment or period. Here, the text enters into a detailed account of the concepts of space and time, themes which in turn are supported by the author's ethnoarchaeological investigations in Guatemala. She still carries out a detailed review of the economic and social significance of the Neolithic period, its political economics, mainly following the theories of J. Vincent. From this viewpoint, she rejects the validity of the Neolithic as a revolutionary period and suggests that, instead, the Neolithic was the result, prolongation, epilogue or indeed proof of the success of the Epipaleolithic period. She refers to studies by P. Rowley-Conwy and M. Zvelebil. The book attempts to bring together Spanish publications concerning this historical debate, something which has previously been ignored due to the omnipresence of English-language publications in international bibliography.

The most original part of the book is her proposal that the Neolithic period is a cultural construction which once again reconstructs the reiterative myth of civilization, creating and believing in the existence of savages which legitimize civilized existence. The Neolithic period would have been the instrument of a modern ideology which bases the beginnings of civilization on the domestication of savage Epipaleolithic peoples. Here the author maintains that the strength of the traditional concept of the Neolithic as a time of revolution, its ability to resist and continue despite the lack of empirical evidence which does not support this interpretation, is really derived from the legitimizing function of our own cultural reality. This reality retains the discourse about the Neolithic period as the empirical evidence appears unwilling to sustain this interpretation of the Neolithic as a

time of revolution. Although some of us agree with this statement, it will undoubtedly be hotly discussed by specialists in the subject.

Last but not least, it is a merit of both the book and its author to clearly offer a woman's alternative perspective to the subject. This may be seen not only in her concern for the question of gender within the social processes she examines, and to uncover (or at least indicate) the hidden female side of the Neolithic, but above all in a concern and sensitivity towards some themes which are beyond the normal range of a male perspective. Reading the book, one clearly has the impression that it was written by a woman. From my point of view, this is the kind of feminist archaeology we need, a different perspective that opens new fields and aspects of experience.

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Susana Oliveira Jorge, ed., *Existe uma Idade do Bronze Atlântico?* (Lisboa: Instituto Português de Arqueologia, Trabalhos de Arqueologia 10, 1998, 293 pp., ISBN 972-97903-0-2)

This volume incorporates 24 papers, most of which were originally presented at an International Meeting held in Lisbon from 12–14 October 1995. Based on the Council of Europe's programme for the Bronze Age as part of the 'First Golden Age of Europe', the volume is a welcome addition to the ever-increasing literature on the symbiosis between archaeology and politics. As the editor explains, the purpose was to invite prominent researchers representing different trends in archaeology to debate the existence and nature of a so-called prehistoric cultural entity specific to the Atlantic region of Europe.

The book consists of seven chapters organized into five sections. Each section concludes with a debate by the assistants with comments on different papers in the section. It covers: the concept, commerce and exchange, and the development of social complexity during the Atlantic Bronze

Age. The papers are written in four different European languages: Portuguese, French, English and Spanish. Perhaps, it would be more appealing and understandable to the reader if the book were written only in one language, preferably in English.

The first section, 'O conceito de Bronze Atlântico no quadro do pensamento arqueológico do séc. XX', addresses concepts, problems and different perspectives on the Atlantic Bronze Age. Antonio Gilman engages the reader in a discussion of how to use the archaeological record to understand the development of social evolution. Ana Bettencourt discusses the development of the Atlantic Bronze Age concept from an Iberian perspective. Bettencourt defines the Atlantic Bronze Age as a plural reality, impossible to generalize in terms of regional or cultural development. Patrice Brun also stresses the importance of understanding cultural processes to comprehend social development, raising the point that the Atlantic Bronze Age may not be the first Atlantic horizon of cultural identity. On the contrary, he suggests the existence of an Atlantic cultural complex from Neolithic times. Far from these primary considerations, Marguerita Díaz-Andreu surprises us again with a different approach on how to understand archaeological thought through ideas and readings linked with social and political factors. The conclusion is that nothing is what it appears to be and everything depends on the time and society in which it was created.

Sections two and three, 'Intercâmbio e Comércio: As economias da Idade do Bronze (I)(II)', consist of nine papers. Manuela Martín's introductory chapter emphasizes the necessity of a broad-scale regional perspective for studying economy and exchange in Atlantic prehistoric societies. Martín Almagro-Gorbea discusses the Atlantic Bronze Age from a 'pre-colonial' and societal perspective. Marisa Ruiz Galvez believes that the development of world systems models will help elevate the role of the Iberian Peninsula. Jacques Briard sees the early Bronze Age as important in understanding the development of the Atlantic Bronze Age. José Gómez de Soto and Jean-Pierre Pautreau discuss the problems of identifying a unique cultural identity in the