

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF CULT AND RELIGION



Edited by
PETER F. BIEHL and FRANÇOIS BERTEMES
with HARALD MELLER



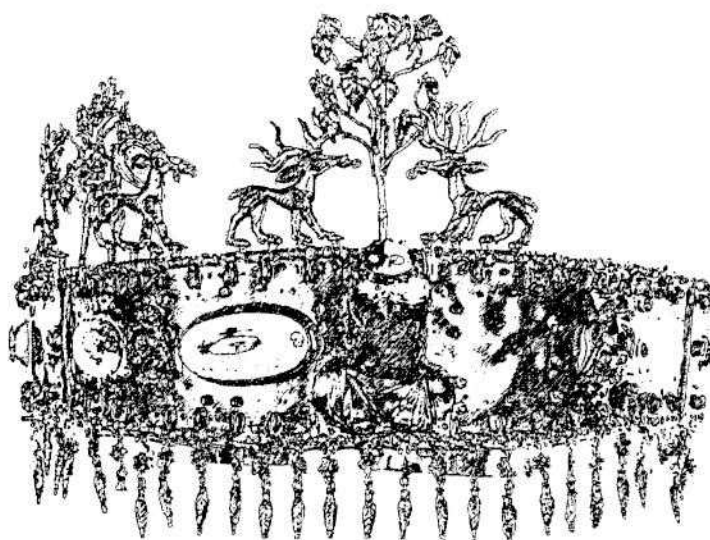
ARCHAEOLINGUA

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Edited by
ERZSÉBET JEREM and WOLFGANG MEID

Volume 13

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF CULT AND RELIGION



Edited by
PETER F. BIEHL and **FRANÇOIS BERTEMES**
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BUDAPEST 2001

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Series Editor's Preface

The articles in this volume generated from talks given in Ravenna in 1997 and Göteborg in 1998 during conferences of the European Association of Archaeologists. I attended the conferences and witnessed the lively debates that dominated the two academic sessions organised by the editors. Although I had hoped the papers would be published quickly, financial constraints led to what has become a long and unfortunate delay. ARCHAEOLINGUA agreed to publish them in its Main Series because the subjects they cover and the methodological questions they address perfectly fit our profile and objectives.

The publication of this book has been done in close co-operation with ARCHAEOLINGUA's Budapest-based editorial staff and the editors of the volume, both of whom are in Halle, Germany. The Internet facilitated our work greatly, allowing the editorial staff to work on authors' manuscripts electronically and to exchange proofs of the revised manuscripts as PDF (*Portable Document Format*) files. Especially thanks to the outstanding and highly-efficient work style of Peter Biehl we have been able to produce the book in a mere five months. Throughout this process, we allowed the authors to revise and update their articles. I want to thank the ARCHAEOLINGUA team and especially András Kardos who was responsible for the typography and the image processing. I also want to thank the Archaeological Heritage Service Sachsen-Anhalt for the financial support that enabled us to finally publish this important book.

The publication of this volume is a major step in the study of the archaeology of religion and will undoubtedly provide a solid basis for future research. The book makes it clear that religion and cult haven't been studied thoroughly by archaeologists and that the development of an adequate and unbiased methodology is desperately needed. Without one, we can neither move forward nor even begin to grasp the true complexity of this fascinating and under-explored aspect of prehistoric life. The ideas presented in this book hint at the exciting potential this field holds. It is our hope that the volume will not only stir debate, but will also serve as a catalyst for fresh new ideas and research.

Erzsébet Jerem
ARCHAEOLINGUA Foundation

Preface

Collaborations between the Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg and the Archaeological Heritage Service Sachsen-Anhalt are hardly unique and we are proud to continue this tradition by supporting this book project. In fact, it is the second time we have worked with the Institute of Prehistoric Archaeology on a project involving cult and religion in pre- and protohistory. The first project, a 1985 conference and accompanying volume, contained articles that focused on this topic. I see the present compilation of papers – which hone in on essential questions about cult and religion, provide background of what has been accomplished and offer insight on what can be done in this field – as a continuation of our work together in 1985.

The volume contains the work of authors from a variety of backgrounds and institutions both in West- and Eastern Europe and places a clear emphasis on the Neolithic of Southeast Europe. The co-operation of the archaeologists from East and West and the publication of their work in English is highly significant and presents new trajectories for the study of prehistoric religious practices and actions. For those of us involved in archaeological heritage management, the study of religion in prehistory, which unfortunately has been neglected for so long, is of tremendous import.

During the last ten years, archaeologists in Sachsen-Anhalt have discovered new evidence – mainly documented through aerial photography – that points to the religious life of prehistoric peoples. These finds merit critical evaluation and study and it is my hope that serious work will be done on them in the near future. Some of the most spectacular finds include: the enclosures at Goseck (Weißenfels), Kötschlitze (Merseburg-Querfurt) and Quedlinburg, which are documented only through aerial photography and most likely stem from the period of Linear Stroke Pottery. There are also a dozen other enclosures probably dating into the Bronze or Early Iron Ages. These enclosures are always connected to cemeteries and consequently can likely be linked to ancestor cults. Numerous bog and water findings, which may also have had a cultic context, have also been discovered. Recently, unearthened hoards, such as one found deposited at the foot of a megalithic tomb in the Haldenslebener Forest, are also of great significance for Sachsen-Anhalt. Finally, I want to mention artifacts, such as the mace from the “dance site of witches” at Thale, which even today puzzles us by its unique form. Finally, there are the so-called “Miracle Castles (*Wunderburgen*)” of Sachsen-Anhalt, a dozen of which were visible around 1900, but all of which have since disappeared. These labyrinths, which are marked in the grass, were maintained over centuries and date back further than previously believed. Unfortunately, only the one at Steigra has survived the negligence of the mostly-secular world of the last century. All of these sites and artifacts deserve careful study, with special attention to the religious and cultic roles they may have played. We stand at the beginning of this process.

The present volume contributes a great deal to bring us onto the road we need to travel to unravel these and many other archaeological uncertainties. The Archaeological Heritage Service is proud to play a role in furthering this sort of study. I see this volume as a continuation of our long-standing commitment to the university and to this important research field. I look forward with great excitement to future projects and opportunities for collaboration.

Harald Meller
Landesamt für Archäologie Sachsen-Anhalt

Forms of Ceremonial Landscapes in Iberia from the Neolithic to Bronze Age. Essay on an Archaeology of Perception

FELIPE CRIADO BOADO – MANUEL SANTOS ESTÉVEZ – VICTORIA VILLOCH VÁZQUEZ

Introduction: Aims and Methods

This work intends to approach the reconstruction of the Neolithic and Bronze Age ceremonial landscapes and their meanings, and from this to the ways of creating a humanized space and of conceiving the landscape firstly through Megalithic monuments and then through Bronze Age petroglyphs. In short, this study tries:

1. to define a method of reconstructing socio-cultural landscapes in prehistory,
2. to discover the continuities among these archaeological landscapes, particularly establishing how they worked and kept a long-standing tradition,
3. to characterize their differences and how they referred to distinctive social conditions,
4. and, mostly, to approach in greater detail the study of the ways of spatial perception in prehistory.

In the same way as a *Geography of Perception* exists, various studies have appeared in recent years supporting an *Archaeology of Perception*. If we understand landscape as the spatial representation of human practices, then this line of investigation is very important since the understanding of the social landscape is not complete without considering the perceptive dimension, or being aware of the appreciation and positions of the individuals who constructed and used a particular landscape. In addition to the study of the three fundamental dimensions of landscape (environment or physical space, social or used space, and cultural or thought space) we should then have to add the perceptive dimension.

However, the study of this dimension presents important problems. It may easily be subjective or subjectivising. It is subjective because it is difficult to analyze this theme without substituting the reconstruction of the perception of the space by prehistoric peoples with our own perception. And it is also subjectivising, as by doing this it extends our pattern of subjectivity through history.

Our investigation strategy will not consist of studying perception in its directly individual or subjective dimension, but in discovering the social systems of constructions, guide or predetermination of perception. We believe that if we are able to transcend the level of subjective perceptions and situate ourselves in the objective level over which they are constructed, we would really be able to approximate an *Archaeology of Perception*. In a manner of speaking, we are trying to study perception in its objectivity. This strategy therefore implies a displacement of the objective: there is no attempt to study perception at an individual scale (what the prehistoric subject felt), but at a social scale (how those sensations were directed and controlled, how a certain type of perception was imposed).

This investigation may be based on the reconstruction of those procedures or technologies through which a certain social landscape expressed its meaning and pre-established it for those individuals who knew its visual and symbolic code. This may be done through a systematic analysis of the visual features of the prehistoric monuments (either Neolithic megaliths and barrows, either Bronze Age petroglyphs) and in a characterization of the scenic effects and panoramas related to them. The study of the location pattern of the monuments and their conditions of visibility, particularly of the visual catchments that they generate, and visibilisation, particularly how they are made out at a distance, will allow us to recognize, if they indeed exist, the regularities that show the will and intentional strategy to make a monument perceptible, underline its presence and provoke dramatic artificial effects in relation to it.

Theoretical Model

The theoretical and analytical strategy followed in this study has been considered with certain detail in the introduction of this article. In short, our methodology is based on comparing the archaeological spaces (i.e. the distribution of monuments, their location and the architectonic varieties, being the elements we may observe without the need for excavations) with the geographical and physiographical data. This comparison allows us to discover the correspondence which exists between them, and so be able to deconstruct the models of spatial organization which exist within the megalithic ceremonial landscape.

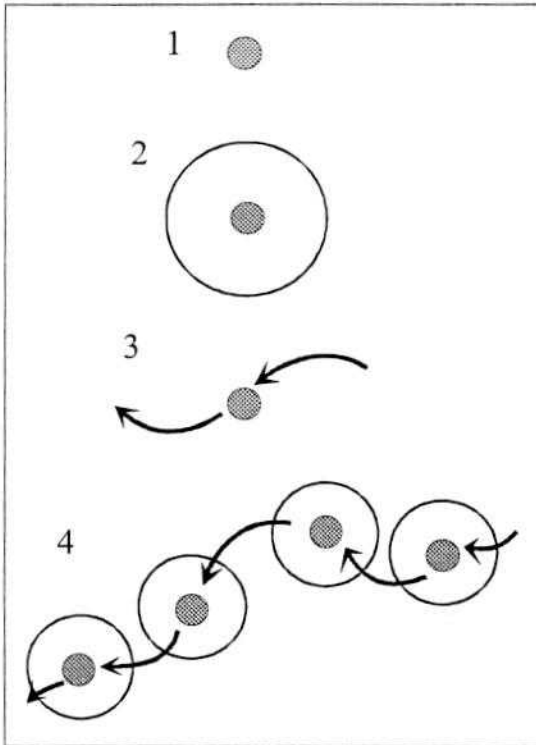


Fig. 1. Simple model of perception of space and construction of a human landscape.

But beyond these remarks, we may define now a theoretical model to build up the human construction of space. This model is really based on a model of human perception. The analysis of archaeological record will try to discover to what extent this perception model has determined the forms of cultural landscapes. We will contrast such hypothesis considering two different archaeological landscapes.

The model will be described in a totally graphic style (Fig. 1). Humans are dots; at the very beginning individuals are dots in the middle of nowhere. To know where they are, they look about and create a visual catchment; visibility and perception open a human space. To know more, they walk about and produce physical lines; movement and time break down the closed natural environment for humans. So, dots, catchments and lines are the basic mechanisms to revert the space into social space, environment into landscape.

We can understand this mechanism as a set of basic principles to produce landscapes or a landscape technology. As we could see nextly, this technology underlies the megalithic as well as the Bronze Age landscape. They both keep the same general model and implement it producing phenomena with certain distinctive features.

Data

This paper considers two kinds of archaeological evidence (Fig. 2). Firstly it undertakes a revision of the megalithic monuments of the Barbanza Sierra, an area of the North West of the Iberian Peninsula that is well known within Galician Archaeology and was studied monographically at the start of the last decade (CRIADO ET AL. 1986). Secondly, it deals with Bronze Age rock art, prehistoric petroglyphs engraved on flat surfaces of rocks in open environments (BRADLEY ET AL. 1994, 1995; SANTOS 1996).

The Barbanza study area corresponds to a coastal sierra situated between two estuaries, surrounded by steep slopes and dominated by a gentle, flat landscape. In the central part of the sierra, over a surface of 3 km², there are 28 Neolithic barrows. In the rest of the sierra there are another 10 barrows, but these are dispersed and spread out from one another, with no less than 4 km between them linearly.

The barrows belong to two well defined types. The most frequent are circular barrows, 20–25 meters in diameter and 2 m high, and have within them the remains of megalithic chambers. These are of a type that is frequent in Galicia: Passage graves made with granitic slabs with a short corridor. As well as this more frequent type, there are another 8 barrows that have completely different characteristics: these are

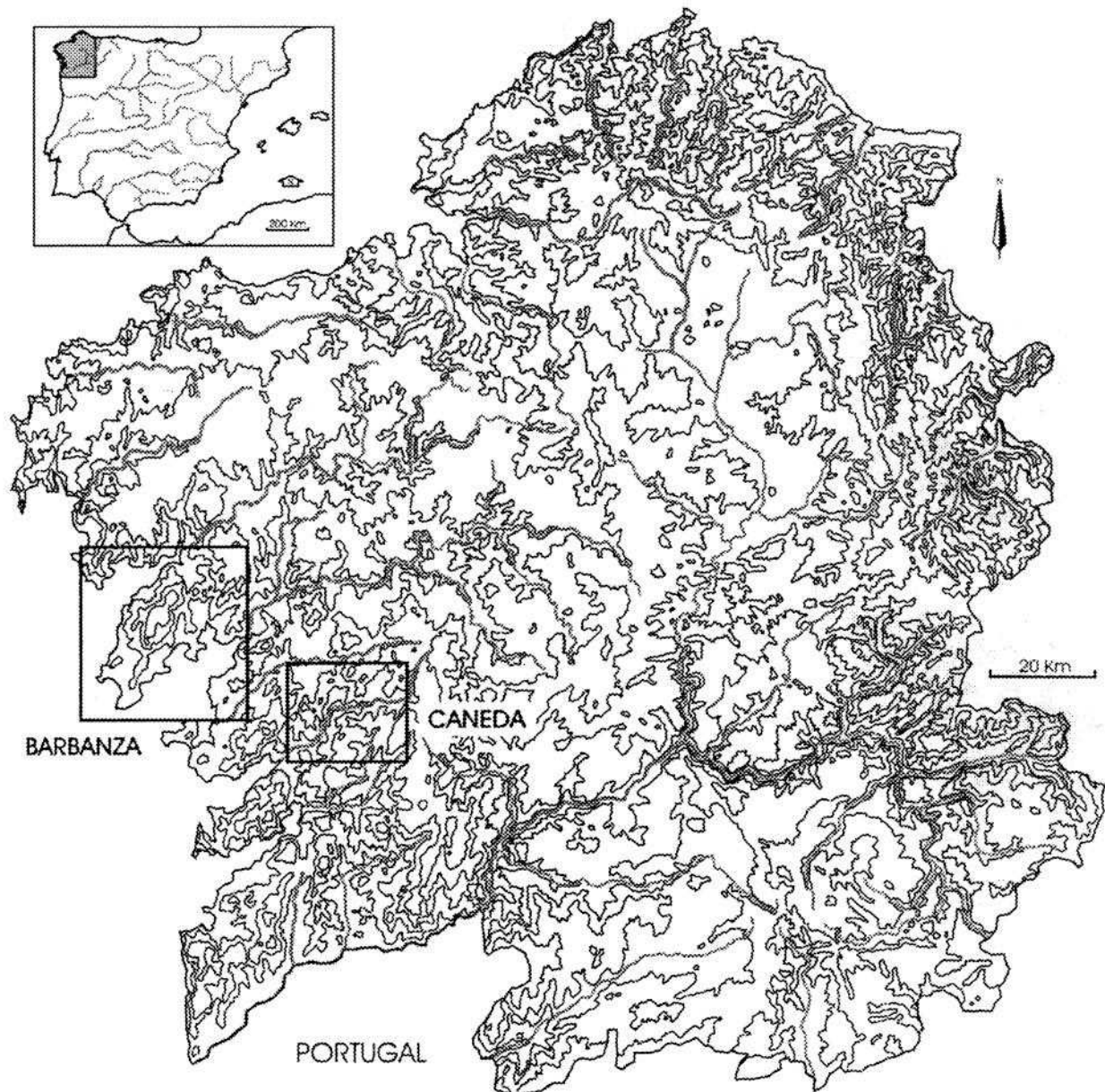


Fig. 2. Map of Galicia showing the situation of the case-studies.

smaller barrows, of between 10 and 15 meters in diameter and 50 cm high, with a chamber formed by a stone cist. While the first type is prominent and clearly stands out over the surrounding landscape, the second type is difficult to make out.

Our present knowledge about funeral constructions in Galician megalithism indicates that the second type appears to be older than the first. In fact, it appears to correspond to the first moments of monumental architecture in Galicia, that has been dated in calibrated radiocarbon dates at around 4200–4000 BC. In turn, the other type represents the most characterized group of tombs from the peak moment of Galician megalithism. According to calibrated radiocarbon dates, they were built between 4000 and 3500 BC and would have been in use until around 2800 BC, when the access corridors were sealed and they appear to have been abandoned.

In this analysis we will concentrate on studying the most recent monuments. The Barbanza Sierra is perfect for carrying out this type of study and thus reconstructing the patterns of emplacement and the

perceiving conditions of its monuments due to the fact that the natural and traditional landscape is quite well conserved, with a predominance of open vegetation, which allows for both viewing and moving in any direction.

Then we will move to Bronze Age rock art, which consists of prehistoric petroglyphs on flat rock in open land locations. Their designs are quite simple, either abstract or geometrical motifs (circles, cup-marks, lines, spirals...) either naturalistic ones with representations of animals (mostly deers and horses). The depictions of human figures and everyday scenes (hunting, riding...) are present but exceptional and in any case they have got a mostly male-dominant character being probably the expression of a male-chauvinist ideology. The representations of weapons also adjust to this character. Despite being exceptional, they are important and acquire quite relevance in size and number of motifs.

Petroglyphs occur mostly in Galician southwestern areas, near the coast and in the prelitoral valleys and mountains. It is an area which presents problems of summer drought and, then, the control of areas with water and fresh pasture surpluses becomes quite critical.

For the intentions of this paper, it is relevant to recognize that, with the exception of some small funerary mounds, petroglyphs are the only visible feature from the archaeological point of view in Bronze Age landscapes. The settlements of the period were open area hamlets made in perishable material and without any permanent or stone construction what had left visible traces on landscapes (MÉNDEZ 1994). Then petroglyphs are the monumental expression of this period and produce a strong contrast between ritual-ceremonial sites with monumental character and domestic settlements without it.

Analysis and Results

Pattern of Neolithic monuments location

Monuments and nature

Studies carried out up to date in Galicia have shown that megalithic barrows comprise the artificial reference point of a cultural landscape based on the symbolic domestication of nature (CRIADO – VAQUERO 1993, CRIADO – FÁBREGAS 1994, VILLOCH 1995). This domestication of space was principally built using four types of resources which continually appear associated with the emplacement of the monuments. This association is underlined by a relationship which is both visual and related to proximity:

1. Situating the monuments in relation to the rocks and important natural features which allow cognitive references to be spread over the area.
2. Situating the monuments in relation to the natural lines of movement that make a particular natural space accessible.
3. Situating the monuments in relation to other previous monuments, which would allow a representation of a social tradition kept through time in the territory to be built.
4. Situating the monuments in relation to their builders' domestic sites.

The recurrence of these factors may be seen in the Barbanza Sierra (*Fig. 3*). However, at the same time the analysis may go further. The results from the analysis carried out in the area are detailed below.

Natural signs. A relation with significant natural features exists, although this adopts a special morphology. In some cases the barrows are linked with conspicuous rocky outcrops, although this is not predominant. A specific variant of this relationship would be the link with petroglyphs with cupmarks.

In recent studies, it has been observed that this relationship is recurrent and that the cupmarks tend to define the barrow's immediate arc of visibility. The cupmarks occupy a topographical edge which also becomes a visual and practical boundary.

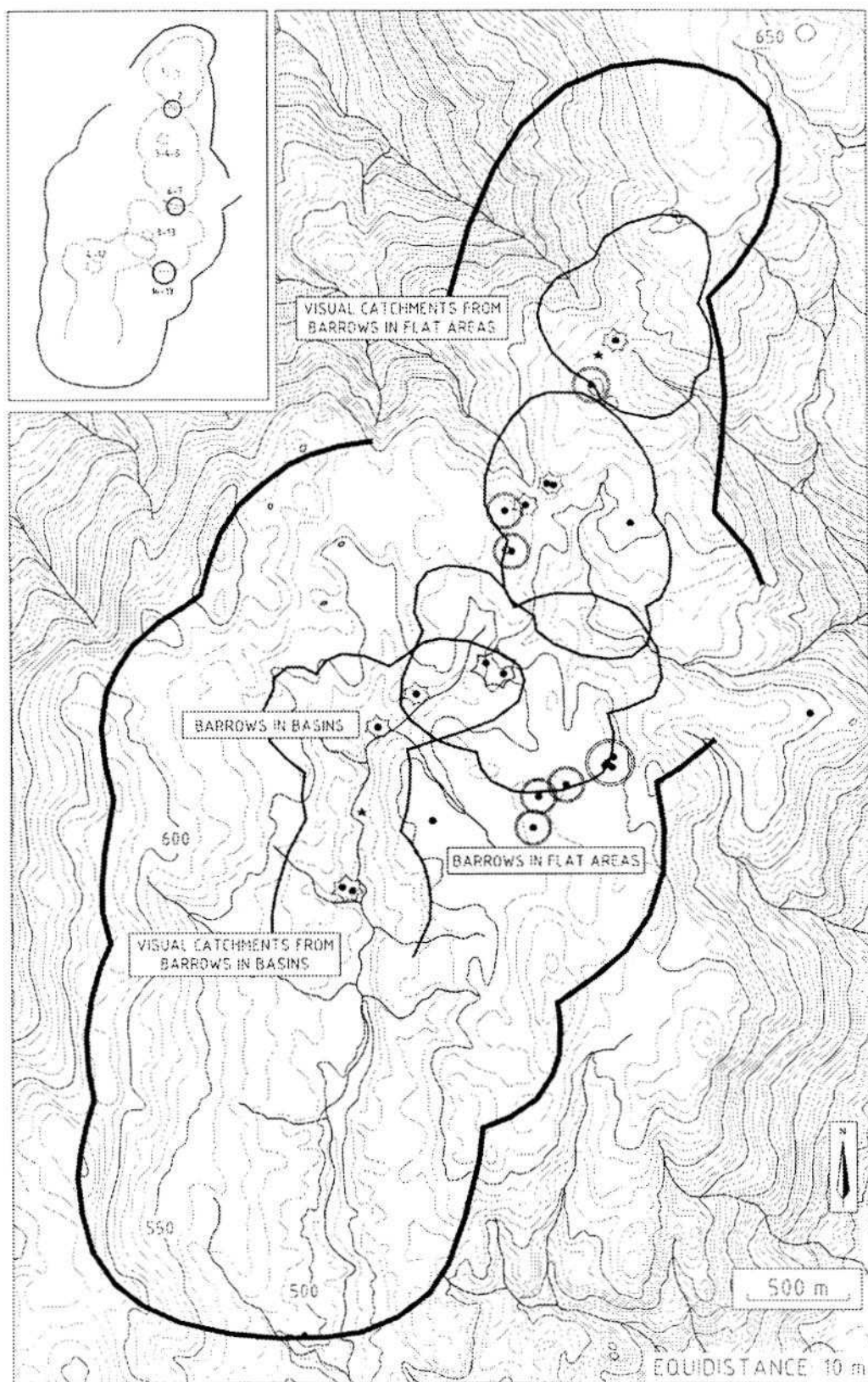


Fig. 3: Actual example of a Neolithic ceremonial landscape with megaliths: Barbanza area.

According to the data collected from these studies, the cupmarks would have been an artificial signal that identified the proximity of a monument, which marked the line of access towards it, and above all, outlined the sacred space around the barrow.

Visibility conditions. The barrows of the second type which we have defined are situated so that some of them are visible from more than 2 km away. Even those which occupy low-lying areas are clearly visible.

Except for some exceptions (to be precise, 7) from where less than 4 barrows may be seen, a high number of monuments may be seen from all of them: the average is around 8–9 intervisibilities, and in some cases more than 15. But before we comprehend the syntax of the visual relationships, we must widen the analysis, considering a different set of circumstances, particularly movement.

Monuments and movement

The relation of the monuments with transit allows us to understand the position of all of the barrows in the sierra. This association is so close that it could be thought that transit is the one and only factor for barrow placement. However, as we will see, this is only part of a complex process of emplacement and of making the monuments more widely perceptible. This phenomenon may be studied at various levels or scales.

Firstly, what allows us to understand the concentration of barrows in the sierra in the space which they occupy, what justifies why they are mainly found in a concrete space forming a close-knit nucleus, is the fact that this is a keypoint for organizing transit across the Barbanza peninsula. On a general scale, it may be seen that this zone is a great natural gorge which is the most adequate point for crossing the topographical barrier formed by the sierra. This area thus becomes a type of traffic distributor, in a key cross-roads in the Barbanza peninsula.

On a smaller scale, the importance of this factor may still be observed as the precise distribution of the monuments of the centre of the sierra follows the specific transit lines which cross it. Or put differently: the most important routes (in fact the only possible routes, as they have the best physical conditions to allow for travel on foot, horseback or wagons and carts), are identified thanks to the presence and distribution of the particular barrows.

But we may make the relation between barrows and transit even more precise if we reduce the observation scale and carry out a detailed analysis. When one covers the natural routes which we have previously described, one does not only see that the best way of following the best route is to guide oneself by the barrows seen in the distance, but that on an even more reduced scale, when one arrives at a change of direction or where the trajectory to be followed is ambiguous, then the precise disposition of the barrows is what indicates the option that should be followed. In these cases, after having arrived at the barrow marking the stage of the journey that has just been made, another monument, close to the former (generally less than 50 m) marks the correct direction which should be taken to complete the next stage. In this way the transit allows us to understand not only the distribution and emplacement of the barrows in the sierra, but also the precise configuration of the grouping of various barrows. Having arrived at this point, it would be simple to conclude that movement is what explains everything. And in this way it would also be very easy and tempting to correlate this circumstance with the presence in the Atlantic Neolithic (also in Galicia) of mobile patterns of settlement, protoagricultural ways of land use and light domestication of the land which still was a wild environment. Although these situations are partially true, they should be evaluated in the light of the wider observations which we may still make if we continue with the analysis of the emplacement of monuments in Barbanza.

Monuments and visual catchments

The network of routes and the visibilisation of the monuments allow the space to be crossed and understood as a whole. Based on the recognition of the monuments and of the movement network

related to them, a form of spatial organization is reproduced which simultaneously contains a cognitive and a form of rational domestication of the environment.

Given that this form of organization is imposed upon the observer when he or she crosses the terrain, the perception of this landscape model becomes a living experience. Experiencing landscape produces a series of scenes that are unveiled before the observer throughout the space he or she is crossing.

The megalithic scenes possess some regular characteristics. The majority of them possess an elemental form, characterized by the concurrence of three features:

1. They have a closed view, divided by well-defined topographical borders and which have within them a low basin, both topographical and visual.
2. The edge of this view is dotted with artificial monuments as well as natural features.
3. The scenery trends to have a centre or omphalos that is well individualised and that is thus identified with the presence of a barrow.

These features are present both in the visual valleys that stretch away from the monuments and in the principal visual valleys which are seen when crossing the area, regardless of whether one is next to a barrow or even following the network of routes or not. Although there are certain differences that, above all, are defined in the fact that point number 3 is accomplished nearly always when the scenery is contemplated from a barrow and only occasionally when observed from any other point, it is particularly relevant that a regular form is maintained in both cases.

In this way, the space experience of megalithic landscape is concreted into a succession of circular scenarios which are outlined and/or presided by monumental constructions and articulated by the network of routes (*Fig. 4*).

Here we find a phenomenon which is of great importance in the European Neolithic: the existence of circular patterns of spatial organization that take form in the construction of artificial circular spaces, and, more generally, in the production of ways of perceiving the landscape based on circularity. Lack of time does not allow us to go into this discussion further.

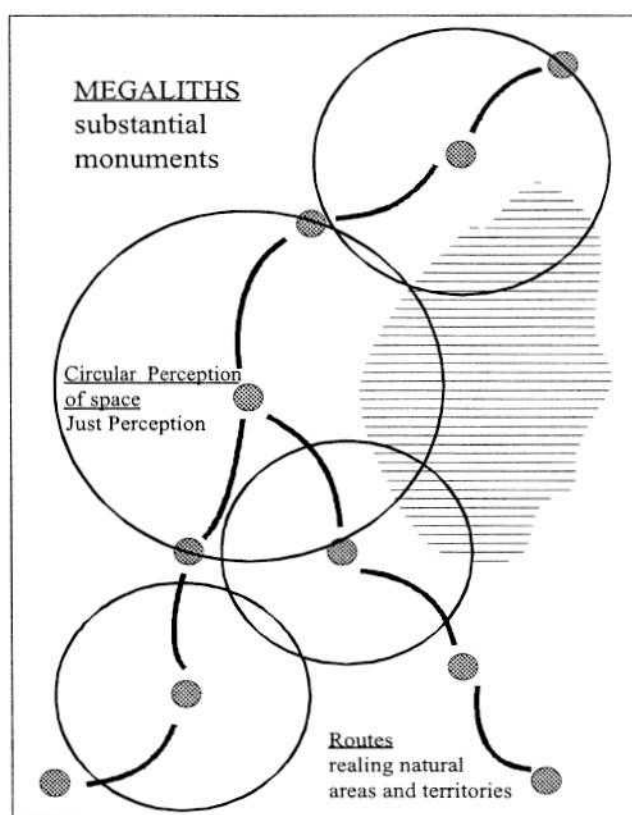


Fig. 4. Model of Neolithic ceremonial landscape based on megaliths and barrows.

Pattern of Bronze Age rock art location

As we said earlier Bronze Age landscape as marked by petroglyphs keep the same general model than megalithic landscape.

The archaeological record from the Bronze Age presents two types of elements which represent two dimensions of the same spatial reality. Firstly, the domestic sites found in high positions near flat, open areas with wet basins in their center. Petroglyphs appear in the areas with most accented slopes, in contact zones between escarpments and the previously mentioned areas. The relationship between sites and petroglyphs therefore takes shape in the lower and peripheral location of the petroglyphs.

In spite of megaliths, which could be defined as substantial monuments, petroglyphs could be called ambiguous monuments. They were engraved on flat rocks what often are not particularly conspicuous on the surrounding and just seen by humans when they are approached.

They are related to patterns of movement through land and control visually small basins which are wet areas with fresh pasture even during the summer drought. In fact petroglyphs worked as an artificial resource to translate into the land a movement syntax, a code that expressed the ways and routes to make accessible natural space and go from one places to others. The whole of petroglyphs in a single area builds up a net of lines and nodes that revert land into a social territory. A good example is the Caneda-Fentans area (*Fig. 5*).

At the same time, rock art established a circular control of topographical basins occupied by brañas, peat bog or humid area with stock of pasture (*Fig. 6*). These became important resources areas for either wild and domestic animals either humans (A more detailed review of this pattern could be found in BRADLEY ET AL. 1994, 1995).

However, the landscape model shaped in this moment is more complex, particularly with regard to petroglyphs. The definition of lines of movement is still a basic resource for the appropriation of space, although there are important differences compared to Neolithic times. Instead of general lines of transit, they are more concrete and related to local topographies. Generally, the petroglyphs occur in such positions that they controlled the connection between the uplands, where the settlements are concentrated (in areas suitable for shifting cultivation and around peat bogs which acted as stocks of pasture land, MÉNDEZ 1994), and the lowlands, covered with dense woodland offering hunting and wild resources. The lines of movement which now acted as basic axes of articulation of the social landscape appear marked artificially by the presence of important concentrations of petroglyphs.

Interpretations and Perspectives

A detailed analysis of the pattern of location of megalithic monuments (expression of a Neolithic landscape) and of rock art (Bronze Age landscape), of their visibility conditions (i.e. the visual catchment commanded by them) and visibilization conditions (i.e. the way as these are seen from the distance), allow us to recognize certain regularities that display an intentional will of remarking the existence of artificial cores to organize land perception and provoking dramatic artificial effects in regard to them.

Our study took into account the different resources to create visual impact, skylines, contrasts of colors and textures. In such way we could approach towards a phenomenology of prehistoric perception without falling in mere subjective solutions. But the final scope of this study is not only proposing theoretical and methodological as well as critical standpoints to develop the approach to these phenomena but producing a case-study that offers new insights to the understanding of archaeological past.

In this sense, to end we would risk some interpretations about the meaning that these technologies of landscape construction and spatial perception would have transmitted. We will start from Barbanza Sierra and then we will move to petroglyphs.

The linking of the monuments to movement indicates that they worked as artificial references of a complex code of signs that transmit information about the routes. As well as having a practical dimension, this function evidently has an important symbolic dimension. On one hand it linked the world of the dead with the route and created a representation of the relation between the living and the dead, between life and death, based on a metaphor of movement and discourse. On the other hand, it used dramatically and scenographically movement, access and approximation to the barrows, as a basic resource in order to construct its monumentality.

In other words: the process of symbolic domestication of space articulated through the monuments was based, as well as on the visibility and inherent permanence of monumental construction, on the control and management of the experience of time and of movement over the space which is produced through the monuments.

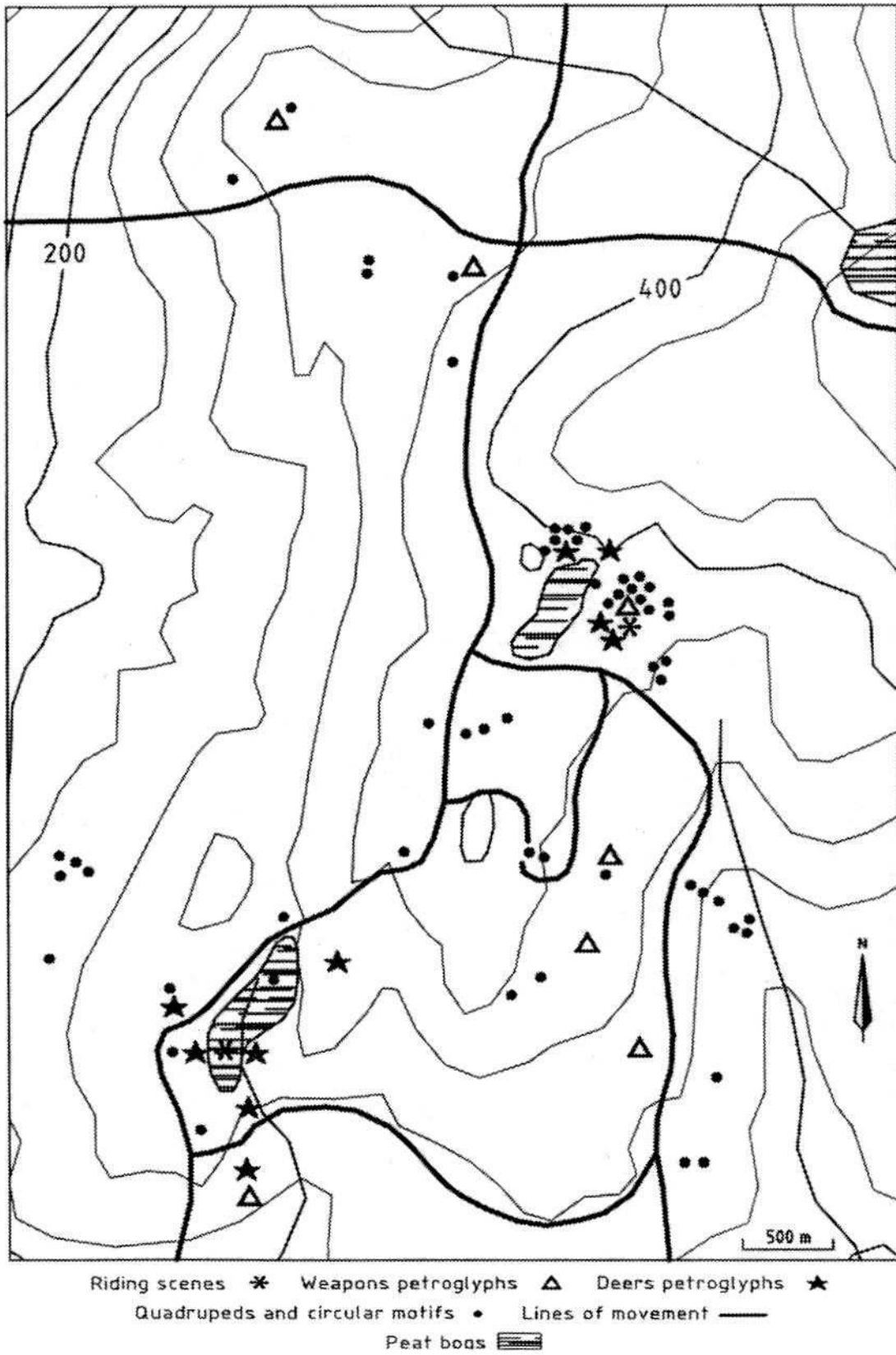
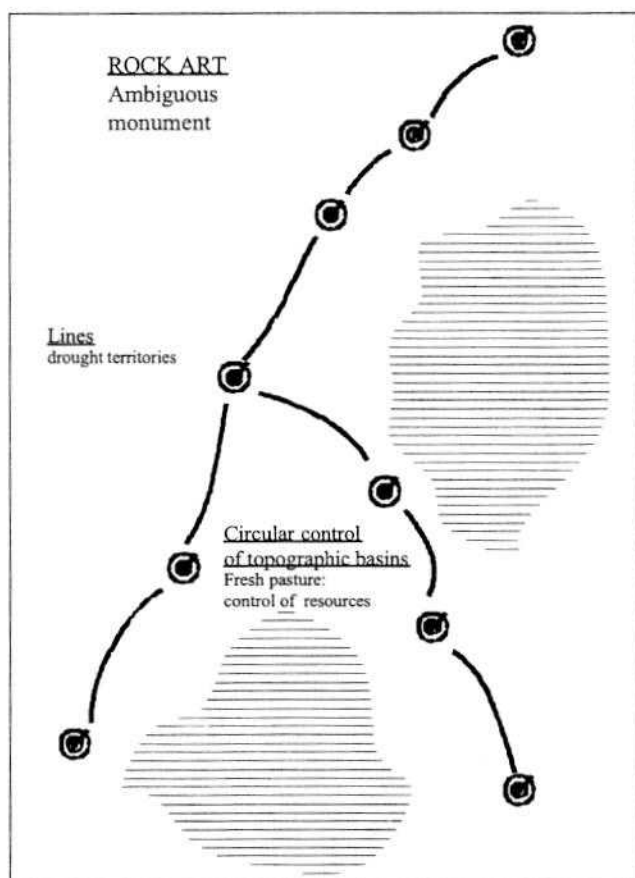


Fig. 5. Actual example of a Bronze Age social landscape with petroglyphs: Caneda-Fentans area.



Similarly, the hegemony of the circular perception of space should perhaps be understood as a metaphorical resource of human domestication of his surroundings. Circular shapes are the best expression of dominion and control, in the same way that circular vistas are the core point of the panoptico.

But at the same time that this general model is kept, is also changed from Neolithic to Bronze Age. What is new in the latter is the control of basins with practical purposes and the construction of lines what made accessible the whole lands understood now as territory. This shows the split from a pure cultural landscape to a mostly economic landscape and from strategies of just cultural domestication of nature to emphasis on economic domestication. In this sense, what we find in Galicia is parallel of a general trend found throughout Europe what, from neolithic to Iron Age times, changes the cultural control of land by its practical control.

Fig. 6. Model of Bronze Age social landscape based on petroglyphs.

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