

WOMEN IN BRONZE AGE SOUTHEAST IBERIAN PENINSULA: DAILY LIFE, RELATIONSHIPS, IDENTITIES

The aim of this paper is to retrace women in the archaeological record of Bronze Age southeast Iberian Peninsula. It focuses on daily life, mainly on maintenance activities and resulting relationships, and on how these affect women identities. Such identities are archaeologically “visible” not only within funerary ritual and grave goods, but also in the ways in which domestic space and time are organised.

The ability of social groups to survive over time depends, primarily, on their biological reproduction. But it also relies on activities, practices and tasks that ensure their daily life and subsistence. These can be grouped within the concept of maintenance activities: the set of practices related to the sustenance and welfare of the individual members of a social group, and their generational replacement, including production and the creation and preservation of interpersonal relationships.¹ They are consistent with the two basic dimensions of human needs, namely the objective dimension of biological needs, such as food, clothing and shelter and the subjective dimension of needs like psychological security, care, affection etc. All of these are essential elements for the development of human life.²

Such crucial activities are, nevertheless, usually carried out only by a segment of the community: it is women who perform them in most societies that have been ethnographically analysed,³ and, indeed, in social groups that are historically documented.⁴ For this reason, the domestic becomes a universal category associated with a particular class of uniform and unchanging individuals: women.⁵ This is why material culture associated with the domestic space has been as rule exclusively approached through archaeological typologies and analytical descriptions instead of being a source of reflection on how people organise and value their activities and their relationships with other members of the group. In reality, the debate over the meaning of domestic space and maintenance activities, and the time cycles of everyday routine that they involve is of particular relevance.⁶

It is very important to put an emphasis on the forms of mutual dependence, interaction and interrelation of the activities performed by different members of a community, and try to understand how past gender relations are expressed within domestic space. Yet, for so doing, archaeologists use often two generalising – and mistaken – assumptions. First, the notion of domestic space is oversimplified through universal binary oppositions, such as private/public or passive/active. Secondly, approaches to domestic activities are influenced by contemporary

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- 1 “Hearth and home”; P. GONZÁLEZ-MARCÉN and M. PICAZO, “Arqueología de la vida cotidiana,” in *Arqueología y género* 141-58; M. SÁNCHEZ-ROMERO, “Actividades de mantenimiento en la edad del bronce del sur peninsular: el cuidado y la socialización de individuos infantiles,” in *Arqueología de las mujeres* 185-94; GONZÁLEZ-MARCÉN and MONTÓN-SUBÍAS in this volume.
 - 2 C. CAARRASCO, A. ALABART, A. COCO, M. DOMINGUEZ, À. MARTÍNEZ, M. MAYORDOMO, A. RECIO and M. SERRANO, *Tiempos, trabajos y flexibilidad: una cuestión de género* (2003).
 - 3 A. HERNANDO, “Hombres del tiempo y mujeres del espacio. Individualidad, poder y relaciones de género,” in P. GONZÁLEZ-MARCÉN (ed.), *Espacios de género en arqueología, Arqueología Espacial* 21 (2000) 23-44.
 - 4 M.D. MIRÓN, “La casa griega antigua: género, espacio y trabajo en los ámbitos domésticos,” in *Arqueología y género* 332-65.
 - 5 J. BRÜCK, “Homing instinct. Grounded identities and individual selves in the British Bronze Age,” in C. FOWLER (ed.), *The Archaeology of Plural and Changing Identities. Beyond Identification* (2005) 135-60.
 - 6 M. SÁNCHEZ-ROMERO AND G. ARANDA, “Changing foodways: new strategies in food preparation, serving and consumption in the Bronze Age of Iberian peninsula,” in P. GONZÁLEZ MARCÉN, S. MONTÓN, M. PICAZO and M. SÁNCHEZ-ROMERO (eds), *Engendering Social Dynamics. The Archaeology of Maintenance Activities*, BAR International Series (2008).

biases that relegate them to marginality, and attribute minor economic importance to them – despite anthropological and ethnographic evidence on the opposite.

A number of related insights need therefore to be re-considered. For example, domestic space is not restricted to house-dependent structures, since many maintenance activities were – and they still are – performed outside the dwelling.⁷ Nor are domestic activities and experiences static and unchanging, but are influenced by society and have definite effects on social and economic transformations.⁸ Furthermore, domestic spaces and activities are not reserved to women and children, but imply both male and female technical and technological knowledge. This is another major weakness of our approaches: technological experience and advances are as a rule assigned to the sphere of men: they are thus often conceived in relation to metallurgy, stone working or pottery, and are only seldom applied, e.g. to the production and preparation of food and the manufacture of textiles – even though these imply similar technical processes, skills, and an important know-how through which raw materials are transformed into final products.⁹

Here, I would like to focus on relevant archaeological evidence provided by fieldwork carried out in the Bronze Age site of Cerro de la Encina (Monachil, Granada), which is assigned to the so-called Argaric culture. This culture flourished in the South Eastern part of the Iberian Peninsula in the 2nd millennium BC, and is characterised by a high degree of settlement hierarchisation, with a number of central sites controlling specific territories, resources, and populations. Considering the particular features of each region, settlements tend to occupy steep slopes. In many cases, central sites in particular had developed complex fortification systems, with walls, bastions, towers, and stone enclosures protecting their *acropoleis*. The settlement of Cerro de la Encina is located on one of the hills on the left bank of Monachil River, which connects the plateau of Granada to the mineral resources of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. This is the central site of the Argaric population in the area and consists in rectangular houses with internal divisions constructed on artificial terraces.¹⁰

This culture shows, however, major variations in mortuary practices. In contrast to the previous collective burials in cemeteries, Argaric funerary ritual involves mainly individual, and, less often, double and even triple inhumations realised within the inhabited areas, normally beneath the floors of dwellings. People were buried in urns, or put either in cists or in artificial cavities (*covachas*), and pits. Finds in tombs differ dramatically in number, variety and quality. Some burials have few or no grave goods, while others have quantities of wealthy and prestigious items: stone, bone and metal jewellery and other ornaments and accessories (e.g. pins), and different types of pottery, and weapons (e.g. axes), and tools (mainly awls). Such variations in grave goods reflect differential access to wealth and strong social stratification.¹¹

As to the aforementioned “objective needs” met by maintenance activities on this site, dwelling units include several domestic structures and artefacts related to production. There are thus: zones with loom-weights, pointing to the manufacture of textiles – which would require the use of other related implements, but also specific knowledge and skills of cloth making; and storage containers, mainly medium-sized vases found in their original places – maybe a key to our understanding of who had access to and even controlled stored resources; and milling areas, indicated by large grinding tools, set on stone benches, which are of great importance for food processing on prehistoric sites. To these, we must add cooking vessels and spaces for the preparation of food. Through this material, we can retrace maintenance activities and their

7 S. MONTÓN, “Las mujeres y el espacio: una historia del espacio sin espacio en la historia,” in GONZÁLEZ-MARCÉN (*supra* n. 3) 45-59.

8 P. GONZÁLEZ-MARCÉN, S. MONTÓN and M. PICAZO (eds), *Dones i activitats de manteniment en temps de canvi*, *Treballs d'Arqueologia* 11 (2005).

9 C.L. COSTIN, “Exploring the relationship between gender and craft in complex societies: methodological and theoretical issues of gender attribution,” in R.P. WRIGHT (ed.), *Gender and Archaeology* (1996) 111-40; J.A. McGAW, “Reconceiving technology: why feminine technologies matter,” *ibid.* 52-75; R.P. WRIGHT, “Technology, gender, and class: worlds of difference in Ur III Mesopotamia,” *ibid.* 79-110.

10 G. ARANDA and F. MOLINA “Wealth and power in the Bronze Age of the south-east of the Iberian Peninsula. The funerary record of Cerro de la Encina,” *OJA* 25 (2006) 47-59.

11 *Ibid.*

influence on both the use of domestic space and the organisation of time. Even related technical skills, experiences and gender identities can be “read” and understood.¹²

Anthropological studies have “placed” Argaric women within the excavated domestic spaces, and associated them with the performance of maintenance activities.¹³ They have also revealed important differences in male and female activity patterns. We must consider three markers: arthrosis (a chronic and degenerative disease that afflicts bones when the joint cartilage is worn out), musculoskeletal stress, and frequencies and types of trauma. Bringing together this evidence suggests that activity patterns were very different between men and women. The evidence of arthrosis in both men and women is manifested on those parts that also carry greater presence of musculoskeletal stress: dorsal vertebrae, shoulders and feet joints. This means that the development of arthrosis could be related, at least in some joints, to the performance of intense physical activities. This relationship becomes relevant when these markers coincide in the same skeletal bodies. The strong sexual dimorphism manifested by musculoskeletal stress markers, with a greater presence in men’s upper and lower limbs, especially in the shoulder and leg joints, also indicates clear differences in activity patterns, with higher levels of mobility among men. Most likely, women’s activities were related to tasks that required low levels of mobility, probably associated with the settlement and its most immediate surroundings. Besides, women’s higher levels of musculoskeletal stress are present in the upper limbs, in the forearm muscles that bend on the arm, which coincides with a greater presence of arthrosis in the elbow joint. Grinding activities are perfectly compatible with such evidence, since the elbow develops continuous flexing and unflexing movements of the arms. The major stress in women’s lower limbs is found in knees and feet, which can be caused by bending postures related, again, to activities such as grinding. Evidence of, mainly cranial, trauma also shows a clear difference between women and men, which may also indicate a possible difference in activity patterns, with men carrying out tasks with greater risks of suffering traumatic lesions.¹⁴

Furthermore, Argaric societies provide a very good example of how daily life and the symbolic world of dead, two domains that are often examined separately, were actually closely linked: not only because, here, they share the same – domestic – space, but also because they reveal a similar way of understanding the world. Domestic space ensures cohesion between life and death. Inhumations are perfectly well integrated into the houses, where they indicate both the importance of ancestors and the appropriation of space by the living. Domestic space becomes thus a central place, critical for the detection of past behaviours and identities that have dictated the forms of its organisation. Mortuary practices are included in the subjective human needs, since they reflect care of the living for the dead members of the group. While, burials mirror different identities through dress, ornaments and grave goods, which may show age, gender, status, ethnicity or even religious and other beliefs.

Tomb 21 from Cerro de la Encina (Monachil, Granada) provides a good example.¹⁵ It contains two individuals, a female aged around 16, and a male aged around 23. The position of the bodies and the construction of the tomb indicate that they were buried at the same time – probably having died of an infection. A total of 29 artefacts accompanied the dead. Some of them possibly belonged with both individuals: pottery, mainly a chalice-shaped bowl (*copa*), two globular bottles, two tableware vases and two cooking vessels, and metal objects, such as a long dagger with six silver rivets and a copper knife, and up to three legs of slaughtered cattle related

12 SÁNCHEZ-ROMERO and ARANDA (*supra* n. 6).

13 See e.g. S. JIMÉNEZ-BROBEIL, I. AL-OUAOU and J.A. ESQUIVEL, “Actividad física según sexo en la cultura Argárica. Una aproximación desde los restos humanos,” *Trabajos de Prehistoria* 61 (2004) 141-53.

14 G. ARANDA, S. MONTÓN, M. SÁNCHEZ-ROMERO and E. ALARCÓN, “Death and everyday life: the Argaric societies from South East Spain,” *JSA* 9 (forthcoming -2009); M. SÁNCHEZ-ROMERO, “Actividades de mantenimiento, espacios domésticos y relaciones de género en las sociedades de la prehistoria reciente,” in L. PRADOS (ed.), *I Jornadas Internacionales de Arqueología del Género* (forthcoming).

15 G. ARANDA and F. MOLINA, “Intervenciones arqueológicas en el yacimiento de la Edad del Bronce del Cerro de la Encina (Monachil, Granada),” *Trabajos de Prehistoria* 62.1 (2005) 165-80.

to communal feasting rituals.¹⁶ But some other items are more clearly related to one or the other deceased, namely their clothing and jewellery. The woman had a silver and three copper bracelets, a silver and a copper ring, a silver hair-pin, two copper beads and a necklace made of polished stone beads, and a copper awl. Auls are the only finds related to daily life activities. They are found only in women's tombs and seem to be closely linked to female identity through the whole Argaric period.¹⁷ The man was wearing a copper and a silver bracelet, silver earrings forming triple spirals, a necklace made of polished stone beads, and a stone archer bracelet.¹⁸ The types and wealth of these items indicate the high social status shared by the two deceased, but they also reflect differences in their identities.

This seems to be the case also with children. Tomb 22, in the same site, included the double inhumation of two children, buried at different times – only the later burial was found articulated, the bones of the other having been piled up in a corner. They were both accompanied by three clay vases, but the one deposited last had a necklace made of polished stone beads¹⁹ – the intimate association of which with the body apparently stresses its individual importance for the child's identity.²⁰

One of the most interesting aspects of maintenance activities is related, of course, to maternal care. Here we recognise, again, the objective and subjective dimensions of vital human needs; and, once more, funerary record provides evidence on them. A child and an adult, as a rule a woman, are frequently associated in the tombs, as in the case of Tomb 6 at Cerro de la Encina, which housed a dead child about four years old and a woman in her thirties,²¹ maybe his/her mother. Natural and/or social mothers provide infants food, care and protection. Lactating and weaning are most important for the child's survival. While, the process of passing from the safety of the mother's milk to the uncertainty of normal food, including milk of animals, must have involved risks for the life of the offspring in prehistoric times. Archaeologically significant are artefacts especially designed for feeding, transporting and clothing children, but also related knowledge and experience to entertain, socialise and educate them.²²

Equally important is the subjective dimension of motherhood, as mainly related to the socialisation of infants, and the "construction" of identities, at least during the first years of their lives. Archaeological research has not paid enough attention to maternity,²³ maybe because of its obvious connection with the female universe. Crucial information has thus been lost, and much remains to be explored in this domain. In Argaric societies, children were full members of the group: not only they were included in the mortuary rituals on equal terms with adults, but also they were offered grave goods. This suggests that they equally had their own places in the social hierarchies of their times.²⁴

Children's socialisation is obtained through mechanisms of learning. The use of toys and their interactions with the objects that surround them are important parts of this learning.

16 G. ARANDA and J.A. ESQUIVEL. "Ritual funerario y comensalidad en las sociedades de la Edad del Bronce del Sureste peninsular: la cultura de El Argar," *Trabajos de Prehistoria* 63.2 (2006) 117-33; G. ARANDA and J.A. ESQUIVEL, "Poder y prestigio en las sociedades de la cultura de El argar. El consumo comunal de bóvidos y ovicápridos en los rituales de enterramiento," *Trabajos de Prehistoria* 64.2 (2007) 95-118.

17 GONZÁLEZ-MARCÉN and MONTÓN-SUBÍAS in this volume; ARANDA *et al.* (*supra* n. 14).

18 ARANDA and MOLINA (*supra* n. 10).

19 *Ibid.*

20 M. SÁNCHEZ-ROMERO, "Childhood and the construction of gender identities through material culture," *The Journal of Childhood in the Past* 1 (2008) 17-37.

21 M. SÁNCHEZ-ROMERO, "Actividades de mantenimiento en la Edad del Bronce del sur peninsular: el cuidado y la socialización de individuos infantiles," in ID. (*supra* n. 1 -2007) 185-94.

22 M. SÁNCHEZ-ROMERO "Maternidad y prehistoria: prácticas de reproducción, relación y socialización," in *Las Mujeres en la Prehistoria. Exposición Itinerante, Museo de Prehistoria de Valencia* (2006) 119-37.

23 But cf. *Prehistoric construction of mothering: Childbirth and Mothering in Archaeology*; L.A. WILKIE, *The Archaeology of Mothering* (2005). See also KOPAKA and POMADÈRE in this volume.

24 M. SÁNCHEZ-ROMERO "An approach to learning and socialisation in children during the Spanish Bronze Age," in L.H. DOMMASNES and M. WRIGGLESWORTH (eds), *Children, Identity and the Past* (2008) 113-24.

Playing games helps children find out ways of integration and assimilation in the adults' structures and ideologies as members of social categories that have to be reproduced.²⁵ Miniature clay vases have been found in a number of Bronze Age sites, like Cerro de la Encina (Monachil, Granada),²⁶ Motilla del Azuer (Daimiel, Ciudad Real),²⁷ and Peñalosa (Baños de la Encina, Jaén),²⁸ have been interpreted as children's toys, because of technological and morphological features they present. These imitate real Argaric pottery shapes, but have irregular forms and show a reduced technical skill – they are thicker than normal and have no surface treatment.²⁹ Their definite association with children is established by their presence in respective funerary contexts.³⁰

Through a series of archaeological examples related to the Bronze Age societies of the Southeast of Iberian Peninsula, in this paper I have tried to highlight the importance of maintenance activities for the analysis and understanding of prehistoric and historic groups. Maintenance activities and the domestic space have different forms and uses and bear different connotations through time and space. These encompass material but also symbolic and ideological aspects of life: subsistence, production, care, creation and reproduction of social relations through communication, socialising and, at least funeral, display are only some of them. These also shape and maintain social identities, within the framework of shared space and activities, in which women certainly have had – and they still have – a vital contribution.

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- 25 M. SÁNCHEZ-ROMERO, "Children in South East of Iberian Peninsula during Bronze Age," *Ethnographisch-Archäologische Zeitschrift* 45 (2004) 377-87.
- 26 G. ARANDA-JIMÉNEZ, "Craft specialization in pottery production during the Bronze Age in South-eastern Iberia," *Journal of Iberian Archaeology* 6 (2004) 157-79; SÁNCHEZ-ROMERO (*supra* n. 24).
- 27 T. NÁJERA, F. MOLINA, M. SÁNCHEZ and G. ARANDA, "Un enterramiento infantil singular de la edad del bronce," *Trabajos de Prehistoria* 63.1, 149-56 (2006).
- 28 F. CONTRERAS (ed.), *Proyecto Peñalosa. Análisis Histórico de las Comunidades de la Edad del Bronce del Piedemonte Meridional de Sierra Morena y Depresión Linares-Bailén* (2000).
- 29 ARANDA-JIMÉNEZ (*supra* n. 26).
- 30 SÁNCHEZ-ROMERO (*supra* n. 25); NÁJERA *et al.* (*supra* n. 27).