

# GENERAL APPRECIATION OF THE BOOK CONTENTS: *BREAKING BORDERS, CROSSING TERRITORIES. IDENTITIES AND EXCHANGES DURING THE LATE PREHISTORY IN THE NORTHERN INTERIOR OF THE IBERIAN PENINSULA*

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**Abstract:** *This text analyses the book BREAKING BORDERS, CROSSING TERRITORIES. Identities and exchanges during the Late Prehistory in the northern interior of the Iberian Peninsula, not only in terms of its presentation, but also trying to approach, in an analytical way, some of the developed concepts. Boundaries, physical and others, methodologically created in order to access new paradigms, as well as dynamic questions posed by the relationship between low, medium and high scale analysis in the discussion of interpretive trends in prehistoric societies are also addressed.*

**Keywords:** *Iberian Peninsula; Territorial/conceptual borders; Large scale narratives.*

**Resumo:** *Este texto analisa o livro BREAKING BORDERS, CROSSING TERRITORIES. Identidades e intercâmbios durante a Pré-História Recente no Interior Norte da Península Ibérica, não só em termos da sua apresentação como de análise de alguns dos conceitos ali desenvolvidos. Os limites, físicos e outros, metodologicamente criados para aceder a novos paradigmas, assim como as questões dinâmicas colocadas pela relação entre a análise de baixa, média e alta escala na discussão das tendências interpretativas nas sociedades pré-históricas, são também abordados.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Península Ibérica; Fronteiras territoriais/conceptuais; Narrativas de escala ampla.*

## 1. PREAMBLE

Research in archaeology simultaneously involves creating boundaries and discussing their assumptions, propositions and interpretations. However, research in archaeology is also systematically part of a methodological and epistemological game where the formulation and the conceptual appliance of the various types of boundaries under consideration becomes difficult to follow and fully understand, particularly when the «objects of study» are societies without writing, whether they are prehistoric or proto-historical.

This difficulty mainly resides in both the nature of the object of study — the societies of the Past, absent and foreign to us in their behaviour, which often seems «irrational»

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— as well as in the empirical means available to approach it. This is already commonplace, it will be said, but it is this condition that, in the first place, requires a great speculative effort, such a leap between what was, and is almost completely absent, and what could have been or between what we know as being in the realm of the intangible and what we desperately want to understand. It is in this multiplicity of ways of approaching what we envision having happened that the richness of the investigation resides, as it is well shown in this book.

Leaving aside, for now, the greater or lesser completeness of the materials (objects, built structures, stratigraphic layers) that have come down to us, archaeology necessarily produces historical, spatiotemporal «narratives», otherwise it would restrict itself to a discrete description of materials and ways of making them. Such narratives focus on an ever-increasing multiplicity and variety of «objects» that have a legitimate tendency to increase in the coming years in fields that only in the future, and in hindsight, will we be able to discern and assess their concrete contours. And their guiding lines are the knowledge from various fields (philosophical, anthropological, historical, geological, etc.), which create frames of reference, both in the form of explicit models, and more implicit ways of thinking, within the framework of the human sciences.

It is in the interpretation, in the creation of such narratives, whether of a low scale — at the level of archaeological sites or structures, for example —, or of a broader scope — the identity and/or physical borders, the sociocultural borders, for example —, that both consensus and disagreement are simmering. They are both, consensus and disagreement, the most appealing aspects of this book, not only because they concatenate here a plural vision of the past — distanced from homogenization of the Great Narratives, which are mainly linear narratives that we see as never managing to imprison the totality of human reality —, and at the same time they show that the authors of the different texts fit healthily, more implicitly than explicitly, into different ideological currents. However, they accompany the great debates of the present time, regarding the understanding of ontologies (their own and those of the communities they study), the questioning of the agency role of artefacts in the construction and re-elaboration of individuality and collectivity as a (sometimes unconscious) entity of belonging, that is, in the multifaceted subject-object relationship that does not allow itself to be imprisoned, as we mentioned, in simple narratives. To that extent, approaches that are already characteristic of the post-procesual debate are found here, being preponderant the approach to artefacts (ceramics) by R. Vilaça (text 3)<sup>1</sup> and D. Pinto and M. Sanches (text 20)<sup>2</sup>; or, in the case of paintings or engravings (in the most diverse media), that of P. Bueno Ramírez *et al.* (text 8)<sup>3</sup>, the latter highlighting concrete proposals for the study of the so-called Atlantic Art.

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<sup>1</sup> VILAÇA, 2022 (in this book).

<sup>2</sup> PINTO, SANCHES, 2022 (in this book).

<sup>3</sup> BUENO RAMÍREZ, BARROSO BERMEJO, BALBÍN BEHRMANN, 2022 (in this book).

Next, taking into account the theme of the congress, we will summarize, in points 2 (Borders) and 3 (New data & tangent and dissonant issues), what the book is most relevant about. We do not intend to exhaustively discuss each of the theme-concepts of the congress, but rather underline how this small sample of texts highlights the multiple facets that the demanding investigation in archaeology continues to reveal. Furthermore, a historiographical perspective of the ways of thinking in prehistoric archaeology, its framing within the human sciences and its consequences, is soon advanced in Chapter I by the sublime opening text, in the introductory chapter — Overcoming Frontiers — by J. Thomas «Beyond Borders and Boundaries in Prehistoric Research»<sup>4</sup>.

And, in the Epilogue chapter (Chapter IV), it is the text of Vítor Oliveira Jorge — «Some suggestions for a philosophical strategy to try to overcome the impasses of prehistoric archaeology and its discourses»<sup>5</sup> —, the one that, bearing the pertinent and always innovative approach to which we are already accustomed, questions, while discussing, the creation of knowledge and historical narrative in the context of contemporary philosophy.

## 2. BORDERS

The creation and political affirmation of Portugal and Spain cannot be reduced to a phrase or a discrete idea, as it was configured within a long-term historical process that was always politically marked by opposition (Spain. vs. Portugal/Portugal vs. Spain). That is to say, by the construction of historical discourses that emphasize heroic acts or battles of each country, giving rise to identities differentiated from each other. But in the situation that is now being overcome, where information sharing is facilitated not only by general information technology, but also by access to several and more accessible graphical representations of the territory, this book sought to be, in the first place, a platform for formatting and understanding the territory, if transported to Prehistory, as a «flat» geographic space. In other words, it was intended to elide political borders, methodologically creating a continuous geographic space as a means of accessing continuities and/or discontinuities of another nature: in chronological-cultural formulations, in the understanding of settlement networks and intra-community relations, in networks of various exchanges, etc.

We know that this desideratum also has identity implications, and these are revealed in this book in a more implicit than explicit way, although what stands out are the results of the historical processes that shape the research traditions not only nationally, but of certain chrono-cultural periods of Prehistory where mobility and/or large-scale intra-community connection networks are assumed to be indisputable. Thus, it is the

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<sup>4</sup> THOMAS, 2022 (in this book).

<sup>5</sup> JORGE, 2022 (in this book).

text by Aubry *et al.* (text 11)<sup>6</sup> on the reading of Paleolithic social networks involved in the long-distance exchange of raw materials, in rock or mineral (silcrete, corneal, etc.) and based on petrographic studies, which doubly responds to this break in the border: (i) the team is made up of Portuguese and Spanish researchers; (ii) and the investigated space, centered on the North Meseta — mainly in La Dehesa (Ávila) — emphasizes the Coa Valley as a site of systematic aggregation along the Upper Paleolithic. Here the axes of mobility and more intense «regional» social relations between communities in the North-South axis of the middle Douro are centered, at distances of up to 50 km from the Coa. Thus, it seems to define a geographical space contained in another, of greater extension (100 km), whose relations cross the borders between the two Mesetas (North and South) and link the Douro basins to the Tagus and to those of other smaller rivers. The presence of this text in this book also symbolizes a third form of breaking boundaries, the chronological one, leading our reflection to a time outside of what we had initially defined as the scope of this publication.

However, more complex historical processes of interaction, in time and space, evidenced by the art of the post-glacier (from the Mesolithic/Ancient Neolithic to the Bronze Age), are pointed out and discussed in the text by P. Bueno Ramírez *et al.* (text 8)<sup>7</sup>. In this one, an integrative reading of open air-rock art (engraved rocks, painted rock-shelters, steles, menhirs) and megaliths (supports, steles, figurines, decorated vessels) not only blurs the classical boundaries of Atlanticism and Mediterraneanity in the context of the Iberian Peninsula, as in the Western European context. In turn, Guerra-Doce and Zapatero Magdaleno's text integrates medium-scale and inter-regional relationships into the low-scale relations between the Ancient Neolithic communities of Meseta Norte. With its «shepherds without bread» — and following traditional approaches — this text connects, through a complex network of intercommunity relations, Meseta Norte and Meseta Sul, Estremadura and Alentejo (text 10)<sup>8</sup>.

However, «biogeographic borders», and in particular the border that distinguishes the Atlantic (Galaic-Asturian) and the Ibero-Mediterranean regions, are also used as a methodological basis to discern precisely what would have distinguished, or united, prehistoric populations of the Peninsular Northwest. They are tried and discussed in the text by L. Alves and B. Comendador Rey (text 9)<sup>9</sup> — with regard to the peninsular schematic painted art and the so-called engraved Atlantic Art — and in Alexandre Canha's (text 5) concerning the structuring of the long-term settlement (from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC) in the southern region of the lower Douro basin)<sup>10</sup>,

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<sup>6</sup> AUBRY *et al.*, 2022 (in this book).

<sup>7</sup> BUENO RAMÍREZ, BARROSO BERMEJO, BALBÍN BEHRMANN, 2022 (in this book).

<sup>8</sup> GUERRA-DOCE, ZAPATERO MAGDALENO, 2022 (in this book).

<sup>9</sup> ALVES, COMENDADOR REY, 2022 (in this book).

<sup>10</sup> CANHA, 2022 (in this book).

in which material culture (mainly ceramics) is discussed within the scope of the creation of borders in certain periods, as opposed to its dilution in others. The contribution of exchanges and contacts between populations from the North and South regions of the peninsular interior for the social and identity formation of local communities, in the Late Bronze Age/Transition to the Iron Age, is discussed by Senna-Martínez and collaborators based on a case study (text 16)<sup>11</sup>, despite the fact that this information has been extensively published in texts prior to this one.

Other texts, because they focus on areas adjacent to the political frontier — thus treating the territory at a scale that we intuit to be the most routine in the circulation of human groups in recent Prehistory — announce not only similar settlement patterns, but similar historical processes, from the Neolithic (initial?) to the Bronze Age, clearly visible in the texts of C. Lorenzo Salgueiro and collaborators (text 7) and of L. Rodríguez Álvarez and B. Comendador Rey (text 12)<sup>12</sup>. In this case, the Tâmega river valley is considered the structuring axis of privileged circulation and intercommunity relations. Through it, the communities of the recent prehistory of the province of Ourense are closely connected with those of the entire North of Portugal, and in particular with those of the lower Douro basin, which includes the province of Zamora. In the first, the settlement network is also based on natural passageways and contacts, through the Lima and Minho valleys, in the most Atlantic area of the Peninsular Northwest.

In this way, large and small narratives are combined in this book in an open and imaginative way, so that the proposals for creating, or diluting, traditional political and conceptual boundaries, following the same movement, end up highlighting aspects of the archaeological remains that have remained hidden (being devalued) or were correlated with each other according to very linear guidelines.

### **3. FROM THE END OF THE UPPER PALEOLITHIC TO THE BEGINNING OF THE IRON AGE. NEW DATA & TANGENT AND DISSONANT ISSUES**

We hesitate to create a point so dear to archaeologists: the «news», that is, how the continuity of fieldwork would have contributed to cement, or on the contrary, deny previously accepted discourses. We are mainly referring to excavations, which have the ability to systematically create healthy resistances to interpretation. Although the «news» or new discoveries are there, they are reflected in this book above all in the interpretive tendencies to which this short text will not, nor intends to, do justice.

Even so, more restricted or broader excavations of sites constitute a substantive part of this book (Chapter III), bringing to light: (i) the monumentalization or fortification

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<sup>11</sup> SENNA-MARTINEZ, LUÍS, MENDES, 2022 (in this book).

<sup>12</sup> RODRÍGUEZ ÁLVAREZ, COMENDADOR REY, 2021; LORENZO SALGUEIRO, RODRÍGUEZ RELLAN, FÁBREGAS VALCARCE, 2022 (both in this book).

of concrete sites or wider areas/landscapes, from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 1<sup>st</sup> millenium. BC, its emergence in specific historical conditions, and socio-political functions in the whole of the coeval regional population (texts 4, 6)<sup>13</sup>; (ii) the settlement structure of places with «constructions/remnants» only conserved in negative, often of multi-century use, revealing enclosures and housing units made of perishable materials, with several layers, with emphasis on elongated buildings (longhouses), these centered on the 2<sup>nd</sup> millenium. BC in the Northwest of the Iberian Peninsula, (texts 13, 14)<sup>14</sup>; (iii) the study of construction materials (clay) in «perishable buildings», of mixed constructions (wood with mortar and clay) of the North Meseta between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC (text 19)<sup>15</sup>; (iv) the organization of hypogean necropolises and trenches in the peninsular interior, in the chronological range of the XXV-XIV centuries BC, simultaneously overcoming the contingent separation between the Chalcolithic-Bronze Age and between the North Meseta-South Meseta, while at the same time highlighting non-linear paths of social transformation in those two chronological-cultural periods (text 17)<sup>16</sup>; (v) the seasonal occupation of rock shelters, with purposes that include the carving of instruments, but simultaneously with marking them with schematic rock art (text 9)<sup>17</sup>; (vi) the long life of materialities and their multitemporal use, seen in the case of reuse of menhirs in the Alentejo (text 18)<sup>18</sup>; (vii) the proposal for the chronological contextualization of representations of rock art based on the parallel analysis of elements of material culture (text 16)<sup>19</sup>; the approach to the representation of weapons in the so-called Atlantic Art, based on new discoveries by photogrammetric recording (text 15)<sup>20</sup>.

In the set of chapters II, III and IV, we approach issues dear to archaeologists, and that pervade almost all texts: (i) the fences and walls delimiting the places and their role in the historical regional processes or even more comprehensive wider processes; (ii) mobile and rock art (including that on megaliths) that takes place in different contexts and assumes, with its own codes, the act of unveiling, as an agent of conduct, more than a symbol of them; (iii) the understanding that the various types of «megalithic monuments» of the Iberian Peninsula (and Europe) are an integral part of the neolithic process, being an idiosyncratic characteristic of it since ancient chronologies; (iv) the multiple functions of material culture, especially the ceramics, as the lithic industry was briefly

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<sup>13</sup> DINIZ *et al.*, 2022; VILLALOBOS GARCÍA, RODRÍGUEZ MARCOS, 2022 (both in this book).

<sup>14</sup> RODRÍGUEZ PÉREZ *et al.*, 2021; BOTELHO, 2022 (both in this book).

<sup>15</sup> FONSECA, 2022 (in this book).

<sup>16</sup> BARROSO BERMEJO *et al.*, 2022 (in this book).

<sup>17</sup> ALVES, COMENDADOR REY, 2022 (in this book).

<sup>18</sup> ROCHA, 2022 (in this book).

<sup>19</sup> SENNA-MARTÍNEZ, LUÍS, MENDES, 2022 (in this book).

<sup>20</sup> PEREIRA MARTINEZ, 2022 (in this book).

addressed in this volume (with the exception of text 18<sup>21</sup>, about archeopetrography, referred to above), and occasional typological approaches to lithic materials — particularly arrowheads — used as chrono-cultural indicators.

#### 4. EPILOGUE

For publishers, archaeologists and prehistorians, all texts are pertinent, for one or more reasons. However, we are pleased to note that a large number of these were written by authors from younger generations who, as individual authors or as part of teams, have contributed to naturalize the new «analytical methods». They, systematically using new communication technologies, are creating new representations, panoptic at times, it is true, but which at the same time constitute other mental tools to be able to access the Past in the present.

We hope that the quality of this e-book also responds, in its quality of presentation and dissemination, to the wishes and desires of the authors.

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<sup>21</sup> AUBRY et al. 2022 (in this book).

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