

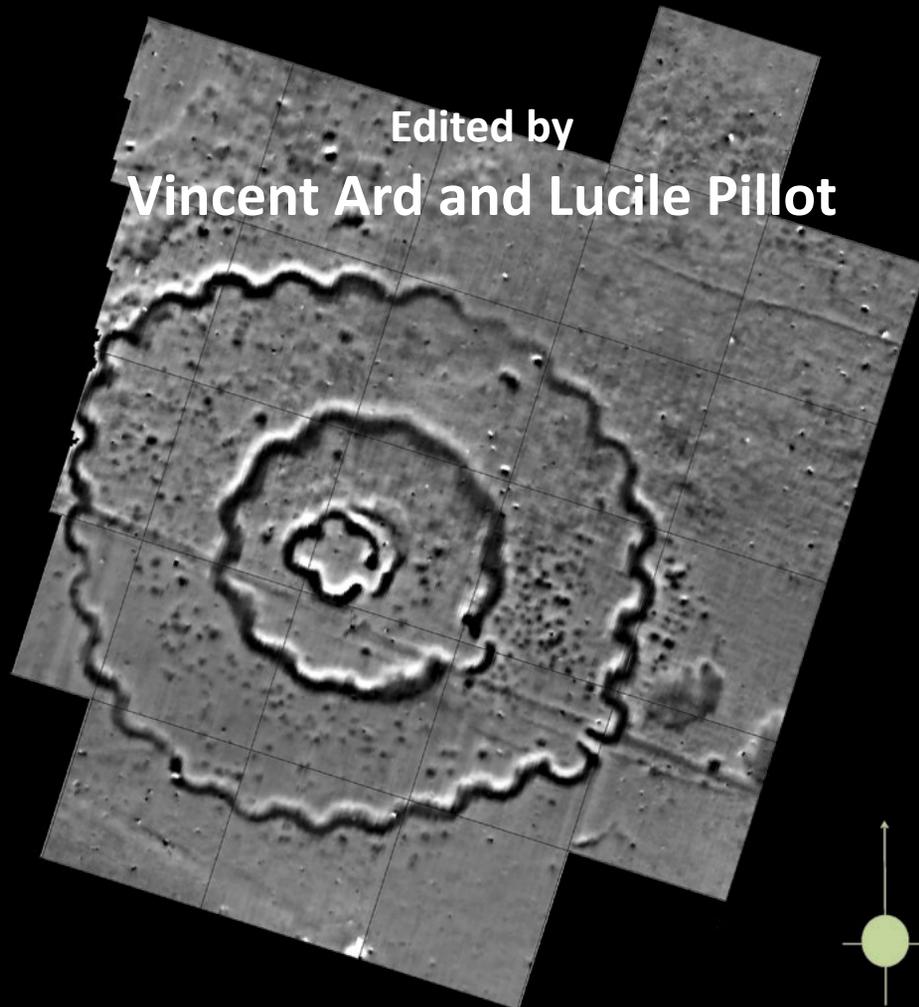


GIANTS IN THE LANDSCAPE: MONUMENTALITY AND TERRITORIES IN THE EUROPEAN NEOLITHIC

PROCEEDINGS OF THE XVII UISPP WORLD
CONGRESS (1–7 SEPTEMBER, BURGOS, SPAIN)

Volume 3 / Session A25d

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Prehistoric ditched enclosures and necropolises in Southern Iberia: a diachronic overview

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Abstract

In this paper, we shall briefly describe the main features of Southern Iberian Final Neolithic and Copper Age enclosures, and will examine how they relate in space and time to Prehistoric funerary contexts. We will attempt to show how this relationship changed through time. In the 4th millennium BC, during the Final Neolithic, both megalithic tombs and ditched enclosures were built. However, very rarely they are close in space. In the 3rd millennium BC, coinciding with the Chalcolithic, necropolises of tombs (tholoi and hypogea) began to form around ditched enclosures of the period. However, this process only occurred at a few sites – the ‘mega-sites’.

Keywords: *Archaeology, funerary practices, human remains, pits, megalithic tombs, ditched enclosures, Neolithic, Copper Age, Iberian Peninsula*

Résumé

Dans ce article, nous allons décrire brièvement les principales formes d’enceintes du Néolithique récent et du Chalcolithique du sud de la péninsule ibérique et nous examinerons leurs relations dans l’espace et le temps avec les contextes funéraires contemporains. Nous montrerons comment ces relations changent au cours du temps. Au cours du 4e millénaire avant notre ère, au Néolithique récent, des tombes mégalithiques ainsi que des enceintes fossoyées sont construites en même temps mais rarement à proximité. Au 3e millénaire, au cours du Chalcolithique, des nécropoles funéraires composées de tholoi et d’hypogées commencent à se former autour de certaines enceintes: les ‘méga-sites’.

Mots-clés: *Archeologie, pratiques funéraires, restes humains, fosses, tombes mégalithiques, enceintes fossoyées, Néolithique, Chalcolithique, péninsule ibérique*

Introduction

Neolithic and Copper Age ditched enclosures (4th-3rd millennia BC) are one of the hottest topics in Iberian Prehistory today (e.g. see Márquez-Romero and Jiménez-Jáimez 2013). They have been found in almost all Iberian regions, but there seems to be a higher concentration in the central plateau (*Meseta Central*), the East (*Levante*) and, particularly, the South, where most fieldwork has been carried out, and where the focus of this paper will be (Fig. 1). Since their discovery in the 1970s, Southern Iberian ditched enclosures have been interpreted mainly as fortified villages defended by ditches and other non-surviving above ground elements such as palisades or banks. These so-called fortifications were supposedly built and inhabited by large groups that lived all year round within the limits defined by the ditches (e.g. Lizcano *et al.* 1991-1992; Arteaga and Cruz-Auñón 1999; Cruz-Auñón and Arteaga 1999; Nocete 2001; Morán and Parreira 2003; Cámara *et al.* 2011). Only in the

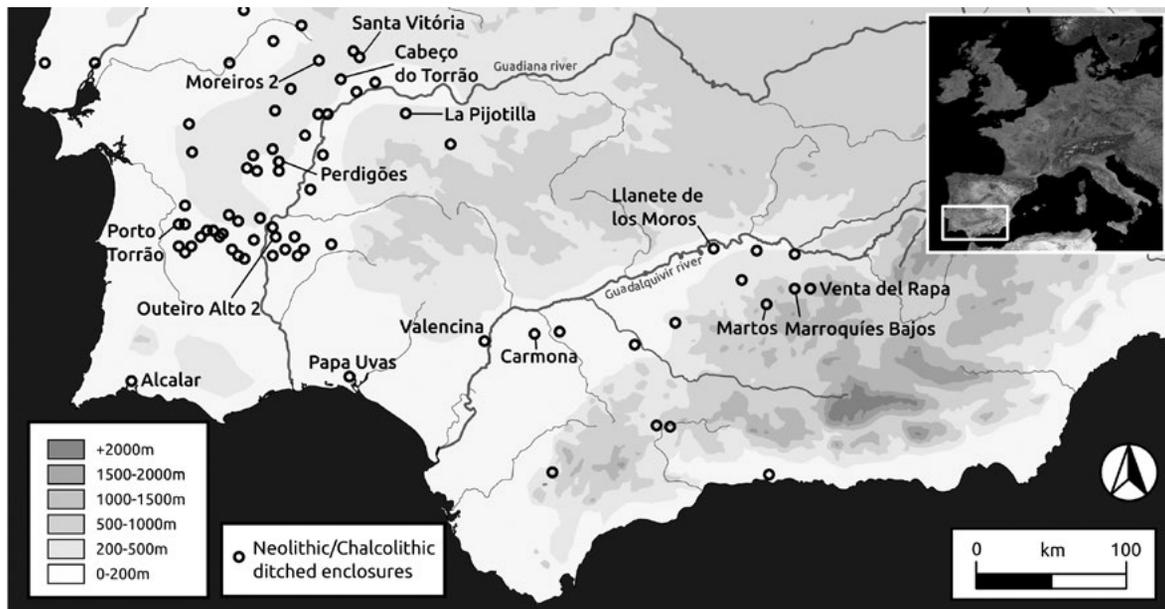


FIGURE 1. MAPS SHOWING THE GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF NEOLITHIC AND COPPER AGE DITCHED ENCLOSURES IN SOUTHERN IBERIA, WITH INDICATION OF THE SITES MENTIONED IN THE TEXT (BACKGROUND SATELLITE IMAGE OF EUROPE BY RETO STÖCKLI, NASA EARTH OBSERVATORY).

last 12 years this interpretation has been challenged, on the basis of little attention paid to issues of temporality and formation of the archaeological record, ambiguous evidence of stable occupation of the inner areas at many enclosures or questions about the defensive capabilities of said places and the structures that circumscribe them (e.g. Márquez-Romero 2003; 2006; Martín de la Cruz and Lucena 2003; Márquez-Romero and Jiménez-Jáimez 2010, 2013; Valera 2012a; García Sanjuán and Murillo-Barroso 2013).

Where Southern Iberian Prehistoric ditched enclosures are conceived as places occupied throughout the year, the relationship between them and contemporary necropolises – chiefly megalithic – may seem straightforward: they would represent a dualistic organisation of space within a settlement, with an area devoted to daily life and activities – the village or town –, separated from another one reserved for funerary rituals – the necropolis or cemetery. History and anthropology, however, show that this duality between the living and the dead, and particularly the distribution of space in terms of the opposition of the sacred and the profane, or the ritual and the everyday, is typically Western, and does not necessarily apply to other cultural contexts (Brück 1999). If the conceptualisation of Southern Iberian ditched enclosures as fortified and permanently inhabited settlements is questioned, and instead more fluid or mobile lifestyles and settlement patterns are proposed (see above), then the issue becomes even more problematic. These questions are underlined by the Final Neolithic and Chalcolithic Southern Iberian evidence itself, for most ditched enclosures do not have an associated necropolis in their proximity.

In this paper, we shall briefly describe the main features of Southern Iberian Final Neolithic and Copper Age enclosures, and will examine how they relate in space and time to funerary contexts. Before we attempt to do that, a clarification involving the concept of ‘necropolis’ used here needs to be made, nonetheless. Often at Southern Iberian ditched enclosures two contrasting phenomena occur:

- a. The discovery of human remains in dedicated containers, such as megalithic or rock-cut tombs, often accompanied with what archaeologists have traditionally termed grave goods.

- b. The recording of complete bodies, body parts or isolated bones recovered from ditches, pits and other non-dedicated contexts. Here, the presence of human remains does not appear to be essential, but contingent upon other conditions being met; pits and ditches containing human remains are actually a minority relative to the totality of such features.

This dichotomy could even have a spatial component. For example, at Porto Torrão (Ferreira do Alentejo, Portugal), there seems to be a clear contrast in the distribution of features including human bones. Collective burials following a normalised funerary ritual in tombs, which constitute the majority of contexts with human bones at the site, are located outside the ditched enclosures. By contrast, pits containing osteological remains, much more scarce, are located inside the enclosed areas (Rodrigues 2014). Of course, there are grey areas, and the evidence from other sites may show different patterns. It all could very well end up being a continuum of practices involving the human body, of which we are seeing only the two extremes. But we believe it is worth considering the possibility that, overall, the differences between ‘a’ and ‘b’ could be indicative of two or more distinctive practices or behaviours in the past. It is important to note, however, that we do not see the binary character of the evidence as described here as a materialisation of the typically Western dichotomies of the sacred and the profane; the meaning of this distinction is much more subtle, complex and difficult for us to grasp than that.

For pragmatic reasons, not least of which is to make our point more evident, in this paper we will restrict the use of the concept of ‘necropolis’ to only a subset of all the contexts in which human remains are found, coinciding with phenomenon ‘a’ above. Thus, we will consider a necropolis a cluster of dedicated funerary containers with some kind of normalised shape, size and building technique. These structures must contain human bones (or it must be suspected that at some point they did), and in them the human body has to be the most important element of the rite, its *raison d’être*, the centre of attention. That should be reflected in a dominant position within the funerary container, in quantitative, or especially, qualitative terms. Although not essential, a common feature of funerary contexts is the appearance of grave goods, that is, an assemblage of items which can directly be associated with the bodies, supposedly deposited to accompany the deceased in their transition to the world of the dead, following existing guidelines or traditions. We are aware of the somewhat arbitrary character of this definition, and we see it more as a provisional working hypothesis worth exploring than as a true fact; the conclusions reached will therefore have to be taken as such (see also Márquez-Romero and Jiménez-Jáimez 2014).

Unfortunately, data is still fragmentary in many cases, particularly as regards the size of the enclosures and the layout of the ditches. Further, the quantity and quality of available dates does not yet come close to that of other European regions such as Britain (Whittle *et al.* 2011), and is often clearly insufficient to understand the relationship in time between different elements of the archaeological record like ditches, pits, walls, houses and tombs. It is nevertheless good enough to support the idea that Iberian ditched enclosures were a long-lasting phenomenon in the Prehistory of the Iberian Peninsula. Perhaps for that reason, ditched enclosures are quite diverse in their defining characteristics and probably their social roles. Therefore, they, and the relationship between them and the necropolises of the same period, must be understood in time. This paper will hence address these issues following a chronological sequence.

1. Final Neolithic ditched enclosures and necropolises in Iberia (last three centuries of the 4th millennium BC)

The earliest known ditched enclosures in Southern Iberia thus far date back to last three centuries of the fourth millennium cal BC (Márquez Romero and Jiménez Jáimez 2010: 198-204, 2013: 455; Valera 2013: 338; Boaventura and Mataloto 2013: 86). Moreiros 2 (Portalegre, Portugal) (Boaventura 2006; Valera *et al.* 2013a), Cabeço do Torrão (Elvas, Portugal) (Lago and Albergaria 2001), Llanete de los Moros (Córdoba, Spain) (Martín de la Cruz 1987) and the earlier acts of ditch-digging at

Perdigões (Reguengos de Monsaraz, Portugal) (Lago *et al.* 1998; Márquez *et al.* 2011; Valera *et al.* 2014), Porto Torrão (Beja, Portugal) (Valera and Filipe 2004; Rodrigues 2014); Papa Uvas (Huelva, Spain) (Martín de la Cruz and Lucena 2003), and Martos (Jaén, Spain) (Lizcano *et al.* 1991-1992; Lizcano 1999) are the ones which provided more information so far.

Southern Iberian Final Neolithic ditched enclosures were often located in river basins like those of Guadiana and Guadalquivir. Generally speaking, they do not present traces of houses or walls; usually only structures dug in the ground (enclosing ditches, pits) are documented, with sporadic instances of possible foundation trenches for timber palisades. Data about their layout is fragmentary and incomplete in most cases, but they appear to have been concentric circular or oval spaces, sometimes with somewhat straight sides, delimited by ditches. The ditches are often non-causewayed, with the exception of few entrances, ie spots where the ditches are interrupted, allowing access in or out of the enclosed space. Some of the ditches are wavy or sinuous (Valera 2012a). The size of the enclosed areas varies from less than 1 ha to around 10 ha, while the dimensions of the ditches range from 1 m to 6 m in width and 1 m to 3 m in depth, although the average Final Neolithic ditch would be around 2 m wide and 2 m deep. The profile of the ditches is normally either U or V-shaped. Most pits are approximately circular, 1 to 2 m in both depth and diameter. In broad terms, enclosures from this period appear to have shared the Neolithic landscapes of Southern Iberia with other elements –i.e pit sites, lithic scatters, schematic art places and, of course, funerary contexts. Regarding this, megalithic (*dolmens*, *antas*) and rock-cut tombs (*hypogea* or ‘artificial caves’) holding collective inhumations constitute the main forms of burial throughout the period.

There is only one Southern Iberian site dated in this period where a clear relation of proximity between a ditched enclosure and a megalithic or rock-cut funerary structure has been observed. That is Cabeço do Torrão (Barbacena, Elvas, Portugal). Located in a flat, low hill but with good visibility over its surroundings, excavations carried out in the late 1990s detected a ditch and 14 pits. The ditch is V-shaped, 1 m deep and 1,5 m wide at the most, and describes a small enclosure of less than 1 ha. No radiocarbon dates have been obtained, but the typologies of the ceramic materials unearthed suggest a Final Neolithic chronology for the ditch and most of the pits. 15 small menhirs or standing stones were found immediately SW of the ditch, and over 100 m further in the same direction a small *anta* (megalithic funerary chamber) containing Neolithic material was identified and excavated. However, there are problems with the association between the enclosure and the anta. Simply put, at the moment there is no way to know if both structures were in use simultaneously (Lago and Albergaria 2001: 60).

Cabeço do Torrão is, at best, a weak exception to a more general pattern consisting on the non-proximity of ditched enclosures and megalithic burials in the 4th millennium BC. In fact, most Final Neolithic ditched enclosures elsewhere in Southern Iberia do not show a direct association with megalithic tombs. Some indirect relationships can be seen, nonetheless. Perdigões (Reguengos de Monsaraz, Portugal) (Lago *et al.* 1998) is a good example. The site comprises no fewer than 12 roughly concentric ditched rings, some of them wavy ditches, with at least one palisade (inner circle) and thousands of pits (Márquez-Romero *et al.* 2011). Ditches and pits are of diverse chronologies, from the Final Neolithic to the Late Copper Age (second half of the 4th millennium to the last third of the 3rd millennium cal BC) (Valera *et al.* 2014). To the E of the enclosures there is also an area with several Copper Age tombs and a cluster of standing stones (*cromeleque*). The site as a whole occupies an area of about 16 ha. For now we will focus on the Final Neolithic evidence only (ditch 5, probably ditch 8, and especially ditches 12 and 6, enclosing an area of just over 1 ha, as well as a few pits), thus momentarily ignoring the Chalcolithic necropolis and enclosures.

Perdigões is located near the right bank of the Ribeira do Álamo valley, a tributary of the Guadiana river. The valley is rich in Neolithic megalithic tombs (*antas*) that have been known for a long time (Leisner and Leisner 1951; Gonçalves 1992). The chronology of these structures is sometimes unknown or unreliable, but it is very likely that when the earliest ditched circuits were constructed

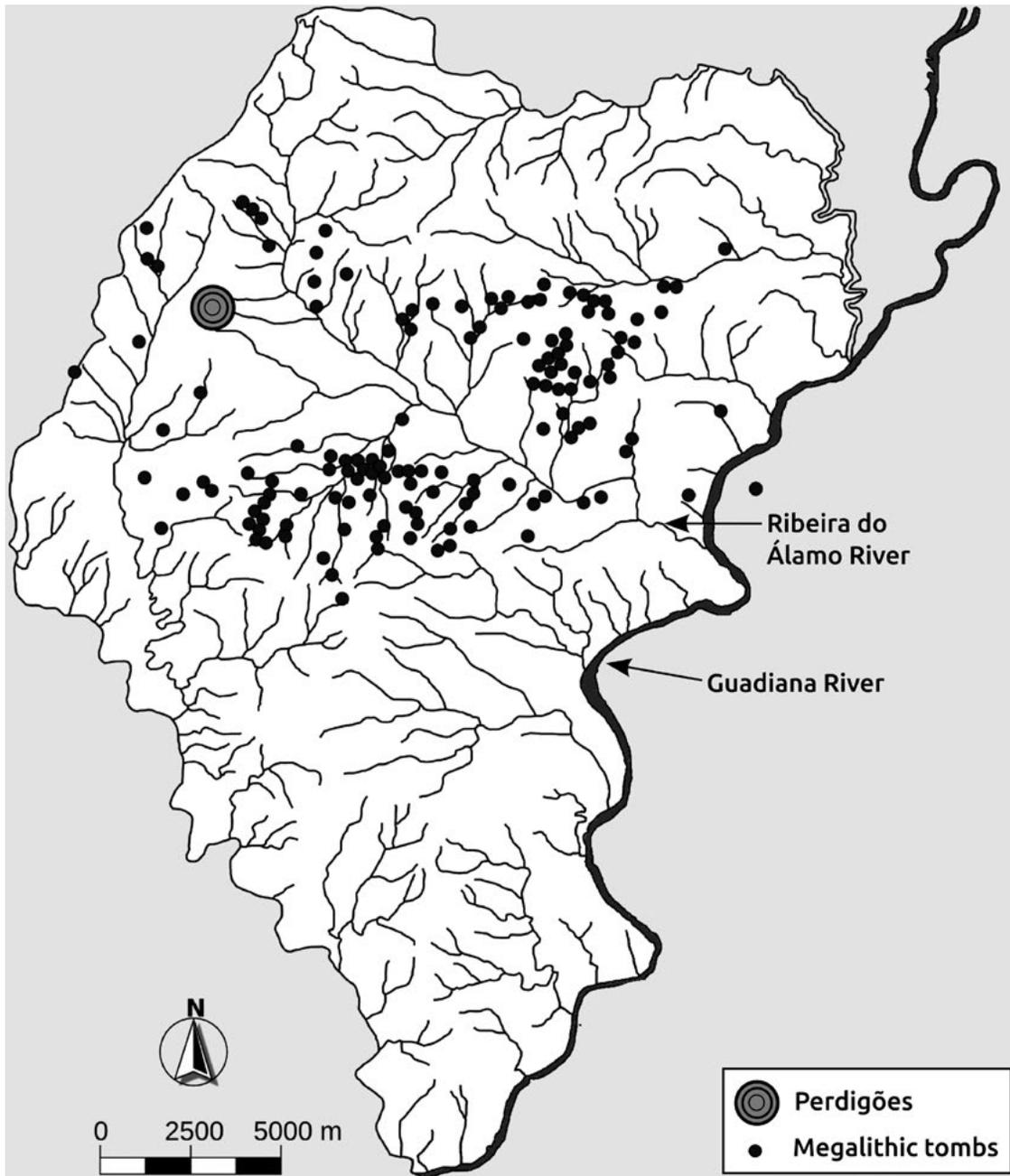


FIGURE 2. PERDIGÕES (REGUENGOS DE MONSARAZ, PORTUGAL) AND ITS SPATIAL RELATIONS WITH NEOLITHIC MEGALITHIC TOMBS (*ANTAS*) WITHIN THE LANDSCAPE SURROUNDING THE RIBEIRA DO ÁLAMO RIVER (MODIFIED FROM VALERA 2006, FIG. 3). IT IS A GOOD EXAMPLE OF THE INDIRECT CONNECTIONS BETWEEN DITCHED ENCLOSURES AND NECROPOLISES IN THE FINAL NEOLITHIC (4TH MILLENNIUM CAL BC) IN SOUTHERN IBERIA.

at Perdigões, numerous *antas* were already populating the valley (Fig. 2). Crucially, Perdigões is not only located on the margins of a valley with plenty of Neolithic megalithic burials: the local topography of the place is also naturally oriented towards them. Perdigões is characterised by a gentle slope descending from W to E. The N and the S of the place are also higher than the centre of the ditched enclosures. It all results in a basin-like shape, or even better, a Greek theatre: from the centre of the site visibility is almost non-existent to the N, the S and the W. Visibility is, however, good to the E, which is where the menhirs are located and the valley begins and, with it, the megalithic tombs spread throughout the lands that lead to the Guadiana river.

Currently available evidence from sites like Moreiros 2, Porto Torrão, Papa Uvas, Llanete de los Moros or Martos (see references above), among others, suggest that, with its peculiarities, Perdigões is a paradigmatic example of the dynamics of the Late 4th millennium BC in the region: megalithic or rock-cut tombs did not form necropolises near ditched enclosures during the Final Neolithic in Southern Iberia. Instead, they were more or less dispersed across the landscape, and the relationships between enclosures and necropolis were indirect. For example, no megalithic burials were recorded in the immediate surroundings of the Moreiros 2 ditched enclosures (Arronches, Portalegre, Portugal). However, an anta sits 1 km away to the NE. Interestingly, visibility to and from the site is restricted in most directions, but less so to the NE, towards the megalithic tomb (Boaventura 2006: 68).

In contrast with this, even though most Southern Iberian Final Neolithic ditched enclosures have not been extensively surveyed, they are known to abound in pits. Of those pits, a relatively small percentage, located either within the boundaries created by the enclosing ditches or in their proximity, contain human bones or complete bodies. That is the case, for example, of a few pits at Llanete de los Moros (Martín de la Cruz 1987, p. 48), Perdigões (Valera and Godinho 2009; Valera and Silva 2011: 11) or Martos (Lizcano *et al.* 1991-1992: 21). In our view, these instances should not be mistaken for necropolises or cemeteries. Unlike what we would normally expect from a necropolis, in all these sites pits are numerous but those with human bones are few; they appear to be the exception and not the rule. Further, the presence of human remains does not fundamentally alter the content of the pits. Whether they include human bones or not, most pits usually hold complex assemblages comprising a variable combination of stone blocks of varied types and sizes, artefacts such as ceramic sherds, flint tools and knapping waste or quern stones, often broken or incomplete, as well as animal remains, both complete and articulated carcasses and isolated bones or body parts. Moreover, although the sample size is still small, it seems that the arrangement of osteological remains within the pits is not normalised, and no clear-cut grave goods can be recognised.

2. Chalcolithic (3rd millennium BC) ditched enclosures and necropolises in Iberia

In the third millennium cal BC (Chalcolithic/Copper Age) the general picture turned more complicated in Iberia. Ditched enclosures continued to be built arguably until the last few centuries of the millennium (Márquez Romero and Jiménez Jáimez 2010: 204-208, 2013: 455; Valera 2013: 339). However, both the sites themselves and the landscapes they populated evolved.

There is reason to believe that the main heyday of the Southern Iberian ditched enclosure tradition occurred during the Copper Age. The main characteristics of Iberian ditched enclosures mentioned above, –ie tendency to circularity, concentric, continuous and often sinuous ditches, scarcity of undisputed evidence of houses or walls, profusion of pits, depositional practices, etc.– remained more or less constant, at least for most sites. Examples of this are Outeiro Alto 2 (Serpa, Portugal) (Valera *et al.* 2013b), Santa Vitória (Portalegre, Portugal) (cited in Hurtado 2008: 192), Venta del Rapa (Jaén, Spain) (Lechuga *et al.* 2014), or the late acts of ditch-digging at Papa Uvas (see references above), amongst many others. The general impression, therefore, is not one of structural change but of continuity. However, the social forces that led to the construction of ditched enclosures, whatever they were, not only continued but intensified even further, as reflected in the appearance of a few larger sites with truly monumental features. That is the case of Valencina de la Concepción (Seville, Spain) (Vargas 2004; García Sanjuán *et al.* 2013), La Pijotilla (Badajoz, Spain) (Hurtado 1986, 1999, 2008), Alcalar (Portimão, Portugal) (Morán and Parreira 2003), Marroquies Bajos (Jaén, Spain) (Zafra *et al.* 1999, 2003) and later phases of building activity at Perdigões and Porto Torrão (see references above), which show unique characteristics. At those ‘mega-sites’, interior areas substantially increased. Thus, the outer ditch at Marroquies Bajos enclosed an estimated area of over 100 ha, La Pijotilla 70 ha, Alcalar 20 ha and Perdigões 16 ha, while Chalcolithic features are spread across vast areas of more than 400 ha at Valencina de la Concepción and Porto Torrão – including their extensive necropolises, as we will see below –. The ditches also grew, reaching up to 9 m or even 20 m in width and 7 m in depth on occasions. Even the pits seem to be generally larger.

Pit sites and other characteristic elements of the Final Neolithic landscapes persisted. However, certain aspects of the cultural landscapes appear to dramatically change at the beginning of the Copper Age period. In particular, the 3rd millennium cal BC saw the advent of new architectural principles in the form of stone-walled enclosures, with ‘towers’ and ‘bastion-like’ features, akin to the well-known south-eastern site of Los Millares (e.g. Molina *et al.* 2004; Jorge 1994). Restricted geographically largely to the Iberian *Atlantic Façade* and the Southeast, stone-walled enclosures include what appear to be circular houses and other domestic features. The geographical distributions of ditched and walled enclosures partially overlap each other. In the absence of detailed chronologies, it is commonly assumed that they somehow shared the same spaces in certain areas of the Iberian Peninsula during these centuries.

At some point during the 3rd millennium BC, circular, stone-based houses, and stone masonry walls similar to those typical of the aforementioned walled enclosures, including towers and bastion-like features, began to appear at some of the ‘mega’ ditched enclosures (e.g. Alcalar or Marroquíes Bajos), although their chronology and therefore their relationship with ditches and pits often remain unclear. Metal artefacts, amongst other novel material culture items, appear on the archaeological record corresponding to this period.

The practice of deposition of human bones, body parts or complete skeletons in pits not only continued but increased, especially at, but not limited to, the ‘mega’ enclosures. Likewise, some sites saw the deposition of human remains in ditches. In both cases, and looking at the available data, there does not appear to be any kind of normalisation, and the diversity of sex and age distributions, anatomical conditions of the bodies, positions, treatment of the bones and accompanying objects, if any, is considerable (see e.g. Márquez-Romero and Jiménez-Jáimez 2010: 213-219; Valera 2012b). At least at some sites, these practices remained numerically less important than burials in tombs (again, see for example Rodrigues 2014 for Porto Torrão), but more data is needed to sustain this inference at a more general level (see e.g. García Sanjuán and Díaz-Zorita Bonilla 2013 for Valencina; and Valera, this volume, for Perdigões).

As regards normalised burials, a ‘second megalithic tradition’ featuring corbelled dome tombs, normally with a corridor and a circular chamber, called *tholoi*, materialised (García Sanjuán 2009: 18). At the same time, rock-cut tombs (hypogea) remained to be constructed, whilst the use and re-use of old mortuary monuments continued (Boaventura 2011). More importantly for the objectives of this paper, in Southern Iberia some of these forms of burials (*tholoi*, hypogea) formed necropolises nearby Chalcolithic ditched enclosures, or viceversa. Intra-site temporality is a big issue here: the contemporaneity of most of these features remains undemonstrated, and things that are close in space today not necessarily were close in time in the past. If the model proposed by Whittle *et al.* (2011) for Early Neolithic Britain is any indication, it is unlikely that Iberian ditched enclosures were constructed without a break for almost 1500 years, from the Final Neolithic to the Late Chalcolithic; instead, short bursts of building activity might have alternated with periods of relative inactivity on that front. If that is true also in Southern Iberia, the funerary structures mentioned above could have been built in-between episodes of ditch-digging. However, the British model does not necessarily apply to Southern Iberia as is, and Iberian chronologies do not allow yet to make inferences of that nature. Moreover, the proximity of tombs and ditched enclosures at some sites, regardless of the diachronic or synchronic character of their relationship, is a novelty of the period that deserves attention in itself, particularly when compared to the Final Neolithic.

Another important aspect of this is the restricted nature of the phenomenon. There are about 30 Chalcolithic ditched sites in Southern Iberia – counting just once the sites that have multiple Copper Age ditches such as Perdigões or La Pijotilla –, and many more are probable. Of those, only 6, maybe 7, have Chalcolithic necropolises in their proximity: La Pijotilla, Perdigões, Porto Torrão, Alcalar, Valencina de la Concepción, Marroquíes Bajos (see references above) and perhaps Carmona (Seville, Spain), where, according to several sources, a *tholos* was found in the 19th century (Conlin

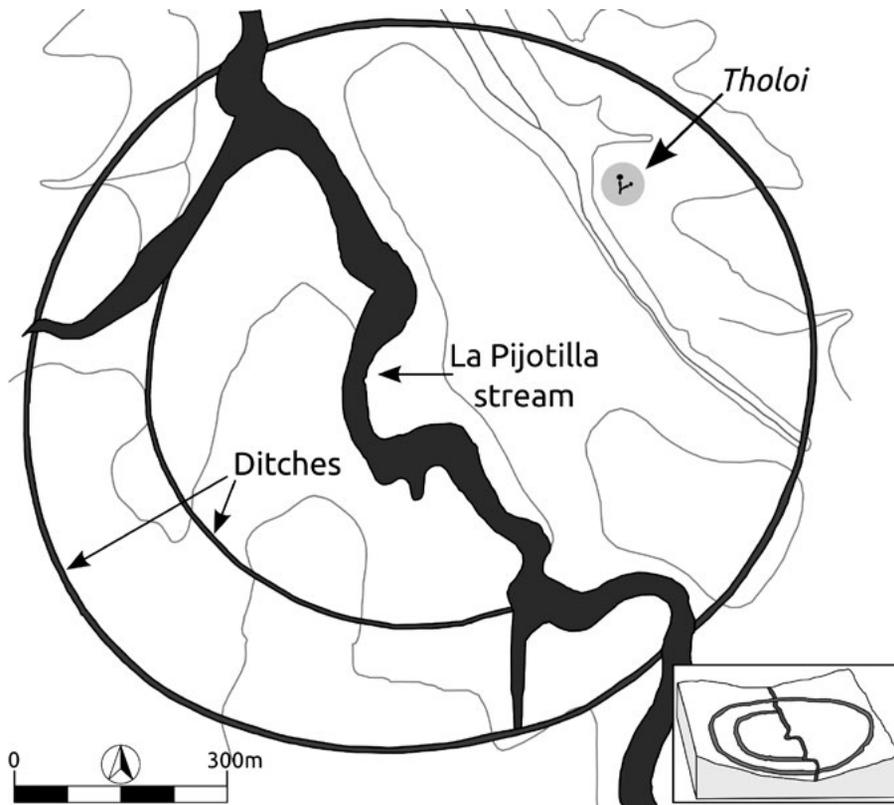


FIGURE 3. FLOOR PLAN OF LA PIJOTILLA (BADAJOZ) DITCHED ENCLOSURE, SPLIT INTO TWO HALVES BY A STREAM. THE NECROPOLIS, FEATURING SEVERAL THOLOI AND SOME SIMPLER FORMS, IS TODAY WITHIN THE ENCLOSED AREA, ALTHOUGH THE TEMPORALITY OF THE OUTER DITCH REMAINS UNCLEAR (MODIFIED FROM HURTADO 1999, FIG. 4). THIS ILLUSTRATES THE MUCH CLOSER CONNECTIONS BETWEEN (SOME) DITCHED ENCLOSURES AND NECROPOLISES IN THE SOUTHERN IBERIAN COPPER AGE (3RD MILLENNIUM CAL BC).

2003: 87-88). Necropolises nearby Southern Iberian ditched enclosures are, therefore, unusual, even in the Chalcolithic. Importantly, the sites with clusters of tombs are also the largest and the ones which possess the most monumental features (ditches and pits) in the region. In other words, as far as Southern Iberian Copper Age ditched enclosures is concerned, only the ‘mega-sites’ were accompanied by necropolises.

Although simpler forms exist, the necropolises at the Copper Age ‘mega-sites’ commonly comprise tholoi and hypogea and usually contain collective inhumations. In a few instances, the outer ditch was constructed in such a way to include some pre-existing tombs in the enclosed area; this occurs at Perdigões (Valera *et al.* 2014: 20-21) and probably La Pijotilla (Hurtado 1986) (Fig. 3), although the chronology of the outer circuit at the latter is less certain. By contrast, at Valencina de la Concepción (Cruz-Auñón and Mejías 2013) and Porto Torrão (Valera *et al.* in press) the tombs appear to be spread across such wide areas that some funerary contexts are located several hundred metres, or even kilometres, away from the known ditches, and organised in several clusters. More and better surveys, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the layout of the ditches, are needed, nonetheless.

Concluding remarks

Despite the evident shortcomings of the available data, in terms of spatial distribution of the evidence and, particularly, their temporality, some basic trends seem to be emerging in the archaeological

record of the 4th and 3rd millennia BC in Southern Iberia. The changing nature of the relationship between necropolises and ditched enclosures throughout the period under study appears to be one of them. In the 4th millennium BC, during the Final Neolithic, both megalithic tombs and ditched enclosures were built. However, very rarely they are close in space. When ditched enclosures and tombs coincide in one region, e.g. the Ribeira do Álamo valley around Perdigões, the megalithic burials do not seem to cluster in the proximities of the enclosure. Quite the contrary, they are often distributed throughout the landscape, outside the enclosed spaces and almost always away from the ditches and their accompanying pits. Interestingly, some human remains, both body parts and whole carcasses, have been identified at ditched enclosures of the 4th millennium BC, but these are mostly restricted to a minority of pits. Hence, human bones found at ditched enclosures of this period were buried in non-monumental, non-dedicated containers distributed throughout non-specifically-funerary areas.

In the 3rd millennium BC, coinciding with the Chalcolithic, and in clear contrast with the Final Neolithic, necropolises of tombs (tholoi and hypogea) began to form around ditched enclosures of the period. However, this process only occurred at a few sites – the ‘mega-sites’ – that stand out from the rest because of their unique characteristics: large enclosed areas, monumental features (ditches and pits) and sometimes walls and houses. Moreover, the apparent association of ditched enclosures and dedicated funerary areas consisting of clusters of tombs should only be taken as valid when the simultaneity of their use is demonstrated with systematic radiocarbon dating programmes. Unfortunately, that is not the case for most sites at the moment, and the chronological relationships between ditches, pits, walls, tombs and houses often remain unclear.

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