

A BRIEF NOTE ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOURSES CONCERNING THE PROTO-HISTORY OF NORTHERN PORTUGAL AND GALICIA

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A brief note on archaeological discourses concerning the proto-history of northern Portugal and Galicia

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ABSTRACT

The following text intends to provide a short but clear insight on the classicist approaches concerning the proto-history of the northern region of Portugal and Galicia of Spain. During the last 40 years, many were the archaeologists that dedicated their work on this region. However, as the decades passed by, a conglomerate of theoretical plots was formed until such point that history of these ancient societies became something rather confusing. In order to achieve new and clean readings, it is first necessary to perform a fragmentation of scientific paradigms that prevail for this particular chronological period and finally enhance the archaeological polymorph universe that is notable nowadays.

Key-words: Archaeology; Discourses; Proto-History; North of Portugal and Galicia.

RESUMO

O seguinte texto pretende disponibilizar uma curta análise das abordagens classicistas na proto-história da região do norte de Portugal e Galiza de Espanha. Ao longo dos últimos 40 anos, muitos foram os arqueólogos que dedicaram os seus trabalhos para esta região. Porém, à medida que as décadas iam passando, foi-se formando um conglomerado de diversas parcelas teóricas que propiciam o desentendimento e mesmo confusão na narrativa histórica. Para que seja possível alcançar novas leituras, é primeiro necessário proceder a uma fragmentação dos paradigmas científicos que subsistem para este período cronológico, assim como valorizar o seu universo polimorfo arqueológico que hoje se evidencia.

Palavras-chave: Arqueologia; Discursos; Proto-História; Norte de Portugal e Galiza.

1. A scientific paradigm for northern Portugal and Galicia

The study of the Portuguese proto-history in the northern region began by the end of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century with authors such as Francisco Martins Sarmiento, Mário Cardoso, Afonso do Paço, Joaquim dos Santos Júnior, among others. In a time when archaeology in Portugal was still in an embryonic state, these first studies came to contribute for what would become the founding pillars of many scientific paradigms that even today endure in the Portuguese archaeological thinking. In the second half of the 20th century a new generation of archaeologists, such as Carlos Alberto Ferreira de Almeida and Armando Coelho Ferreira da Silva, dedicated their work to search for the region's historical roots and to better understand their predecessors' views and theories. This period was crucial to consolidate the theory of "Cultura Castreja" or Castro Culture: a paradigm of the archaeological science that covers the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula.

In any ancient society, the organization of their habitat seems to always be related to its ecosystem, its economy, its patterns of social life and their mental, imaginary forms, something symbolic, hardly attributable today. Perhaps because architectures reflect the creation of space, the transformation of and the integration in the landscape and its close relation with the functioning of a society, this subject has been target of interest and study by various socio-cultural interpretive models since the 20th century. Nevertheless, it is important to ask ourselves "do the political and social contexts influence in the archaeological discourse and thinking of researchers?" According to Khun (1970), that is one of the reasons why historians, by confronting themselves with a particular scientific theory, are faced with error conglomerates, myths and superstitions that had an inhibiting role on new components to appear and favor its modernization. And assuming that the archaeological interpretation is partially subjective, this little text seeks to expose some of the troubling regarding the theories on proto-history of northern Portugal and Galicia, and specially some of the interpretations on the Castro Culture's architectures.

A close analysis on the many evolutionary descriptions concerning "Castro Culture" reveals that this scientific paradigm goes throughout many historical contextualization's, despite always being faithful to the same structure of thinking. According to Silva (1986), the emergence of the Castro habitat in the northwestern Iberian Peninsula occurred in the late Bronze Age (900-800 BC). Briefly, this habitat is essentially characterized by the network of defensive walls, for its location in high places and that the number of interior structures suggests the capacity to assemble a reasonable number of population. To Almeida (1986: 70), these proto-historical societies have also chosen locations to settle by their small or medium size, but always by having "natural defense and installation conditions". Also, according to this author, the Castro Culture could have first intensified its cultural traits between 800 and 500 BC with the phenomenon of the 'Indo-Europeanization' of the Western Europe. To the author, this fact can be ensured by the evidence of Punic and Greek jewelry and ceramics in this region, resulted from the Mediterranean trade, the first signal of our global village fate. But many more signals of that fate would have to come, according to the established theory of Castro Culture.

2. Contextualizing the establishment

After the establishment of this theory and along its duration of validity (still until this day), many were the Portuguese and Spanish archaeologists that published a vast number of thesis and articles in order to either confront it or to complement it. To Fonte (2008), we can point the thesis of Martins (1990) as the first real attempt to confront the Castro Culture paradigm.

However, according to the first author, by isolating specific aspects of a particular geographical area, Martins ended up reinforcing the original paradigm. The same happened in the first decade of 2000 with the studies of González-Ruibal (2006-2007) that, despite the incisive and remarkable demarcation of regional differences in his syntheses, the author did not specifically question nor confronted the various theoretical plots of Castro Culture (FONTE, 2008).

The current paradigm of Castro Culture advocates that the significant transformations within the proto-historical settlements of northern Portugal and Galicia are justified by the migration of people carrying Hallstate influences (800 BC), by the influx of southern influences of the Tartessian world (700-600 BC), by the Mediterranean commercial contacts, by post-Hallstatt stimuli (600-500 BC), the coming of *Turduli Veteres* (500-400 BC) and finally by the arrival of the European phenomenon of the Roman Empire, with the army campaign of Decimus Junius Brutus (138-136 BC). It is then recognized a 'process of acculturation' between foreigners and natives along the chronological narrative (SILVA, 2015). However, it becomes problematic to analyze the different aspects of the 'material culture' throughout the first half of the 1st millennium BC, since the metals are systematically absent and imported products are scarce. Still, it has been from rare artifacts (such as jewelry) that an evolutionary chronology has been assigned to Castro Culture, specifically.

But to better understand the context in which Castro Culture was assigned, we must go back in time, to the second half of the 20th century. Despite the ending of the second world war, the western world was still living in fear and tension. But it was also a moment in time when new ideologies flourished as the modern democracies were being shaped. Henry Kissinger, the Secretary of State of the administration of Gerald Ford, believed that History have always really been a struggle for power between groups and nations. And what he took from the Cold War was a way of seeing the world as an interconnected system in perpetual tension. As a politician, his aim was to keep that system in balance and prevent it from falling to chaos. And when our word was divided, in an interview in 1975, Kissinger stated the following:

"I believe that with all the dislocations that we now experience, there also exists an extraordinary opportunity to form, for the first time in history, a truly Global Society carried out by the principles of interdependence, and if we act wisely and with vision, I think we can look back all this turmoil as the birth banks of a more creative and better system. If we miss the opportunity, I think there's gonna be chaos." - From Adam Curtis' documentary "HyperNormalisation" aired on BBC channel

Since then, and over the last 40 years, politicians, financials and even historians, rather to face out the real complexities of the world, constructed a simpler version of it - an overwhelming fate for us today. For as this new world grew, all of us went along with it, because the simplicity and positivism was reassuring. Culture-historical archaeology is a perfect example of that simplicity. And its reconstructions of our past had a great impact in museums and other forms of cultural related tourism, and consequently in the economy. We can aver that Marshall McLuhan's idea of a global village, contracted by the instantaneous movement of information between humans (The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man, 1962), became a premise in modern thinking. And its impact in our vision of the past is fairly evident.

3. Struggles & lack of postmodern debates

Not only the confusing narrative of this Castro Culture theory is based on rare artifacts, but it's also based on its architectures. For example, most of the readings concerning the proto-historical world of this specific region focus in an either natural or artificial fortification of the

settlements. The question of the origin of the Castro's round houses was also a widely discussed case. Authors such as Childe (1962), Almeida (1964: 201), among others, admit that "people that brought here agriculture and sedentary in the Neolithic" might have brought with them the rounded type architectures. However, this idea seems to expose the Neolithic as a Revolution, in a Jewish-Christian narrative of the Genesis: The Man that domesticate, with the knowledge that separates him from nature and his savaged Paleolithic Era, appears in the world with a new order, evangelizing Europe under the new laws of society, like a myth of the origins of the European Union (ALVES-FERREIRA, 2009). There is another theory pointing to a purely autochthonous style that was shaped over the ages, passing throughout the use of perishable materials to later use of stone. This theory, whose precursor was Jorge-Dias (1946), and perhaps because in the 40s Spain was under the regime of Franco, came to be accused by Silva (1994: 75) of manifesting a "patriotic" idea.

So, the most known and accepted theories concerning the subject of petrification and fortification of settlements first began with Romero-Masia (1976) and later Silva (1983-1984; 1986; 1995). Both authors define the 5th century BC as the beginning of the epistemological shift in societies of this region: villages made of perishable materials were at this moment being reconstructed with the use of stone and, among it, the creation of the first notable human artificial fortification devices in northern Portugal and Galicia. In fact, Silva (1986) took another step further and argued the fortified architectures in the 5th century BC would be linked, not only to the defense, but also as a display of more powerful groups within regional communities led by an elite of warriors. By other words, the community with a greater wall could intimidate communities with less architectural improvements and therefore prevent a physical and real conflict. It's to presume that the elite of warriors would have a significant role, according to this theory, for they were the ones to keep the system of conflict between communities in balance. The most extreme theory concerning this subject is probably the thesis of Queiroga (1992), where the author actually argued the walls we see in some Castros reflect an endemic State of War in the landscape of northern Portugal and Galicia. However, as Jorge (1997) refers, the archaeological record is extremely opaque for these point of views, and besides two Castro sites (Couto da Pena and S. Juzenda), there is no other evidence of artificially fortified settlements during the 5th century BC.

One decade passed since the end of the Soviet Union, and with the turning of the millennium, more were the archaeologists rising new theories for the Castro Culture's architectures, such as the subject of the fortification devices in these proto-historical settlements. Authors like González-Ruibal (2003) suggested that the construction of walls around the villages was, in fact, a delimitation method between the outside world and the domestic space. So instead the idea of an ancient society in perpetual tension of war and conflict over the territory, the author suggests that the walls we see in some Castros around the 5th century BC were actually used to reinforce the bonds of the inside community and its social identity. According to Lemos and Cruz (2006), it should also be borne in mind a possible deeper meaning for this architectural device. For these authors, the wall device enclosed a refugee space, host of guard, where the wall itself would unite both heaven and earth, and that this theory could be sustained by the archaeological findings of symbolic deposits of ashes of the dead that some settlements have inside these structures.

Nevertheless, archaeologists must be aware that, perhaps in certain cases, culture takes the form of tradition. By other words, an articulated set of beliefs and diversified practices that are taken for granted, although not always positively accepted. Apart from tradition, culture takes the form of common sense, which is based on unaware acceptance and felt as natural (Crespi, 1997). According to Almeida (1986), these proto-historical settlements remained in isolation until the approach of the Roman civilization. Also, for Martins and Jorge (1992: 364), with the

fall of the bronze production and circulation, the various communities of this region became more and more isolated from each other. This fact would explain the "lack of technical innovations in the region and a certain heterogeneity of cultural traits" in either its stone structures and organization of habitats, either at the level of other material evidence, such as the ceramics and other artifacts.

And despite all of this, archeology held in northern Portugal and Galicia have shown a somewhat diversity in some of these social and cultural traits, the most obvious being the existence of different rates of "development" among the various proto-historical settlements. Should we take the example of the proto-historical settlement of Lago, in Amares, where the archaeological record shows us that simple huts made of wood were still used during the 1st century BC. Plus, there is also a whole new protohistoric dimension in the region of Trás-os-Montes that is still to be fully debated (MARTINS et al., 2010; SANTOS, 2015). And that make us conclude that we are, perhaps, facing a proto-historical universe that is "polymorphous, hardly categorized or reducible to a single interpretation" (JORGE, 1999: 94).

3. Final considerations

According to Swidler, the sociology of culture should seek to identify aspects of cultural heritage that have lasting effects on the act, on the ways in which culture is used by social actors and on what specific historical changes weakens certain cultural forms, favoring the appearance of others (CRESPI, 1997). And to Almeida (1986: 163), the proto-historic settlements of northern Portugal and Galicia retains all its "prestige" after the Roman conquest and "continues to be imitated in the foundations of new settlements." It's also important to note that when we study the spaces of these sites, we must have in mind this particular idea of Bourdieu: the social space is an abstract representation, an observation point covering all those who make up the social world (CRESPI, 1997). In practice, what matters most are the private views that social actors have of a specific space, from the position they occupy and their attitude of either conservation or transformation during their own reality confrontations.

Also, the concept of 'material culture' is deeply connected to a modern form of the West to grasp the world, which may inhibit our ability to understand the past. To Thomas (2007), the material culture translates into a table of attributes and products of human societies that are extra-somatic and transmitted over generations by customized and personalized mechanisms. But in archeology, the concept of 'material culture' has been ambiguously used to represent either the adaptation of the mankind, either to express the species' achievement in this world. So we may aver that the main problem of 'material culture' in archeology is the fact that it is used as a qualifying term, observed from the lens of our contemporary context: perhaps the reason for the multifaceted point of views since the Cold War, and further conglomeration of errors and myths. And shall we not forget that archeology, not only contributes to the study of the relationship between materiality and memory, but it does have an active role in the formation of those same memories (HODDER, HUTSON, 2003). Memories that we also have the responsibility to deliver directly into the main public, into the global knowledge.

And the lack of archaeological data seems to also legitimate the attempt to linearly joint cultural changes with events described in classical literacy sources, such as Strabo's narratives in his Geography III. Although these sources seem to apply more or less accurately in more recent times (after the arrival of the Romans), reflecting them to earlier centuries may not be

conclusive. However, the archaeological discourse for this subject is also based on these classical narratives, specially to legitimize the idea that the migration of more evolved people from the central and northern Europe was crucial for the transformation of the protohistoric universe in this region: "*La richesse de la Galice et du nord du Portugal a donc été certainement un pôle d'attraction pour les nouveaux arrivants dans la péninsule ibérique*" (TRANOY, 1981: 43). And perhaps, it should be borne in mind that such radical cultural changes, if indeed existed, should be unmistakably evident in the archaeological record, as an overlay of a previous material culture with a new, strange, different one (MARTINS, JORGE, 1992).

Shanks and Tilley (1992) calls for archaeologists to detach themselves from categories of the evolutionary thought, recommending, instead, our focus in the particular and in the different. This approach doesn't mean that archaeologists must ignore certain features of the past to rather focus in other ones instead. In fact, by creating less absolute, less precipitated ways of interacting with the past, the effect in our readings will be quite the opposite. The equation between people, their culture, and the land they inhabit is central to the time-space systematics of the discipline of archaeology (SHANKS, 2001). And we, as readers of the past, must be aware of our own circumstances and how we mirror them in our interpretations, especially on those from archaeologists that have read before. For only then, the definition of postmodern condition will be reflected in the archaeological theory. That is, the incredulity and skepticism for certain pre-established paradigms and the escape from the Establishment, from the balanced system and from the universalizing legitimation. Proto-history of northern Portugal and Galicia requires, with no doubt, new readings, and new analysis in order to problematize it and consequently value its miscellaneous facts and its unique archaeological record. And only with new debates it will be possible to achieve a better scientific understanding of this ambiguous and remarkable subject.

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