

Marta Díaz-Zorita Bonilla. *The Copper Age in South-West Spain. A bioarchaeological approach to prehistoric social organization*. BAR International Series 2840. Oxford, Archaeopress, 2017. ISBN 978 1 4073 1509 6.

The Iberian Peninsula is rich in prehistoric burial sites. These sepulchres, excavated since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, have dominated our fascination but, surprisingly, the recovered human bones have not. This seems striking as bones represent the most direct evidence on the biology of past populations and so their study provides insights into demography, diseases, physiological stresses, injuries and other relevant data about them. So why were they forgotten? The main reason is the nature of these collections: frequently very disturbed, commingled and reduced to tiny pieces, and so most researchers avoid their study. However, this changed during the last decades where the potential information from these human remains were recognized through the use of appropriated anthropological methodologies (Boaventura *et al.* 2014; Silva 2017; Silva and Ferreira 2016/7). This monograph is the author's published Doctoral Research conducted at Durham University. Marta Díaz-Zorita Bonilla has embraced the challenge of studying a set of "apparently low-informative" human bone collections, performing a bioarchaeological approach to communities that lived during the Cooper Age (3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC) in South-West Spain. With the goal of exploring possible social differences there, she documented the biological, morphological and pathological profile of these individuals, besides obtaining inferences about their mortuary practices, dietary patterns and mobility. Bonilla added a new perspective to the research while exploring social differences through anthropological data.

This book is organized into seven chapters, references and appendices. The first section begins with some notes on Copper Age research in southern Spain, with special focus on the South-West, describing the social structure of these human communities and the typology of funerary structures they used. The aims of the research are well described in five points and can be summarized as approaching the social structure and social differences of human communities during the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC, based on the documentation of the funerary practices, anthropological data, health pattern, diet and degree of mobility. For that purpose, two Late Iberian Prehistory key sites were selected: La Pijotilla (Tomb 3) and Valencina-Castilleja (structures of 6 different sectors), an inland and a coastal site.

The second chapter begins with a short introduction to the concept of bioarchaeology, and then moves to the theoretical background of mortuary analysis. It ends with an historic review on the development of this discipline in Spain. In this section I would underline the description of documented skeletal collections and several expressive archaeological collections, very useful for readers not familiar with Spanish skeletal collections.

The next chapter, titled: "The 3<sup>rd</sup> Millennium BC in South-West Spain" introduces the reader to the relevant contextual information of this period. The study areas are well described, and the information is synthesized in tables with the text, being extremely informative, as they include published radiocarbon dates, anthropological data and a list of tholos structures in this geographic area. These key data will be very valuable for comparative studies by other researchers.

The fourth chapter describes the methods used in this research. The recording data protocol, using standardized anthropological methods, are adequate. However, this work could have benefited with the inclusion of some specific approaches to interpret complex prehistoric funerary burials, such as bone weight and tooth proportions, and by the use of population-specific methods of sex diagnosis, since methodologies based on Portuguese and Spanish skeletal samples for this last parameter are available. I found strange the option by the author to consider enthesal changes as abnormal variation instead of a marker of activity in the paleopathological section, as usual.

In the following chapter the results are detailed. Minimal number of individuals, age at death, sex diagnosis, non-metric traits and paleopathological data are presented and carefully synthesized in tables throughout the text and illustrated with several figures. I appreciate the recognition by the author on the importance of radiocarbon dates on human bones to validate their chronology. The dietary reconstruction of these individuals confirmed a mainly C3 plant diet. Moreover, for Valencina-Castilleja it was possible to infer that individuals buried in megalithic structures display higher  $\delta^{15}N$  values, and thus diets higher in proteins, suggesting that certain segments of these societies had access to higher protein foods. No meaningful differences between inland and coastal diets were detected,

suggesting that fishing may not have made a large contribution to the diet of these latter communities.

Strontium analysis revealed the presence of around 30% of non-local individuals in both areas. For Valencina-Castilleja, a more detailed demographic analysis was possible, revealing that these non-local individuals are of both sexes, adults and non-adults. Therefore, no particular mobility pattern was detected. These data confirm a certain degree of heterogeneity of these prehistoric populations. Interestingly, no associations with funerary structures were found. More studies are needed to clarify these issues, as suggested by the author.

The discussion (chapter 6) is focused on the interpretation of the human communities of the Copper Age, based on a multidisciplinary approach that includes funerary practices, paleodiet and mobility. All these data are used to explore social inequality during this period of prehistory. Bonilla found evidence of social differences reflected in the type of funerary structure in which individuals were buried (megalithic versus non-megalithic), associated grave goods, their health status and different diets. Yet, the access to resources does not seem to be influenced by sex or age group, so it seems that social differences existed and became more acute towards the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium in South-West Spain, although less marked than in South-East Spain. Although the data are well handled, the inclusion of coeval funerary contexts from the Portuguese region of Alentejo, (published since the late 1990s) would have improved the discussion and made this research more attractive.

Díaz-Zorita Bonilla ends with a summary of her research, concerning the biological profile (age at death, sex, stature) and health status of these individuals. It is worth mentioning that the amount of raw data included in the appendices will be very useful for future research.

Albeit aware of the limitations and difficulties of studying these types of collections, Díaz-Zorita Bonilla's work demonstrates that the analyses of these collections provide valuable details about the biological profile, diseases and injuries these prehistoric

individuals underwent, and their dietary patterns and mobility not available from any other source.

This book will be mostly useful to anybody interested in studies of bioarchaeology of prehistoric populations, and in particular to scholars with an interest in funerary practices, anthropological data, diet and mobility during the European Copper Age (3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC). In sum, this work is relevant for our understanding of Late Iberian prehistoric communities and is a valuable contribution to the still scarce literature on human bones from this chronology compared to those exhumed during the last 150 years.

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