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Landscape practices and everyday life in domestic spaces in Bronze Age Mallorca (Balearic Islands): Perspectives for and archaeology of fuel and firewood

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ABSTRACT

With this article we intend to explore a theoretical and methodological approach to energy procurement and consumption in prehistoric households through the archaeological record. To do so, we focus on a specific kind of archaeobotanical material, charred wood, and in a specific case study, the Bronze Age Naviform society of the Balearic Islands. We discuss different theoretical issues related to the study of energy consumption as socio-environmental arena of nature–culture interaction and apply the classic methodologies developed by the anthracological discipline (taphonomic interrogation of the samples and taxonomical identification) to approach the landscape practices related to firewood gathering and consumption in the megalithic Naviform households (so-called navetiforms). We present data from three of these structures in two different sites from the South of Mallorca. These datasets reveals a mosaic landscape in which the Naviform groups organized the firewood procurement in relation to their task-scape and landscape perception and organization. Sclerophyll and open vegetal formations dominated the landscape and provided the main energetic resources to the Naviform households. The cyclopean navetiforms constituted the *locus* in which the social life of the familiar group inhabiting them was organized and, it is in this context that the firewood practices revealed in the anthracological record can be interpreted.

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1. The archaeology of fuel and firewood practices

Human societies obtain the material resources necessary for their development and reproduction from the environment. This is one of the core elements in the establishment of the complex networks of interactions performed in socio-environmental systems. In this context, fuel constitutes a primary element, as it satisfies energetic social demands. Before the very recent and partial generalization of fossil fuels, plant biomass and especially wood

had been the main energetic resource for human groups. Firewood management and consumption is, thus, a central component of the organization of maintenance and subsistence activities of human societies, but it should be understood from a contextual perspective that considers the relations between firewood practices and all the other social and environmental elements that plays a role in a socio-environmental system.

This viewpoint may facilitate the analysis of charcoal assemblages not as isolated datasets, but as the result of social-landscape/vegetation interactions performed against ecological, social and historical backgrounds. In this sense, we propose to explore this perspective of study among domestic groups of the sedentary pastoralist and agriculturalist Naviform society through the Bronze Age archaeological record of the island of Mallorca (Balearic Islands, Western Mediterranean, Fig. 1). The main goal of our work is to integrate firewood practices in the context of the social and

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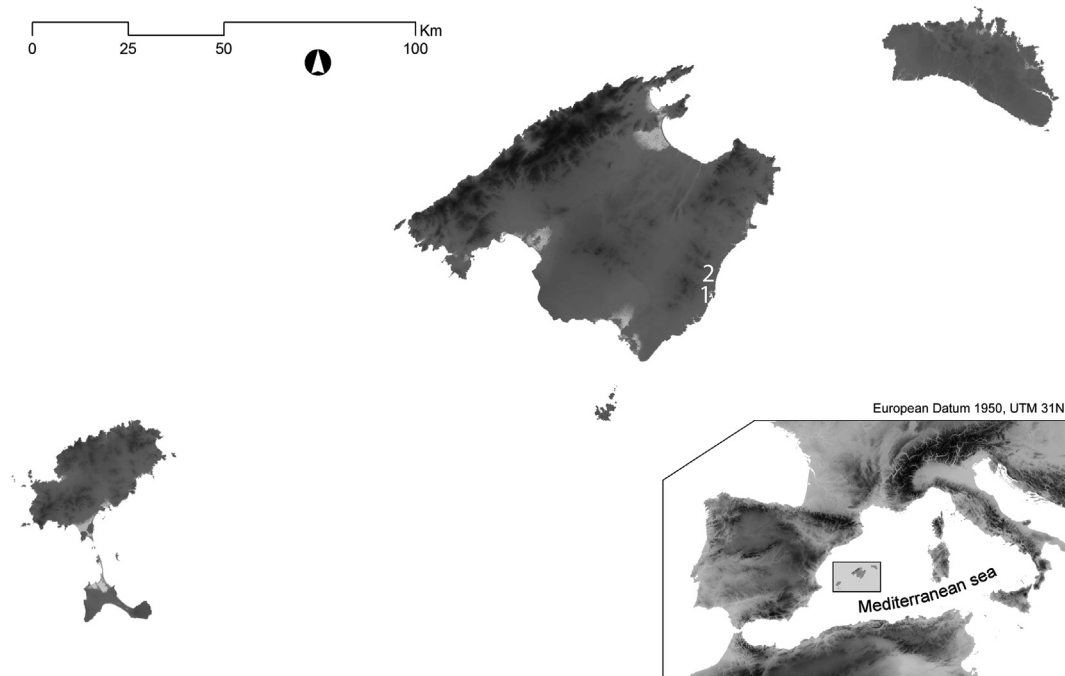


Fig. 1. Location map of the studied sites: 1 Closos de can Gàia; 2 Hospitalet Vell.

economic organization and the development of the everyday maintenance activities carried out in the Naviform domestic spaces.

On the one hand, firewood gathering constitutes a landscape practice integrated in the organization of mobility, the sense of place and landscape and the organization of maintenance activities. On the other, firewood consumption in domestic spaces is a component of the everyday life related with the different household activities and the creation, use and abandonment of domestic spaces. In this sense, thus, our primary data, charcoal assemblages from three Naviform houses, will be necessarily put in conversation with their archaeological and environmental contexts in order to disentangle the socio-environmental complexities of these activities.

These objective and approach help elucidate fuel wood procurement and energy consumption through the archaeological record. It is noteworthy the lack of attention that energy consumption has among archaeologists. Especially considering the relevance of energy in regard to issues like climate change and global warming, important challenges in modern societies. These issues have been reflected in changing political, economic, and social perspectives of energy consumption. Which in turn have been reflected by the way social scientists from many other disciplines have approached the study of energy and society (Horta et al., 2014).

The sociology of energy has experienced diverse turns since the second half of the 20th century, but what remains as a key topic is that “the modes of energy production and consumption also reflect the relations that any society establishes with humans and non-humans” (Horta et al., 2014, pp. 115). According to this, the construction of an archaeological approach to energy consumption has to consider this specific kind of socio-environmental relationships as surfaces of nature–culture interaction. The perception and material relations with nature are variable among human societies, so there is no way to universalize a specific kind of schema of human–nature relations, as they are rich, variable and creative (Descola, 2012, pp. 468). If sociologists analyse the complexities of the networks of social relations that involve energy consumption in modern western households, this social schemas cannot be

translated in a straight line to current non-western groups or prehistoric societies. Different ways of perceiving the world are translated into different manners of intervening in it (Descola, 2012, pp. 468). This gives place to specific practices in relation to energy procurement and consumption, not just entirely coherent with the way of perceiving and intervening in the world of each society, but also as daily and routine practices satisfying material demands. In this sense, the daily activities related with firewood procurement and energy consumption constitutes a social arena in which this “relational modes” (*sensu* Descola, 2012), the ways of perceiving and intervening in the world, are negotiated and transferred to children, socialized and perpetuated as recurrent and ubiquitous domestic practices.

2. Firewood, fuel and landscape in household practices

Anthracology is the archaeobotanical discipline dealing with wood charcoal remains recovered from archaeological contexts. Although the discipline has been focused on landscape and palaeoenvironmental reconstruction since the very beginning, obtaining a meaningful success, it is clear that the possibilities of anthracology are broader at this stage of its development (see Asouti and Austin, 2005). Anthracology has been discussed in relation to the study of a range of nature–culture interaction issues, socio-economic and cultural practices, time allocation strategies or spatial behaviour (e.g. Morehart and Helmke, 2008; Picornell, 2009; Out, 2010; Veal, 2012; Asouti, 2013; Salavert and Dufraisse, 2014; Wright et al., 2015). Even though the field and laboratory methodologies have been largely developed and improved and the level of maturity of the discipline is significant, it is clear that the organization, discussion and interpretation of the data have to be methodologically adapted to the research objectives in any case (differentiating if our research subject is ancient vegetation, human behaviour or the interaction among both, Théry-Parisot et al., 2010) and, in case of approaching social and cultural issues, theoretically defined and oriented (Austin, 2000; Picornell et al., 2011; Dufraisse, 2012; Morehart and Morell-Hart, 2013).

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