

CHRONOLOGY OF MEGALITHIC FUNERARY PRACTICES IN SOUTHEASTERN IBERIA: THE NECROPOLIS OF PANORIA (GRANADA, SPAIN)

Gonzalo Aranda Jiménez^{1*} • Águeda Lozano Medina¹ • Margarita Sánchez Romero¹ • Marta Díaz-Zorita Bonilla² • Hervé Bocherens³

¹Department of Prehistory and Archaeology, University of Granada, Campus Cartuja s/n, 18071, Granada, Spain.

²Institut für Ur- und Frühgeschichte und Archäologie des Mittelalters, University of Tübingen, Hölderlinstr. 12, 72074, Tübingen, Germany.

³Department of Geosciences, Biogeology, and Centre for Human Evolution and Palaeoenvironment (HEP), University of Tübingen, Hölderlinstr. 12, 72074, Tübingen, Germany.

ABSTRACT. An excavation carried out at the megalithic necropolis of Panoria in 2015 offered an excellent opportunity for dating a widespread variety of polygonal, rectangular, and trapezoidal-shaped tombs with short passages for which, surprisingly, there were previously no known radiocarbon (¹⁴C) measurements available. Based on the anthropological remains, a series of 19 ¹⁴C dates was obtained and modeled in a Bayesian statistical framework. The results stress a long period of use that began in the Late Neolithic (3525–3195 cal BC), reaching the most intensive ritual activity during the Copper Age and ending in the Early Bronze Age (2125–1980 cal BC). Throughout this period, tombs were built at different times and used at different temporal scales and intensities, ranging from a few decades to centuries.

KEYWORDS: Bayesian modeling, funerary ritual, Iberian Peninsula, Late Prehistory, megalithic phenomenon, radiocarbon dating.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, methodological advances in radiocarbon (¹⁴C) measurements and their statistical interpretation have led to a profound change in our perception of the chronology of past societies (e.g. Buck et al. 1991; Bronk Ramsey 1995, 2013; Bayliss 2009; Scarre 2010; Whittle et al. 2011). These developments have provided a great opportunity to create a refined chronological framework that could be considered a critical issue, particularly in the study of the megalithic phenomenon, which is characterized by long periods of use in many cases (Whittle et al. 2008, 2011; Scarre 2010).

The Iberian Peninsula has not benefited from these improvements, at least not in the same way as other European regions. Only a few graves have been dated with the aim of confirming a broad cultural framework for this phenomenon. Radiocarbon chronology was not an important concern until very recently. This is the case of southeastern Iberia, where the lack of ¹⁴C dates—only 10 by 2012—has been one of the main factors hindering a better understanding of this phenomenon (Aranda Jiménez 2013). Our current research is aimed at contributing to changing this situation with new insights into the chronology and temporality of these megalithic monuments (Aranda Jiménez and Lozano Medina 2014, 2017; Aranda Jiménez et al. 2017a; Lozano Medina and Aranda Jiménez 2017).

This paper is specifically aimed at discussing the ¹⁴C dates obtained for the necropolis of Panoria (Darro, Granada) (Benavides et al. 2016; Aranda Jiménez et al. 2017b). In the following pages, a new chronological series will be analyzed in a Bayesian framework and the social and cultural implications of these results will be discussed in the context of the megalithic societies of the region.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND: THE PANORIA NECROPOLIS

This megalithic necropolis is located in the foothills of the mountain of the same name, at the easternmost end of the Sierra Harana in the present-day province of Granada. Discovered in 2012,

*Corresponding author. Email: garanda@ugr.es.