
Deconstructing Neolithic Monumental Space: the Montenegro Enclosure in Galicia (Northwest Iberia)

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This article presents a comparative analysis of archaeological sites in northwest Iberia focusing on Neolithic spatial concepts and their materialization in different architectures from this period. The recently excavated site of Montenegro in Galicia is analysed to determine how the construction of circular enclosures reproduces the organizational model of space identified in monumental architectures elsewhere. The origin of these constructions, their functionality and their relation with other archaeological phenomena are explored to show how they are all different versions of the same concept. Finally the authors discuss what they consider their key point that the prevalence of circular design may be recognized behind the diverse materialities as an essential instrument of Neolithic societies which began to tame the world.

The most outstanding archaeological elements from the Neolithic period in Galicia are megalithic monuments (dolmens and mounds). Their construction covers a period between *c.* 4500 cal. BC and *c.* 3000–2500 cal. BC. At the same time, recent investigations have revealed the presence of another type of site that shared the space with the megalithic monuments, and which has begun to be studied as a result of the large-scale archaeological interventions carried out in connection with the construction of public works (Criado-Boado & Cabrejas Domínguez 2005; Bonilla Rodríguez *et al.* 2006; Prieto-Martínez *et al.* forthcoming; Varela 2008; 2009; 2010). Within this broad context, open-air settlements, pit enclosures and circular structures have come to form an important part of Galicia's Neolithic landscape.

The initial aim of this article is to present a summary of the site of Montenegro (in the Morrazo Peninsula, Pontevedra, Spain), which is one of the best examples of a complex archaeological site excavated to date in Galicia epitomizing this new variety of construction and monument beyond burial mounds. The site has been defined as such due to its recognized architectural, chronological and functional diversity. In this article we will focus almost exclusively on one area of the site: the circular enclosure located to the east of the

excavation area, dated to the mid-third millennium BC.

We would, however, draw attention to the fact that the treatment of this information leads us to propose a series of important historical and anthropological questions. The method we use here is based on a specific theoretical principle that we have developed in our research in Landscape Archaeology for some time: all spatial forms are determined by the spatial concept present in the socio-cultural group that produced them. This principle is applied to tangible or intangible forms, to (amongst the first group) landscapes or material culture, and to (amongst the latter) moveable objects or architectures.

The article proposes a deconstruction (or a reverse engineering) that leads us from the materiality of a specific archaeological item to the identification of its formal regularities. Based on these, the structural principles embedded within the item can be sought out and compared with other similar entities.

So, by considering the site of Montenegro, we will develop a theoretical and methodological proposal. As well as presenting new data for the Neolithic in the northwest Iberian Peninsula, we explore further the cultural significance of circular ritual monuments of this kind, and discover the spatial design model that

was in place in a Late Neolithic society. It may sound ambitious, but such is the duty of producing meaning beyond mere descriptions.

In order to develop this approach, we need to define the spatial pattern that is materialized in different types of monuments through spatial regularities. Based on the Montenegro site and on further evidence from Galicia (similar to others along the Atlantic coast), we will present what we consider to be the model for Neolithic monumental space in this region.

The article will thus be organized into three main sections. Firstly, a general overview of the forms of Neolithic spatiality in the northwest Iberian Peninsula; secondly, a detailed description of the Montenegro site and enclosure; and thirdly, a contextual discussion of the type of Neolithic space it represents.

Neolithic spatiality: concept and materiality

Discoveries and re-assessments of Neolithic enclosures and open-air settlements in the Iberian Peninsula have multiplied in recent years (Zafra *et al.* 1999; Bernabeu *et al.* 2003; Lago 2004; Costa *et al.* 2010), particularly in areas where remains of this kind had not been previously identified. This is the case in the northwest Iberian Peninsula, with discoveries of this kind in both northern Portugal and Galicia (i.e. Jorge 2004; Aboal *et al.* 2005; Bonilla Rodríguez *et al.* 2006; Fábregas Valcarce *et al.* 2007; Gianotti & Cancela 2005; Lima 2000; Vilaseco 2009). While these new sites present new problems in terms of their interpretation and excavation (Aboal *et al.* 2005) — basically associated with their functional and chronological heterogeneity and the dynamics of their construction — we must recognize that they contribute in some way towards ‘normalizing’ the situation of the monumentality of the northwest Iberian Peninsula and its Neolithic record, equating it with the situation known for this period in most of the Atlantic ‘provinces’, in which the enclosures have become common realities and part of the phenomenon. This means that we can now verify that Neolithic forms of monumentality present in other Atlantic regions are also present in northwest Iberia, which apart from burial mounds at least include standing stones, enclosures, stone and timber circles and related settlements (Villoch Vázquez 1998; Monteagudo García 2003; Gianotti & Cancela 2005; Bonilla Rodríguez *et al.* 2006; Vilaseco 2009).

The field of anthropology has studied in great detail the structure of thought and cognitive forms, and their relationship with specific social and historical forms (Lévi-Strauss 1973). The application of these theories to prehistory is one of the ways in which Landscape Archaeology functions. We have proposed

the application of Lévi-Strauss’s model to prehistory in the shape of two different patterns of rationality: the ‘wild’ and ‘domestic’ pattern (Criado-Boado 2000).

Therefore, our examination of a circular Neolithic enclosure is presented primarily to propose how this special type of monument materializes a Neolithic concept of space that is also represented in other areas of the megalithic experience: funerary architecture, the organization of burial mounds, the construction of funerary chambers, the representations which they contain (paintings or carvings), the distribution of grave goods, the erection of standing stones and, of course, the construction of the monumental landscape. Each of these areas must be treated as a different expressive code (in the sense conferred upon it by Structural Anthropology for some time: Lévi-Strauss 1973). The different codes within a culture are interconnected by relations of compatibility between them, a principle which, in turn, is based on the practical requirements of linguistic and meta-linguistic communication, as nobody is able to create contents that are significant for an audience without using the references that are common to this same audience. This gives these abstract principles a level of reality which, despite being characterized by structuralism as rationalist (Layton 1997), and by mechanistic materialism as idealistic (Lull & Micó 2001–2), could be better understood from the notion of intersubjectivity proposed by recent hermeneutics (Gadamer 1977; Johnsen & Olsen 1992) or from the principle of ‘incorporeal materialism’ established by Foucault (1980).

The theoretical assumption implicit in this proposal is very simple: all societies need a certain concept of space in order to live and reproduce social life. A proposal of this type makes it possible to advance architectural analysis, studies of the landscape or stylistic analyses far beyond the point they normally reach. It also allows us to see that beyond monuments and landscapes there is pure space.

It is true that this treatment of the enclosures conceals the historic or social significance behind their structural or cultural meaning. There are a number of specific archaeological problems which, in principle, this proposal does not resolve, and which are currently the subject of debate with regard to the Neolithic in the northwest Iberian Peninsula, such as their chronology, their emergence and disappearance, their relationship with other monuments, their use over time or their relationship with the settlements (Díaz-del-Río 2003; Jorge 2004; Prieto-Martínez *et al.* forthcoming). However, being aware of the difficulty of these issues, our methodological alternative is to resolve the important features which should (and may) be resolved at a more general level — the existence of a Neolithic concept

for the cultural organization of space and its definition — and then discuss the social and historical features of the phenomenon (for this reason we will structure the last section of this article at both levels). In other words, several works deal with current research issues raised by circular enclosures, but there is another level of reality to these constructions (the meaning of their spatial design) that can also be approached from other perspectives.

Monumental spaces in the western European context

Analysis of Neolithic spatiality at the scale of the European Atlantic Façade remains a difficult task. First of all, the different research traditions in different parts of western Europe have resulted in disparate approaches to material culture, landscape, space and their interpretation. While in some parts the research has largely explored the ideological and symbolic dimensions of space, in others, more materialistic, chrono-typologically oriented views have traditionally predominated. The analysis of archaeological theory in Britain and France by Scarre (1999) is a good example of this kind of dichotomy. Secondly and partly linked to the precedent, archaeological division into periods becomes fuzzy when translated from regional to interregional scales. A paramount example of this is given by the use of the same division (i.e. Early Neolithic) for different periods in northwest Iberia, western France and the British Isles. Such archaeological ‘boxes’ (i.e. Neolithic, Chalcolithic or the Bronze Age) are actually used to define a diverse range of social and economic realities. The same is true for concepts such as ‘megalithic society’ or ‘megalithic religion’ which unify the complexity and variability of social diversity at a global, transverse level.

Because of these conditioning factors, it is important — as in the previous section — to place ourselves within the theoretical, methodological and geographical context in question. Once this has been stated we can say — in an exercise of generalization — that two broad Neolithic types of architecture have usually been identified and contrasted in the western European Neolithic: a linear and a circular type. The former relates to the Early Neolithic tradition of longhouses and the expansion of a new mode of production; the later monumental development of this tradition would be long-barrow construction, well known in the southern and eastern parts of the British Isles, and linked in central and western France to the ‘Passy-Balloy’ structures of the ‘Cerny culture’ (Mordant & Simonin 1997; Midgley 2005). The association of stone alignments and earthen long barrows (*tertres tumulaires*) in areas such as Brittany could also be discussed in this context (i.e. Boujot & Cassen 2000). The latter relates

to the circular structures (mounds and cairns) which appeared from the middle of the fifth millennium BC onwards. This model has sometimes been connected with Mesolithic structures present by the end of the sixth millennium BC in Atlantic Europe. This link has mainly been discussed for regions such as southern Brittany in France or the Sado and Muge estuaries in Portugal, but it is also of relevance elsewhere (Sheratt 1995; Arias & Fano 2003, 150–53). Excavation and radiocarbon dating obtained in the early 1980s at several sites in the British Isles served to provide further arguments for this view (cf. Scarre 2003, 40–41).

In a research context largely dominated by chrono-typological seriation, both spatial models — which, by the way, reflect background diffusionist and indigenist paradigms for the origins of monumentality — have probably been oversimplified, and have often been opposed on typological, morphological and temporal grounds. It is worth mentioning that recent research has highlighted the complexity of building sequences, showing how the dialogue between circular and linear architectures needs further consideration (L’Helgouac’h 1996; Laporte *et al.* 2002a). Several regularities concerning long mounds — such as the emphasis on the eastern parts of the structures — are actually reminiscent of the behaviour found within the circular ‘rationality pattern’. The structural, symbolic and ideological implications of these constructions have also been the object of analysis by several researchers since the 1990s (Criado-Boado 1989; 1993; 2000; Bradley 1998; 2000; 2001; Criado-Boado & Villoch Vázquez 1998; Scarre 2003), thereby opening the way to further interpretations of both the archaeological evidence and the landscape.

At a more particular level, other types of spatial regularities have focused the attention of research on western European monuments. Stressing certain architectural features seems to have acquired a particular significance. The emphasis given to the southeastern quadrant of monuments is one of the most common regularities of this kind. This aspect is more easily identified in mound-like architectures like the well-known case of passage orientation or the emphasis on façade composition. Differential building strategies in the mound itself, or how orthostats are negotiated within the structure, reflect this same concern but are usually less discussed in these terms. Moreover, a deeper analysis shows that such a spatial recurrence can also be found in the architecture and setting of other types of monuments. In the case of standing stones, the specific orientation of their flat faces or their particular situation within the landscape may well indicate similar conceptions of space management (Benéteau 1993, 157; López-Romero 2005,

414–15). It is precisely this link with the landscape which may better demonstrate concerns with circular spatiality. The location of several mounds, standing stones and stone circles within spatially constrained landforms is found throughout the Iberian Peninsula and beyond (cf. Criado-Boado *et al.* 1986; Criado-Boado & Villoch Vázquez 1998; Bradley 1998). The fact that many of these landforms are naturally open to the east highlights the significance of these settings. Therefore, it seems that both linear and circular monuments interact with the surrounding landscape in a similar way: they usually emphasize easterly and southeasterly orientations and face away from the west.

Similarly, several authors have stressed the role that natural elements may have played in the origins, development and reaffirmation of monumentality (Criado-Boado 1993; Criado-Boado & Villoch Vázquez 1998; Tilley 1996; Bradley 2000; Calado 2002). Some of these elements even seem to have fully conditioned the construction of monuments. A good example of this is the Menga monument in Antequera (Andalusia, Spain). Its northeast orientation is at odds with the general regional pattern (Hoskin *et al.* 1994, 78), but its axis exactly faces the rocky massif known as the Peña de los Enamorados (García-Sanjuán & Wheatley 2009, 140–43). A different kind of relationship with natural elements is connected with the replication or emphasis of topographical elements. Although this trend is once again epitomized by funerary architecture (Laporte *et al.* 2002b), the same driving principle may be found in other contexts such as henge monuments or stone circles (Richards 1996). Once again, more systematic research is needed in order to better evaluate the implications which these recurrences have in the framework of European Neolithic spatiality. We will return to the analysis of these patterns in the final part of this article.

Megalithic sites, structures and enclosures in the northwest Iberian Peninsula

The megalithic phenomenon in Galicia covers a period of approximately 2000 years, between 4500 cal. BC, as documented in monuments with the oldest dates,¹ and 3000–2500 cal. BC, coinciding with the period when the great chambers were sealed.² Between five and ten thousand burial mounds were constructed across much of Galician territory, mostly in upland areas. These are circular mounds between 10 and 30 m in diameter and 1.5 to 3 m high.

The fifth millennium BC saw the development of the Early Neolithic, a period that witnessed the emergence of the earliest types of agriculture, mainly based on a mixed economy, which we may actually assimilate within what is known as the ‘Meso-Neolithic’ period (Zvelebil 1986). Little evidence remains

of this period in Galicia: a pair of non-monumental sites dated to the mid-fifth millennium (Lima 2000). So far no older sites are known. Beyond Galicia, the first monumentalism of the European Atlantic area produced architectural forms such as standing stones, stone circles, alignments, dolmens and timber circles, extensively documented from the fifth to the third millennia BC in Great Britain, Ireland, Portugal and France (Bradley 1998; Bradley *et al.* 2002; Burl 2005; Gibson 2005; Giot *et al.* 1996; Hartwell 2002).

In Galicia, with the exception of the funerary structures that appeared around 4500 BC, the evidence for other megalithic elements (standing stones, stone circles, etc.) is currently limited and has been little studied (see a list of sites in Fábregas Valcarce & Vilaseco Vázquez 2003; Monteagudo García 2003; Villoch Vázquez 1998) (Fig. 1). Other recognizable sites from this period include domestic settlements, with evidence frequently found of structures made of perishable materials (post-holes, ditches, hearths, etc.) (Bonilla Rodríguez *et al.* 2006; Lima 2000; Méndez Fernández & Rey García 2005; Parcero Oubiña & Cobas Fernández 2005; Prieto-Martínez 2005; Suárez Otero 1997; Suárez Otero & Fábregas Valcarce 2000), and the material culture mainly formed by incised pottery (Prieto-Martínez 2001; Prieto-Martínez *et al.* 2005), and stone production based on quartz technology (Tabarés & Baqueiro 2005; Baqueiro 2006).

Similar features are described for dwelling sites dating from the Middle Neolithic. These data support a rather homogeneous model of settlement from the middle of the fifth millennium BC until the middle of the third millennium BC, based on small settlements with a location pattern that coincides on occasion with the location of monuments, or close to them (Criado-Boado *et al.* 1986; 2000; Lima 2000).

The transition between the fourth and third millennia BC may be seen as a moment of social intensification, in which the most monumental funerary structures were in use. This is suggested by the dating of the different episodes of use at monuments such as Cotogrande 5 (Abad Gallego 2000), Dombate phase II (Alonso Mattheías & Bello Diéguez 1997), Forno dos Mouros 5 (Mañana-Borrazás 2005) and A Romea (Mañana-Borrazás 2003), amongst others. In traditional terms, this period may be situated within the Late Neolithic, although in Galicia other authors have attributed this to the Copper Age with Penha-type pottery (Bonilla Rodríguez *et al.* 2006; Eguileta Franco 1999; Fábregas Valcarce & Vilaseco Vázquez 2003; Suárez Otero & Fábregas Valcarce 2000), applying a periodization more befitting central and southern Iberia, the defining features of which (large settlements, ‘fortifications’, systematic metalworking,

social complexity) are not apparent in Galicia until some time later. In this case, we prefer to use an Atlantic categorization, in which the Late Neolithic replicates the dynamics of the southern regions, revealing an intensification of the previously existing social dynamics. Following this high point of monumental activity, critical changes in monumental funerary architecture seem to have begun — marked by an event that is repeated in several mounds with corridors — when the large chambers began to be sealed around 2800–2500 BC (Dombate phase III, Os Campiños 6). By this time, there is evidence of similar processes in other parts of the European Atlantic Façade and the Iberian Peninsula; several passage graves were sealed and new types of architecture developed (i.e. gallery graves in Brittany or ‘tholoi’ in southern Iberia). This moment marks an inflexion point in the construction dynamics of monumental architecture in northwest Iberia, with both change and diversification.

New funerary structures — cists — were built (Casota de Berdoias, Fornela dos Mouros de Aplazadoiro, Devesa de Abaixo: Vázquez Liz 2005); also smaller monuments, small mounds with pits or cairns, or other deposits that usually contain important grave goods, something that has been interpreted as a change from collective to individual monumentality (Criado-Boado & Fábregas Valcarce 1989).

Work continued on existing monuments, where reuse has been documented (such as well pits, holes, fires, etc.), as have deposits of new materials (particularly Bell Beaker pottery), as well as remodelling work, mainly involving increasing volume by adding new quantities of material.

New monumental spaces emerged. We see diversification of monumental architecture, transferring it to other spheres such as large settlements, with different areas of activity and architectural forms, palisades, enclosures and stone circles.

Alongside this change, many of the sites from this period are larger than their predecessors, whether open or ditched. Internally they consist of areas of activity in which processes of repeated and intensive occupation of the same space throughout long periods of time are

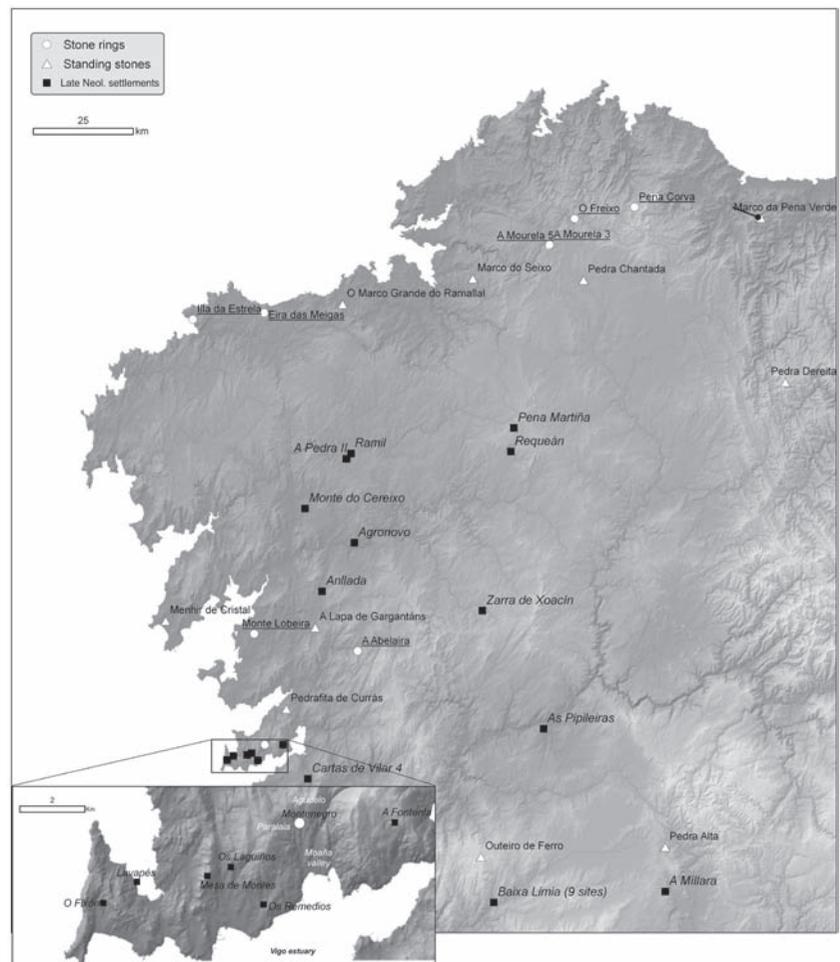


Figure 1. Distribution map of megalithic sites (mounds and dolmens excluded) and Late Neolithic settlements in the northwest Iberian Peninsula.

documented. Here we find superimposed archaeological structures: post-holes, hut floors, hearths, storage structures (in the Morrazo peninsula, Montenegro, Remedios, Lavapés, Mesa de Montes, A Fontenla, Guidoiro Areoso: Bonilla Rodríguez *et al.* 2006; Fábregas Valcarce & Vilaseco Vázquez 2003; Gianotti & Cancela 2005; Méndez Fernández & Rey García 2005; Prieto-Martínez 2005; Suárez Otero 1997), and materials that bear witness to a technology focused on making use of cultivated resources, grazing and intensification in exploitation of wild resources. It was at this time that the settlement of Montenegro appeared.

Montenegro in the light of the data

The archaeological site of Montenegro was discovered in 2003 as a result of archaeological monitoring of construction work on a motorway in the Morrazo peninsula. This initial phase led to an open-area excavation, covering 5800 m² (Gianotti & Cancela 2005).

The site is located in southwest Galicia, in the peninsula of O Morrazo, between the Pontevedra and Vigo estuaries. Situated at a transition point between highlands and lowlands, at a height of 180 m above sea level, it stands at the head of the Moaña Valley, over a prominent outcrop on one side of Mount Agudelo, which runs northeast–southwest along the coast. To the east it is flanked by a small basin with steep, shady slopes, while to the west the land slopes gently downhill towards an open section of the valley with a small stream. Its topographic position means that the site is very prominent in relation to its immediate surroundings, further highlighted by the presence of a large granitic outcrop to the south of the excavated area. Its position offers extensive views to the south-east–southwest over the whole of the Moaña Valley, part of the coastline and the Vigo estuary. However, to the west, north and northeast, the view is partly constrained by the hills of Paralaia and Agudelo.

Areas of activity, structures and material culture

Excavation work at the site made it possible to document a series of archaeological structures corresponding to two different periods: medieval and Late Neolithic. The Late Neolithic period is represented throughout practically all of the excavated area, and has the most conspicuous archaeological features. The distribution and type of structures located makes it possible to identify three different areas. Despite difficulty in identifying correspondence between structures without any direct stratigraphic relation (a common feature in many open-air Galician settlements: see Aboal *et al.* 2005), we were able to identify at least three stages of occupation for this period that are confirmed by the dates currently available (see below) (Fig. 2).

To the west, coinciding with a flat area facing towards the valley bottom, a settlement area was more clearly documented, thanks to a variety and density of structures such as post-holes, hut floors, linear structures, foundation trenches, pits and hearths. The absence of clear occupational floors made it difficult to identify the constructive units in this sector, although two specific cases of larger oval structures were identified, surrounded by other smaller, probably complementary buildings. Based on a sample of charcoal from the base deposit (UE362) which filled in a rectangular pit (UE155) located in this sector, a date of 3813±52 BP (CSIC-1986; 2470–2130 cal. BC, 95.4 per cent prob.) was obtained.

Another settlement area coincides with the zone halfway down the hillside, and with the lowest density of structures and materials. Here the base of an oval hut measuring 3.5 × 1.5 m was found, identified

through two foundation trenches with post-holes, similar to three others found in different parts of the settlement. Based on a sample of charcoal from one of the deposits (UE732) filling in the foundation trench to the West, a date of 4125±40 BP (Ua-23591; 2880–2570 cal. BC, 95.4 per cent prob.) was obtained, coinciding, as we shall see, with that for a similar hut within the circular enclosure.

A few metres away from this hut, a series of structures was found with relevant stratigraphic complexity. This group was formed by a subcircular structure excavated in the substrate and intentionally filled in with the same material. At a later stage, two rectangular pits were excavated on top of this structure, filled in by slime deposits and with interior walls lined with medium-sized stones. In this same area, a trench with a length of 35 m was excavated, which exits the circular enclosure (which we will describe later) and crosses the slope from southeast–northwest. The straight trench, except for a small section that splits into two parallel sections, is 25 cm wide, between 20 and 25 cm deep, and has a ‘U’-shaped profile. Towards the northwest a series of post-holes was excavated, leading us to put forward the hypothesis that this was part of some type of palisade.

At the highest point of the site, coinciding with the existing plateau, one of the most peculiar monumental structures found to date in Galicia was identified. It is a circular enclosure with an internal diameter of 20 m, comprising a series of perimeter structures and internal constructions, an access zone facing towards the southeast, and two other possible access zones to the north and north-northeast, which as a whole are indicative of its constructive complexity and sequence of use (Fig. 3).

From an architectural point of view, the enclosure is configured in its southern half by two stone rings, while to the north it is surrounded by a trench. To the west, part of the granitic outcrop running from north to south was altered in the process of constructing the stone ring. This process involved cutting the outcrop away to a width of 1 m and including it within the general structure of the enclosure. A ring of large stones supported by smaller blocks was connected to this structure, set into a previously dug trench, so that the southwest quadrant was enclosed by both structures. From one of the deposits (UE727), a sample of charcoal was sent for dating, giving a result of 7390±60 BP (Ua-23590; 6400–6080 cal. BC, 95.4 per cent prob.). Lacking the ability to contrast this information with new dates, this reading opens an interesting series of questions regarding the sequence of occupation of this space throughout time. Another stone ring was also identified in the southeast quadrant although, unlike

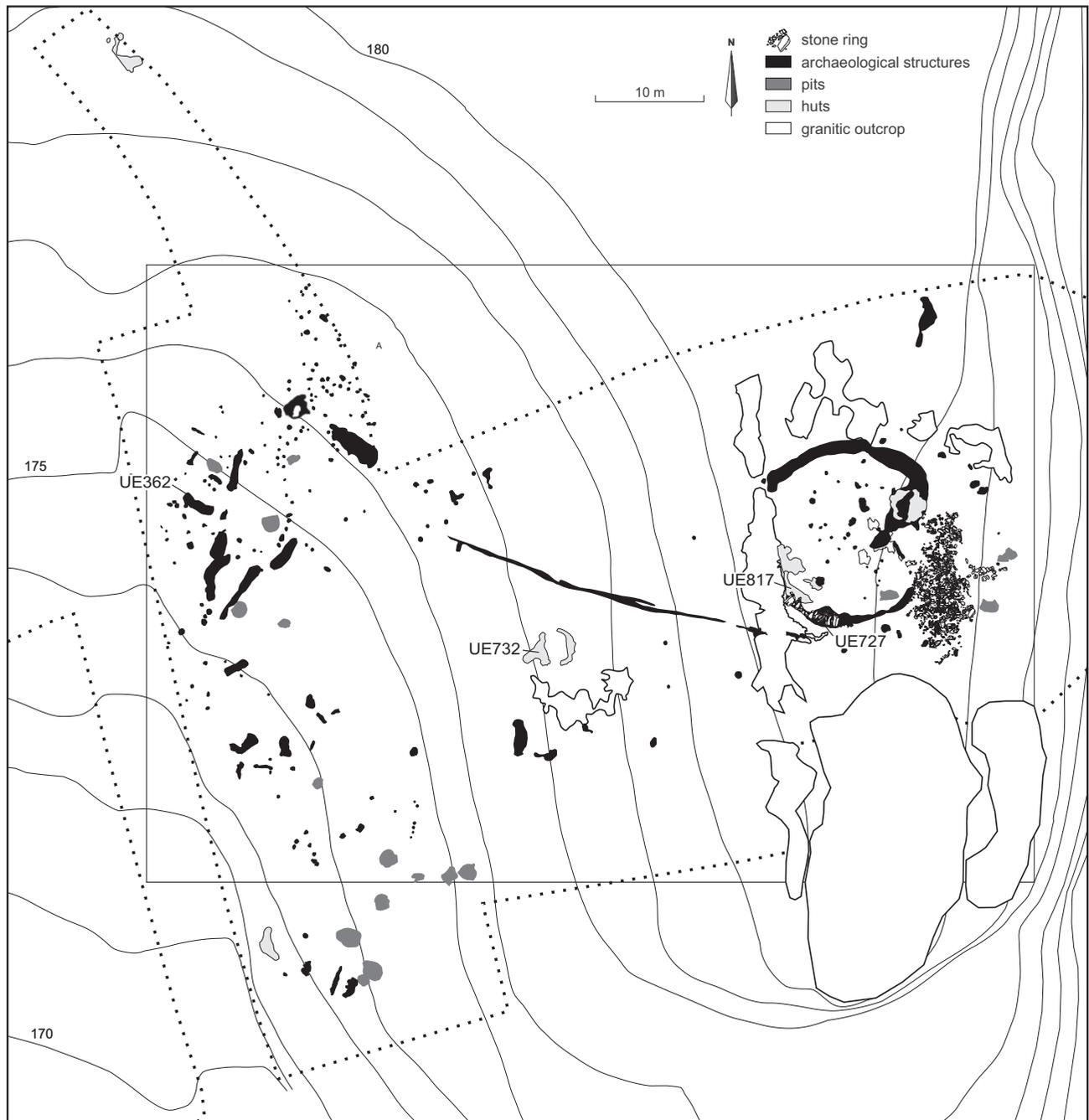


Figure 2. Archaeological plan of the excavated area showing the dated stratigraphic units (UE).

the former, it is made of small- and medium-sized blocks laid over the underlying rock.

The northern half of the enclosure is surrounded by a semi-circular trench 0.8 m wide, with a 'U'-shaped profile and a depth of between 0.3 and 0.4 m. The trench is interrupted at two points, one towards the northwest where it coincides with the rock outcrop, and another towards the north-northeast, which continues by connecting with the stone ring to the east.

Both interruptions have been interpreted as secondary access points to the enclosure.

The interior space contains a series of structures that bear witness to the organization and use of the enclosure. In a central position, slightly to the north, a circular structure was excavated, with a diameter of approximately four metres formed by post-holes, with an access zone facing towards the southeast, marked by the presence of an access structure defined by post-holes.



Figure 3. Aerial view of the circular enclosure at Montenegro.

Inside the enclosure, almost symmetrical to the perimeter wall and adjoining it, two hut bases were excavated similar to the one found on the sloped part of the settlement. Oval in shape, measuring 3.5×1.5 m, both include foundation trenches with post-holes in their base. These types of huts were built in an identical manner, characterized by cutting away the base rock and then digging two lateral foundation trenches (one deeper than the other), and an interior flooring of saprolite. The base deposit (UE817) which filled in one of the trenches (UE836) of the hut was dated to 4120 ± 40 BP (Ua-23589; 2790–2570 cal. BC, 70.1 per cent prob.).

Most of the materials recovered come from the circular enclosure. Close to 2300 sherds of pottery were recovered, along with 1032 stone items, ochre, adobe and fragments of iron (the latter from the area that was occupied in the medieval period).

In general terms, the analysis of the pottery has made it possible to characterize the system of ceramic production. One outstanding feature was the well-preserved condition of the material, which made it possible to reconstruct 120 closed, bowl-type vessels with simple morphologies (13 per cent of the sample), with a wide range of sizes and a high percentage of decorated pieces. The frequency of decorated vessels is high, mainly using incised, metope or Penha-type decoration, together with a small number of vessels

($N = 4$) with Bell Beaker decoration (Criado-Boado & Cabrejas Domínguez 2005, 117–19).

The system of lithic production is mainly based on local raw materials (quartz), although there are also pieces of flint, schist and granite. Products were found that were representative of all of the sequences of the 'operative chain' that made it possible to establish the technological characteristics of the production of chipped lithic tools. The site has also provided an interesting collection of pieces connected with grinding activities. A total of seventeen millstones made of granite was recovered, of which only four were complete, while the other thirteen were fractured and reused as construction material. Six of these millstones (Fig. 4) were used on both sides, and had been thrown away as a result of becoming overly worn or having broken. None of the pieces were reassembled, meaning that fragments are missing from the fractured millstones. Other polished pieces that were also found inside the enclosure included a number of cutting tools, two axes and an adze (Criado-Boado & Cabrejas Domínguez 2005, 117–19).

Discussion and final considerations

The monumental enclosure: a singular space

The circular enclosure of Montenegro provides us with new data for old problems, and provides evidence that

helps to equate Galician megalithism with the rest of the Atlantic coastal region, showing the diversity and integrity of the archaeological record in the northwest Iberian Peninsula.

An initial analysis of this singular space presents us with four fundamental issues to discuss here. Firstly, the enclosure itself as a monumental space with its own entity within the settlement; secondly, its relation with other areas within the site, leading us to a third question: the meaning behind its construction and the type of activities that took place there. Finally, the historicity of the construction, its origin and the development of a context in which there were still many other monuments in use.

The model of Neolithic spatiality, already explored by a number of authors (Bradley 1998; Criado-Boado 1989; Criado-Boado & Villoch Vázquez 1998; Cummings *et al.* 2002), is reproduced in the architecture of the enclosure, with a strong correspondence with the spatial organization seen in another type of megalithic site: mounds (see Fig. 5). The circular shape, the dual and asymmetrical organization of space in two halves (mostly adjusting to east and west), access from the southeast, the pre-eminence of the centre, and the integration of natural elements are some of these features (Criado-Boado & Villoch Vázquez 1998). In Galicia and the north of Portugal, there are some examples in which it is possible to see the association between rocky outcrops, mounds and stone circles sharing the same space. Though the chronology of some of the latter needs to be further analysed, this correspondence makes it possible to initially establish a chronological relationship between the enclosure of Montenegro and the megalithic phenomenon, and secondly, suggest the relationship with a ritual space (we will return to this idea later on).

One of the most problematic aspects of this kind of site is their functionality and temporality; as the latter is reflected in sequences of use that stretch over relatively long periods of time. Sites similar to the timber and stone circles of the British Isles allow us to set a horizon of reference in order to approach both aspects. Sites of this kind in the Atlantic regions usually appear integrated within larger monuments such as henges or even mounds, generally representing stages within the sequence of use and construction of more complex monuments (Burl 2005; Gibson 2005). Although the enclosure in Montenegro is not exactly a timber or stone circle, it does show similarities with the complex sites in which these tend to appear, and shares a series of formal features with them. The ring stone, the central circular construction of wooden posts with access to the southeast and the small huts inside are three key

elements within the sequence of use and remodelling of this monumental construction. For the time being, until we obtain new dates, it seems that the oldest structure is the stone circle, while the huts are apparently the last stage. However, we are unable to establish the chronology of the circular structure of wooden posts, owing to the lack of any stratigraphic connection between them.

But what were the reasons for maintaining, remodelling and using a space with these characteristics throughout time? What relationship did this space have with other areas of the settlement? Although it is difficult to answer the first question, especially due to the very poor preservation of organic remains in Galicia that prevents us from recovering direct funerary remnants, there are other aspects that do allow us to suggest that it may have functioned as a worship space, possibly related to funerary events:

- *The presence of a rectangular pit in the interior of the enclosure*, located in the access zone and functioning as burial area, is seen in different megalithic circles and timber circles in the British Isles (Burl 2005; Gibson 2005) or sites such as the Druid's Circle (Burl 2005, 33), Down Farm (Green 2000, 70).
- *The material culture recovered from within the enclosure stands out as a result of its uniqueness* if we compare it with other areas of the site and other sites in the region: i.e. the high density of decorated pottery in relation to undecorated pottery (Tabarés & Baqueiro 2005), and the incorporation of broken millstones into the architecture of the enclosure (Figs. 4 & 5), reused in the construction of the surrounding wall (Gianotti & Cancela 2005). In contrast, Atlantic-region level comparison merits wider consideration, since, for instance, the inclusion of broken millstones appears to be a recurrent (symbolic?) strategy (i.e. Giot 1959; Oliveira 1993).
- *The location of the enclosure in relation to the settlement*. The enclosure is located towards the east-southeast of the settlement, in a prominent position looking out over the Valley of Moaña. We find a similar situation and location in other Iberian settlements such as Perdigões, where the funerary space (tombs) and a cromlech are situated to the east of the settlement, with the first positioned between two ditches that surround it (Lago *et al.* 1998; Valera 2003).

So far we have focused on the enclosure, its architecture, meaning, function and temporality; yet there can be no doubt that in order to consider the singularity of this archaeological site, a complete interpretation should integrate its context. As we said at the beginning, the site has been interpreted as a Late Neolithic settlement with different areas of activity, one of which

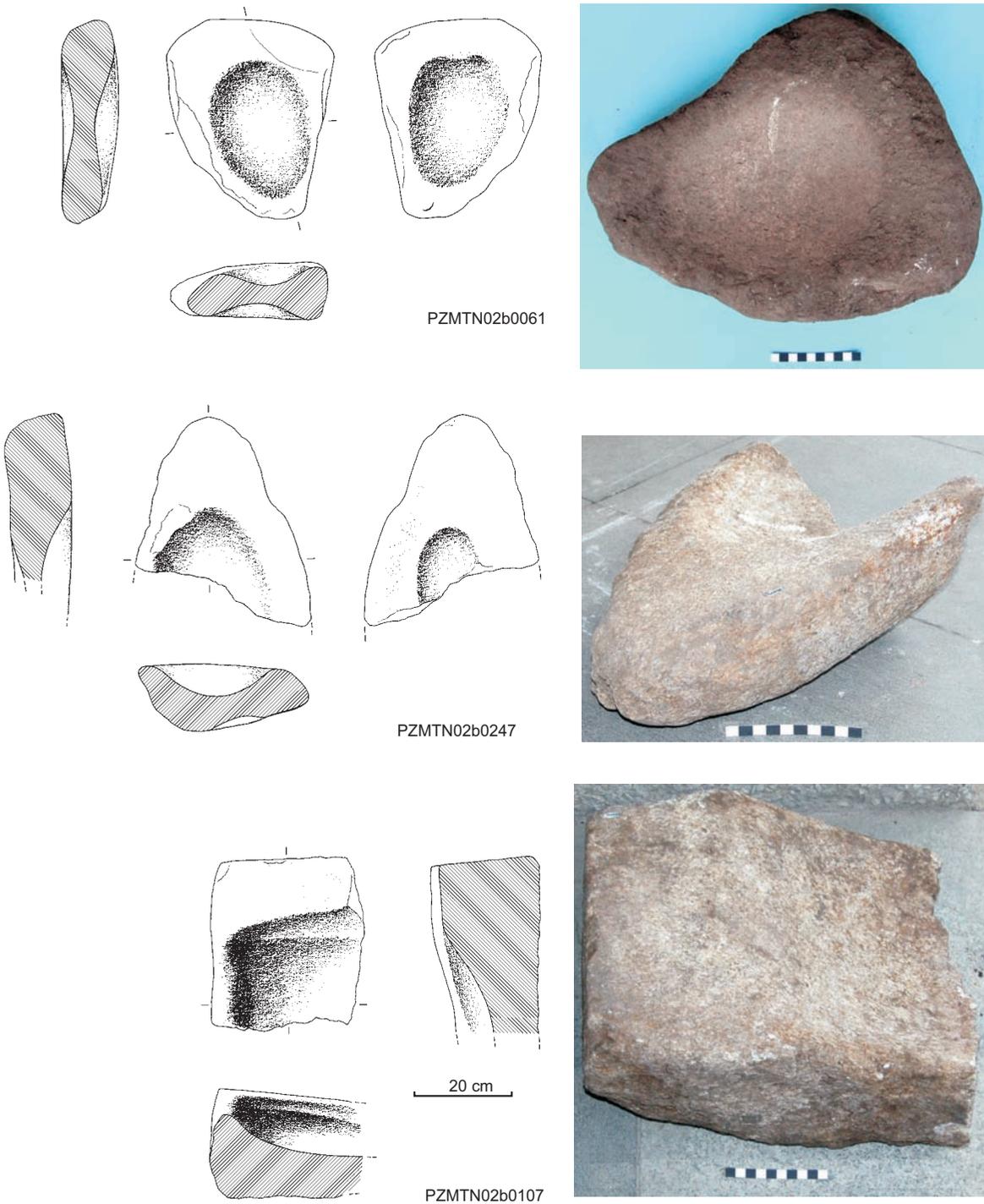


Figure 4. Some of the reused millstones from the circular enclosure of Montenegro.

is the circular enclosure. The relationship between this and other areas of the settlement leads us to important issues we wish to explore: the convergence and indissolubility of the domestic and funerary spheres in the Neolithic world, at least in its later stages, something we have already pointed out in previous studies

(Criado-Boado *et al.* 2000; 2005), and which is clearer in some Copper Age sites such as Perdigões (Lago *et al.* 1998; Valera 2003) or Bronze Age sites such as Devesa de Abaixo (Vázquez Liz 2005). The same is true in Galicia for the recently excavated Neolithic site of A Gándara (by Fidel Méndez).

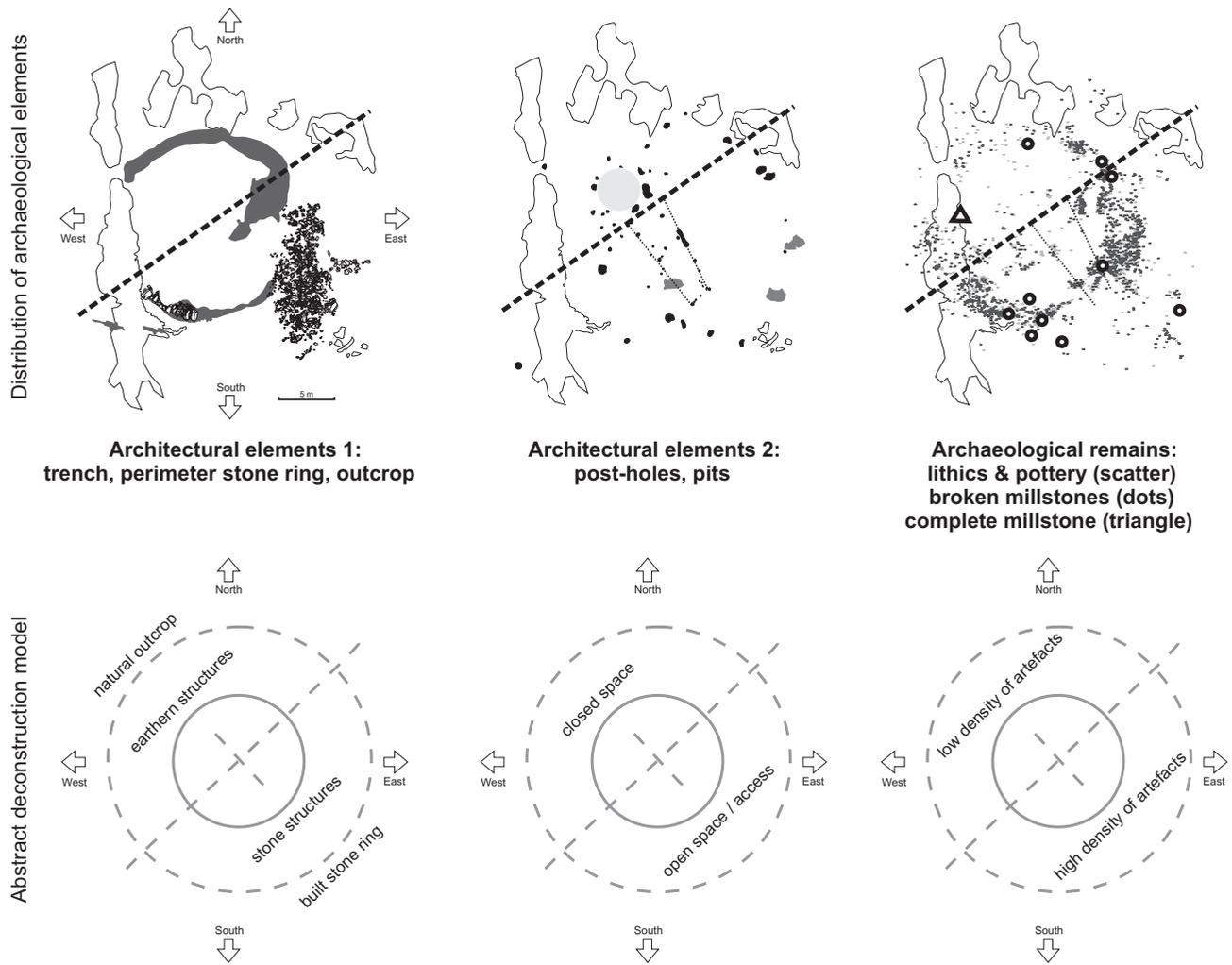


Figure 5. Model of Neolithic space represented in the circular enclosure of Montenegro.

At the Montenegro site, the settlement was founded and expanded, integrating a previously existing space (the circular enclosure), and also reproducing and maintaining the previous spatial order. This can be seen in the huts that were built onto the sides of the interior of the enclosure (described in previous sections) and the central circular construction. These structures, which were clearly built after the enclosure, do not significantly alter its original shape, and reaffirm the organization of the existing space. We will return to this point later on in this article.

These issues raise questions that should be resolved in future excavations and new explorations of the archaeological record: are circular enclosures such as that at Montenegro complementary to funerary monumentality when megalithism appeared — making funerary and ritual monumentality operate together — or do they represent a change, at a given moment of funerary monumentality, to the ritual cer-

emonial, settlement and domestic sphere? We believe the latter to be the case because this enclosure was constructed during a later period of Galician megalithism.

The structure in time and its historicity

The data obtained make it possible to situate the construction of the circular enclosure into what we refer to as the Atlantic Neolithic, establishing points of coincidence between Montenegro and constructions such as stone or timber circles from the Neolithic period in several regions along the Atlantic Façade (Bradley 1998; Bradley *et al.* 2002; Burl 2005; Gibson 2005; Hartwell 2002). In addition, the circular enclosure within its context, the settlement, puts Montenegro at the forefront of a new reality in Galicia: research into open settlements from the Late Neolithic.

Considering again the long life-history of these sites, the Montenegro enclosure makes it possible to understand the megalithic phenomenon — as

do mounds — as a long-lasting historical and social process which maintains a common formal-spatial and temporal background. The desire for permanence and visibility is typical of the nature of monuments, in opposition to the concealment represented by burials in chambers or pits, or the fact that while dwelling structures were perishable those used for the dead are permanent. Also, the presence of breaks within this phenomenon, which are marked by peaks of monumental activity followed by periods of inactivity, allow us to maintain that this process is neither continuous nor linear (Blas Cortina 2006; Criado-Boado *et al.* 2005; Mañana-Borrazás 2003). The combination of the stratigraphic analysis of the monuments, together with the dates of their different stages, provide reliable proof that this model of a long lifespan with discontinuities in their use is increasingly recurrent, leading us to propose that this ‘cultural rhythm’ is something inherent in monumentality itself (Criado-Boado *et al.* 2005; Mañana-Borrazás 2003).

In the case of Montenegro, so far we have four C^{14} dates. Three of these fall around the first third and middle of the third millennium BC. Like other monumental sites — mounds and stone or timber circles — the historical process of the enclosure in Montenegro reveals a series of stages that involved the remodelling, maintenance and even replacement of previously existing structures with new ones although, above all, it reveals the continued existence of the significance and use of certain places with a ritual character (Holtorf 1996; Bradley 2002; L’Helgouac’h 1996; Hartwell 2002; Mañana-Borrazás 2003; Lorrio & Montero 2004; García-Sanjuán 2005; Prieto-Martínez 2007).

Returning to the Neolithic model of spatial organization

In closing, we should like to return to the idea presented at the start of this article, that all spatial forms are determined by the concept of spatial design that exists in the socio-cultural formation that produces them. The absolute coherence between the spatial organization of the enclosure of Montenegro and Neolithic spatiality is a clear example of the materialization of this principle. From a purely formal perspective, we see that the Neolithic pattern of organization is repeated in the circular enclosure which once again reaffirms the model already proposed by several authors (Bradley 1998; Criado-Boado 1999; Criado-Boado & Villoch Vázquez 1998):

1. circularity;
2. access from the southeast;
3. asymmetrical organization of space;
4. dual arrangement by halves, ‘built’ by leaving the rocky outcrops towards the west and north, using ditches in the south, east and north, concentrating

- the disposal of archaeological material in the south and east, and placing domestic millstones in this half;
5. close relationship with natural elements (such as rocky outcrops).

This pattern, translated into different areas and types of Neolithic architecture, such as monumental architecture (Bradley 1998; Criado-Boado 1999; Criado-Boado & Villoch Vázquez 1998) reflects the continued existence of an idea: the circular spatiality and the concentric model of organization so commonly seen in Neolithic architecture, reproduced later in the large settlements surrounded by ditches. The continued use, reuse and reconstruction of the circular enclosure of Montenegro reveals a general spatial concept that was maintained, an earlier idea that continued not only in the architecture of the enclosure, but also in its dual, asymmetrical organization, as shown by the greater density of materials found in the southeast sector. The concordance between spaces and cardinal points is also an expression of this same code, a code that is not exclusive of northwest Iberia (Hoskin 1998). Examples all along the European Atlantic Façade show that similar concerns regarding spatiality are to be found at different levels of analysis, from the micro-spatial organization of architectural elements and deposits to the relationship and setting of the monuments in the landscape. The use of the landscape in this respect — by integrating circular landforms and visibilities, constrained places, etc. in the global monumental project — is especially significant, for it implies the human construction of space by means other than physical building.

In summary, we may consider monumental architecture to be a constructive project, as a mechanism for reproducing a concept, and for making an idea reality. What we have, beyond mounds and enclosures, is a Neolithic spatial design with its regularities; an abstract model of this concept of space underlying monuments, landscapes and materiality from the Neolithic period in the northwest Iberian Peninsula and beyond. The fact that the materialization of this Neolithic rituality takes shape through a constructive action that combines negative artificial architectures (ditches) with the use of natural forms (rocky outcrops), the proliferation of artificial elements towards the east with a relative absence of these elements to the west, and the symbolic reuse of worn-out millstones, would metaphorically indicate the presence of a diffuse Neolithic, with a limited domestication of the world, which correctly represents the nature of the Neolithic period in Galicia (Prieto-Martínez *et al.* forthcoming, in the same way as other parts of the Atlantic world.

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Notes

1. Forno dos Mouros 5 de Ortigueira — A Coruña (UA-20009; 4552–4351 cal. bc: Mañana-Borrazás 2005), the dating of the painting from the chamber of Coto dos Mouros (CAMS-83631; 4540–4240 cal. bc 2σ: Steelman *et al.* 2005) or the tumular mass of Catasol 2 (CSIC-1039; 5030–4800 cal. bc 2σ), and the oldest from the tumular mass of Alto da Barreira (CSIC-1039; 5030–4800 cal. bc 2σ: both in Alonso Matthías & Bello Diéguez 1997).
2. The enclosures in Os Campiños (Fábregas Valcarce & Fuente Andrés 1991/92) or Dombate (Alonso Matthías & Bello Diéguez 1997) have been dated to this period.

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