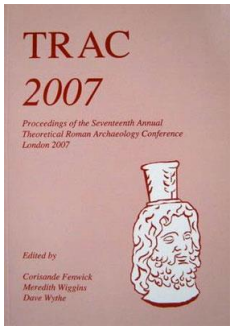

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Author(s): Leonardo García Sanjuán, Pablo Garrido González, and Fernando Lozano Gómez
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The Use of Prehistoric Ritual and Funerary Sites in Roman Spain: Discussing Tradition, Memory and Identity in Roman Society

Leonardo García Sanjuán, Pablo Garrido González and Fernando Lozano Gómez

Introduction

In the last decade, archaeologists investigating European prehistory have begun to understand the dimension of "materialised memory" that is often embodied in funerary and ritual sites and landscapes (Hingley 1996; Holtorf 1997; 1998; Bradley 1998; 2002; Bradley and Williams 1998; O´Brien 2002). This has opened the way to innovative research dealing with, for example, cultural memory, genealogies, manipulation of the past for ideological purposes and the definition of cultural identities. People select elements from the past according to the needs of the present, so that the past becomes subsumed, dominated, conquered or dismantled (van Dyke and Alcock, 2003: 3).

From the onset of the farming economy in the Neolithic (and probably as far back as the Upper Palaeolithic), and the gradual emergence of complex social systems, the cult of the ancestors gained great prominence as a vehicle for the legitimisation of power. Early agricultural societies developed ideological concepts based on belonging to and a connection with the land, as well as possessing it, in which the ancestors, deposited in burial chambers, played an essential legitimating role. The very architectural scale and quantity of Neolithic sites dedicated to the celebration of death, especially those of megalithic character spells out the relevance of the past in the reproduction of social practices. As Bradley has shown, Neolithic society was permeated by ancestor rituals (1998: 66).

European Bronze and Iron Age societies received from their Neolithic predecessors not only a legacy of belief systems and cultural practices, but, more importantly for the aim of this paper, a network of prominent sites and landscapes where that legacy was materialised. The prominence of these sites must have stemmed from their spoken resonance through oral traditions, which is archaeologically unverifiable, as well as from their physical properties, such as monumentality, location, visibility, material and symbolical associations – which can be accessed through archaeological evidence. As they were perceived, identified, interpreted and reinterpreted by successive generations of people living under evolving social and cultural conditions, the sacred sites and landscapes founded in the Neolithic were transformed into tradition, identity and power. Such an understanding emphasises that, centuries or even millennia after their original

construction, prehistoric monuments very often played important roles for communities which assimilated and incorporated them as part of their own systems of ideological reproduction. We argue that this more nuanced interpretation of Neolithic monuments and landscapes represents an epistemological rupture in the discipline of European prehistory – one which Roman archaeologists have yet to realize the potential of.

This phenomenon goes well beyond the realm of prehistoric societies and, as it has been noted, its importance within Roman and Medieval Europe must not be underestimated (Alcock 1991; Holtorf 1997; 1998; Williams 1998; Blake 2003). When Rome began to conquer the lands of Western Europe, from the end of the third century B.C. onwards, the already existing complex web of religious ideologies that had evolved from the Neolithic, became further complicated. On the one hand, the past and the ancestors were clearly of the utmost political relevance within Roman society itself (D'Ambra 2002). On the other hand, from the point of view of the local populations that were conquered, Rome was a foreign power that imposed its political and economic dominance with ruthless violence. In the face of defeat, one immediately available cultural response was the invocation of the cultural memory as a means of ideological and symbolic resistance. This involved, first and foremost, the adherence to sites and spaces loaded with the strength of a millenary memory, as is demonstrated by a number of cases from the British Isles, France and Germany (Evans 1985; Williams 1998; Bradley 2002; Holtorf 1997; 1998).

In Spain and Portugal, a series of articles published in recent years (Beguiristán Gúrpide and Vélaz Ciaurriz 1999; Mañana Borrazás 2003; Lorrio Alvarado and Montero Ruiz 2004; Bueno Ramírez et al. 2004; García Sanjuán 2005a; 2005b; 2007; García Sanjuán and Wheatley 2007) provide the basis for an understanding of how the past was negotiated by Iberian prehistoric societies. The ideological role of prehistoric sacred sites and landscapes within Iberian-Roman society remains, however, poorly understood. More often than not for prehistorians excavating megalithic monuments, material remains of Roman date convey only one meaning: "looting". Concomitantly, from the point of view of a Classical archaeologists and ancient historians alike, the notion that people under Roman domination may have felt the drive to visit ancestral prehistoric sites has often been dismissed as largely anecdotal and unworthy of scrutiny. In this paper we outline a different approach, which demonstrates that it is time to bring about an analogous epistemological rupture in the study of the Iberian-Roman society regarding how traditional sites and landscapes were interpreted, appropriated and manipulated as part of ideological strategies that drew on the past to legitimize the present.

Archaeological evidence.

The evidence on which this paper is based was obtained after a non-systematic sampling of published cases, as well as a number of unpublished cases which have been provided by colleagues, corresponding essentially to the southern regions of Spain and Portugal and spanning the entire Roman period. On the basis of this research, three main patterns of reuse or continuous use of prehistoric ritual and funerary spaces in Roman times have been distinguished: a) overlapping or spatial proximity of prehistoric and Roman cemeteries (8 cases); b) funerary and ritual use of the interior and exterior spaces of individual prehistoric funerary chambers in Roman times (23 cases); c) use of prehistoric rock-art sanctuaries and stelae in Roman times (6 instances). These cases are summarised in Tables 1, 2 and 3. For the sake of brevity, the relevant information will not be subjected here to a detailed critique – see however an extended Spanish

version of this paper in García Sanjuán et al. 2007. Although the bibliographic search from which these data have been compiled is not systematic, and therefore no claim is made on the statistical significance of the results, we suggest that this compilation greatly under-represents the extent of the phenomenon under study. All too often the relevant data have been disregarded by archaeologists as irrelevant for the reasons mentioned above.

The cases listed in the first group, which exhibit overlapping or spatial proximity of the prehistoric and Roman necropolises (Table 1), do not necessarily demonstrate patterns of conscious reuse of prehistoric funerary sites: they may be simply explained by the rather obvious fact that numerous Iberian-Roman communities continued living in the same settlements as their Iron Age, Bronze Age, Copper Age and even Neolithic predecessors. Depending on their morphology and size, prehistoric funerary monuments may or may not have been conspicuous from the Iberian-Roman settlements, but we argue that several burials became spatially and even stratigraphically associated simply because of their proximity to settlements.

The second group of cases (Table 2) may be more meaningful, as they involve the performance of funerary and ritual practices inside or at the entrance of much older tombs. For example in the case of megaliths, we find evidence of later activity inside the chambers, on top of the mounds, and in neighbouring areas. Detailed archaeological descriptions of the Roman funerary events are not available in many cases and much caution must be attached in their interpretation. However, the fact that some of these old ancient burial chambers were in remote or isolated places, far from any Iberian-Roman settlement, and that they were often barely visible on the surface, as in the case of some artificial caves or hypogea, suggests that those places were used by Iberian-Roman

Table 1. Overlapping or spatial proximity of the necropolis.

Site	***Prehistoric Context***	***Description and chronology of the Roman materials***	***Reference***
El Gandul: El Término (Seville)	Megalith	2 cremations 1st–2nd centuries AD	Personal communication by J. M. Rodríguez Hidalgo
El Gandul: La Casilla (Seville)	Megalith	Ceramic material of unspecified date	IAPH 2000
El Gandul: Cañada Honda B (Seville)	Megalith	Iron Age tomb with Roman material of unspecified date	IAPH 2000
Pago de San Ambrosio (Seville)	Megalithic necropolis	22 tombs 1st–8th centuries AD	Guerrero Misa 1987; Larrey Hoyuelos and Jiménez Barrientos 1990
Alcolea del Río (Seville)	Cist	Roman necropolis 1st–2nd centuries AD	Sierra Alonso 1999
El Jadramil (Cádiz)	Artificial caves	Necropolis 1st–2nd AD (cremation) and 3rd AD (inhumation)	Ladrón de Guevara et al. 2003
Antequera (Málaga)	Megaliths	2 tombs (inhumation) 4th–5th centuries AD	Fernández Rodríguez et al. 2006
Ermita del Almendral (Cádiz)	Artificial caves	Necropolis with Roman and Early Medieval materials	López Rosendo 1999

people because they were regarded as culturally and genealogically close, perhaps belonging to their own ancestors. As a consequence they were used for burial or ritual purposes, or both. Whether the fact that these places had a previous funerary character was due to the perpetuation of burial traditions or a more simple empirical observation, that is, whether they were known through "memory" or through "discovery", is, we argue, more difficult to infer.

One of the most conspicuous and interesting cases of this group is that documented at the entrance of tomb 14 of the megalithic necropolis of Las Peñas de los Gitanos at Montefrío (Granada, Spain). This chamber was excavated in the mid-1970s by the University of Granada and later published in a fairly detailed and reliable report (Ferrer Palma and Rodríguez Oliva 1978). At the entrance of this monument, and covering an area of approximately 1 square

Table 2. Funerary and cultural use of the interior and exterior spaces of prehistoric funerary sites.

Site	***Prehistoric Context***	***Description and chronology of the Roman materials***	***Reference***
El Pozuelo 7 (Huelva)	Megalith	Coin from the Reign of Constance	Piñón Varela 2005
Dolmen de Mascotejo (Huelva)	Megalith	Pit with two cremations plus a looted cist, next to the mound, with limited undiagnostic material.	Personal communication by J. A. Linares Catela
Dolmen de Soto 2 (Huelva)	Megalith	Infundibulum	Piñón Varela 2005
Los Majadales (Seville)	Megalith	Ceramic materials of unspecified date	IAPH 2000
Cerro de las Aguilillas (Málaga)	Artificial caves	Late Roman ceramics and coins	Ramos Muñoz et al. 1994
La Encantada I (Almería)	Megalith	Ceramic material and personal objects (grave goods) 2nd century AD	Lorrio Alvarado and Montero Ruiz 2004
La Encantada III (Almería)	Megalith	Personal objects (grave goods) 2nd century AD	Lorrio Alvarado and Montero Ruiz 2004
Los Caporchanes II (Almería)	Megalith	Personal objects (grave goods) Principate.	Lorrio Alvarado and Montero Ruiz 2004
Llano de los Frailes (Almería)	Megalith	Ceramic and numismatic material together with personal objects (grave goods) 5th century AD	Lorrio Alvarado and Montero Ruiz 2004
Los Millares (Almería) Tumba XXII	Megalith	Two small ceramic vessels placed at the base of the megalithic chamber	Personal communication by Dr. F. Molina González
Llano de los Baños de Alicún III (Granada)	Megalith	Brass ring Late 5th century AD (Visigothic)	Lorrio Alvarado and Montero Ruiz 2004
Covacha de la Presa (Granada)	Megalith	Ointment container Principate	Lorrio Alvarado and Montero Ruiz 2004

meter, a fairly compact deposit composed of charred organic material was found (Figure 1). This deposit yielded abundant fragments of wheel thrown pottery, 7 coins and 15 fragments of copper and bronze objects corresponding to various functions (several were appliqués). Based on the study of the coins, the deposit was dated to the beginning of the fifth century A.D. (Ferrer Palma and Rodríguez Oliva 1978: 335). From the group of metal objects, three in particular stand out in terms of the diagnostic of the functional character of the deposit: a *tintinnabulum* (small bell) a sceptre and an amulet composed of two phalli (the one on the left displays, instead of the glans, a *manus dextera* with a closed fist) joined by the genitals under which there is a small circular perforation (Figure 2). There can be little doubt that the deposit found outside megalithic monument 14 of Las Peñas de los Gitanos can be explained by the undertaking of

Table 2. contd.

Site	***Prehistoric Context***	***Description and chronology of the Roman materials***	***Reference***
Las Peñas de los Gitanos (Granada)	Megalith	A deposit of burnt material, bronzes and coins 5th century AD	Ferrer Palma and Rodríguez Oliva 1978
Tapada de Matos (Alentejo, Portugal)	Megalith	Inhumation burials. Ceramic materials and coins together with grave goods 4th–5th century AD	Oliveira 1998
Porto Aivado (Alentejo, Portugal)	Megalith	Tegulae fragments of unspecified date	Oliveira 1998
Ribeiro do Lobo (Alentejo, Portugal)	Megalith	Tegulae fragments of unspecified date	Oliveira 1998
S. Gens II (Alentejo, Portugal)	Megalith	Tegulae fragments of unspecified date	Oliveira 1998
Las Castelhanas (Alentejo, Portugal)	Megalith	Tegulae fragments of unspecified date	Oliveira 1998
Navalcán (Toledo)	Megalith	Inhumation burial (no grave goods) of unspecified date	Bueno Ramírez et al. 1999
Granja del Toriñuelo (Badajoz)	Megalith	Several wall structures organised around a large, central building From 1st century BC 1st century AD	Carrasco Martín 2002
Cova de la Pastora (Alicante)	Artificial cave	Ceramic materials of Late Bronze Age, Phoenician, Iberian and Roman date	Lorrio Alvarado and Montero Ruiz 2004
Alcalar (Algarve) Monument 7	Megalith	Ceramic vessel on the cairn and bronze coin at the entrance (unknown chronology)	Morán Acuña and Parreira, 2004:112
Alcalar (Algarve) Monument 4	Megalith	Roman grave in the corridor, next to the chamber's entrance, provided a coin minted in Claudius time, a white glass urn and a small blue glass bead.	Morán Acuña and Parreira, 2004:112

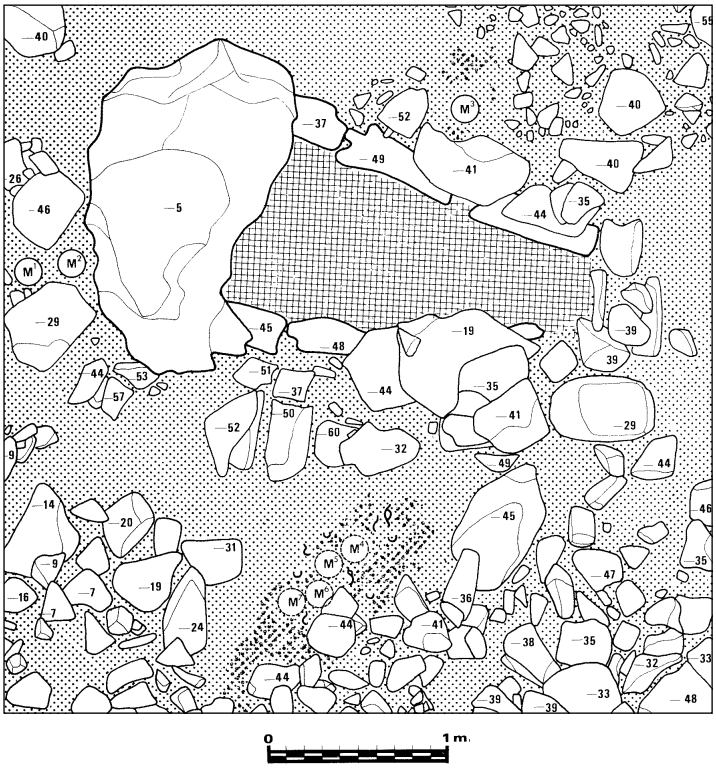

Figure 1. Las Peñas de los Gitanos at Montefrío (Granada, Spain).

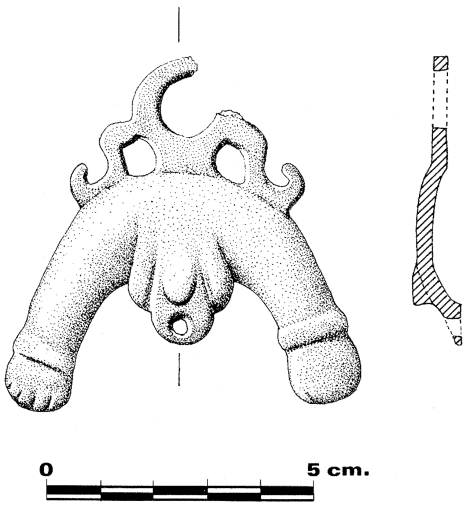

Figure 2. Amulet.

one or more rituals in relation with fecundity, health and prosperity, in the Late Roman period. First, the small number of coins clearly discards the possibility of interpreting the deposit as a hoard. Second, both the sceptre and the tintinnabulum are objects frequently employed in Roman magical-religious ceremonies; the use of fire and libations (fragments of broken pots) is equally characteristic of ceremonial practices. Third, phallic amulets have a strongly apotropaic function in the Roman religion, as well as a strong meaning in terms of fecundity (Del Hoyo Calleja and Vázquez Hoys 1994).

However, perhaps the most telling example of how ancestral sites and monuments were interpreted by Iberian-Roman populations is to be found in the list of cases of re-used rock-art sanctuaries and stelae (Table 3). Given the limitations of space, we shall concentrate here on two examples of Late Bronze Age 'warrior stelae' re-cut and re-engraved as Roman funerary slabs. The so-called 'warrior stelae' are a set of monumentalised graphic representations that, totalling at present a number of just over one hundred, appear mostly, with only a few exceptions, in the south-western quadrant of Iberia (Extremadura and western Andalusia). They are basically stone monoliths with an average height between 70 and 200 cm, dressed with engravings representing principally, although not exclusively, panoplies of weapons. Their precise functional context remains largely unknown, as they have most often been found by farmers and local amateurs and no successful archaeological excavation of their setting has ever been carried out. However, it seems quite plausible that they were used to commemorate cenotaphs or surrogate burials (see Celestino Pérez 2001 for a discussion).

The stele found at Chillón (Guadalajara, Spain) is quite remarkable because in the first century A.D. it was re-used as a funerary slab. In addition to its Bronze Age symbols (a human figure with various weapons), this stela displays an added Latin inscription reading Procul/us Touto/ni F(ilius) An(norum) XL H(ic)/ S(itus) E(st) S(it) T(ibi) T(erra) L(evis) ('Proculus, son

Table 3. Use of rock-art sanctuaries and prehistoric stelae.

Site	***Prehistoric Context***	***Description and chronology of the Roman materials***	***Bibliography***
Cueva del Piruétano (Cádiz)	Bronze Age rock-art sanctuary	Painted Paleochristian symbols and anthropomorphic rock-burials	Topper and Topper 1988
Cueva de Atlanterra (Cádiz)	Bronze Age rock-art sanctuary	Possible painted Paleochristian symbols	Topper and Topper 1988
Cueva del Obispo (Cádiz)	Bronze Age rock-art sanctuary	Possible painted Paleochristian symbols	Topper and Topper 1988
Cueva Negra (Murcia)	Prehistoric rock-art sanctuary	Tituli picti with Iberian lettering and Latin inscriptions 1st–2nd AD	San Nicolás del Toro 1985
Chillón Stela (Ciudad Real)	Warrior Stelae (Bronce Final/Edad del Hierro)	Reused as a funerary inscription 1st–2nd AD	Fernández Ochoa and Zarzalejos Prieto 1994
Ibahernando Stela (Cáceres)	Warrior Stelae (Bronce Final/Edad del Hierro)	Reused as a funerary inscription	Almagro Basch 1966

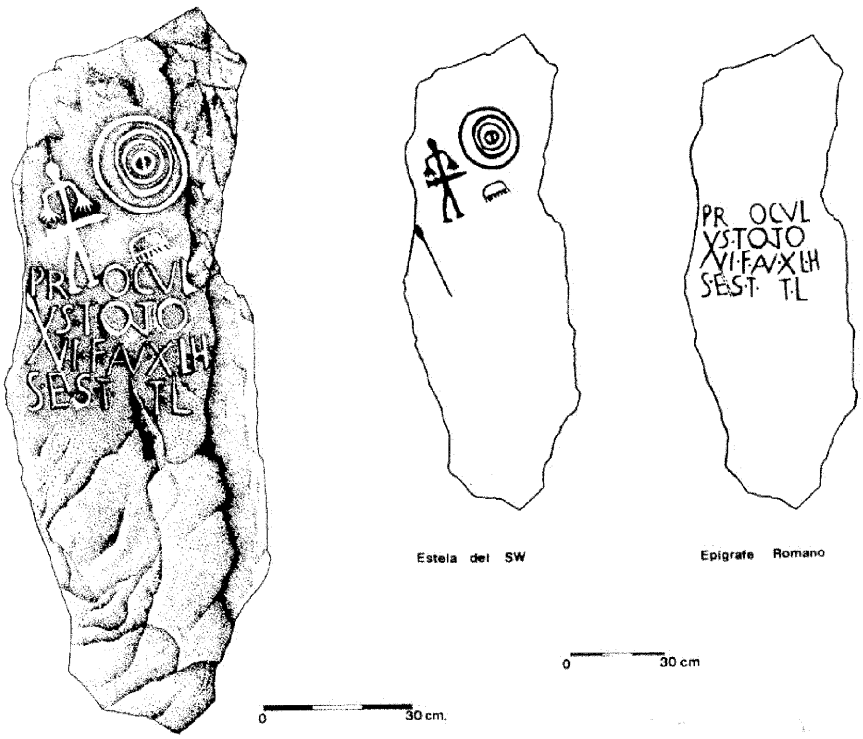

Figure 3. Stele found at Chillón (Guadalajara, Spain).

of Toutonius, of forty years of age, lays here – May the earth be light to you') (Fernández Ochoa and Zarzalejos Prieto 1994) (Figure 3). It is interesting that, several hundred years later after its original carving, this monolith, probably made with a funerary purpose, was re-utilised with a funerary function. Furthermore, there is compelling evidence to suggest that the Latin inscription was carefully designed to respect and integrate the prehistoric symbols in the new funerary slab. First, the engraved text was placed right below the panoply of weapons, so as not to damage them. Secondly, the word 'Proculus' was interrupted so as not to overwrite the legs of the warrior. Finally, two of the letters of the inscription (the "u" of the word 'Proculus' and the "n" of the word 'Toutoni') partly use the shaft of the warrior's spear. The way this inscription was arranged suggests that Proculus felt great reverence for the ideological meaning of the stele: he not only re-used it in his own tomb, but perhaps also instructed the carver to take care not to damage the prehistoric motifs while preparing the inscription.

A similar example can be found in the stela of Ibahernando (Cáceres, Spain). This monolith shows a slightly simpler composition, including a shield and a sword (no anthropomorph in this case). Again, this stele was re-dressed with a Latin funerary inscription, and reused as a tombstone in Roman times. Although the precise dating and interpretation of the inscription is further complicated by the fact that it seems to have orthographical errors, it is apparent

that it commemorates the death of someone who bore a Celtic name (Almagro Basch 1966:94) (Figure 4). Various elements in this stele suggest, again, that a conscious ideological statement, perhaps resistance against Roman domination and acculturation, was being made by a person that, first, had a Celtic and not Italian name, second, was put to rest with an inscription written in a very poor Latin, and third, chose an ancient prehistoric monolith showing weapons to mark his tomb. Here, the ancestral stele may have been re-interpreted as an ideological tool that brought together the expression of both personal identity and cultural resistance. Although we favour this view, we must admit, however, that the nature of the evidence lacks enough detail to exclude an alternative interpretation in which this case might, more simply, be understood as a statement of participation in a hybrid Ibero-Roman or, for that matter, Romano-Celtic culture. Identity, of course, also works at a personal (individual) and subjective (psychological) level, a level to which neither archaeology nor history can easily access.

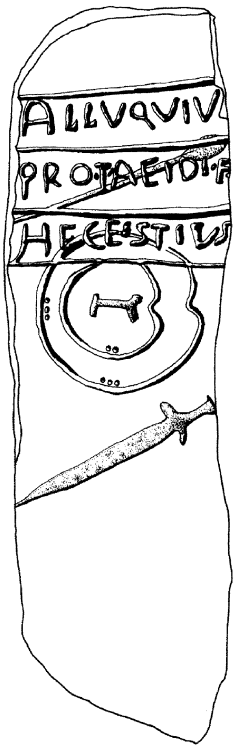

Figure 4. Stela of Ibahernando (Cáceres, Spain).

Conclusion.

The above discussion has sought to suggest ways in which long-neglected and under-valued empirical evidence can be read in terms of a powerful set of cultural practices present in the Roman society, namely the use of the material remains of the past in the construction of religious, political, social and ideological statements. The sample handled in this paper is small, and no claim is made for its statistical significance. Rather, our main aim has been to suggest, first, a new way of looking at the empirical evidence, by understanding how archaeological observations are made and what archaeological observations are taken as epistemologically relevant; and second, to propose new avenues for the interpretation of the cultural interaction between Roman Empire and the Iberian societies integrated into it.

From the point of view of the Iberian prehistoric and protohistoric populations, Rome imposed its political and economic dominance with great violence. No written record allows us to access the ways in which local Iberian societies reacted to this dominance, and thus the archaeological record takes on a special importance. At the early stages of the Roman period, local cultural traditions may have been invoked as a means of ideological self-assertion, for example, through the reutilization of traditional sacred spaces as a display of ideological and symbolic resistance. The communities subjected to Rome may have used their own past materialised in ancestral burial grounds, to define themselves in the face of a foreign imperialist power (Evans 1985; Espejo Muriel 2000). This process of self-definition was two-fold: it must have conveyed submission and acculturation and, at the same time, resistance to Roman oppression. Rome's policy towards local religious ideologies was generally pragmatic and tolerant, which often favoured the integration of traditional cults within the local social structures – the impact of

this phenomenon on the increasing complexity of religious life in the Roman Empire has been well studied (North 1992; Frankfurter 1998). But how is this reflected in the archaeological record? The poor quality of the available archaeological record, makes this issue highly difficult to investigate. It is worth noting that the material culture that presently allows us to identify the reutilisations of prehistoric tombs and sanctuaries in the Roman period is of Roman origin, notably imported ceramics. This could easily lead to the circular argument that the groups or communities who held ceremonies in prehistoric monuments were already Romanised – that is to say, they had accepted the domination and influence of Roman culture and thus lacked an active cultural memory and/or will to resist. However, this is not necessarily true. It is possible that some social groups, although fully integrated within the social system controlled by Rome and using a material culture influenced by Rome, maintained very active links with their local, indigenous, cultural heritage. In this respect, the examples of the stelae of Chillón and Ibahernando are particularly interesting since they reveal the existence of individuals who, in the first centuries A.D., paid a powerful tribute to local symbols of great antiquity. This type of reuse leads us necessarily to ask whether a symbolic connection with the warrior elite of the past, whether factual, or mythical, was being made, and whether this connection implied an act of cultural and social auto-affirmation.

Once the process of Romanisation was more consolidated, cultural reactions to ancestral sites may have changed. The frequent reuse of prehistoric funerary structures in other parts of Europe during Late Antiquity has been interpreted as another aspect of the movement of revitalisation of local identities that is so characteristic of the Late Roman period (Scott 1991). The rituals held at the entrance of dolmen 4 at Las Peñas de los Gitanos (Granada) perhaps reflect this phenomenon. Contemporary with the disintegration of the political and administrative system of the empire in the 3rd and 4th centuries A.D., a phenomenon of great importance to the religious and political ideology of Iberian societies took place: the beginning of Christianisation. This issue would of course demand a detailed discussion that is beyond the scope of this paper. Some evidence, however, does suggest the pervasiveness of traditional and ancestral cults among Iberian populations during the early stages of Christian penetration. From the 4th century A.D. onwards, edicts and rules were issued by the early Christian church to forbid the now pagan custom of the cult of the dead, with only one concession: the "day of the dead". Thus, for example, edicts II, III and IV of the Council of Elvira (300–307 A.D.) strictly prohibited any type of sacrifice to idols, especially if one had been baptised (García Villoslada 1980). The majority of the measures on this matter are collected in the Codex Theodosianus, especially in book XVI, 10. Here, very severe measures were established not only for the offenders, but also for the civil servants involved, through actions or omissions, in the performance of rites considered to be pagan. The frequent Episcopal complaints constituted a clear illustration of the pressure suffered by the civil authorities in order to accelerate the process of Christianisation. These criticisms also show the ecclesiastic discontent about the lack of rigour in the compliance with the rules that had been dictated. In the particular case of funerary cults, disposition CTh. 16.10.19.3, dated to the 15 of November of 408 A.D., established that "…it is forbidden to carry out sacrilegious rites in honour (of the dead), nor celebrate feasts or any other ceremony at burial places. We grant the bishops of all places the means of forbidding them by ecclesiastic means; as is for judges, we establish a penalty of twenty pounds of gold, equally applicable to themselves, if, surreptitiously, they do not fulfil their obligations". Similarly, Canon LXVIII of the II Council of Braga (572 A.D.) established that "it is forbidden to celebrate mass on the tomb of the dead: it is not right that ignorant and audacious clerics give sacraments in the field

upon the tombs, and they should offer mass for the dead in the basilicas or wherever the relics of the saints be held (…). It is otherwise forbidden to Christians to take food to the tombs of the deceased and to offer God sacrifices in honour of the dead". Almost one century later, at the XII Council of Toledo (681 A.D.), the prohibition of worshiping idols (along with other kinds of pagan practices) was reiterated and reinforced with the threat of severe penalties.

It is reasonable to ask to what extent the official edicts and canons put an end to the age-old practices of the cult of the dead, so strongly rooted in the religious behaviour of the Iberian societies, or, for that matter, European, since the Neolithic. As a religion of power, Christianity disposed of a written bureaucracy and a well structured hierarchy, capable of persecuting pagan rites. On the other hand, the survival of pre-Christian ideologies and religious practices might have taken place especially in rural areas, and thus among communities who have not left any written trace of their cosmologies. In this sense, if a conflict existed, then the edicts and council acts only offered one of the versions. In its desire to overcome the pagan religions, the Christian church did not distinguish between paganism of prehistoric origin and Romanised paganisms, which complicates the assessment of the official records of the church in relation to the aims of this paper. However, having observed the generally tolerant attitude of pre-Christian Rome towards indigenous religious practices and the continued use of prehistoric spaces in pre-Christian Roman times, it is not unreasonable to think that, through its edicts, the Christian hierarchy was fighting cults of the dead based of funerary ideologies of millenary antiquity and prehistoric origin that involved the use of ancestral sites such as burial grounds and rock-art sanctuaries.

Department of Prehistory and Archaeology, University of Sevilla
Department of Ancient History, University of Sevilla

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