The Hand that Threads the Needle Can also Draw the Arrow: the Case of Bela Vista 5

Abstract:

Bela Vista 5 is a double ditched enclosure near the town of Beringel (Beja, Portugal) dating from the last quarter of the 3rd millennium BCE. Eighty-four pits are associated with the enclosure. During archaeological works in 2012, 26 pits and sections of the ditches were excavated. The single pit found within the inner ditch contained the only funerary context found in the site. Votive items accompanying this individual included three ceramic vessels, a metal awl and a Palmela copper point. Although not all pits were excavated, the seclusion of this burial within the inner circle might suggest attention was meant to be drawn to its only occupant. Despite the presence of a weapon, the human remains belonged to an adult woman. Moreover, the human remains had undergone a very peculiar funerary treatment that implied one or more visits to her tomb after the primary deposition of the corpse, including the reorganization of parts of the skeleton and removal of some bones. This is probably the best documented case of a female burial with a complex long term funerary chaîne opératoire in the Late Prehistory of Portugal. The attention and goods dispensed to this individual might point to her importance within the community that made use of the site. Her association with a prestige weapon raises doubts on the role women played in these societies and might point to the association of at least some women to tasks and objects traditionally considered as male attributes.

Keywords: *Female burial, bone manipulation, weapons, Bronze Age; Portugal.*