ENCLOSURES, MONUMENTS AND THE RITUALIZATION OF DOMESTIC LIFE

por

Richard Bradley[*]

Resumo: O artigo aborda os recintos do Norte da Península Ibérica e compara-os com uma série de monumentos neolíticos e da Idade do Bronze existentes em Inglaterra, Dinamarca e Suécia. Cada caso analisado parece mostrar que a distinção entre "ritual" e "vida doméstica" não é convincente. As pessoas, no passado, podem ter dado relevo a certos elementos da vida diária no contexto de cenários mais formais constituídos por monumentos especialmente construídos para o efeito.

Palavras-chave: Ritual; domesticidade; deposição.

Abstract: The paper considers the enclosures of Northern Iberia and compares them with a variety of Neolithic and Broinze Age monuments in England, Denmark and Sweden. In each case it seems as if the distinction between 'ritual' and 'domestic life' is unsatisfactory. People in the past may have highlighted certain of the elements of daily life in the more formal settings provided by specially constructed monuments.

Key-words: Ritual; domesticity; deposition.

There are two ways of thinking about the artefacts that prehistoric people employed in their daily lives. One is to consider the functions of these items and the other is to study the circumstances in which they were deposited. But problems arise if we confuse those two procedures.

Consider the evidence of grave goods. Among the burials of the Bell Beaker tradition there may be many kinds of cross-reference between the objects that feature in the funeral rite and those associated with domestic life. Although there is considerable variation from one region of Europe to another, these relationships can take several forms. Exactly the same objects may have been buried with the dead and deposited in settlements, for example arrowheads or decorated pottery. In some cases there are differences in the quality or style of these particular items – the arrowheads in burials

[*] Department of Archaeology, University of Reading (U.K.).

may be especially finely made (Bailly, 2001), the pottery vessels could be more fragile than the others (Boast, 1995) – but still there is a clear relationship between the two assemblages. Alternatively, the objects deposited with people in the grave may reflect their position in society. Thus particular sets of grave goods might refer to the activities of hunters, warriors, leather workers and smiths (Case, 1993). In this case a particular selection of objects evokes the role that someone could have played in life. It may be an idealised portrait, for these objects would have been chosen by the mourners, but it does maintain a close connection between the living and the dead. Archaeologists have no difficulty in accepting that artefacts whose distinctive forms refer to the domestic world might sometimes be deposited in more specialised contexts. Perhaps that is because some activities were imbued with a particular significance.

That example would be accepted by most prehistorians, but what if we consider a second question? How were the same kinds of material treated in everyday life? If particular kinds of artefact played a part in funeral rites, how were they to be treated in the settlements of the same period? And if certain tasks were so significant that they were symbolised by grave goods, was their importance also acknowledged in the domestic assemblage? Here we come to the problem of deposition.

Not all the deposits that are found in settlements can be treated as chance accumulations. As Ian Hodder argued twenty years ago, it is too easy to impose modern conceptions of 'rubbish' on the societies of the past (Hodder, 1982). For instance, burials are frequently deposited in corn storage pits in England and Northern France (Whimster, 1981; Delattre, 2000) and they are commonplace in the Bronze Age settlements of Central and North-east Europe. They have been studied in a recent monograph edited by Rittershofer (1997).

Human remains, and even whole skeletons, have been found within the occupied area and sometimes they seem to be directly associated with animal bones. They may represent a minority burial rite rather than the chance accumulation of unwanted material. These finds can be associated with some types of settlement rather than others – for example, such deposits may be particularly characteristic of hill forts – and specific body parts may be over-represented, especially skulls. A number of the bodies had undergone special treatment. They may have been dissected or burnt, and only certain parts may have been deposited. Alternatively, individual bones may have been modified at some stage before they entered the archaeological record. A good example is the production of masks out of human crania. There is also evidence that deposits of human remains were associated with particular kinds of feature within the settlement. In the Laustiz Culture, for instance, human and animal burials were placed in shafts that may originally have been wells (Bukowski, 1999). In some regions these deposits existed in parallel with cemeteries, but in other cases they provide practically the only evidence for the treatment of the dead. Although there is considerable diversity,

it seems clear that these were purposeful deposits and that it was necessary to connect them with the places where people lived.

The corollary is equally important. For some time it has been obvious that certain kinds of material may have been associated with the domestic sphere but had to be deposited beyond its limits. In the southern Netherlands, for example, a recent study suggests that pins and sickles may be associated with houses and farmyards, and axes and spearheads with the edge of the settled land (Fontijn, 2002). These are often found in streams and marshes. Swords and more elaborate personal ornaments entered the archaeological record at a still greater distance from the occupation site, as deposits in major rivers. Clearly objects that may have been associated with daily life need not have been discarded in the places where people lived. Again there is an importance difference between the ways in which an artefact was used and the context in which it was deposited. Thus the axe was a domestic artefact which was probably meant to work timber, but it became a votive offering when it was buried in a marsh.

What do these examples have in common? In every case the items found in specialised contexts were of types that were directly associated with the domestic domain. They were not a special class of artefact. Moreover the same types that occur in these different deposits can sometimes be found within the settlements themselves. Thus the crucial distinction to make is not between different kinds of object or between the roles that they had played in daily life. Rather, it concerns the manner in which they were deployed when their use came to an end.

A good example of this process is found at El Pedroso, on the border between Portugal and Spain (Figures 1 and 2). This site has two main components: a walled settlement on a hilltop with a group of houses, and what seems to have been a cave sanctuary located on the lower ground. Their chronologies extend from the Copper Age into the Early Bronze Age, although it is possible that the cave was used for longer than the hillfort. Here I shall be referring to the excavations that I carried out there together with Rámon Fábregas and Germán Delibes (Delibes, at al. 1995; Bradley, 2002, 242-5).

At first glance, the different components of the site could hardly be more different from one another. Inside the enclosure wall there is a group of circular houses, including a workshop where arrowheads were made. The defences comprise a massive wall, a gateway and a tower, and the settlement seems to have extended beyond the fortifications to a series of terraces on the side of the hill. But the cave is located beneath a massive outcrop and can only be recognised from the defences because a cairn was built on top of it. The cave has two chambers, separated by a narrow passage. Both of these were decorated, the first chamber entirely with cup marks and the second with a series of carved anthropomorphs and other motifs typical of Iberian Schematic Art. Outside the entrance there was a terrace, revetted by a massive wall

built in a similar technique to the enclosure. At a late stage in its history this was overlain by an oval platform with a timber superstructure which seems to have been burnt. It seems likely that the outer chamber of the cave was first used whilst the hillfort was occupied, and this may also apply to the construction of the terrace wall. In a subsequent phase the inner chamber came into use and the oval platform was built.

Two points are relevant to my argument. First, it seems most unlikely that the cave was a living site. No trace of any houses was found on the terrace immediately outside it, and space inside each of the decorated chambers was far too limited for domestic activities to have taken place there. In fact the presence of carved decoration suggests that this site had played a specialised role. The second point is critical. There seem to be few distinctions between the kinds of artefacts found in and around that cave and those from the fortified settlement at El Pedroso. Despite some differences of chronology, both include large amounts of ceramics, worked quartz, stone axe heads, arrowheads and querns. Indeed it seems very likely that the projectile points deposited inside the cave had been made within the hillfort. Of course there are minor distinctions to observe, but these are far outweighed by the similarities. How could this have come about when one part of the site included the remains of houses, whilst the other seems to have been unsuitable for occupation?

In some respects the different parts of El Pedroso recall elements that have been found separately at sites of the same period in north and central Portugal. The hillfort, with its houses, is one of a number of examples which seem to be associated with domestic occupation, but the decorated cave is like Crasto de Palheiros and Fraga da Pena where in each case a striking rock formation has been enhanced by platforms or walls (Sanches, this volume; Varela, this volume). But that is not the only possibility, for the cave can also be compared with other examples associated with hilltop settlements. In the same way, the oval platform that was built towards the end of the sequence at El Pedroso is very similar to one outside the walled enclosure at Castelo Velho which was associated with human bones (similar material would not have survived in the acid soil at El Pedroso). There are other comparisons between these sites. There are considerable terraces or ramps at Fraga da Pena and Crasto de Palheiros, and a large circular platform built around a rock outcrop in the centre of the enclosure at Castelo Velho might have played a similar role to the cairn above the cave at El Pedroso (Jorge, this volume).

Some of these sites are enclosures and seem to have been used as settlements. Others are suggested as ceremonial monuments, but both groups raise the same problem, for it is by no means easy to characterise the differences between them. The clearest distinctions concern the architecture of these places. Thus one group features terraces and platforms but lacks many obvious dwellings. The other has defensive walls and

houses, but sometimes their features overlap. El Pedroso includes a fortified settlement but has a decorated cave with an artificial terrace immediately outside it. There is a similar terrace or ramp at Castelo Velho but it was constructed just beyond the enclosure wall. In the same way, the structures at Fraga da Pena and Crasto de Palheiros emphasise the position of a striking rock formation. So does the sanctuary site at El Pedroso, but in this case there is a defended settlement on the mountain top. Fraga da Pena introduces a further variation, for two small enclosures built against the granite tor contain a specialised assemblage, including a number of Beaker vessels, a copper artefact and an idol, whilst a less specialised assemblage is associated with a domestic site beyond their limits. It shares yet another distinctive feature with El Pedroso for the rock outcrop at Fraga da Pena has painted decoration.

El Pedroso and Fraga da Pena emphasise the difficulty of distinguishing between a class of monumentalised settlement and a ceremonial site, for both components occur together where they might be found at different locations. At the same time, the artefact assemblages from the different parts of El Pedroso have a similar composition. The apparently 'domestic' material associated with the houses on the hilltop is like that found inside the cave, which was too small to have been inhabited.

How could the same kinds of material have been associated both with ritual and with daily life? That is a question that goes to the heart of the matter. Castelo Velho is especially relevant here for Susana Oliveira Jorge has written about the way in which her interpretation of the site has changed. What first seemed to be a fortified settlement she now describes as a ceremonial monument (Jorge, 1999). This is consistent with the excavated evidence, but one element must not be overlooked. A number of the structures on the site do have an unusual character, not least the external platform with its deposit of human bones, although the enclosure itself replaced an open settlement and may include the remains of houses. Moreover most of the material associated with this site makes an explicit reference to the concerns of daily life. Thus there were finds of loom weights and broken pottery, quernstones and a copper axe. There was also evidence of burnt grain. These seem to have been deposited with some formality. They were usually placed within stone-lined containers or larger structures which were filled on a number of occasions before some of them were covered by large slabs. These deposits may refer to the domestic sphere, but in this context they assume a special significance.

The problem is not peculiar to Iberian archaeology. There are many similar cases, but in the interests of brevity I shall confine myself to two examples. The first concerns the causewayed enclosures of the Neolithic period. The second takes the argument into the Late Bronze Age.

I begin with the causewayed enclosure at Sarup in Jutland (Figure 3; Anderson, 1997). This went through five phases of activity, the first two of which involved the

creation and use of an earthwork perimeter. There were obviously many formal deposits here, including finely decorated pots, axes, animal remains and human bones, some of which were purposefully located in relation to the enclosure ditch. In fact individual segments of the perimeter were carefully screened by palisades. But the excavator also attempted to characterise the deposits found inside that enclosure, distinguishing between those associated with domestic occupation and what he called 'ritual pits' The first group consisted of storage pits containing artefacts in their secondary filling, whilst the 'ritual pits' were those dug specifically to receive offerings of complete pots or axe heads. During the enclosure phase about 30% of the pits were associated with 'ritual' and 70% with 'occupation', but in subsequent phases, when the perimeter was no longer maintained, the proportion of specialised deposits apparently fell, suggesting that domestic occupation became more important at Sarup.

This analysis depends on a simple distinction between the practical and the non-utilitarian. A limited range of intact objects are regarded as special and ritually-charged and the remainder as refuse which was causally discarded. This is an entirely subjective scheme. For example, caches of tools or raw material are interpreted as occupation debris, where they would be treated as specialised deposits if they were found in isolation. In the same way, axe heads are considered to have been important in ritual life but quernstones are denied the same significance.

It is interesting to compare Anderson's interpretation with the results of excavation at a similar enclosure at Etton in eastern England. In this case the site had been buried beneath a layer of alluvium, with the result that it was very well preserved (Pryor, 1998). Detailed analysis of the ground surface inside the earthwork showed that the enclosure had not been inhabited and there were no signs of any domestic buildings. Rather, the environmental evidence from the project suggested that the monument had been used only intermittently, perhaps on a seasonal basis. It was obviously set apart from the normal pattern of settlement.

Like Sarup, the interior of the enclosure at Etton contained a large number of pits, but this time they were not interpreted in functional terms. They contain unusual quantities of burnt animal bones as well as the remains of non-local axes, which may have been deliberately destroyed. These compare with the contents of the 'ritual pits' at Sarup, but similar deposits at Etton included quernstones. Again they were interpreted in terms of ritual activity.

The interrupted ditch at Etton provided the focus for a series of placed deposits, which were covered over and renewed on several occasions. Different segments of that ditch contained different kinds of offerings, and individual assemblages may have had a distinctive layout, with items of particular significance placed against the causeways providing access to the site. The excavator, Francis Pryor, has suggested that these collections of material were provided by particular groups of people, who came to the

monument for the purpose. Individual segments of the earthwork may have been created and maintained by separate parts of the community, but not all these lengths of ditch need have existed at the same time. Individual features had probably been surrounded by a rim of spoil so that people could view the material that was displayed. Indeed these deposits varied so much from one part of the site to another that he describes them as purposeful 'statements'. Again such statements were composed from the material that was familiar in domestic life. Indeed a recent study of the lithic artefacts from a similar enclosure in southern England could not identify any major differences between them and the material from other sites of the same date (Saville, 2002). It seems likely that the real difference concerns the circumstances in which these items were used and deposited.

The last example concerns a completely excavated Late Bronze Age enclosure at Odensala Prästgård, near Stockholm (Figure 4; Olausson, 1995). This occupied a low but conspicuous hill and consisted of two approximately concentric enclosures, each of them defined by discontinuous walls of rubble. Like the causewayed enclosures of the Neolithic, they seem to have been built in segments, but in this case they were used during the first millennium BC. The inner wall was sub-circular and the outer wall roughly square, although neither formed a continuous circuit. A series of stone settings occurred against the inside of both enclosure walls and had often formed around a conspicuous boulder. Beyond the outer limit of the monument were a series of other structures and deposits.

The central feature of the site was a circular stone setting which contained the burials of four adults and a child; these were associated with bronze tweezers and with fragments of three knives. Another human burial was discovered in a stone setting against the wall of the inner enclosure, whilst the last example came from an open area beyond the monument altogether. The burials on the hilltop are from the Middle Bronze Age, but the enclosure that was built around them probably dates from the ninth century BC. The interior contains no evidence of any structures apart from low stone settings, but the irregularities in the exposed rock were filled in to create a level surface.

The most striking evidence was of fire, and this extended to the material of the enclosure walls and to the surrounding area. There were a number of hearth pits, and beyond the outer wall there seems to have been an oven. The large quantity of burnt stones may provide evidence for large scale cooking, as it seems to do on other sites of this period in Sweden (Kaliff, 1999). Nearly all the evidence of burning came from the outer part of the enclosure. In addition to the hearths, the excavation located the positions of 26 features that were identified as graves, half of which contained burnt animal bones. Again these were located close to the outer wall of the monument. These bones had apparently been cleaned before their deposition. Only one animal was

represented in each of these features and the parts of the body that would have provided most meat were absent from these deposits. One of the animal burials was against the inner wall of the monument and also contained human remains. With that exception, the human burials tended to be found at the centre of the site and the animal graves in the outer enclosure.

Beyond the limit of the enclosure there were two terraces, each of them occupied by a wooden 'cult house' of the type that is sometimes associated with barrow cemeteries (Victor, 2002). These were accompanied by numerous hearths, concentrations of fire-cracked stone and by layers of cultural material containing many animal skeletons. There were also deposits of burnt grain which seems to have been brought to the site fully processed. Just as the cremated bone had a different distribution from the other burials of animals, they were also separate from the levels of burnt grain, which may be rather later in date. The excavator interprets the site as a ceremonial monument at which feasts probably took place. It saw the sacrifice of foodstuffs brought in from nearby settlements, but it does not seem to have been inhabited. What is particularly significant here is the way in which domesticated plants and animals were being offered – and probably consumed – at a site which was associated with older human burials.

What do these different places have in common? They share certain structural features, for all of them can certainly be described as monuments. In some cases they were defined by walls and in others by earthworks, but a feature that they share is that in every case particular activities or deposits of cultural material seem to have been put on display. The separate lengths of ditch at Etton were surrounded by a bank of excavated soil and at Sarup they were enclosed by wooden fences. At Odensala Prästgård there were numerous stone settings, as well as two specialised buildings of a kind that is sometimes associated with a cemetery. The site has a complex layout which shows a superficial resemblance to that of Castelo Velho, whilst other Bronze Age earthworks in southern Sweden actually have interrupted perimeters in the manner of an older causewayed enclosure. One of the Scandinavian enclosures at Draget focuses on a massive rock outcrop like some of the Iberian monuments (Olausson, 1997). It encloses a number of stone settings, but excavation has shown that it was not a settlement. In the same way, sites like Castelo Velho, Crasto de Palheiros, Fraga de Pena and the cave at El Pedroso all include terraces, ramps or smaller platforms which would have given added emphasis to the activities that were taking place there. Indeed the granite outcrop at El Pedroso would have highlighted the position of anyone who was standing in front of the cairn on its highest point. The architecture of these monuments is like that of a theatre, emphasising the positions of certain actors and events and displaying them to a wider audience.

It would be easy to describe such performances as public *rituals*, but archaeo-

logists have been reluctant to do so because so much of the excavated material from these places is similar to the finds from settlements. Why is the field evidence from these sites so ambiguous? Perhaps they face this situation because they have been working with an unsatisfactory conception of ritual. Prehistorians are used to contrasting the sacred and the secular as if they were categorically opposed. As a result, their accounts of prehistoric Europe are not sufficiently subtle. Artefacts, monuments and deposits are considered to be either ritual or functional, as if this simply dichotomy were the only option available for interpreting them. Like the much-criticised distinction between culture and nature, these schemes say more about the concerns of Western society than they do about people in the past (Bradley, 2003a).

What these sites have in common are structures and deposits which utilise the components of domestic life but provide them with a new emphasis. It is because these elements all form part of a wider settlement record that their deployment in specialised contexts has been so difficult for archaeologists to understand. Perhaps the problem is of their own making. Should they distinguish so sharply between the sacred and the profane or between the ritual and the domestic? Instead they ought to place more emphasis on the process of ritualization, for this is a form of behaviour which is often used strategically (Bell, 1992; Humphrey and Laidlaw, 1994). It is employed by specific people to attain specific ends. Ritual itself is a form of action which may leave certain physical traces, and these are among the features that make up the archaeological record, yet particular excavated contexts are not imbued with special qualities in themselves. Rather, they result from distinctive kinds of performance. Such performances may been composed out of elements that had a wider resonance, for this is how they would have gained their social significance and why they could have been understood.

I suggest that one way of reconsidering some of the problems identified here is by studying the ways in which rituals were constructed out of the materials of domestic life. Elements taken from everyday activities seem to have been emphasised and acted out in the past. This could happen at a variety of scales, from an individual action to a public ceremony, and in a whole range of contexts from the house to the hillfort. Particular activities were highlighted through the ways in which they were performed and such performances were distributed along a continuum from the local and ephemeral to the large scale and highly structured. Ritualization is a process which can extend from the everyday to the arcane. It permeates the prehistory of Europe, but it has to be understood in its local contexts.

Ritual life in prehistoric Europe selected and emphasised the components of domestic life in a kind of theatre. This could have happened in many locations: in settlements, in 'natural' places, at production sites or in specially-built monuments. The connecting links, however, are clear. Some of the elements of daily life were

played out with an added emphasis, in special contexts and perhaps before a special audience. The modern distinction between the sacred and the profane is meaningless here, and so is any attempt to divide the archaeological record on the same lines. In prehistory ritual gave domestic life its force, and domestic life in turn provided a frame of reference for public events. Ritual and domestic life were not two halves of a single phenomenon, to be picked apart by the archaeologist. Instead they formed two layers that seem to have been precisely superimposed.

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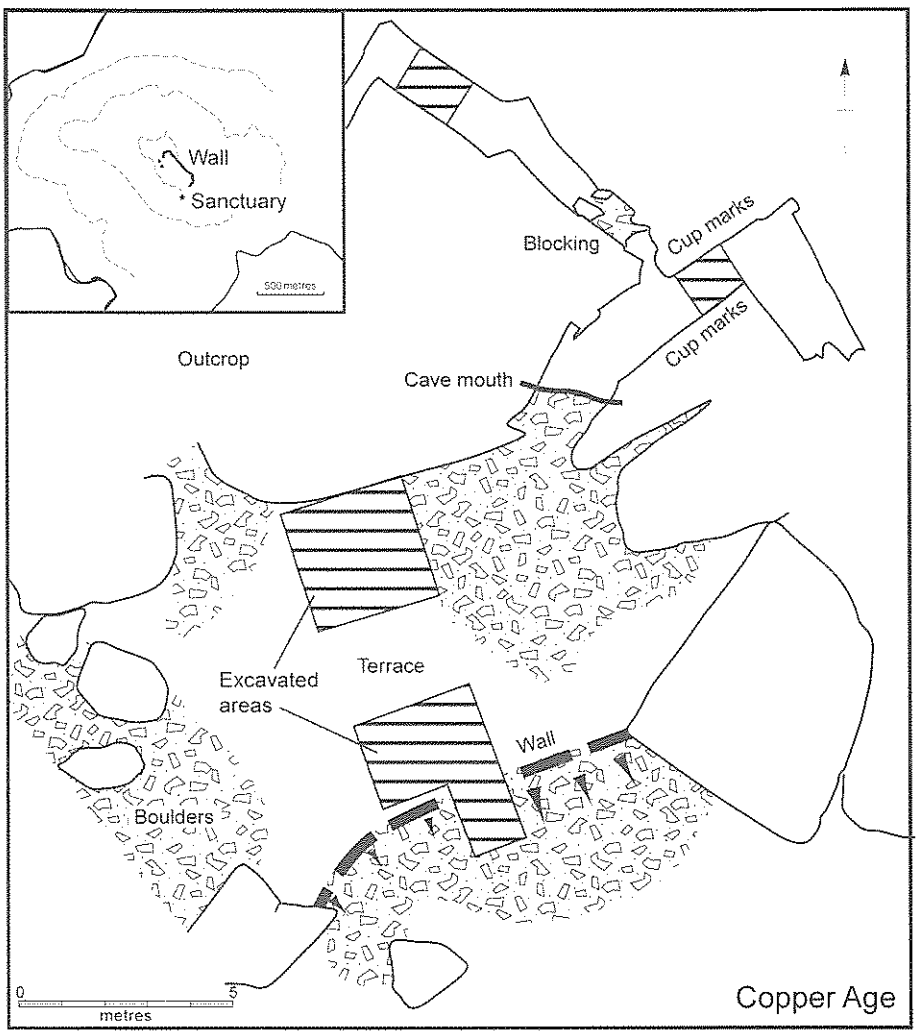

Fig. 1 – The features assigned to the first phase of activity at the cave sanctuary of El Pedroso, Zamora. The inset shows the relationship between the cave and the hilltop enclosure. Sources: Delibes et al. (1995) and Bradley (2002).

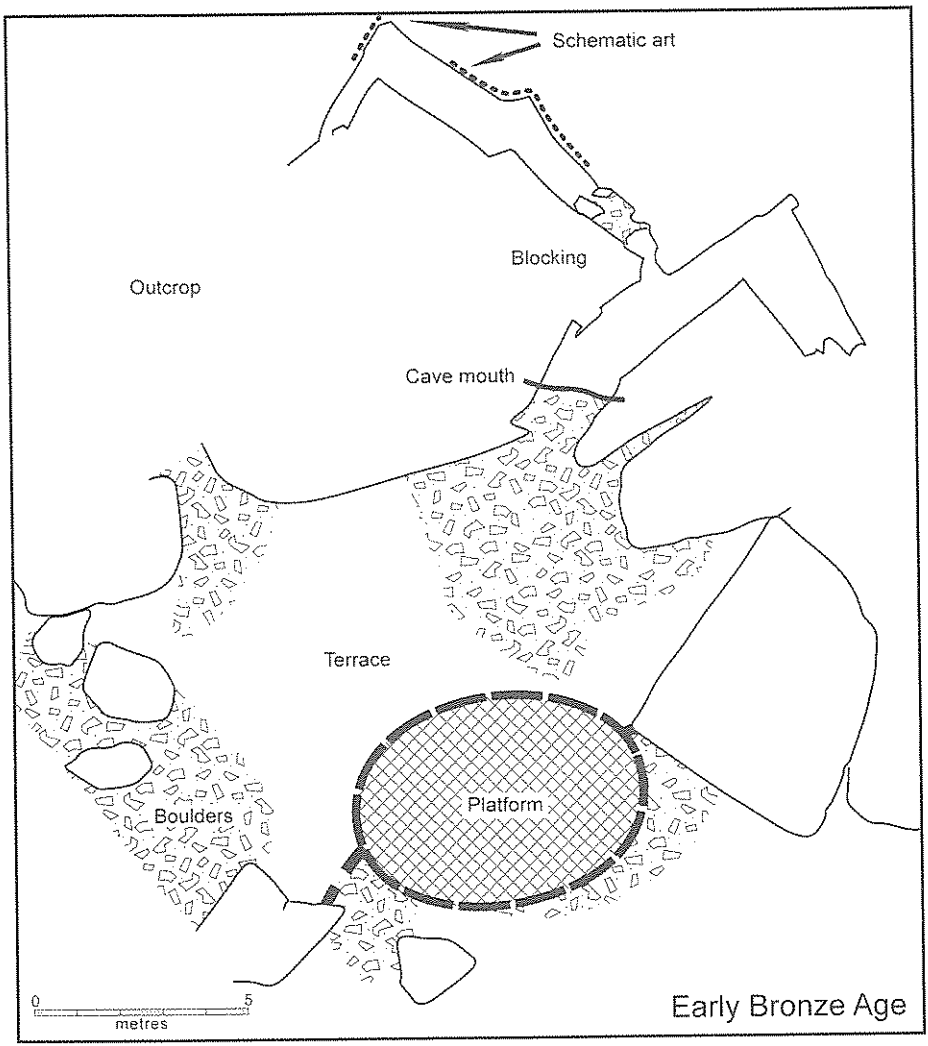

Fig. 2 – The features assigned to the second phase of activity at the cave sanctuary of El Pedroso. Source: Bradley (2002).

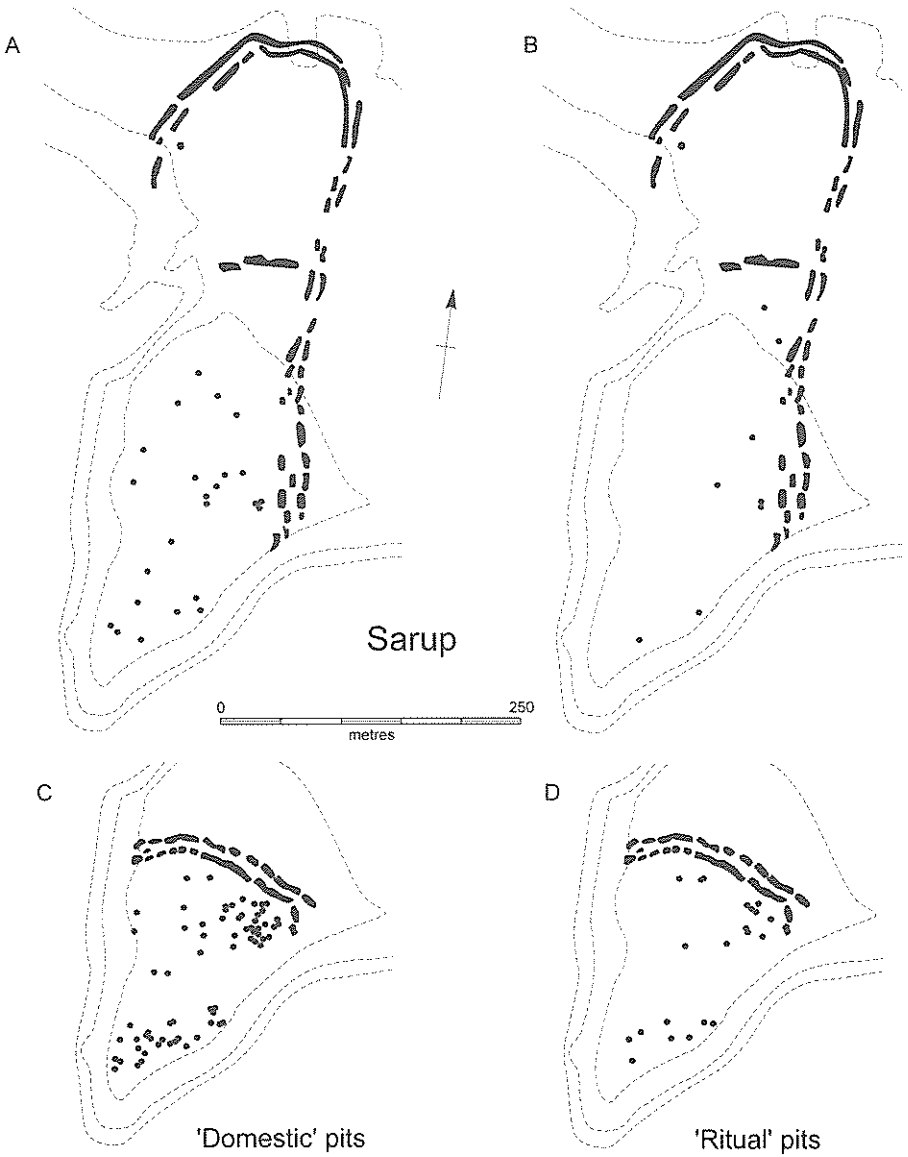

Fig. 3 – The distribution of 'domestic pits' and 'ritual pits' in the two principal phases at Sarup, Denmark. Sources: Anderson (1997) and Bradley (2003 a).

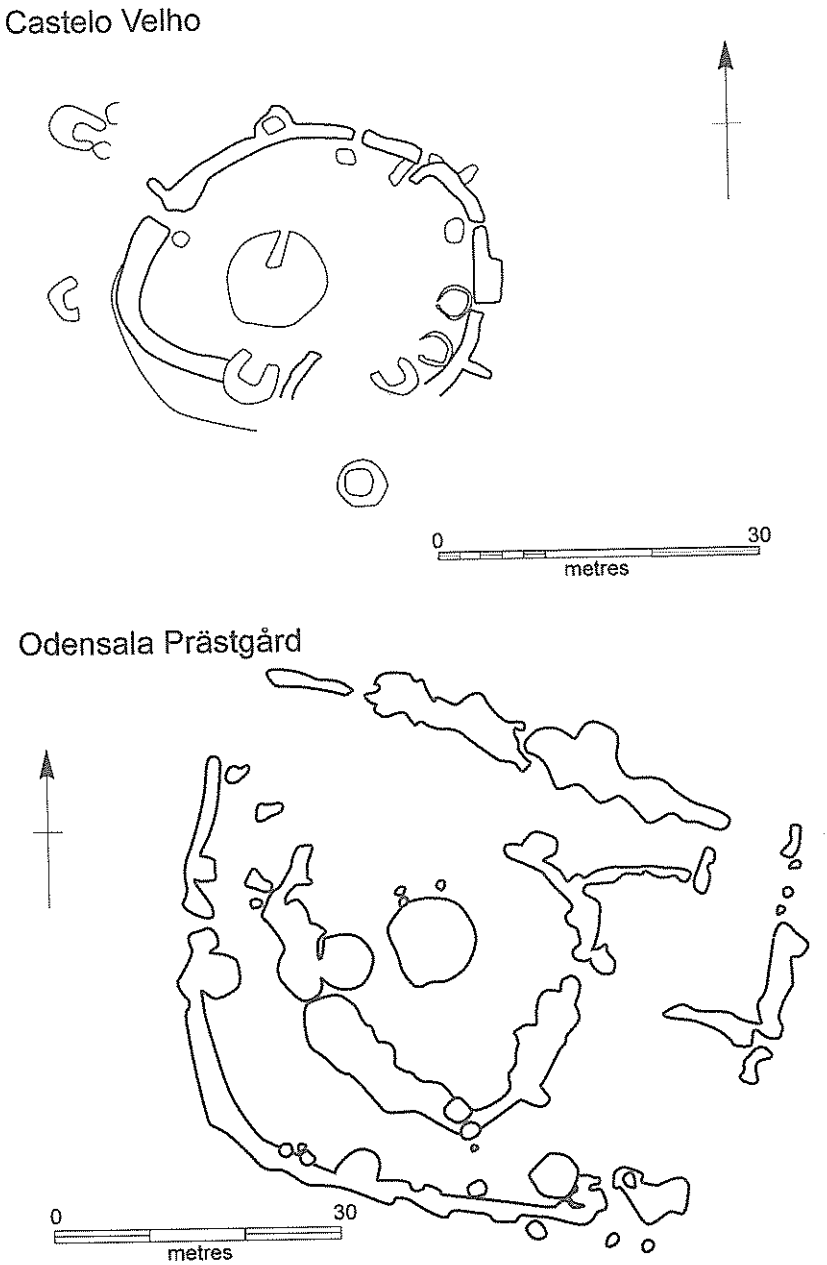

Fig. 4 – Outline plans of the enclosures at Castelo Velho, Portugal and Odensala Prästgård, Sweden. Sources: Jorge (1999) and Olausson (1995).