

# Multiple burials on pit graves from Recent Prehistory at Southwest of Iberia: The cases of Monte do Vale do Ouro 2 (Ferreira do Alentejo), Ribeira de S. Domingos 1 and Alto de Brinches 3 (Serpa)

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## Introduction

The consecutive works of rescue Archaeology have revealed new data about the funerary practices of Late Prehistoric communities of southwest of Portugal (Alentejo). The archaeological sites studied in this work were excavated by three archaeological enterprises (Omniknos, ERA Arqueologia SA and Palimpsesto), at different locations of the district of Beja. These correspond to Monte do Vale do Ouro 2 (Ferreira do Alentejo), Ribeira de S. Domingos 1 (Brinches) and Alto de Brinches 3 (São Salvador) (Fig. 1). According to the archaeological reports (Miguel & Godinho 2009; Alves *et al.* 2010; Moro Berraquero & Figueiredo 2013) at all sites were multiple burials on pit graves. The chronology of the structures varies from Late Neolithic/Chalcolithic to Bronze Age.



Figure 1 – Localization of the studied area.

## Materials and Methods

### Monte do Vale do Ouro 2:

Pit 97 – burials [9701], [9702] and [9703], and a few decidual teeth;

Pit 102 – burials [10202], [10205] and [10207], and a few scattered bones from stratigraphic unit [10200].

### Ribeira de S. Domingos 1

Pit 1 – anatomical connections [805], [807], [808] and [809], the burials [812], [813] and [814], and the scattered bones from stratigraphic unit [806].

### Alto de Brinches 3:

Pit 691 – burials [661] and [656], the anatomical connections [639] and [668], and the ossuaries [453], [469], [637] and [659].

**Non-adults:** age at death estimation (Smith 1991; Alqahtani *et al.* 2010). **Adults:** assessment of age at death (MacLaughlin 1990; Schaefer *et al.* 2009) and sexual diagnosis based on cranial features (Ferembach *et al.* 1980; Buikstra & Ubelaker 1994) and long bones (Wasterlain 2000). The **laboratory** results and the **field** data were also articulated.

## Results and Discussion

- Structures had multiple burials, most of them in anatomical connection allowing to match the few cases of ossuaries or scattered bones with each respective individual.
- Minimal number of individuals varies between 3 (pit 691 at Alto de Brinches 3), 4 (pit 97 and 102 at Monte do Vale do Ouro 2) and 5 (Ribeira de S. Domingos 1).
- Several inhumation positions identified: dorsal, lateral (right and left) and ventral decubitus and foetal position. The orientations were diverse: W-E, E-W, NW-SE, SE-NW and S-N (Fig. 2; Table 1).



Figure 2 – 1: Pit 1 of Monte do Vale do Ouro 2; 2: individual 10202 on pit 102 of Monte do Vale do Ouro 2; 3: individual 10207 on pit 102 of Monte do Vale do Ouro 2; 4: individual 809 on pit 1 of Ribeira de S. Domingos 1; 5: individuals 812 and 813 on pit 1 of Ribeira de S. Domingos 1; 6: Pit 691 of Alto de Brinches 3.

- Both sexes and adults and non-adults are present. No discrimination by sex or age was detected (Table 1).

- Traces of fire found in several bones of the 3 individuals from pit 97 of Monte do Vale do Ouro 2 confirmed by FTIR analysis (Thompson *et al.* 2009), showing the possibility of inconsistent exposure to a low intensity fire. However, this cannot be interpreted as a practice of cremation (Fig. 3).

- Pit 102 of Monte do Vale do Ouro 2: Two lateral superior incisors (Fig. 3) display lingual sulcus on the cement-enamel junction, probably resulting from the continuous friction of some kind of thread or wire. This represents evidences of non-masticatory use. Some occlusal and interproximal sulcus of the posterior and anterior teeth have been interpreted as a consequence of activities: weaving, basketry, production of nets, ropes and fibers, being the teeth used as a third hand (Lorkiewicz 2011).



Figure 3 – 1: Traces of fire on individual 9701 of Monte do Vale do Ouro 2; 2 – tooth with evidences of non-masticatory use.

- At Alto de Brinches 3 some bones were rearranged, in some cases still with the soft tissues. This probably occurred for various reasons: ritual manipulation, space requirement or taphonomic agents (Rodrigues *et al.* 2012).

- In the same site, on the flat grave excavated inside de pit 691, a skeleton in ventral decubitus was possibly inhumed in some type of perishable material that allowed the preservation of its position (Fig. 2).

Table 1 - Results of the studied bones from the archaeological sites.

Site	Individual	Sex	Age at death	Inhumation position	Orientation	Structure	Structure dimensions	Chronology
MVO2	9701	F?	Adult	Supine, limbs extended	W-E	Pit 97	Circular countour. Diameter: 1,65 m; depth: 0,72 m.	Chalcolithic
MVO2	9702	Undetermined	Non-adult (15,6-16,2/16,5-17,5)	Right lateral decubitus, flexed position	NW-SE			
MVO2	9703	Undetermined	Non-adult (8-12/9,5-13,5)	Right lateral decubitus, flexed position	Unobservable			
MVO2	9703 (2)	Undetermined	Non-adult (1,5-3,5/2,5)	Unobservable	Unobservable	Pit 102	Circular countour. Diameter: 1,22 m; depth: 1,16 m.	Bronze Age
MVO2	10200	M?	Undetermined	Unobservable	Unobservable			
MVO2	10202	Undetermined	Non-adult (5-7/6,5-7,5)	Right lateral decubitus, flexed position	SE-NW			
MVO2	10205	F?	Adult	Right lateral decubitus, flexed position	Unobservable			
MVO2	10207	F	Young adult	Left lateral decubitus, flexed position	SE-NW	Pit 1	Circular countour. Diameter: 1,60 m; depth: 1,55 m.	Late Neolithic/ Chalcolithic
RSD1	805+806+808	Undetermined	Non-adult (7,5-12,6/10,5-12,5)	Ventral decubitus, flexed position	SE-NW			
RSD1	807+809	Undetermined	Non-adult (7,5-11,5/8,5-13,5)	Supine	SW-NE			
RSD1	812	M	Adult	Supine, flexed limbs	E-W			
RSD1	813	F	Adult	Ventral decubitus, flexed limbs	E-W			
RSD1	814	Undetermined	Non-adult (4,8-6,8/5,5-6,5)	Unobservable	Unobservable	Pit 691	Circular countour. Diameter: 2,37 m; depth: 1,03 m.	Chalcolithic
AB3	1	F	Young adult	Unobservable	Unobservable			
AB3	2	M	Adult	Left lateral decubitus	S-N			
AB3	661	F	Adult	Ventral decubitus, flexed limbs	SE-NW	Flat grave 689 inside pit 691	Sub-rectangular countour. Length: 1m; width: 0,40 m; depth: 0,22m.	Chalcolithic

## Final remarks

A new investigation perspective has been developed at the region of Alentejo's Late Prehistory. The emergence of new data about burials in pits, hypogeum and ditches reveals the complexity and heterogeneity of prehistoric funerary practices. The studied sample, although small and limited by taphonomic agents, contributes to a better understanding of the funerary contexts of this territory. Nevertheless, it is important to continue the investigation of Funerary Anthropology and Paleobiology of these populations, since the comparison between coeval osteological collections from different structures of Southwest of Iberia can help to comprehend the diversity of funerary solutions and practices.