De la estructura doméstica al espacio social: Lecturas arqueológicas del uso social del espacio

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The bold proposal of this volume is to present a number of contributions that examine the social construction of domestic space in different times and places. As the first editor Sonia Gutiérrez Lloret points out in her own paper, the archaeological study of households can be compared to the different layers that make up linguistic analysis. The basic layer is the morphological level, which describes the shapes of household units, as they are found in excavations and countless archaeological reports; the syntactic level explores the spatial and organic relations between these structures, their organization, and the network patterns that can be discerned in them; finally, the semiotic level reads the previous layers looking for the cultural meanings that convey the social structures that households literally accommodate. The comparison is particularly apt. The morphological, syntactic, and semiotic levels of analysis produce what Gutiérrez calls ‘a grammar of the house’ (p. 245), whose changing and distinctive regularities may be found across time and space. The challenge for archaeological studies is to isolate and identify the precise and concrete elements that make up such grammar and produce its recognisable patterns. Although this is not an easy task by any means, this volume shows that research on this field is beginning to produce interesting results.

Following the analogy with linguistic studies, all contributions to this volume make clear in one way or another the necessity of basing the analysis on a clear distinction between synchronic and diachronic elements, between household features that can be identified at a particular juncture and those that keep changing as a result of short and long-term processes. Archaeology has several tools to tackle this fundamental distinction—the most prominent being stratigraphic analysis—but it is also true that the very nature of the evidence tends to produce flat dimensions instead of the multifaceted representations that are necessary to deal with such a complex issue. The evolution of domestic units, their changing relational patterns, or their social meaning are not easily apprehended in excavation, and
modelling usually encounters unsurmountable difficulties. Particularly acute are problems concerning the identification, explanation, and interpretation of changes due to social, economic, cultural, or even demographic factors, as each archaeological site is usually described as a self-contained unit that needs to be compared with other (relevant) units in order to recognize evolutionary trends. The same holds true in the quest for synchronic social distinctions within a particular set of households: leaving aside monumental or significant architectural elements like visual markers of status, there are a number of problems concerning how to discern inequalities in a particular social milieu that shares the same material culture (e.g. Is the multiplication of hearths in a single household a marker of social status or rather an expression of the strength of kinship ties reflected in an organic growth of household units, or both of them? Are proxemics—as defined by Hall (1966)—an issue in the social configuration of settlements? How does the functionality of domestic spaces relate to social rank?)

These and other issues connected with particular fields of research are prominent topics in the twenty-one contributions that make up this volume. It opens with an introduction (‘Presentación’) by the editors, Gutiérrez Lloret and Grau Mira, which summarizes its contents and explains that the book springs from an on-going research project (Lectura arqueológica del uso social del espacio: Análisis transversal de la protohistoria al Medievo en el Mediterráneo Occidental), and an international workshop of the same title as the book that was held at the University of Alicante in May 2012. Contributions cover a huge timespan (from prehistory to the late Middle Ages, including protohistory and antiquity) that allow the reader to fathom the diverse (and also common) approaches prevalent in different disciplines. Five papers deal with domestic units among societies of hunter-gatherers (Jover Maestre), Iron Age settlements and Iberian oppida (Ayán Vila, Grau Mira, Belarte, Vives-Ferrándiz Sánchez), whereas the different social and cultural roles of Punic and Roman houses are discussed in the next six contributions by Jiménez Vialás and Prados Martínez, Molina Vidal, Bermejo Tirado, Pérez Ruiz, Saravia Batista, and by Sisani. Two late antiquity case studies are discussed by Vigil-Escalera Guirado and by Beolchini. The transformations of household units in medieval Islamic contexts in the Maghreb and Iberia are also addressed in the three papers authored by Fentress, Gutiérrez Lloret, and Cañavate Castejón, respectively. Special mention should be given to another three contributions that deal particularly with households, fortifications, and igudar (communal fortified granaries, sing. agadir) in medieval Morocco (Ettahiri et al., Bokbot et al., Delaigue et al.). The two final papers by López Lillo and Kiss close the volume by focusing on theoretical considerations on the concept of ‘domestic economy’ and the architectural implications of domestic spaces.

The geographical distribution of the papers shows a predominance of research focused on the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa, although there are also two contributions that deal with Italian cases (Roman domus in Umbria and an account of the urban transformations in Tuscum). As is usually the case in this kind of volume, multilingualism pervades the whole book: most of the contributions are written in Spanish, but also in English, French, or Italian. However, a brief summary in English is provided for all of them, although in some cases the language tends to be defective and some corrections should have been made.
Apart from the value of each contribution, this volume highlights the necessity of multidisciplinary approaches for the study of domestic spaces. It is certainly a necessary step in the right direction. Future research will increase the dialogue among different disciplines in order to confront similar problems related to such an important problem as the reconstruction of the domestic landscapes that housed societies in the past.

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The study of the origin of complex societies has been one of the most extensively debated in the archaeological literature. The Prehistory of Iberia: Debating Social Stratification and the State, which results from a conference session presented at the seventy-third Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) held in Vancouver, Canada in 2008, explores the different historical developments of the state. The book mainly focuses on Late Prehistory although it extends to the pre-Roman Iron Age with a broad set of case studies from different areas of the Iberian Peninsula. It is organized in three parts. Part 1, 'Introducing social stratification and the state in the Iberian Peninsula', contains three chapters. The 'Introduction' (Ch. 1, co-written by the editors) offers a general but brief historiographical account of the old debate concerning the origin of social stratification and the state, highlighting the contribution of each chapter to this debate. Chapter 2 (Gilman) offers a critical analysis of the state hypothesis in Southern Iberia, while Cruz Berrocal (Ch. 3) reviews the historical character of Spanish archaeology and its shift to Marxism, which started in the 1980s.

Part 2 is made up of fourteen case studies (Chs. 4–17). The first case study by Bernabeu Aubán, Moreno Martín, and Barton focuses on the evolution of social complexity in Eastern Spain from the Neolithic to the pre-Roman Iron Age based on long-term changes in the structure of socio-political networks. By applying insights and methods from the field of complex adaptive systems they are able to detect non-synchronous cycles of increasing and decreasing complexity and dynamic social change. In Chapter 5, Ramos Millán describes the different changes in the Iberian southeast from the Neolithic onwards, when village chiefdoms and village-centred landscapes with peer polity interaction within the Los Millares culture were transformed into territorial chiefdoms with ranked village-centred landscapes during the Bell Beaker and Argaric periods. In Chapter 6, also focusing on the southeast, Aranda Jiménez refutes the mainstream view of Argaric societies as monolithic and culturally...