

CHAPTER I

SETTING THE STAGE: THE HISTORY OF IBERIAN ARCHAEOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHY OF THE IBERIAN PENINSULA

Fortunately, a chance discovery has increased my legitimate satisfaction at being able to bring to light the discoveries of the esteemed Cárdenas and Mr. Fernandez-Guerra. This revelation is mine alone – it does justice to Cárdenas’s drawings – and grants me the honor of being the first person in Spain to introduce an entirely new and heretofore unknown piece of prehistoric writing.

Don Manuel de Góngora y Martínez (1822–1884) on the discovery of
 Levantine-style art at Cueva de los Letreros¹

I discovered, discovered as people discover these things, having the eye oriented in a particular way. In addition, I have an enormous network of collaborators. These collaborators are the hunters, the rural guards, the herders. They are the people with whom I work.

Henrique Leonor Pina (1930–2018) on his discoveries of menhirs and cromlechs
 of the Portuguese Alentejo²

One night, I was checking, of course, the soccer results from the Portuguese league, to see how “my” team was doing. Not well. They had just lost 6–3 to their main rival, a game that would be made into history books of the sport in Portugal. But what caught my attention that night was a small post. Stating something like – “200 meters of Palaeolithic engravings to be flooded by the dam at Foz Côa.” There were a couple of other posts by people who were concerned with the situation. My mouth opened wide in disbelief. If this was true, it was a revolutionary discovery. Not a lot of open air sites with Palaeolithic rock art were known in Europe, and Portugal was usually regarded as the westernmost area where Palaeolithic rock art was present, but in only a couple of places . . . And threatened by a dam? Shit.

Francisco Almeida (personal communication, 2018)

Look, father, oxen!

María Sanz de Sautuola (1871–1946), upon seeing the painted
 bison in Altamira in 1879³

INTRODUCTION

For over 100 years, archaeological discoveries in Spain and Portugal have revolutionized our thinking about human cultural and biological history. Sites in the Guardix-Baza Basin and Atapuerca Range in Spain demonstrate that Europe was inhabited far earlier than previously imagined, more than one million years before painters took pigment to the walls of Altamira. The Lapedo child, who was buried in a rock-shelter in central Portugal and died 24,000 years ago, stimulated new thinking on the possibility of Neanderthal and modern human interbreeding. We recognize that modern humans not only painted in secluded caves, like Altamira, but also along open-air cliff faces, such as the Côa Valley of Portugal. In an astonishing development, recently dated art in Spanish caves strongly suggests that Neanderthals also produced art. The archaeological heritage of the Iberian Peninsula provides many examples of evolutionary firsts but also insights into creativity, resilience, environmental degradation, competition, cross-cultural exchanges, and violent conflicts.

This book brings together what we currently know about the lives and histories of the ancient people who lived in Portugal and Spain. It begins at the beginning. That is, the story begins with the first peoples who arrived to the peninsula around one million years ago. It ends in the mid-second millennium BCE, when the peninsula became incorporated into the Atlantic and Mediterranean world systems. In culture historical terms, it spans the Paleolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Copper Age, and Early Bronze Age.

Archaeologists now recognize that many sites were revisited or reoccupied repeatedly over long periods of time and had enduring biographies. This book takes these histories into account. That is to say, megaliths are not only a Neolithic phenomenon; some were also used as burials in the Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman period, or Middle Ages.⁴ A few were converted into Christian chapels, such as the dolmen-chapel of São Dinis in Pavia, Portugal (Figure 1.1). Large caves were particularly amenable to enduring histories. Escoural, in the Portuguese Alentejo, had cave art dated to the Upper Paleolithic and was later used as a mortuary cave during the Neolithic. After the entrance was closed off, groups during the third millennium BCE (the Copper Age) established a settlement and built a tomb next to the cave.⁵ The cave of El Mirón in Cantabrian Spain was used over tens of thousands of years, from the Late Mousterian through the Early Bronze Age, during the Middle Ages, and up to the time of excavations as a shelter for humans and their herds.⁶ Similarly, ancient objects were sometimes circulated and heirloomed after their initial manufacture. Some engraved slate plaques, which were created during the Late Neolithic/Copper Age ca. 3,000 BCE, were broken and made into pendants, and others were later engraved – at an unknown time – with images of people or fish.⁷ Neolithic stone axes were often recovered by later peoples and used as talismans. For example, archaeologists found axes at the



Figure 1.1 Anta/chapel of São Dinis in Pavia (Évora, Portugal).

Photo: Courtesy Cornelius Holtorf, 2001

Iberian sites of Ullastret and Ampurias in Spain and at the Iron Age site of Citânia de Briteiros in Portugal, interpreting them as amulets of Iron Age peoples.⁸ Romans also used Neolithic axes to protect their homes, as at Conimbriga in Portugal. This practice lasted into the nineteenth century with the belief that these axes, known as *pedras de raio* in Portuguese, could give good luck or protect homes against thunderstorms when placed on the roof or inside the house.⁹ These examples of reuse or reoccupation of places and the circulation of objects reveal the importance of the past for ancient peoples.¹⁰ Archaeological accounts that neglect these afterlives are not only incomplete, they marginalize or privilege the histories of particular peoples. The creation of selective histories of ancient monuments and the ways they can serve as symbolic capital in shaping national identity have been eloquently explored by Yannis Hamilakis in his discussions of the Parthenon marbles.¹¹

Geographically, this book synthesizes and summarizes the archaeological past of continental Portugal and Spain, including the Balearic Islands. Given that the mosaic of current geopolitical boundaries and national administrative provinces do not correspond to ancient territories (Figure 1.2), the cultural regions most relevant for the time period under consideration will be used to organize information. Furthermore, the peninsula was never isolated. Throughout its long history, people have journeyed with goods and ideas between the African continent and Iberia, along the Mediterranean coast to and from Iberia, and northward along the Atlantic coast toward western France and the British Isles. This book also considers these interactions, as have scholars working in more recent time periods.¹²

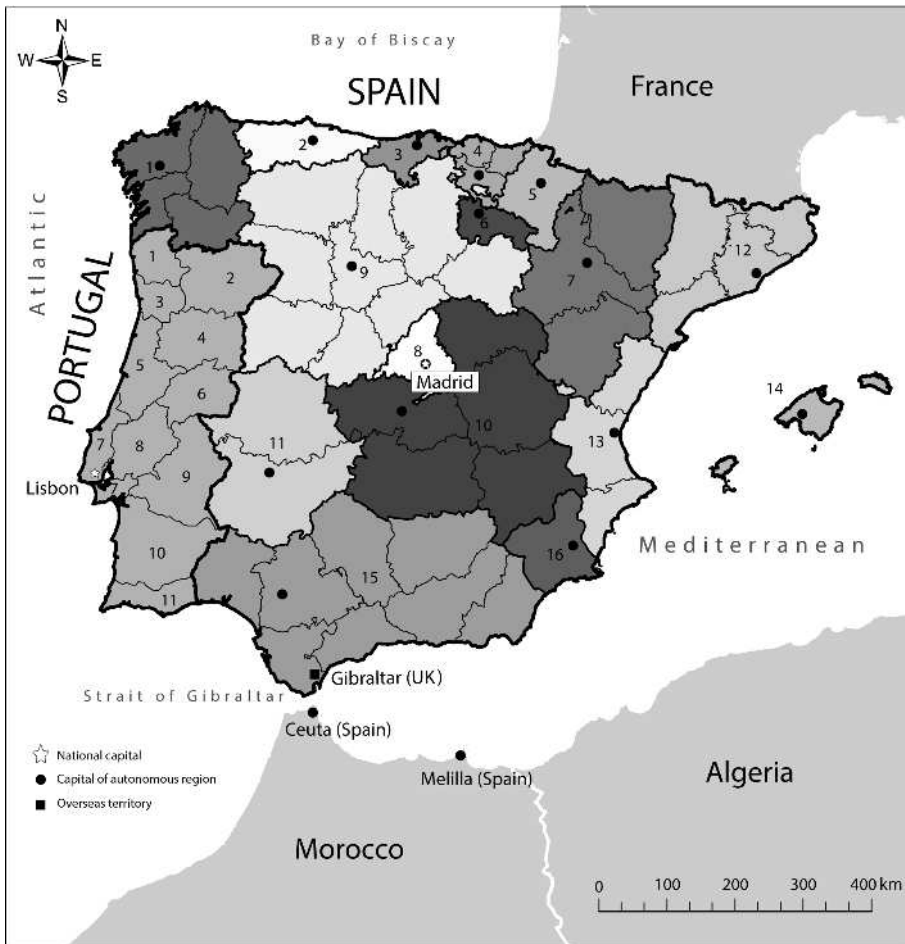


Figure 1.2 Administrative regions of Portugal and Spain. Portuguese provinces: 1. Minho; 2. Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro; 3. Douro Litoral; 4. Beira Alta; 5. Beira Litoral; 6. Beira Baixa; 7. Estremadura; 8. Ribatejo; 9. Alto Alentejo; 10. Baixo Alentejo; 11. Algarve. Spanish autonomous communities (with capital): 1. Galicia (Santiago de Compostela); 2. Asturias (Oviedo); 3. Cantabria (Santander); 4. País Vasco (Vitoria-Gasteiz); 5. Navarra (Pamplona); 6. La Rioja (Logroño); 7. Aragón (Zaragoza); 8. C. Madrid (Madrid); 9. Castilla y León (Valladolid); 10. Castilla-La Mancha (Toledo); 11. Extremadura (Mérida); 12. Catalunya (Barcelona); 13. C. Valenciana (Valencia); 14. I. Balears (Palma); 15. Andalucía (Sevilla); 16. R. Murcia (Murcia). Map: Drawing from Angela Collins and Rasmus P.L. Schlütter

In addition to examining the archaeological evidence, this book evaluates the factors that shaped the creation of this evidence. One factor is the environment. The distinctive qualities of the Iberian landscape – its richness in metal ores and rock types, diverse climates and topographies, coastal resources, riverways that created corridors of connectivity, and proximity to another continent – structured the lives and histories of ancient peoples. The environment constrained and shaped opportunities for agriculture, trade,

communication, defense, travel, production, and community-building. The peninsular configuration of Iberia, surrounded by water on three borders and mountains along its fourth, created (and creates) some degree of coherence out of its regional diversity. It is perhaps because of the tensions between its geographic coherence, regional diversity, and enduring cross-cultural interactions that indigeneity and exogeneity are meta-themes of Iberian archaeological research. The colonial histories of Portugal and Spain have also played a role in shaping understandings of cultural novelty, identity, and mobility in the ancient past.

Environmental factors not only shaped the lives of ancient peoples, they structured what of the past is preserved. Within the large expanses of limestone bedrock in Iberia are many caves and rock-shelters, where ancient peoples sheltered themselves and their animals and where they buried their dead. They also tend to provide excellent conditions for the preservation of human and animal bones. The arid caves of southern Spain have been particularly favorable for the preservation of organic remains. For example, at Cueva de los Murciélagos, sandals, bags, and tunics made 7,000 years ago were preserved.¹³ In contrast, the acidic soils of western Iberia, where megalithic burial sites are primarily found, have destroyed or significantly damaged the bones found in them, challenging archaeologists in their understanding of the human (and animal) populations with which they were associated, and, as a consequence, in dating them.

However, archaeology is not only the product of what happened in the past, shaped by environmental and preservational factors. It is an outcome of social practices structured by history. The histories of Portugal and Spain as territories of Al-Andalus (711–1492 CE) and as colonizers of the Americas, Africa, and Asia, their extra-centrality with respect to Northern European hegemony, and the dictatorships experienced in both nations until the 1970s have contributed to similarities in archaeological discourses and practices and in their reception by archaeologists from other countries.¹⁴ For example, the peripheral position of Spain and Portugal meant that some discoveries of Paleolithic art, such as at Altamira in the nineteenth century¹⁵ and the Côa Valley in the twentieth century,¹⁶ were initially thought to be fakes or recent works.

Yet, archaeology in Portugal and Spain have evolved differently given the hundreds of years during which the countries have had stable territorial borders, established between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. Díaz-Andreu García has argued that Spain's earlier and more developed industrialization led to an earlier emergence of a middle class that supported and promoted the study of history.¹⁷ Spain's greater proximity to France and the European continent facilitated closer ties to international scholars than Portugal. Further differentiation occurred after the late 1980s, when the autonomous governments of Spain undertook the management of archaeological

investigations. This precipitated a growth of regional cultural heritage entities and an increasingly fragmented (and bureaucratic) institutional landscape in Spain, in which significant differences exist between autonomous regions in terms of local policies, funding support, and infrastructure.¹⁸ Another factor contributing to the fragmentation of Iberian archaeology is language. The archaeological literature has been published in Portuguese, Castilian, Catalan, Galego (Galician), and Basque, as well as French, English, and German. National differences also play out in citation practices. Until the mid-1990s, archaeologists in Spain and Portugal tended to cite scholars from their own country.¹⁹ When referring to the other's work, Portuguese authors cited the work of Spaniards more often than Spanish authors cited the work of Portuguese. Thus, even though both countries share important elements of history and rivers crosscut their borders, different archaeological practices have evolved and shape what is known about the Iberian prehistoric past and how it is interpreted.

One consequence of the compartmentalization of research and heritage management and the explosion of archaeological research in Iberia since the 1980s is that peninsular syntheses are rare, and those that exist are out-of-date.²⁰ Two exceptions are *Prehistoria de la Península Ibérica (The Prehistory of the Iberian Peninsula)*²¹ and *Iberia: Protohistory of the Far West of Europe*,²² although they emphasize the Spanish record. Syntheses exist for each country. For Portugal, there are *Portugal pré-histórico: seu enquadramento no Mediterrâneo (Prehistoric Portugal: Its Context in the Mediterranean)*²³ and *Pré-História de Portugal (The Prehistory of Portugal)*.²⁴ For Spain, there are *Historia de España (The History of Spain)*,²⁵ *Prehistoria de España: Los orígenes (The Prehistory of Spain: Origins)*,²⁶ and *Prehistoria antigua de la Península Ibérica (Early Prehistory of the Iberian Peninsula)* and *Prehistoria reciente de la Península Ibérica (Later Prehistory of the Iberian Peninsula)*.²⁷ Other synthetic works focus on specific time periods, such as early prehistory,²⁸ later prehistory,²⁹ or protohistory.³⁰ Some works have synthesized findings on topical themes, such as Bell Beakers³¹ or social complexity.³² Thus, no comprehensive and up-to-date book has been available since the publication of Savory's *Spain and Portugal* in 1968 that brings together the archaeology of prehistoric Iberia from the Paleolithic through the Bronze Age for interested students, scholars, or tourists, particularly those of the Anglophone world. This book aims to fill this gap.

GEOGRAPHY

The Iberian Peninsula can be seen as a miniature continent.³³ With the lofty ranges and peaks of the Cantabrian Mountains and Pyrenees, the scorching desert of Almería, the fertile valley of the Guadalquivir River, and the cool moist winds of the Atlantic coast, the peninsula offered an array of opportunities and challenges to ancient peoples (Figure 1.3a–d). The peninsula

(a)



(b)



Figure 1.3 Landscapes of the Iberian Peninsula: (a) Cantabria (on the road to Ruesga); (b) Meseta; (c) Andalucía (view from El Torcal de Antequera, Málaga); (d) northwest Iberia (Island of Sálvora, off the Galician coast).

Photo: (a) Katina Lillios, 2016; (b) Courtesy of Elvira S. Uzábal (CC BY-SA 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=38478363>); (c) Katina Lillios, 2017; (d) Courtesy of Paula Mota Santos

enjoys an extensive coastline with harbors and estuaries, teeming with birds, fish, and shellfish. It straddles two large bodies of water – the Atlantic and the Mediterranean – with distinctive climates. It faces another continent, Africa. Its mountains and rivers are rich in metal ores. It is bisected by extensive river systems, many with fertile valley soils. These intrinsic features played an important role in structuring cultural interactions and histories. These features are not static, however, and significant environmental changes have taken

(c)



(d)



Figure 1.3 (cont.)

place between the Late Pleistocene and through the Holocene. These changes are covered in individual chapters.

The Iberian Peninsula is the westernmost (and third largest) peninsula in Europe, covering an area of approximately 582,000 km² (225,000 sq mi). It is surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean to the north and west, and the Mediterranean Sea to the south and east. It is separated from the rest of the European continent by the Pyrenees, and from the African continent by the Strait of Gibraltar, which is 14 km wide at its narrowest (Figure 1.4). These geographic barriers, although



Figure 1.4 Iberian Peninsula, by satellite.

Photo: Courtesy of Jacques Desloîtres, MODIS Land Rapid Response Team, NASA/GSFC

not impenetrable ones, have contributed to creating distinctive material practices in its ancient populations. In recent times, the identity of Iberian peoples and their differences from other Europeans have been the subject of creative explorations. One of the most imaginative is José Saramago's novel *The Stone Raft* (*A jangada de pedra*).³⁴ In the book, the Iberian Peninsula mysteriously undergoes a powerful geological event near the Pyrenees, separating it from the rest of Europe and sending it slowly floating southward into the Atlantic Ocean toward Africa and South America. The peninsula's southward drift provided Saramago, through the characters in the novel, an opportunity to explore the subaltern position of Portugal and Spain vis-à-vis their European neighbors to the north and their ambivalent relationship to their former colonies to the south.³⁵ Not coincidentally, the book was published (in Portuguese) in 1986, the year Portugal and Spain joined the European Union (EU).

However culturally distinctive the Iberian Peninsula may be viewed, its geographic heterogeneity and biodiversity are high: "Although its area is <6% of western Europe, the Iberian Peninsula harbors as much as 50% of the European plant and terrestrial vertebrate species."³⁶ One reason for its high biodiversity is that it was relatively ice-free during the Pleistocene and served as a refugium for animal and plant life from more northerly glaciated parts of Europe. There are, however, a number of ways that the internal variability of the peninsula can be framed (geological, topographic, climatic, etc.), and it is

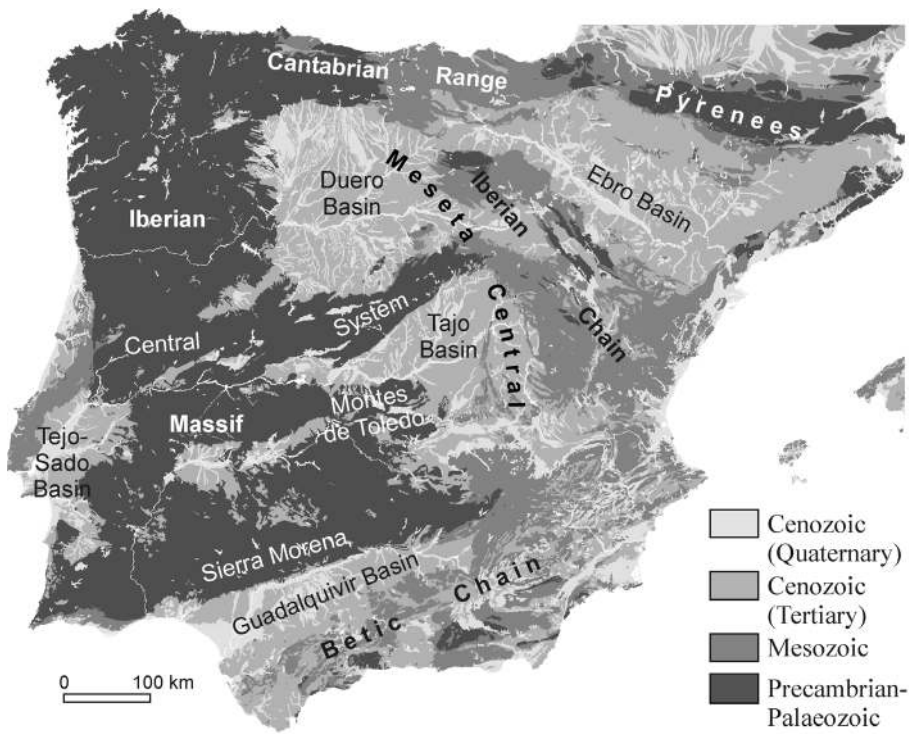


Figure 1.5 Geological regions of the Iberian Peninsula.

Adapted: Benito-Calvo *et al.* 2009, fig. 1

likely that the role of these different environmental qualities changed over time, depending on the economic and social lives of the human groups.

One factor contributing to the geographic heterogeneity of the Iberian Peninsula is its tectonic history, which began when the Eurasian and African tectonic plates collided and joined the Mesomediterranean plates.³⁷ Five major geological regions have been defined, each with distinctive classes of rocks and minerals (Figure 1.5).

- (1) The Iberian Massif: Located on the western half of the peninsula and includes the Central System (*Sistema Central*) and Sierra Morena. It is associated with igneous and metamorphic rocks (such as amphibolites) dating from the Precambrian–Paleozoic that were formed during the Variscan/Hercynian Orogeny when the supercontinents Laurasia and Gondwanaland collided, between 370 and 290 mya. The Iberian Pyrite Belt, with its many metal ores, is part of the Iberian Massif.
- (2) The Pyrenees and Cantabrian Mountains: These mountains were formed through the collision between the Iberian and European plates. They comprise diverse geologies, including limestone and marls. During the Last Glacial (and earlier glacials), there were continuous glaciers along the Pyrenees from the west to the east, with narrow corridors at the Atlantic and Mediterranean ends.