



UNIVERSITAT DE
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Food Storage among the Iberians of the Iron Age North-West Mediterranean (c. 225-c. 50 BC)

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5. Concluding remarks.

Agronomists, economists, and biologists were both the first and the most eminent scientists to address the question of storage and preservation, at least until the 1950s. The revelation of the hermetic nature of storage pits by Reneaume in 1708 demonstrated that pit storage was very expedient for future use. As a result, some French agronomists believed that the use of storage pits could serve as an economic solution for the preservation of cereals in other parts of the continent, especially after a few episodes of food shortage in highly populated areas. It proved (at least on paper) so attractive that new experiments were continuously attempted ever since, especially during the first half of the nineteenth century. It is with the same level of astonishment that this storage system was first described by the Roman agronomists Varro, Columella, and Pliny, who are together considered the principal authorities on the subject in antiquity. I started by exposing how the French colonial experience in Algeria, where this method of storage was still in use primarily among semi-nomadic communities, and it had almost been forgotten in Europe, markedly transformed some notions concerning storage in pits and adapted this method to the advances of science and technology and the French colonial program of modernization and control over the local agricultural production, what Michel Doyère categorized in 1863 as the *ensilage rationnel des grains*.

This long-standing colonial legacy has had in turn a great impact on the manner archaeologists have more recently inquired and categorized storage in pits, resulting in a misrepresentation of the ecological and social functions of subterranean storage. The first chapter, therefore, has resulted in showcasing a limited and doubly inflected view of the use of ancient agronomical texts by later readers, and how this has considerably limited the direction and targets of archaeological research. These texts are perceived through the prism of the highly partial judgements of ancient agronomists, which are in turn further refracted through the lens of modern readers who have been formed by both a culture of admiration for Greco-Roman “civilization” and the experience and rationale of modern imperial ventures.¹ Consequently, archaeologists run the risk of perpetuating the same misconceptions and attitudes into our own inquiry of the past, and consequently incurring in some sort of ‘second colonization’, one that is ‘even more pervasive’ than the first

¹ As a process this has been well described by Dietler (2010: 14).

colonization. This long-standing colonial legacy, both ancient and modern, has become the source of many misinterpretations (both intentional and unintentional by nature).

The increasing popularity of landscape archaeology and the use of ethnographic analogues has facilitated the identification of many storage structures that leave little trace on the landscape, such as pits or other structures built in perishable materials, which has in turn allowed the rejection of many of the conventions traditionally related to storage (cf. among others DeBoer 1988; Hendon 2000; Rothman 2016), such as its association with sedentism, social complexity, and surplus production. I have illustrated in the second chapter how perceptions of the economy and storage more specifically, are underpinned by theoretical concepts rather than on a systematical observation of the archaeological evidence, partly due to the risks of conflating subterranean storage with storage and surplus production in general. The archaeological evidence in the region being studied, which mostly consists of pit clusters and other rural sites which are occasionally attached to a small number of storage units, has been analysed in the third chapter.

The mass of the available archaeological evidence seems to indicate with significant clarity that the second and the beginning of the first centuries BC saw an overall increase in the number of clusters excavated. Typically, these clusters are not associated with any archaeological structure other than pits and a few other occasional substructures of an unknown nature. When these *are* associated with other structures, they are normally isolated buildings built in rough, drystone techniques or traces of what has been recognised as huts. Now, the lack of substantial buildings should not be seen as merely a matter of archaeological invisibility, but also as evidence for the relatively short length of occupation of these sites and their locational context. The close spacing between clusters and their period of occupation make it highly unlikely that we should think of the dispersion of clusters across the landscape as involving the existence of a permanent occupation of the sites and the simultaneous presence of more than one group of people across the same area. Through a confusion of frequency for intensity, this is what has been most commonly agreed upon in our case study. Alternatively, the recognition of the mobility and concealment reasons made explicit in a number of ethnographic reports, might indicate a series of repeated reoccupations of slightly different locations within the same area, separated by more or less prolonged moments of abandonment.

It has often been outlined that modern scholars engaged in the archaeological exploration of ancient colonial situations run the risk of pouring the same misconceptions and attitudes into our own inquiry of the past (Dietler 2010: 14). Accordingly, it would be too simplistic an assertion to suppose that the use of pits alone could be considered as an indicator of an act of resistance or opposition to a new social order. The last chapter has focused on intentions rather than consequences, recognizing that many acts of resistance may fail to achieve their intended result.² In the same vein, the Roman historian and archaeologist David J. Mattingly refers to taxation and other exactions as ‘the quiet violence of empires’, due to the ‘difficulty for archaeologists to find traces of this current battle, when so little of the written sources of the census and taxation systems survives’. But even so, the potential of archaeology as a source for the history of the colonized is immense; and growing.³ In order to produce a radically different picture of how these communities became part of the expanding Roman Republic, I adopted a long-term approach to this explicitly local context. For this reason, I moved beyond dichotomous analytical constraints and reconceptualise the complex interweaving of different cultural and economic phenomena as coeval or contemporary⁴, in order to offer an alternative and non-teleological interpretation. As a result, rather than an index of increasing trade or the intensification of agricultural activities, alternatively one could think that the spread of these storage locales on the plain, may be suggestive of the desire to disguise their location, as well as the separation of storage locales from habitation sites. Resultantly, the consolidation of Roman control in the region during the 1st century BC, may have resulted in the gradual abandonment of storage pit clusters.

In the future, this proposal seeks to incorporate material from rural, hillfort, and town sites across the north-eastern Iberian landscape during the Roman period, through which it will try to interrogate not so much how certain forms, patterns, or practices persisted beyond the baseline of the Roman invasion but rather, by further developing my doctoral dissertation, how disparate economic and cultural phenomena intersect.

² The nature and meaning of an act of resistance has been abundantly discussed, and indeed has amounted to questioning whether ‘consciousness is a prerequisite condition for resistance’ (van Dommelen 1998: 27).

³ A fine example of this progress is *The Archaeology of the Colonized*, published by Michael Given in 2004, where he deals with the competing economic forces of imperial exaction and individual strategies of evasion.

⁴ What Ghisleni 2018 calls a ‘contingent context of possibilities’.