

RITUAL SPACES IN LAS CABEZAS, ICOD DE LOS VINOS (TENERIFE)

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Abstract. It contributes to the knowledge of the funerary practices and rituals in the Guanche Society, presenting the bioanthropology study and several materials from the sepulchral caves Las Cabezas (Icod de los Vinos).

These materials, originally coming from the Eduardo Espinosa de los Monteros y Moas Archaeology Collection, are shown with the objective of highlighting the spatial contextualization with other Rock Carving Sites.

Keywords. Funerary archaeology. Bioanthropology. Rock carvings. Astroarchaeology.

I. INTRODUCTION

I.1. Background

The study we hereby present is based on the archaeological works carried out during the research project called: *El Menceyato de Icode*, (1986-1993) accomplished by the University of La Laguna, with the support and funding of the *Dirección General de Cultura* – Government of the Canary Islands. In this project, systematic archaeological excavations were performed in the territory of “El Menceyato de Icod”, one of the territories in which Tenerife was divided in the Guanche cultural period, where we can find the oldest populated areas in the Canaries (Fig. 1), among others:

- *Cueva de Los Guanches* (since 9th century BC), in the area of coastal cliff. (Del-Arco 1984, 1987; Del-Arco et al. 1992, 1997).
- Group of *Cuevas de Don Gaspar-Las Palomas* (since 3rd century BC) in mountainside area, with the development of a mixed agriculture (cereal, legume and forestry) and stockbreeding. (Del-Arco 1984, 1987; Del-Arco et al. 1990, 1992, 1997, 2000).
- Systematic prospecting in San Juan de la Rambla, La Guancha and Icod de los Vinos, areas which had been part of that Menceyato for a certain time during the aboriginal period.

The high level of anthropisation (human activity) in the area has led to the disappearance of archaeological remains. There are some traces and news about funerary places in some areas of the mountainside, which can be observed through the presence of scattered remains in some caves and through hearsay.

For the context of the populated settlements studied (*Cuevas Don Gaspar-Las Cabezas*), the mountainside of *Las Cabezas* is of interest, with funerary sites and ceremonial uses¹.

¹ The knowledge of the funerary settings and rock engraving stations in the surroundings, which are the object of our study, comes from archaeological prospecting, and especially from materials belonging to the private collection of Don Eduardo Espinosa de los Monteros y Moas, former owner of the lands where all the archaeological settings of *Las Cabezas* mountainside are located.



Fig. 1. Geographical location of Tenerife and *Las Cabezas* site (Northwest of Tenerife).

1.2. Geographical Context

The sepulchral space of *Las Cabezas*, composed of 10 burial caves, is located in the west mountainside of the valley of *Icod de los Vinos* (North of Tenerife). It is a cliff area, between 200 and 300 m s. n. m., with steep slopes and with the hillside adjacent to the west presenting a lower divide and few archaeological registers due to the high anthropisation of the area.

Originally an area of thermophilic forest, nowadays it's mainly scrubland and rock vegetation.

The burial caves are distributed in the cliff area of 220 metres of maximum length and 87 metres maximum width (with a great vertical travel).

In the west, the funerary area is closed by the rock engraving site composed of two panels of linear geometrical rock carvings.

In the north, the coastal limit of the cliff, there is a cave dwelling called *La Cueva Grande de Las Cabezas* (150 m s. n. m.).

1.3. Record conditions

It consists of a group of bio anthropological materials coming from different funerary sites in which the absence of an archaeological methodology in prospecting works is clear, as is the lack of specific documentation about the exact location of the sites.

The lack of comprehensive graphic or written documents about the procedure of extraction and manipulation *in situ* of the register, as well as about the building

of the Archaeological Collection entails a high decontextualisation. A similar scenario as with traditional archaeological collecting.

All these determinants make it difficult to recognize the funerary area beyond its use as a natural shelter-cave due to its geological characteristics, which also make it difficult to define funerary rituals, such as the conditioning of the space, the distribution of funereal areas or other ritual activities, the exact composition of the deposit, primary or secondary deposits, temporary use, etc.

Thus, the bio anthropological perspective becomes one of the scarce options of the archaeological study.

2. BIOANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY

The bio anthropological study was carried out over 415 identifiable bone remains from 10 funerary caves, scattered within the area of *La Ladera de Las Cabezas*, in *Icod de los Vinos, Tenerife*.

2.1. Methodology

The preliminary analysis of the bone remain samples took place in the laboratory of the Archaeological Museum of Tenerife.

This was carried out from February to April 2018, using callipers, osteometric boards and magnifying loupes. (Bass 1987; Brothwell 1987).

Due to the deterioration and fragmentation of the samples, in some cases it was necessary to consolidate some bone pieces using reversible glue.

2.1.1. Determining sex and age

Next, a morphological analysis was accomplished, determining the laterality and an estimation of the height of the individual, performing the necessary measurements in the bone samples selected and classified according to their shape: long, short, flat or irregular (Bass 1987; White 2011) (Fig. 2).

The obtained results were used to identify the minimum number of individuals in each sepulchral area.

2.1.2. Register of bone indicators

Once the morphological study was completed, there was an evaluation of possible traces of occupational stress or pathologies encountered in the bone record (Fig. 3) (Estévez 2004).



Fig. 2. Four adult *patellae* from BC.7 (upper left), two *manubrium* from BC.7 (lower left) and three *ulnas* from BC.5 (right). (© M.C. Del-Arco).

It was possible to determine, in most cases, the existence of dental attrition and cavities, probably caused by the predominance of a plant-based diet in the area where the funerary sites object of our study were located.

As an example of genetic pathology there is a case of *spina bifida*, and in a fragmented ulna of an adult individual there are signs of hypertrophy of the supinator crest (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Cranial fragment with possible *Pachonian* granulations from BC.2.I, *Spina bifida* from BC.2.I and vertebra with arthrosis from BC.4 (left to right). (© M.C. Del-Arco).

2.1.3. State of preservation

Due to the lack of archaeological methodology in the excavation of the funerary caves, the material shows a very deteriorated state of preservation.

There is a great number of both lengthways and crossways fractures owed to the lack of methodology in the handling of the remains, along with numerous post depositional alterations of chemical, animal or plant origin.

Some pieces show clear signs of alteration by fire, of undetermined cause, due to the lack of archaeological register data.

2.1.4. Archaeological methodology

In spite of the absence of technical documentation about the excavation of the sepulchral caves, research of specific bibliography was carried out, as well as an analysis of the associated archaeological material and an assessment of possible funerary rituals.

2.2 Results

In the whole sample analysed it is possible to identify a minimum number of 31 individuals, of whom 26 are not determined in terms of sex, being the result: 2 male individuals and 3 females identified among the group of bone remains.

Regarding age, four categories were found: adults older than 25, sub-adults younger than 15, infants younger than 10 and younger than 5. The result obtained from the analysis is that there is a majority of adult individuals (18), followed by in-

fants younger than 10 (8), and younger than 5 (3), being the sub-adult category the least present in this sample (2) (Table I-III and Graph. I, II on appendix).

3. CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

3.1 Ritual Aspects

This is a space defined by funerary rituals in caves, in most cases of a collective use, where we can find skeletonized remains, and an absence of mummification.

Additionally, due to the type of samples used, it is difficult to determine if these rituals were primary or secondary, although we find examples of ossuaries (bone deposits) for the area studied in the *Cueva de El Masapé* (San Juan de La Rambla), a selection of skeleton parts in the *Cueva de los Guanches y de Cafoño* (Icod de los Vinos) (Del-Arco et al. 1995, 2003), also registered in other areas of the island with a certain proximity, such as Arenas I (Buenavista del Norte) (Alberto et al. 1997) or farther, such as the one in *Ucazme* (Adeje) (González et al. 1995).

The analysed sample shows thermal alteration in the remains and an association of charred woods. Maybe a partial cremation ritual? Ritual fires and actions for optimal use of space? Historic bonfires in the manipulation of funerary sites? (evidence of all these in different areas of the island) (Del-Arco 1992-93; Alberto & Velasco 2003).

Some bone char remains appear due to the thermal alteration of the bones (some fragments of considerable size -cave 21): Are they the consequence of funerary fires (coetaneous of the deposit) and due to the practice of preservation and rituals for the dead? Or maybe traces of the actions mentioned before for burnt bones?

The presence of funerary objects is scarce and fragmented (common practice in indigenous culture) (Del-Arco, 1976, 1992-93), with an impossibility to distinguish their association to specific individuals, owing to the decontextualisation conditions of the sample. Some whole pieces appear (lithic and shell fragments) in contrast with some fragments (thermo-altered sheep/goat remains and pottery fragments) with a possible symbolic value as offerings such a deposit of one part for the whole (Del-Arco 1976, 1992-93).

3.2. About the rock engravings

The rock engraving site is located in the funerary limit of the sepulchral caves. A possible indicator of a rite of passage?

In some ethnohistorical sources and in the compilers of the centuries after the Spanish conquest the references about the indigenous inhabitants of the islands addressing prayers to the skies, controlling time using the moon phases, or worshipping the fire, the sun and the stars are very rare, and carry the subjectivity of the narrator. This undoubtedly shows the reserve kept in the new society imposed under the sign of the cross.

As regards the type of rock carvings found in Icod, only the text by Marín de Cubas, dated over two centuries after the conquest of Gran Canaria, shows the performance of these rock engravings.

“Contaban su año llamado *Acano* por las lunaciones de veinte y nueve soles desde el día que aparecía nueva empesaban por el estio, quando el sol entra en *Cancro* a veinte y uno de junio en adelante la primera conjunción, y por nueve días continuos hazian grandes vailes y convites, y casamientos haviendo cojido sus sementeras hazian raías en tablas, pared o piedras; llamaban *tara*, y *tarja* aquella memoria de lo que significaba” (Marín 1986 [1694]: 254)².

After performing measures of orientation, the Eastern panel of rock carvings seems to be associated with solstitial indicators of winter.

However, the Western panel could be related to the so-called *tarjas* or fertility indicators.

4. ROCK ENGRAVING

There is a rock engraving site in the upper West side of the Ladera de “Las Cabezas”, where the sepulchral caves are located, from which the analysed anthropological sample was taken. The site is composed of two main panels.

² They counted their year called *Acano* based on the moon phases of twenty-nine suns. From the day a new one appeared they started in the summer; when the sun enters in *Cancro* from the twenty-first of June onwards the first conjunction, and for nine days celebrated great dances and feasts, and marriages. Once they had collected their seeds, they made lines on boards, wall or rocks; they called *tara* and *tarja* the memory of their meaning (Marín 1986 [1694]: 254).

4.1 Description

Panel 1

Dimensions of the panel: 33 cm width x 20 cm maximum height.

Technique: deep incision, "V" shaped.

Group of vertical parallel lines and in two cases convergent two by two in the middle and base zone, except a group located in the north of the panel where they are shaped as 4 lines with a central convergence.

Panel 2

Dimensions of the panel 37 cm width x 21 maximum height.

Technique: pecking and abrasion, "U" shaped.

Group of 18 corrugated vertical lines, parallel and oblique and in two cases with an angular convergence in the base and in another case (South) in both edges.

4.2. Orientation measurements

Panel 1 or Eastern panel shows vertical parallel convergent lines which were measured with a compass and set square, to determine their azimuthal angles (Fig. 4).

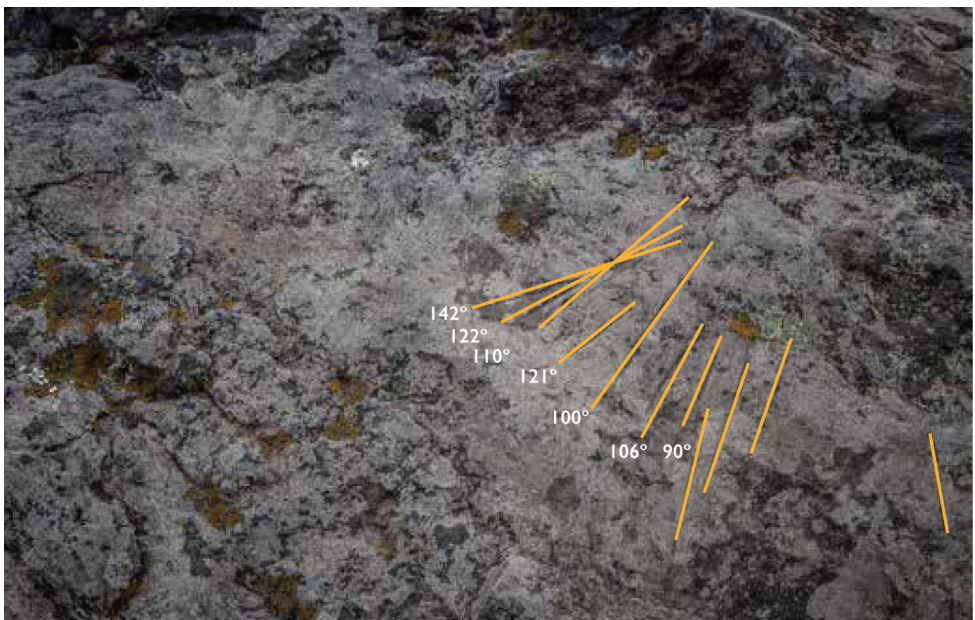


Fig. 4. The azimuthal angles obtained in panel 1 range from 90° to 142°. (© E. Rivero).

Through the use of astro-photographic software (TPE) it is possible to geolocalise the exact location of the rock carving panels, from data gathered through *Global Positioning System*. The use of this programme allows to add specific date and time and to draw the lines of the sunrise and sunset with their corresponding azimuthal angles. The ALT/AZIMUTAL measures obtained are then transferred to the celestial vault from STELLARIUM programme to check any relevant events during the day or night, finishing with a direct verification of the angles of the rock carvings in contrast with the ones obtained with those events.

4.2.1. Summer solstice

The verification of the azimuthal angles of the rock carvings (panel I) with the azimuthal angles of astronomical events occurred on 21/06/2017 in the summer solstice do not conclude any significant data. The sunrise is located at 62.6° and the sunset at 297.4° . Nevertheless, the azimuthal angle of the north of La Palma island, visible from the rock carving site, is located at 295.8° , which permits the viewing of the sundown in that precise point.

4.2.2. Winter solstice

Winter solstice was registered on 21/12/2017, with a result of the sunrise at 116.4° and sunset at 243.6° . During the night the star Sirius (CMa) appears in the

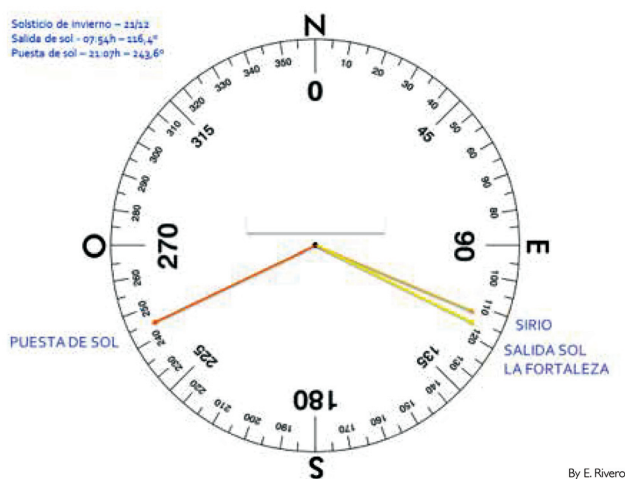


Fig. 5. The azimuthal angles obtained in panel I range from 90° to 142° . (© E. Rivero).

horizon with an azimuthal angle of 114.4° . In this occasion it is confirmed that there is a coincidence of the angular range of the carvings (panel I) with the sunrise at dawn and with the appearance of Sirius at nightfall. At the same time, we can verify the correspondence between the sunrise and another geographic landmark which is visible from the site: "La Fortaleza" (Parque Nacional de El Teide) with a referenced azimuthal angle of 116.2° (Fig. 5).

5. CONCLUSIONS

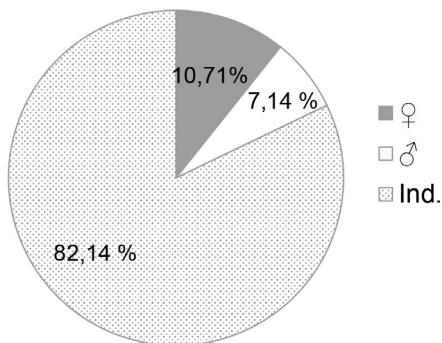
The interdisciplinary study of this archaeological area in the north of Tenerife provides new data surrounding the funerary world of the indigenous people, despite the state of preservation of the remains which were dug up with a complete lack of methodology.

The de-contextualisation of the commingled register does not prevent the observation of meaningful bioanthropological data which confirm patterns determined in other contexts studied in the island.

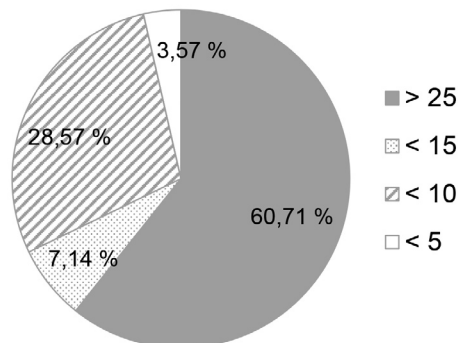
6. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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7. APPENDIX



Graph. I.
Las Cabezas. Sex



Graph. II.
Las Cabezas. Age Group

Table I. Results from Burial Cave 1 to 4.

RN	MNI	B. Presence	Sex	Age	Pathologies	P.Alterations	A.Arch. Mat.
BC. 1	2	-Cranium -Vertebrae -Humerous -Carpal/Tarsal	2 Indt.	>25 <10	Indetermined	-Mechanical fractures	-16 Obs. Flakes -Wooden fragm. -2 Shells <i>P. aspera</i>
BC. 2	3	-Teeth -Vertebrae -Clavicle -Ribs -Humerous -Tibia -Carpal/Tarsal	3 Indt.	>25 <15 <10	-Dental Attrition -Caries	-Mechanical fractures -Thermal alterations -Vegetal Alterations	-14 Obs. Flakes -Wooden fragm. -Skull frag. And molar of a pig, <i>Sus domesticus</i> -1 Shell <i>P. aspera</i>
BC. 3	3	-Teeth -Vertebrae -Clavicle -Ribs -Tibia	3 Indt.	>25 <10 <5	-Dental Attrition -Caries	-Mechanical fractures -Vegetal Alterations	-1 Obs. Flake -1 Shell <i>P. aspera</i>
BC. 4	4	-Mandible -Teeth -Vertebrae -Scapula -Pubis	1 ♀ 3 Indt.	>25 >25 <15 <10	-Dental Attrition -Caries -Artrrosis	-Mechanical fractures -Microfauna intrusions	-3 Obs. Flakes -9 Pottery fragments
RN: Register Number - MNI: Minimum number of individuals - B. Presence: Bones presence - P.Alterations: Postdepositional alterations A.Arch. Mat.: Associated archaeological materials - BC: Burial cave - Indt: Indetermined							

Table II. Results from Burial Cave 5 to 7.

RN	MNI	B. Presence	Sex	Age	Pathologies	P.Alterations	A.Arch. Mat.
BC. 5	3	-Clavicle -Ribs -Ulna	3 Indt.	>25 >25 <10	Indetermined	-Thermal Alterations	-Wooden fragm.
BC. 6	3	-Vertebrae -Clavicle -Ribs -Humerous -Ulna -Tibia -Carpal/Tarsal	3 Indt.	>25 <5 <5	Indetermined	-Mechanical fractures	-3 Obs. Flakes -Wooden fragm.
BC. 7	3	-Cranium -Vertebrae -Scapula -Esternum (manubrium) -Patellas -Tarsal -Phalanges	3 Indt.	>25 >25 <10	-Dental Attrition -Caries	-Mechanical fractures -Vegetal Alterations	-2 Obs. Flakes -Wooden fragm. -1 Wooden stick -Charcoal fragm. -Rodent fragm. <i>Muridae</i>
RN: Register Number - MNI: Minimum number of individuals - B. Presence: Bones presence - P.Alterations: Postdepositional alterations A.Arch. Mat.: Associated archaeological materials - BC: Burial cave - Indt: Indetermined							

Table III. Results from Burial Cave 8 to 21.

RN	MNI	B. Presence	Sex	Age	Pathologies	P.Alterations	A.Arch. Mat.
BC. 8	3	-Teeth -Vertebrae -Scapula -Manubrium -Patellas -Phalanges	1 ♀ 1 ♂ 1 Indt.	>25 >25 <10	-Dental Attrition -Caries	-Mechanical fractures	- 1 Script from 1977 - 1 Shell <i>P. aspera</i>
BC. 16	1	-Cranium -Ribs -Carpal/Tarsal	Indt.	>25	Indetermined	-Mechanical fractures	- 1 Pottery fragment
BC. 21	6	-Cranium -Teeth -Mandible -Vertebrae -Ulna -Pelvis -Patellas -Femur -Carpal/Tarsal -Phalanges	1 ♀ 1 ♂ 4 Indt.	>25 >25 >25 >25 >25 <10	-Pacchioniam granulation (intracranial hyperension) -Spina bifida Stress Mark -Low hypertrophy of the ulnar crest	-Mechanical fractures -Vegetal Alterations -Thermal Alterations	-Charcoal fragm. -Shell fragm. <i>P. aspera</i> -Mandible fragment of a goat. <i>Capra hircus</i>
RN: Register Number - MNI: Minimum number of individuals - B. Presence: Bones presence - P.Alterations: Postdepositional alterations A.Arch. Mat.: Associated archaeological materials - BC: Burial cave - Indt: Indetermined							

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