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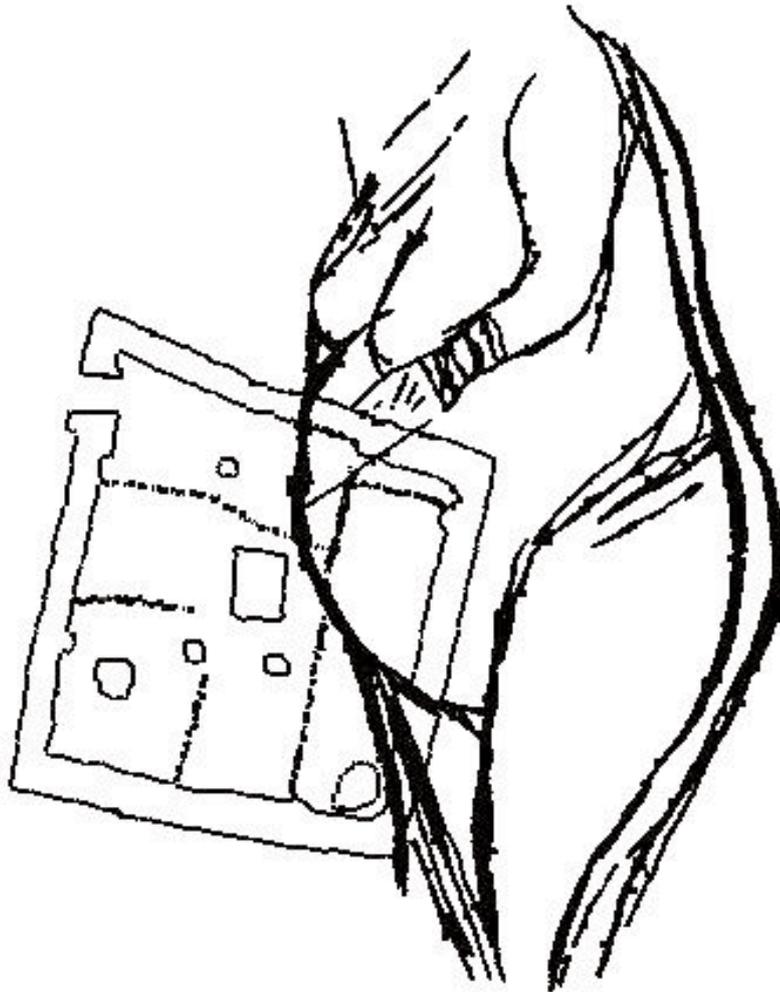
INTERPRETING HOUSEHOLD PRACTICES: REFLECTIONS ON THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ROLES OF MAINTENANCE ACTIVITIES

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We are really pleased to publish here the papers presented at the international workshop *Interpreting household practices: archaeological reflections on the social and cultural roles of maintenance activities*, which took place in Barcelona in November 2007 (22nd-24th). Originally, it was designed following the initiative consolidated by the previous workshop *Women and maintenance activities in times of change*, celebrated also in Barcelona in November 2005 (González Marcén, Montón and Picazo 2005).

Among its general goals, the first workshop was aimed at launching internationally research related with the topic “women and maintenance activities”. We had been working for a series of years, together with other scholars, with the concept of maintenance activities, trying to demonstrate how importance tasks such as food-processing, making of clothing, carrying water, caring for others, raising and socializing children, preparing and administering remedies and medicines, cleaning, etc. were in the social cohesion, reproduction and welfare of human groups. And we had been also emphasizing the importance of the maintenance activities realm in any historical interpretation.

Precisely, when we contacted the contributors to the first seminar we wished to call the attention over the fact that only in the last years academic research is beginning to give historical significance to the afore-



mentioned activities, related with the management of daily life (for example, Hendon 1996; O'Donnell 2004; Brumfiel 2006). Considered similar and monotonous, these set of activities had been disregarded to explain change in History. The main thread of the workshop was to show that maintenance activities were paramount to understand life dynamics in any human communi-

ty, an integral part of human agency and related to the actions and decisions that affect the development of human communities throughout history.

The papers presented in 2005 discussed the previous idea from a material culture perspective and demonstrated that maintenance activities and the domestic domain,

instead of being a constant variable, unconnected with the social, economical, political or ideological transformations that confer dynamism and creativity to changes in human societies, were paramount to understand those moments considered by academic research of social change.

For the present workshop, *Interpreting household practices: reflections on the social and cultural roles of maintenance activities*, we invited our contributors to reflect on the role of maintenance activities within the wider social context and to examine their articulation with other social and economic activities and spheres such as food production, textile production, public health, identity mechanisms and funerary practices. Also in this case, we received an enthusiastic and encouraging response from all of them. Needless to say, we could not have accomplished our goals without such an involved implication.

As a result, we present now a new set of cross-disciplinary reflections

related to maintenance activities. As it will be seen, the papers in this volume cover a wide range of topics, embracing methodological discussions (Diane Gifford-Gonzalez on zooarchaeology or Nuria Rafel on the reliability of funerary gender attributions), the role of women and maintenance activities in funerary and symbolical practices (Elizabeth Brumfiel on the Aztec society and Maria Luisa Ruiz Gálvez on the Aegean Iron Age), the role of maintenance activities in identity development (Ana Delgado and Meritxell Ferrer on Phoenician colonialism and Carmen Rísquez and Antonia García Luque on Iron Age Iberia) or the relation of gender and ritualized commensality in Bronze Age Iberia (Margarita Sánchez Romero, Gonzalo Aranda and Eva Alarcón). What does stand without doubt is that the variety of the different approaches to the topic by the participating archaeologists has stimulated and, hopefully, will stimulate new interpretive approaches to our understanding of maintenance activities.

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