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## Symbolic Heritage in the Mountains: the Megaliths of LesGavarres Catalonia

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During the past year I have had the good fortune to be able to work as a professional archaeological conservator in an exceptional area -Les Gavarres (BaixEmpordà, Catalonia). The Gavarres Mountains are home to some of the best examples of megalithic heritage in the northeastern Iberian Peninsula. They include such amazing structures as the Covad'enDaina, which translates as Daina's Cave, although it's not actually a cave! Megalithic structures have been part of the Gavarres landscape for several millennia and this project, which is led by Miquel Molist and comes under the auspices of the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB), aims to survey, restore and write reports on the state of conservation of a selection of them (Ríos et al. 2014).

Picture 1. (Inappropriate use by tourists of the Covad'enDaina megalith structure (St. Cristina d'Aro, Girona, Catalonia). June 2013. Photo by Ana Pastor)

One of the megalithic structures we have been working on is the Taula dels Tres Pagesos dolmen. The name means "the Table of the Three Farmers" (pagès is the name given to the traditional Catalan farmer). The locals tell us there is a story about this monument that is related to the Catalonian tradition of heirs (hereus) and heiresses (pubilles). The legend says that three farmers used to play dicet here, using the cup marks (known ascassolets) carved in the stone. One day they decided that the prize would be the

loser's daughter (heiress), implying that the winner would inherit his land.

Picture 2 and 3. (Excavation process at the Taula dels Tres Pagesos (September 2013) ©SAPPO-UAB, reproduced with permission)

The Taula dels Tres Pagesos megalith is on private land on a farm belonging to the Botey family. It is where Carlos Trijueque, a forty-year-old shepherd born in the nearby village of Palamós, works. Carlos lives alone in the mountains and often goes for several days without seeing any other human beings. He says he can feel our ancestors in the megaliths (dolmens and cists) and for him they are places to connect with our predecessors. Carlos told us he was studying biology, but gave up his studies to become a shepherd. Behind his decision was a wish to recover old traditions and crafts. He chose to live and work on the land that he felt as part of his own roots. He spent some years interviewing the old shepherds of these mountains, as he wanted to learn from them before they passed away. He enquired about their way of life and folk traditions. Once a year his flock helps clean the firebreaks in the forest to preserve not only the countryside, but also, as he explained to us, the more than thirty megalithic structures found in this area.

Our project team arrived in the area to clear and excavate one of these sites and to develop a risk management plan for the future by assessing its values in order to undertake preventive conservation. In our opinion, one of the most important of these values was the symbolism attached to the spatial archaeology and territorial domain. After spending a month analyzing the area, as conservator in charge of drafting the risk management plan, I realized that Carlos the shepherd was the best means we had of protecting this heritage. He knows where all the catalogued structures are; he has access to them during his shepherding work; he has a good relationship with the authorities, and he can keep us informed of any changes to the dolmens or cists. Moreover, he can let us know if he thinks he has found a new, uncatalogued site. Carlos' dream is to find a bead necklace from his ancestors and wear it to feel energetically connected to them. Carlos Trijueque was interviewed on the local TV programme Terreny Personal (Personal Terrain). You can see it [here](#).

Picture 4. (Carlos Trijueque at Mas Cals (Forallac, Girona) in October 2013. Photo by BushraTaha (SAPPO-UAB) with permission)

Carlos is not the only one who sees megaliths as special places connecting the living to the domain of the ancestors. On another occasion we came across a medium who had come to visit the dolmen with some branches and a pendulum. She told us that at the megalith she felt considerable telluric energy and that she was visiting all the megalithic monuments in the area. In fact, we then found out that she had come especially because she had heard we were working there. She wanted to tell us where we would find a burial, but when we finally opened up the chamber, we found it was empty. Why was a local medium visiting all the Les Gavarres dolmens? She explained that for her those monuments were energetic spaces full of memories. In this respect she seems to have similar beliefs to Carlos. However, it would be necessary to find out how far into the past we can find this type of feeling. Discussing this with Margarita Díaz-Andreu, she explained that during a visit to the rock art site of Roughting Linn in Northumberland (UK) in 2009, she encountered a group of three women who wanted to charge their crystals in the rock art engravings. Talking to them it became clear that they had been partly trained in the US. This means that globalization is permitting local traditions. In the two examples above I may have encountered the glocalisation of the tradition.

Picture 5. (Charging crystals at Roughting Linn rock art site, 31 May 2009. Photo by M. Díaz-Andreu)

Local or glocal, the connection between natural heritage and archaeological heritage is felt strongly by at least a section of local population. This is especially marked in the case of the megaliths, as their position is linked to maximum visibility and the use of resources and sunlight (Font 2005). Despite all the knowledge archaeologists have been able to obtain from these Neolithic and Chalcolithic monuments, we

still have many questions about them (Tarrús 2010). However, what is clear is that the people living in this region – or at least some of them – have a symbolic attachment to these monuments and the places in which they are located. They use them as geographical references and enjoy the legends surrounding them. The Gavarres Consortium is the institution responsible for the maintenance of this area, which was declared of ethnographic interest in 2011. We hope in the coming years they will have more options to enhance these spaces.

Ana Pastor Pérez



1. Inappropriate use by tourists of the Covad'en Daina megalith structure (St. Cristina d'Aro, Girona, Catalonia). June 2013. Photo by Ana Pastor



2. Excavation process at the Taula dels Tres Pagesos (September 2013) @SAPPO-UAB, reproduced with permission



3. Excavation process at the Taula dels Tres Pagesos (September 2013) @SAPPO-UAB, reproduced with permission



4. Carlos Trijueque at Mas Cals (Forallac, Girona) in October 2013. Photo by BushraTaha (SAPPO-UAB) with permission



5. Charging crystal sat Roughting Linn rock art site, 31 May 2009. Photo by M. Díaz-Andreu

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