



Heraldry for the Dead: Memory, Identity, and the Engraved Stone Plaques of Neolithic Iberia

Katina T. Lillios

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In the late 1800s, archaeologists began discovering engraved stone plaques in Neolithic (3500-2500 BC) graves in southern Portugal and Spain. About the size of one's palm, usually made of slate, and incised with geometric or, more rarely, zoomorphic and anthropomorphic designs, these plaques have mystified generations of researchers. What do their symbols signify? How were the plaques produced? Were they worn during an individual's lifetime, or only made at the time of their death? Why, indeed, were the plaques made at all?

Employing an eclectic range of theoretical and methodological lenses, Katina Lillios surveys all that is currently known about the Iberian engraved stone plaques and advances her own carefully considered hypotheses about their manufacture and meanings. After analyzing data on the plaques' workmanship and distribution, she builds a convincing case that the majority of the Iberian plaques were genealogical records of the dead that served as durable markers of regional and local group identities. Such records, she argues, would have contributed toward legitimating and perpetuating an ideology of inherited social difference in the Iberian Late Neolithic.

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