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Identity negotiation and social competition through a materiality lens – editorial

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The present volume is the result of a selection of papers presented first at the 29th Annual meeting of the European Association of Archaeologists in Belfast in 2023 for the session 'It's a matter of space: The materiality of spaces of negotiation and social competition from prehistory to medieval times'. The original EAA session and this volume place the tangible expressions of community interactions at their heart, adopting a materiality perspective to the diachronic investigation of social negotiation, including notions of *otherness*. We address the multifaceted expressions of the human condition in the past by inviting papers to consider cultural settings of antagonism and identity (trans)formation widely through a materiality lens. The reader of this volume will find case studies that a) cover a wide geographical, chronological, and thematic range from Bronze Age Iberian Peninsula to medieval southeastern Europe, and b) explore the interplay between secular and religious contexts, as well as between the manmade and natural environments.

Organised chronologically, the papers within this volume collectively underscore the enduring human endeavours to negotiate identity, navigate social competition, and reshape relationships through material culture across millennia. Our journey begins in the Late Bronze Age in Os Castrullos in Galicia (NW Spain), where Maria Pilar Prieto-Martinez, Eduardo-Breogan Nieto-Muñiz, Luis Cordeiro-Maañon, and Maria Guadalupe Castro-Gonzalez shed light on a paradigmatic example of 'Roda' type sites. The authors suggest that these circular structures served as multifunctional hubs for communal negotiation, funerary practices, and political gatherings. This research offers a fascinating glimpse into early communal life and the physical spaces that facilitated social cohesion and interaction in pre-Roman Galicia.

From northwestern Iberia, the volume moves onto Italy and Greece in the 1st millenium BC with the contribution by Vana Orfanou, Azzurra Scarci, and Arianna Zapelloni Pavia. The article examines how metal votive offerings acted as media for negotiating individual and group identities in Greek and Etrusco-Roman sanctuaries. Through case studies from Thessaly, Sicily, and central Italy, the authors explore the material, technological, and epigraphic dimensions of bronze and iron votives, framing sanctuaries as arenas of social competition, and intercultural interaction. The study illustrates how votive durable material culture and cult rituals shaped group affiliations and promoted intercultural tolerance within the shifting sacred landscapes of the ancient Mediterranean.

Following this, Elisa Perego and Rafael Scopacasa guide us to the dynamic landscapes of Iron Age Italy (1st millenium BC). This study meticulously examines how power structures were inscribed upon and articulated through the physical environment across diverse ecosystems, with specific chronological insights in ancient Veneto and Puglia. By analysing the interplay between human agency and natural settings, Perego and Scopacasa reveal how specific landscapes were transformed and utilised to express and reinforce social hierarchies and competition.

Moving eastward, Adele Vorsanger's paper takes us to the heart of ancient Greek religion, exploring how infrastructure, specifically road networks, facilitated connections to the pivotal religious and cultural centre of Delphi. Vorsanger implicitly explores how a shared sacred geography and its accessibility shaped collective identity and inter-community interactions tied to the myth of the Omphalos.

Finally, this collection of papers concludes with Valentina Šoštarić's contribution, which shifts our focus to the highly sophisticated diplomatic world of Dubrovnik during the 14th to 15th c. AD. Šoštarić meticulously examines the role of diplomatic gifts not merely as tokens of exchange, but as potent symbols in negotiation and the intricate web of international relations. This study underscores how material culture in the form of carefully chosen gifts played a critical role in asserting power, forging alliances, and maintaining influence in the political landscape of the Late Middle Ages in southeastern Europe.

Collectively, the above papers provide a cohesive narrative on how societies across different eras and geographies engaged with materiality to forge identities, navigate social complexities, and compete for influence. Spanning from the Bronze Age to the Late Middle Ages, each study enriches uniquely our understanding of how past societies continuously shaped their worlds and articulated their place within them through material expressions and spatial organisation.

Last but not least, we sincerely thank all the authors who shared our vision for a materiality approach to identity negotiation and social competition diachronically and whose contributions make the present volume possible, as well as all the authors who originally presented at the session in Belfast back in 2023.

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