

## Felipe Criado-Boado honoured with the National Research Award 2023 by the Spanish Ministry of Science. A portrait

Ariane Ballmer, on behalf of the DGUF

**Abstract** – The Spanish archaeologist Felipe Criado-Boado is director of the Institute of Heritage Sciences (INCIPIIT) of the Spanish National Research Council. His work in landscape archaeology is considered particularly groundbreaking. Criado-Boado consistently emphasises the importance of interpreting archaeological findings and data in order to immerse oneself into the humanistic discourse, on the one hand, and to connect and contribute to social reality, on the other. What connection does Criado-Boado have to the German Society for Pre- and Protohistory (DGUF)? Under his presidency of the European Association of Archaeologists (EAA), a Memorandum of Understanding was concluded with the DGUF in 2018, which is of great importance for German archaeology, especially at the level of European politics. In 2023, Criado-Boado was given the *National Research Award* by the Spanish Ministry of Science. To mark this honour, the DGUF is presenting a portrait of Felipe Criado-Boado, which consists of a brief introduction followed by the text of an interview he gave to a Spanish journalist.

**Key words** – Archaeology; Spain; National Research Award; Landscape archaeology; Interpretive archaeology; Humanities; Responsibility

**Titel** – Felipe Criado-Boado erhält den Nationalen Forschungspreis 2023 des Spanischen Wissenschaftsministeriums. Ein Porträt

**Zusammenfassung** – Der spanische Archäologe Felipe Criado-Boado ist Direktor des Institute of Heritage Sciences (INCIPIIT) des Spanischen Nationalen Forschungsrats. Insbesondere seine landschaftsarchäologischen Arbeiten gelten als wegweisend. Dabei betont Criado-Boado stets die Wichtigkeit der Interpretation archäologischer Befunde und Daten, dies einerseits zwecks Teilnahme am humanwissenschaftlichen Diskurs, und andererseits, um an die gesellschaftliche Realität anzuschließen und einen entsprechenden Beitrag leisten zu können. Was verbindet Criado-Boado mit der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Ur- und Frühgeschichte (DGUF)? Unter seiner damaligen Präsidentschaft der European Association of Archaeologists (EAA) wurde 2018 eine Absichtserklärung mit der DGUF abgeschlossen, die für die Deutsche Archäologie bis heute v.a. auf europäisch-politischer Ebene von hoher Bedeutung ist. 2023 wurde Criado-Boado vom Spanischen Wissenschaftsministerium mit dem Nationalen Forschungspreis ausgezeichnet. Anlässlich dieser Ehrung präsentiert die DGUF ein Portrait von Criado-Boado, das aus einer kurzen Einleitung sowie einer Wiedergabe eines Interviews mit einem Spanischen Journalisten besteht.

**Schlüsselwörter** – Archäologie; Spanien; Nationaler Forschungspreis; Landschaftsarchäologie; Interpretative Archäologie; Geisteswissenschaften; Verantwortung

On the occasion of Felipe Criado-Boado being honoured with the prestigious *National Research Award* in the field of the Humanities by the Spanish Ministry of Science in 2023, and in view of his special connection to the German Society for Pre- and Protohistory (DGUF), we would like to introduce him to those colleagues and DGUF-members who do not know him well through an interview.

Criado-Boado, who is currently the director of the Instituto de Ciencias del Patrimonio (Institute of Heritage Sciences, INCIPIIT) at the Spanish National Research Council, has been given this award for his ground-breaking and innovative contributions to the field of archaeology, and especially landscape archaeology, although they also extend to so-called cognitive archaeology. The citation states that Criado-Boado's work has resulted in the integration of new concepts and approaches into the discipline, as well as to a paradigm shift both in Spain and elsewhere. His exceptional dedication to the training of young researchers and his decisive role in the develop-

ment of research infrastructure are also explicitly highlighted.

Born in Santiago de Compostela (Spain), Criado-Boado graduated from the University of Santiago de Compostela (USC) in 1982 and obtained his PhD in 1989. In 1986/87, he spent a little more than a year in Cambridge, just as post-processual theory was emerging – an experience that left a lasting impression on him. Following his return to Spain, where he took up a post as lecturer at the University of Santiago de Compostela, Criado-Boado founded a research group for landscape archaeology in 1991. In 2000, he was appointed research professor at the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC). The landscape archaeology group ultimately merged into the CSIC in 2010, where, as the Institute of Heritage Sciences (INCIPIIT), it became one of Spain's leading research centres under Criado-Boado's direction.

Criado-Boado is committed to defining systematic methodological frameworks for archaeological interpretation. If interdisciplinarity

is taken for granted in archaeological research today, and indeed virtually characterises our discipline, Criado-Boado advocates going a step further: on the one hand, he is of the opinion that archaeologists tend to get lost in the collection and analytical processing of data, thus losing their connection to the Humanities. Criado-Boado has repeatedly demonstrated in his work on landscape archaeology how important and illuminating the interpretation of archaeological data can be and, above all, the key role it plays in bridge-building. On the other hand, he sees the scientific focus on data collection and processing as problematic, insofar as it threatens to sever the connection to the here and now, that is to current events and social concerns. In both cases, it is humanistically informed scientific research, in this case involving the interpretation and embedding of data in broader contexts, that makes its integration into scientific and social discourses possible, and thus ultimately enables archaeology to make a substantive and sustainable contribution.

Particularly dear to Criado-Boado's heart is the liberal and holistic engagement of archaeology: research conducted at his institute should not remain isolated in the capsule of archaeology, but should instead be brought to bear on contemporary concerns and public debates. In doing so, archaeology has the ability to contextualise and put into perspective issues connected to social and political life – political systems, power relations, ultimately everything that humanity simultaneously creates and is constituted by. Criado-Boado sees himself as an advocate of *“knowledge in action”*: through his advocacy of science, he strives to help transform and change present-day society – *“science and knowledge are important for human welfare.”*

During Criado-Boado's presidency of the European Association of Archaeologist (EAA) (2015–21), the DGUF and the EAA signed a Memorandum of Understanding: in September 2018, on the occasion of the EAA Annual Meeting 2018 in Barcelona, the long-standing informal collaboration between the two associations was written down and officially finalised. This collaboration between the DGUF and the EAA proved fruitful, for instance, during the European Parliament elections in May 2019, with the EAA adapting the same core issues (e. g. election benchmarks or Wahlprüfsteine) that the DGUF had been using for many years. Accordingly, it approached the political parties standing for election in the 2019 European elections with these electoral criteria. Another example of the collaboration between the DGUF and the EAA is the project *“Connecting*

*Archaeological Associations in Europe”*, which aims to significantly improve networking between archaeological organisations in Europe. The goal is, among other things, to enhance the political campaigning capabilities of German as well as European archaeology.

When I spoke to him, Criado-Boado had high praise for German archaeology and archaeologists, stating that he is *“amazed by its present-day capacity”*. German archaeology not only evinces impressive achievements, but it is also powerful and impactful. Today, it demonstrates presence, capacity and leadership on the global level. It may be a question of personal temperament, but Criado-Boado sees significant exponential potential in German archaeology. It is tempting to accept his verdict.

Ariane Ballmer  
mail@arianeballmer.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8210-7837>

**Felipe Criado-Boado, interviewed by Alberto Pereiras for El Asombrario & Co.**

The following interview with Felipe Criado-Boado was conducted by Alberto Pereiras. It was published on 28 November 2023 in the Spanish online magazine El Asombrario & Co. (link to the original article: <https://elasombrario.publi-co.es/felipe-criado-premio-nacional-en-humanidades-hay-que-decolonizar-el-pensamiento/>). We thank Alberto Pereiras and El Asombrario & Co. for allowing us to reproduce the interview here in its entirety! The original Spanish-language version was translated into English by Jadranka Verdonkschot.

*ALBERTO PEREIRAS: Felipe, first of all, congratulations on the recognition this award brings. What do you value most about it?*

FELIPE CRIADO-BOADO: The development of my feelings in the first few days after the news reflect its importance. I am going to explain it a bit jokingly, but also very seriously, because apart from the satisfaction and joy, also for my daughters and my partner, who in the end are the ones who suffer from our extreme dedication to research, there was a mix of different feelings too: I found it hard to believe, and I soon realised that this was because I had no internal model to filter that experience. The notion of the “*internal model*” is very important in the research we are doing right now. I have always operated in groups and have tried to avoid an individualistic and heroic model of science, focused on the discovery as the goal and the discoverer as the protagonist. But many people told me that they felt represented by this prize because they share my positions on the Humanities and research. Having always been very critical of the Humanities, to receive a national award for research in the Humanities was a difficult thing for me to accept. In fact, generally I don’t feel comfortable with the label of Humanities, I have always preferred to speak of Human Sciences. In the end, the most important thing is the feeling of gratitude; I am grateful for this honour and I receive it knowing that it obliges me to do more.

*ALBERTO PEREIRAS: Why this criticism of the Humanities and this appeal to the Human Sciences?*

FELIPE CRIADO-BOADO: Usually, I criticise the Humanities’ claim to centrality and their simultaneous inability to occupy their rightful place. When

we have to defend the importance of the Humanities, we appeal to the fact that only the Humanities allow us to understand the human side of life. But these references are more often than not just rhetoric, and it is not so easily put into practice. The arguments tend to be those of the modern, Western, bourgeois humanist tradition which, although not so hegemonic now, was the intellectual counterpart of the capitalist, colonial and patriarchal system. The first victims of this social system were the people who were marginalised in this tradition, otherness and women, as well as children. Although there are many people working to overcome this intellectual system, the humanist tradition in the West remains more or less the same as ever. I don’t feel comfortable there.

*ALBERTO PEREIRAS: And what alternative do you see to this situation?*

FELIPE CRIADO-BOADO: Honestly, I don’t have a solution, but I answer in lines of concrete strategies where instead of putting the burden of responsibility on others (in other disciplines, in politics, in the administration of science), we take it into our own hands and try to accelerate tactical, almost guerrilla solutions.

*ALBERTO PEREIRAS: For example?*

FELIPE CRIADO-BOADO: A first answer for me is trying to rewrite the Humanities as Human Sciences. I am not talking about the positivist or strong model of science, but about a weakened, soft model that allows the construction of a knowledge whose foundation can be recognised by other people without the need for a common referential or belief system. A knowledge that, although not objective (what is objective, when the subjective nature and power relations that cross the notion of objectivity have been demonstrated?), is objectifiable (acceptable and sharable). The Humanities are very powerful because they produce knowledge in a speculative, conjectural, narrative way. This enables them to imagine other worlds very well, to do so quickly and, moreover, very cheaply (without bearing the burden of scientific infrastructures and experimental processes), although their proposals are necessarily limited. I do not renounce these Humanities. But they can be even more powerful if they also work in an explanatory, objectifiable way, trying to go beyond narrative knowledge. This is not always possible, but sometimes it can be done. And we must do it. We will gain reputation and weight in society. And we will gain the

capacity to dialogue better with other sciences and disciplines. And this is the second answer I would venture: the Humanities must be situated within the major transdisciplinary schemes and projects in order to address the human-social dimension of the problems that arise. We cannot tackle climate change, for example, without looking at what history, archaeology, anthropology and indigenous knowledge have to tell us. It has taken a long time, but this is now increasingly accepted (this is the background of <https://www.e-a-a.org/2021Statement>). What we do in the XSCAPE project is something similar to this.

*ALBERTO PEREIRAS: This award recognises your innovative contributions to archaeology, which from what I read go back to the 1980s, when you were already citing some of the sources that are now highly relevant for the most groundbreaking history book of the moment, 'The Dawn of Everything', by David Graeber and David Wengrow. What do you attribute its success to?*

FELIPE CRIADO-BOADO: To the fact that as well as being groundbreaking, it was necessary. Everything that is necessary is something that is in the air. It had been in the air for a long time. And Graeber and Wengrow have written a wonderful book in the best Anglo-Saxon tradition, with scholarship and data, with ideas and with a great ability to reach the audience. The book represents what I would call an "inverse sociology". That is, we are still heirs to the evolutionary thinking that explained history and the world in terms of continuous progress towards an ever more capable, ever more technological, ever more complex society. Although it was clear that this vision forgot that this also meant more inequality, more exploitation (of our resources, of nature and of our fellow human beings), more imbalance and ultimately problems that threaten our existence.

Evolutionism has been so successful that it has become ingrained in the common sense of modern people, no doubt because it was and is the best explanation for the success of the West. In contrast, there is a long tradition, culminating in Graeber and Wengrow's book, that looks at history from the other side: not as the progress of hegemonic power, but as the trajectory of processes and actors seeking to challenge that power in order to survive and maintain an ideal of justice and community. It is a story in which the fundamental concept is not progress, but resistance. When you analyse resistance, you get a different story, which, to put it graphically, is no longer drawn

as a line following the arrow of time upwards, but as a zigzag, with interruptions and discontinuities... For me, the best graphic representation of history is the movement of a cycloid, i.e. the curves woven by a point on a wheel moving on a surface that can be flat, inclined upwards or downwards. It is more complex than the simple metaphor of the evolutionary line, which is easy to understand.

It is true that from a certain point (which we can historically situate at the victory of capitalism, be it liberal or state capitalism), there is no turning back. But the unlimited line is not sustainable, it leads the world to its destruction. That is why resistance movements are so important. That is why in the end we do not always have an eternal line upwards, but rather a staircase, with resting pauses. People of order have to understand this, it is for our salvation as a species. The resistant fighters, on the other hand, have to understand that many people will not follow them because it makes their heads spin. I don't think our progressive movements are heeding these lessons, certainly in Spain, but I am afraid that widely beyond too.

*ALBERTO PEREIRAS: In your articles from the 1980s you were already considering the application of Levi-Strauss or French post-structuralism to archaeology, and specifically the ideas of the anthropologist Pierre Clastres, whose influence underlies 'The Dawn of Everything'. What weight does Clastres carry in the book and how does it coincide with your way of understanding archaeology?*

FELIPE CRIADO-BOADO: For some special reasons, in what is now INCIPIIT and in some circles of the Faculty of History of the University of Santiago de Compostela from as early as the 1980s, the Anarchist Anthropology of Pierre Clastres was very influential. Note that this is not only the anthropology of anarchists. It is an anthropology of power that privileges the social and that discovered that the essence of a society is to maintain power under control. It should be sought to avoid the separation of power from the social body, in which case it would establish itself with its own autonomy and, therefore, start working against society and its members. Society will always be acting as a counterweight to power, resisting power. This gives rise to those cycloid movements I quoted earlier. Graeber and Wengrow's work is faithful to this alternative perspective, this view from the other side; I think you can't do without Clastres. That is why I defined it as inverse sociology above. Its essential

merit is to have opened up these reflections in the Anglo-Saxon world.

Let me tell you an anecdote. When I was discussing these ideas in Cambridge in 1986-87, the smartest people (I mean those who wanted to understand, I'm not talking about those who didn't) told me that they couldn't accept this vision because *"how can a society oppose what it doesn't know"*. This is a candid criticism. A society always has an experience of what the autonomy of power can do to it and a feeling of the advantages of community-oriented decisions. But it was a critique based intimately on the Anglo-Saxon model of individualistic subjectivity, on the philosophy of individual intentional action. From that perspective, which denies the possibility of sharing an extended rationality with any community, this could not be understood.

Wengrow, and Graeber before him, have the merit of having turned this position around, and they have done so with a multitude of well-drawn data that show that the evolutionist or teleological views, the counter-reactions such as those I pointed out from Cambridge, are not just based on data and reflective interpretations, but on the rationality that constitutes them. And, by the way, Wengrow and Graeber have done this in a way that flatly negates the fatal version of anarchist anthropology, which is anarcho-liberalism, advanced by Ayn Rand and culminated by neo-conservatism and Trumpism (Bolsonaro, Milei...), the real climax of the evolutionary-individualist society. That is the opposite of what we need.

*ALBERTO PEREIRAS: From El Asombrario we have followed some INCIPIT projects and especially XSCAPE closely, for the scientific and environmental impact it has. How does this recognition translate into your research?*

FELIPE CRIADO-BOADO: I guess the jury recognised that it is a project that is consistent with the research objectives I and the other PIs always had. However, these objectives are given a twist, because the project seeks to confirm and radicalise previous research with a methodology that is scientific in the truest sense of the word. In other words, many different disciplines will be able to accept or refute our consequences as long as they share the scientific methodology as a way of approaching the world, and without the need to share the metanarratives or specialised narratives of each discipline or their mode of knowledge.

In my case, the research problem has always been space: the configuration of space. As an em-

pirical reality and as a category and concept. How the cultural conceptualisation of space shapes the form of the world of each culture, and how that form is related to the historical characteristics of each social formation. In the XSCAPE project on Material Minds we look at this research problem by examining how the material world we humans construct interacts with our cognitive processing and constructs our internal model of the world, so that, reciprocally, it is then reconstructed in the world. But you can ask Johannes Müller, Andy Clark or Luis M. Martínez, the other XSCAPE PIs, and they will give you complementary accounts on the project.

*ALBERTO PEREIRAS: The jury also highlights your "very active dedication to the training of young researchers" and your "crucial role in the creation of important study centres in this field". Let's talk about INCIPIT...*

FELIPE CRIADO-BOADO: All in all, I am a team player. I learn from the people with whom I share research. I dissolve in my tasks and in the community with which I undertake them. Hence the ambiguous feeling about the national award I mentioned. For this reason, and without false modesty, the prize is also a recognition for the whole of INCIPIT and for the people with whom I have collaborated for the last 40 years. Sometimes we have a hard time, them and me both, precisely for venturing visions that are not the most accepted. A recognition like this compensates for this and, in the most academic sense, proves us right. But I must note something else. Levi-Strauss said something that I have always identified with. When he got into these reflections or was asked questions of this kind, he would end (after giving a masterly answer) by adding that *"these are digressions in which the self is absorbed before dissolving into a new task"*. This is an anti-humanist answer in the purest sense of structuralist thought which I share, and not because it denies (as has sometimes been said) the human, but because it connects this with the social and communitarian rather than just with the hegemony of the liberal individualism that Western culture has built.

*ALBERTO PEREIRAS: In what ways do you think our conception of archaeology and landscape should change?*

FELIPE CRIADO-BOADO: Archaeology and landscape are, like all the intellectual toolboxes we use, Western constructs. What we need to do is to think about these realities, these practices, aligning

them with ways of thinking and being that have nothing to do with the West, with the thought we used to call Modern or Bourgeois, based in the Enlightenment. Nowadays we must also call this rationality colonial, liberal and patriarchal. Our categories of thought and action, including those we use in science, must be aligned with the knowledge and experiences of the most diverse otherness. And then, when we have done so, we have to return critically to our own conclusions to see the traces of our own cultural order, our concerns and priorities and, above all, our individual identity. This identity is, for better and for worse, the most fabulous construction (and I do not mean this in a laudatory sense) of the West. This construction allows us to recognise the rights of the individual, of each and every person, but in return it leads to the denial of the rights of everything else that exists, and often also those of other people in a subordinate or marginal position.

This is why the need to decolonise thought should be our starting point. It is difficult. Too often we just restrict ourselves to political correctness, rhetorical positions and mere intellectual posturing. I cannot resist giving an example that may be controversial: the journal *Science* has been defending an editorial line that demands the incorporation of inclusive policies and practices in science for over a year now. It is imperative to demand this, and it is fortunate that *Science* is making a stand for it. But in the meantime, *Science* is, to put it mildly, becoming increasingly boring: it publishes things that are predictable and do not challenge the commonplaces. In archaeology this is particularly true: they only know how to publish papers on archaeogenetics, which is, even if interesting, a limiting way to experience archaeology.

*ALBERTO PEREIRAS: At INCIPIT you champion transdisciplinarity. What are the successes you are most proud of as the conductor of this orchestra of researchers?*

FELIPE CRIADO-BOADO: Thank you, that is a nice way to describe our community. Its greatest success is precisely that different disciplines and people work in dialogue, complementing each other in an atmosphere that is generally respectful and friendly. Together we work on Cultural Heritage and how what we now call "*heritage*" has come into existence, when it originally did not exist. Heritage is a superb proxy for analysing society and many of our major problems. It relates to tradition, memory, identity, power, resistance, it gives rise to conflicts or these are expressed

through our heritage disputes. This is the interest of our subject of study. By analysing its political economy, we discovered many other things, some of which did not even seem to be there.

The great success of INCIPIT is to bring together an institute you will always find someone who can give you an informed commentary on the latest discoveries in Cosmology, the risks of AI, the relationship between Taiwan and China, and so on. All of which, by the way, are very good examples of the previously discussed subalternity. And all these people can comment from their fieldwork and their heritage research. It's a very rich and very healthy intellectual environment. I would like to think that the great success of INCIPIT is what a pre-doctoral researcher at the institute, Carolina Cornax, said recently: "*At INCIPIT we are like a Macedonian phalanx in which each one of us shoots, with our own means, against the canonical ideas*". We do it to think differently, not because we want to be original, that is, powerful.

*ALBERTO PEREIRAS: Finally, what do you see as the latest breakthroughs in archaeology?*

FELIPE CRIADO-BOADO: The breakthrough will be to think differently of what in my mind are the two main problems in archaeology right now: the illusion of discovery and the risk of archaeometry. Many colleagues reduce archaeology to the magic of the big findings and the temptation of headlines. If you look at the big archaeological news, it's all about "*the first...*", "*the biggest...*", "*the oldest...*". But I have not seen the big headline that archaeology deserves in the world press: "*100 years of archaeological research proves that another world is possible because other worlds existed*". Archaeology is seen first and foremost as research that uncovers things, great treasures. This is wrong. Archaeology is a discipline that can explain the past and the present from their materiality, that can think about the future because it is unique (for the long duration it studies) in discovering how past futures came into existence.

The other risk is the uncritical hegemony of archaeological science. In the last 20 years, scientific applications in archaeology have exploded. Almost any science, any method, can be applied to archaeology. This is so true that one can joke about a Past-Research Council. 95% of the research institutes of an organization as CSIC or Max Planck Society, could have their archaeological version. Obviously, that is not going to happen. But not because it would not be useful. It should not happen because the possibility of finding more and better

answers in scientific applications cannot distract us from the importance of questions and interpretations in a socio-anthropological key. Questions and interpretations always refer us to a practice that is above all theoretical, critical and human. Without this dimension, our knowledge is useless. This is the great value of the human-social sciences: it is not to recover what is human, but to provide a reflexive critique of our system of knowledge and power.