The Origins of Complex Societies in Late Prehistoric Iberia

edited by Katina T. Lillios
# Table of Contents

**Introduction**  
Katina T. Lillios ................................................................. v

**The Historiography of Late Prehistoric Iberia**  
Chapter 1. Recent Trends in the Archaeology of Spain  
Antonio Gilman ........................................................................... 1

Chapter 2. The Historiography of Late Prehistoric Portugal  
Katina T. Lillios ......................................................................... 7

**Technology and Social Complexity**  
Chapter 3. The Making of Material Culture—The Roles of Metal Technology in Late Prehistoric Iberia  
Christopher R. Hoffman ............................................................. 20

Chapter 4. Central Places and Social Complexity in the Iberian Copper Age  
Michael Kunst ........................................................................... 32

**Regional Views of Social Complexity**  
Chapter 5. Evidence for Social Complexity in the Copper Age of the Northern Meseta  
G. Delibes de Castro, J. I. Herrán Martínez, J. de Santiago Pardo, and  
J. del Val Recio ........................................................................... 44

Chapter 6. The Late Prehistory of Central Portugal: A First Diachronic View  
João Carlos de Senna-Martinez ...................................................... 64

Chapter 7. Neolithic and Copper Age Settlements of Northern Portugal  
Susana Oliveira Jorge .................................................................. 95

Chapter 8. Late Prehistoric Social Change in the Southern Meseta of the Iberian Peninsula  
Margarita Díaz-Andreu ................................................................ 97

Chapter 9. Torres and Torrentes: A Spatial Analysis of Mallorcan Talayots  
P. J. da Mota Santos ................................................................... 121

**Burials and Social Complexity**  
Chapter 10. Late Prehistoric Funerary Mounds in Northern Portugal as Indicators of Social Complexity  
Vítor Oliveira Jorge ..................................................................... 140

Chapter 11. Approaches to Class Inequalities in the Later Prehistory of South-East Iberia:  
The Gatas Project  
Jane Buikstra, Pedro Castro, Robert Chapman, Paloma González Marcén,  
Lisa Foshower, Vicente Lull, Rafael Micó, Marina Picazo, Roberto Risch,  
Mathilde Ruiz, and Mª Encarna Sanahuja Yll ........................................... 153

**Theoretical Perspectives**  
Chapter 12. Los Millares and the Copper Age of the Iberian Southeast  
Rafael Micó Pérez ....................................................................... 169

Chapter 13. Early Social Complexity in Iberia: Some Theoretical Remarks  
Juan M. Vicent García ................................................................ 177
Abstract
The emergence of ranked societies in Iberia has been attributed to one of two alternative phenomena: the development of metallurgy and, more recently, the Secondary Products Revolution. This paper proposes a critical reconsideration of these approaches from the perspective of historical materialism. It is suggested that the process of increasing social inequality in post-Neolithic societies is related to the degree to which primary producers were made vulnerable to direct exploitation, thus providing the basis for the establishment of a limited tributary mode of production.

Introduction
In the last two decades, Early Metal Age (Copper Age and Bronze Age) cultures of the Iberian Peninsula have attracted the attention of specialists as examples of stratified societies which emerged in conditions of relative isolation. Processual and non-processual approaches to this problem have produced an appreciable amount of theoretical literature. In this paper, I will present some comments on this literature, rather than any new interpretation of the archaeological evidence. My objective is to present some ideas with which these arguments can be integrated. In particular, I will discuss some of the theoretical implications of Gilman's writing on early social complexity in Iberia.

The importance of technological innovation and the consequent elaboration of the division of labor have been stressed by functionalist, evolutionist and even some Marxist accounts of the origin of social complexity in Iberia. The emergence of the first stratified societies in the Iberian Peninsula has, thus, been attributed to one of two alternatives: first, the incipient development of metallurgy and, more recently, the specific Iberian variants of the "Secondary Products Revolution." These two points of view share the assumption that the key to social complexity is the functional differentiation brought about by the managerial necessities of more complex production technologies.

In this paper, I wish to criticize these positions from a point of departure defined by the following general propositions:

(1) The social conditions for the application of a technology must necessarily precede the efficient development of that technology as an economic strategy. Thus, not only incipient metallurgy, but also the Secondary Products Revolution, should be considered consequences, not causes, of an unequal social division of labor.

(2) In a complex society all political divisions (e.g., rank, status) necessarily have an economic foundation. More concretely, exploitation (i.e., the appropriation of human labor) is the principal structure of social complexity.
These propositions summarize in simplified form some well-known principles of historical materialism. I suggest that these propositions offer us a more satisfactory account of social complexity than the functionalist perspectives mentioned above. The emergence of social complexity cannot be regarded as a mere process of functional specialization, accompanied to some degree by an increase in the "vertical differentiation" of societal components (Chapman 1991: 169); it must be seen as a qualitative transformation of social relations, which corresponds to a different state of the relations of production. The origin and development of social complexity are, above all else, historical processes and, as such, cannot be reduced to any mechanical causal schema. In contrast, historical materialism gives us the necessary tools with which to understand how the factors and relations of production develop in a process of dynamic interaction.

[p. 178]

**Origins of Inequality in Iberian Prehistory: an "Historicist" Argument**

From my point of view, the Early Metal Age period, with its often spectacular archaeological manifestations (megalithic monuments, accumulation of grave goods, the spread of metallurgical production, fortified settlements, etc.) constitutes a broad unit of analysis, a Braudelian 'long dureV cycle. The meaning of this cycle corresponds to the passage of Iberian societies from what one might term a primitive political economy, characterized by a collective (but not necessarily egalitarian) mode of production and appropriation, to a "proto-tributary" political economy, in which the foundations are laid for the development of permanent structures of inequality.

The point of departure of this transitional process is the spread of a peasant way of life in some areas of the Peninsula from the second half of the fourth millennium BC. This is not only a technological process but also a socio-political one. The development of true peasant communities requires/implies the formation of absolute links of dependence between the local group, as the basic social unit, and a limited and explicitly determined quantity of agrarian basic resources. This requires the previous dissolution of band type social order and the creation of forms of permanent appropriation. As Meillassoux (1975) has suggested, such a process probably develops by means of the substitution of band-type classificatory kinship systems by genealogic lineage-based schemes. This system could provide, in its beginnings, the collective (restricted to local kin-ordered communities) basis for the mode of production. However, the resulting virtual "capitalization" of productive factors shows a "perverse effect": it allows the development of permanent structures of unequal labor division.

Elsewhere (Vicent 1991), I have referred to this process with a term taken directly from analyses of the origin of capitalism - "previous accumulation" - to which might be added the expression "tributary", in the sense that tributary forms of production (Amin 1973; Wolf 1987) are the final result of the process.

If capitalist previous accumulation supposes, following Marx's analysis (1978a:607-648; 1991:199), the separation of primary producers from the means of production and the conversion of land and labor into commodities, our pristine previous accumulation is the process whereby land and labor came to be integrally united in an inalienable totality. This totality, the peasant self-sufficient community, is built on the basis of a
fund of labor, permanently tied to land resources. Its self-reproduction depends critically on access to both productive factors: land and labor. In segmentary social conditions, there is no political guarantee of such access, beyond the limits of the self-protective capacity of each community. For this reason, the peasant community is extremely vulnerable to "extra-economic coercion", as Gilman (1987a, b) has shown. This is the "secret of the so-called [tributary] previous accumulation" (paraphrasing Marx [1978a: chapter 24]): the control of dependent labor funds of peasant communities by means of the manipulation of intra- and inter-community violence.

Archaeologically, the Early Metal Age cycle shows its development through a succession of relevant 'conjunctures' (megalithic cultures, beaker complex, Bronze Age "cultures", etc.). In my view, those archaeological formations represent the material products of different forms of a small-scale tributary social order. Such scale is determined by two main factors: (1) the resistance against the logic of accumulation of wealth and power by means of intra-community exploitation and (2) the absence of a means of accumulation of value due to the absolute predominance of use value. The opposition between those factors and the logic of wealth and power accumulation by emerging elites must be considered the "fundamental contradiction" of the process.

This contradiction remained unresolved until the early first millennium BC, when the Iberian Peninsula entered the Mediterranean "world system" by means of Oriental colonization and the introduction of iron implements. In this new historical process, which made possible an amplified scale of accumulation, the tributary organization of society developed in its classical form.

Discussion

I will refer briefly to the general lines of this process as it developed in the Iberian Peninsula. First, however, let us reconsider the significance of the phenomena to which I referred at the beginning: incipient metallurgy and the Secondary Products Revolution.

Metallurgy

What I have termed the metallurgical point of view conceives of the rising elites of the Copper [p. 179] Age and Bronze Age as taking advantage of the incipient metallurgical technology by acting as intermediaries in the process of production and exchange. This argument has been presented in its classical form by Sherratt (1976), but, as Gilman (1987a:31) has shown, we could find its roots in Engels (1991a:548). This could explain the fact that one of the most prominent exponents of this approach is an author who considers himself a Marxist (Lull 1983).

Following Gilman (1987a), the principal empirical weakness of this theory is the small scale of production and metallurgical accumulation during the periods in question. Only until the Final Bronze Age (1200/1100-750 BC), with its spectacular hoards of precious metals (such as the Villena treasure [Soler García 1965; Schule 1976]) and bronzes (such as the Huelva hoard [Fernandez Miranda and Ruiz Galvez 1980]) are there indications of an amplified scale of metallurgical accumulation. During the Copper Age and Bronze Age, elites do not seem to obtain their power on the basis of their control over metallurgy, inasmuch as metal does not seem to have the important use value in the period's technology which would justify the strategic character of that control, as
Montero Ruiz (1993) has shown. On the contrary, it would appear that the dominant
groups are the principal consignees of that production, which they used to secure their
social rank by creating differentiated patterns of consumption (Mathers 1984). The
development of metallurgy must be, therefore, a consequence of the need of dominant
groups to underline their social differentiation. The possibility of their ability to do so,
that is to say, of the existence of a previous accumulation of value which could be
exchanged for metal (except in the case of a direct control of metal sources). This leads
to the essence of the problem: what does this accumulation consist of and from where
does it come?

According to the general principles enunciated at the start, we must think in terms of a
logical and ontological priority of production processes over accumulation ones. In
those terms we must suppose, naturally, that the accumulation comes from the specific
form in which the "production and reproduction of actual life" (Engels 1991b:651) is
realized and the particular form in which it offers the possibility of an effective control
of labor by non-producers (vid. Marx 1978b:754). This leads us to the question of the
real significance of the Secondary Products Revolution as it manifests itself in the
Mediterranean region. Secondary Products Revolution

Two different strategies, applied to different environmental conditions, have been
presented as specific Iberian variants of the "Secondary Products Revolution" (for the
original concept, see Sherratt 1981; Chapman 1982).

Gilman (1987b; Gilman and Thornes 1985) has emphasized the importance of intensive
agriculture based on irrigation and/or tree crops for the agrarian colonization of the most
arid areas of southeast Spain. Harrison (1985) has stressed the extensive pastoralist
strategies (policultivo ganadero) and the forest extensive exploitation related to them,
specifically the dry forest management practices associated with the dehesa landscape
(Stevenson and Harrison 1992), that are predominant in a large part of central and
western Iberia,

Both strategies are representative of the present (although almost extinct) variants of
traditional agriculture in Spain and Portugal. In this sense, we must consider the
Secondary Products Revolution in Iberia as the establishment for the first time of the
now traditional agrarian landscape.

Mediterranean polyculture in any of its variants does not seem to arise as a means of
augmenting production in absolute terms, but rather as a complex of strategies designed
to stabilize medium-and long-term production which is characterized by the
capitalization of social labor. In effect, the development of both intensive (tree
crops/irrigation) and extensive (forest pastoralism) strategies have in common a sizeable
investment of social labor in a productive infrastructure with deferred returns. This
would not seem to be a strategy useful for combatting a population crisis, since this
would require an immediate increase in available resources. These are, however,
strategies which are very useful for reducing variance in long-term income, which
would be important in an environment as unstable as the Mediterranean, with its
irregular sequences of good and bad years, its seasonal variability characterized by
summer droughts, and by the frequent occurrence of catastrophes (early and late frosts,
hailstorms, storms, etc.) (Teran and Sole Sabaris 1978). In general terms, this kind of
agrarian strategy is the only one which is really viable under these circumstances. We
can say, therefore, that the development of a Mediterranean polyculture lies more in a consolidation of an agrarian economy in the region, rather than in an intensification of a prior system.

[p. 180]

Mechanisms of "proto-tributary" accumulation.

What are the a priori conditions required for the implementation of such a subsistence strategy? First, one must have some means for the permanent appropriation of land, so that one may guarantee the long-term income-yield capacity of the infrastructural investments. Second, it is essential to constitute a fund of labor permanently tied to this fixed capital formed by the land and by the investments required to put it into production. These two complementary processes of appropriation involve drastic limitations of between-group reciprocity and of the free circulation of producers, through the creation of restrictions on the access to membership of the local group that is settled in a given territory. In this sense, it seems logical to suppose that the condition sine qua non for the development of an agrarian society is the dissolution of the institutions of band-type societies, based on classificatory kinship and the more or less free adherence as means to recruit members, and its substitution by genealogical kinship institutions and of filiation (in Meillassoux's [1975] sense).

If we assume that the formation of elaborate funerary practices can be a trustworthy indicator of such processes, we may suppose that they did not begin before the later fourth millennium BC, the period when the megalithic traditions of the various areas of the Peninsula began. This time corresponds, likewise, to the appearance of the first long-term settlements, which denote the first agrarian landscape sensu stricto, if we take the village (as opposed to the prior, more or less unstable, encampments) as the distinguishing feature of a peasant way of life. These important, archaeologically detectable transformations, show that the techniques of food production, present and operating in the Peninsula from at least two millennia earlier, were not in and of themselves sufficient to transform social relations, although they no doubt contributed to the erosion of the old institutions. In effect, the archaeological patterns observable during the Early and Middle Neolithic show a remarkable continuity with the period before the introduction of pottery and of exotic domesticates, a circumstance which suggests that the influence of these innovations was limited.

In order for the techniques of food production to lead to the establishment of an authentic agrarian (village) landscape, it would be necessary to create social structures of permanent appropriation, which would make it impossible for the producer to survive without having the right of re-strictively regulated access to capitalized means of production (land, infrastructural investments, reserves, and so on). This would ultimately imply a drastic loss of personal autonomy on the part of this primary producer, but at the same time it would guarantee his survival in an ever more closed landscape.

In effect, the motor force which we may most plausibly suppose to underlie this whole process is a universal feature of societies that practice a subsistence economy, namely what Scott (1976:15) has called the "safety-first principle". As we have seen,
Mediterranean polyculture fulfills the technical requirements of this principle in a region where risk to production is huge (as is proven by its virtually unchanged persistence into our times). We may reasonably suppose that this system is the result of the tenacious application of the method of trial and error by Mediterranean populations during the two millennia which separated the arrival of domestic species and the first peasant villages. But this insurance function of polyculture could only be fulfilled on the condition that the truly inalienable character of the means of production was also assured. No one would invest their labor in planting olives, digging irrigation ditches, laboriously clearing forests and thickets, if they did not have guarantees to the fruits of that labor (or at least to a sufficient part of them).

It is here precisely that the unequal division of social labor comes into play. We need not suppose that, prior to the establishment of the economic and political foundations of peasant society, there did not exist pressures to social inequalities (Testart 1982). All the same, whatever the political structure of post-Paleolithic societies may have been, the exercise of power would have had a negotiated and ephemeral basis, given the self-sufficiency we have attributed to primary producers. But in the agrarian landscape of the previous accumulation, such as I have described it, the accumulative character of the economic base, the centrality of a reserve fund, and the appropriation of both land and labor all created quite different conditions. Aspirants to the exercise of power had the means to make permanent (and even hereditary) their position to the extent that their activities were consistent with the safety first principle at the heart of the moral economy of peasants. This was that they represented their consumption of surplus value as a form of reciprocity: power and surplus value in exchange for protection. In sum, there existed conditions that made the free play of the interests of political actors (who pursued the same goals as before) give rise to very different results.

Let us examine, finally, the "fundamental contradiction" between pressures to inequality and restrictive factors. One factor which undoubtedly constituted an objective obstacle to the development of true social classes was the limitation on the capacity to consume surplus labor imposed by the limited means of concentrating value. What good is it to be powerful if this does not translate itself into a better life than that of the powerless? How could the local kin leaders be compensated for the vigilance they exercised on behalf of the followers they protected from the threat of plunder and extortion?

The archaeological record contains traces of the continuing effort to create patterns of differential consumption, which we must take to be indicative of the condition of previous accumulation: the continuous increase of long-distance exchange, the increasing circulation of exotic objects and raw materials that are scarce and of little use (such as variscite), the growing investment of labor in funerary rites, and finally the beginning of metal production. This whole elaboration of a differentiated way of life (whose point of inflection was the appearance of Beaker paraphernalia) runs parallel to what seems to be a constant increase in violence between communities. In the third millennium, fortifications were built to protect settlements which had been occupied initially without taking defense into account, while in the second millennium, defensive considerations dominate site placement. There seems to be no real cause for this increase in defensive investments other than the manipulation of violence by the dominant social stratum. Indeed, the increased marginal costs to labor imposed by the defensive emplacements of second millennium sites would directly increase the effective consumption of surplus labor by the elite. In other words, the inversion of
effort devoted to daily provisioning of settlements with food, water, and fuel seems significantly higher in the Bronze Age than in the immediately preceding period.

Of course, the road from a regime we have just sketched, one that offers protection at a small scale, in which power was exercised within a framework of kinship (and is, therefore, drastically limited), to a full-blown tributary society, in which there exists an objective differentiation of social classes, must have been long and slow. In my view, a fully developed form of such tributary society, whose political superstructure must be a state-form one, did not appear in the Peninsula before the first millennium BC. Despite the opinion of some authors (e.g. Nocete 1989), Bronze Age societies of Iberia seem to have reached only a very restricted form of tributary relations, limited to a local scale and by segmentary political conditions (Gilman 1987a). As I have noted above, we must wait until the introduction of iron and the arrival of Phoenician merchants, in the early first millennium, for the conditions to overcome the aforementioned limitations for the development of a real tributary society.

The introduction of iron tools increased the productivity of labor, allowing higher rates of accumulated surplus value and, at the same time, more efficient means of coercion. On the other hand, the incorporation of the Peninsula into the Mediterranean "World Economy" offered, for the first time, the opportunity for such surplus value to be realized, thus stimulating further accumulation on an amplified scale. With the possible exception of a Tartessian state in the first half of the first millennium [for a critical review, see Wagner 1990], we must wait until the development of the Second Iron Age aristocratic city-states (Ruiz Rodriguez and Molinos Molinos 1993; Santos Velasco 1989) for the complete realization of those possibilities. This process, however constitutes a different unit of analysis.

Acknowledgements

I am especially grateful to Antonio Gilman, who is not only the principal intellectual inspiration of these pages, but who is also the person who translated the text to English. I also wish to thank Katina Lillios for her critical comments on this manuscript and her patience with this dilatory author.

Notes

(1) The term is taken from Chernykh (1992). I use it in a historical sense more than in an archaeological one. It emphasizes the continuity of some social processes in Copper Age and Bronze Age archaeological formations. However, the contrast between the Copper and Bronze Ages should be retained and continue to be discussed.


(3) Chapman (1991) offers a synthesis of Iberian late prehistory, especially that of southeast Spain, for English speaking readers. For more extensive and updated information, see a recent synthesis of Spanish prehistory in Dominguez Ortiz (1990). For Portugal, see the chapters by S.O. Jorge in Serrão and Marques (1990).
Bibliography

Amin, S.

Chapman, J.C.

Chapman, R.W.

Chernykh, E.N.

Dominguez Ortiz, J.A.

Engels, F.


Gilman, A.
1987a  El análisis de clase en la prehistoria del Sureste. Trabajos de Prehistoria 44:27-34.

Gilman, A. and J.B. Thornes

Harrison, R.J.

Harrison, R.J. and G. Moreno
Lull, V.

Martinez Navarrete, Mª I.

Mathers, C.

Marx, K.

Meillassoux, C.

Montero Ruiz, I.

[p.183]
Nocete, F.

Ruiz Rodríguez, A. and M. Molinos Molinos

Santos Velasco, J.A.

Scott, J.C.

Schüle, W.
Serrão, J. and A.H. de Oliveira Marques

Sherratt, A.

Soler García, J.M.

Stevenson, A.C. and R.J. Harrison

Testart, A.

Terán, M. and L. Solé Sabarís

Vicent García, J.M.

Wagner, C.G.

Wolf, E.R.
1982 *Europe and the People without History*. Berkeley, University of California Press.