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en Europe entre 6500 ET 500 BC:
Hypotheses socio-culturelles et/ou climatiques

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INTRODUCTION

Information on new Copper Age sites has increased dramatically since the last state-of-the-art meeting on Chalcolithic Iberia (Seville 1990, see Hurtado dir. 1995). No doubt, the first and most evident consequence has been the loss of centrality of the two traditional cornerstone cultures of the Copper Age –Los Millares and Vila Nova de San Pedro– in the interpretations of the political, social and economic dynamics of Third millennium BC Iberia. Since then, some researchers have put forward different explanations for this new evidence. They have suggested new alternative readings that have explained the archaeological record of the Third millennium BC, with explicit or implicit generalizing interpretative intentions. This paper is a critical review of two recurring opinions used by Spanish scholars to support the hierarchical -read class- and coercive nature of Copper Age societies: that variability in settlement size reflects control hierarchies and that highly formalized planning of villages and monumental enclosures reflect direct coercive control of labor. Finally, I briefly comment on some recent problematic uses of the ritual/domestic dichotomy.

Key Words: Iberia. Copper Age. Enclosures. Coercion. Persuasion

There are currently two confronting proposals. On the one hand, some Marxist perspectives inspired by Latin-American “Social Archaeology” (e.g. Bate 1998; for a review see Patterson 1994 and Oyuela-Caycedo et al. 1997). They prioritize coercion as the key element in the formation process of the so-called “initial class societies” of the Copper Age. This interpretation has been widely accepted by many scholars, and could be identified as dominant, at least in Spanish contemporary archaeology (see Vicent 2006).

On the other hand, the late impact of different kinds of post-processualisms (phenomenological, hermeneutical…) has encouraged the surge of interpretations that tend to stress ideological aspects (frequently reduced to “ritual”) in the formation and development of Chalcolithic societies.

In sum, contemporary Spanish leading interpretations on the critical causal elements that would explain the archaeological record of the Copper Age emphasize either coercion or ritual. Obviously, any scholar familiar with Iberian Prehistory would accept that there may be plenty of evidences for both in the Third millennium BC archaeological record. My interest in this paper is not in evaluating the strength or weakness of the different positions, but the strength of the evidences used to support each interpretation.

Although with slight differences, most researchers would admit that pre-Copper Age Iberian societies were characterized by a kinship-based social structure, a relatively low level in the development of the productive forces, and a variable dependence on agriculture and/or herding related to differential environmental contexts. Under these circumstances, the possibilities of increasing surplus would require either a radical technological change –one that would trigger the development of productive forces- or an increase in the concentration of productive forces.
the labor force. The archaeological record suggests that the latter was preferred, probably the only historically feasible.

We should also suppose that due to the initial social conditions (let us say, of the Fourth millennium BC) where all social relations were probably expressed in terms of kinship, any option of applying force or extortion to your own kin would imply either breaking kinship logics or manipulating them in one’s own benefit. Certainly, most studies of early civilizations suggest that the use and manipulation of such logics was behind the rise of many powerful groups, and frequently an effective means in the hands of the elites. However, the logic of kinship demands the practice of reciprocity: overt and continuous extortion may be impossible unless groups are previously “caged” (sensu Mann 1986; see Gilman 1981). Lacking these conditions, “inequality is not constructed practically nor ideologically justified but by services to a community” (Godelier 1977: 136). Thus, persuasion rather than coercion may be behind the archaeological evidence for Third millennium BC lineage competition in Iberia (Díaz-del-Río 2004).

It is reasonable to suppose that open coercion did not play an initial determinant role in these aggregation processes. One would expect the evidence to be not too different from the previous late Neolithic one. Nevertheless, one should be able to evaluate the feasibility of the “coercion hypothesis” by analyzing the archaeological record, and not just by a preference for an alternative discourse. In order to do so, I will now focus on two arguments frequently used by Spanish scholars to support the hierarchical (class) and coercive nature of Third millennium BC societies: that variability in settlement size reflects control hierarchies and that highly formalized planning of villages and monumental enclosures reflect direct coercive control of labor. Finally, I will briefly comment on what I think are some recent problematic uses (or let us say, abuses) of the role given to ritual practices in Third millennium BC Iberia.

SETTLEMENT HIERARCHIES

A classical way to argument the existence of political hierarchies and relations of dependence between settlements has been the observation of size differences between sites: the smaller should depend political and/or economically on the larger. Although problems related to this kind of interpretation are multiple (and I would say evident by now) its use is still frequent, particular when confronting the Iberian Copper Age, where size differences between sites are undeniable.

In spite of the well-known limitations of our archaeological record, and the inevitable problems related to the statistical error of absolute chronologies, one would suppose that most small sites would have been at least for some time contemporaneous to the larger “centers”. For instance, radiocarbon dates would suggest that the pretty impressive fortified site of Albalate, in the Upper Guadalquivir (Nocete 1994), was at least partially contemporaneous to the massive site of Marroquies Bajos (Zafra et al. 1999; 2003). A possible interpretation would consider that the fortification process in both sites emerged as a result of the need to control – and most of all proclaim – the access to nearby resources. Although difficult to prove, this suggestion would not demand substantial differences between the evidence for production and consumption at both sites, and could simply explain differences in settlement size by considering the relation between inhabitants and nearby carrying capacity. Otherwise stated, it may be reasonable to suppose that the archaeological evidence for both sites would be somehow similar. If, on the other hand, we propose that a big settlement controls all smaller sites by, let us say, coercion, we should expect to find clear-cut notorious evidences for differences in production and consumption between sites. Testing this hypothesis would obviously require both a territorial analysis and a detailed and comparable in scale analysis of the archaeological evidence, something that is nowadays impossible knowing the available information. If we face the fact of a virtual absence of contextual information, we can only rely in accepting the scale of labor investments in infrastructure as the only proxy to evaluate the degree of submission of small sites to big “centers”. However, this view reintroduces the premise that settlement size is enough to prove the existence of hierarchies, thus becoming a circular argument.

The Iberian central Meseta is a good case study to assess the relation between settlement size and political hierarchies during the Copper Age (for an overview see Díaz-del-Río 2006). The area has been traditionally considered less complex than its contemporary southern neighbors (Millares and Vila Nova cultures) and, consequently, left aside in debates concerning “initial class societies”. The region is known to have an important amount of Chalcolithic settlements of different sizes, mostly discovered as a consequence of past decades real-state and public infrastructural boom. Out of all, the most relevant may have been the recent discovery and excavation of the first ditched enclosures in the region (Díaz-del-Río 2003; 2004b). At least two of them have been completely mapped, allowing the definition of their total extension: the external enclosure of ‘Fuente de la Mora’ has 1 ha and Gózquez 0.3 ha. Both are small compared to other known enclosures of Iberia or of the British Isles (Oswald et al. 2001: 73).

These sites contrast with some recently discovered settlements such as Camino de las Yeseras (Blasco et al. 2005). It is located in fertile riverbanks of the Jarama, about one

\[\text{2} \text{ Nevertheless, this is not always the case. For instance, a detailed examination of the evolution of regional settlement patterns (Nocete 1994) compared to the evolution of the woul-be-center of Marroquies Bajos (Zafra et al. 1999) suggests that small villages may have been the result of a peopling by groups fleeing the macro-village (Díaz-del-Río 2004a), and not tribute-producing settlements.}\]
kilometer from the river-bed and three from its confluence with the Henares river. According to its diggers, this Third millennium BC settlement is placed in an especially advantageous location regarding all potentially exploitable resources: “the availability in fertile lowlands of both irrigation land agriculture and fresh pasture […] should have been determinant in the election of the sites’ location” (Blasco et al. 2005: 457). Although only 1.4 ha have been excavated up to date, the authors suggest a total extension of about 20 ha and a structure comparable to a caswayed enclosure.

As has happened in other Iberian regions, the presence of a site with these characteristics and extension would allow some scholars to argue for the existence of a political-economic hierarchy by the Third millennium BC in the central Meseta. The argument would be simple: the existence of a size hierarchy in contemporaneous settlements would indicate the existence of a political and/or economic dependence of the smaller from the largest. The way to test this hypothesis would also be straightforward (Brumfiel 1972; Steponaitis 1978; 1981; Wright 2000): comparing the “carrying capacity” of each settlement, i.e. the maximum number of individuals that can be indefinitely supported in each nearby environment. If there is a proportional relation between settlement size and resources, we must then consider a more parsimonious explanation: larger settlements and population concentrations may exist wherever the surrounding carrying capacity would allow them to survive.

Obviously, this kind of analysis requires a straightforward landscape archaeological research program to a regional scale, something that is not the aim of this paper. But I nevertheless have some tips on how results would be. It is possible to order the up-mentioned sites just by knowing their position regarding nearby fertile lowlands: Gózquez, close to a secondary stream would be the smallest; Fuente de la Mora, on a hill by the slightly larger Butarque riverbank would follow and, finally, Camino de la Yesera, on the fertile lowlands in the Jarama river (the largest riverbank in the area) would be the largest. And so it is.

Concluding, we have to set aside our frequent predisposition to suggest the existence of political and/or economic hierarchies between sites by just considering their size. We would necessarily require the use of quantitative methods in order to contrast the carrying capacity of the settlement’s territory to support variable size aggregations. It is however symptomatic to observe how the largest sites in Copper Age Iberia are located in highly fertile areas (Valencina de la Concepción, La Pijotilla) or in places with a comparatively prominent productive potential (Los Millares, Marroquines Bajos).

**PLANNING**

The organization of collective labor and the planning and execution of public works demand leadership. Based on this premise and due to the lack of unequivocal evidences of differential production or consumption in and between settlements (Gilman 2000), many researchers have ventured considering communal constructions in larger sites as good examples of the existence of social hierarchies (“nobilities”) organizing and taking advantage of collective labor.

There are obviously substantial differences among Third millennium BC settlements in Iberia, both in the amount labor and in the design complexity. Labor gradation may range between the 113 ha complex ditch system of Marroquines Bajos (Zafra et al. 1999) and, to give an emblematic example, the 0.5 ha enclosure of Los Millares known as “Fortín 1” (Arribas et al. 1983). Design complexity does not necessarily relate to size, as the latter example clearly shows.

The up-to-date best quantified comparative analysis of Copper Age labor investments has been put forward by Monks (1997). Although the author points out to important aspects of labor mobilization, it informs us specifically on the amount of labor invested. Nevertheless, I would suggest that the straightforward quantification of construction volumes misses an important point: the way collective labor was carried out. I believe that it is this variable the one that can help us understand the tactical or organizational power (Wolf 1999: 5) of these prehistoric groups.

It may be illustrative to start with a close-by French example, the Third millennium BC settlement of Boussargues, near Montpellier (Colomer et al. 1990) (Figure 19.1). It is a small 860 sq.m enclosure located on top of a hill, in a position rather similar to many contemporary settlements in Iberia. A detailed publication describes at least three constructive phases. The place is initially occupied by six small circular structures of identical dimensions. The reduced interior space in each of them suggests they were shelters rather than a place to carry out the everyday life of the building group. Moreover, the distance between them point to a predetermined design in their distribution, facilitating while limiting the future second phase: an enclosure. Using an hydraulic analogy (with apologies to Barceló 1989), the initial disposition of these structures entail the future rigidity of the design: any later modification would imply expanding it outside the initial limits. The enclosure was constructed building wall segments between the six initial structures. Further on, some initial huts were expanded by roofing new areas. Due to the construction scale as a whole, it is reasonable to suppose that the structure of the village was a result of the organization of a segmentary group, where constituent parts create a space -both private and collective-, and where decisions are taken in a cooperative way. The same structure of the village acts as metaphor and a formal representation of the social structure of the aggregation.

Let us now analyze a classic case in Iberian Prehistory. Monks (1997: 21) has calculated that Los Millares
required a labor investment of more than 100,000 days. This, of course, says nothing of the way and pace in which it was built. But we can obtain a general sense of the way the first line of enclosure was built, even though the sequence of building events at the site has not been entirely published. Although the enclosures are most frequently represented as a continuous black line, without the outlines of construction events, I have redrawn them specifically attending to their different components. In fact, the excavators represented building interfaces by drawing a thicker line. In my representation (Figure 19.2), different greys do not represent a specific building sequence, but highlight the fact that the “fortification” does not seem to be a pre-planned construction, but a series of far from neatly crafted constructions and reconstructions. Obviously, many authors have stressed that Los Millares walls were sequentially widened by the incorporation of different reinforcements and formal changes. As Molina and Cámara (2005: 34) note, the average thickness of this (wall) is about two meters and was made adding many reinforcements in the internal face of the main wall”. This interpretation, however, gives a unified view of how labor was deployed; something that is not so obvious if the building dynamic is carefully revised following the evidence recorded during the excavation. When we separate clearly later reinforcements and modifications, we can identify that the so-called main wall is in itself nothing else than an addition of different segments. Some of them were built in a strange way for a planned construction. For instance, there are many rectilinear wall fragments ending in a so-called bastion, but its continuation is another building project, rather inadequate if the construction was intended to be a long-term monument/fortification. In other cases, rectilinear walls were built over previous circular constructions (either bastions or dwellings), or other walls were made and later bastions finally added, some of them incorporating evidence of everyday life activities inside. Actually, the image of an impressing fortification with eleven bastions strategically placed (such as the one recently reconstructed in the archaeological guide of the site) is highly misleading: there is enough evidence to argue that bastions and façades were neither designed nor built simultaneously.

I think the case of the first line in Los Millares provides good clues about labor organization and its deployment, and above all, about the kind of surplus labor control that may have been at work. It would not be reasonable to suppose that the society that built Millares lacked the practical knowledge to build a main wall with bastions if they had wanted to. Consequently, it may be suggested that no matter the social institution behind this work, it did not control the means to recruit, organize and mobilize labor in order to build a unified monumental project. The resulting image is an aggregation of segments of building projects that, in a way, reflected a similar idea about a desired final product. The tactic or organizational power (to use E. Wolf’s terms) was probably restricted to each group’s variable recruitment capacity. The multiple segments constituting the fortifications in Los Millares, as those at Boussargues or at the Portuguese site of Castanheiro do Vento (Jorge et al., 2006) (see Figure 19.2) are not just good metaphors, but the very result of the social structure that built it.

The apparently large constructions of Iberian Peninsular Chalcolithic are not necessarily the result of powerful and exploitative hierarchies behind decision-making. It rather seems that, as happens in Boussargues or Los Millares, they are the result of additions with a sequential labor mobilization, according to the capacity of the different segments to mobilize their own labor force in an effort that rarely required an important collective effort. They did not demand a high previous planning, although they probably shared and transmitted a highly valued practical knowledge.

**BEYOND RITUAL**

Open coercion does not seem to be the generalized mechanism to mobilize collective labor during the Third millennium BC. Thus, we should evaluate more persua-
sive forms. Perhaps the most evident—and effective—way to attract and mobilize labor in tribal contexts is the practice of collective activities of a reiterative nature that establish a web of social relations of mutual support. These activities, whatever their form (feasts, gatherings, different kinds of works …) and degree of ceremonial elaboration, are eminently persuasive: groups are voluntarily involved and frequently subdued to the highly formalized dynamics of the activity. Groups may avoid these activities as long as they are not seriously affected: voluntary exclusion from these social webs of mutual support may expose them to socioeconomic predation (Hayden 2001: 575). Consequently, groups would participate in collective activities in order to avoid potential risks, obtain immediate benefits, or promises of future gains.

These means of labor mobilization were probably accessible to all Iberian groups in the Third millennium BC. However, only some of them mobilized surplus labor efficiently enough to be materialized in a massive perpetuated result. In order to achieve it, it was necessary to meet three *sine qua non* conditions: availability of a large labor force, the material conditions of production to support them, and a recurring and persuasive summoning capacity. It is the differences in the political-economic scale of regional developments during Iberian Late Prehistory that I suggest are key in order to understand how these three conditions historically interplayed.

Nevertheless, most interpretations of monumental enclosures in the Iberian Peninsula that have rejected the “coercion hypothesis” have highlighted the role of ritual activities, but oversimplifying the archaeological evidence into a domestic/ritual dichotomy. Certainly, during the last years the interpretative pendulum has shifted from considering enclosures as habitation/domestic spaces to non-habitational /ritual arenas, an interpretation repeated *ad nauseam* by scholars that have applied Procust’s bed to all European and non-European enclosures. The under-
standing of enclosures has been so radically inverted that any enclosure was indisputably considered a ceremonial space: domestic or defensive components would be the ones that required extra support in the eyes of the new exegetes.

I want to highlight three aspects of this trend that may be problematic within its use in the Iberian archaeological practice. First, it has invigorated the risk— and the application— of a traditional (normative) interpretation of what ritual is and can look like. In other words, this trend argues the presence of some kind of ritual practice whenever the archaeological record includes “anomalies”, that is, unusual evidence difficult to interpret in straightforward functional terms.

Secondly, in spite of frequently having a post-processual discourse, the most frequent interpretation is openly functionalist: enclosures are spaces that are not appropriate for living but are created in order to host ceremonial gatherings of dispersed groups. The interpretation has been applied to most Italian and central European Neolithic enclosures, the English Stonehenge or the north American Poverty Point, and seems to become a enlightening interpretation when applied to Los Millares, Valencia, Marroquies, La Pijotilla, Gózquez de Arriba or Castelo Velho. Thus, the previous postprocessual stress on the importance of the ideological component of all societies has been overtly simplified into a conventional archaeological practice.

Finally, the domestic character of enclosures has been systematically denied, but one still wonders the kind of archaeological features that should be found to define a domestic space or a ritual one, if that division is in any way possible. For instance, most scholars would agree on the idea that most Third Millennium BC sites in central Iberia have both animal and human deposits in primary and secondary position that suggest a society with widespread ritual practices. But, if they all should be considered as ritual spaces, we would then face the paradox of not only lacking domestic sites, but most of all, ignoring its defining features.

Of course, the background of all these problems is a limited understanding of the political-economic role of ritual in most early farming societies. If, as Sahlin (1976) or Godelier (1986) have argued, there is no division between structure and superstructure in the so-called tribal societies, then trying to define the archaeological evidence by applying the domestic-ritual dichotomy would be misleading, as in fact Bradley (2005) has recently reminded us. Nevertheless, the fact that—in Bradley’s opinion— daily life is ritualized does not imply that we have to focus settlement analysis exclusively in order to identify non-utilitarian anomalies. On the opposite, it is precisely in the domesticity of the archaeological record were we can find key elements to understand Third Millennium BC Iberian societies. Over all, we should highlight the fact that this domesticity is neither explicit nor massive in previous Neolithic phases, and is practically non-existent in the later Bronze Age, with the outstanding exception of the Southeast. Be it domestication of the ritual or ritualization of domestic events, what is needed is to focus on the political roles of ritual practices in a comparative diachronic and regional perspective.

Bibliography


