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Egalitarianism and resistance: A theoretical proposal for Iron Age Northwestern Iberian archaeology*

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Abstract

We propose a theory of "egalitarianism" as an active historical factor in contexts which have been traditionally considered structurally hostile to it, such as complex agrarian societies. First, we review thoroughly the main anthropological and sociological contributions to resistance against hierarchization in agrarian social contexts (taking into account peasant studies and a segmentary lineage's tradition). Specific emphasis is placed on the forms of organizing production. Then we go through the archaeological landscape of the Iberian Northwestern Iron Age in order to evidence the viability of "assertive egalitarianism" where control of resources was distributed among social segments (households and settlements).We will show a historical process that diverges from what occurs at that time in hierarchical regions. By combining two levels of archaeological analysis (regional and local) we will conclude that a large part of the Iberian Northwest was occupied, from the 8th up to 2nd centuries BC by egalitarian social formations – with social exploitation absent – whose anti-hierarchization structures only crumbled upon the presence of Rome from the 2nd century BC onwards.

Keywords

Egalitarianism, segmentary societies, European Iron Age, landscape archaeology, stateless societies, resistance, agrarian societies, peasants.

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Introduction

This article argues the plausibility of a theory of assertive egalitarianism for understanding the social formations of Northwestern Iberia throughout the first Millennium BC (from the 8th to 2nd centuries BC). We maintain that assertive egalitarianism allows a generalized explanation of the archaeological record of Iron Age societies in terms of opposing segments and social fission, both in settlement patterns and in the configuration of space inside settlements. The different sections in the paper make the argument as follows: first, we deal with the historical dimensions of an updated concept of egalitarianism (second section) and its development inside complex agrarian societies (third section); later, we go through the archaeological record under the light of this theoretical framework (fourth section); and finally we deal with the factors that maintained egalitarianism along the Iron Age (fifth section).

General approach and proposals: assertive egalitarianism

Egalitarianism has been traditionally seen as the "original" or "natural" state of human society, an idea which frequently implies "primitivism" (or "marginality"). But egalitarian societies are also products of history. It has been argued that egalitarianism is a result of human adaptation to the hunter–gatherer lifestyle, thus abandoning the hierarchical and dominant tendencies apparently identified in the predecessors to Homo sapiens (Gintis et al., 2015). Trigger says, following Clastres (1974), that "one of the challenges facing evolutionary anthropologists is therefore to understand the processes involved in the eventual destruction of the behavioral patterns that maintained equality in small-scale societies" (Trigger, 1990: 144–159). The reversible nature of authority in societies with marked seasonal variations has been also defended. It is the case of Paleolithic communities purposefully experimenting with different social strategies – hierarchical or egalitarian – and ways of expressing them materially (Wengrow and Graeber, 2015). These researchers consider egalitarianism as cultural constructions, not as inherently natural or characteristic of the "childhood" of humankind or "primitive" societies.

Although hunter–gatherers have traditionally been considered more open to egalitarian models than the productive ones, there is growing evidence of equal relations in agrarian societies. From a theory of "assertive egalitarianism," the objective of this article is to look for patterns of organization that exhibit the construction of equality using the archaeological record in contexts which are usually considered structurally hostile (Woodburn, 1982), such as complex agrarian societies. Moreover, these societies belong within the European Iron Age, a field of study traditionally governed by strong hierarchy or early state models. Nonetheless, archaeological research has made promising inroads by revealing a far greater degree of social diversity (Collis, 1994; Hill, 1993). As a result, this has prompted momentous changes among prevailing academic perspectives.

These promising ideas in Europe have benefited from the dialectic between egalitarian cooperation and dominance hierarchy stemming from anthropological studies (McGuire and Saitta, 1996; Price and Feinman, 2010: 2), and they acknowledge the possible coexistence within the same society of both hierarchical and egalitarian models (Crumley, 1995). This duality has been directly applied to the European Iron Age in general (Thurston, 2010), and the Iberian Northwest in particular (Parcero, 2003). While this has been refreshing, the primacy of hierarchy remains unquestioned (Sastre, 2011).

Our analysis also joins with current research that has used the archaeological record of villages and households which exert a bottom-up resistance to the expansion of states (Grier and Kim, 2012; Haber, 2007; Parkinson, 2002; Thurston, 1999; Vander Linden, 2007), thereby echoing Edmund Leach's ethnographic work (Leach, 2004 [1959]). Current ideas such as collective action theory (Blanton et al., 1996; Carballo and Feinman, 2016) and political economy (Earle, 2005; Thurston, 2010) have been incorporated. Complexity no longer implies centralization, hierarchization,

productive intensification, and exchange according to these theories. Also, a useful model is that of "horizontally integrated societies" (McIntosh, 1999: 9), which feature diffuse, segmentary and heterarchical power structures, such as horizontal differentiation, consensus-based decisionmaking (McIntosh, 1999: 4) or anarchists' political relations (Angelbeck and Grier, 2012; Scott, 2009).

Inside this wider context, our contribution focuses on egalitarianism as a dominant and prevalent social strategy. Our research deals with agrarian societies which have characteristics such as family/individual use of land and family appropriation of production which are not usually associated with egalitarianism. These domestic aspects have traditionally fueled evolutionary ideas based on the connection between agriculture and hierarchy, ideas that contrast enormously to more common examples of egalitarianism between farmers and peasants.

Many approaches emphasize a decentralizing pattern, but we will prove that this concept is insufficient on its own. Hierarchical societies – for example, Vicent's kinship modes of exploitation (Vicent, 1998) or Gilman's Germanic chiefdoms (Gilman, 1995), or diverse forms of feudalisms, for example, those explained by Crumley's concept of heterarchy (Crumley, 1995), or Thurston's Iron Age Kings (Thurston, 2010) – can be markedly decentralized or segmentary, but this usually is just a consequence of an "egalitarian ideology," that is, a worldview of the dominant group (put in Marxist terms), which actively defends the equality of the segments. This egalitarianism between segments does not imply equality within the segments. That is why it is important to distinguish those societies built through a successful assertive egalitarianism from those in which egalitarianism works as an ideological cloak which can conceal very real inequalities in the access to both power and wealth.

In contrast to "egalitarian ideology," we propose the idea of "assertive egalitarianism" (based on Woodburn, 1982), related to resistance against hierarchical power structures inside and outside segments. This resistance generates societies that maintain equal access for all families to the means of production and to status positions, as well as communal decision-making. Egalitarianism (that which asserts equality) is not 'being equal' (Lancaster comment to Salzman, 1999: 42) and it does not imply absence of social differences of other types: gender, age or authority (Godelier, 1982). Egalitarianist societies know perfectly about (and interact with) hierarchization and social exploitation. It is precisely for that reason that they actively resist them to preserve their social system (Bern, 1987).

Our goal is to detect the corporate units which make up this egalitarian society. A comparative archaeological analysis of areas and settlements within the Iron Age Iberian Northwest can facilitate this detection on two levels.

• Regional level, for defining a decentralized territorial organization without supra-local or political entities.

• Local level, for demonstrating the lack of inequality in the social structure of settlements.

A new theoretical proposal within current trends

The most important anthropological and sociological contributions to the notions of egalitarianism and resistance against the State are usually centered on societies with low-intensity productive systems. The less connection to the land, the easier it is to move, flee or "vote with your feet," all highly effective instruments against exploitation. As Gilman (1981, 1995) has defended, productive intensification could make the "costs of submission" less burdensome than the "costs of resistance."

The relationship between agriculture, complexity, and inequality has been frequently studied. Sahlins (1972), partially inspired by Chayanov, defined the domestic mode of production, which

has then been approached from many points of view (Feinman, 2011; Meillassoux, 1991; Netting, 1990; Plog, 1990; Vicent, 1998). The societies we study here have complex agrarian systems based on delayed returns and high production capacities. We, however, defend that they are egalitarian, both in terms of organization of production as well as social relations. Our approach builds upon the research provided by anthropology, archaeology, and sociology on how egalitarianism in complex agrarian social contexts works. It permits also to identify which corporate entities are relevant in those cases.

Villages (and households), more than kinship, are key elements in these questions. Even inside the segmentary lineage academic tradition, villages have been considered as reference points for social organization. Middleton and Tait (1958) distinguished between three types of segmentarity: those based on cognatic relations, age groups, and groups in which it was the village that provided social cohesion. Horton, on the other hand, identified three types of agrarian stateless social organizations in West Africa: segmentary lineage systems – the "orthodox" but "the rarest of the three types of organisation type" (Horton, 1976: 85); dispersed, territorially defined communities; and large compact villages. The latter two also featured lineages, but these were not considered vital in social organization.

Netting criticized the conceptualization of descent groups as corporate units in acephalous sedentary societies and the assumption that "the kin group will be the dominant social institution [. . .] I have suggested that descent groups are seldom cooperative labour units, and that, as agriculture intensifies, they may diminish in economic importance as compared to households, exchange groups, and neighborhood work parties" (Netting, 1990: 51–52). In his criticism of Marxist primitive communalism Netting stresses that the relevance of individual property of an intensified farming system is a significant difference from the purposed collectivism of pre-state societies (Netting, 1990: 46 ss.). This approach also recognizes that egalitarianism is a cultural construction, and that differences of wealth should also be expected in non-hierarchical agrarian societies.

All these developments also stress that there is not a direct or single correlation between intensive agriculture, demographic pressure, and political centralization. The relation is multidirectional: "there are indeed ethnographic cases where the logic of permanent intensive agriculture in the context of dense sedentary populations has seemingly militated against the emergence of the state [. . .]. Evidence of intensive agriculture is therefore not diagnostic of the presence of supra-local polities" (Netting, 1990: 61). Plog (1990), using the archaeological record of the US Southwest and highland Mesoamerica, lists some characteristics of those sedentary communities such as: "the development of a more restricted form of sharing, producing a smaller, more formalized social group composed of a limited number of households"; "an associated change from public storage of resources to private storage areas associated with individual habitation units and an increasing probability of land and resource ownership by smaller social units"; and "the evolution of a group ideology consistent with increased territoriality."

Marxism has also made significant contributions for understanding how small agrarian communities worked. As we have explained previously (Sastre, 2008), and based on the notion of "domestic community" (Meillassoux, 1991), the system of delayed returns and the needs for storage create links of common identity which serve the greater cohesion of the local community, while at the same time clearly demarcating it and its productive territory. This has also been applied by Thomas to the British Iron Age (Thomas, 1997). Agrarian intensification, by enhancing the importance of property, generates a clear separation between those who are in and those who are out (Bloch, 1984; Goody, 1974). Access to means of production is communally controlled, which usually guarantees the access of all households to them. Netting (1990: 46) speaks explicitly of "heritable property rights." In these contexts, the relevance of households, villages or groups of villages is increased. Even from an evolutionist perspective, where political relevance is placed on the role of supra-

regional entities, local communities are still considered the true axes of social articulation (Carneiro, 2002; Yoffee, 1993: 62).

Households (inside or outside villages) are basic units of production and consumption in intensified agrarian communities. They have been defined by Sahlins (1972: 131) as "centrifugal forces," representing a tension between families and the community. Inside this internal conflict wealth inequalities can take root, if historical conditions allowed it. But peasantry-based studies also identify selfregulating mechanisms which help re-balance these trends in order to maintain the weight of the community as main power structure: "differential inheritance, farming skills, stage in the life cycle, demographic chance factors, and external sociopolitical demands contribute to local inequality in the distribution of productive resources" (Netting, 1990: 60). But these phenomena occur in the structural framework of production and reproduction of equivalent segments, so society can actively offset the potential inequalities. Inside a peasant economic mentality, as originally defined by Chayanov, surplus is culturally fixed (Vicent, 1991): intensive cultivators are usually more interested in minimizing risks rather than maximizing production. These are not "subsistence economies" because agrarian households produce beyond subsistence demands based on a "reference income" of goods they seek (Netting, 1990: 35). They are, however, economic systems which do not produce surplus of power. Following Sahlins, some families may work at surplus intensities, yet with negligible results for the community (Sahlins, 1972: 109–114). Agrarian communities, therefore, do not inherently tend to intensify production, since there are structural factors destined to avoid it.

The same can be said for the size of the community. The close relationship between villages/households and their productive territory imply a strict definition of belonging to the community, undoubtedly including growth control. The connection between demographic growth and inequality has been studied from many different perspectives. Two hundred inhabitants are the common "critical threshold" considered necessary for complexity to emerge against face-to-face and group solidarity (Bintliff, 1999: 533; Fletcher, 1995: 89). By keeping communities below that threshold, recurring to fission when necessary, exploitation tendencies can be contained. Obviously, this is not the only mechanism which wards off these trends. Feinman (2011) has pointed out that the correlation between population and complexity should not only be understood quantitatively, but also on a qualitative level; that is, the way in which the constituent units are integrated and form larger ones ("connectivity") also helps limit social hierarchies. In any case, regarding settlement size "when they are small, groups that operate more collectively often dampen the emergence of decision-making hierarchies" (Feinman, 2011: 37).

Peasantry studies concerned with forms of resistance – both against capitalism or the expansion of ancient states (Haber, 2007; Scott, 2009; Wolf, 1966) – have greatly developed these issues. The historical phenomenon of egalitarianism can be explained as a resistance to hierarchization in the context of contact and interaction with imperial expansion. Studies on intercultural contacts have mostly focused on tribalization and the marked increase in conflict-related hierarchization (Ferguson and Whitehead, 1992). Important to note, however, is the evidence that coalescence sometimes smoothed social hierarchies (Kowalewski, 2006). Less attention has been paid when conflict has led to social atomization, flighting towards "marginal" areas in search for social isolation or the development of egalitarian strategies (Scott, 2009). Isolation and marginality are the result of historical processes and they are culturally defined (Bern, 1987; Fowles, 2002; Scott, 2009).

Finally, some words must be said on segmentary societies. This concept was used by Durkheim in 1893 (Durkheim, 1987 [1893]; Sigrist, 2004), though it is with the detailed development in the work of Fortes and Evans-Pritchard that "segmentary lineage" becomes an inescapable reference for all anthropological thought. Anthropological literature on this subject is vast (Kuper, 1982) and lies far beyond the aims of this paper. What must be strongly emphasized is that social anthropology has

ceased to insist in studying societies from a kinship perspective centered around the idea of lineage as a corporate group (as indicated above). Even the fundamental role of kinship to social structure has been rejected. The principles of lineage have encountered an uncomfortable diversity of actual social structures: cognatic kinship, non-unilinear filiation, territorially-based groups, factions, clientships, etc. which could make kinship subject to significant social manipulation. The great abundance of studies and debates along these lines (Holy, 1979; Kuper, 1982; Needham, 1971; Schneider, 1984) conclude that kinship is not the base of social structure in any case. "Il n'y a jamais eu de 'kin-based societies' sauf dans les manuels d'anthropologie et de sociologie" (Godelier, 2004: 517).

We propose turning to a Durkheimian notion based on the idea of equivalent segments (Albergoni, 2003; Dresch, 1986; Sigrist, 2004). The key point is the structural definition of the concept of segmentation, founded on the principles of complementary opposition, fusion and fission of equivalent aggregates or segments – which can be based on several forms of social relations. A segmentary society is markedly decentralized. Some authors have defined segmentary societies as "ordered anarchies" (Evans-Pritchard, 1940; Middleton and Tait, 1958) or "regulierte anarchie" (Sigrist, 2004).

To sum up, the following general indicators to an archaeological theory grounded on egalitarianism must be taken into account:

• Egalitarianism is a historical product, a cultural construction, also in agrarian societies.

• Kinship is no longer the keystone for interpreting ancient, low-scale societies.

• Evolutionist ideas which consider that hierarchization and social exploitation are inevitable once agriculture appears have been getting weaker. Intensification of production and generating surplus are processes that must be explained in historical terms.

• Importance of the villages and households as corporate communities.

• Importance of segmentarity for understanding structural mechanisms.

• Existence of objective mechanisms to avoid hierarchization, for example, control of surplus, community balancing of unequal richness between households, space management, control of settlement size or keeping social distance and opposition between communities.

The Iron Age in the Northwestern Iberian Peninsula: an egalitarianist archaeological record

This theoretical proposal allows us to approach our study in bottom-up terms, emphasizing the role of communities and households in constructing social relations. We will try to demonstrate that, despite the regional diversity, the structural territorial and social dynamics are very similar throughout a great part of Northwestern Iberia prior to the Roman conquest. Moreover, we will try to overcome the established view that around the 4th century BC a general hierarchization process was taking place.

Settlement patterns in a diachronic perspective

The Iron Age of Northwestern Iberia (Figure 1) is characterized by "castros," the usual fortified settlements. No other type of settlement has been discovered (Parcero, 2003: 273). Despite some speculations (Ayán, 2013: 45) there are no open habitation places in clear pre-Roman contexts. Neither is there a funerary record for this period in this region.

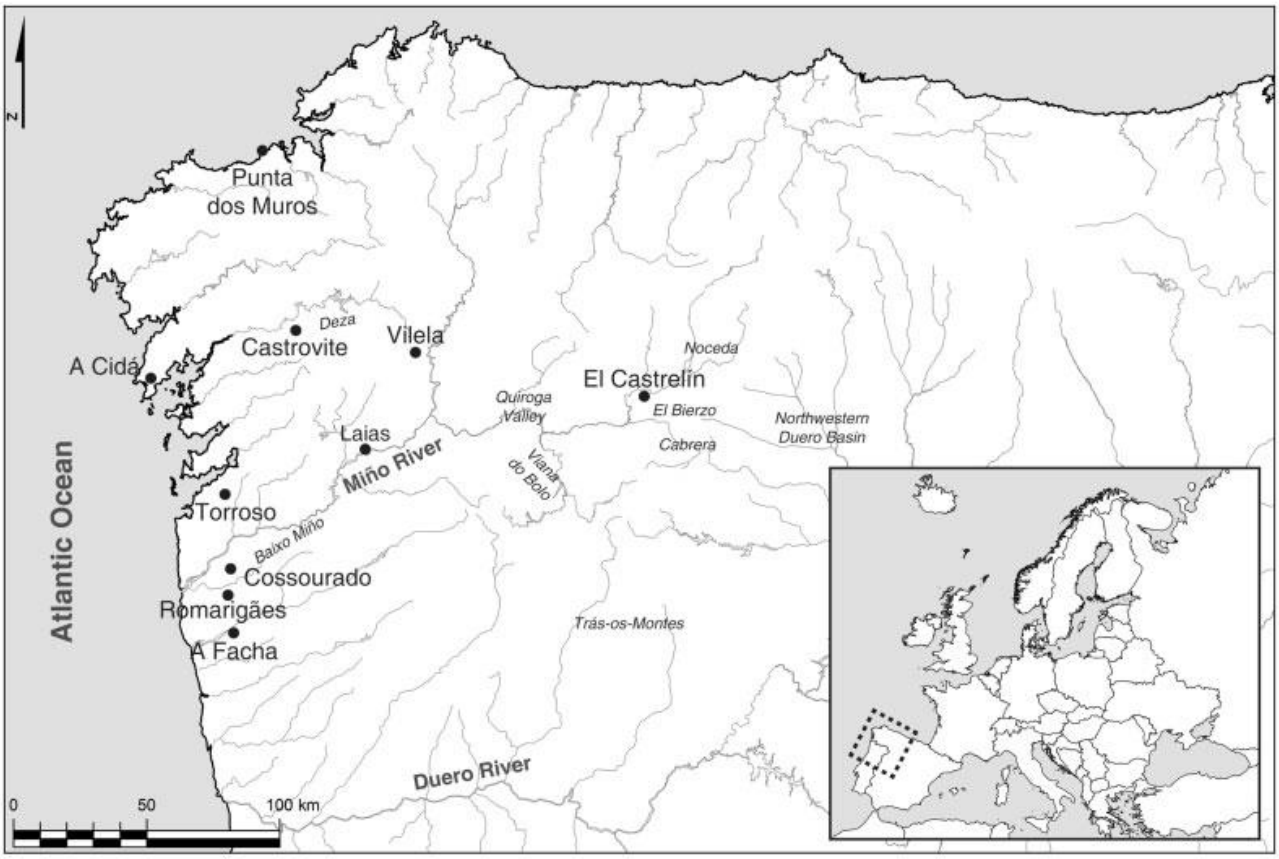

FIGURE 1. Location map with the main sites mentioned in the text.

Researchers in general assume a process towards social hierarchization during the first millennium BC. Martins (1990, 1997) and Alarcão (1992) maintain that a great transformation between the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age (10th–7th centuries BC), was followed by a stand-by situation until the very end of the Iron Age. Others, however, sustain a two-age scheme with a turning point during the 5th century BC, which marks the transition between an Early Iron Age and Late Iron Age (Carballo, 2001; Parcero, 2002). Researchers agree on considering the latter period (from the 2nd century BC onwards) as a "definitively complex social context" (Parcero and Criado, 2013: 264).

For the Early Iron Age (8th–5th centuries BC) a model based on Clastres' (1974) "societies against the State" has been proposed (González-García, 2017; González-García et al., 2011). This interpretation rightly implies a cultural construction based on resistance against Bronze Age hierarchies. Castros are small, stable, well-defended, visible agrarian communities that gave place to an "isonomic landscape" (Gonzá lez-Ruibal, 2006–2007: 221).

But researchers (with notable exceptions, Alarcão, 1992: 43), do not discard elites, even in these egalitarian contexts (Ayán, 2013: 44; González-Ruibal, 2006–2007: 221): "being against the State does not mean being against hierarchy" (González-Ruibal, 2011: 259). Therefore, the internal dynamics of the model (the development of productive forces) lead inevitably to social hierarchization (González-García et al., 2011). Some researchers have warned about the artificial character of this temporal division in the 5th century BC (De la Peña and Vázquez, 1996: 257; Fernández-Posse, 1998: 203). Nonetheless, this idea has been recently reinforced. Social changes of the end of the Iron Age are assumed as consequences of an earlier process and thereby disconnected from any possible inference from Roman expansion in the latter phase. Around 400 BC "the mechanisms that had previously been used to inhibit social division now began to act in the

opposite way, when the changes in the productive landscape indicate a new intensification that would once again make it possible to generate surpluses" (Parcero and Criado, 2013: 263–264). Some anthropological models have been proposed for this hierarchical Second Iron Age: Germanic societies (Parcero, 2003); kinshipbased chiefdoms (Gonzá lez-Ruibal, 2011); or warrior societies with circuits of prestige goods (González García, 2017). Egalitarianism is reluctantly accepted, but only for highland "deep rural" areas (Gonzá lez-Ruibal, 2011). The role of warfare in these societies has been discussed elsewhere (Sastre, 2008).

Despite the appeal to search for ruptures and continuities in the archaeological record (Ayán, 2013: 41; Parcero and Criado, 2013), the mere definition of the Late Iron Age implies a lineal and natural progression towards intensification of production based on the development of productive forces (De la Peña and Vázquez, 1996: 260; Martins, 1997: 150). This is contrary to the analysis of the productive processes of castros based on the model of peasant economies (Fernández-Posse and Sánchez-Palencia, 1998; Parcero, 2003). Therefore, it is necessary now to review the archaeological foundations of the supposed intensification of the production which the model relies on.

The two-age scheme is based on the distinction of two forms of territoriality, interpreted as two subsequent stages, tested in different regions (Fábrega, 2005; Parcero, 2002). During the Early Iron Age, villages are settled on prominent locations, with wide long-distance visual control, limited accessibility and with a bias for extensive farming lands. During the Late Iron Age, locations are less prominent, long distance visibility is reduced, and villages enjoy an easier accessibility towards their surroundings (mainly intensive farming lands).

But these two systems do not fit when compared with other studies. There are interior regions – Viana do Bolo region (Xusto, 1993), Cabrera river basin (Ferná ndez-Posse and Sá nchez-Palencia, 1998), Northwestern Duero river basin (Orejas, 1996), Trás-os-Montes region (Lemos, 1993), Noceda river basin (Álvarez, 1993), Quiroga region inside Sil river basin (López, 1990) – without any variation of settlement patterns throughout the Iron Age. In all of them, the only substantive change documented is related to the Roman conquest including the changes in settlement patterns and intensification of production (from the 2nd century BC onwards) (Almeida, 1990, 1996).

On the basis of these regional studies, and particularly within the Baixo Miño region (Currás, 2014), it can be safely affirmed that castro settlement patterns form a fragmented and decentralized landscape with a marked social continuity throughout the Iron Age (Figure 2). The landscape is a continuum of agrarian communities formed through the repetition and opposition of equivalent settlements, with no superior political organization to articulate them and without relevant structural changes during the Iron Age.

FIGURE 2. Castros of Northwestern Iberia.

The analysis of location and accessibility to productive lands of the Baixo Miño castros have taken into account a great diversity of factors[1]. This allows the definition of four types of settlement[2]. Cross-matching has been done between this typology and the chronological information obtained from archaeological survey and excavation (Table 1). Diverse dates exist for all the types, and locational strategies are not chronology-oriented. We do not find any evidence of a supposed evolution from diverse agrarian models. The morphological variations on territorial strategies only reflect diversity – probably environmentally conditioned – inside a common pattern: castros are agrarian villages that represent themselves in the territory as corporate units of political significance opposed to other castros[3], located in areas that always guarantee access to agrarian resources.

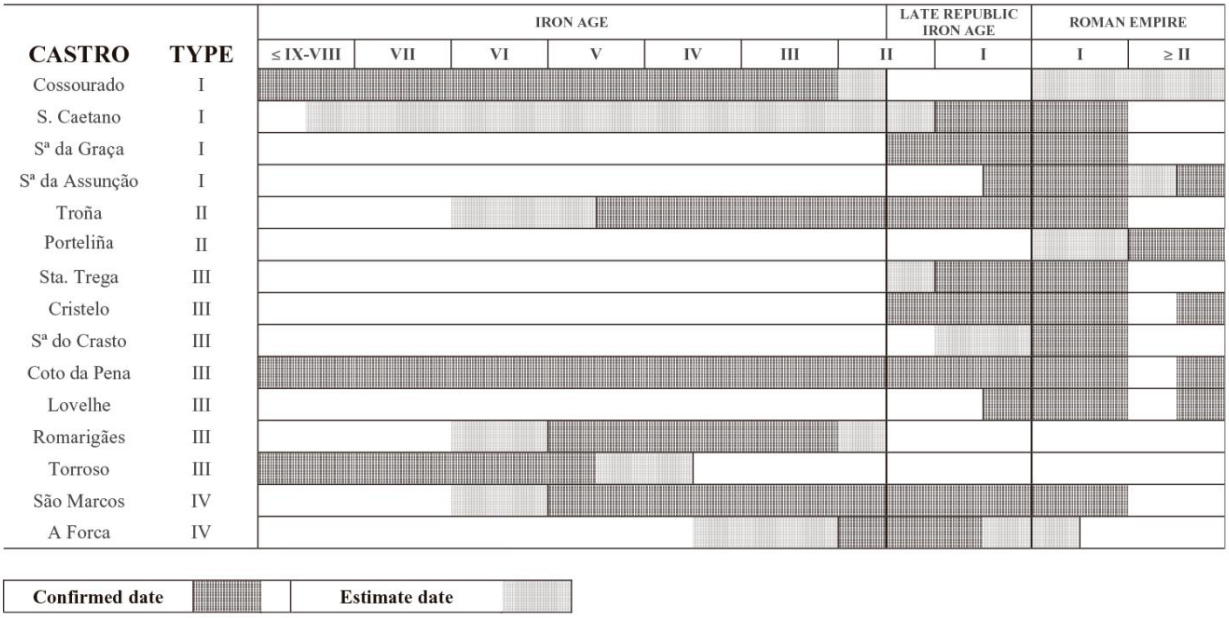

Table 1. Chronology of the castros of the Lower Miño valley.

Spatial studies clearly show an average size of communities of around 1 ha (Table 2) (Figure 3). The smallest ones are less than half a hectare, and even the largest ones never exceed a meager 3 ha, at least until the latest phase when Roman influence is already evident. These sizes have been documented in detail in the Baixo Miño surface study, using remote sensing and including aerial photography and LiDAR topographies. Settlement size is a key point: although complexity is not wholly a matter of size (Feinman, 2011), "critical thresholds" are fundamental for containing social division, even more so in a complex agrarian social context. A limit of 150–200 inhabitants was always respected.

[1] Parameters – analyzed with a geographic information system – are: relative height (regarding to 400, 800, and 2000 m); visibility from the settlement (within a 800 m, 2 km, and 15 km radius); visual prominence in the landscape (total and relative within 800 m, 2 km, 5 km, and 10km radius); accessibility over the surroundings (150, 30 0 , and 450); accessibility and visibility of the potential agrarian resources; Euclidean and temporal distance related to the nearest neighbor; visual exposure index; prominence index; living area gradient and gradient of the 400 and 800 m surrounding the castro; area of the castro; demographic estimate; location type; and population–-resource balance.

[2] Type I: prominent location with preferential access to extensive agricultural lands; Type II: low prominent location with preferential access to extensive agricultural lands; Type III: prominent location with preferential access to intensive agricultural lands; and Type IV: low prominent location with preferential access to intensive agricultural lands.

[3] Prominence and visibility are spatial factors well developed by castro archaeologists. Their relation to excluding identities in these agrarian communities has been discussed by Sastre (2008).

	Mean	<0.5	0.5–1	1–1.5	1.5–2	>2	Range
Total surface							
Lower Miño Valley ($n = 151$)	0.97 ha	30% ($n = 45$)	43% ($n = 65$)	11.25% ($n = 17$)	9.25% ($n = 14$)	6.5% ($n = 10$)	0.1–3.8 ha
Deza Valley (Carballo, 2001)	0.78 ha	29%	47%	13%	7%	3%	0.2–2.2 ha
Quiroga Valley (López, 1990)	1.1 ha	18%	32%	23%	23%	4%	0.3–2.8 ha
West Coruña (Agrafoxo, 1989)	0.63 ha	23%	45%	16%	4%	1%	
Inhabitable surface							
Lower Miño Valley ($n = 151$)	0.8 ha	33% ($n = 50$)	46% ($n = 70$)	12% ($n = 18$)	5% ($n = 7$)	4% ($n = 6$)	0.1–2.65 ha
Quiroga Valley (López, 1990)	0.5 ha	59%	32%	9%			0.09–1.5

Table 2. Surface of Northwester castros.

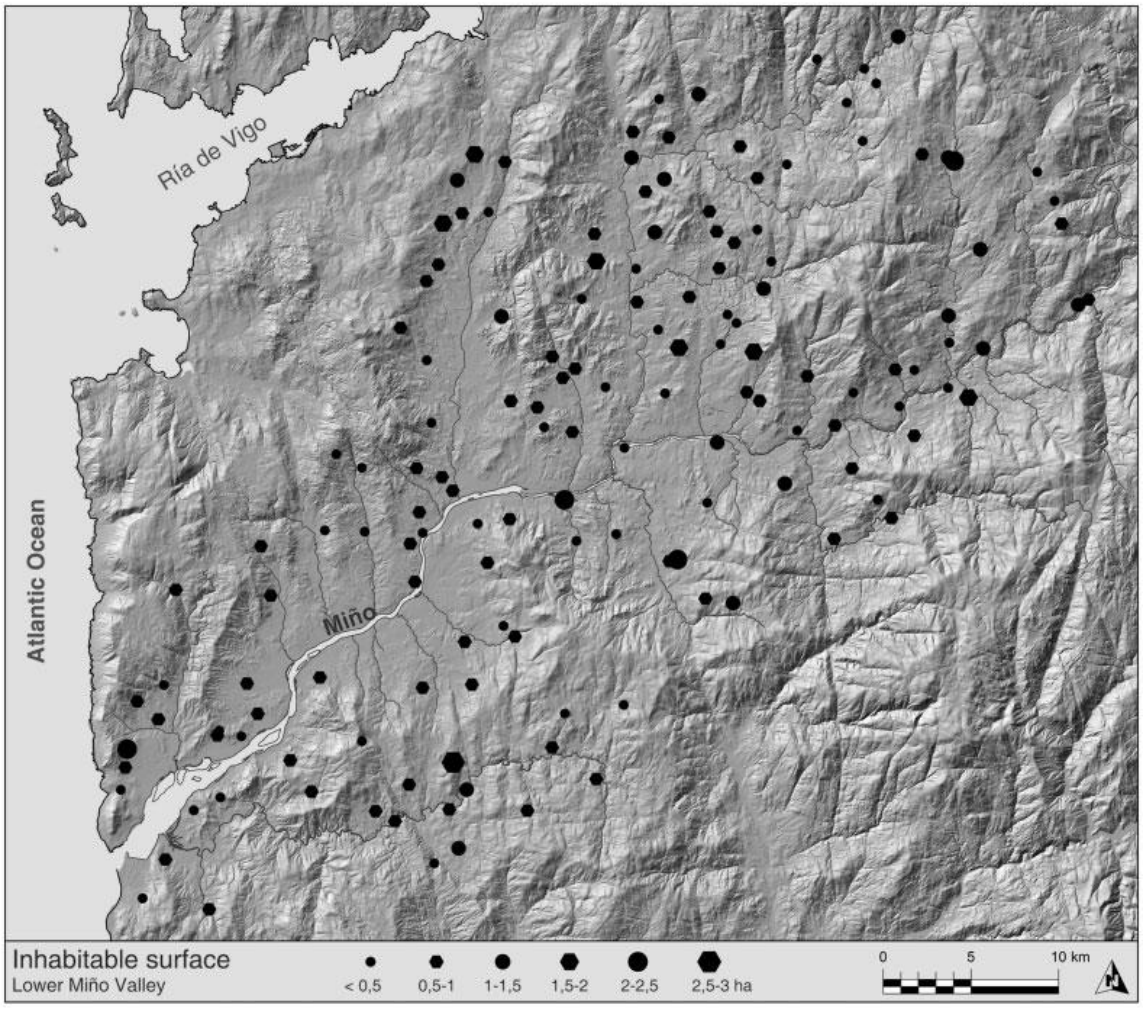

FIGURE 3. Inhabitable surface in the Lower Miño Valley castros (excluded Late Roman Republic and Roman gold mining castros).

Castros are distributed throughout the territory following a segmentary logic, based on the contraposition of equivalent units. These settlements always maintain a regular separation with other castros, and conform to isolated units inside the territory: the average lineal distance to the nearest neighbor in the Baixo Miño is 1.800 m or 39', a figure similar to that of other regions of the Northwest.

All castros have an equivalent access to productive resources, and studies have also revealed strategies of diversification of production, something consistent with peasant forms of economic organization (Fernández-Posse and Sánchez-Palencia, 1998; Parcero, 2002: 50–57; Sastre, 2008). Access to arable lands is the primary parameter. Indeed, the location of castros is never conditioned by other considerations such as communication routes, access to trade, or other variables. Matching population density and land types shows that the areas with higher settlement concentration are those more suitable for the development of peasant strategies (Figure 4). Lack of central places and the impossibility to identify any sort of castro grouping or commonalities beyond mere conformance to the emplacement preferences around the valleys, stems from the above.

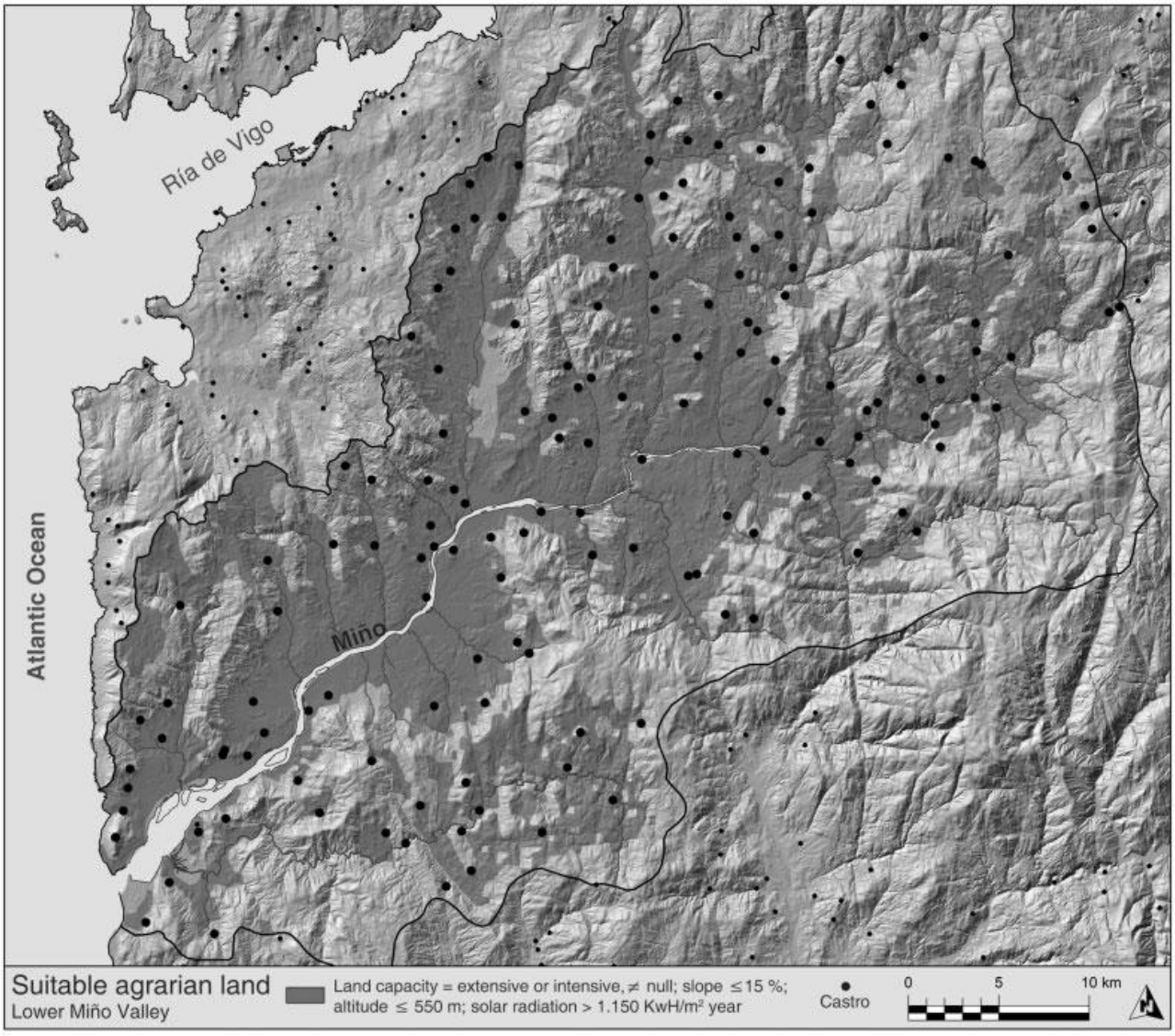

FIGURE 4. Relation between the Lower Miño Valley castros and the suitable agrarian land.

The Iron Age can therefore be interpreted as a process of consolidation of small agrarian communities, which maintained the same social parameters throughout the millennium. There is a great morphological variety of castros depending on the adaptation of community requirements (visibility and delimitation) to the geomorphology of each location and the combination of natural and artificial elements –that is, walls, terraces, and ditches. This variation has been used to propose a regional differentiation that makes the culture-historical label of "Castro Culture" useless. In spite of this, the inner structure found across this diversity reveals the systematic presence of identical processes.

Castros at a local level: segmentating space

Castros are basically groups of households, which Sahlins (1972) would define as "centrifugal social forces," in which communal unity has successfully prevailed over internal conflicts. In contrast to the atomized relations of production found in other Iron Age contexts of Europe (Hill, 2006), in the Iberian Northwest markedly village-type societies emerged. Nonetheless some scholars have seen in the domestic record indications of social division around the 5th century BC (Ayán, 2013). According to this, whereas the Early Iron Age had a more "primitive architecture" made from perishable materials, the Late Iron Age saw the widespread adoption of stonework and a more complex spatial distribution.

The early occupation phases are certainly characterized by perishable building materials. A few Early Iron Age settlement excavations have provided a micro-spatial analysis of this so-called "primitive architecture" (Ayán, 2013). In Torroso (De la Peña, 1992) and Cossourado (Silva, 2015) each building corresponds to a multifunctional dwelling. As in the case of the earliest phase of Castro de A Facha (Almeida, 1982) and Romarigães (Silva, 2015), households are of big size, built with perishable materials and the space is used loosely, including some wide unoccupied areas. In Punta dos Muros (Cano Pan, 2012) (Figure 5) and A Cidá de Ribeira (Vidal, 2015) the inner space is distributed in a more complex fashion, but there are no structural differences between households. All of them show a similar material record. Each domestic unit stores its agrarian production inside the house (Ayán, 2013: 43). Although the metallurgical production is poorly known for this period, in settlements such as Torroso for example, the remains of bronze metallurgy are dispersed throughout the site and correspond to domestic productions (De la Peña, 1992).

Radiocarbon dating from Romarigães and Cossourado (Silva, 2015) shows that the so-called "primitive architecture" and the material culture of the beginning of the Iron Age remained until the 3rd century BC. The same evolution has been recently documented at A Cidá (Vidal, 2015), where architecture and pottery typical of the beginning of the Iron Age have been dated by carbon-14 (C14) from the 8th century BC until the 2nd century BC. In A Facha (Almeida et al., 1981, 1982), where a complete sequence of the evolution of domestic spaces has been outlined, radiocarbon dating shows that the main architectonic change only took place from the 2nd century BC onwards (phases Ia and Ib). At the castro of Vilela, using C14 dating, the earliest stonework appears even later, during the change of era (Álvarez et al., 2006).

More relevant for us is the fact that the "monumentalizing" process did not change the spatial logic of the settlements. The most outstanding archaeological analysis to date about the spatial organization of castros has been carried out by Fernández-Posse and Sánchez-Palencia in the regions of Bierzo and Cabrera (León) (Fernández-Posse and Sánchez-Palencia, 1998) (Figure 6). Inside these castros, households keep equal access to agrarian resources. The dwellings consist of adjoining spaces of varying function (hearth, courtyard, etc.), including a space for storage. A fundamental characteristic is the homogeneity of all the households. They all have more or less similar spaces both in size and in function and their artifact assemblages are equivalent. Only one household shows a clear contrast to the others, the metallurgical unit, which for functional reasons uses its space differently. Thus, despite the agrarian self-sufficiency of each household, the productive processes are not reduced to the domestic sphere. Metallurgy emerges above the

domestic sphere, and fulfills its function at the communal level, reinforcing the cohesion between households (Fernández-Posse et al., 2004).

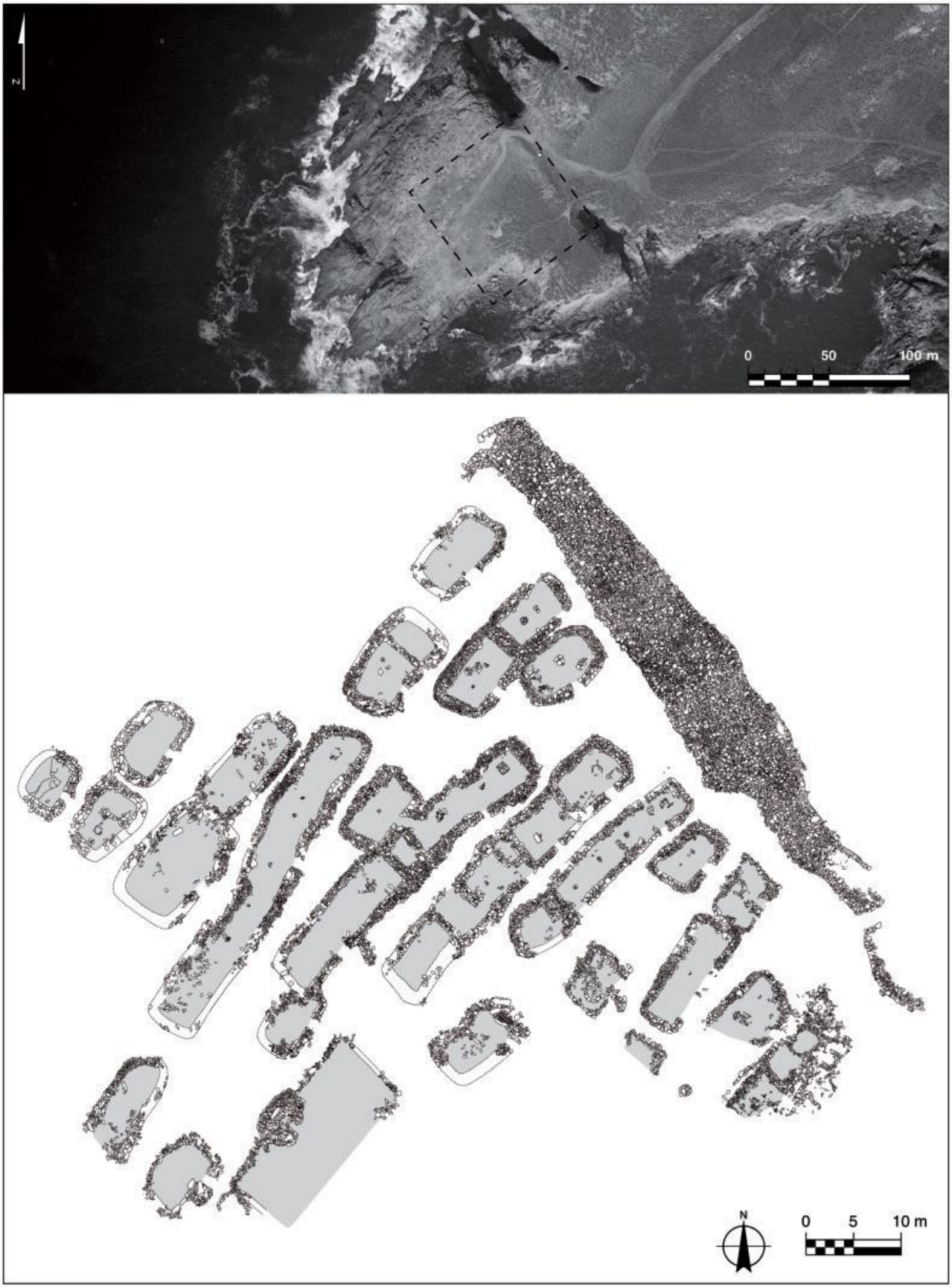

FIGURE 5. Punta dos Muros (after Cano Pan, 2012).

The building of households by aggregating functionally diverse spaces is a construction system different from the earlier settlements (Torroso, Romarigães, and Cossourado). Nonetheless, the "monumentalized" settlements share a segmental logic with the "primitive architecture" defended by Ayán. There are no differences in the archaeological record of households. Although it is true that households are clearly autonomous elements and act as centrifugal forces, it is likewise also true that all of them are equal. Households stand steadfastly inside their communities, on equal basis. They are self-sufficient units albeit dependent on a communal productive structure. Each castro is formed by the repetition of equivalent households, always similar in shape and size. More than 200 castros have been excavated throughout the Northwest, and forms of inequality have never been documented.

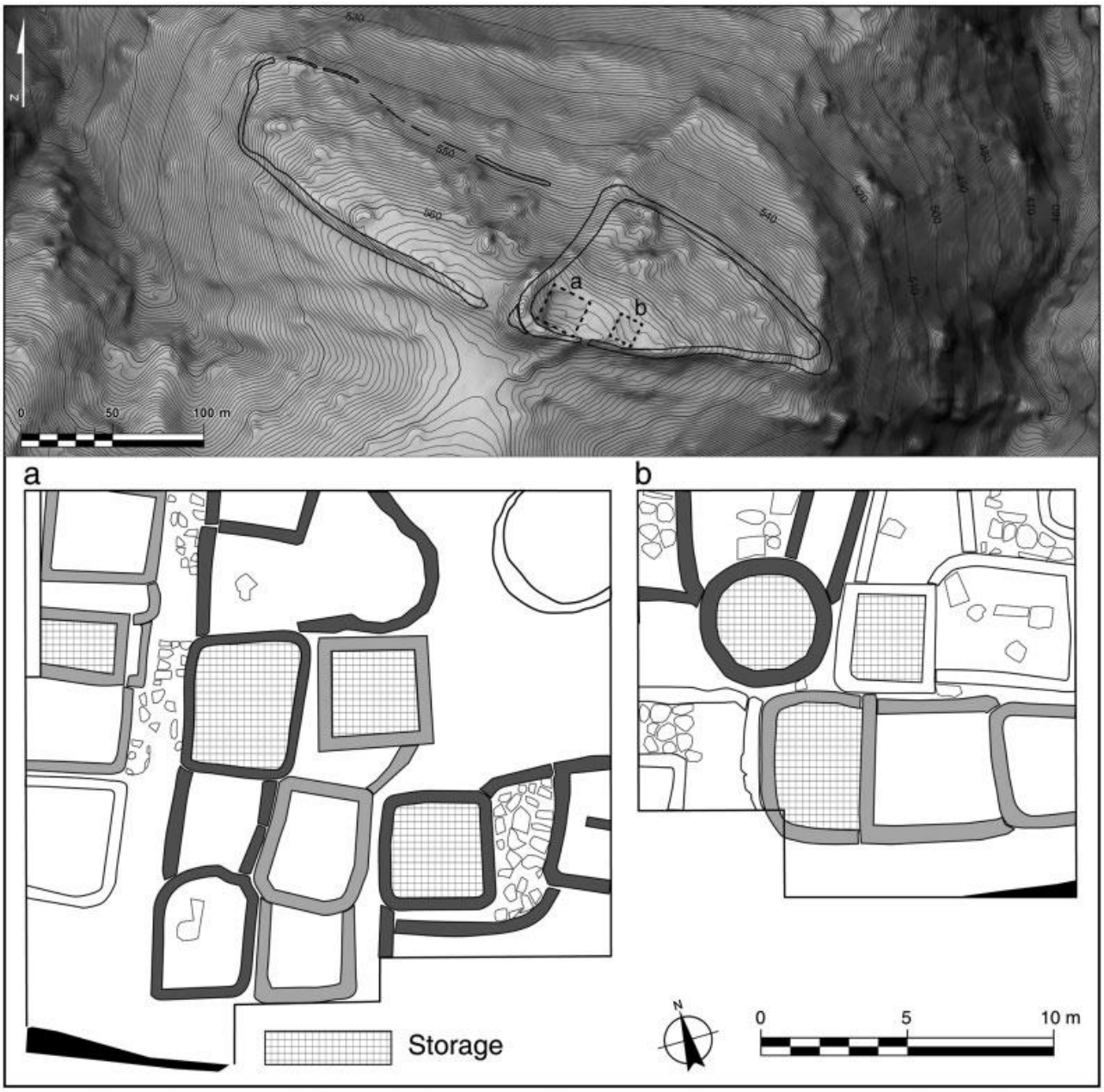

FIGURE 6. Castrelín de San Juan de Paluezas (after Fernández-Posse and Sánchez-Palencia, 1998).

Communal organization is also expressed in other ways. At Laias (Álvarez and López, 2001), the identification of an enclosure on the top of the settlement in which wooden and clay structures were built to store grain has been interpreted as sign of territorial pre-eminence. However, given that there are domestic units in that castro, the central storage space could have been controlled by the community, for communal ritual, or for other forms of collective keeping (e.g., collective safekeeping for times of shortage or for the following year's sowing). This could explain the evidence without a complete alteration of the agrarian segmentary social model.

Prestige goods in egalitarianist contexts

Gold objects are a relatively abundant material record in the Northwest that have, however, rarely been studied in their archaeological context. Jewelry has been studied mainly typologically and automatically associated with Pre-Roman times and social elites.

These associations have prevailed notwithstanding the suggestions on behalf of certain experts that new ways of interpretation should be put forth, in order to better integrate it into the social analysis of castro societies (Armbruster and Perea, 2000; Fernández-Posse and Sánchez-Palencia, 2004; García-Vuelta, 2007). Contrary to the idea that "la rica orfebrería del Noroeste debería ser argumento suficiente para demostrar el carácter desigualitario de las sociedades prerromanas de la zona" (González-Ruibal, 2006–2007: 427), we think that the existence of jewelry creates a challenge taking into account the stubborn domestic characteristics of the archaeological record (Fernández-Posse and Sánchez-Palencia, 2004; Fernández-Posse et al., 1993; Sastre and Sánchez-Palencia, 2013).

One key argument is that all well dated pieces point towards the end of the Iron Age (Armada and García-Vuelta, 2015). They are therefore always related to this final moment of the Iron Age under Roman pressure, and never to the supposed turning point around the 5th century BC. Notwithstanding, some experts continue to defend a long metallurgical tradition dating from Bronze Age, produced within hierarchical social contexts. Recent propositions suppose the existence of a "prestige goods system" in warrior societies (González, 2017) or kinship-based chiefdoms (González-Ruibal, 2011: 259). The first include the evidence from southern areas which are closely related to the earliest Roman expansion. The second model corresponds to the extreme Northwestern parts of Galicia. This interpretation depends exclusively on the supposed "overabundance of jewels, most notable torcs," which are however found within a "heterarchical landscape" that is quite the same as the segmentary landscape we have defined.

This particular archaeological record, so often over-interpreted and undercontextualized, obviously warrants deeper study. But the potential of a more balanced approach to such spectacular pieces is enormous. Recent work on metallic productions usually considered to be unquestionable evidence of social hierarchies in other regions, such as the Sardinian bronzetti from the end of the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age, have also been interpreted communally, as the "annihilation of material wealth." Figured representations of "chiefs" have become "symbolic entities," expressing "idealized social roles" (Araque, 2014). This example shows that social interpretation of metalworking is an open field to discussion and the "obvious" hierarchical paradigms are far from undeniable.

Assertive egalitarianism during the Iron Age: a new proposal

Segmentary castros represent the successful resistance against social exploitation/division during all the first Millennium. This process is at the core of the Early Iron Age, as some researchers have defended (González et al., 2011; Parcero and Criado, 2013). Parcero and Criado affirm that from 800 BC onwards "the ways of exploiting the environment and the pattern of settlement were modified to diversify the model of subsistence, although the possibility of producing surpluses was diminished" (Parcero and Criado, 2013: 263). Conversely, we defend that the Iron Age agrarian

system does produce generalized intensification, much more so than in the preceding Late Bronze Age systems. “A decrease in the amount of surplus available to be stored” (Parcero and Criado, 2013: 257) is not due to a decrease of the capability of production, but to the against-surplus economic mentalities. In fact “the productive system became more diverse and potentially more productive, thanks to the expansion (perhaps the introduction) of a summer cereal (millet) that, in addition to wheat, barley, and different pulses, would have allowed for permanent yields through the whole year” (García et al., 2011: 294). Indeed, the extension of farmlands is also well documented (Martínez-Cortizas et al., 2009). And it is this specific form of organization of anti-surplus production which explains the restrictive identities developed by the castros and not the other way around (Sastre, 2008).

From the very beginning Iron Age societies are constructed against inequality, to the same extent that they exercise anti-surplus systems of production. And they assertively maintain this resistance during the whole period against factors that could have provoked the development of inequality. The potentiality for expanding production was inherent in their agrarian system, and the centrifugal forces against communal control were always present and archaeologically visible in households. These conditions, however, were never sufficient to foster social division. A breaking of the anti-surplus economic mentality of agrarian communities, generated by the “development of productive forces,” must not be taken for granted. Conversely, in the case of Iron Age societies, the communal agrarian system became consolidated with time (Fernández-Posse and Sánchez Palencia, 1998: 134–135; Sastre, 2008: 1029).

There were some factors that facilitated the reproduction of this isonomic, segmentary social system until the arrival of Rome. Bearing in mind Carneiro’s theory of circumscription (Carneiro, 1977), we can affirm that there is plenty of land available for reproducing the segmentary settlement patterns and the diversified production systems. Some researchers (González-Ruibal, 2007: 190; Martins, 1990: 202) have defended that conflict and competition for resources led to social hierarchies. Nevertheless, an analysis of the balance between population and resources (Currás, 2014: 1023 ss; cf. Carballo, 2001: 208) has proven that all settlements have access to all the resources they need within their catchment area. Although not all the castros have access to the same quantity of land, all of them have access to more land than the necessary minimum. The catchment area of each settlement is perfectly defined, and never overlaps that of others.

Obviously, what type of land is available, just like what type of access to the catchment area, is defined according to the social and cultural norms and customs of Iron Age societies. As a result, “typical” castro locations are easy to find in Northwestern areas.

According to Gilman “segmentation is only easy if those who leave can readily produce in the manner and at the levels to which they are accustomed. Departure must not involve the abandonment of substantial assets. [. . .] If the productive system requires a heavy preliminary investment of work, the producers will be reluctant to relinquish the restricted resources they themselves have created” (Gilman, 1981: 4). Castro agriculture and architecture imply a significant investment of work, but “broad stretches of uninhabited, but habitable, wilderness existed in Europe and the Mediterranean well into the mediaeval and early modern period. In later prehistoric times, when population densities must have been far lower, there would have been plenty of land into which people could move to avoid unwanted masters” (Gilman, 1981: 4). Gilman intends to seek for the “conditions impeding segmentation” in order to understand the origins of hierarchies. In our

case, these conditions do not come into play ("circumscription," specialization of production, capital-intensive forms of subsistence, or other conditions which attach people to the land). Segmentation and social fission are compatible with intensified agriculture and stable settlement patterns, and in this way internal stimuli towards social division are resisted by communal control of production and reproduction.

External stimuli for breaking down social equilibrium were weak. Since the Late Bronze Age, Northwest Iberia is a region open to Atlantic exchange relations and yet during the Iron Age a handful of Mediterranean imports (i.e., beads, amphorae, Attic pottery and some fibulae) reach some castros. Authors Researchers have paid attention to these contacts before the arrival of the Romans, underline the low-intensity level of the impact of this interaction in essential aspects such as technology diffusion. González-Ruibal explains the reluctance of local communities for adopting foreign imports, and the fact that indigenous people select things that could be consumed collectively or adapted to local needs (González-Ruibal, 2006–2007: 143). In fact, trade and exchange do not necessarily cause a loss of autonomy, or impose radical changes in indigenous relations of production, particularly when it is not indispensable for social reproduction (Lee, 2005: 23). The low-intensity of these contacts may have reinforced the anti-hierarchization tendencies of the castros.

The arrival of Rome during the 2nd century BC implied a political and military dominion of the southern and coastal regions of Galicia and Northwestern Portugal (Morais, 2007; Morillo, 2011). The radical change in settlement patterns and material record involved in the development of "big castros" (Currá s et al., 2016) is precisely a consequence of this presence. Roman military incursions north of the river Duero/Douro brought hard-intensity external stimuli which broke down segmentary social equilibrium in these contact regions. Later, the definitive conquest under Augustus meant a radical disruption of the segmentary social pattern and its complete disappearance in the whole Northwest, but the changes began in the previous century.

Conclusion

We have argued a theory of assertive egalitarianism and we have tested it with the archaeological record of Northwestern Iberian Iron Age societies. The communal and domestic record evidenced by archaeology through territorial studies can hardly be contained inside traditional hierarchical paradigms. Conversely, we have shown that the explanation lies in the active resistance against social hierarchy that actually takes place, creating different historical processes alternative to the formation of chiefdoms and states: the emergence and maintenance of social egalitarianism. It is based on complex economic systems which undoubtedly are prerequisites, if current social theory must be believed, for hierarchical inequality. But the organization of production neutralizes tendencies for social exploitation. The evidence we have presented supporting our theory shows, on the one hand, that surplus is contained in various ways: peasant economic mentalities and the common and equal access of all segments – settlements and households – to the means of production. On the other hand, it demonstrates that social reproduction is controlled by limiting the size of settlements.

We defend a theory of "assertive egalitarianism" that emphasizes its historical and active character, alien to outdated stereotypes based on redistribution, sharing, communalism, or absence of private

property (Angelbeck and Grier, 2012). It is not only a matter of "killing" or "abandoning" the chief. It is about building a society where chiefs just simply do not have the opportunity to rise because the system structurally avoids it. In the case of Iberian Northwestern Iron Age societies, assertive egalitarianism is constructed through the domestic appropriation of the means of production, a communal control of the productive system, and a selfsufficiency which restricts sharing to the strictly necessary. This is implemented through a segmentary organization at a local and a regional level, as our evidence on castros' spatiality clearly proves.

The theory of assertive egalitarianism is significant because it permits a systematization of the evidence on communal forms of social organization during the European Iron Age. Although in general all the European Iron Age is still marked by too homogenous and warrior-hierarchized interpretations, we can safely say that there is an important trend to dismantle this view and to propose alternative historical developments (Collis, 1994; Hill, 1993; Hill and Cumberpatch, 1995; Moore and Armada, 2001). We want to go one qualitative step further in this way. Not only do we deal with a new example of this regional variation in the archaeological record, but we propose a new theoretical framework to go through the archaeological record with a new approach. Hierarchies are no longer the only explanatory reference for societies during the First Millennium BC, so "forcing recalcitrant archaeological entities [. . .] into statejackets" (David and Sterner, 1999: 99). These "ambiguous" archaeological records – complex productive systems in domestic–communal "equal" contexts – can become explicit if they are interpreted as the result of an active construction of egalitarian relationships. We propose a theory of assertive egalitarianism for understanding the archaeological record in this way, with the intention to "become unshackled from the bonds of inappropriate theory borrowed from other fields" (Yoffee, 1993: 74). "The heady possibility is, in short, that archaeologists will become important contributors to social evolutionary theory not just adaptors or low-brow acolytes of their fellow social scientists" (Yoffee, 1993: 74). We hope to be already on this way, aligned with those researchers that have stressed the importance of diachronic historical– archaeological studies for anthropological analysis (McIntosh, 1999; Stahl, 1999; Wiessner, 2002).

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