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Segmentary Societies: a Theoretical Approach from European Iron Age Archaeology*

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Abstract

Back in the 1940s, the segmentary lineage theory proposed by E. Evans-Pritchard and M. Fortes was one of the basic pillars of anthropology in the study of stateless societies. However, archaeological research, which cannot access to the formal analysis of kinship by its very epistemological foundations, was side-lined in the theoretical development of the segmentary model. Kinship studies have been losing relevance progressively in Anthropology as a determining factor in the identification of the essential components on which the political and social structure of a society is based. The current reconsideration of kinship anthropology has led to a revised vision of segmentary societies based on the work of E. Durkheim, allowing archaeology to be incorporated in anthropological reflection. Accordingly, this paper focuses on the theoretical characterisation of the segmentary model as a valid tool for archaeological research on Iron Age societies, taking the *castros* society in north-western Iberia by way of example.

Segmentarity and its theoretical fundamentals

The first reference to segmentary lineage systems appeared in H. Morgan's seminal work, *Ancient Society* (1877). The historical process of division and replication of a community is described in order to explain how the North American territory was formed by a series of fully independent and clearly separated corporate groups: the tribes. Segmentation, understood as a 'natural process', resulted from an expanding population pressing 'upon the means of subsistence'. The imbalance between population and resources, generating a state of 'perpetual segmentation' and a 'constant tendency to disintegration', was at the origin of the replication and expansion of the tribe as a social entity the length and breadth of the territory. Segmentation, strictly based on kinship structures, gives rise to new corporate entities. The splinter groups initially maintain ties with the main group with which they formed a 'league or confederacy for mutual protection'.

The propensity to political fragmentation and dispersion and the nesting character of political units were ideas that E. Durkheim recovered years later, when he published in 1893 *De la division du*

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travail social. Here the concept of segmentary societies is mentioned for the first time, defined as those that ‘*sont formées par la répétition d’agrégats semblables entre eux, analogues aux anneaux de l’annelé*’ and which possess a decentralised structure (1893: 150). For Durkheim, the social structure was based on the balance and similarity between social segments, ‘*homogenes et semblables entre eux*’ (Durkheim 1893: 157); segmentary societies ‘*ne comporte(n) évidemment pas d’autre solidarité que celle qui dérive des similitudes, puisque la société est formée de segments similaires et que ceux-ci, a leur tour, ne renferment que des éléments homogènes*’ (Durkheim 1893: 152). But, at the same time, he claimed that these societies were formed through contrast and integration, through similarity and otherness: ‘*pour que l’organisation segmentaire soit possible, il faut a la fois que les segments se ressemblent, sans quoi ils ne seraient pas unis, et qu’ils diffèrent, sans quoi ils se perdraient les uns dans les autres et s’effaceraient*’ (Durkheim 1893: 152).

A segmentary society defines a social model or ideal type, based on the social cohesion generated by the similarity between the parts comprising it and which is governed by forms of ‘mechanical solidarity’. It is a relationship in which individual identities dissolve into the group: ‘*la personnalité collective est la seule qui existe*’ (Durkheim 1893: 155). Collective consciousness prevails and the morals, values, beliefs and actions of individuals are mediated by their belonging to the group. The contravention of these community values leads to the imposition of social sanctions of a repressive nature. In these societies, in which the solidarity that generates similarity takes precedence, there is no specialisation of labour, namely, no differentiation based on the tasks and functions performed.

In Durkheim’s work, segmentary society is a primitive evolutionary state prior to the advent of more complex modern societies, governed by forms of ‘organic solidarity’, in which the division of labour appears. The community and its collective consciousness lose ground to a greater individualism, with the subsequent disappearance of similarity as a source of social cohesion. A complex social structure emerges then, with specialised and differentiated functions, which generates a form of functional independence based on the need for complementarity. In other words, it becomes a centralised society revolving around a permanent centre of power in which ‘*les éléments sociaux ne sont pas de même nature, ils ne sont pas disposés de la même manière. Ils ne sont ni juxtaposés linéairement comme les anneaux d’un annelé, ni emboîtés les uns dans les autres, mais coordonnés et subordonnés les uns aux autres autour d’un même organe central qui exerce sur le reste de l’organisme une action modératrice*’ (Durkheim 1893: 157).

The distinction between the ideal types of *solidarité mécanique* and *solidarité organique* proposed by Durkheim is very similar to that between community (*Gemeinschaft*) and association or society (*Gesellschaft*) underpinning the sociology of F. Tönnies. In his book entitled, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, published in 1887 six years before *De la division du travail social*, ‘community’ appears as a form of deeply cohesive socialisation, based on emotional, personal and family ties in which the individual is fully integrated in society as a whole. Conversely, ‘association’ involves a more structured and regulated affiliation grounded in rational, instrumental and strategic relationships. Both forms of socialisation do not appear on a continuum, as in Durkheim, insofar as they are not exactly states of a revolutionary model or empirically identifiable descriptive categories, but ideal types that are found in all societies in a dialectic relationship.

The segmentary lineage system

In 1940, M. Fortes and E. Evans-Pritchard published *African Political Systems* and *The Nuer*, laying the foundations for what would be, for many decades, the paradigm for the study of egalitarian and non-centralised societies, viz. the segmentary system. This model, directly inspired by Durkheim’s segmentarity (Fortes 1953: 26), explained how a society could function without depending on a central political body vested with the monopoly of coercive power.

In their research on African groups, the two British anthropologists departed from a basic division between centralised and acephalous societies, grounded on the existence of more or less developed governmental institutions, with an administrative and judicial apparatus. Centralised societies have a hierarchy based on wealth, privilege and status, correlating with an unequal distribution of power. For their part, acephalous societies are essentially egalitarian. But the most important element that makes it possible to differentiate between both forms depends on the role of kinship in the social structure: in acephalous societies it is the system's backbone, while in those groups with a centralised government it plays a secondary role. A division is thus established between groups organised on the basis of a political system and those on that of kinship, which is reproduced in Morgan's scheme for social evolution from *societas* to *civitas* and which also has many to do with the dichotomy in which Durkheim's and Tönnies' sociological models are grounded.

The political and social functioning of the acephalous groups identified by Fortes and Evans-Pritchard is based on unilineal descent groups—lineages—which form 'corporate units' that play a key role in the structuring of all spheres of society and which define the segments making up the segmentary lineage system (Smith 1956, 39-41). In this system, kin relationships are key to social dynamics and the driving force behind political relations. The belonging to a social group and space of socialisation is determined by the position of an individual in the lineage. Relations of opposition or affinity, co-operation or conflict between social units are, in turn, regulated by the relations of filiation and the position of that individual in the genealogical model.

Segmentary societies are structured around the replication of corporate groups, both balanced and similar but opposed to one another within the same social sphere <Chapter1.7_Curras&Sastre_Fig. 1 HERE>. Opposition always occurs among equals, the basic principle being the equivalence of genealogical segments. Furthermore, in the segmentary lineage system each segment is assumed to have a territorial correlate. Specifically, each level of the system corresponds to a territorial unit, from the village to the region defined by the tribe, and is interconnected with the rest following the order established by the succession of segments: 'Lineage and locality are interwoven and interdependent factors' (Fortes 1945: 143).

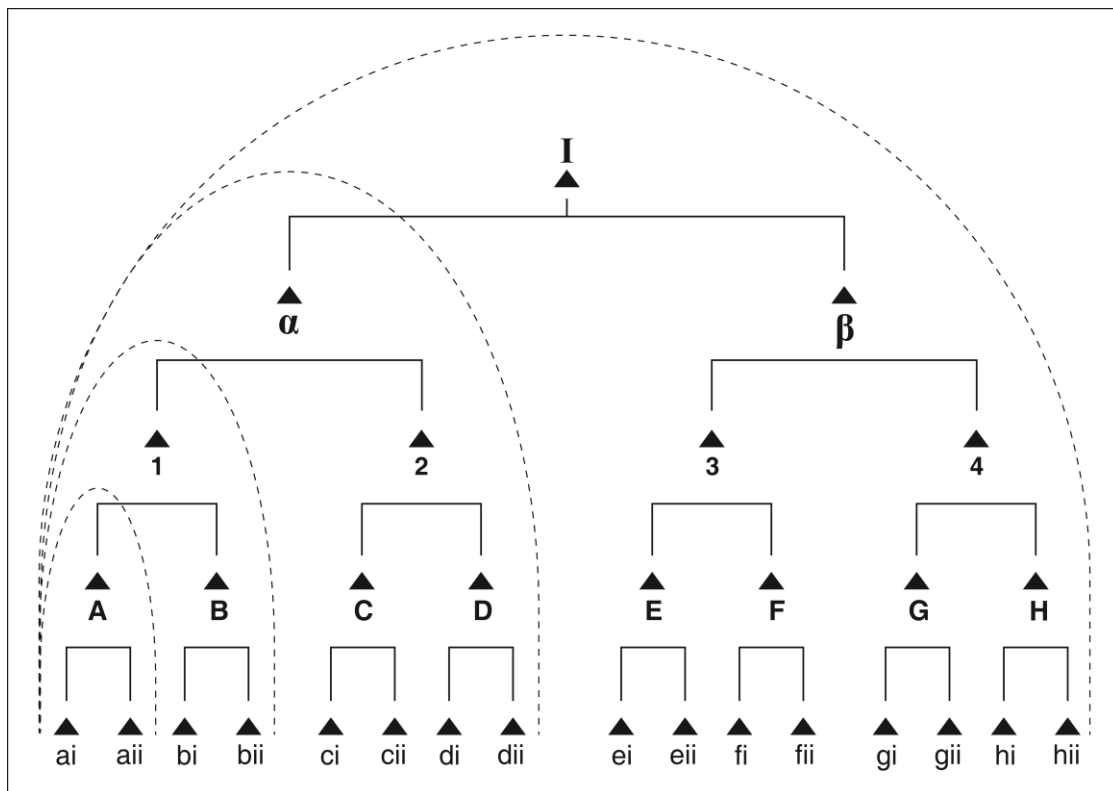


Fig. 1- Segmentary Lineage Organization.

Social dynamics are defined by a system of complementary opposition: each unit is opposed to another equivalent one (of which it is a perfect reflection) in the social sphere; but in turn both complement each other and are integrated in a level of socialisation of a higher order. This nested structure is replicated at as many levels as there are social spheres. Groups are defined merely because of their relationship with others, thus creating a dynamic structure that guarantees smooth social relations. Both relations of opposition and conflict and processes of fission and fusion occur between segments positioned at the same level. In the words of Fortes (1953: 31), 'The general rule is that every segment is, in form, a replica of every other segment and of the whole lineage. But the segments are, as a rule, hierarchically organized by fixed steps of greater and greater inclusiveness, each step being defined by genealogical reference.'

Segmentary lineage is characterised by its strong egalitarian nature, by the importance of community values and by the absence of central institutions monopolising power: 'Government is laterally distributed amongst all the corporate units that make up the society, instead of being vertically distributed as in pyramidal societies. All the corporate units are [...] politically equal; all are segments of the same structural order' (Fortes 1945: 232). The main feature of this social model is its capacity to perpetuate isonomic socio-political relations. The segmentation and opposition among equals rules out any possibility of power concentration: 'the political system is an equilibrium between opposed tendencies towards fission and fusion, between the tendency of all groups to segment, and the tendency of all groups to combine with segments of the same order' (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 147). When social relations are sustained by the dynamic complementarity of segments that simultaneously oppose and complement each other, it is very difficult for a stable centralised power to emerge. The segmentary lineage system thus opened up the possibility that a society might organise itself efficiently without central structures, one that, in the words of Evans-Pritchard, could be defined as an 'ordered anarchy' (1940: 6).

Rise, fall and revival of the segmentary model

Segmentary lineage, also known as the tribal system, rapidly became the ideal model of primitive society and an unavoidable reference in the study of stateless groups. The number of identified societies organised along these lines mushroomed in a short time: Evans-Pritchard's field research on the Nuer, the study performed by P. J. and L. Bohannan (1953) on the Tiv, a West African people living between Cameroon and Nigeria, and Fortes' (1945) survey of the Tallensi of Ghana are some of the most outstanding examples of 'classical' segmentary lineage societies analysed from the functionalist anthropology. In 1958, J. Middleton and D. Tait published *Tribes Without Rulers* where they delve into the ideas of *African Political Systems*. Later on, the model was appropriated and disseminated above all by M. D. Sahlin (1961; 1968) who, from a neo-evolutionist perspective, defined segmentary lineage groups as those occupying the level below chieftainship.

But soon after consolidating its position, segmentarity was subject to thorough review (Smith 1956; Buchler and Selby 1968: 74 and ff.; Holy 1979). Kinship as the keystone, the relevance of unilineal filiation, the system's ability to perpetuate itself in equilibrium and the egalitarian nature of the social model were all reassessed, while the colonial prejudices permeating its theoretical construction were decried. Under this barrage of criticism, segmentary lineage was gradually sidelined as a valid anthropological tool, until being completely ditched in the 1980s and 1990s.

Evans-Pritchard had claimed about the Nuer that 'Their state is an acephalous kinship state and it is only by a study of the kinship system that it can be well understood how order is maintained and social relations over wide areas are established and kept up.' (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 181) An assertion that was soon rebutted when E. Leach (1961: 66) held that 'Kin groups do not exist as things in themselves without regard to the rights and interests which centre in them'. Kin

relationships were insufficient on their own to create the units of political and social content: they were merely the language with which social relations were structured. Leach's objection was not aimed at kinship *per se*, 'but against attempts to isolate kinship behaviors as a distinct category explainable by jural rules without reference to context or economic self-interest'. Later on, the idea clearly expressed by R. Fox (1983: 10) that 'kinship is to anthropology what logic is to philosophy or the nude is to art; it is the basic discipline of the subject', was contested by Needham (1971) and Schneider (1984) who went so far as to divest the field of kinship studies of all substance. The object of study did not correspond to a clear and unequivocal reality. The basic assumption that relations of kinship are central to the organisation of stateless, classless or casteless 'primitive' groups is now water under the bridge (Godelier 2009). As M. Godelier (2004: 517) has noted, '*il n'y a jamais eu de "kin-based societies", sauf dans les manuels d'anthropologie et de sociologie.*' Kinship can involve political, social or economic functions, but these are not relations of kinship (Godelier 2004).

The notion of segmentary lineage as a kinship system based on the theory of filiation was the most strongly and unanimously contested of all. According to the classical model proposed by functionalist anthropology, segments were formed by types of unilineal descent, outlining corporate groups defined by a common ancestor and which could have a territorial expression. But this general principle, based on the anthropology of African groups, proved to have its limitations insofar as it clashed with different anthropological registers: the forms characterising the spheres of socialisation and corporateness might go above and beyond kinship. Middleton and Tait (1958: 3) identified non-centralized societies not based on a segmentary lineage system: there were groups in which age-classes played a decisive role, and others in which the unifying role was played by the village councils and associations, or even by chiefs and headmen. Later on, R. Horton (1971) contributed to demolish the model's apparent homogeneity by establishing a tripartite division within 'stateless' groups based on sedentary agriculture: segmentary lineage systems; dispersed; territorially defined, which "at the highest level of organisation, territorial co-residence replaces common descent as the criterion of political identity" (Horton 1971: 97); and communities organized in large compact villages. Indeed, territoriality and co-residence proved to be more relevant as structuring elements than previously thought. Leach (1961: 301) observed that 'Pul Eliya is a society in which locality and not descent forms the basis of corporate grouping.' On the island of Yap, D. Schneider (1984) discovered that the reference unit in political relations was the residential group formed by the *Tabinau*, in which filiation played no role: co-operation and farming could by themselves create spheres of socialisation.

Groups governed by segmentary principles were progressively identified, but they did not tally with the postulates of unilineal descent, while the theory of filiation was debunked (*vid.* González Echeverría 1994; Godelier 2004). The principles of lineage came up against a diverse casuistry as regards types of social relationships: those of parentage of a cognatic nature, forms of non-linear filiation, territory-based groups, client networks, the complementarity between filiation and alliance, forms of factionalism, etc. Namely, the structure was less important than the capacity of individuals to manipulate parentage networks. Actually, as noted by M. Hart (1999: 47), segmentary lineages are too rigid and too narrow, and adapt badly to quite a few societies. The grounds of segmentary lineage was refuted even at its source: the Nuer were not like *The Nuer* and the agnatic principles underpinning the social structure were not faithfully reproduced, as neither was the case with the Tallensi (Kuper 1982; 1991; McKinnon 2000).

The over-dimensioning of the role of lineage and unifiliation overshadowed the relevance of alliances as a way of forging ties and defining the different 'segments' of the social system. The considerations of Lévi-Strauss (1967) in his study of kinship in *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté* showed that alliances were regularly employed to shape discrepancies and confluences between social groups, which gave rise to a distinction between ranks and an unequal redistribution of power. Accordingly, it was discovered that the formation and integration of 'corporate groups'

depended on many factors and could not be reduced to inflexible unilineal filiation. Thus, for example, the Achuar people of the Amazon rainforest are an acephalous society structured in '*nexus endogames*' formed by '*un ensemble de dix à quinze maisonnées dispersées sur un territoire relativement délimité et dont les membres entretiennent des rapports étroits et directs de consanguinité et d'alliance*' (Descola 1986: 19). These groups, which are in a permanent state of conflict, are not based on filiation, but are structured by alliance networks determined by prescriptive marriage (Descola 1986).

The idealised picture of primitive society as a segmentary lineage system was no more than that, to wit, a rigid ideal that clashed with its empirical application. Segmentary society as depicted in different ethnographic studies was merely an ideal self-representation of 'tribal' groups without any counterpart in the real extension of their social relations. Thus, it would be solely a type of discourse that concealed the contradictions of the system, rather than a social form in itself (Meeker 2004). G. M. Smith (1956: 78) highlighted the inflexibility of the segmentary model and the need to surmount formalist approaches: 'Lineages, like kinship systems, cannot be explained in terms of themselves'. It was essential to conduct a wider study that took into account the ideological content concealed in the construction of social relations through segmentary lineage (Sahlins 1965). In the case of the Bedouins of Cyrenaica, for instance, it was confirmed that the social group presented itself following the principles of segmentary lineage. However, that self-representation was not correlated with the analysis of kinship (Peters 1967).

The functionalist approach had put the accent on the equilibrium and perpetuation of the system through the definition of a perfectly structured organic whole. The harmonious representation of segments led to an all but perfect operating model in which internal contradictions and conflicts were reduced to a minimum. The work of Leach (1954) on the Kachin people of Burma posed challenges for the models designed from an anthropological perspective by demonstrating that social systems did not remain constant, reproduce themselves over time or evolve in a lineal sense. His fieldwork portrayed a society that wavered between a hierarchical and centralised model (*gumsa* societies) and another more egalitarian and isonomic one (*gumlao* societies). The instability of the *gumlao* system easily led to the emergence of an aristocratic system, but once this had been established, the trend was reversed and, over time, it would revert to the original egalitarian system. 'That social systems are intrinsically in stable equilibrium and that all parts of such a system are mutually consistent' were nothing more than 'functionalist fictions' (Leach 1961: 299)

The British anthropological model was criticised for the ideological slant in its application of the principles of functionalism: a social order determined by a model of organic integration, governed by a harmonious and stable order. Stateless societies would thus foreshadow the virtues of a liberal democracy with a high degree of social cohesion. For this reason, anthropology focused on the analysis of the non-hierarchical elements of social groups, pursuing the slightest economic and political difference and placing the spotlight on social forms in which power was exercised through consensus and co-operation, at the expense of centralised political leadership (Kuklic 1991). At the same time, the model's colonial connotations were addressed. In this connection, A. Kuper (1991) noted that, more than a reality, kinship-based societies were a Western creation, an inverted image of its own system, namely, a model based on kinship and bloodlines which was defined in opposition to state territoriality.

British functionalist anthropology focused excessively on the egalitarian relationships between segments. It was not long before this egalitarian and acephalous character became the target of criticism and, soon afterwards, it became clear that segmentary lineage might conceal more complex forms of exploitation; social relations were not as uniform as first met the eye and could involve a markedly hierarchical pyramidal structure. The initial distinction between acephalous and state societies became hazier and it was gradually discovered that the segmentary structure extended across very different social systems. The fieldwork of Southall (1956) among the Alur of Uganda

revealed the existence of what was defined as a Segmentary State, i.e. a social system combining segmentary lineage with forms of institutionalised power. The traditional division between state and segmentary society seemed difficult to maintain since its limits could be exceedingly vague (Fox *et al.* 1996). Among the Mandari in South Sudan, a group organised along the lines of a segmentary system, there was a land-owning lineage and forms of dependence and taxation (Buxton 1958). In Kabylie, it was observed that segments were neither the same, nor balanced (Favret 1968: 30) and that, in addition to the mechanisms of fission and fusion guaranteeing equality, there were also clashes and confrontations that could lead to the formation of factions that did not correspond to segments and which, through the manipulation of relations of kinship and the establishment of alliances, could lead to relations of inequality. One example followed another and it became increasingly clear that the mechanisms of segmentary lineage were compatible with hierarchal forms and rigid structures of exploitation (Terry 1985).

What remains of the segmental structure after all the critiques and reviews of the lineage system? It was the lineage model and its applicability to pre-state societies as a whole that were actually plunged into crisis. The abstraction of the segmentary structure—without the burden of lineage—could indeed serve as a valid tool for explaining the functioning of decentralised societies. As observed by P. Dresch (1986), even though it is possible to surmount segmentary lineage, segmentarity *per se* should not be left to fall by the wayside.

Ch. Sigrist (2004) has suggested that Fortes' and Evans-Pritchard's approach to the issue was based on a restrictive reading of Durkheim's work. Other authors have also defended the anthropological soundness of the segmentary model, decoupling segmentation from segmentary lineage and reducing it to its basic mechanisms (Dresch 1986; Albergoni 2003). A more structural application of the concept of segmentation has thus been suggested, to wit, a 'weaker' version of the model, lacking its harmony, elegance and theoretical coherence, but which, by being much more flexible, is actually more robust and easier to manage in archaeological research. Noteworthy in this respect is the idea, put forward by P. Bonte (1991: 657) of the structural relativity of social groups, according to which it is possible to identify the opposition and alliance dynamics of the units comprising the social structure not only within the kinship dynamics of unilineal descent groups, but also in other spheres such as marriage alliances, war and conflict, or exchange relations.

Redefinition from the perspective of archaeology

Despite several recent proposals whose purpose has been to identify kinship structures through the archaeological record (Enser 2013), we should assume that archaeology cannot broaden our knowledge of kinship (Allen and Richardson 1971). Relations of kinship form a discursive reality, based on a set of logically structured linguistic rules that are only accessible through direct contact with a culture. The study of meanings and symbols allows anthropologists to identify the elements constructing the framework of a kinship system: the terminological system, the forms of descent and alliance, the residence rules, the symbolic meaning of child conception, etc. But all these elements are beyond the grasp of archaeologists faced with a mute materiality.

The overcoming of kinship structures as the mainstays of segmentary social organisation, has opened an opportunity to gain further insights into those societies that can only be studied on the basis of the material record. Kinship plays a role in the production and reproduction of a society, but not as an isolated element that defines it as a whole (Godelier 2004). Departing from this premise, archaeology can now dispense with the formal analysis of kinship and focus on the study of social structure by interpreting domestic and territorial spaces with an eye to gaining a better understanding of political relations and ways of organising production. From a new, strictly archaeological approach—necessarily unlinked to kinship—the segmentary model can be interpreted through the study of the material dimension of relations of production and the territorial articulation of the political space (Sastre *et al.* 2010). Only when this model is understood as an ideal type without a normative dimension and which is not empirically purely specified in any case

study, is the potential of Durkheim's sociology for understanding ancient societies from an archaeological perspective revealed.

Segmentary structures can be detected archaeologically in both the political and social dimensions, with a direct correlate in territorial structure and domestic organisation. These two dimensions do not depend on one another. For example, there can be social structures with an internal hierarchy which function politically in a segmentary fashion.

Political segmentarity

Returning to Durkheim's sociology, it is possible to conceptualise a segmentary political model reduced to the lowest common denominator, defined by the existence of the principles of complementary opposition, of fission and fusion of equivalent corporate units, and by the absence of a political centre defined as an executive power authorised to intervene in those mechanisms. As Sigrist (2004: 7) has noted, 'the decisive criterion in defining segmentary societies is the absence of a political centre which we define by executive power commanding the use of physical power by way of delegation'.

From an archaeological point of view, a segmentary political organisation had to be expressed in essentially symmetrical and divided social forms. The segments forming corporate entities (farmsteads, villages, hamlets, regional aggregations, etc.) had to be equivalent, a material fact that ought to be unambiguously reflected in the archaeological record. Although symmetry did not necessarily have to be formal, it did indeed have to be functional. Thus, the role played by each social unit in the political dimension and in the structure of production would have been strictly equivalent: each political unit would have been relatively independent and economically self-sufficient. A settlement's functional diversity was proof of a more organic structure that implied denying the logic of the mechanical solidarity prevailing in segmentary societies. The appearance of production centres, spheres of productive specialisation, exchange centres, settlement forms with singular functions, etc., thus thwarted the possibility of developing segmentary relations.

The basic element of political-territorial functioning was the progressive opposition of equivalent social aggregates, i.e. complementary opposition. In segmentary societies, there was a need for each segment to resemble the rest and, to this end, all of them had to share some basic elements. Relations of exchange and reciprocity—whether as regards the means of production, consumer goods or elements of a symbolic nature—might have helped to establish the meaning of the alliances and political positions of groups. But, at the same time, they had to clearly display their opposition and difference. Segments had to be structurally equivalent and socially and spatially juxtaposed, for only in this way did a segmentary society make sense in this dialectic of analogy/difference, aggregation/opposition. The opposition between segments was evidenced by the concretion of spatial relationships: in the political-territorial dimension, the segmentary social landscape was antagonistic, in which equivalent and similar segments presented themselves in terms of relations of opposition, isolation, juxtaposition, continuity and division, and shaped by a settlement's atomisation and dispersion.

The dynamics of complementary opposition can also be observed in settlement structures. The position of each political unit in opposition to the rest could be expressed by reinforcing its individuality in the landscape. As was to be expected, each political corporate entity had to form a discrete, well-defined unit contrasting with the rest. Walls and ramparts could have been a way of guaranteeing the internal cohesion of a group and served, in turn, to convey this to all the other communities.

Segments underwent a continuous process of fission which perpetuated the state of political-territorial atomisation. From a segment only an equivalent, located in the same political sphere, could emerge. Conversely, processes of coalescence between corporate entities positioned at the same level could develop, thus leading to the appearance of new settlements and to a redefinition of the dimensions of the political model or to mere circumstantial alliances more difficult to observe in the archaeological record.

One of the aspects that most clearly define segmentary social formations and which allow for their archaeological identification was the prevalence of horizontal relationships over vertical ones. The social space of segmentary lineage societies was formed by a continuum of equivalent non-hierarchical groups that maintained horizontal, rather than vertical, social relationships with one another. The antagonism and integration between political units always occurred in the horizontal dimension and between equivalent segments positioned at the same level of the segmentary model. From an archaeological point of view, these relations can be geometrically categorised according to the type of spatial relationships of archaeological sites: the lack of hierarchical elements or relations of superiority or inferiority. Aggregates were equivalent and thus deployed continuously and linearly in space, equidistance being the predominant feature. Since relations had to be uniform, any hierarchical form between segments positioned at the same level would have been tantamount to repudiating the segmentary system: the emergence of political centres or spaces for controlling production are an indication of this in the archaeological record.

Within the social dynamics of contrast, conflict can be a form of reproduction for a segmentary society. F. Kelly (2000) has showed that for war to have existed as such (rather than as a simple murder or feud), there had to be segmented social units in which the principle of social substitution and collective responsibility was upheld, that is, an individual was not solely responsible for his actions, but his political group was also liable. Thus, the answer to violence was not interpersonal, but had a collective character inbuilt in the social group; war—whatever its intensity—could only be effectively waged between two corporate entities. This type of intercommunity war might have been triggered by the very dynamics of complementary opposition and of smooth intercommunity relations. Thus, in addition to giving rise to forms of antagonism that exacerbated social atomisation, war can also be behind the appearance of spheres of co-operation in the face of conflict.

The institutionalisation of war can be understood as a further dimension in the formation of a segmentary landscape. The evolution of war was thus closely related to the meaning of social structure. It was not only a question of the degree or intensity of violence, but also a social fact that can only be explained by understanding the structure of a society as a whole. Clastres (1977), assuming the centrifugal nature of the segmentary model, rightly saw conflict and war as forming part of the mechanisms that reproduce a segmented and decentralised social order. However, in a reductionist way he understood war as the origin, driving force and end of primitive or stateless societies. A monocausality that flounders when sketching the big picture of the social functioning of decentralised societies. War should be understood as part and parcel of political relations and as a result of the dynamics of complementary opposition. Hence, conflict and warfare can appear embedded in the social values of a decentralised and egalitarian segmentary society, even in a more conspicuous fashion than in a state in which it is the central apparatus that monopolises violence.

Social segmentarity

To define an univocal social model associated with the segmentary political structure would hide again the complexity and diversity of stateless social formations, without classes or political centralisation. Although we believe that it would be implausible to speak of a 'segmentary mode of production' (*cfr.* Terray 1969), it is indeed possible to analyse relations of production through the

prism of segmentary social dynamics. It is possible to speak of segmentary relations of production when the domestic aggregates forming social units of production are independent and there is an absence of centralised political and economic power. In other words, a basic social model in which the units of production are also those of consumption, without any institution mediating access to the means of production.

Sahlins has aptly characterised his “domestic mode of production” as an anarchic, segmentary-based model governed by the principles of ‘mechanical solidarity’ (Sahlins 1972: 95). The organisation of a community is based on the atomisation of fully independent domestic units, in which ‘each house retains, as well as its own interests, all the powers that are wanted to satisfy them’ (Sahlins 1972: 95). Sahlins has also claimed that ‘The social economy is fragmented into a thousand petty existences, each organized to proceed independently of the others and each dedicated to the homebred principle of looking out for itself’ (Sahlins 1972: 95). Elsewhere, he has noted that ‘the domestic mode of production is inclined toward a maximum dispersion of homesteads, because maximum dispersion is the absence of interdependence and a common authority, and these are by and large the way production is organized’ (Sahlins 1972: 97). Segmentary social dynamics can be understood as a valid model for analysing classless societies. These societies do not show evidence of inequality based on access to the means of production, but they accommodate forms of social differentiation by prestige, experience, age-classes, gender, influence or specialisation.

This extremely elementary conception is compatible with many ways of organising production and structuring political power, and does not explain the diversity of social formations observed in the ethnological record. But it can be a useful tool for describing, at the most basic level, ways of organising production that can be identified in the archaeological record.

Segmentary landscapes in Northwest Iberia: A model for a decentralized and non-hierarchized Iron Age

From an archaeological perspective, the segmentary social structure in Northwest Iberia Iron Age can be detected in the fully independent character of domestic groups with guaranteed access to the means of production. There were no political or economic institutions that implied the loss of that independence. By the same token, the occupation of the territory by more or less small communities allowed for collective control over the exercise of political power and the development of face-to-face social relations.

The concept of segmentarity applied to the archaeological analysis of *castro* societies was introduced for first time by M^a D. Fernández-Posse (1998; Fernández-Posse & Sánchez-Palencia 1998). Archaeological studies on territory and settlement (Sastre 2002; Currás 2014) have shown that from ca. IX-VIII c. BC, the social space was formed by monotonously replicating equivalent corporate units –with no hierarchical relations between them–, always in opposition, always equidistant, and continuously distributed throughout the territory: the *castros*. The landscape was thus occupied by a network of small settlements regularly distributed (about 4000 sites), adapting to the conditions which are necessary for establishing a peasant community: given habitation requirements and access to farming resources for a peasant community (<Chapter1.7_Curras&Sastre_fig2 HERE>).



Fig.2- Distribution of the Iron Age castros of Northwest Iberia

The *castro* represents the maximal level within the political structure, and it is the reference framework for inter-community relations. Beyond the village was no level of integration with any significance in territorial organization. There was no stable political union which encompasses any number of interdependent communities structured within an integrated region, marked by the exclusion of other equivalent units.

Territorial organization is based on the individuality of the *castro* as the embodiment of a peasant community which can present itself in the territory as a population unit of political significance. The *castro* village has locational strategies which strictly support this notion of the community as the only political reference within social space. That is why all *castros* invariably occupy visible emplacements within the landscape, always enjoying great prominence and ample visual control

over their immediate surroundings. The *castro* is always a peasant village which is clearly confined within a perimeter, often including built structures which could act as defensive walls, which always act as displays of the groups individuality and their projection on the territory. Thus, the *castro* landscape is a network of communities which display their independence to, and against, their neighbors. This opposition of equivalent social groups is the basis for all sociopolitical relationships witnessed in the territory.

Oppositeness between equals can also be considered as a necessary precondition for the reproduction of segmentary political-territorial organization. The persistence of social distance and the counter-positioning of equivalent political units effectively annul any power centralizing process or the creation of hierarchical structures. But this map of polarity, in which every community is and acts independently, also implies a generalized need for inter-*castro* relations. A group can only exist as an independent unit with its own political personality if it has an *other* against whom to build itself. In other words, the *castro* itself only makes sense if existing in opposition to all the others. At the same time, a village can only succeed in remaining self-sufficient –i.e. with secure access to the means of production necessary for economic sustainability– if it engages in exchange relationships, including brides.

This dialogue between isolation and interaction is the basis of how complementary opposition works. Dynamics are created of interrelation, alliance and conflict which may involve two or more *castros*, but they only make sense if the political independence of each one is acknowledged and reaffirmed in the process. The space which harbors these modes of inter-relationships are a social continuum of discontinuous relations, based on the dialectic of opposition and complementarity. It is continuous because it creates forms of integration which link each *castro* with others, but also discontinuous because those relations do not imply any stable and durable entity, much less the consolidation of any supra-community territorial structure.

This antagonistic relationship between *castro* communities acts on the structural level, as a means of reaffirming the group's identity. The appearance of conflict, however, is purely accidental. War is present in *castro* society, but it hardly plays a role in conforming social structure. There is no evidence of permanent state of war, there are no aristocracies which maintain their position through a monopoly of violence, or a restricted access to the plunder obtained from raiding other communities. Violence, in fact, is integrated within a segmentary mode of functioning. It, therefore, would presumably include all adult males, who could take up arms when conflicts involving their community arose. The origin of war lies in several different tensions within segmentary society, such as disregarding reciprocity, breaking solidarity networks, problems derived from exogamic relationships... Conflict and violence reproduce this complementary opposition. On the one hand they reinforce the social distance between communities. At the same time, however, they prove how necessary supra-castro interaction dynamics are necessary.

The social structure of each *castro* community is an aggregation of equivalent domestic units which enjoy equal access to the means of production <Chapter1.7_Curras&Sastre_fig3 HERE>. It is a society where there are no forms of inequality based on exploitation or differentiated access to richness. There is no chiefdom or aristocracy. The absence of social stratification does not mean these communities were level societies without social differentiation. As in practically all social formations, there were inequalities based on gender, age. Also, certain forms of leadership based on justified authority can be hypothesized, despite their relative invisibility. Functional differentiation is well documented in the case of metallurgical activities. The political organization of each community was collective. Power was not centralized; it was distributed horizontally through the whole *castro* society. The reduced size of the settlements actively reinforced this power configuration: decision making could be in the hands of the whole group, and not monopolized by specific sectors. In villages with normally no more than 200 inhabitants, the corporate weight of the totality of the community would completely condition how power was organized.



Fig.3- Castro of Borneiro (contour lines interval= 10 cm) after Romero Masiá: 1987

The study of the *castros* society proves that hierarchization, centralization and inequality are not inherent to Protohistory. As a whole, Iron Age social structure of Northwest Iberia resembles a very complex system, though not in the sense in which social complexity is usually defined. It was articulated in a way which enabled the reproduction of a non-hierarchical society within a territorially decentralized political model. For nearly a millennium Iron Age societies effectively quashed any process which could foreseeably foster social hierarchy. The political and social system functioned as a structural means of constructing and reproducing equality.

Segmentary organization remained in place for centuries, not without its inconsistencies and internal contradictions, but maintained by the structural means which guaranteed its reproduction. This situation would remain so until the 2nd century BC, when Rome made its appearance in the Iberian Peninsula and the first legions tread the Iberian Northwest. The presence of Rome represents the destabilizing factor which, in a short period of time, will bring segmentary society to an end, marking a turning point in the history of the indigenous communities. It would bring about the end of the segmentary model and the appearance of social hierarchy: stratification and exploitation based on the differentiated access to the means of production.

Concluding remarks.

The impossibility of archaeology to analyse kinship excluded segmentarity from the models of political economy applied to the study of protohistoric societies. In this paper, we have suggested that by surmounting segmentary lineage by moving beyond the normative role of kinship and by recovering Durkheim's sociology, segmentarity can be understood as an ideal type and a valid tool for archaeological interpretation. Or, put differently, it is a less restricted, more versatile and flexible model that can be applied to a variety of social formations and which allows for the analysis of the evolutionary dynamics of stateless societies. Segmentary-based forms of organisation, already described using the terms 'ordered anarchy' (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 6) and 'anarchic kinship state' (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940: 296), coined by British functionalism, defines a social space in which non-hierarchical and non-centralised political, territorial and social relations crystallise. In this sense, they are connected with modern anarchic anthropology which raises the possibility of developing social functions without central bodies (Angelbeck and Grier 2012).

The definition of a society as segmentary would not be entirely accurate. Rather, we should speak of social systems—in a greater or lesser degree—structured according to segmentary principles. In the classical model, segmentary society—also known as tribal society—occupies a position above the band and below the state as a closed structural model. Nowadays, it seems more appropriate to speak of social interrelation dynamics of a segmentary character that can appear inside different social formations: from groups with a simple political structure to complex structures of a state character; from unranked societies to highly hierarchical groups or with a decentralised chieftainship. Needless to say, there is no such thing as a transcultural symbolic or religious framework inherent to all segmentarily structured societies, nor is there a sole form of self-representation. The ways of organising production and the spheres of interaction that structure relations between segments are variable and unique to each social formation: forms of exchange, the means of accessing property, relations of kinship, the principles of symbolic and ideological organisation, relations of production, the development of productive forces, etc., are relatively independent spheres which should thus be studied specifically. The characterisation of a social system as *segmentary* does not underestimate its complexity, which can only be discovered in a particular analysis of specific social formations.

The anthropology-based segmentary model applied to archaeological research does not, therefore, provide a general theory for the so-called 'primitive or stateless societies'. So, it would be a mistake to assume that all Iron Age social formations in Western Europe fit in the same rigid model; an

erroneous point of view that fails to shed any light on the diversity of protohistoric societies, their different evolutionary paths and their responses to processes involving contact with the state. Segmentary mechanisms can be lodged within different types of social and political formations, without having to restrict themselves to the most egalitarian and democratic models. Given that the segmentary theory does not explain social functioning as a whole, it needs to be integrated into theoretical models that allow us to ponder on social complexity, such as trans-egalitarian societies (Hayden 1995), heterarchical models (Crumley 1995) and assertive egalitarian strategies (Currás and Sastre 2019).

The European Iron Age reveals a wide array of forms of social organisation in which excessively rigid interpretative models, such as the warrior aristocracies or the Celtic chieftainship, do not explain the different processes of social evolution. And proposing an equally hermetic and inflexible model is not an alternative. Ergo, the aim of this paper has been to present the segmentary theory as an analytical framework capable of making room for the multiplicity of European social formations during the Iron Age, without reducing them to a sole closed model; a framework in which there is a place for different ways of organising production and different political-territorial systems sharing the same non-centralised characteristics. Following the line of research regarding the Iron Age opened by M^a. D. Fernández-Posse (1998) or the work of J. D. Hill (2007), the segmentary model can be explored as an interpretative framework in the study of dispersed, non-hierarchical settlement patterns and societies without any signs of class inequality. By understanding the mechanisms that operate in the substratum of segmentary societies, it is possible to address the study of the evolution of decentralised territorial systems: the processes leading to the nucleation of settlements, the social structures guaranteeing the continuity of territorial atomisation or, conversely, the processes of coalescence leading to aggregation and political integration. The spheres of interaction that emerge from the dynamics of complementary opposition can contribute to contextualise the meaning of war and conflict during the Protohistory, exchange and solidarity networks and the forms of social identity.

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