

REGIONAL DIVERSITY IN THE IBERIAN BRONZE AGE - ON THE VISIBILITY AND OPACITY OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD*

by

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INTRODUCTION

It is currently accepted by most archaeologists dealing with the Iberian Bronze Age, that a phenomenon of growing social complexity can be observed throughout this period. Regional diversities notwithstanding, this phenomenon is displayed through the progressive increase of certain general processes which, according to the functionalist/processualist terminology, are those of intensification of production, interaction, social hierarchization and social-political integration (Chapman, 1991). Within this global phenomenon, spatial and temporal diversity, cultural asymmetries, different rhythms of regional complexity, are to be admitted. Even "involutions", which are seen to occur within certain areas (Gilman, 1987b), are considered to be ephemeral and geographically limited set-backs within ineluctable social complexity. Those regional diversities mentioned above are envisaged as local adaptations in consequence of a wide range of conditions, such as: the specific environment and available resources; different cultural backgrounds; the manifold communitary interactions and supra-regional interdependence mechanisms; etc. They influence each group's trajectory and shape the processes of cultural complexity on a regional scale (Gilman, 1987a, b, Chapman, 1991, Dias-Andreu, 1993). Clearly, functionalist/processualist indicators of intensification, interaction, hierarchization and integration processes are quite hard to quantify in the so-called archaeological record. This is mainly due to the fact that they are liable to assume quite variable material configurations. Therefore, their identification depends on the correlation of different

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variables rather than on the presence or absence of a small number of them.

Despite these constraints, however, a large majority of archaeologists allows the process of Iberian social complexity - between the late third millennium b.C. and the early first millennium b.C. - to be expressed, in a generic way, through a progressive visibility of "materialities" (Barrett, 1994) related to the structure of power. It is also commonly assumed that such "visibility" materializes itself through monumentalization and/or specialization of domestic/burial contexts, through the variable enrichment of grave goods, and through the somewhat frequent presence of prestige artefacts, all of which point towards the emergence of ritually ostentatious contexts. In short, the phenomenon of social complexity during the Bronze Age in the Iberian Peninsula seems to be connected with new standards of social ostentation, which, as a rule, have left traces which may be perceived in the so-called archaeological record.

Nevertheless, it has proved difficult to validate empirically the correlation between visibility and complexity. This is particularly true when one tries to establish the features of the Early and Middle Bronze Age (1800-1300 b.C.): except for the Southwest and peripheral areas, the other regions of the Peninsula do not show the classical archaeological "indicators" of such complexity. If one does not admit that a period of manifold and varied 'complexities' (Chalcolithic) has been followed by another period of social "involutions" (Early and Middle Bronze Age), one must question the heuristic value of the indicators themselves. On the other hand, one witnesses an increase during the Late Bronze Age of the visibility of material remains which can be linked to the processes already referred to. But this visibility does not again fall into traditional contexts of power. Throughout this latter period, the displacement of power settings from the classical burial contexts to the new ritual/ /domestic ones, introduces changes in the previous cultural pattern and casts a few doubts on the neo-evolutionist model of "social complexity".

The assumption that social complexity usually puts up a clearly visible archaeological front is not present in studies on Iberian Bronze Age alone. Rather, it is as an obsession in many theoretical construct of European Prehistory and Protohistory. In my paper I will attempt to clarify the way in which concepts of visibility and opacity of archaeological remains, from the Chalcolithic to the Late Bronze Age in the Peninsula, may be manipulated, in order to delimit, enlarge or simply reject the classic processual standards concerning social complexity.

FROM THE CHALCOLITHIC TO THE LATE BRONZE AGE

1. CHALCOLITHIC, c. 2500 - c. 1800 b.C.

Until the late 1980' s, the South-east and the Portuguese Estremadura were seen as the two only culturally developed areas in the Iberian Peninsula (Chapman,

1991). One of the classic indicators of such cultural complexity would be the emergence in both areas of fortified settlements from the middle of the third millennium b. C. on. These fortified settlements are seen to be closely related to copper metallurgy, to the building of false-vault tombs, and to the manufacturing of some prestige artefacts. Despite the different colonial and autochtonist explanations (vd. Hernando Gonzalo, 1988, Martinez Navarrete, 1989), which see these innovations as the result, respectively, of migrations of population from the East Mediterranean, or of internal changes, fortified settlements have always been regarded as locations with defensive, deterrent and sumptuous functions. Basically, they reflect conflicts: either between colonists and natives (colonial account), or between local communities in their need to assert territorial claims (autochtonist account). In either of these explanatory trends, the fortified settlement is taken as the overpowering indicator of a given level of social-political development. To the functionalist/processualist, the fortified settlement is the individual sign of general, underlying, aprioristic processes such as "intensification", "differentiation", "competition/interaction" or "complexity", which it only serves to illustrate.

I have recently re-evaluated the Iberian Chalcolithic, by taking the concept of "fortified settlement" as a main reference point in the analysis of this period (Jorge, forthcoming). To this purpose, two issues have been focused on: the spatial-temporal restriction of the "fortified settlements" to the classical areas and their peripheries (South-east Spain and Portuguese Estremadura); the correlation of these sites to the processes deriving from social complexity. The latter seemed to be a crucial one, at first, since the possible deconstruction of the unified character of the concept of "fortified settlement" would question the homogeneizing character of the different "processes" that would equally well have given rise to it. In fact, even before scrutinizing the available data, it seemed clear that chalcolithic "fortifications" were basically places where energy and technological knowledge had been invested. In this sense, they might appear as general indicators of social organization and leadership. But since these two aspects haven't been sufficiently contextualized, it turned out that resorting to labels such as "intensification" or "social complexity" in order to grasp the plural reality which is expressed in those places was rather useless.

I have analysed about 70 sites (predominantly dating to the second half of the third millennium b. C. - uncalibrated C14 dates) scattered throughout a wide area: South-east, South-west, Portuguese Estremadura, the Northern Meseta and its western periphery. The following items concerning each one of the sites have been examined: spatial-temporal features; architectonical types; settings for the use of domestic spaces; spatial-temporal relationships to culturally linked burial contexts; levels of visibility/ monumentality; etc. The results of this research have

dismembered the commonplace statements about these matters. Consequently, one can but propound generalities: that over a period of 700/800 years, the first enclosed settlements appeared, showing different kinds of walls and having differing spans of occupation, which were articulated with diversified ecosystems, and linked to distinctive economic and social processes. In other words, the expression "fortified settlement" does not have semantic unity. The only common feature is the fact that they all are surrounded by structures made out of stone which present different levels of durability, visibility and monumentality. There is a correlation between the restriction of the inhabited area and the building of walls around it. The question that often emerges is: what were those walls for? I think that they will make no sense unless they are connected with "practices" which, in their turn, must be interpreted with reference to a broader arrangement that might be observed within a more embracing landscape. Apart from the fact that they might have had defensive functions at a certain point in their history, walls must be seen, globally, as communication devices giving specific ways of establishing territoriality and communitary identity.

If one observes the areas where these enclosed settlements appear together with other contemporary settlements¹ and graves, a common element can be found: *a new use of land* and a correlative emergence of *new systems for its representation*. From the beginnings of the third millennium b. C., almost all of these areas indicate long term agricultural investments. For this purpose, different means might have been used, such as irrigated farming (eg., in the South-east) (Gilman/Thornes, 1985, Chapman, 1991), or other intensive cultivation devices resulting in short-fallow systems, for instance. All of these investments resulted in continuous occupation of the same places over long periods of time (vd., for instance, the chronology of such sites as Los Millares, Zambujal, Castelo Velho de Freixo de Numão, etc.). Therefore, such investments in agriculture can not be dissociated from continuous and systematic occupation in territories which are ever more circumscribed, both geographically and conceptually. The new resulting territory goes along with the first major "fragmentation of the agricultural landscape" (vd. a similar occurrence in Great-Britain at a later period) (Barrett, 1994). In the fourth millennium b. C., a territory which was traditionally vast, possibly fluid, changed, in the third millennium b. C., into one with clear boundaries, both real and cognitive, where the dichotomies between internal/external, inside/outside, grow stronger and stronger.

The management of this new territory by groups which are still faintly

¹ Among the settlements belonging to this period, one must point out the presence in the South-west of settlements surrounded by ditches (eg. La Pijotilla or Sta. Vitória) the possible monumentality of which would require maintaining wood rather than stone structures.

hierarchized or not centralized politically, required the boundaries to be much more clearly delimited, the spaces to be enhanced, the routes to be marked, the accesses to be controlled, spatial interdictions to be imposed, spatial possibilities to be expressed. This new management called for a new kind of power which was inscribed in space, thus shaping the very perception of the territory. The enclosed settlements of the second half of the third millennium b. C., despite the constellation of contextual relations they have been linked to, reproduced locally a new pattern of "belonging to", new perceptions, both individual and collective, of the social world. It must be stressed that this movement - occurring during the strengthening of the "second agricultural revolution" (Vicent, 1989) - is quite embracing in all of the Peninsula. As symptom of a "meta-regularity", a new way of comprehending the territory, the enclosed settlements appear from Almeria, in the South-east of the Peninsula, up to the Douro basin, in the North (vd. in this second area the settlements of Castelo Velho and El Pedroso). What I have postulated in 1986 concerning a restricted area in northern Portugal (Jorge, 1986), can also be found when one observes the North of the Peninsula, and, particularly, the provinces of Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro, Zamora and Salamanca: the increase in intensive agricultural production and the emergence of permanent settlement from the middle of the third millenium b.C. onwards (Jorge, 1992). Those researchers who would like simply to reject this, in order to back up the thesis that permanent settlement would have taken place from the Late Bronze Age only (Ruiz-Gálvez, 1991/1992a, Fabião, 1992) should reflect upon important indicators of a growth in production recognized in chalcolithic settlements which have been published, such as Las Pozas, Zamora (Val Recio, 1992, Morales Muñiz, 1992), Buraco da Pala, Mirandela (Sanches, 1987, 1989, Sanches *et alii*, 1993), or Castelo Velho, Vila Nova de Foz Côa (Jorge, 1993). As far as permanent settlement is concerned, it may involve several ways of manipulating the landscape, and it does not necessarily have to express itself through enduring domestic structures. This means that permanent settlement can be made invisible on a superficial approach. Nevertheless, it is an indisputable phenomenon at least as far as walled settlements, such as Castelo Velho and El Pedroso (already mentioned above), S.Lourenço, Chaves (Jorge and Santos, forthcoming), and other still unpublished sites in the North of Portugal, in the province of Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro (Jorge, 1993), are concerned.

How can the analysis of chalcolithic settlements throw light upon this matter? In fact, visibility of so-called "fortified settlements" leads us to quite a large scale process: territorialization handles such high level "meanings" that a wide range of social formations may be hidden with them. While accommodating to a low density of occupation of the territory, these social formations may integrate several ways and degrees of economic intensification, diverse possibilities of social

specialization and differentiation, multiple restricted spheres of exchange. Thus, the archaeological visibility of chalcolithic enclosed settlements must not be taken as a trustworthy indicator of "complexity". Rather, complexity is virtually conducive to opacity, given the multiple middle level processes it can be associated with.

2. EARLY AND MIDDLE BRONZE AGE, c. 1800 - c. 1300 b. C.

The archaeologists who have been working in the Peninsula, the Spanish in particular, have repeatedly supported an idea which is far from being new, but seeks consistency through validation of empirical data. This idea states that in the South-east and on its peripheries a phenomenon of social complexity can be observed which led to the highly centralized Argaric community - the "Argaric state" of V. Lull (1983) -, and that the remaining areas of the Peninsula saw the permanency of groups which, despite regional diversities, did not in this phase reach a similar level of complexity (Gilman, 1987a, b, Chapman, 1991, Barceló, 1991, González Marcén *et alii*, 1992, Dias-Andreu, 1993, García Sanjuán, 1994). Some authors even refer to a process of "involution" in areas outside the South-east, in the Portuguese Estremadura, for instance (Gilman, 1987, Lillios, 1993). Such a deep distinction between the South-east and all the other peninsular areas, is essentially based upon the assumption that social complexity is expressed through materials associated with power and that power is lineally mirrored by a restricted set of archaeological correlations. Such correlations are measured by the monumentality and internal structuring of domestic, ritual and burial contexts. This amounts to establishing a lineal system of homologies between archaeological and cultural realities, which is something that has a definite normative ring to it. According to this scheme, the Argaric community would point towards a high level of social complexity through: the fortification of several settlements, the proto-urban features many of them display, the existence within some of them of specialized areas of production, namely in metallurgy, the presence of graves under the house linked to at least five levels of social class. Finally, the Argaric community would establish hierarchical settlement networks, scattered through areas yielding complementary resources, and it would point towards high levels of economic intensification and specialization, and of political integration and regional interdependencies. The debate concerning the control of which goods ensures the rise of elites (subsistence resources and/or metallic artefacts) (Lull, 1983, Gilman, 1987a, b, Chapman, 1991, Montero Ruiz, 1992, Dias-Andreu, 1993), does not call for development at this point in my paper. Instead I mean to question the social specificity of Argaric groups when compared to other peninsular groups.

And, consequently, to reflect once more on the concept of social complexity.

If one observes the standard processualist methodology - correlation of a restricted number of variables - and looks for the classic indicators of those variables in the peninsular archaeological record, one is confronted with the following picture: during the Early and Middle Bronze Age, "fortified settlements" in the chalcolithic tradition are still to be found in areas outside the South-east. These are some of the published examples: in the basin of the river Douro, the settlement of Castelo Velho (Jorge, 1993); in the portuguese Estremadura the settlement of Zambujal (phase 5) (Sangmeister and Schubart, 1981); in the south of the Northern Meseta several enclosed settlements of this period are known (Fabián Garcia, 1993); in the Alto Guadalquivir the Early Bronze Age "fortified settlement" of Peñalosa (Contreras Cortés, 1995) is, after all, a site with features characteristic of the Argaric periphery. In the La Mancha region, the groups of Motillas (Martín *et alii*, 1993) belong to an area of interaction with the Argaric world. However, if one leaves the peripheral areas of the South-east, whose "fortified settlements" could be interpreted as resulting from the proximity to the Argaric community, and if one resorts to data which are mostly still unpublished², one comes to the conclusion that throughout this period fortifications continue to appear in almost all of the Peninsula, even if they are less frequent. On the other hand, in some open settlements a few traces have been identified which indicate that there had been an *increase of production*. This would have taken place within the process conventionally known as "S.P.R." (Sherratt, 1981, 1983). One can present as examples settlement with *storage structures* (early phase) of Bouça do Frade, in the North of Portugal (Jorge, 1988), which might have been occupied for the first time in the 16th century b. C. in a proto-Cogotas context³; and the settlement of Agroal, in the Portuguese Estremadura (Lillios, 1993). Harrison (1993) has recently maintained that the use of pastoralism would have been crucial during the second millenium b. C.. In fact, he argues that livestock raising and horse riding would have been part of a strategy of economic intensification just as effective as the mediterranean polyculture used in the South-east.

But other indicators of complexity also appear which are traditionally considered to be evidence of power: for instance, *stellae* in such different provinces as Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro - the Longroiva stella (Almagro-Bash, 1966) - and Alentejo - the well-known "stellae of Alentejo", if one accepts the chronology

² Several archaeological survey programmes are now taking place in different areas in the Peninsula, namely in portuguese territory. When these are published, the traditional views according to which settlement in the second millenium b. C. is scarce, will have to be altered.

³ There are unpublished C 14 datings concerning the first occupation of this settlement, which, from the start (at least 16th century b. C.) reveals storage pits. These data are the result of excavations which occurred from 1987 until 1990, and they are still unpublished.

of Barceló (1991); *graves with some architectonic complexity*, like the earliest tombs of Atalaia cemetery in Alentejo (Schubart, 1975, Garcia Sanjuán, 1994) or the grave of Outeiro de Gregos 1 in the province of Douro Litoral (Jorge, 1980); *burials with rich metallic artefacts* in the context of Montelavar-Ferradeira; *engraved rocks with weapons*, in the North-west of the Peninsula, like that at Monte da Laje (Silva and Cunha, 1986) in the context of the so-called “galaico-portuguese” art (Peña Santos and Rey García, 1993); *hoards* like that at Carrapatas in western Trás-os-Montes, or the famous treasure of Caldas de Reyes in Galicia (Hernando Gonzalo, 1989).

This rather summary depiction is only meant to support the following observation: that if one considers only the presence/absence of certain conventional indicators of complexity, one would not be able to establish such a clear distinction between the South-east and the other peninsular areas, as some authors would have it.

And still one can recognize differences between several peninsular areas. This is not so much due to the amount of power held by the elites as far as control over production and/or circulation of prestige items is concerned, but rather the degree of openness of their internal and external boundaries. These differences depend on the internal organization of the societies and on the alternating promotion of “high or low grids” of exchange through which objects, individuals, and ideas flow.

“However, great differentials, especially in terms of metal goods, need not represent greater social complexity, but rather (...) concentrations of power in societies with a high degree of social closure associated with strong ‘grid’ in Douglas’ terms. Similarly, lack of archaeologically visible status or wealth differentials need not imply poverty and may not suggest a lack of high hierarchy, although they do imply weak ‘grid’. In fact, the significance of such differentials or the lack of them cannot simply be read off the differentials themselves but only in relation to the workings of particular kinds of society and economy, including the processes of social categorisation.” (Shennan, 1993: 65).

What seems to be more distinctive of the Argaric societies when compared with the other contemporary societies of the Peninsula, is the closed and restrictive structure of its exchange network and, correlatively, the visibility of its social categorisations. Despite the well known fact that metallic artefacts of Argaric type spread over almost all the Peninsula, it is possible to identify, in a restricted area of the South-east, a standard set of archaeological associations. This recurring set seems to indicate the existence of socially closed groups, using strong grids of exchange and manipulating highly competitive “prestige economies”. On the contrary, in some other peninsular regions, particularly along the western atlantic

façade, one is confronted with communities which, their degree of social hierarchization notwithstanding, produce, transform and exchange metal, possibly within low grids of supra-regional exchange. Such exchange grids enabling the circulation of metallic prototypes along most of the European Atlantic façade promote a socially diversified use of metallic artefacts. Thus, they favour the cutting off of metallic artefacts from regional symbolism and dispose the traditional economies towards a “proto-currency” sphere (Sherratt, 1994) which became characteristic of the Late Bronze Age. A great number of societies within the Iberian Peninsula, whatever their resemblances in respect of leadership capability of their elites, seem to be socially more open and less competitive than those of the South-east during the period I have been considering. But rather than establishing that the nature of this difference is that of social complexity, it seems that it is an organizational difference which calls for research within an other perspective altogether.

3. LATE BRONZE AGE, 1300 - 700 b. C.

Researchers who have been studying the Late Bronze Age in the Peninsula have recurrently declared both the progressive concealment of burial contexts, and the relative instability in land occupation, and, consequently, the difficult recognition in the archaeological record of domestic contexts. On the other hand, almost every archaeologist has emphasized the increase in a new kind of social/ritual settings - stellae/statue-menhirs and hoards of metallic artefacts - as ostentatious signs for a new social and political order.

I shall now briefly review some material evidence that has been presented to support these statements (tombs, settlements, stellae/statue-menhirs and hoards), so as to discuss the meaning of their absence/presence within a possible rearrangement of the processes of territorialization in the Peninsula.

If one happens to read some of the most recent publications on the peninsular Late Bronze Age, one may be persuaded that almost no tombs are known. And this is due to three main reasons: because those that have been taken as such were not, after all, correctly identified, both chronologically and culturally; because such tombs, being unsubstantial, haven't been recognized in the so-called archaeological record; or, finally, because they were never built (Ruiz-Gálvez, 1991, Belén *et alii*, 1991). The idea underlying this denial seems to be that of integrating the Iberian Peninsula into an Atlantic community whose affinities would go far beyond the links originated by exchange routes: united by burial concealment, the Atlantic façade would share the same sphere of social and

symbolic interests. This is not the place to discuss whether there something such as an “atlantic cultural identity”, exists. It seems to me more appealing simply to pose the question: is it possible to recognize Late Bronze Age tombs? If so, what is their nature as places for the interment of the elite?

Before making any attempt to answer these questions, it seems necessary to stress an obvious point: the detection of any unsubstantial context in the landscape requires even more intensive survey and excavation programmes. These have only been developed, in quite limited areas in the Peninsula, since the 1980's. In most of the areas, namely in portuguese territory, they haven't even started. Therefore, in the face of the scarce data provided by “dirt archaeology”, one finds oneself in an awkward position if one wants to argue about the existence and nature of Late Bronze Age tombs.

Despite this limitation, I think that the following ideas are quite plausible: regional diversity notwithstanding, it is possible to distinguish between two main phases in this period, as far as burial contexts are concerned - before and after c. 1100/1000 b. C.; after 1000 b. C., available archaeological information is scarce in the Peninsula; between c. 1300 and 1100/1000 b. C. some tombs appear which are either isolated or inserted in cemeteries, and which are characterized by an absence both of architectonic monumentality and complexity, and of rich and diversified burial goods, such as prestigious raw materials (eg. metal).

Even so, I should like to call the reader's attention to some tombs belonging to this phase whose existence cannot be ignored. In spite of the chronological re-evaluation which has been proposed for the South-western Bronze Age cemeteries, inserting them massively in the Early and Middle Bronze Age (Barceló, 1991), there are some late tombs in cemeteries like Atalaia or Provença, in the province of Alentejo, which can be ascribed to the early phase of the Late Bronze Age (Jorge, 1990, García Sanjuán, 1994). Curiously enough, García Sanjuán identified an architectonic hierarchy in Atalaia which he wasn't able to link in a standard way with the different interment categories or with the diversified assemblages of grave good. Even if this author has interpreted this as a proof for the absence of social hierarchisation, based on the assumption that there is a lack of assymetry in the distribution of the goods, it seems to me that one should point the presence, throughout the use of the cemetery, of individuals buried in central and dominating positions. Such an hierarchy of interments even in the final phase of use of the cemetery, leads one to the question concerning the nature of the social structure of these southwestern groups.

Another set of tombs indisputably belonging to this period is located in the north of Portugal. I'm referring to the cemetery of pits of Tapado da Caldeira (Jorge, 1980) and also to the cemetery of cists at, for instance, S. Paio de Antas (Soeiro, 1988). Both the chronology of these two sites and the interpretation of

Tapado da Caldeira as a cemetery, have been repeatedly disputed by some Spanish colleagues (Ruiz-Gálvez, 1991, Ruiz-Gálvez and Galan Domingo, 1991, Belén *et alii*, 1991). However, any one of these cemeteries, particularly Tapado da Caldeira, presents strong contextualized indicators for its function and chronology. The cemetery of Tapado da Caldeira consists of four rectangular pits. Their inner filling was found intact and was composed of layers of compact soil mixed up with a little charcoal. A complete vessel was found at each extremity of each one of these pits. One of these pits was dated by radiocarbon around 13th century b. C. The probability of this date is supported by the presence of a "Cogotas I" type vessel in another pit. On the other hand, the interpretation of these pits as tombs follows standard archaeological criteria: firstly, one is dealing with untouched pits; secondly, these pits can be compared with similar stone graves, as far as shape and size are concerned; thirdly, their filling (soil, charcoals and a complete vessel in every pit), even though it does not include bones, which is very frequent due to the acid soils in this area, follows the normal pattern of a closed and homogeneous burial association. One must add that one of the pits presented a convenient size to the inhumation of a child together with a small vessel. The simple attribution of ritual functions to these pits surprises me, since no additional valid arguments are presented (Ruiz-Gálvez, 1991:282). If one puts aside the fact that no human bones have been found, which occurs in almost every tomb of every period, these pits have all the features that are common to individual inhumation graves. This does not, of course, prevent one from accepting that the cemetery and its surrounding area could have been used from the start to create settings related to diversified ritual practices.

Even though it hasn't recently been excavated according to up-to-date scientific methods, the cemetery of cists at S. Paio de Antas has revealed human skeletons together with ceramic vessels, namely some of specific peninsular North-west type, which are characterized by their large horizontal rim. It is through the presence of these vessels that one is able to infer the general chronology of these cists. In fact, such pottery has been found in the settlement of Bouça do Frade, also in the north of Portugal (Jorge, 1988) from, at least, the intermediate stage of occupation until the end (12th/11th - 8th century b. C.). This means that the cists can be placed within this period although no precise chronology can be obtained.

In both, Tapado da Caldeira and S. Paio de Antas, one is dealing with flat graves.

The well known monument of Roça do Casal do Meio, located in the Portuguese Estremadura and dated around the 10th/9th century b. C. (Spindler and Ferreira, 1973), with its monumental structure presents already not only a remarkable architectonic complexity, but also a burial pagentry with a mediterranean ring. Regardless of the debate concerning the "proto-oriental"

(Almagro-Gorbea, 1986, Belén *et alii*, 1991) or the autochtonist (Galan Domingo, 1983) origins of this site, it is important to bring out the paucity, throughout this period, of prestigious architectures and grave goods, linked to prototypes existing in the western Mediterranean.

I do not wish to be fastidious, so I will refrain from an extensive enumeration of Late Bronze Age tombs and cite just a few examples. For instance, the pit grave of S. Román de Hornija, in the northern Meseta (Delibes de Castro, 1978), several cave interments in the Portuguese Estremadura (Jorge, 1990, Belén *et alii*, 1991) or the innumerable re-utilizations of megalithic monuments in different areas of the portuguese territory (Jorge, 1990).

This brief approach intends to focus on the following issues: despite the scattered archaeological information, it is possible to document Late Bronze Age burial contexts; if the frequent lack of monumentality of these contexts renders archaeological identification difficult, it is however easy to argue that those which have already been identified are but the top of a still unknown iceberg⁴; the tombs which have so far been detected, despite the general lack of monumentality and richness, present features which vary from one region to the other: the most important of these features concern architectonic structures, topographic location and the isolation or clustering of the tombs.

One must therefore come to the conclusion that the so-called burial concealment characteristic of the Late Bronze Age is no more than the effect of archaeology's inability to perceive the diversity of insubstantial burial contexts. Not only have these burial contexts left no impressive trace upon the landscape, but, at the same time, they do not seem to follow a common pattern of spatial location, architectonic type, vicinity to contemporary settlements, etc. Therefore, this so-called concealment is no other than archaeological invisibility. And, as already was the case with the "visibility" of enclosed chalcolithic settlements, this "invisibility" conveys a virtual opacity in interpretation.

To address the Late Bronze Age settlements of the Iberian Peninsula, one must approach the general question concerning the "stability" and/or "permanency" of occupation in the territory. Several archaeologists have recently maintained that an "itinerant way of life" would have endured even in the Late Bronze Age in most of the peninsular regions. This would be expressed by an extensive mobility and the extreme transience of domestic contexts. Only in some areas would settlement have been reestablished, and this mainly from 1000 b. C. onwards, as the reappearance of fortified settlements would show (Ruiz-Gálvez,

⁴ There are excavations of settlements in the North of Portugal, which are still occurring and which have revealed the presence of tombs belonging to this period inside or in the surroundings of the domestic space. I am grateful to my colleagues who are studying these particular settlements for sharing such valuable information with me.

1991, 1992a, Fabião, 1992, Galan Domingo, 1993).

When considering the Peninsula as a whole, one observes an immense variety of domestic contexts and settlement patterns. On the other hand, settlements with natural or artificial defences appear at a late stage in this period and are in the minority. Open settlements predominate, with perishable dwelling structures made out of wood and clay (Jorge, 1990). This is the case of the settlement with storage structures at Bouça do Frade in the north of Portugal (Jorge, 1988). It is a long-lived open settlement (from, at least, the 16th to the 8th century b. C.) which must have been continuously occupied by groups surviving on an intensive economic system based upon agriculture and livestock raising. The underground storage structures, some of which are quite large, are an unequivocal proof of this. The suggestion that the settlement of Bouça do Frade could be inserted in an itinerant settlement model simply because its dwelling structures are perishable, can only be the result of misunderstanding and confusion. As for the misunderstanding, it has already been mentioned: the simplistic correlation of archaeological invisibility (in this particular case, of domestic remains) with social fluidity, mobility or instability. The confusion consists of equating the permanent occupation of a given place with the permanent and organized exploitation of a territory. The continuous occupation of Bouça do Frade during almost 800 years is obviously connected with spatial-temporal occupation strategies of the surrounding territory. The exploitation regime of this territory is not, however, to be inferred from the continuity or disruption in the occupation of a site; rather continuity or disruption can both be observed either in sedentary or itinerant systems. The "permanent" occupation of a given territory cannot be checked by the durability of some domestic structures only, or their continuous use. It is verified by the correlation of several variables, such as economic intensification and specialization.

At this point, one must ask the question: should settlements such as Bouça de Frade (which is an open settlement containing storage structures), or Alegrios (Vilaça, 1991) and N. Sra. da Guia, Baiões (Kalb, 1979) (the latter are hill-top settlements with evidence of metalworking activities) be seen as part of itinerant networks of territorial occupation, solely because of their feeble internal structures?

It seems clear to me that systems of occupation and perception of the territory by Late Bronze Age groups have not as yet been sufficiently studied. Actually, the general perishable character of domestic structures often coexists with traces of specialized productive activities which are closely related to those structures. This is not consistent with the proclaimed fluidity and instability of settlement during the Late Bronze Age (vd. Shennan, 1993).

Finally, one should attempt to include the Late Bronze Age "fortified settlements" in a whole new phenomenon of peninsular territorialization. Such a phenomenon comprehends cross-cultural interactions promoted by contradictory

mechanisms of social interdependency. In contrast to the Chalcolithic enclosed settlements, Late Bronze Age fortifications are not mere communication devices serving isolated movements of "colonisation" and communitary identification. In order to understand the manifold functions of these sites, one must, however briefly, approach the new settings and the different scales of power.

That Late Bronze Age hoards and stellae/statue-menhirs embody, in different ways, the rise of an hereditary leadership in communities scattered throughout vast peninsular territories, is already quite a commonplace assertion.

There is a very stimulating recent study of the southwestern stellae by Galan Domingo (1993). Following a previous paper written with Ruiz-Gálvez (Ruiz-Gálvez and Galan Domingo, 1991), this study presents a symbolic and spatial approach to these monuments. The stellae are envisaged as visual reference points on the landscape, signaling communication routes which would connect the southwestern hinterland with its meridional peripheries. According to the author, the stellae would be "territorial markers" emerging as other neighbouring and more sedentary groups constituted a threat to the more traditional communities of the South-west. The latter would have erected those monuments, namely in the peripheral areas of their political territories (that is, in areas of possible conflict), as an attempt to reinforce their social cohesion, thus conveying a message of belonging to a given group and/or space. I think that the most refreshing and original idea in this research by Galan Domingo can be presented in the following way: firstly, it is suggested that through the routes marked by the stellae mainly subsistence items would flow, rather than metal artefacts (for example, those which can be found on the stellae); secondly, it is maintained that the stellae would essentially convey a message of social prestige, which would not be in direct relation to the exchanged products in the territories marked by them. Therefore, these monuments would manifest a social status with no actual reference to the social paraphernalia of the group who built them. The objects depicted on the stellae would not have been directly manipulated by them although they might have been acquainted with the prototypes of such artefacts through contact with other groups who produced and /or exchanged them, thus being close to their original meaning. The stellae would contain figurations which would have no referential relation to actual objects existing in their sphere of action. Therefore, one can say that such figurations are metaphorical and not literal: their meaning is established as in a language; their shape is related to an original object only in a detached and unaware way, since it is mediated. Such shape is transfigured into a stable mark, with a specific meaning so as to be recognized by groups belonging to the same identification system.

The interpretation of the stellae according to this point of view can also be connected with another important idea: that the Iberian Peninsula was a western

margin of a core located in the eastern Mediterranean, within an interaction system of “core-periphery-margin” supported by Sherratt (Sherratt, 1993, Galan Domingo, 1993). This new conception maintains that the margin, although not directly dependent on the core, nor competing directly with it, would absorb, in a selective way, elements both of the core and the periphery. Such selective integration of elements culturally strange to the margin, due to the particular interests of the native groups, would trigger a structural change in the meaning of the circulating products and prototypes. Therefore, elements formally connected to the mediterranean world, such as, for instance, the icons engraved upon the southwestern stellae, the burial goods of tombs such as Roça do Casal do Meio, or some metallic artifacts in hoards like Baiões, Villena or Peña Negra, should be understood as native productions with an Atlantic cultural affiliation. These productions appear within cross-cultural exchange networks joining the Mediterranean, the Atlantic façade and Central Europe into a system.

At this point, the discussion concerning local meanings attributed to different kinds of hoards should be introduced (Ruiz-Gálvez, 1993). This archaeologist states that such hoards can be differentiated according to their commercial and/or social/emblematic value. Following these views, the hoard of Baiões, in the province of Beira Alta, is an utilitarian hoard of commodities conveyed by traders, a kind of “common merchants”, as opposed to the “refined aristocrats” who displayed the prestige objects found at the votive hoards of Peña Negra or Villena, in the South-east (Ruiz-Gálvez, 1993: 58-63). This clear cut opposition calls for a careful analysis which would go far beyond the scope of this paper. I should like to draw attention, however, to a point which has repeatedly been brought out by several authors, including Ruiz-Gálvez (Ruiz-Gálvez, 1992b, Barceló, 1992, Shennan, 1993): the traditional dichotomy between gift and commodity is quite inoperative. In every transaction, objects can assume, successively or cumulatively, both these functions, according to the scale of competition or the nature of the exchanges. If one accepts that the hoards, either utilitarian or votive, are native productions, and that, just as the stellae, they exhibit a transfiguration of the meaning which originally was ascribed to the prototypes, it will be difficult to interpret them without a contextualized research into the societies that produced and used them. I am convinced that this research is still lacking.

I would conclude by saying that the elements of stronger archaeological “visibility” in the peninsular Late Bronze Age - stellae/statue-menhirs and hoards - hide an obvious opacity under a formal similitude to artifacts coming from ideological contexts outside the Peninsula. This is due to the fact that they belong to practically unknown social and cognitive systems.

CONCLUSION

As far as archaeological visibility is concerned, one witnesses shifts from the Chalcolithic to the Late Bronze Age in the Peninsula. During the Chalcolithic, there is evidence of monumental sites and of a regionally diversified "material culture". In contrast, during Early and Middle Bronze Age, there is a general withdrawal of archaeological information and the groups are recognized through some unsubstantial burial and ritual contexts. Finally, during the Late Bronze Age, one finds an abundant and heterogeneous archaeological record which would at first seem to render the social characterization of this period an easy task.

However, as I have tried to show throughout this paper, the different archaeological "visibilities" end up leading to an inescapable dark zone where interpretation falters. The fortified settlements of the Chalcolithic do not indicate culturally patterned processes and point towards a general and therefore uncomfortable territorialization phenomenon. The asymmetric "visibility" of Early and Middle Bronze Age communities may be due to the integration in strong or low exchange grids, which also points towards a general social categorisation phenomenon. Finally, Late Bronze Age groups, which are linked through strong cross-cultural interactions, are blended by mechanisms of material standardization. These mechanisms conceal the specific identities of these communities as seen in the archaeological record.

If one accepts that, from the Chalcolithic to the Late Bronze Age, a growing process of regional political integration occurred, dismantling the chalcolithic self-sufficient regimes and promoting supra-regional "solidarities", one must accept as well that this process involved ambiguities and contradictions which ended up dismembering the societies existing in the beginning of the first millenium b. C. Some of the most conspicuous of the mentioned ambiguities and contradictions are the coexistence/transience of several interaction scales, the simultaneous use of traditional ways of accumulating and displaying wealth and of new transactions in a "proto-currency" fashion, and the unbalanced experience of many levels of "meaning" which is shared by things, individuals and identities.

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