

Aggregation and Dispersal from a Long-Term Social Perspective: Rural Landscapes of the Northwestern Iberian Peninsula from the Iron Age to the Early Roman Period

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The European Iron Age is currently undergoing a debate regarding forms of social organization. The move away from aristocratic paradigms rooted in purported Celtic systems, and the increased interest in regional studies has revealed greater social variability than previously noted. Meanwhile, the concept of Romanization has been critically reviewed and homogenizing interpretations have also been rejected. In this context, the northwestern part of the Iberian Peninsula is of enormous interest. A combination of regional studies and theoretical approaches has produced alternative insights into Iron Age and provincial societies in the area.

The Iron Age societies, between the eighth and third centuries BC, are characterized by a particular settlement type in northwestern Iberia: the *castro*. These small, fortified settlements enjoyed political independence and economic self-sufficiency. This situation only changed around the second century BC, when Rome appeared as a transformative power just beyond the region. Hence, the final phase of the Iron Age brought a sharp change in the southernmost coast, usually defined as the core area of the so-called Castro culture. Changes include a tendency towards population concentration in larger *castros*. Social interpretations for the Iron Age are strongly conditioned by this later record, which is often considered as the most valid reference for the whole period, and as self-evident proof of a ranked society.

In our paper, we propose an alternative vision. The *castro* society, reflected by the pre-second century BC record, was based on the struggle to arrest hierarchical tendencies by using “assertive egalitarianism.” These anti-hierarchical tendencies explain both settlement patterns and production systems. The segmentary balance, which can be documented in the organization of space within and outside the *castro*, began to unravel under Roman pressure during the military campaigns of the Late Republic. Later, the conquest under Augustus imposed a new fundamental change marked by the construction of a provincial system based on *civitates* whose capitals do not resemble classic models of monumental urbanism as they are eminently rural in nature.