House societies vs. kinship-based societies: An archaeological case from Iron Age Europe

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Abstract

The idea that houses and territories can be alternative systems for structuring society is undermining the traditional belief that lineages, clans and other systems based on kinship ties were the only conceivable principle of social organization in traditional communities. The concept of *société à maison* (house society) developed by Lévi-Strauss is proving to be a useful tool in anthropology. However, only a few archaeological examples have been provided to date. Following Lévi-Strauss' definition and drawing on different ethnographic cases of societies based on house and territory rather than kinship, an archaeological example from the Iberian Iron Age is explored.
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Introduction: Lévi-Strauss beyond kinship

Claude Lévi-Strauss is strongly associated with the study of kinship systems, a field of research to which he devoted many influential works. His interest in this topic led him to discover anomalies in several ranked societies, that did not fit into traditional kinship classifications. In order to deal with these anomalous cases, he developed the concept of *sociétés à maison* (house societies), where the house became a key principle of social organization, although he always considered house societies as another kinship type (Lévi-Strauss, 1987, p. 151). The idea of house societies has been retrieved recently by some authors, both anthropologists and archaeologists (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995; Joyce and Gillespie, 2000). This new interest is not without problems: The concept of house society has been applied to egalitarian or seemingly egalitarian groups (Chesson, 2003; Rivière, 1995; Waterson, 1995); it has been used as a rather vague idea to underline the importance of domestic structures (Borič, 2003); to label societies, such as the ancient Maya (Gillespie, 2000; Joyce, 2000), where the relevance of houses as opposed to kinship is not absolutely clear (Houston and McAnnany, 2003, pp. 36–38); and to characterize groups, such as Early Bronze Age Israel, where kinship—if we draw upon later literary evidence—seems to have prevailed (Chesson, 2003). In other contexts, such as in Polynesia, house societies have been studied thoroughly by archaeologists and anthropologists and with more convincing results (e.g., Kahn and Kirch, 2004). In any

way or the other, all these works contribute to enlighten the key role houses play to structure social organization in ancient communities (Gillespie, 2000, p. 15; Tringham, 2000).

I think that it is necessary to return to the concept as it was first defined by Lévi-Strauss and restrict its applicability. Otherwise, the conceptual widening may render the term devoid of meaning. As Gillespie (2000b, pp. 38–39) has criticized "Stripped of all its distinguishing qualities, the house of Lévi-Strauss has reached the point where it is used to refer to any corporate kin group in the generic sense of a convenient all-encompassing rubric." The house is an element of a paramount importance in most societies, but not all are organized as house societies. The famous definition of a house in a house society provided by Lévi-Strauss (1982, p. 174; 1991) states that it is "a moral person holding an estate made up of material and immaterial wealth which perpetuates itself through the transmission of its name down a real or imaginary line, considered legitimate as long as this continuity can express itself in the language of kinship or affinity, and, most often, of both".

Lévi-Strauss based his theory on Boas' work among the Kwakiutl. Franz Boas was puzzled by the complex kinship organization of this society, which had displayed simultaneous matrilineal and patrilineal elements. He wrote several articles trying to disentangle the intricacies of the system, sometimes defending the primacy of patrilineal principles, sometimes defending the opposite. Finally, he chose to use the local term *numaym* (currently spelled *numayma*), instead of "clan," "tribe," "sib" or any other anthropological concept that he or others had previously used to refer to the basic social unit among the Kwakiutl. Within the *numayma*, titles of nobility, ritual items (masks, headdresses, and sculptures), and territorial rights for hunting and fishing were transmitted (Lévi-Strauss, 1982, pp. 167–168). Boas considered this population a unique anomaly in anthropology. However, he failed to notice the similarities that the Kwakiutl bore with other societies, such as the Californian Yurok, which were extensively studied by Kroeber. This anthropologist was also bewildered by their socio-political structure, to the point of denying them any social organization at all (Lévi-Strauss, 1982, p. 172). Nonetheless, as Lévi-Strauss points out, "the institutions that support Yurok society do exist: they are, first of all, the fifty-four 'towns' among which population distributed itself, and above all, within each town, the 'houses'" (Lévi-Strauss, 1982). At last, says Lévi-Strauss, the

word is out: "house." That is the word that better fits the Kwakiutl *numayma*, too. In both the Kwakiutl and Yurok cases, houses constitute jural entities: notwithstanding its relevance, anthropology did not count on their "institutional arsenal" with the concept of house along with those of tribe, village, clan or lineage (Lévi-Strauss, 1982, pp. 173–174).

Lévi-Strauss also considers other societies whose kinship system is defined as "non-unilineal," as in the *sociétés à maison*: in Polynesia, Indonesia, Melanesia and sub-Saharan Africa (Lévi-Strauss, 1991), as well as Medieval Europe, feudal Japan and ancient Greece. As a matter of fact, the anthropologist especially relies on the European example for clarifying what a house society is. Feudal European families, with their focus on the castle or manor (material wealth), their emphasis on the acquisition and maintenance of names and titles (immaterial wealth), the use of different kinship strategies to enlarge the house, hereditary prerogatives, etc. exemplify, in a straightforward manner, how a house society works.

In all the mentioned cases, kinship lacks the rigidity that characterizes systems strictly based on it. Therefore, kinship is actively negotiated in order to obtain more power or economic control: matrilineal and patrilineal lineages can be strategically used by different members of the house. The flexible use of kin and the complex gathering of opposed principles might lead to crisis and tensions inside houses (Lévi-Strauss, 1982, p. 186), thus causing splits in certain households (Gillespie 2000a, p. 10, 2000b, p. 33). House societies, according to Lévi-Strauss (1987, p. 152, 187) resort to the house as a social mechanism to subvert kinship. That is especially obvious in those communities where centralized, complex polities (states), do not exist, but where strong inequalities are being developed. Houses, starting from a language of kinship, with its social servitudes, provide an opportunity for transforming it and acquiring higher rates of control. On the other hand, fictitious kinship bears an enormous importance among noble maisons in places so distant as Indonesia or Medieval France: mythic heroes, divinities or invented warriors can be placed at the origin of a certain house (Waterson, 1997, p. 64).

Although Lévi-Strauss does not clearly state that house societies must be hierarchical, all the examples he uses, and the very definition of house society he offers, with its emphasis on wealth—I would say "capital," following Bourdieu (1979, 1984, 1990) due to its multifarious character (economic, cultural,

social and symbolic)—obviously point to a ranked social organization (Gillespie, 2000b, pp. 38, 49). The complexity of house strategies to accrue wealth, status, power or property, which the French anthropologist often stresses, can only fit into a hierarchical order or an egalitarian system that is being subverted (Lévi-Strauss, 1987, p. 152) a fact that has already been noted by some authors (Gillespie, 2000a, p. 9). Waterson (1995), despite proposing a looser definition of "house society," calls for a closer evaluation of the role of houses as a prominent institution in societies undergoing deep social transformations, toward more hierarchical situations. She and other anthropologists have focused on the role of houses as a vehicle for the naturalization of rank differences (Hugh-Jones, 1995; McKinnon, 1995).

Lévi-Strauss (1982, p. 174) said that houses display material and immaterial wealth, although he focused, for the most of his brief work on house societies, on immaterial wealth—names, titles, and kin strategies. The material side is represented by relics, heirlooms, ritual items, signs of power (sceptres, weapons, dresses, jewels) (Joyce, 2000; Lillios, 1999), and, of course, by the house itself. Paradoxically, Lévi-Strauss almost completely forgot the most important material element in house societies: the house as a physical structure (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995, p. 12). Later studies have explored the importance of architecture as a critical cultural symbol both among house societies (Cunningham, 1973; Gillespie, 2000a,b; Scarduelli, 1991; Waterson, 1995) and kin-based societies (e.g., Bourdieu, 1973; Preston Blier, 1987). In all traditional societies buildings metaphorically encapsulate basic social and cosmological principles (Tuan, 1977; Parker Pearson and Richards, 1994). Lacking other means of storing symbolic capital (literacy), houses are fundamental in the creation of habitus and in inscribing social principles among illiterate communities (Cunningham, 1973, p. 235).

Recapitulating, if we are to track *sociétés à maison* in ancient communities, in the original sense proposed by Lévi-Strauss, the following elements should be ideally attested:

1. Ranked systems, or societies that are undergoing major social transformations towards a more hierarchical organization.
2. Unclear or mixed descent systems.
3. Houses must be a key symbolical element in the community at issue. They have to be the focus of all ordinary and extraordinary activities, but especially of rituals and sacrifices, thus displaying defining material features pointing at their symbolic relevance.
4. Related to the latter, a strong investment in houses (as buildings) and clear differences among houses should be noticed. Houses must be an arena for social competition and this may be reflected in monumentality and in prestige materials associated to houses.
5. The existence of titles of nobility, recurrent family names, etc. This can be tracked down through epigraphy, graffiti, coats of arms or symbols depicted in personal belongings or structures.
6. Heirlooms and elements of rank which are inherited.
7. Houses go beyond traditional kin systems and both the female and male lines might be manipulated in order to accrue the house's wealth. Women in house societies usually make a significant contribution in terms of wealth or power to the house's capital.
8. The relevance of territory for defining a collective identity, though not decisive, might also point to this kind of social organization.
9. Explicit references to houses as social units.

Admittedly, at least two elements (unclear descent systems and explicit references to houses) are only fully accessible through textual data, thus hindering the applicability of the model to many prehistoric societies. Explicit references to houses obviously reinforce the interpretation and underline the symbolic relevance of homesteads. However, absence of this particular evidence does not imply the absence of a house society at all.

In this article, I will examine in detail an archaeological example from Iron Age Iberia (Fig. 1)—which I have explored in my Ph.D. thesis (González-Ruibal, 2003a), following the aforementioned points.

The case study: space vs. kinship in western Iberia

The western Iberian Peninsula is composed, from a geographical point of view, of the northern Iberian Plateau (herein called Meseta) to the east, and the mountainous peninsular edges to the north (Asturias) and northwest (Galiza, N. Portugal). Different communities inhabited this wide area—ca. 200,000 km² —in the Late Iron Age. Gallaecians, Lusitanians and Northern Asturians are the most important groups living in the North and

Fig. 1. The Iberian Peninsula in southwestern Europe.

Northwest, while Southern Asturians, Vacceans, Vettons, and Celtiberians were among the people that dwelled in the Meseta (Fig. 2). These groups are all mentioned by Greek and Roman authors from the 3rd century BC onwards (cf. García Quintela, 2004), such as Polybius (200–114 BC), Posidonius (135–151 BC), Artemidorus (active ca. 100 BC) or Strabo of Amasia—who wrote a monumental *Geography* in the time of Emperor Augustus (late 1st c. BC–early 1st c. AD), gathering together the works of previous scholars. Strabo, our main source for the Gallaecians in particular, used data from the mid-2nd and early 1st century BC (collected by geographers, officials and soldiers assigned to the area), as well as from his own lifetime. This period comprises more or less from 150 BC to 20 AD, that is, the time known by prehistorians as the Late Iron Age. Later historians and geographers, such as Florus or Apianus (2nd c. AD), also furnish data from the 2nd and 1st c. BC. All the groups mentioned above can

be labelled as "Celtic" because of the languages they spoke and some cultural affinities with other communities from tempered Europe.

The peoples that lived in the Meseta and those who inhabited the Northwest had two different material cultures, as expressed in different pottery styles, settlement patterns, domestic architecture, weapons, etc. The Meseta peoples had a more sophisticated material culture (wheel-turned pottery, and square houses), akin to that of the Mediterranean cultures of the period (and particularly to that of the Iberians); while the people from the Northwest lived in a more conservative material world, rooted into the previous Bronze Age traditions—as shown, for example, in the prevalence of hand-made pottery, archaic weapons, the abundance of small defended villages and the persistence of dense clusters of round huts in them. While the Meseta peoples had less but larger settlements, the Gallaecians, in the northwest, inhabited thousands of tiny hillforts (around 4000 sites are known) and only
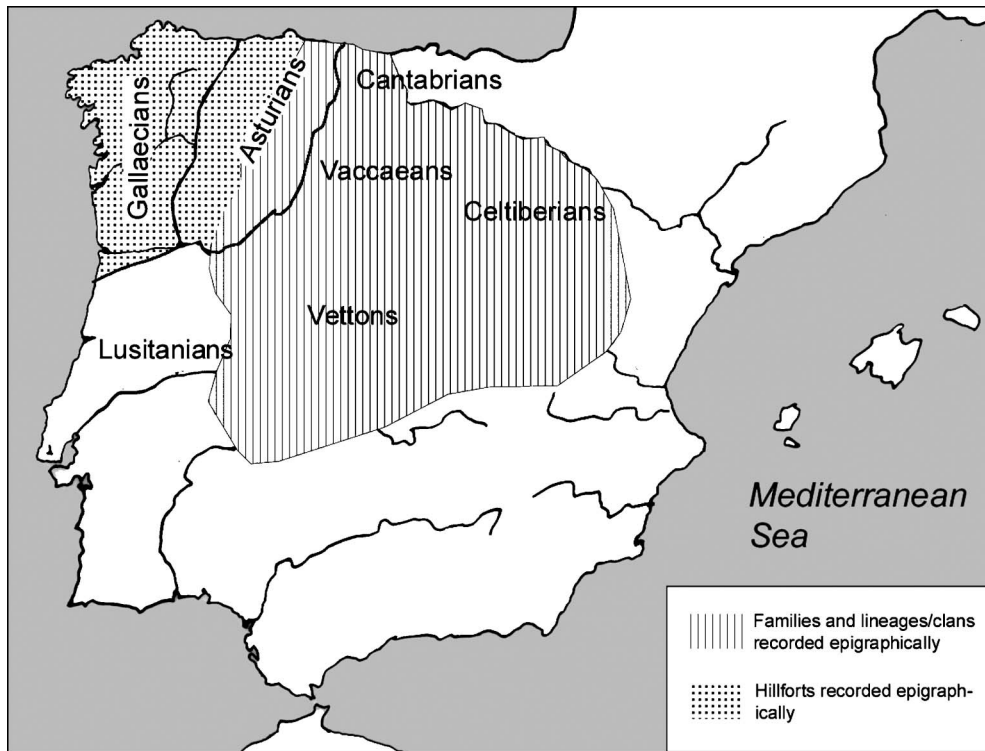
Fig. 2. The western Iberian Peninsula. Late Prehistoric ethnic groups, as reported by Graeco-Roman authors (3rd–1st c. BC).

a few larger towns (*oppida*). Apart from artefacts and structures, another kind of evidence is available, that marks a clear distinction between Meseta and Northwestern peoples: inscriptions in stone and bronze. Most of them are of early Roman date (early 1st– early 2nd century AD), when the indigenous structures were already going through great transformations, but others are prior to the effective conquest of the area—around 100 BC in the Meseta, 20 BC in the northern and northwestern mountains. The most important documents, for the aims of this article, are the so-called *tesserae hospitalis*, a pact of hospitality established between individuals or groups (families, lineages, clans, and hillforts) and materialized on a bronze sheet. Those from Gallaecians and Asturians are all of Roman date (after 20 BC), but among the eastern Meseta peoples tesserae where widely used just before the conquest. Nonetheless, even the documents from Roman times can be considered to reflect somewhat indigenous traditions.

If we use early Roman epigraphy (stone inscriptions and pacts of hospitality) to map social organization we can easily discern two different areas, which roughly coincide with the geographical and archaeological regions already pointed out (Fig. 2): one stretching out through the Meseta and its envi-

rons, where a system based on lineages and families—*gentilitates* and *gentes*—is attested (Alarcão, 2003) and another in the northwestern mountainous region (mainly Gallaecia), where a system based on defended villages—*castella*, represented in epigraphy with an inverted C, appears (Pereira Menaut, 1983). The terms *gentes* and *gentilitas*, Latin words used to describe families, lineages and clans, clearly point to the existence of a kinship-based social system (Fig. 3). *Castellum*, on the other hand, means hillfort (defended settlement), and it seems to be a reference of origin equivalent to that of *gens* or *gentilitas*, thus pointing at a territory-based system (Fig. 4). Due to the expansion of the so-called Celtiberian culture from East to West, the spread of the *castella* system was most probably reduced during the Middle to Late Iron Age (3rd–2nd BC). Thus, between the system based on lineages and those based on territories, a buffer zone can be observed were both *castella* and *gentes* appear (Alarcão, 2003; Mangas and Olano, 1995, pp. 18–20). The existence of lineages or clans in the Meseta area can also be attested through archaeological data alone, thanks to the existence of many cemeteries (4th–2nd c. BC) in which tombs are arranged in clusters, probably following kinship criteria (Fig. 5). Nothing comparable
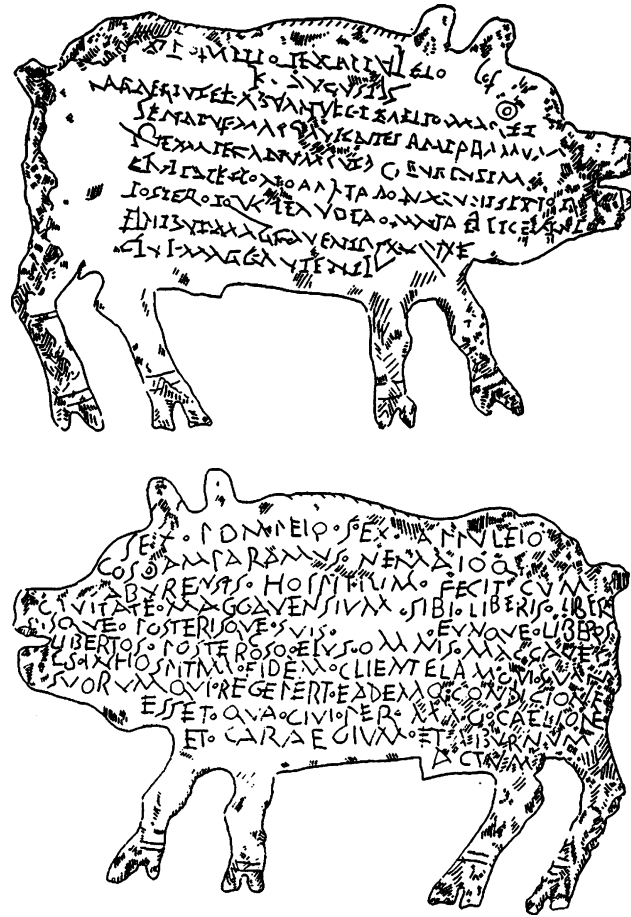
Fig. 3. *Tessera hospitalis* in the shape of a wild boar (a sacred animal among Celtic peoples), from the Vaccaean area (after Pérez González and Illarregui, 1992). An individual (called Amparamus), belonging to a lineage/*gens* (the Nemaioqum), is received with his family in hospitality by the denizens of the *civitas Maggavensium* ("the city of the Maggavensium [*gens*]").

can be found in the Northwest, where no necropolises have been found at all. This can be further related to the secondary role of lineages and kinship ties in general for organizing society among Gallaecians. The dead, here, seem to be embodied in the whole landscape, beginning from the place of the living itself: houses and settlements are the dwelling of the ancestors. Probably, as among the Torajans, identification with the house offers the individual a kind of immortality (Waterson, 2003, p. 36), as in other societies the tombs do.

I will focus now on the northwestern area (Gallaecia) where a territorial system seems to be in the place of a lineage-based society.

Territory vs. tribe

During a long period of time, the archaeology of the Iron Age communities of NW Iberia (8th–1st

BC) showed almost no interest at all for issues concerning social organization. Archaeology was basically a descriptive culture-historic activity, detached from theoretical developments everywhere in Europe or America. However, since the late 1980s, the study of the late prehistoric societies of the NW of Iberia has been much reinvigorated, as proved by the works of Fernández-Posse and Sánchez-Palencia Ramos (1998), Brañas (2000), Parcero (2002, 2003), and Sastre Prats (2001, 2002). César Parcero argues that the Iron Age populations of the second half of the 1st millennium BC were organized as a non-class "heroic society" with a germanic mode of production, implying a growing economic importance of families within the community (Gilman, 1995). This heroic society was a strongly hierarchical system imbued with aristocratic values and in which war ideology, hereditary power and wealth (cattle and jewels) played a prominent role. The theories of

Fig. 4. Tessera hospitalis from the Astur area. A man from a hillfort called Alobris (*castello alobrigaeco*) is received with his family in hospitality not by a lineage or clan (*gens*), but by a hillfort (*castellum Toletum*).
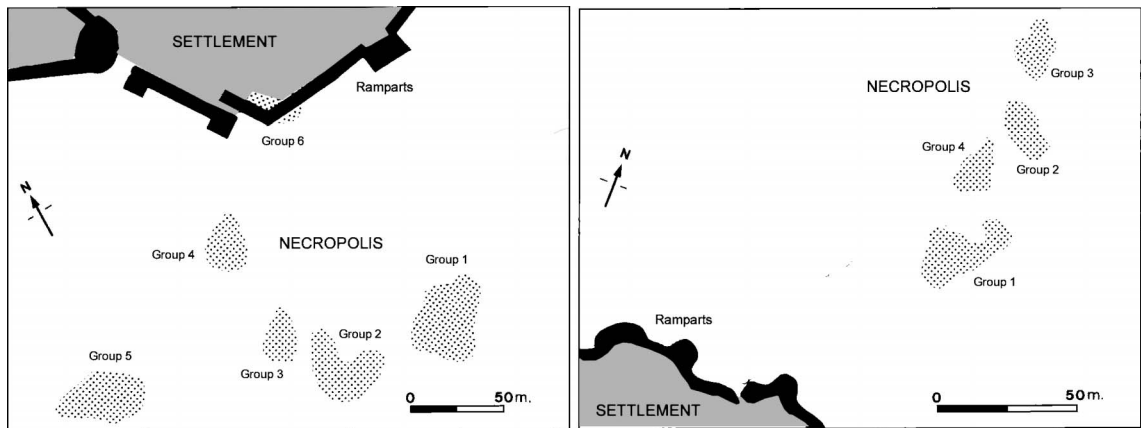

Fig. 5. Tombs probably grouped by real or fictive kinship (clients) in the necropolises of two Vetton hillforts (after Álvarez Sanchś, 1999).

Sastre, Fernández-Posse and others are diametrically opposed to those of Parcero. They argue that the type of organization that prevailed in the NW of Iberia in the Iron Age could be labelled as a peasant society, following the theories of Eric Wolf (1982) and other anthropologists. As in any other peasant society egalitarian values were extremely important—these authors sometimes describe pre-Roman communities as segmentary—and nuclear families played an outstanding social and economic role. They defend that war was, if not completely absent, at least something scarcely important in the local Iron Age. According to these authors, inequalities only developed after the Roman occupation of the area. Unlike Parcero, who describes a process of changing social systems, tending to a greater hierarchization throughout the 1st millennium BC, Sastre seems to propose a more homogenous Iron Age, with a single dramatic social transformation after the arrival of the Romans. I think that this model is the most flawed for archaeological reasons (mainly, the enormous amount of jewels and other hierarchi-

cal elements that have been located in Gallaecia) and for anthropological reasons (the original peasant societies model was developed based on farmers from modern state societies) and, thus, it can hardly account for the majority of the pre-Roman communities in the NW of Iberia. However, irrespective of the more or less hierarchical character of the Iron Age communities of Gallaecia, both groups of authors agree that kinship is the main organizing social principle. Thus, Parcero (2003, p. 271) thinks that social exploitation is restricted by kinship, and familial units, rather than individuals, are hierarchically structured. Families are also the most important economic and social units for the supporters of egalitarian polities, although in this case families are not hierarchically structured. All relations within the village are established by kinship ties.

Despite the fact that no lineages have been recorded at all in the epigraphic record among the Gallaecians, most authors still think that they should have had a kinship-based system, since "no polities based on territory are known anywhere" (Brañas, 2000, p. 16). Nevertheless, several ethnographic examples show this affirmation—quite widespread among prehistorians—to be wrong and at the same time help to understand how these peoples, to whom lineages were something secondary— at least not worth being quoted in epigraphy, could be organized.

Anthropologists have explored a certain number of communities in which social identity is established through a certain territory or place, rather than through real or imagined kin ties. Among the Southeast Asian Pipikoro, for example, self-identification happens through defining oneself in relation to a specific locality or neighborhood, or according to a historically framed co-origin (Sørum, 2003, p. 90). Local, or spatial, attachment is the source of ethnic identification: "a grounding of personal identification," says Sørum, "is mediated to a form of group identity brought to consciousness by the medium of the village as a metaphoric site of original gathering." If the village creates a collective identity, by building the house they construct a locality, or place, to which they can personally relate (Sørum, 2003, p. 92). Also in Southeast Asia, the people of Alor, as most Indonesian groups, use the organization of space as the main means to interpret their own social organization and to define social identity, even if lineages have a relevant role here. Not only houses, but the whole structure of the village is vital in shaping the social order (Scarduelli,

1991). Still in Asia, territory had a paramount importance in Medieval Japan (Beillevaire, 1986, p. 483).

Africa shows several similar examples. Among the Iraqw from Tanzania (Thornton, 1980) the village, rather than kinship, underlies all the social organization over the domestic group: spatial principles—not hierarchical principles, "shared substance" or economy—integrate independent homes, the smallest of the productive and reproductive units, into greater social and political units. Also in Eastern Africa, the structuring of the Kaguru territory (Kenya) is the base underlying the order of their culture. The alterations in the spatial order are those which could lead Kaguru society to its extinction (Beidelman, 1991). Still in Kenya, Moore (1986, p. 23) has pointed out that the Marakwet, who are theoretically organized in clans and lineages, consider the topological reference in the first place. "From my experience," says Moore, "the first question asked to a stranger is *ichono kornee*, 'from which village do you come?' Only then is it relevant to ask for the clan name ..."

Neither is Latin America free from territory-based societies. Rivière (1995) has underlined the importance of house, settlement and landscape in creating a social identity among the Panare from Guyana. Among the Yurok in North America territory was a primary determinant of group membership (Lévi-Strauss, 1982, p. 172). Finally, some traditional societies in Europe can be said to be organized through territorial principles. A thoroughly studied example is that of the modern peasant societies from the NW of Iberia (Lisón Tolosana, 1979). Galician peasants structured their social relations and established their collective identity with respect to their houses, the territory of their parish and, finally, to their *comarca* (shire). Instead of clans or lineages, parishes help to create a sense of belonging and a frame of reference.

The definite argument to support a residential membership rather than one based on real or fictive kinship in ancient Gallaecia is the aforesaid mention to hillforts (*castella*), instead of clans and tribes (*gens, gentilitas*). Thus, a Gallaecian in the 1st century AD established his or her identity in the following terms: "Nicer, son of Clutosus, from Cauriaca hillfort (*castellum*), from the people or territory (*populus* or *civitas*) of the Albioni" (ERA 14). On the contrary, an individual from the Meseta—a southern Asturian or a Celtiberian, wrote in his inscription: "Araus, son of Ablaecaenus, from the Desonci

family (*gentilitas*), from the tribe (*gens*) of the Zoe-lae" (CIL II 2633).

Hillforts (*castella*) enjoyed a remarkable auton-omy within wider political organizations (called *populi* or *civitates* by the Romans). They had their own protective deities (*Genium Castelli*), to whom altars were devoted. Hillforts as an institution and *personne morale* could erect monuments also to native or Roman gods. Such is the case of the shrines offered to Iuppiter by Aviliobris hillfort (CIRG I 66) and by Queledinus hillfort (Brañas, 2000, p. 184) (Fig. 6). The same function is carried out by families, clans or tribes in other parts of Ibe-ria. Although epigraphic data are from the 1st c. AD, it is reasonable to think that similar practices were carried out before the arrival of the Romans. The political territory of hillforts was not obviously restricted to the villages themselves. As the modern Galician parishes, the settlement was the center of a wider territory, which was economically and politi-cally under its control (Parcero, 2002). Hillforts were rather autarchic in both the economical and politi-cal sense, although supralocal organizations did

exist, especially in southern Gallaecia, where *oppida* (central places) lead to a whole reorganization of the landscape in the Late Iron Age, making smaller hill-forts dependent on those large walled towns. These towns with their territory were called *civitates* by the Romans, according to their own organization. Even where *oppida* did not exist, there could have been supralocal organizations based on the confederation of several hillforts (Parcero, 2002). In any case, the existence of ethnic groups or larger territories is attested in epigraphy and Roman texts all over Gallaecia.

The existence of political treaties among hillforts is recorded through the aforementioned hospitality pacts. These are better known in the area of tribes and lineages: that is the case of the *tessera hospitalis* signed by two extended families (gentilitates), the Desonci and the Tridiavi, of the Zoelae tribe (*gens*) (CIL II 2633). In the *castella* area, pacts are usually made between an individual and his family, on the one side, and a hillfort (*castellum*), on the other side: e.g. the document (Fig. 4) signed between Tillegus and his family (wife and children), on the one hand,
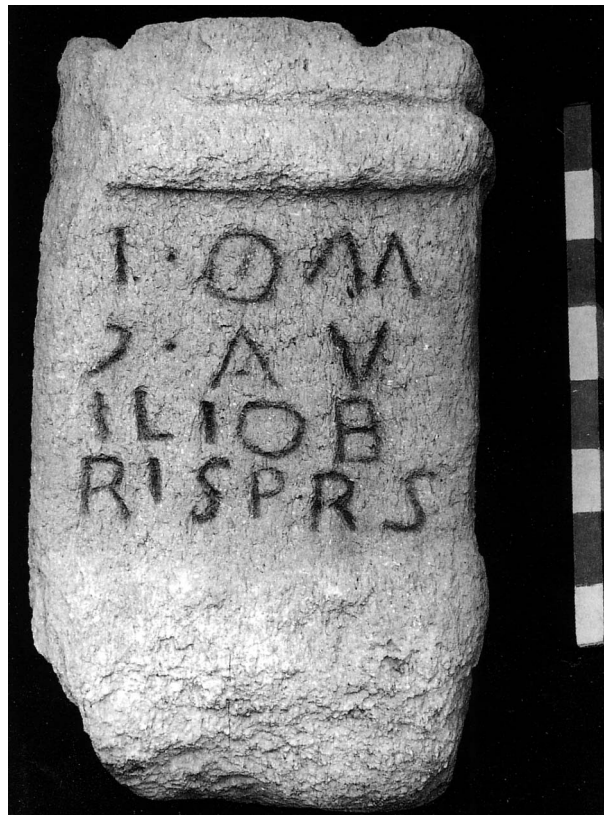

Fig. 6. A votive altar dedicated to Jupiter by (the community of) Aviliobris hillfort (after CIRG I).

and Toletus hillfort, on the other (IRPL 55). A later example would be that of the *tesserae hospitalis* signed between a Roman prefect and Coeliobriga hillfort, in the early 2nd century AD (Ferro and Lorenzo, 1971). Villages never sign this kind of treaty in the region of tribes and lineages, which means that the settlement per se was not invested with any political power there.

A territorial system is, therefore, attested in Gallaecia for the early Roman period, which should necessarily be based on a previous indigenous phenomenon. However, having a territorial organization does not imply a house society. In fact, although houses had a great importance in most of NW Iberia, not every group can easily be labelled as a house society. Thus, in the northernmost part of Gallaecia and in the most secluded and mountain-ous regions, houses seem to have had a rather negligible role in displaying and negotiating power. I will explore herein a particular area in Gallaecia where a house society model is very likely.

House vs. lineage

From the 4th century BC onwards, southern Gallaecia—what the Romans called Gallaecia Bracarensis—witnesses the progressive development of monumental domestic compounds (Fig. 7). This process increases from the mid-2nd century BC, with the appearance of towns (*oppida*), and the standardization of an architectural style and a peculiar art in stone (Calo, 1994; González-Ruibal, 2003a, 2004b). Gallaecian compounds (Fig. 8) are composed of different buildings, most of which have
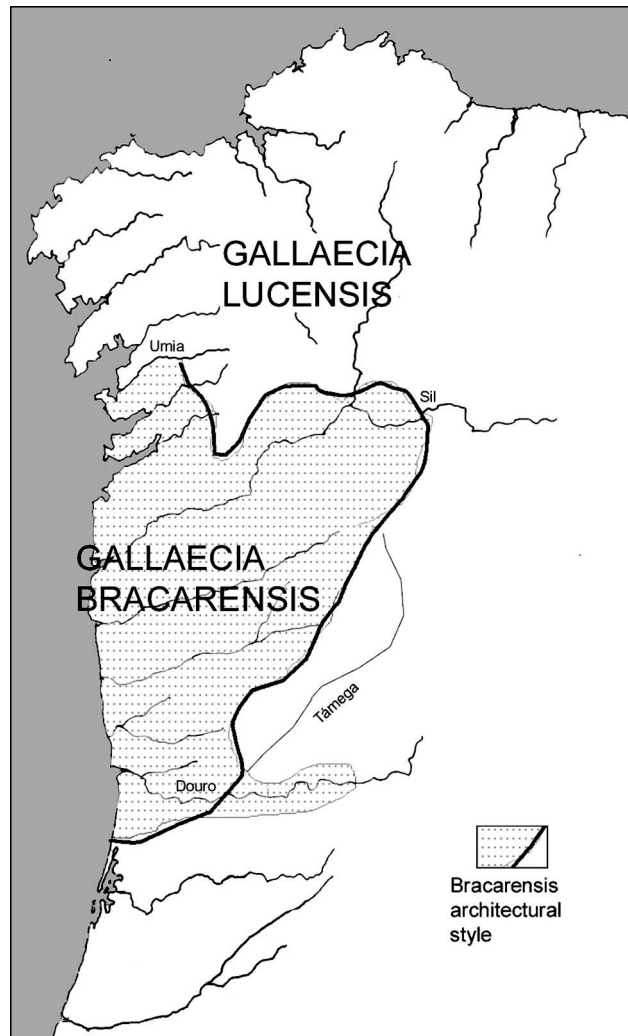

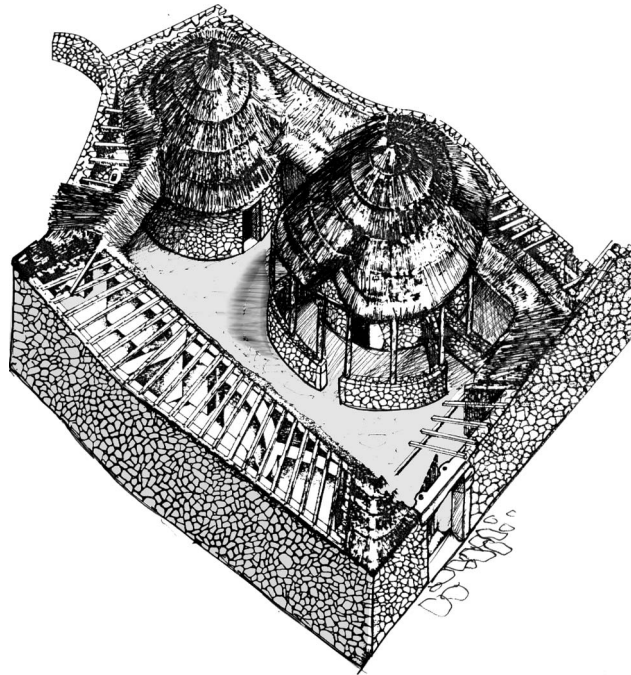Fig. 7. The area where southern Gallaecia architecture and oppida appear.

Fig. 8. Reconstruction of a typical southern Gallaecian compound (after Silva, 1999).

round plans: the central structure, that can be identified with a nuclear family, has a curved porch, sometimes decorated, and an oven to make bread. Indoors, there is a very elaborated hearth, made with well-carved and polished slabs, and sometimes a bench attached to the wall. Other huts were used as warehouses, stockyards, bedrooms and meeting-houses. All the structures enclose a paved area that worked as a courtyard. The relevance of the central structure is underlined by its sometimes better finishing and the use of architectural decoration. All ordinary activities, probably including threshing and other agricultural tasks, took place within the house. Each domestic compound was inhabited by a family. Depending on the size of the compound and the number of buildings, it could be a nuclear (only one central structure with porch) or an extended family (two or more central structures). In fact, it seems that the space of each family inside the village was becoming more relevant and self-contained by the Late Iron Age, as opposed to the more open layout observed in previous hillforts (Parcero, 2003, p. 288). This might be explained as a result of the increasing prominence of individual families—or houses—within the society of hillforts and *oppida*. We can clearly say, with Waterson (2003, p. 42) quoting a Torajan, that "the house is the centre of everything, because everything important is done

there—it is where we get children, where we eat our food, it's where we think, it's where we celebrate rituals".

We have to take into account the whole settlement, and not only particular compounds, to understand how this society was socially and spatially organized in a meaningful way. One of the best examples that we have is that of Sanfins hillfort, in northern Portugal (Silva, 1999). Sanfins is a big settlement (14 Ha), enclosed by four defensive walls. It has most of the elements that identify *oppida* as places controlled by an aristocratic group, such as a ritual sauna, statues of warriors, a ritual area on the summit of the settlement, and several examples of architectural decoration in stone. Here we can find at least three levels of spatial organization (Fig. 9): in the first place, a large section within the settlement, delimited by ramparts; in the second place, the quarter, defined by long, rectilinear, paved avenues; in the third place, the house, a compound delimited by walls and huts, with the courtyard in the middle. We can guess that the people that lived in the same section, and within the same section in the same quarter, had closer relations than with other people in the settlement. It is even possible that a whole quarter could be a house in Levi-Straussian terms, the domestic compounds being simply residential units. That may be implied by the fact that some
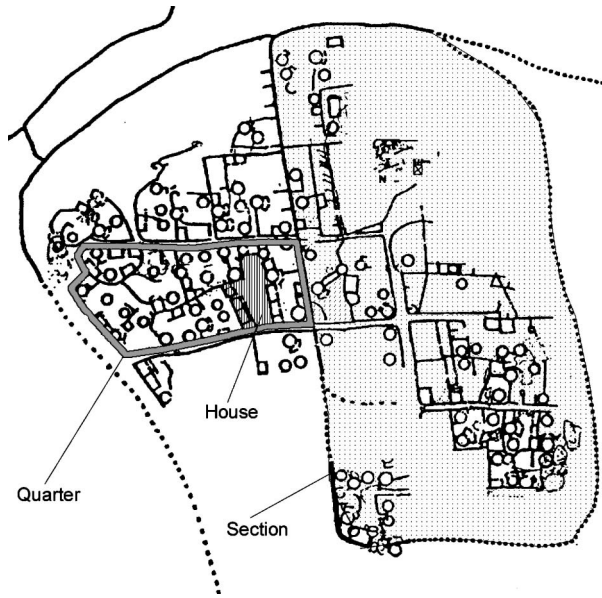
Fig. 9. Sanfins' central area, showing the distribution of urban space in sections, quarters and compounds (after Silva, 1999). Houses, in the Lévi-Straussian sense, may both be the compounds and the quarters (*grande maisons*).

compounds dissolve to form bigger compounds within the quarters, while the same is not possible between compounds from different quarters and sections, even if they are adjacent. On the other hand, it is also possible that both quarter and domestic compounds were "houses": quarters could well be "big houses"—a large group linked by the same ancestors (house founders) and a particular spatial location—and the domestic compounds could be "branch houses"—I will elaborate this below (see "Explicit references to houses"). We can compare these quarters to Chesson's neighborhoods in Early Bronze Age Arad (Chesson, 2003; Fig. 4), in Israel. Similar divisions are to be found in most house societies, loaded with symbolic and social values (Beil-levaire, 1986, p. 517; Scarduelli, 1991, p. 77) which, in the archaeological cases, are extremely difficult to recover. In our case, we can venture to say that the monumentalization of the boundaries and the conspicuous character of segmentation probably reflects an equally segmented social order, in which divisions are clear-cut and conspicuously marked.

In my opinion these communities were organized as a house society in the Late Iron Age and in the early decades after the Roman conquest (ca. 2nd c. BC/early 1st c. AD), when the system started to be superseded by a kinship-based system. I will follow the nine points mentioned at the beginning of this article in an attempt to prove how southern Gallaecians fit into the concepts proposed by Lévi-Strauss.

Hierarchy

The first point is probably the easiest to demonstrate: southern Gallaecians have plenty of elements that point towards a ranked social system. One of the most characteristic elements of hierarchy is the existence of urban settlements hosting large populations, at least in relative terms. The biggest *oppida* could have had around 4000 dwellers, a good amount of people if we bear in mind that the great majority of Iron Age settlements in the region, until the 2nd century BC, had less than 250 inhabitants (Alarcão, 2003, p. 25). Besides, these towns (*oppida*) show a planned organization of the space and have special structures, such as ritual saunas (Almagro-Gorbea and Álvarez-Sanchís, 1993), meeting houses (senates?), large avenues, and sanctuaries or public ritual spaces. Gold jewellery, oversized sculptures representing warriors and architectural decoration in stone—revealing an elite culture—are often found in these settlements (González-Ruibal, 2004b) (Fig. 10). Social differences, as we will see, were obvious in domestic compounds. Power in the Late Iron Age was based on the control of fertile lands, mining and industrial activities. Two "economic" activities, deeply interrelated, figure in a prominent place: trade and war—or peaceful and violent intercourse. Trade, especially Mediterranean trade, was controlled by the elites ruling the *oppida*, as in other European regions (González-Ruibal, 2004a). The
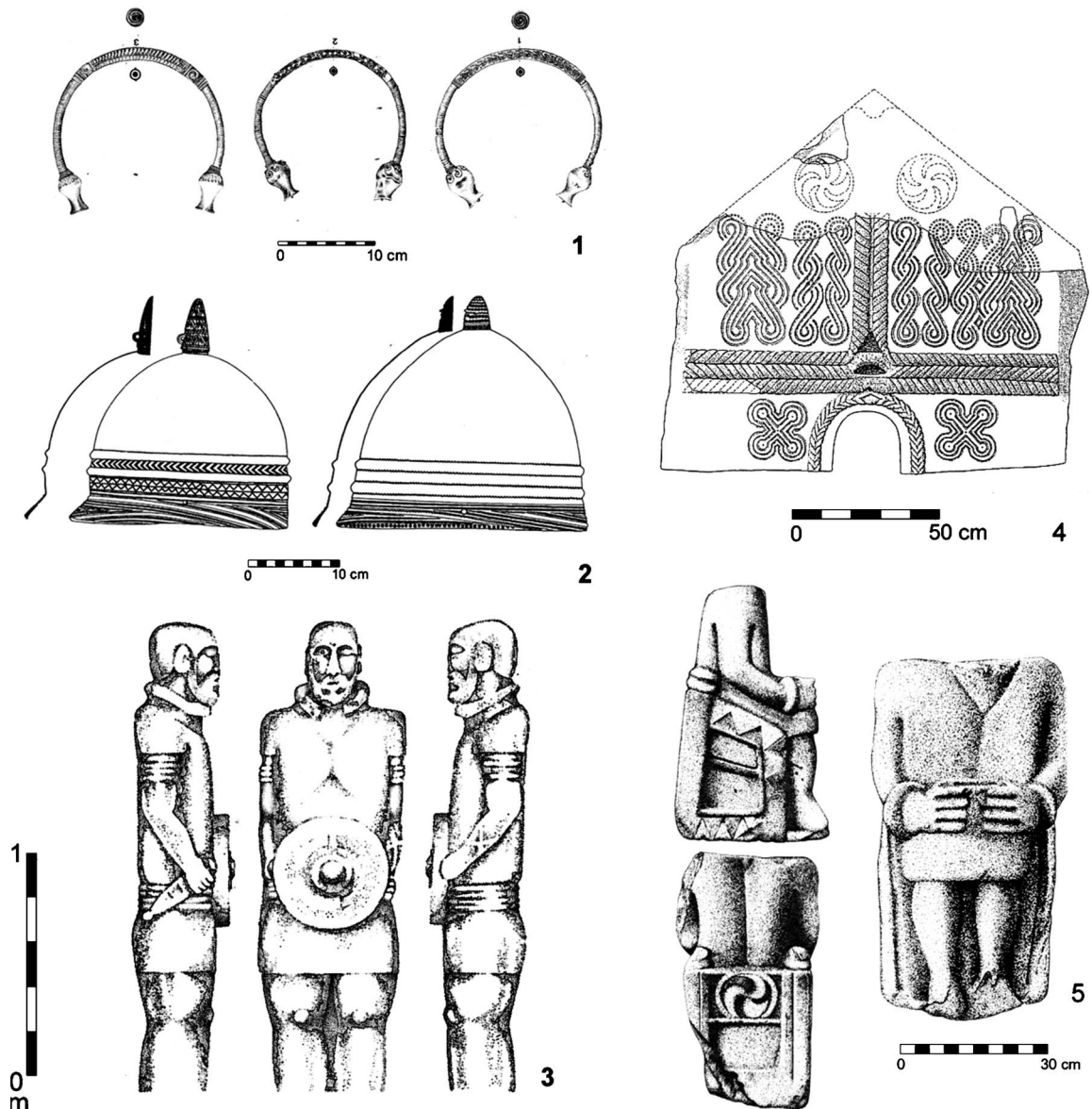
Fig. 10. Some aristocratic elements in southern Gallaecian material culture: 1. Gold torcs (after Silva, 1986). 2. Celtic-style Bronze helmets (after Queiroga, 1992). 3. Statue of a warrior with dagger, shield, bracelets and torc (after Silva, 1986). 4. The façade of a ritual sauna (after Queiroga, 1992), probably used in warrior rituals. 5. Representation of a male deity in a throne (after Luis, 1997).

most relevant import was wine, which stood prominently in rites and feasts sponsored by aristocrats. With respect to war, Gallaecian elites, as other Iberian rulers, profited from the turmoil and wars that devastated the Peninsula throughout the 2nd and 1st centuries BC, following the Roman arrival. Successful leaders, commanding war parties against the rich southern Iberian peoples and their allies (Romans or Carthaginians), seemingly obtained a substantial gain in their raids, both in material (booty) and immaterial terms (followers, prestige). The political economy of the Late Iron Age peoples was, therefore, based, as in other parts of "Celtic" Europe, on feasts and war (Dietler, 1990; Dietler and Herbich, 2001; Arnold, 1999).

Unclear descent systems

This is almost a truism in the case of prehistoric societies. The complex operations of kinship and

affinity in house societies have been approached by Gillespie (2000,a,b). This author observes that houses contribute to a broader understanding of how the ties that people perceive among themselves emerge from practical, as opposed to official, action and from the perspective of strategies rather than rules. Strategies enable the use of different kinship and affinal ties and alliances to accrue or perpetuate wealth. This also applies to exogamy and endogamy: the former can be used to capture titles, while the latter may avoid them leaving the house (Gillespie, 2000b, p. 37). All these opposing principles are given an appearance of unity by the house (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995, p. 8). However, what the ethnographer or historian might see is an undefined and entangled panorama—as the bewilderment of Kroeber or Boas with the Yurok and Kwakiutl reveals.

In the case of Gallaecia, we have some data coming from the work of ancient Graeco-Roman authors, which offer some information on kinship. The often contraposed theories on the social organization of the northern peoples of Iberia are, in itself, a good indication that something is going on. Traditionally, historians have talked about matriarchy and even amazonism in the region due to some classical references in which women play an outstanding social role (Caro Baroja, 1977, pp. 53–54). Others have defended a patrilineal system, based on later Roman inscriptions and in accordance with other Celtic peoples (Brañas, 1995). Bermejo Barrera (1978) has proposed the existence of relevant matrilineal elements in a general patriarchal system, for example in the significant role of the mother's brother, the women's right to decide in their brothers' marriages and the inheritance rights among women, according to Strabo (Str. 3, 4, 17–18). Thus, portable goods (such as torcs and other rank symbols) and livestock (cattle) would be likely transmitted by the maternal uncle to his nephews, while land would be inherited by daughters from their mothers. Some of these customs, however, were probably characteristic of the Cantabrians only, and not of the Gallaecians—the former are specifically mentioned in Str. 3, 4, 17. The absence of a similar description for the Gallaecians does not mean that they did not have such a system, since there are references to Gallaecian women's special status in other ancient writers (see below). The maternal uncle or grandfather played a relevant role in other barbarian societies from tempered Europe, which share significant features with house societies: that is the case of the Germanic *Oheim* (Cuvillier, 1986, p.

297). After the Roman conquest, the immense majority of Gallaecian epitaphs show a patrilineal descent. This may be considered a product of the Roman influence on the local social organization. However, it can also be due to the existence of strong patrilineal elements in the pre-Roman social system. After all, houses were identified by a male ancestor or founder, as we will see.

Houses as a critical symbol (rituality)

Houses achieved an enormous symbolic relevance from the beginning of the Middle Iron Age (ca. 400 BC) in southern Gallaecia with the generalization of monumental structures in stone and the increasing occupation of the space inside the villages with buildings. It has been argued that Late Iron Age houses, with their tendency to display a closed layout, are the metaphoric reflection of the whole hillfort, also isolated and autarchic (Blanco et al., 2003, p. 35). Unfortunately, good painstaking excavations, as those carried out in other European regions, are lacking in our area, thus hampering fine-grained interpretations of the use of domestic space and the embodiment of cosmological principles—cf. Hingley (1995), Oswald (1997), and Parker Pearson (1999). Nevertheless, some elements point to the importance of houses from a ritual point of view: the most striking feature, at least from the late 2nd century BC onwards, is the presence of quite elaborate stone carvings with an obvious cosmological meaning: triskels and swastikas are among the most recurrent symbols depicted in Iron Age domestic sculptures (Fig. 11). The same images are to be found in jewellery, rock art (sanctuaries), belts, fibulae and ritual buildings (saunas). Swastikas and triskels are well known Indoeuropean motives usually associated with the sun and with apotropaic functions. Houses were probably thought to be a possible prey for evil eye and other courses; hence, perceived as living beings—as many pre-modern houses are (Preston Blier, 1987), they were protected using the same devices that guarded people. Meaningfully, when decorated stones were destroyed in the early Roman period (González-Ruibal, 2003b), they were reincorporated in the house walls or as slabs in pavements. I have interpreted this as a way of constructing a new Roman identity by destroying the previous one, regarded as barbarian and backward. However, the broken remains of triskels or string-work were probably still invested with symbolic power, which could be transmitted into the

Fig. 11. Triskels, swastikas and wheels. Apothropaic and cosmic symbols recovered from the oppidum of Santa Trega. After Mergelina (1944-95).

new buildings, such as in the Torajan case (Waterson, 2003, p. 45).

In the Late Iron Age and Early Roman period some shrines and ritual structures have been discovered inside domestic compounds. In Romariz hillfort (Vila Nova de Gaia, N. Portugal) there is an unequivocal evidence: a Mediterranean-style altar table—made with a well-carved slab stone, a Graeco-Roman column and a Toscan capital—was found in situ, leaning against a house wall (Silva, 1986, p. 50, Est. XXX) inside a domestic compound. Domestic altars are very widespread among house societies and they are usually devoted to the ancestors' cult (e.g. for Medieval Japan: Beillevaire, 1986, p. 520). The more important the ancestors are, the more important the house will be; furthermore, the better they are looked after, the better the fate of the house will be. In Cividade de Âncora (Viana do Castelo, N. Portugal), there is a possible ritual space inside a domestic compound consisting of a series of stone receptacles filled with ashes and pottery. This was interpreted by its discoverer as a funerary structure (Silva, 1986, pp. 302–303, Est. XX), which is quite dubious. The ritual meaning of it, on the contrary, is very likely. Inside compounds, some buildings probably fulfilled ritual functions: these are round houses with benches and an occasional central hearth, very suitable for family meetings, as those recorded by Strabo (3, 3, 7). In some cases (Viana, 1963; Silva, 1986, pp. 49–50), vessels related to drinking (amphorae, jars) have been found indoors. Meaningfully, when Iron Age buildings started to change under Roman influence and began to use square plans, meeting houses kept the old circular plan for a longer time, undoubtedly due to their social relevance and their link to ancestral rites (González-Ruibal, 2003b).

Other elements are more ambiguous but worth noting nevertheless: decorated hearths are quite common (e.g. Sanfins, Castelo de Faria, Santo Estevão da Facha in Portugal; Montealegre in Galicia). They are usually made of clay and have geometric incised designs (Almeida et al., 1981, Est. III, p. 4; Almeida, 1982) (Fig. 12). Hearths seem to enjoy a great symbolic relevance in the Middle and, especially, Late Iron Age, as shown by the great investment in their construction. They occupy a good portion of the floor surface and are constructed with big, well shaped stones—on the social and symbolic relevance of hearths see Sørensen (1999, pp. 161–165). Finally, some votive deposits have been discovered in house foundations although they are by no means usual.
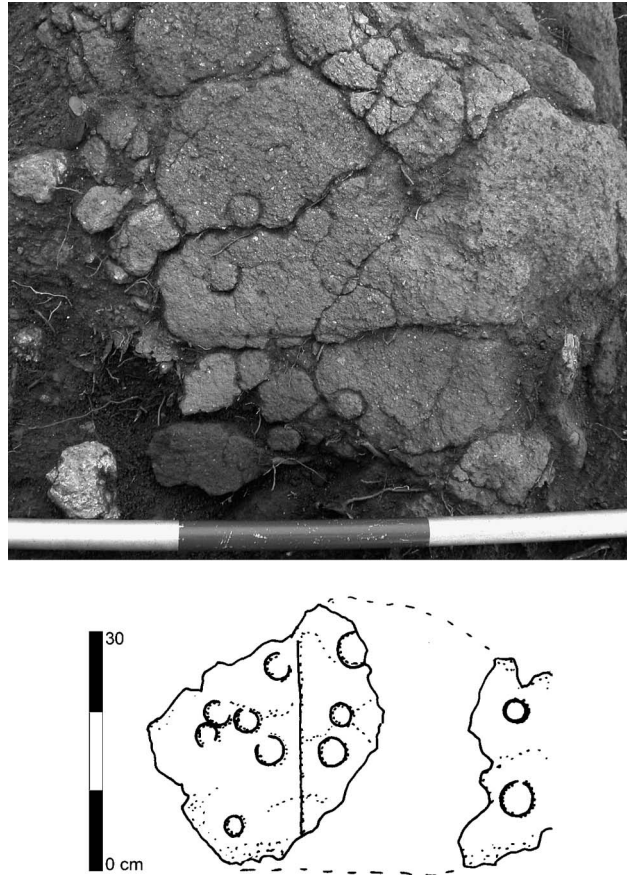
Fig. 12. Two decorated hearths. Above: Montealegre (photograph by Roberto Aboal Fernández). Below: Santo Estevão da Facha (after a photograph by Almeida et al., 1981). Both are dated to the 2nd–1st c. BC.

Probably, the coarse archaeological techniques used by local archaeologists have overlooked many of these ritual deposits. One of the most likely examples comes from the foundations of an oval stone house in Baroña hillfort (A Coruña, Galiza): several brooches, glass beads and other small metal objects were recovered in the foundations of the stone wall (Calo and Soeiro, 1986, pp. 19–20). Jewels discovered under pavements and walls could also be linked to this kind of practices, but, again, there are but a few good recordings of treasure spots. The acidity of soils have prevented the discovery of human or animal bones that could be related to foundational sacrifices, except in one case: Meirás hillfort, in northern Galicia, where several human, bovid and horse bones have been recorded under domestic structures (Luengo, 1950). This must be linked to similar special deposits in the British hillforts (Hill, 1995). As in the British Isles, the prevalent orientation of buildings might be linked to the embodiment of cosmological principles in houses (Fig. 13).

Finally, Gallaecian houses, as in other house societies, have a life history, a biography, that must have been intertwined with those of their human inhabitants (Waterson, 2003, p. 36; Gillespie, 2000a, p. 16). Gillespie (2000a, p. 3) has noted that "a key function of houses is to anchor people in space and to link them in time." The temporal dimension would include "the domestic cycle of individual house groups, the life history of the structures, the continuity and changes experienced by social houses over generations, and the time depth inherent in the ideology of the house or its valued heirlooms" (Gillespie, 2000a, p. 3). I was able to excavate a good example of these long-lived structures (González-Ruibal, 2004c): a stone house abandoned in the late Middle Iron Age (ca. 2nd century BC) in the hillfort of Pena Redonda was rebuilt at least five times since the Early Iron Age (around five centuries before), with the new houses being repeatedly erected over the remains of the previous structure (Fig. 14). The site was abandoned just before the apogee of the
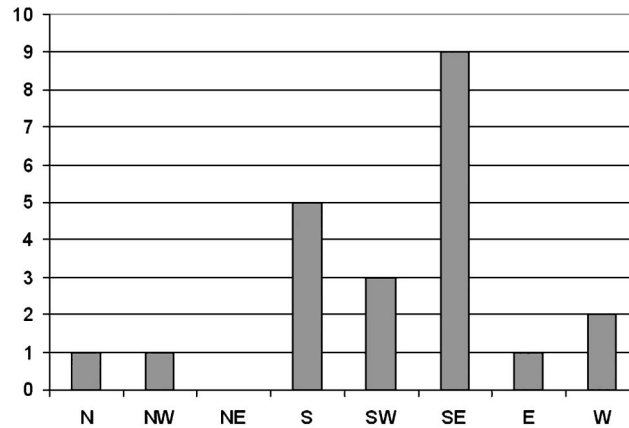
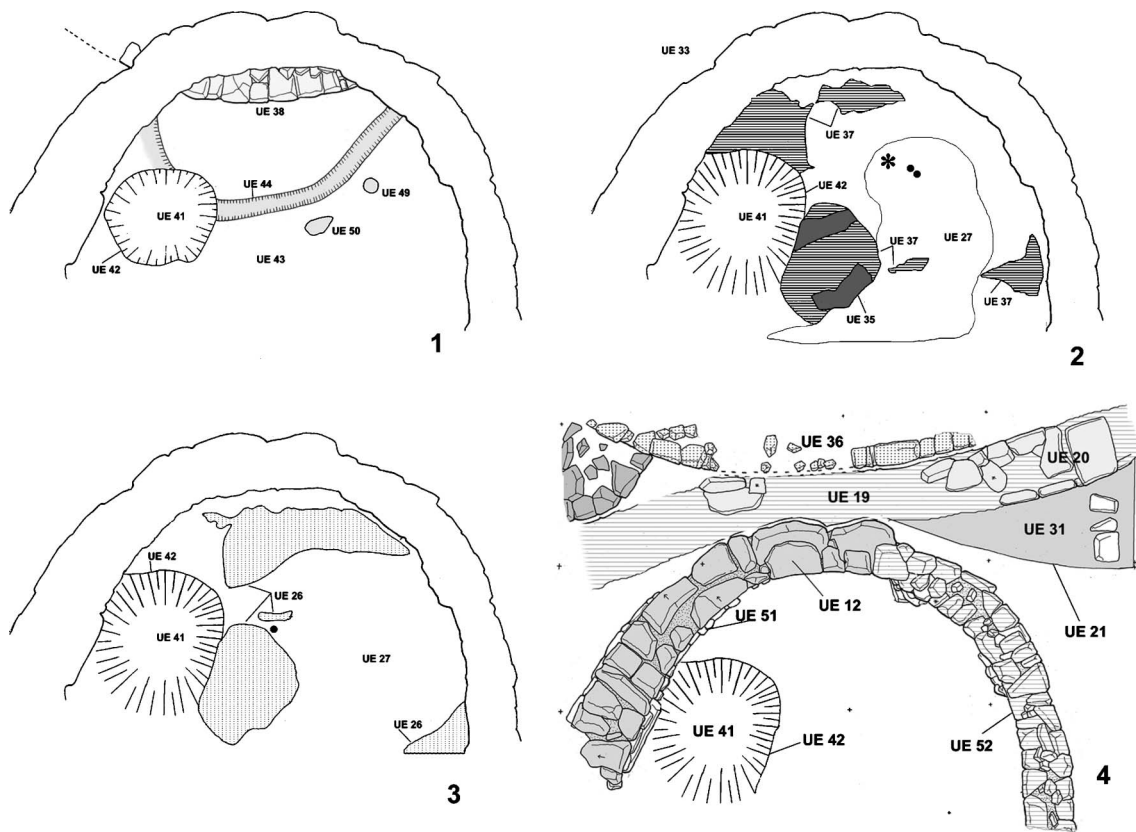Fig. 13. Orientations of the main houses in the oppidum of Santa Luzia.

Fig. 14. The evolution of a house from the 8th c. BC to the late 2nd c. BC. 1. Phase I (ditch) and II (round stone wall). 2. Phase III (pavement of a perishable? hut). 3. Phase IV (pavement of a stone hut). 4. Phase V (round stone house). After González-Ruibal (2004b).

house system, so we lack decorated hearths, sculptures and other elements that enrich the architecture of the Late Iron Age. However, the houses in the hillfort that succeeded this one in the early 1st c. BC (Gaxate) were endowed with decorated friezes and swastikas (Calo, 1994, pp. 271–274). The continuous construction of houses in the same place for long

periods of time reveals the outstanding importance of ancestors, the sense of place, the rootedness of homes (cf. Borič, 2003) and, above all, the idea of perpetuity (Gillespie, 2000a, p. 12). Throughout this long period, the architectural layout shifted, but, as Waterson (2003, pp. 48–49) reminds, "as houses are constantly being renewed, they can be reborn in new

styles." Similar sequences are known in other parts of Gallaecia. Kroeber also noted that the planks, in Yurok houses, are replaced, "but the structure occupy the identical spot" (quoted in Joyce, 2000, p. 199). Similar architectural sequences are known in other parts of Gallaecia. The most important refurbishing tends to affect the main structure (the one endowed with a characteristic central porch in Late Iron Age examples), rather than store rooms, granaries or bedrooms (e.g. Lorenzo, 1973).

Houses as a social symbol of distinction

Gallaecian domestic compounds show important differences among them. Some compounds have a dozen houses while others only have two or three. Some have plentiful sculptures and others none. Finally, some have jewels and an important quantity of imports, while others have but a few. Similar differences as regards house size and the quality of portable goods have been studied by Earle and his team in Peruvian pre-Hispanic settlements with remarkable results (Earle, 1997, pp. 59–61). Houses and their content, as in other agrarian societies around the world, are an expression of the economic success of the family unit (Moore, 1986, p. 11). As it has been pointed out in previous paragraphs, the rough methods employed by archaeologists excavating hillforts in Spain and Portugal destroyed an enormous amount of evidence. The difference in the number of structures can be easily calculated (Fig. 15), but this can hardly be done with the items that have been found in each compound. Therefore, we have to rely on some recent excavations and the re-interpretation of disperse old recordings. None-

theless, we have a relevant quantity of data to propose strong inequalities among domestic compounds.

Differences among houses can be deemed to show, borrowing from Bourdieu's concepts, differences in economic, social and symbolic capital (especially Bourdieu, 1984). To put it simply: a domestic compound which has numerous buildings related to agricultural and storing activities will point to the important economic capital of its inhabitants; several main houses (those with porch and central stone hearth), each one relatable to a nuclear family, reveal an important social capital, i.e. a huge family composed of kin and political ties—big families have big houses, says Bourdieu (1997, p. 180); and finally, compounds with richly decorated stones, fine ware and imports hint at an outstanding symbolic capital. As one would expect, economic, social and symbolic capitals tend to appear together in the same domestic compounds. Power and prestige were negotiated by different compounds, whose leaders probably strove to attain higher quotes of the different capitals through political alliances, war, marriages, increase of agricultural production and the investment of surplus in the acquisition of imports and jewels and the enhancing of family buildings (decoration, architectural projects).

One of the few well-excavated *oppida* in the NW of Iberia, that of Santa Trega has yielded interesting results regarding the differences between domestic compounds. During the excavations conducted by Peña Santos (1985–86), the compound that had a higher number of structures related to living and economic activities was also the one that provided a higher number of stone decorations, a short sword
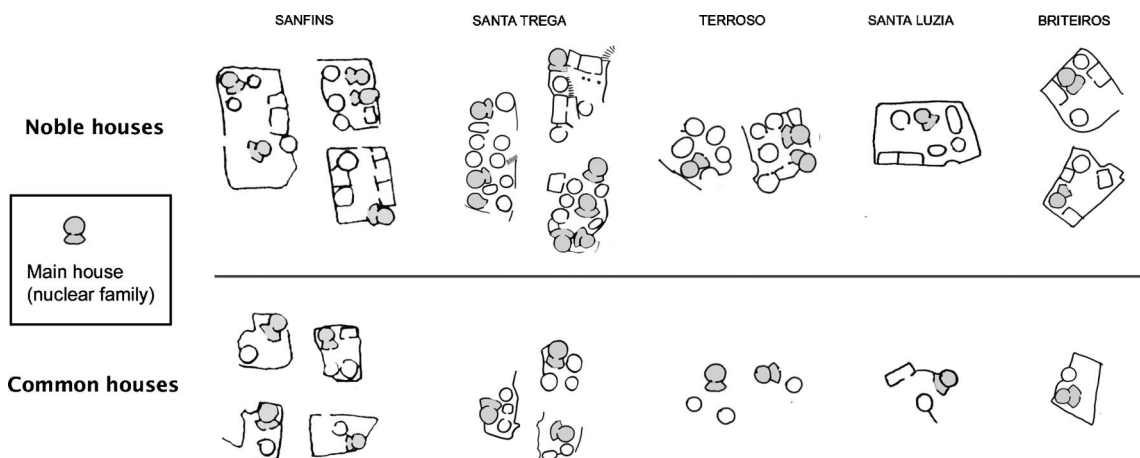

Fig. 15. Noble and common domestic compounds in five Gallaecian oppida.

(weapons are seldom recorded inside hillforts) and luxury imports, in particular, a fine polychromous glass vessel (millefiori) from Italy, extremely rare in Iberia. In the *oppidum* of Sanfins, in northern Portugal, one of the largest domestic compounds, endowed with seven buildings (most of them granaries and warehouses), provided a fragment of a gold torc (Jalhay, 1950). Those compounds which seem wealthier usually have more square structures (probably store houses and stockyards), as opposed to traditional round huts; a phenomenon which is well attested nowadays in Sub-Saharan countries (Moore, 1986; Lyons, 1996). As in the Cameroonian example explored by Diane Lyons, building rectangular houses under the Roman empire would have been a way of displaying a solvent political identity. People closer to power were those more interested in building the new type of houses. In the aforementioned compound from Santa Trega, there is a square warehouse, which is one of the few to be found in the whole *oppidum*, while the compound from Sanfins has four square structures out of seven.

It is unlikely that sculptures and friezes were the exclusive privilege of noble houses, given the abundance of architectural ornaments. However, it seems very probable that the most elaborated programs, including those with Latin inscriptions from the time of Augustus onwards, were restricted to the elites, analogous to Torajan fine carved wood houses (Waterson, 1990, p. 140; 1997, p. 67; 2003, pp. 45–46). The doors from Sabroso and Cividade de Âncora (González-Ruibal, 2004b, pp. 128–129) (Fig. 16), for example, are outstanding specimens of pre-Roman art which only a few aristocrats could have afforded. Most of the houses probably had to be satisfied with a triskel or swastika. In fact, we could perhaps distinguish, on the one hand, a noble art, characterized by string-work, stylized palm-tress and interlaced SS (Fig. 17), which tend to enhance key parts of the house—mainly the entrance—and

Fig. 16. A door's frame from a noble house in the oppidum of Cividade de Âncora. Museu de Guimarães. The altar and the baetyls are not related to the door.
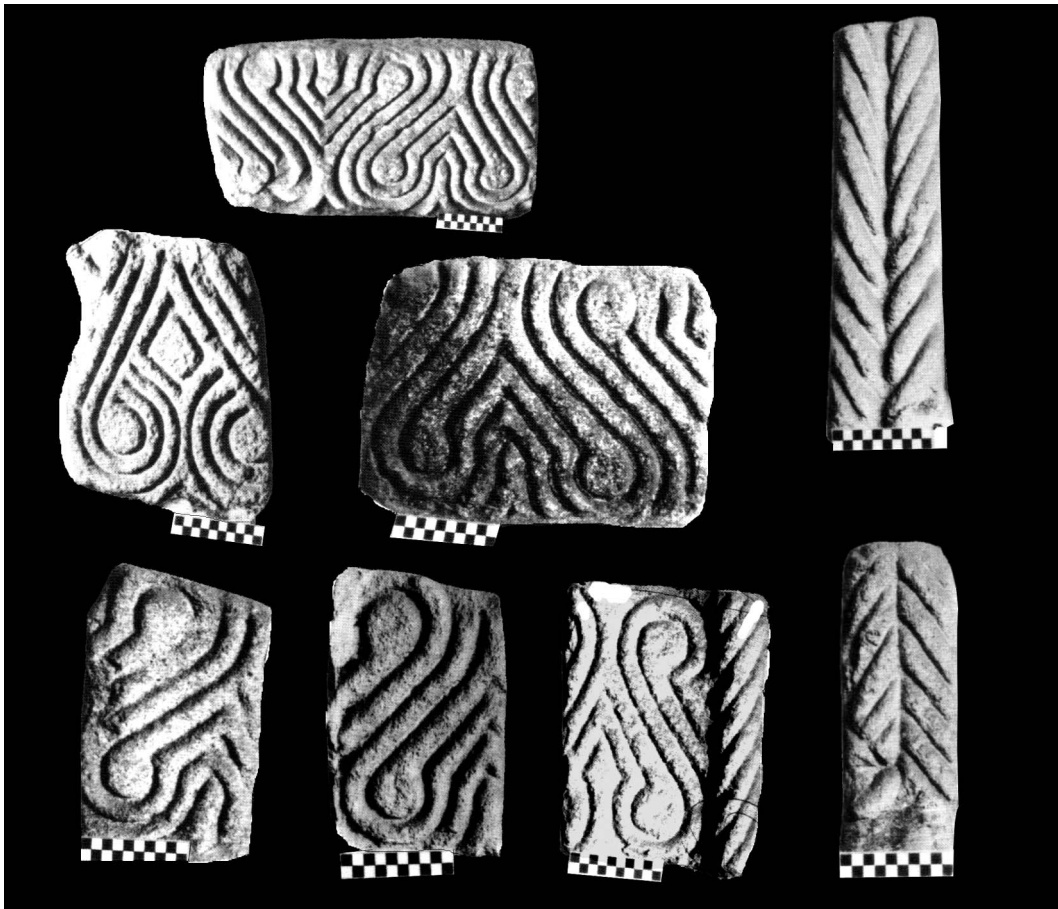
Fig. 17. Decorated friezes from a noble houses (after Calo, 1994).

to cover wide surfaces (such as in sanctuaries and ritual saunas), and, on the other hand, a more popular art, probably characterized by more practical concerns, to which triskels and other apotropaic elements would belong. This is not to say that noble houses did not have triskels—they did: the finest examples are found therein. Likewise, not all commoners could afford a decorated stone to put in his or her house. In fact, the appropriation of cosmological elements, key for the reproduction of the social and natural order (as represented by triskels and swastikas), by noble houses was probably an important element in the political economy of aristocrats. As Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995, p. 12) say "decorative elaboration of the house's external façade … may serve as a sign for the inhabitant's identity, wealth and powers and as vehicle for the conspicuous display of mythologically sanctioned powers and prerogatives …." In our case study, not only decoration but also well carved masonry might have showed the noble character of a building.

Gallaecian noble houses, then, as Torajan houses, were designed "by its impressive size, distinctive shape, and fine ornamentation, to give visible substance to a family's claim to superior status, and to serve as an enduring sign of their prestige" (Waterson, 1990, p. 140).

Titles of nobility and names

Names are extremely important in house societies. In Medieval Europe, the same names can be transmitted repeatedly within the same house; names with similar suffix or prefix can be considered exclusive of a certain house; or, finally, a son may adopt the grandfather's name and so on (Lévi-Strauss, 1982, p. 175). An interesting case is that of the archaic Greek isonimy, the custom of naming the son with the father's or grandfather's name, in order to preserve through generations the glory and reputation (*kleos*) of the ancestors (Svenbro, 1988, pp. 85 ff.).

As it has been pointed out before, literacy does not appear in Gallaecia before the late 1st century BC, after the Roman conquest, and its generalization among elite members is not prior to the mid-1st century AD. Therefore, when we begin to have written documents in the region, the indigenous culture is being radically transformed under Roman pressure. Notwithstanding the alteration of local social structures, the earliest written documents, as it has been noted for *tesserae hospitalis*, clearly reflect pre-Roman features. The most obvious case is that of native names: Camalus, Medamus, Coronerus, Caturo, Viriatus, Corocaudius and many more (cf. Untermann, 1965, maps 26, 33, 54, etc.) are undoubtedly Gallaecian (or Lusitanian) names, only to be found in the NW of Iberia. Some names are recurrently repeated in graffiti on pottery, monumental inscriptions, rock carvings and epigraphs (altars and tombstones). One of the most common names is that of Camalus, which is ubiquitous in southern Gallaecia and Lusitania. However, this does not mean that the name was socially very widespread. The fact that it has been preserved in a written form reveals its condition as a status name. Furthermore, perhaps only a house or a group of houses were allowed to use it. In the *oppidum* of Briteiros, for example, no less than 15 stone inscriptions with the name Camalus have been found (Cardozo, 1976). This is the densest cluster of inscriptions in any hillfort of the NW of Iberia (see below). Most of these inscriptions have been recovered from the *oppidum*'s acropole, in an area where several ritual elements have been discovered (a statue of a deity, deposits of human bones, a huge meeting house and several decorated stones). The *Camali* from Briteiros must have been an important family—or rather house—at the eve of the Roman conquest. Their relevance is proved not only by inscriptions, but also by a series of pot stamps with the name, showing that this house had an important industrial role in the *oppidum*. Therefore, the *Camali* had both a huge symbolic (stone inscriptions) and economic (pottery production) capital. That for Gallaecians the name and its preservation within the house was relevant is showed by the plentiful vessels—most of them store jars—with the name *Argius Camali* ("Argius, Camalus' son," or "from Camalus' house") depicted on it (Fig. 18). Thanks to the existence of several stamps with non-alphabetic or pseudo-alphabetic symbols, we can infer that important houses were also identified by specific icons before the advent of writing.
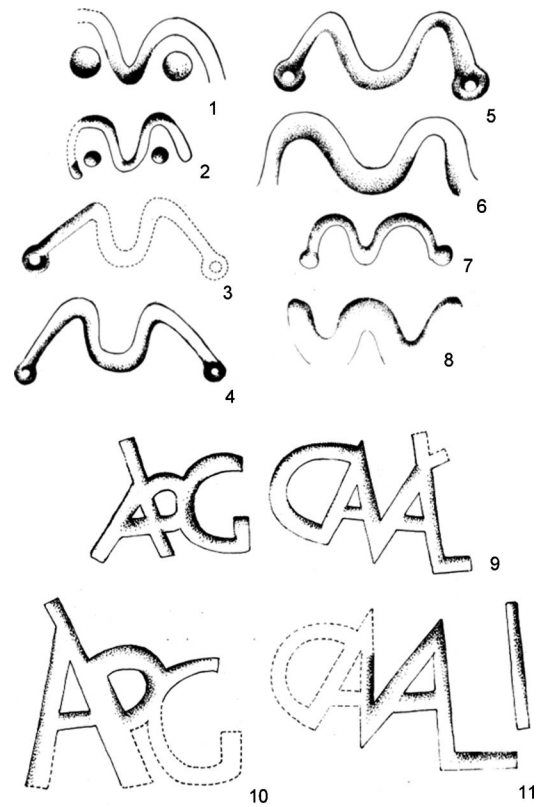

Fig. 18. Anepigraphic and alphabetic symbols found in pottery from the oppidum of Briteiros (after Silva, 1986).

The emphasis on the inscription of name and titles, whether alphabetic or non-alphabetic, recalls that of the ancient Maya (Joyce, 2000, pp. 208–210) and could be an index of the raising or consolidation of a house system.

It is more difficult to ascertain whether titles known through Latin are reflecting previous indigenous ranks or are completely new. There are a few early inscriptions recording power positions under the new order: they inform us about the existence of chiefs and civil dignataries called *principes* and *magistri*. There has been a long debate on the meaning of *princeps* (lit. "prince," "principal person") but it may be equated probably to other titles recorded in barbarian Europe during the Roman conquest and its aftermath, such as *rex*, *regulus* and *princeps* itself (Pereira Menaut, 1983, pp. 208–209). The most likely option is to see in this title the survival of a pre-Roman institution, whose name is unknown, appropriated by the Romans to reorganize the conquered territories. *Princeps*, then, would probably mean "paramount chief." It is difficult to know if they had power over a whole *populus* (lit. "people") or large

political group, or just over a hillfort and its territory. In epigraphy, they appear as "the chief of the X people": *princeps Coporum*, *princeps Albionum*, etc., but in some cases, the territory is too wide to consider that it could be ruled by a single chief— e.g. *princeps Cantabrorum* (Mangas and Martino, 1997). In southern Gallaecia, where towns (*oppida*) are known, we should expect these *principes* to be the rulers of considerably large territories: at least those controlled by an *oppidum*. Unfortunately, the title has still not been recorded in southern Gallaecia, but we have other data supporting their existence: on the one hand, the names already mentioned unequivocally point towards the existence of paramount chiefs or kings, imbued with heroic virtues (Brañas, 2000, pp. 115–142): the root *Korios*, present in different names (Corocaudius, Coronus, Corotiacus, Corocaucus) means "army," and thus the name would be translated as "army chief" (Silva, 1986, pp. 269, 293).

Furthermore, we have oversized representations of warlords, with their weapons and jewels, which were located at the entrance of the walled towns (see Fig. 10, no. 3, above). They are probably idealized representations of ancestors, but they must be reflecting the outlook and power of the actual leaders. We know around 20 of these statues—those of Lezenho, Sanfins and São Julião (N. Portugal) are amongst the most impressive. They appear throughout southern Gallaecia, and their presence coincides with that of the proto-urban settlements (*oppida*) (González-Ruibal, 2004b, pp. 119–120). Some of the warrior statues were later inscribed with the name of chiefs and families. That is the case of Malceinus, Dovilus' son, whose name means, "prince's son" (Brañas, 2000, p. 127). Camalus, one of the most common names in Gallaecia and Lusitania, is again related to war (*cam*, in Irish, means "battle," "fight") (Brañas, 2000, pp. 135–136). Brañas (2000, p. 137) thinks that the fact that many feminine names have etymological roots linked to concepts of leadership and violence could be related to a practice of isonimy, similar to that of ancient Greece, aimed at the preservation of relevant family names within the house. I agree with her on that, but I would argue, against her opinion, that this fact points towards the political importance of women in the Gallaecian house society and elaborates on the idea that matrilineal—and not only patrilineal—ties are relevant. The naming of women with prominent house names could be either explained by the incorporation of important women to a certain house, as a political

strategy, or by the women's power to keep and transmit their family name.

Heirlooms and inherited elements of rank

Recent studies have stressed the relevance of artefacts, especially heirlooms, in showing and transmitting family power (Joyce, 2000; Lillios, 1999). Valuable items, especially those with a long biography and distant provenances, are repositories for the fame of members of the house in house societies (Joyce, 2000, p. 203). Waterson (1997, pp. 69–70) points to the existence of specific heirlooms in Indonesia which were used to show the power of a family, such as swords and stones. They were attached to ancient prestigious ancestors and mythical narratives, which further added to the mystique of the noble houses (Waterson, 1997, p. 73). Things that may be interpreted as heirlooms are abundant in the Iron Age record of NW Iberia. Gallaecian material culture was extremely conservative. Similar artefacts and typologies appear time and again throughout
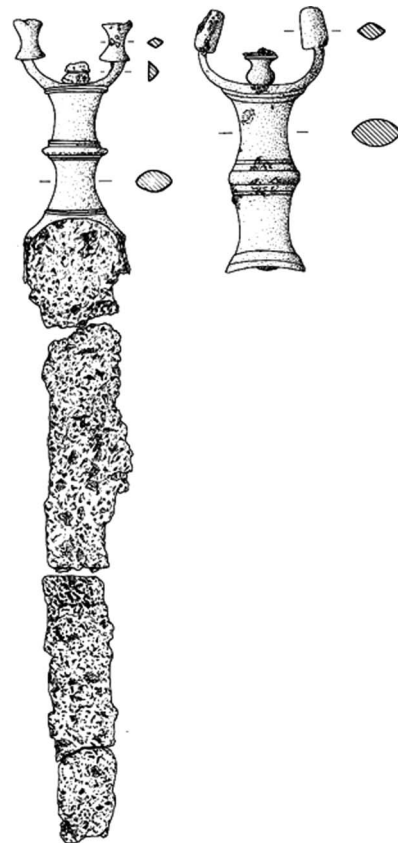

Fig. 19. Two antennae daggers from the oppidum of Santa Trega. After Carballo (1994).

the whole Iron Age. Objects that were discarded elsewhere a long time ago, were common in Gallaecia much later. Sometimes they were repeated according to ancient models, sometimes old artefacts were preserved and passed on. This is especially true for weapons: even in the Late Iron Age, warriors were armed with bronze spear heads—which were ruled out from the usual panoply in the rest of Europe five or six centuries before, and antennae daggers, which were typical of the Early Iron Age in tempered Europe (8th–6th centuries BC), were still widely used—or kept—among Gallaecians in the 1st century BC. Antennae daggers have appeared in some of the biggest Gallaecian *oppida*, such as in Santa Trega (Carballo, 1994, p. 46). Their archaic character could be better explained considering the daggers as heirlooms, linked to the warrior virtues of the ancestors (Fig. 19). A good example is that from Taramundi hillfort (Asturias), where a radiocarbon-dated Bronze Age dagger (1200–800) was located in a late 1st c. BC pavement, inside a house (Villa Valdés, 2002, p. 153 Tab. 1). A Bronze Age axe (with a similar chronology) was discovered in the Late Iron Age

hillfort of Viladonga (Arias Vilas and Durán Fuentes, 1996, pp. 57, 58) in northern Galiza.

One of the most typical items associated to houses in house societies are jewels and personal adornments, which may be redolent of the crowns and jewels of the European royal houses. In some ethnographic cases, gold or silver heirlooms rend sacred the houses that store them, and became the house's insignia (Waterson, 1990, p. 142). Jewellery can be obtained through marriage—as dowries or bride-wealth (Waterson, 1990, p. 161), or through looting, in war raids. In both cases, the inheritance of the artefacts usually preserve the stories about their acquisition and enhances their symbolic relevance (cf. good examples in Joyce, 2000, pp. 205–206). Jewels have an astonishing survival rate in the Gallaecian Iron Age: torcs and necklaces that were produced in the 5th–4th centuries BC were treasured as late as the 1st century BC, such as the diadem from Elviña hillfort (Luengo, 1979), which appeared in the same hoard as glass beads and other adornments. The Bedoya treasure, composed by a pre-Roman diadem from the 2nd–1st c. BC and a couple of earrings of the same or earlier date, were depos-
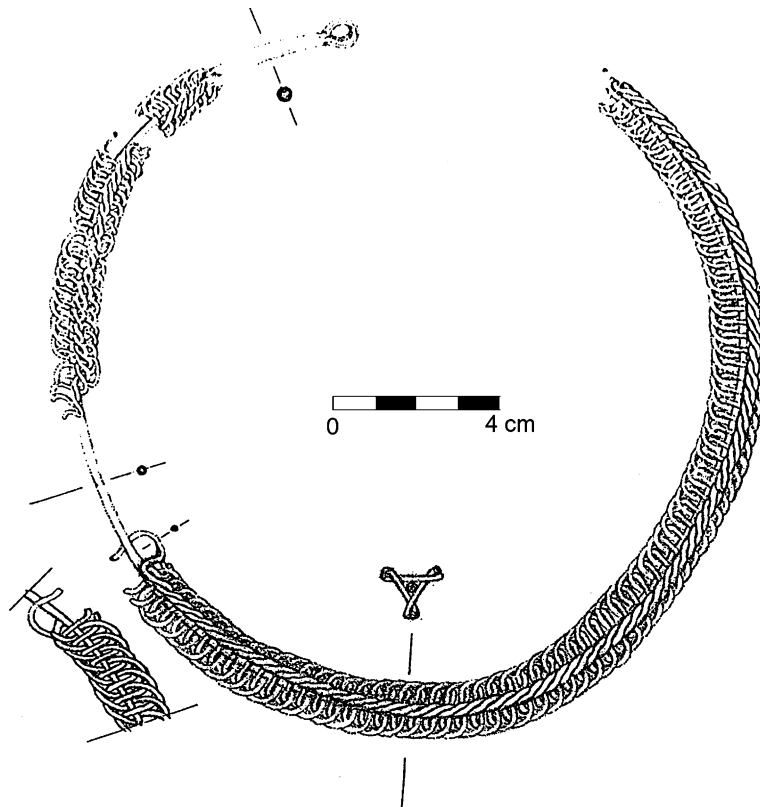

Fig. 20. A silver torc from the hoard of Cividade de Bagunte. After Ladra (2001).

ited in a bronze urn with Roman coins, the latest one minted under Emperor Domitianus (96 AD) (Balseiro, 1987). A treasure composed by five silver torcs (Fig. 20) was discovered in the *oppidum* of Bagunte (Ladra, 2001). The torcs were probably ransacked during the Second Punic War (late 3rd century BC) in different locations by a Gallaecian warlord at the service of Hannibal and brought back home and finally buried around the 1st c. BC. Jewels were transmitted and kept within the domestic compound until their burial, probably in the 1st century BC/AD. Ladra (2002) provides several examples of hoards in domestic areas, that can be considered heirlooms kept inside houses. Similar practices regarding ornaments have been recorded in Prehispanic Mesoamerica. Joyce (2000, p. 203), for example, points out the existence of jade ornaments from 700 to 500 BC in Aztec tombs of the 15th c. AD. As in the Gallaecian case also, some prehistoric valuables travelled a lot before being deposited in a particular tomb (Joyce, 2000, p. 205).

Less valuable body ornaments were also long-lived and maintained within domestic compounds. Necklaces composed of Punic glass beads (5–3rd centuries BC) were still used or stored in houses from the 1st century BC/AD, such as in the *oppida* of Lansbrica and Santa Trega (Fig. 21). Beadwork is also used among Torajans as heirlooms with sacred power (Waterson, 1990, p. 165). Silver coins, from Rome, Greece, Carthage or southern Iberia, could have been inherited also as a precious relic, and this for three reasons: first, for the inherent value of silver—which, unlike gold, is very scarce in Gallaecia-; second, for their antiquity: some coins minted in the 3rd and 2nd century BC have been recovered in domestic contexts dating from the early 1st century AD; third, for the ancestral stories that could be attached to those (foreign) coins, since they were probably obtained as salaries for mercenary work in the Punic War and other conflicts, or looted in the same episodes, or exchanged with Mediterranean sailors. Imported pottery from Italy, Greek or Carthaginian entrepôts could have also played a similar role (González-Ruibal, 2004a).

Some elements are not heirlooms in the strict sense, but they are objects of memory anyway, and very likely invested with mythical, ancestral meanings: that is the case of Bronze Age rock art. In the *oppidum* of Briteiros, one of the inscriptions with the name of a local aristocrat, the aforementioned Camalus (see below), appears associated to a labyrinth-

Fig. 21. Punic glassbeads (4th–3rd c. BC) found in the oppidum of Santa Trega (2nd c. BC–1st c. AD). After Carballo (1994).

shaped petroglyph, which was carved around 2000 years before (Cardozo, 1976, pp. 43, 50). Aristocrats tend to link themselves to these ancient remains: in the *oppidum* of Monte da Saia, a ritual sauna was built close to a rock engraved with several Bronze Age petroglyphs, to which other carvings (swastikas) were added in the Iron Age (Cardozo, 1932, pp. 21–22).

Gender relations: negotiating different sources of wealth and power

Nelson (1997, p. 19) has rightly criticized that "an androcentric emphasis on power and prestige that assumes them to be permanent and inherent in roles or persons has obscured negotiated power and conditional prestige in past cultures." In house societies, power and prestige are usually portrayed in a more complex, fluid and multifarious fashion. Women, for example, usually can achieve an important social position and can negotiate higher spheres of power. Among the Minangkabau from Indonesia, who are basically matrilineal, women can inherit houses from their parents, and take charge of subsistence agriculture while their husbands are absent, as it is often the case (Waterson, 1990, p. 151). Among Torajans, women often have controlling rights in houses too (Waterson, 1990, p. 165), whereas men usually perform public duties (politics, war). Women also had an important social role in Medieval Japan (Beillevaire, 1986, p. 519). Several "barbarian" societies were described by the Romans in similar terms: Tacitus (Germania, 15, 1), talking about the Germans in the 1st century AD, tells "When the warriors are not making war, they devote some time to hunting, or rather to doing nothing. The strongest and most spirited behave like that, the care of the house, domestic gods (*penates*) and fields being trusted to women, old people and the weakest…" A germane picture is given for the Gallaecians of the 2nd–1st centuries BC:

"The female labour takes charge of the rest: she puts the seed in the furrow and ploughs the soil, the men being inactive. All what is to be done, except war, is carried out by the Gallaecian wife without rest" (Silius Italicus, *Punica*, 3, 344–453).

"Women administrate the house and the cultivations, men are devoted to robbery with their weapons" (Justinus, *Historiae*, 45, 3, 7).

This has traditionally been interpreted by historians as an index of matrilineality and even matriarchy. Recently, these theories have been challenged and the descriptions offered by classical writers have been considered biased by their Mediterranean-centered worldview (Bermejo Barrera, 1994). However, I think that ancient texts referring to the role of Gallaecian- as well as Germanic-women have to be reviewed under the light of the house society model. I would suggest that women and men draw upon different sources of power, even if social control is eventually in male hands.

The exploitation of different economic, social and religious means for accruing power, wealth and legitimation by women and men has been well attested in different societies (Dommesnes, 1998; Trocolli, 1999). Levy (1999, pp. 71–72) resorting to the concept of heterarchy, says that there are "multiple sources of power and status in the society, including control of agricultural production, craft production, trade, combat and ritual power." Profiting from the turmoil provoked by the Roman invasion of Iberia, local Gallaecian elites probably engaged in war parties fighting in the south, supporting either native groups or invading forces (Romans, Carthaginians), as it is well attested by classical literature (Silius Italicus, *Punica*, 344–345). Warlords could gain prestige and wealth in these raids, prestige being probably related to esoteric knowledge of distant places and cultures (Helms, 1988), and not only war. The absence of men burdened women with the whole responsibility of the house administration, at least for several months a year. This phenomenon may have enhanced women's power and status and even allowed them to play roles usually categorized as "male," as we know from anthropology (a contemporary Iberian case in Brøgger and Gilmore, 1997) and archaeology: in Viking society, a woman that took good care of the family property while the men were away would be recognised for her skill and honoured in this way (Dommesnes, 1998, p. 341). The contribution of women to the enrichment and development of houses, by performing particular duties, has been already pointed out for some archaeological cases (Chesson, 2003, pp. 84–85).

The relevance of territory

This issue has already been approached in the previous section. The existence of a territorial system in Gallaecia is well known: unlike southern and eastern Asturians, Vaccaeans and others, Gallaecians do not trace their filiation to a lineage or clan (*gens*, *gentilitas*), but to a place of residence: the hillfort (*castellum*).

Explicit references to houses

In all house societies known historically or ethnographically, there are specific terms to refer to the house as a social concept. We have the Japanese *ie* (Beillevaire, 1986, p. 483), the Kwakiutl *numayma*

(Lévi-Strauss, 1982, pp. 167–168; 1991, p. 144) the Toraja *tongkonan* (Waterson, 1990, p. 142), the Polynesian *utuafare* (Kahn and Kirch, 2004, p. 250), the Medieval French *hospicium* or the Italian *albergo* (Bresc, 1986, pp. 393–394).

Despite the fact that literacy is a late phenomenon in Gallaecia and written native references to local customs are extremely scant, mentions to houses (Latin *domus*) do exist. There are only a few because the house-based system was probably fading away in the 1st century AD under Roman influence: the elite families were reorganizing themselves on the grounds of lineages. There are a just a few inscriptions coming from hillforts or *oppida*. It is therefore quite meaningful that within this scant array some mentions to houses have been preserved. They come mainly from the *oppidum* of Briteiros, the indigenous town which has yielded a greater amount of rock inscriptions and epigraphs (Fig. 22). The only two explicit mentions to houses are the following (Cardozo, 1976; Fig. 15):

Coroneri/Camali/domus
"Coronerus' Camalus' house."
Camali/domi/Caturo.
"Caturo, from Camalus' house."

There are four other inscriptions in the *oppida* which read CAMAL, an abridged version of Camali ("of Camalus"). Since they are most likely house lintels, and if we bear in mind the two aforementioned inscriptions, it would be reasonable to think that these inscriptions mean "Camalus' house": CAMAL(i) (domus). In total, nine inscriptions out of 15 mention Camalus in genitive in Briteiros. It is important to note that most of these inscriptions come from the acropolis of the *oppidum*, an area linked to ritual activities—a goddess statue, votive offerings and human remains have been found—and political power—it is in the acropolis where a big round meeting house, probably a "senate" was located (Cardozo, 1976). It is also significant that the acropolis was undoubtedly the area of the settlement occupied from more ancient times, that buildings there seem to have suffered many refurbishments, i.e. they have longer biographies (Gonzáblez-Ruibal, 2003a), and that many important houses were built there, given that many vestiges of architectural decoration come from this area (Calo, 1994, pp. 143–178).

I would interpret Camalus' house as a "grande maison" (Cuvillier, 1986, p. 294) or "core house"

(Waterson, 1990, p. 142), to which the rulers of the *oppidum* of Briteiros would belong. It would have included several "branch houses" (Waterson, 2003, p. 42), such as that of Coronerus or Medamus. The Feudal Japanese society provides a good case for comparison (Beillevaire, 1986, pp. 511–512). There was a *shujin* or *soryo*, the paramount chief of a grand house, and then several *ie no ko*, "house's children," whose houses were considered derivative, "branches" (*bunke*), of the *shujin*'s house. Branch houses in the *oppidum* of Briteiros would be those of Latronus, Viriatus, Talabarus, etc., all of them recorded in house lintels. In summer 2003, an inscription was discovered on the threshold of a main house in a domestic compound, in Romariz hillfort (N. Portugal), with the name in genitive *Publi Macri*, which must be interpreted as "Publius Macer's (house)" (Armando Coelho Ferreira da Silva, pers. comm.). Furthermore, we know two
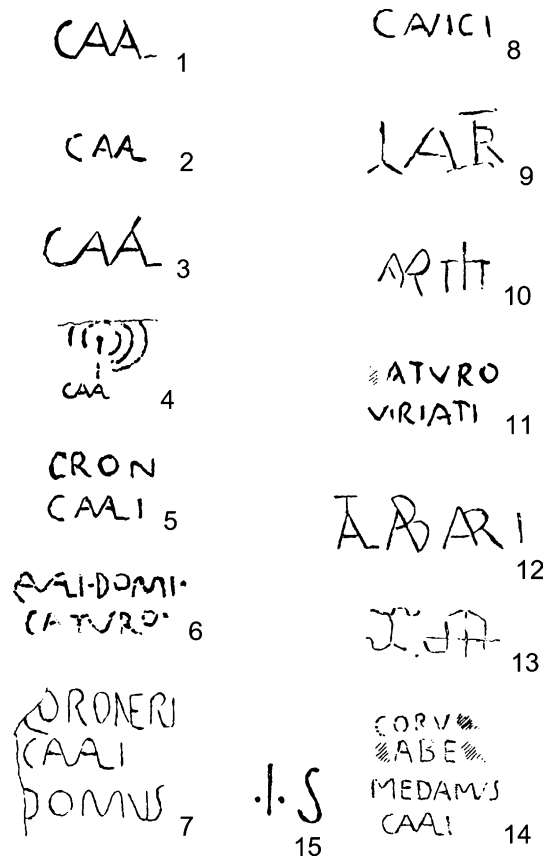

Fig. 22. Inscriptions referring to different 'houses' from the oppidum of Briteiros: Camalus, Caturo, Viriatus, Coronus, etc. Inscriptions 4 and 14 are on rocky outcrops. Note the prehistoric petroglyph in number 4. Probably late 1st c. BC or early 1st c. AD (after Cardozo, 1976).

other inscriptions with explicit references to houses, not in southern Gallaecia, but in its vicinities: among the Susarri—an Asturian group—a *domo Coruniace* ("from the house of Corunius") (CIL III 2016) and an individual coming from Laucus hillfort (*castellum Lauci*), who establishes his filiation to *domo Vacoeci* ("from the house of Vacoeus) (EE VIII 283). In both cases, the house's names appear as adjectives, that is: not "George's house" but "Georgian house." Finally, an individual from the Gaulish town of Lugdunum is known, who mentions his belonging to a *domo Circina*. The name of the house clearly resembles other Gallaecian names (there is a *castellum Circine*) and it is thus possible that the person was a Gallaecian migrant in Gaul (Ares Vázquez, 1992, p. 82). There are significant coincidences between personal names and place names in Gallaecia (Brañas, 1995, pp. 228–238), in both cases stressing heroic and warrior virtues. Meaningfully, it is said that people often take the name of their house in house societies (Waterson, 1990, p. 139). The coincidence of place names and personal names could be related to this phenomenon.

In the previous paragraphs I have mainly focused on southern Gallaecia, the region where greater inequalities exist, expressed in a complex material culture (early urban centers, statues, architectural decoration, etc.). However, as we have seen, some references to houses in epigraphy are known in other parts of Gallaecia and western Asturia and a territorial system, based on *castella*, is detectable through most of the Iberian Northwest. If we bear in mind the astonishing variety of house societies to be found in Southeast Asia, from roughly egalitarian groups to states, from long houses to noble palaces (Waterson, 1990, p. 140), we should not perhaps rule out the possibility that the whole Gallaecia and western Asturia witnessed the development of different types of societies based on residential principles during the Late Iron Age. An element that looks quite similar all over the Northwest is the gendered division of labour, which astonished Roman and Greek writers alike, a fact that has great political implications within house societies. However, it seems that only those peoples inhabiting the southernmost parts of Gallaecia clearly used houses as a means of distinction and to subvert kinship ties in order to achieve more power. Why is that so? Houses seem to have had a crucial symbolic and social role all over Gallaecia in the Middle and Late Iron Age, but only southern Gallaecians, who were more engaged in the Mediterranean world-system—both from a political and economic point of view—and eventually developed urban settlements, regarded houses as a good device to accrue and support group inequalities. A stronger community ethos, in other parts of Gallaecia, probably prevented those inequalities that were growing in the south. Nonetheless, the outstanding jewellery known from northern Gallaecia—at least 150 gold torcs, some of the weighing up to 1.8 kg (González-Ruibal, 2004b, p. 142)—may point towards another direction: social inequalities were negotiated through valuable objects and probably cattle, such as in other "Celtic" communities (García Quintela, 2004), rather than through domestic space, which, in its apparent equality, served to conceal social differences within the community.

Conclusion

Since the publication of the seminal works by Claude Lévi-Strauss, several examples of house societies have been proposed and thoroughly studied by historians and anthropologists. Archaeologists are now becoming aware of the far-reaching possibilities that this concept opens, especially because houses are better studied in the long term: as Gillespie (2000a, pp. 18, 20) has said, all studies in house societies deal with the past. Nevertheless, much more work is needed in order to provide solid grounds for the archaeological identification of house societies. This article wants to contribute with a new case study. Following Lévi-Strauss' original definition and drawing from an array of house and territory-based societies as a means of comparison, I have tried to show that the peoples inhabiting the NW of Iberia, and especially in the southern part of it, were organized as a prototypical *société à maison* between the 2nd century BC and the mid-1st century AD, in striking contrast to other "Celtic" peoples of Iberia and Europe. Complex stone houses, a lavish architectural decoration, heirlooms, inscriptions mentioning houses, settlements and names, and Graeco-Roman texts in which the role of women is underlined, among other data, help to support the existence of a house society in the area. Houses were used, as in other historical and anthropological contexts, to overcome the limitations of community values and to found a more hierarchized social order, freed from kinship servitudes. Probably many other European and Mediterranean prehistoric communities were

organized as house societies: the Levantine Early Bronze Age has been proposed as a good candidate. I would dare to say that Iron Age Scotland, characterized by those astonishing "houses" that are the brochs (Hingley, 1995), and Bronze Age Sardinia, with its castle-like nuraghi (Webster, 1998), could probably be labelled as house societies, too. An in-depth review of these and other archaeological cases could furnish a new understanding of the social organization of prehistoric communities and the construction of power in ranked societies.

Acknowledgments

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