

THE MIDDLE AND THE BEGINNING OF THE LATE BRONZE AGE IN THE NORTH-WESTERN IBERIAN PENINSULA

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present a synthesis on the Middle Bronze Age and the origins of the Late Bronze Age in the Northwest of Iberia. This approach takes into account the burial contexts and practices and the new scenarios (compared to the Early Bronze Age) that structured the world and promoted social identities: settlements, some “natural spaces” and reinterpreted past *loci*. In many cases these “natural spaces” were sometimes materialized by the ceremonial deposition of metallic artefacts and the erection of statues-menhirs. New conceptions of the world, understandable in societies depending on husbandry, forestry and shepherding activities, dedicated to the land, becoming more sedentary and bearing an animist cosmology increasingly connected to the properties of minerals, metallic artefacts and others elements, are also addressed.

Keywords

Iberian Peninsula, Middle and Late Bronze Age, Social Identity, Scenarios, Continuity and discontinuity.

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this work is to present a synthesis on the Middle Bronze Age and the origins of the Late Bronze Age in the Northwest of Iberia.

The Middle Bronze Age will be considered to be the time period between 1700/1600 and 1100/1000 BC (Bettencourt 2005).

Geographically and geomorphologically speaking, the Northwest of Iberia is extremely mountainous and polygenic. The main reliefs form a kind of natural

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amphitheatre facing west and are interspersed by river valleys that create real connection passages between the coast and the inland (Ribeiro *et al.*, 1987).

We should acknowledge that the current western Atlantic platform of Galicia (Spain) includes a lagoon system where the sea penetrates the land, allowing for its easy navigation.

Regarding minerals, the area is predominantly rich in primary and secondary tin and gold minerals (Thadeu, Zbyszewski 1965). Although currently in irrelevant quantities, reserves of native copper, oxides and carbonates of copper were available throughout the area (Comendador 1998). Further northeast, in Asturias (Spain), important copper mines have been explored. Such is the case of Sierra del Aramo, where radiocarbon dating from the site of a metallurgists camp, named La Campa les Mines (Rosas), dates its use from the end of the Chalcolithic until the Middle Bronze Age (Blas *et al.*, 2013)

The extraction of salt was also made possible in some northwest coastal areas, according to the archaeological data collected from the 3rd to the 1st millennia BC (Almeida 1996; Bettencourt 1999), but also to the writings from Strabo (Cardoso 1994).

In paleoclimatic terms, the Middle Bronze Age developed during a cold, dry phase and the Late Bronze Age during a more temperate phase (Fábregas Valcárce *et al.*, 2003; Martínez Cortizas *et al.*, 2009).

2. THE MIDDLE BRONZE AGE

2.1. SETTLEMENT STRATEGIES AND SUBSISTANCE

During the Middle Bronze Age there was a rise in known residential places when compared to the previous phase (Bettencourt 2009, 2013a, 2013b; Sampaio 2014).

The settlements occupy different areas, from the coastal platform to the inland: (1) bottom of hills in the valley or the coastal platform, related with agricultural soils; (2) well-irrigated plateaus and sheltered slopes of mountains, in the vicinity of swamps or small-irrigated valleys; (3) spurs of residual orographies, at altitude, overlooking great farming valleys and shepherding areas; (4) some campsites, probably related with seasonal herding activities, both in

mountainous areas or on riverbanks (Bettencourt 1999, 2009, 2013a, 2013b) (fig. 1).

In the first group we can include the settlements of Quinta do Rapido (Barcelos) (Bettencourt 2009), Pego (Sampaio *et al.*, 2008; Sampaio 2014) and Sola IIB (Braga) (Bettencourt 2000a), Cimalha (Felgueiras) (Bettencourt 2009; Vieira 2014), Fontela de Figueirido (Castelo de Paiva) (Cunha 1991), Lavra (Matosinhos) (Bettencourt, Fonseca 2011), Corgo (Vila do Conde) (Bettencourt 2009; Botelho 2014; Sampaio 2014) (fig. 2a), O Fixón-A Costa da Seixeira (Cangas) (Suárez Otero 1993) and A Pataqueira (Palas de Rei) (Vidal Caeiro 2011).

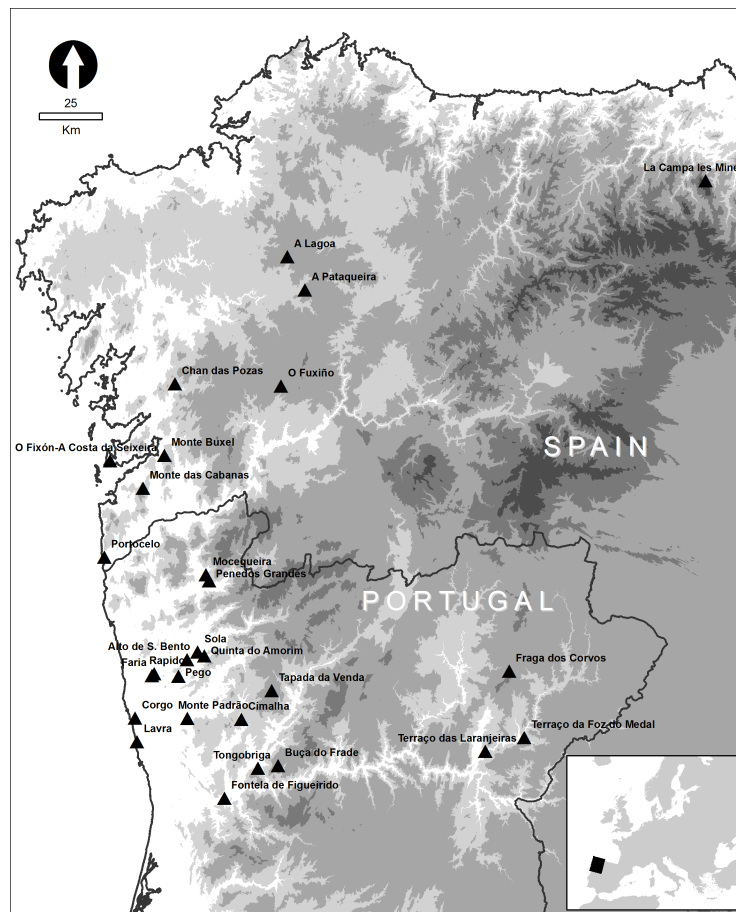


Figure 1: Location of the settlements mentioned in the text in hypsometric map (authorship: Emílio Abad Vidal).

The second group can be best exemplified by the settlements of Quinta do Amorim (Braga) (Sampaio 2014), Bouça do Frade I (Baião) (Bettencourt 1995; Jorge 1996), Tapada da Venda (Celorico de Basto) (Bettencourt *et al.*, 2002a), Tongóbriga (Marco de Canaveses) (Tereso *et al.*, submitted), Monte Buxel (Prazos de Borbén) (Criado Boado *et al.*, 2000; Lima Oliveira, Prieto Martínez 2002), O Fuxiño (Piñor) (Vidal Lojo 2008, 2011), Chan de Pozas (Campo Lameiro) (Méndez Fernández, López Alonso 2013; Martín-Seijo 2013), Monte das Cabanas (Vigo) (Tereso *et al.*, submitted) and Portecelo (O Rosal) (Cano Pan, Vázquez Varela 1988).



Figure 2a: Aerial view from the settlement of Corgo (available at: www.apai.org.pt/m1/1227717902sub.65.2.pdf). **2b:** Campsite of La Campa les Mines (Blas *et al.*, 2013: 173, fig. 3).

The third group, which emerged during the second half of the 2nd millennium BC (Bettencourt 2009), may be exemplified by the settlements of Alto de São Bento (Braga) (Bettencourt 2000b), Monte Padrão (Santo Tirso), Faria (Barcelos) and Fraga dos Corvos (Macedo de Cavaleiros) (Bettencourt 1995; Senna-Martínez, Luís 2011).

Examples of the fourth group are the sites of Penedos Grandes (Bettencourt *et al.*, 2002b), Bouça do Carriço/Mocegueira (Arcos de Valdevez) (Bettencourt 2009), A Lagoa (Toques) (Méndez Fernández 1994) and La Campa les Mines (Rosas) (fig. 2b), all occupying mountain areas. This last one was related to copper mining activities (Blas *et al.*, 2013). The sites of Terraço das Laranjeiras (Torre de Moncorvo) (Gaspar *et al.*, 2014b) and Terraço da Foz do Medal (Mogadouro) (Gaspar *et al.*, 2014a) are all positioned in narrowed river terraces subjected to floods.

Such strategic diversity of settlement has been frequently associated with different settlements. The settlements of the first and second groups are mainly large-sized occupations, revealing a great investment in building and, consequently, an increasingly sedentary way of life. The fourth group includes smaller settlements/campsites, probably seasonally occupied (Bettencourt 2009, 2013a; Ayán, Parcero 2009). This may correspond to a vast and complex network of interrelated places (Bettencourt 2013a) working in some kind of complementarity. In this sense, Bronze Age day-to-day life would have occurred in a landscape where different sites performed distinct roles (economically, socially and symbolically speaking), or even more than one of these roles, relating the cosmological universe with the celebration of ancestry and supernatural powers (Sampaio 2014). As such, senses, meanings and memories of these sites were certainly associated with the communities' individual and collective biographies.

In the large settlements subterranean buildings or constructions made from perishable materials (soil, clay, wood, shrubs, cork, small stones, etc.) left very few monumental or visible remains. Even so, their impact on the landscape would have been of a considerable size, due to the deforestation applied in their construction and maintenance. It should not be forgotten that the creation of farming fields would have certainly produced a huge footprint in the landscape.

Among the identified archaeological structures are ditches, pits and post-holes, sometimes circular or oval huts, and also fireplaces and clay pavements (figs. 4a, 4b, 4c, 4d).

Settlement	Lab. Ref.	Date BP	Cal 2 σ (95.4%)	Reference
Monte das Cabanas	Beta-393992	3450±30	1880-1688 (95.4%) 1860-1853 BC (0.5%)	Tereso <i>et al.</i> , submitted
Bouça do Carriço/ Moceguira	CSIC-1835	3384±37	1771-1608 BC (93.2%) 1582-1561 BC (1.7%)	Unpublished
Quinta do Rapido	AA89662	3351±42	1744-1708 BC (10.2%) 1703-1528 BC (85.2%)	Unpublished
Sola IIB	Weighted average	3334±20	1685-1600 (73.7%) 1586-1534 (21.7%)	Bettencourt 1999: 919
O Fuxiño	CSIC-2087	3370±25	1740-1712 BC (12.8%) 1698-1614 BC (82.6%)	Vidal Lojo 2011: 36
O Fuxiño	CSIC-2089	3325±26	1683-1529 BC (95.4%)	Vidal Lojo 2011: 36
O Fuxiño	CSIC-2088	3318±27	1681-1679 BC (0.4%) 1665-1520 BC (95.0%)	Vidal Lojo 2011: 36
O Fuxiño	CSIC-2090	3292±27	1626-1505 BC	Vidal Lojo 2011: 36
Lavra	Beta-258086	3230±40	1611-1430 BC (95.4%) 1610-1576 BC (9.1%)	Bettencourt, Fonseca 2011: 26
Lavra	Beta-258087	3220±40	1565-1418 BC (86.3%) 1606-1583 BC (1.6%)	Bettencourt, Fonseca 2011: 26
A Lagoa	CSIC-901	3140±70	1559-1554 BC (0.3%) 1546-1221 BC (93.5%) 1497-1377 BC (80.2%)	Méndez Fernández 1994: 84
A Pataqueira	Beta-308703	3140±30	1345-1305 BC (15.2%) 1611-1372 BC (85.5%)	Martín-Seijo <i>et al.</i> , 2015: 4
Chan de Pozas	Beta-267356	3180±60	1358-1300 BC (9.9%) 1492-1482 BC (1.1%)	Martin-Seijo 2013: 135
Monte Buxel	CSIC-1266	3103±44	1454-1259 BC (93.5%) 1243-1235 BC (0.8%)	Criado Boado <i>et al.</i> , 2000: 76
Pego I	AA89668	3086±43	1436-1229 BC (95.4%)	Sampaio <i>et al.</i> , 2008: 230
Penedos Grandes	CSIC-1833	3084±30	1420-1266 BC (95.4%) 1436-1195 (94.8%)	Bettencourt <i>et al.</i> , 2002: 209
Tapada da Venda	Ua-19499	3065±50	1141-1134 (0.6%) 1408-1257 (90.3%)	Bettencourt <i>et al.</i> , 2002: 191
Tapada da Venda	CSIC-1830	3057±30	11251-1231 (5.1%) 1427-1192 (92.7%)	Bettencourt <i>et al.</i> , 2007: 155
Portocelo	CSIC-744	3050±50	1176-1163 (1.2%) 1144-1131 (1.5%)	Fábregas Valcarce, Ruiz-Gálvez Priego 1997: 192
A Lagoa	CSIC-1000	3030±50	1412-1127 BC (95.4%)	Méndez Fernández 1994: 84

Figura 3: Available ^{14}C dates for the settlements mentioned in the text [calibration using Oxcal 4.2, curve IntCal 13 (Reimar *et al.*, 2013)].

In spite of being built with perishable materials, settlements of great dimension become more visible in a space characterised by an increasing deforestation, probably converging into the new reference points of physical and symbolic planning of the surrounding territory (Bettencourt 2009).

The context of many of these settlements, the internal distribution of their structures and the diverse archaeobotanical analysis allow us to confirm the increasing spread of farming³, forestry and shepherding activities, which could have improved lifestyles, diets and, ultimately, could have favoured demographic

³ It is worth noticing that the knowledge about the Early Bronze Age settlements in the Northwest of Iberia is scarce. Moreover, there are no Early Bronze Age sites with archaeobotanical evidence supporting the idea of a large agricultural development during this period.

growth (Bettencourt 2003, 2013a; Bettencourt *et al.*, 2007; Martín-Seijo *et al.*, 2012). This contradicts the hypothesis that economic recession occurred during the Middle Bronze Age as suggested by some authors (Coffyn 1985; Ruiz-Gálvez Priego 1991, 1993, 1998), and corroborates the working hypothesis already adopted by Jorge (1990, 1996), Fábregas (1995), Fábregas and Bradley (1995) and Bettencourt (1995), even though it is based on relatively scarce empirical basis.

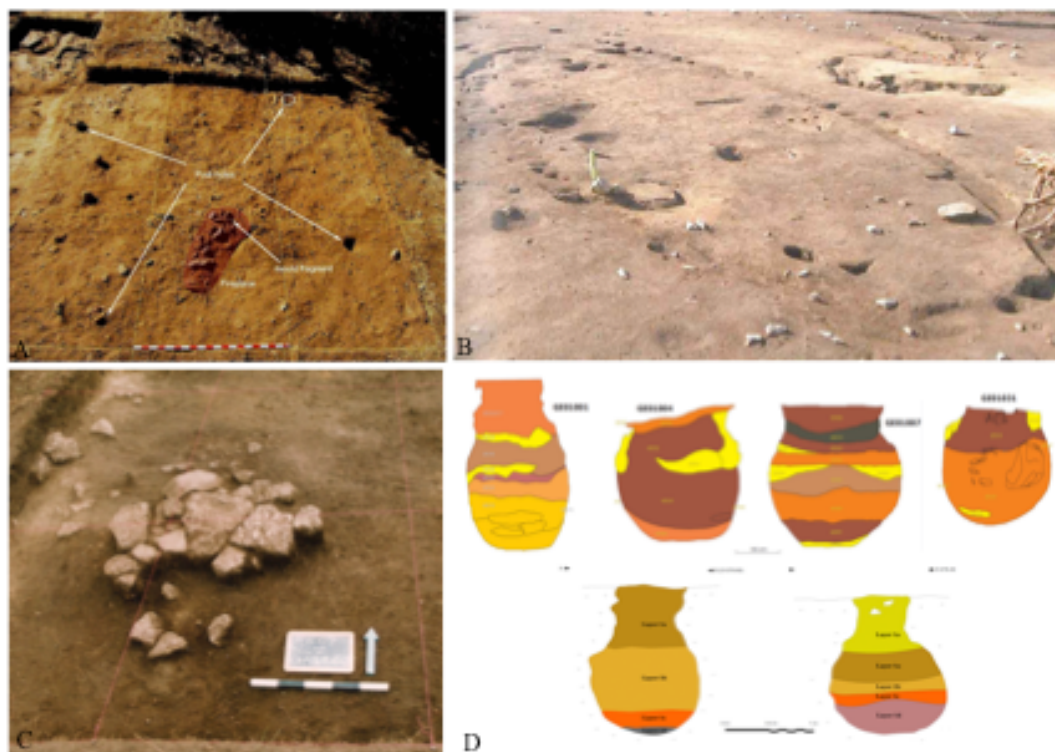


Figure 4a: Foundry area at Fraga dos Corvos (Senna Martinez *et al.*, 2007: 4, fig. 3). **4b:** Hut from O Fuxiño (Vidal Lojo 2006: 167). **4c:** Hearth from Pego (Sampaio 2014: 379, fig. 4.128). **4d:** (top) pits from Monte Buxel (Lima Oliveira, Prieto Martínez 2002:153, fig. 38); (bottom) pits from Quinta do Amorim (Sampaio 2014: 446, fig. 4.162; 448, fig. 4.164).

Results from pollen analysis of archaeological contexts from the Northwest of Iberia indicate a considerable reduction in tree cover and a significant rise of synanthropic plants since 3500/3000 BP. This is due to the progressive increase in human action on the environment (Ramil-Rego 1993), such as deforestation, fires, farming, shepherding practices and bronze metallurgy, which has been confirmed by anthracological (Figueiral, Bettencourt 2004; Bettencourt *et al.*,

2007; Martín-Seijo *et al.*, 2012), carpological (Tereso 2012) and sedimentological studies (Pontevedra-Pombal *et al.*, 2013).

It is important to emphasize the introduction of millet during the 1st half of the 2nd millennium BC at the site of Sola IIB (Bettencourt 2000a, 2003), allowing for two annual harvests and being able to fulfil the needs of the population in case of possible damage to other cereal crops (such as wheat and rye).

2.2. METALLURGY, RITES AND DEPOSITIONS

It is also in the Middle Bronze Age (during the 1st half of the 2nd millennium BC) that bronze metallurgy is adopted. The most ancient evidence comes from two settlements dated back to ¹⁴C, Sola IIB (Bettencourt 2000a; Comendador, Bettencourt 2011) and Fraga dos Corvos (Senna Martinez *et al.*, 2011), where casting drops, crucibles and moulds of axes of Bujões/Barcelos type were found. The settlement of Cimalha can also be included in this group, where the remains of one mould of a Bujões/Barcelos axe were recovered (Bettencourt 2009 Vieira 2014), as well as the site of Bouça da Cova da Moura (Maia), where casting drops were retrieved (Comendador, Bettencourt 2011). Moulds of Bujões/Barcelos type axes from the sites of Monte das Carballas (Ponteareas) (Suárez Oterero *et al.*, 1997), Erosa (A Gudiña) (Comendador, Bettencourt 2011) and the remains of metallurgy identified at O Fixón-A Costa da Seixeira (Cangas) (Suárez Otero 1993) can also be mentioned.

Like their copper counterparts, it is presumed that the first bronze objects continued having a magical and powerful significance following the perspective that matter would not be inert but full of properties, as Ingold (2000), Bradley (2000) and Tilley (2004), among other authors, suggest. As so, these objects were “invested” with special powers that certainly surpassed their nominal value.

At a moment where societies did not distinguish sacred from profane and had a highly ritualized daily life, transforming stone into metal and carrying out successful alloys would have bestowed a deeply magical character on the main figures involved in the metallurgical process, on the object itself, on the places of mineral extraction and on its users. Perhaps that is the reason why a great number of bronze artefacts are axes, an object of great symbolism from previous

periods, widely present in depositional contexts all over Europe, whose polysemic value is undeniable (Bradley 1990).

The special character of bronze objects, systematically deposited in certain “natural places”, demonstrates the importance that these places had to the communities of that period.

The importance of depositing objects can probably be related to the celebration of rites, either connected with the protection of farming and forestry activities (as the major forms of the bronze objects indicate – the axes) or the various spirits present in different “physical” places (Bettencourt 2013a).

An example of these places of great symbolic and collective significance is Monte Louro (Muros), on the Galician coast, and Monte Crasto/Cova da Bouça (Esposende), on the Portuguese coast, both impressive orographies on the coastal platform, visible from very far and certainly points of reference for coastal navigation. In the first case, an axe of Bujões/Barcelos type was deposited together with a ceramic vessel (Monteagudo 1977), and in the second, a Bujões/Barcelos axe (Monteagudo 1977) was recovered in the same place as a flat axe (Almeida 1987; Comendador Rey 1999) and a riveted sword (Harbison 1967; Junghans *et al.* 1968)⁴. The artefacts of Monte do Crasto were recovered between granite outcrops, destroyed during the use of the area as manual quarry. The discovery occurred in a micro place known as Cova da Bouça, at the base of the Northwest slope of the Monte Crasto⁵ (figs. 5a, 5b). These metallic sets conveyed a complex message, as well as a hybrid of traditions resulting from coastal contacts between the Northwest and South of Iberia. Also, Monte de Santo Ovídio (Ponte de Lima), an impressive hill detached from the surrounding valleys, featured the deposition of two bronze axes during the Middle Bronze

⁴ This sword was considered as having many affinities with El Argar like daggers (Harbison 1967: 102, fig. 1.3), a kind of Breton-derived type (Almagro Gorbea 1976) or similar to some models from the West of Europe (Brandherm 2003).

⁵ It was Ana M.S. Bettencourt that attained the spatial contextualization of this metallic set, both speaking with the family of the person who delivered the artefact to the Pio XII Museum, at Braga, and with the masons that worked at the time of the discovery in the quarry of Cova da Bouça. In fact, it is not possible to assert that the three objects were deposited together at the same time. However, it was due to the discovery of the sword, in 1954, that the masons and the seminarian Manuel José Martins Neiva Soares visited the location of the first find. Looking for more objects in the interstices of the granitic outcrops that were being broken, they discovered the two axes. Even if they are not part of the same hoard, this micro place certainly functioned as a *locus* for metallic depositions, something that illustrates its social and symbolic significance to the Bronze Age populations.

Age. The association between Middle Bronze Age axes with distinctive topographies was equally noticeable at Monte Chorz (Guimarães) and Monte da Saia (Barcelos) (Sampaio 2014).



Figure 5a: Monte Louro (available at: <http://rebotacion.blogspot.pt>) and related flat axe (Monteagudo 1977: 91, Est. 29, nº 554). **5b:** Monte Crasto and related metallic hoard (Bettencourt 2009: 104).

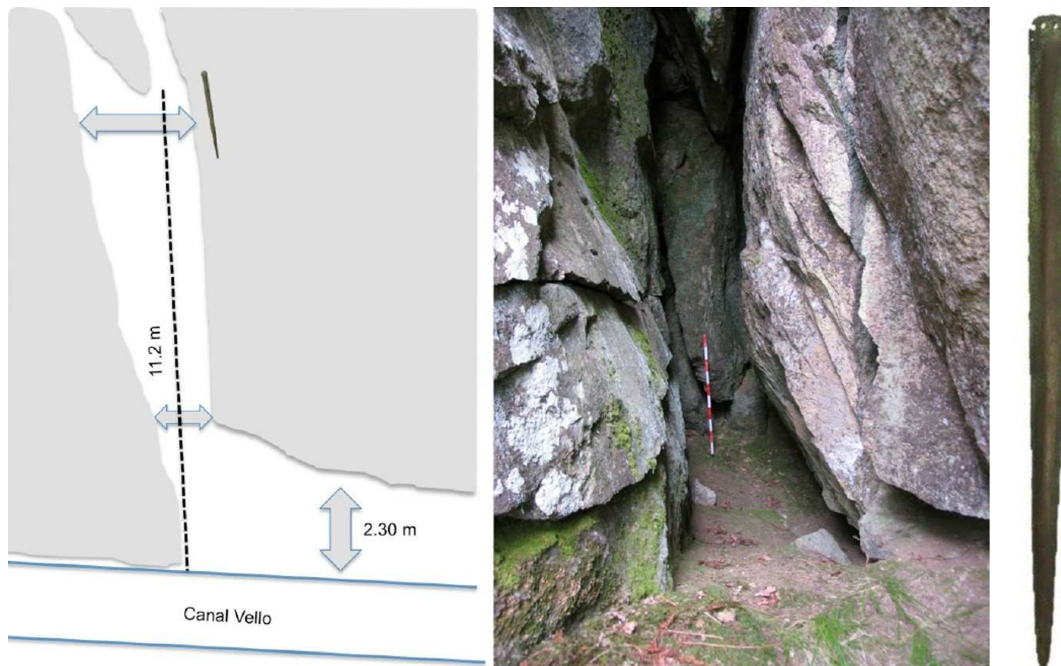


Figure 6: The sword of Forcas and the place of its original deposition (adapted from Comendador *et al.*, 2014: 86, 91, figs. 9, 12).

The importance of natural cavities is reflected in some deposits. One of the best examples is the riveted sword of Forcas, recently associated with a granitic rock shelter called Pena da Espada/Cova da Moura (Parada de Sil), positioned on the slope of Monte Tucela (Comendador *et al.*, 2014) (fig. 6). There are also findings related with the alluvial margins of rivers, such as the Bujões/Barcelos axe type from Bandeira (Viana do Castelo) (Fernandes *et al.*, 2011) and the palstave axe

without rings discovered at Veiga de Cabanelas/Retortas (Vila Verde) (Bettencourt 1988).

Similar hoarding patterns can be inferred by the depositions of gold objects. Such are the cases of Tomadia da Mata/Monte da Saia (Barcelos) (Cardoso 1957) and Arnozela/Monte da Penouta (Felgueiras) (Severo 1905/1908; Armbruster 2010), both recently recontextualised (Sampaio 2011, 2014).

Considering the theoretical concepts of place, space and landscape (Ingold 2000; Bradley 2000; Tilley 2004), the distinct ceremonies that culminated in the deposition of metallic objects in different places could probably be related to distinct meanings. Thereby, such actions were perpetrated in a landscape characterized by a complex network of interrelated and meaningful places.

Assuming the extreme significance of bronze metallurgy, we believe, following the work of several other authors, that it must have been in this period that the first statues-menhirs were erected, something that is considered to be linked to metallurgy and mining. Such an idea can be inferred either by their location or by the stories that are told by the weapons engraved in these objects, referring to pacified places, suitable for circulation and where the metal was easily extracted (Bettencourt 2013b) (figs. 7a, 7b).

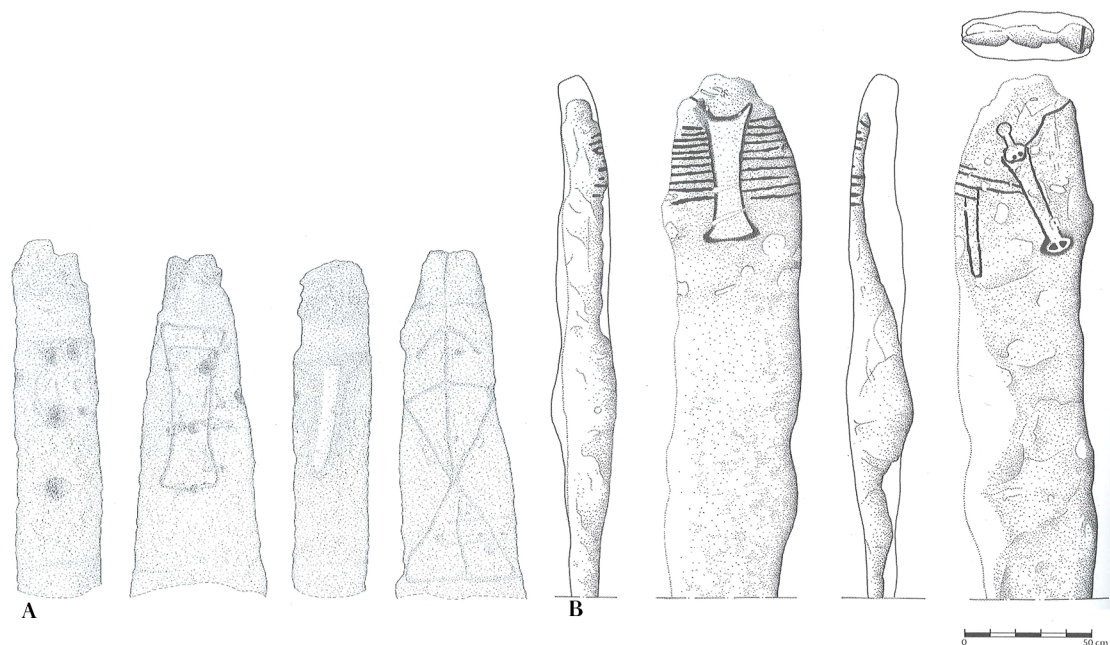


Figure 7a: Statue-menhir of Cervos (Alves, Reis 2011: 214, Est. 5). **7b:** Statue-menhir of Ataúdes (Vilaça *et al.*, 2001: 74, fig. 2).

Despite the similarities observed in metallic materials throughout the Northwest, the cultural backgrounds in which they circulated were distinct, considering the diversity of pottery types and the decorations present in different areas.

2.3. BURIAL CONTEXTS AND PRACTICES

In relation to the sepulchral world and contrary to what was thought until fairly recently, there are several remains that allow for some interpretations.

In coastal areas, in lower lands and on some plateau or sloping areas the construction of necropolis occurred, sometimes close to residential areas. These were generally formed by invisible structures, showing little architectural investment, mainly represented by flat graves, pits and cists.

As for the use of flat graves, one can refer to the sites of Pego (Sampaio, Bettencourt 2014) and Quinta do Amorim (Sampaio *et al.*, 2014), Cimalha (Bettencourt 2009), Tapado da Caldeira (Baião) (Jorge 1980, 1983) and Coto da Laborada (Calvos de Radín) (López Cuevillas 1930, 1947) (figs. 8a, 8b).

Pits with funeral functions were identified at Faísca (Guimarães) (Bettencourt 2011; Sampaio 2014), Campo do Postigo/Beiriz (Vila do Conde) (Bettencourt 2011), Terraço da Foz do Medal (Mogadouro) (Gaspar *et al.*, 2014a) and Terraço das Laranjeiras (Torre de Moncorvo) (Gaspar *et al.*, 2014b) (fig. 8c). With the exception of the two latter examples, the hypothesis has been raised that both the cases of Faísca and Campo do Postigo/Beiriz pits may have been used for the deposition of cremated bones (Silva 1993; Bettencourt 2011; Sampaio 2014).

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Finally, the use of cists is known in the necropolis of Agra de Antas (Esposende) (Ataíde, Teixeira 1940; Soeiro 1988; Cruz, Gonçalves 1998-1999; Bettencourt 1999) and at A Forxa (Riós) (Prieto-Martínez *et al.*, 2009) (fig. 8d).

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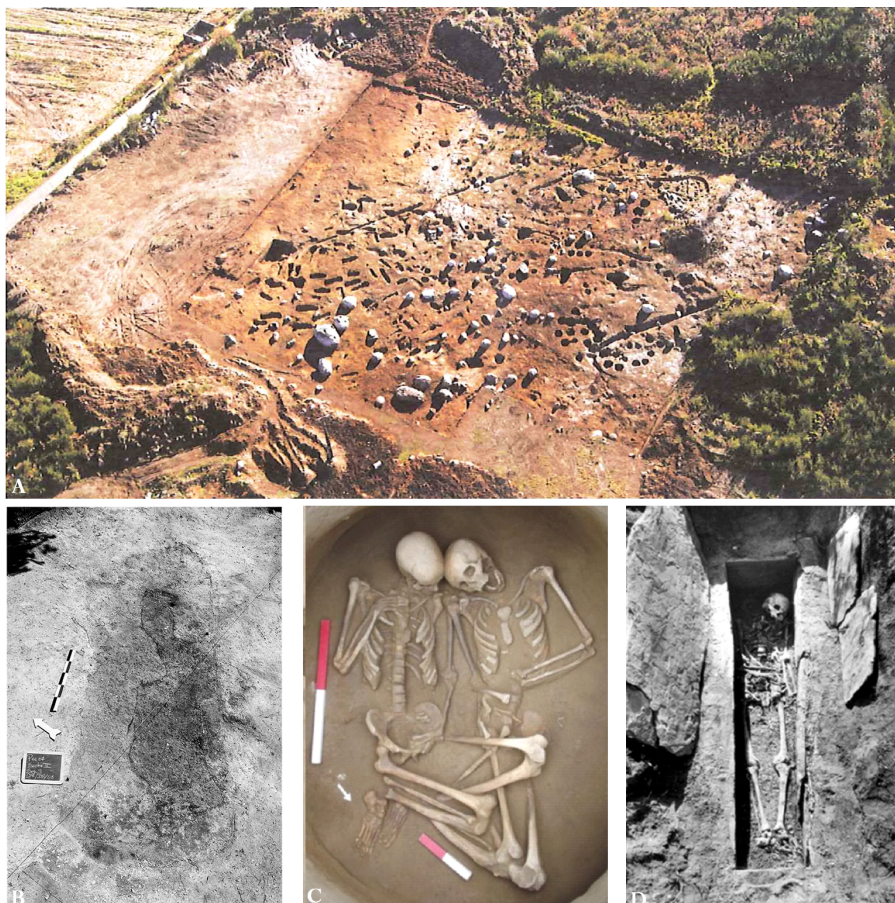


Figure 8a: Aerial view of the necropolis of Cimalha (Almeida *et al.*, 2008:51). **8b:** Flat grave from Pego (Sampaio 2014: 628, fig. 5.43). **8c:** Pit from Medal (Gaspar *et al.*, 2014a: 68, fig. 12). **8d:** Cist from Agra de Antas (Cruz, Gonçalves 1998-1999: 27, fig. 8).

On more elevated areas and far from settlements, monuments under *tumuli* of megalithic tradition still persist, although with significantly smaller dimensions. Casinha Derribada 3 (Viseu) (Cruz *et al.*, 1998), the structure annexed to Outeiro dos Gregos 1 (Baião) (V. Jorge 1980), Senhora da Ouvida 7 (Castro Daire) (Cruz, Vilaça 1999), Piedrafita 5 (Las Regueras) (Blas 1985) and *tumulus* T-VI of Carondio (Allande) (Blanco Vázquez *et al.*, 2013) are some examples. Although it was constructed during the Early Bronze Age, Vale de Chão 1 (Braga) was reused during the Middle Bronze Age (Vilas Boas 2014).

Reuses of megalithic monuments can also be seen in this period, either located in valleys or mountainous areas. With available radiocarbon dates one can mention Monte da Deva III (Gijón) (Blas 2004), A Romea (Lalín) (Prieto Martínez 2007), Madorra da Granxa (Castro Rei) (Chao Alvarez, Álvarez Merayo 2000), Prados (Arcos de Valdevez) (Bettencourt 2011), Carvalhal (Penedono) (Carvalho 2005), Castonairas (Vila Nova de Paiva) (Cruz 2001) and Portela da Anta (Arouca) (Silva 1997) (fig. 9).

Limestone caves in the Northwest of Iberia were also employed for funeral purposes. Cova do Santo (Ourense) (López-Costas 2008; López Costa *et al.*, 2014) and Cova de Valdavara 2 (Lugo) (Vaquero Rodríguez *et al.*, 2009) are good examples. There are also others, like the pseudo-karstic cavity of O Folón (Vigo) (Groba González, Méndez Quintas 2008) and the granitic rock shelters probably used with funeral purposes, as suggested by the intentional deposition of ceramic recipients usually identified in mortuary contexts. In this last case figures Monte da Penha (Guimarães) (Cardoso 1971; Sampaio *et al.*, 2009; Sampaio 2014), Covas da Trapa (Tui) (Méndez-Quintas *et al.*, 2013) and Rubiá (Valdeorras) (Comendador *et al.*, 2014). There are also unusual contexts positioned in the lowlands, which reinforce the polysemy of funeral practices in the Northwest of Iberia. It is the case of Granjinhos (Braga) (Bettencourt 1999; Sampaio 2014), where primary cremations in urns were deposited inside a monument made up of a thin alignment formed by small rocks and gravel.

The offerings included in the different types of graves are scarce, and are essentially made up of different types of pottery, whereas the metal objects – relatively common in the Early Bronze Age – disappear (Bettencourt 2008, 2011, 2013a). Organic chemistry analysis, which was applied to residues extracted from ceramic containers, allows us some interpretations about the funeral ceremonies. For example, the remains of beer identified in the vessels from the cist of A Forxa (Prieto-Martínez *et al.*, 2005) seem to be related to funeral feasts or commensality rites, while other remains identified in horizontal rim vessels (Gonçalves *et al.*, 2010) may be part of ceremonies associated with the burning of greasy substances.

In general and from a symbolic level, funeral contexts and practices in farming areas suggest little social distinction between the deceased, and the gradual loss

of importance of the body as a reference for the legitimization of social memory and territory. This could be seen as a more “familiar” death, using the conception of Barrett (1994), hypothetically related to increasingly sedentary lifestyles. This situation is contrary to what happened during the Early Bronze Age, where some funeral contexts included gold or copper offerings and a great constructive investment (Bettencourt 2008, 2010a, 2010b).

In higher areas – usually in the immediacy of ancestral “*deathscapes*”, in the conception of Cook (2011) – the dead and the ancestors continue to be remembered, and their architectures remain visible. In particular due to the use of various quartz rocks in the construction of their *cairns*, providing them brightness even within the vegetation. This will certainly be significant for communities with a greater degree of mobility and with more fluid boundaries. Always positioned far from settlements, these places have been connected with shepherding lifestyles (Bettencourt 2008, 2011).

Nevertheless, the partial reuse of past monuments, both in agricultural or pastoral lands, leaves us to hypothesise that the people chosen to be buried in these ancestral contexts would certainly be socially significant.

Following the assumption that spatial distribution of burial contexts is not arbitrary, but related to the symbolic world, we have noticed that several of these contexts (flat graves, pits, cists and monuments under little *tumuli*) recurrently occupy a liminar location, such as mountain/hill slopes (between the low and the higher lands), or their summits (between the land and the sky), probably related to conceptions of death as some kind of transition or journey linking the two worlds (Sampaio, Bettencourt 2014; Sampaio, 2014).

Regarding the treatment of the corpse, there are indicators of primary individual (flat graves, pits and cists) and secondary inhumations (some caves) (fig. 10a), some of which in lateral or dorsal decubitus (figs. 8b, 8c, 8d). Despite the scarcity of bones available (26 individuals), there are some anthropological studies that allow for some inferences. The age of death in adults is positioned between 21 and c. 60 years old. The main pathologies detected were oral and degenerative. In the former there are evidences of tartar, rare caries, antemortem tooth loss and dental wear. In the latter, degenerative changes, both articular and non-articular, pointing to, in some cases, continuous physical activities (López-Costas

et al., 2008; Vaquero Rodríguez *et al.*, 2009; Cunha, Bettencourt 2013a; Gaspar *et al.*, 2014a; Gaspar *et al.*, 2014b; López-Costas *et al.*, 2014). At Cova do Santo, the stable isotope analysis suggests similar diets between different sexes, although mainly using plant-based protein (without the presence of ¹³C input, like millet or other kind of C₄ plants), and no evidences of freshwater protein (López-Costas *et al.*, 2014, 2015).

Name	Context type	Lab. Ref.	Date BP	Cal 2 σ (95.4%)	References
Pego	Plain grave (n° 5)	AA102324	3540±55	2026-1742 BC (94.5%) 1710-1701 BC (0.9%)	Sampaio 2014: 611
Pego	Plain grave (n° 9)	AA89666	3328±51	1741-1711 BC (5.6%) 1700-1501 BC (89.8%)	Sampaio, Bettencourt 2014: 53
Quinta do Amorim	Plain grave	AA89661	3345±42	1742-1710 BC (8.0%) 1700-1521 BC (87.4%)	Sampaio <i>et al.</i> , 2014: 40
Tapada da Caldeira	Plain graves	Weighted average	3250±40	1617-1440 BC (95.4%)	Jorge 1983: 55
Terraço da foz do Meda	Pit	GrA-54503	3385±35	1769-1610 BC (94.7%) 1575-1565 BC (0.7%)	Gaspar <i>et al.</i> , 2014a: 66
Faisca	Pit	AA103119	3248±41	1617-1437 BC (95.4%)	Sampaio 2014: 613
Terraço das Laranjeiras	Pit	GrA-54501	3615±35	2042-1888 BC (90.4%) 2122-2093 BC (5.0%)	Gaspar <i>et al.</i> , 2014: 56
A Forxa	Cist	Ua-21691	3370±44	1766-1530 BC (95.4%)	Prieto Martínez <i>et al.</i> , 2009: 95
Agra de Antas	Cists	Weighted average	3028±40	1405-1191 BC (90.9%) 1178-1161 BC (2.1%) 1144-1131 BC (2.3%)	Bettencourt 1999: 1044
Outeiro dos Gregos 1	Monument under tumuli (annexed structure)	CSIC-771	3360±50	1762-1511 BC (95.4%)	Jorge 1993: 419
Pedrafitas 5	Monument under tumuli	Ly-2939	3160±130	1741-1711 BC (1.3%) 1700-1056 BC (94.1%)	Blas 1985: 134
T-VI Carondio	Monument under tumuli	Beta-324748	3110±30	1437-1288 BC (95.4%)	Blanco Vázquez <i>et al.</i> , 2013: 405
Casinha Derribada 3	Monument under tumuli	Weighted average	3056±42	1421-1211 BC (95.4%)	Cruz <i>et al.</i> , 1998: 34
Senhora da Ouvida 7	Monument under tumuli	Weighted average	3010±27	1383-1342 BC (10.5%) 1306-1189 BC (78.0%) 1181-1159 BC (3.3%) 1145-1129 BC (3.5%)	Cruz, Vilaça 1999: 151
Portela da Anta 1	Megalithic monument (reuse)	*	3400±100	1951-1494 BC (94.2%) 1480-1456 BC (1.2%)	Silva 1997: 616
Monte da Deva III	Megalithic monument (reuse)	Beta-12598	*	1885-1490	Blas 2004
Castonairas	Megalithic monument (reuse)	OxA-7436	3365±45	1760-1527 BC (95.4%)	Cruz 2001: 239
Castonairas	Megalithic monument (reuse)	GrA-9314	3250±50	1634-1426 BC (95.4%)	Cruz 2001: 239
Prados	Megalithic monument (reuse)	Ua 19729	3325±45	1736-1716 BC (3.1%) 1695-1503 BC (92.3%)	Bettencourt 2010a: 143
Vale de Chão 1	Monument under tumuli (reuse)	AA89665	3156±41	1509-1373 BC (83.0%) 1357-1302 BC (12.4%)	Vilas Boas 2014: 22
Carvalho	Megalithic monument (reuse)	GrN-20792	3100±90	1608-1582 BC (1.3%) 1561-1113 BC (94.1%)	Cruz 1995: 99
Madorra da Granxa	Megalithic monument (reuse)	CSIC-1377	3346±28	1733-1718 BC (3.0%) 1694-1599 BC (77.3%) 1586-1533 BC (15.1%)	Chao Álvarez, Álvarez Merayo 2000: 60
Madorra da Granxa	Megalithic monument (reuse)	CSIC-1375	3329±27	1686-1530 BC (95.4%)	Chao Álvarez, Álvarez Merayo 2000: 60
Cova do Santo	Karstic cave	Weighted average	*	1890-1600	López-Costas <i>et al.</i> , 2014: 42
Valdevara 2	Karstic cave	Beta-235729	3270±40	1632-1449 BC (95.4%)	Vaquero Rodríguez <i>et al.</i> , 2009: 108
Valdevara 2	Karstic cave	Beta-235730	3250±40	1617-1440 BC (95.4%)	Vaquero Rodríguez <i>et al.</i> , 2009: 108
Granjinhos	Atypical monument	Beta-374921	3250±30	1613-1491 BC (80.5%) 1485-1451 BC (14.9%)	Sampaio 2014: 619

* Unavailable information

Figure 9. Available ¹⁴C dates for the burials contexts by types [calibration using Oxcal 4.2, curve IntCal 13 (Reimar *et al.*, 2013)].

The rites of cremation inside funeral urns (fig. 10b) existed but appeared to be underrepresented (Sampaio 2014), although they have taken place in the Northwest since the 3rd millennium BC (Bettencourt, Meijide Cameselle 2009). However, due the limited information available, we cannot know who was buried or cremated, nor the social reasons for such distinctions.



Figure 10a: Hypothetical secondary inhumations at Cova do Santo (López-Costas *et al.*, 2015, fig. 4C). **10b:** Urns from Granjinhos (Bettencourt 2010b: 39, fig. 3.7).

3. THE MIDDLE BRONZE AGE *VERSUS* THE BEGINNING OF LATE BRONZE AGE

Summarising, it is suggested that during the Middle Bronze age the new scenarios that structured the world and created social identity were a set of network sites. In particular, the increasingly sedentary settlements, the places where statues-menhirs were erected, and some other places, such as mountains, hills, waters, outcrops and soils, sometimes illustrated by bronze and gold depositions. Nevertheless, the reinterpretation or symbolic appropriation of the past *loci* remains important, and was demonstrated by the depositions made inside the Neolithic megalithic monuments or near/inside the funerary monuments built during the Early Bronze Age.

Such an attitude is understandable, taking into account an increasingly sedentary society, devoted to the land, dependent on farming, shepherding, wood exploration and bearers of a cosmology probably much connected with animism, emphasizing the properties of hills and mountains, outcrops, water sources and

streams, soils, metallic and non-metallic minerals, as well as the spirits of ancestors or other kinds of supernatural powers.

Since these features persist into the early Late Bronze Age, it is possible to speak about a change in continuity. For example, the occupation strategies in settlements continue, as suggested by the different types of settlements known. However, there is an increasingly tendency to occupy higher altitude areas, as represented by the third group of integrated, which tend to increase during the Late Bronze Age. Some of these places seem to earn an increasingly social character in the structuration of space (Bettencourt 2013a, 2013b).

In terms of subsistence strategies the planting of different types of wheat, and barley and *Panicum miliaceum* (Bettencourt 1999; Bettencourt *et al.*, 2007; Tereso 2012) prevails, this last cereal present in greater amounts during this phase when compared to the Middle Bronze Age. Leguminous plants like *Vicia faba* and *Pisum sativum* are also known (Bettencourt 1999; Bettencourt *et al.*, 2007; Tereso 2012). Such data shows the continuity of a diversified agriculture based on the planting of cereals, taking advantage of the different types of soils and using appropriate techniques, in order to avoid the exhaustion of the soils and maximizing the work over the year.

The deposition of metallic objects in “natural places” also continues, even though showing an increasing number and a higher diversification of represented objects (Bettencourt 2013a, 2013b; Sampaio 2014). The production of metal goods proliferates, showing several continuities of artefacts produced in binary alloys (Vilaça 1997; Bettencourt 1998, 1999, 2001; Bottaini 2012; Sampaio 2014).

The erection of statues-menhirs, which we believe were associated with mining areas and/or mining stories, also continues during the Late Bronze Age (Bettencourt 2013a, 2013b).

In general, some funeral contexts also persist, such as the reuse of megalithic monuments from the Neolithic (Alto da Barreira, Corunha; Rapadouro 1, Vila Nova de Paiva); the construction of little monuments under *tumuli* (Sr.^a da Ouvida 11 and 12, Castro Daire; Piedrafita 5, Las Regueras); and the erection of cists (Paranho, Viseu; Santinha, Amares). However, these manifestations become

scarce and included other types of offerings, or even their absence (Bettencourt 2010a).

The major shifts only occurred in the 9th century BC, through influences mainly coming from the South, probably introduced by the Phoenicians and resulting from their role in the search and exchange of tin and gold.

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