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## SOCIAL CHANGE AND METALWORKING IN THE EARLY IRON AGE: AN APPROACH FROM NORTH-WEST IBERIA

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*Summary. This paper analyses social transformations in the Early Iron Age based on a holistic and longue durée approach applied to the first fortified habitats in the Iberian north-west. Through a comprehensive review of two paradigmatic settlements of the EIA in the province of A Coruña (Galicia, north-west Iberia), Punta de Muros and A Graña, a comparison is drawn between the social and territorial dynamics of this period by means of an in-depth analysis of the main characteristics of both settlements.*

*Accordingly, a greater level of social complexity during the phases of occupation of the settlement of Punta de Muros has been identified, in contrast to the resistance to change observed in A Graña. Based on these conclusions, the role of metalworking and its symbolic value in fostering and legitimizing these social and territorial transformations and in the development of Iron Age communities are analysed.*

### INTRODUCTION

This paper combines two main areas of interest in the social analysis of Iron Age communities: the emergence of social patterns of inequality in the Early Iron Age (EIA) and the social and symbolic dimension of metalworking. Regarding the first theme, the emergence of processes of social inequality has already been highlighted in some European regions (Fernández-Götz 2014), although not yet in the Iberian north-west. With regard to the second, and with some regional exceptions (e.g. Hingley 1997; 2009; Haaland 2007–08), metallurgy has usually been studied from a technological perspective, as is also the case in north-west Iberia.

Thus, this paper aims, first, to analyse the extent of social inequality in societies that had been previously classified as reluctant to change and, subsequently, to assess the role of metalworking in this process. An approach to the societies of the EIA in the north-west of the Iberian peninsula is implemented, focusing on the characterization of their main social dynamics (Fig. 1). Our goal is to examine their changes and continuities from a *longue durée* point of view based on a multiscale comparative approach that aims to understand the processes and transformations embedded in materiality. Accordingly it is proposed to conduct a diachronic analysis of the settlement, here understood as a ‘living’ entity that changes and develops over time (Gerritsen 2007; Blanco-González 2011) and that reflects the conscious and unconscious values

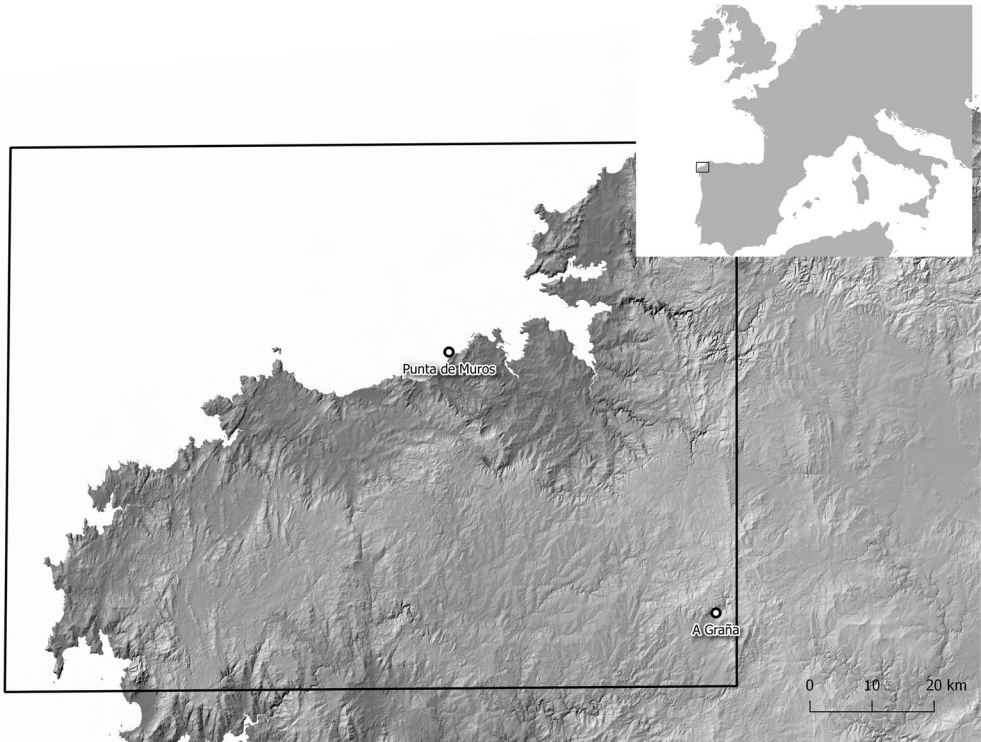


FIGURE 1  
Study area.

and beliefs of its community in the archaeological record (Thomas 1999, 20; Hodder 2004, 74). Within the framework, the analysis of the conduct of metalworking becomes essential, as changes in the perception of metal production are relevant as proxies for understanding new social forms.

This paper also combats an overly economic and/or materialistic approach to social change that points to economic activity as the cause and essential source of any transformation, an attitude which has been common in several historiographical traditions of the last century (González García 2017, 295–8). Social, ideological, or symbolic phenomena should not be considered as dependent on economic factors; on the contrary, various anthropological perspectives have emphasized the infrastructural importance of symbolic thought and ideology (the performance of distinct symbolic or religious knowledge) in the origins of inequality (e.g. Godelier 1986; Feinman 2016). The acceptance of the relevance of religious components in the emergence of new social structures (Bloch 2008) has allowed archaeological research to fashion fresh approaches in studying certain pieces of evidence and processes. This is seen in the case of the Neolithic, which has ceased to be analysed from purely technological perspectives and is now considered a ‘symbolic revolution’ (Cauvin 2013), and again in the identification of religion as a key factor in the first human processes of social and urban aggregation (as has been proposed, for example, in Catalhöyük: Hodder and Pels 2010).

Materialistic and economic assumptions have also shaped the interpretation of protohistoric metalworking, conditioned by the contemporary concept of technology as an exclusively technical activity detached from society (Ingold 2000, 314). Thus, interpreting metallurgy as technical, ‘quasi-scientific’ knowledge (Welbourn 1985, 129) from our contemporary perspective explains the lack of interest shown in its other aspects (symbolic, religious, ritual, or magical), in that we focus all our attention on its dimension as an exclusively ‘industrial’ activity (Budd and Taylor 1995, 137–9; Haaland 2004, 1). From an anthropological perspective, this situation began to change with the understanding of technology as a comprehensive social phenomenon, composed equally of technical, social and symbolic aspects (Pfaffenberger 1988, 236; Reid and MacLean 1995, 145). Hence, its value and meaning are achieved in relation to the society in which it is produced and used (Welbourn 1985, 129; Barndon 2004, 22).

For decades, ethnographic research into the societies of the Eastern Great Lakes of Sub-Saharan Africa has shown the close relationship between metallurgical activity and areas which, from a Western point of view, have little to do with technology (Herbert 1993). The importance of metalworking, therefore, exceeds any strictly economic considerations in terms of the value of metal or its use in various activities (warfare, agriculture, trade, etc.) and can only be understood through indigenous theories of natural and social order (Childs and Killick 1993, 319). In this sense, this paper puts forward a perspective on metalworking beyond its ‘technological dimension’ (*sensu* Ingold) – as a social activity that has influenced the development of complex social dynamics.

For this purpose, a review of the processes that took place during the EIA is proposed, employing our case studies. Through the identification of differences in social organization between regions, the aim is to identify asymmetrical social dynamics in particularly early times, emphasizing the role that metalworking may have played in their emergence, development and legitimization.

#### THE EARLY IRON AGE IN THE NORTH-WEST OF THE IBERIAN PENINSULA

The interpretation of the Iron Age in the north-west of the Iberian peninsula has witnessed, in recent decades, a confrontation between different historiographical trends (Ruiz Zapatero 2005). This clash is evidenced in the application of various models to understand Iron Age societies, especially in the Late Iron Age (LIA), and by the development of hypotheses that deny or defend the existence of social changes in the Iron Age up to the Roman conquest. As a result, different interpretative models have been proposed, suggesting diverse (and sometimes incompatible) social configurations (González-Ruibal 2012; González García 2017; Currás Refojos and Sastre 2019). Other proposals, however, support hypotheses based on non-linear evolutionism and a progressive emergence of social inequalities. Paradoxically, and regardless of their conceptualization of societies (heterarchy, deep-rural, undivided societies, transegalianism, etc.), all of them characterize the EIA as a hotbed of autarchic communities and tend to overlook internal inequalities and the emergence of power groups.

To some extent, these perspectives do seem to be supported by the main characteristics of the archaeological record. The habitation of the EIA in the north-west Iberian peninsula is characterized by small sites, usually less than 1 ha in size, in prominent places of difficult access (Parcero-Oubiña 2000, 86–7) (Fig. 2). The main criteria for selecting a location seems to lie in a natural defensive topography: very prominent sites with long-distance visibility that integrate a

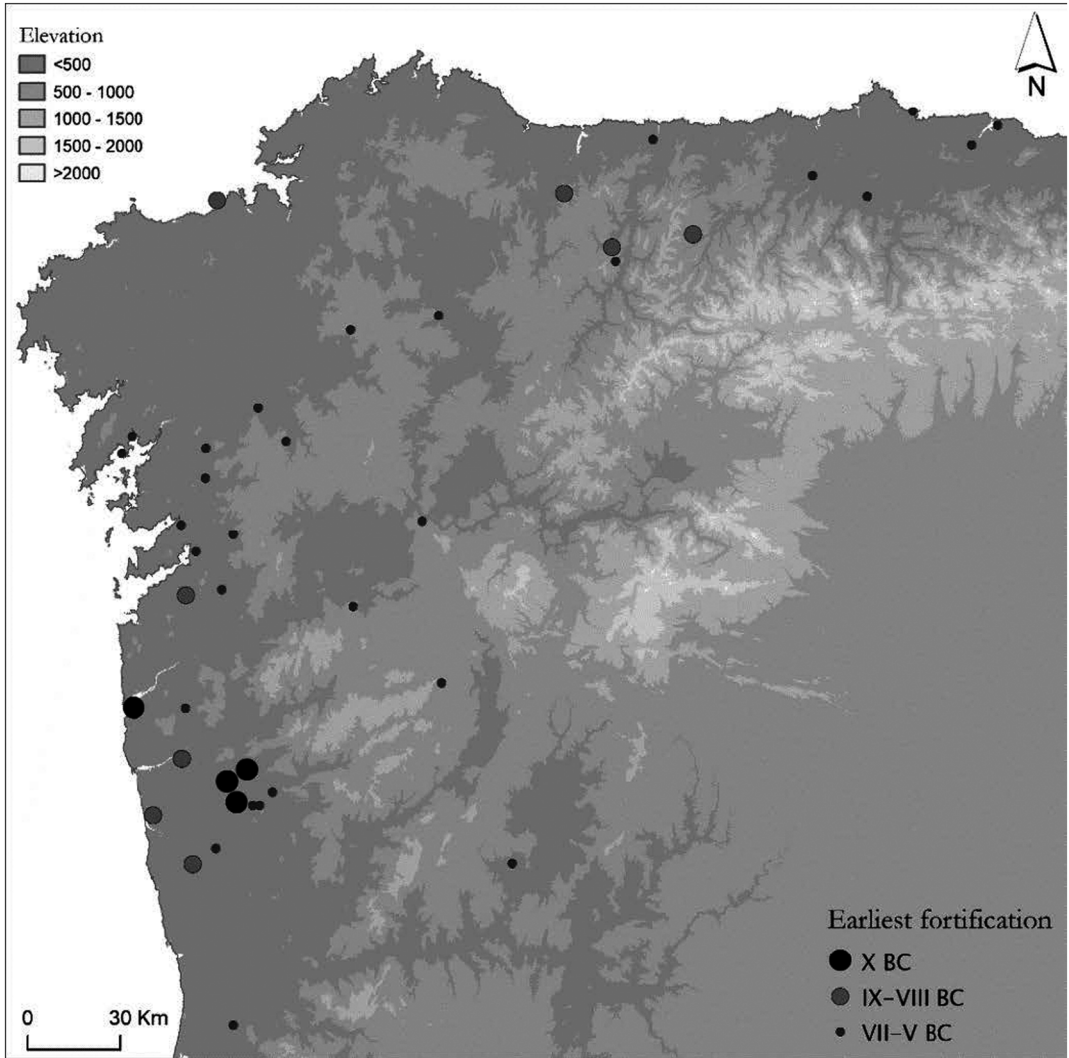


FIGURE 2  
North-west Iberian hillforts with EIA dates (Parcero-Oubiña *et al.* 2020, 164).

fragmented social landscape. This choice meant, in many cases, moving away from areas with greater agricultural potential, a trend that was paralleled, paradoxically but necessarily, by an increased productivity of the farming system.

The process is combined with an architectural monumentalization of the settlement. The construction of larger defensive systems is striking in its break from previous practices, probably linked to the move from semi-nomadism to a full sedentary lifestyle (Méndez Fernández 1994), with all the changes this entailed in their understanding of the world. However, these settlements are characterized by a lack of urban planning, with dwellings of small dimensions and morphological

diversity irregularly distributed throughout the hamlet (González-Ruibal 2006–07). Also worth mentioning is the disappearance of Late Bronze Age practices, some of them related to the symbolic, such as deposits in possibly liminal spaces (González-Ruibal 2006–07, 158), and the reduction in the trafficking of metal objects, both bronze and gold (Parcerro-Oubiña *et al.* 2020). These changes, among others, result in a strong reduction of medium and large-scale mobility that characterized the Late Bronze Age (Cunliffe 1999) and reflect a rupture with previous social forms. This situation – namely the absence of prestige goods – emerges within an egalitarian society reacting against social divisions (González García *et al.* 2011).

Beyond its characterization as a period of egalitarian societies, the EIA tends to lag behind in archaeological research, which is more interested in the social analysis of LIA societies and/or the transition to the Roman world. Research has also been characterized by a certain standardization of processes in different aspects of the study areas. This has led to interpretative hypotheses that homogenize the analysed communities and that have been therefore applied to the whole of the study area, forcing a univocal perspective and biased analysis. This tendency, however, has recently begun to be overcome, allowing a greater receptiveness towards diverse forms of socio-political organization coexisting in the same space at the same time (González Álvarez 2011; González-Ruibal 2012). As a result, a more precise picture is emerging, one defining a social ‘mosaic’ of different communities, with some moving towards centralization and hierarchization in coexistence with others that were resistant to social complexity and inequality (González-Ruibal 2012; Nión-Álvarez 2021).

These perspectives, nonetheless, demand an equally heterogeneous perception of time. A study of social dynamics requires a diachronic vision that integrates ‘past and future’ to offer a ‘succession of archaeo-historical portrayals’ (Nión-Álvarez 2021, 70) and thereby establishes a dynamic representation of past societies. Archaeology, from a contemporary perspective, seeks to analyse and identify different temporal realities (Lucas 2012, 31) and to classify them according to different concepts of representation specific to the discipline (Olivier 2020, 180), recognizing time as a continuous process that involves ‘sedimentation and encapsulation’ in objects (Olivier 2001, 64). It is necessary to take seriously the different speeds and forms of historical processes experienced by Iron Age communities, instead of seeing them as all changing in the same manner and at the same tempo. Considering the specificities and situations of the different areas of north-west Iberia, these groups may have explored more complex forms, as southern societies did, or may have survived as homogeneous communities, as in the inland areas (González García 2017, 304–7). Our obligation is to incorporate the temporal perspective into the account and so provide a more flexible and multiple historical narrative within which the communities are integrated.

#### PUNTA DE MUROS AND A GRAÑA (NINTH TO FOURTH CENTURIES BC): AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL PORTRAYAL OF UNDIVIDED SOCIETIES?

As previously explained, the case study covers two settlements that are particularly representative of social dynamics of the north-west Iberian EIA: A Graña (Toques, A Coruña) and Punta de Muros (Arteixo, A Coruña). Although they both cover a similar area (less than 1 ha), they have differing characteristics in terms of location and their relationship with the environment. A Graña is located inland, on top of a small hill with great medium and long-distance visibility. On the other hand, Punta de Muros is a coastal settlement on a small

peninsula with little and poor accessibility and natural defensive barriers. In spite of these significant differences in terms of location, both were settled in areas far from land communication routes but with great defensive potential, which is characteristic of EIA settlements (Parcero-Oubiña 2000, 86–7).

These two fortified locales have also been subject to relatively extensive excavations that have yielded a temporal sequence and occupational evidence with a certain level of detail (Table 1). In the case of A Graña, six excavation campaigns were carried out between 1987 and 1993, whereas Punta de Muros was completely excavated in 2005, together with several surveys outside the walls,

TABLE 1  
<sup>14</sup>C dates of A Graña and Punta de Muros. Starred Cal Dates were obtained from OxCal software, v. 4.4 (Bronk Ramsey 1995) in an attempt to correct the accuracy of the original data

PUNTA DE MUROS						
Code	Date (BP)	Cal BC/AD	Sample location	Location detail	Material dated	Plant species
PEC 8343	2150 ±35	350-114 BC	Structure VI	Collapse level	Charcoal	Fabaceae
PEC 8345	2480 ±35	756-539 BC	Structure VI	Hearth	Charcoal	Quercus sp.
PEC 8347	2550 ±35	797-594 BC	Southern entrance area	Isolated charcoal	Charcoal	Unknown
PEC 8353	2495 ±35	764-544 BC	Outer area of the rampart	Hearth	Charcoal	Unknown
PEC 8354	2485 ±35	760-540 BC	Outer area of the rampart	Hearth	Charcoal	Unknown
PEC 8407	2620 ±40	821-781 BC	Structure XI-b	Hearth	Charcoal	Unknown
PEC 8425	2500 ±35	764-548 BC	Structure X	Hearth	Charcoal	Unknown
PEC 8429	2710 ±40	896-823 BC	Structure XIV	Hearth	Charcoal	Fabaceae
PEC 8432	2485 ±40	760-539 BC	Structure IX	Hearth	Charcoal	Fabaceae
PEC 8433	2460 ±60	751-419 BC	Structure IX	Hearth	Charcoal	Unknown
PEC 8441	2010 ±40	49 BC-51 AD	Structure VII	Isolated charcoal	Charcoal	Unknown
PEC 8444	2620 ±35	816-786 BC	Outer area of the rampart	Isolated charcoal	Charcoal	Unknown
PEC 8446	1035 ±30	786-988 AD	Inner area of the rampart	Isolated charcoal	Charcoal	Unknown
PEC 8447	2480 ±35	756-539 BC	Structure XVI	Hearth	Charcoal	Quercus sp.
PEC 8451	2375 ±35	507-396 BC	Outer reinforcement of the rampart	Isolated charcoal	Charcoal	Unknown
PEC 8455	2555 ±35	799-596 BC	Outer area of the settlement	Isolated charcoal	Charcoal	Unknown
PEC 8486	2660 ±35	837-798 BC	Structure XIX	Stratum below the hearth	Charcoal	Unknown
PEC 8496	2425 ±35	706-409 BC	Structure XXV	Isolated charcoal	Charcoal	Quercus sp.
PEC 8498	2375 ±35	507-396 BC	Structure XXXIII	Hearth	Charcoal	Fabaceae
PEC 8513	2480 ±35	756-539 BC	Structure XIIb	Stratum below the hearth	Charcoal	Quercus sp.
PEC 8529	2510 ±35	770-550 BC	Structure XXX	Hearth	Charcoal	Fabaceae
PEC 8532	2385 ±35	509-399 BC	Structure XXXII	Hearth	Charcoal	Fabaceae
PEC 8536	2480 ±35	756-539 BC	Structure XXXII	Hearth (second level of use)	Charcoal	Quercus sp.
PEC 9647	2395 ±35	511-402 BC	Structure XIa	Hearth (first level of use)	Charcoal	Unknown
<b>A GRAÑA</b>						
Gd-5555	1980 ±50	94 BC-204 AD*	Structure FC5	Hearth	Charcoal	Unknown
Gd-6068	2610 ±70	922-523 BC*	Structure FC3b	Hearth	Charcoal	Unknown
Gd-6074	2650 ±100	1050-478 BC*	Structure FC3a	Posthole	Charcoal	Unknown
Gd-5859	2210 ±50	393-121 BC*	Structure FC4	Hearth	Charcoal	Unknown
Gd (1)	2580 ±90	903-417 BC*	Structure FC3b	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Gd (2)	2240 ±25	387-204 BC*	Outer area of the rampart	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown

underwater surveys and several archaeometallurgical, palynological, and anthracological studies. In both cases, several radiocarbon dates were also obtained, which have helped to define their chronologies with greater precision. Both settlements show a certain temporal correlation as to their first occupation: Punta de Muros seems to have been occupied for the first time in the middle of the ninth century BC (Cano Pan 2012, 97), whereas the origins of A Graña can be dated in the first decades of the eighth century BC (perhaps even in the ninth century BC: Ni3n-3lvarez 2021, 151).

Regarding the characteristics of their domestic units, the dwellings are defined by their small dimensions and morphological simplicity (not exceeding 30–35 m<sup>2</sup>: Ni3n-3lvarez 2021, 161), without internal compartmentalization and with a multi-functional use of space. The main difference between the settlements is their building style: while in Punta de Muros the dwellings have stone foundations (Fig. 4), in A Graña they were made of perishable materials delimited by foundation ditches or rows of vertical stones (Mejjide Cameselle 1990, 113–16) (Fig. 3). In the case of A Graña, the continuous overlapping of a number of domestic units over a short period of time is significant, as can be seen in the case of structure FC3 (see Table 1), though this sequence should not be understood as a reconstruction of the settlement, but as representing maintenance activities on perishable structures (Blanco-Gonz3lez 2011, 395). This overlapping and reconstruction of dwellings evidence an intense and continuous temporary occupation, which, however, does not imply any transformation of social life in the settlement, but rather a confirmation of its social system and its success.

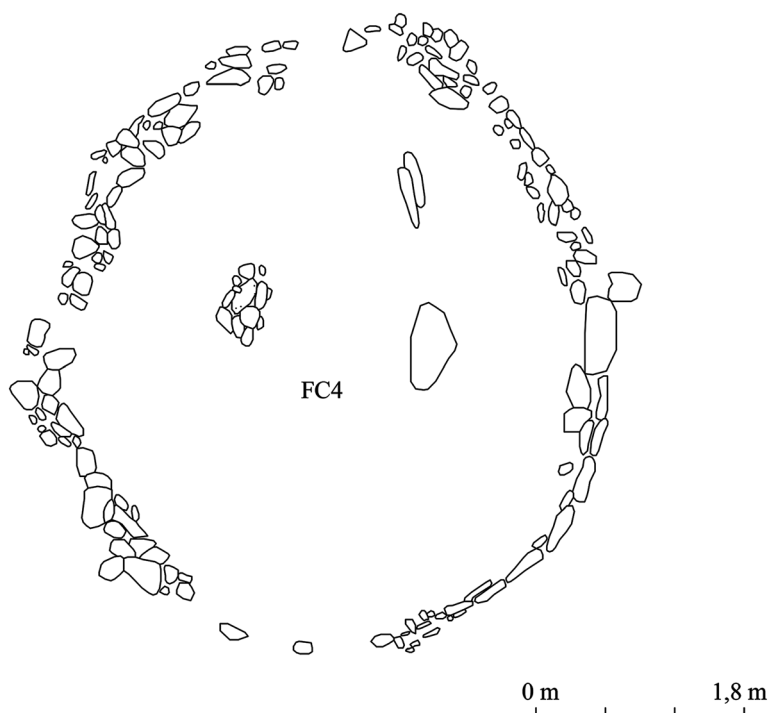


FIGURE 3  
Domestic units of A Graña: Structure FC4.



FIGURE 4  
Aerial photograph of Punta de Muros (Cano Pan 2012, 102).

These modest dwellings would have been home to small family groups that would construct a community with characteristics consistent with the models proposed for the EIA: egalitarian and undivided communities with no signs of hierarchy or inequality, in which the settlement is the unique and basic unit of political organization. Moreover, the homogeneity and simplicity within the domestic units in each settlement highlights the egalitarian *ethos* of these communities.

The internal spatial organization of the settlement points in a similar direction. If we establish a breakdown of the urban structure of Punta de Muros (whose layout can be fully analysed) correlated with radiocarbon dates (see Table 1), we can identify two clearly differentiated

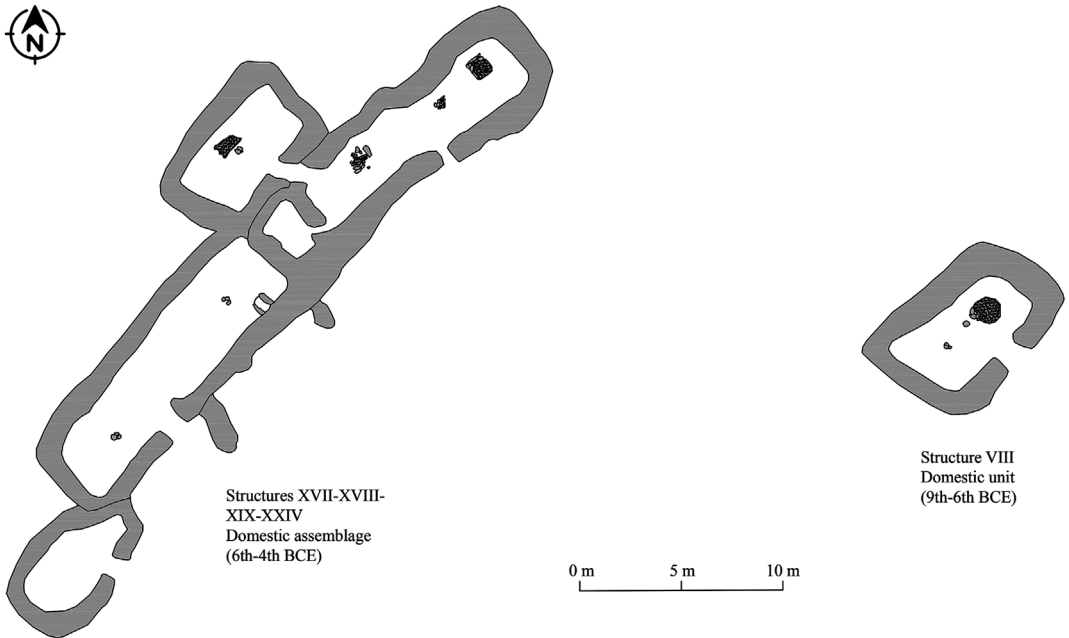


FIGURE 5  
Domestic units of Punta de Muros: comparison between the First (right) and Second Phase (left).

occupational phases (Fig. 5). The settlement seems to have been established around the middle of the ninth century BC, one of the earliest chronologies for the fortified habitats of the north-west of the peninsula (Parcero-Oubiña *et al.* 2020). This date is contemporary with the beginning of the fortified habitat seen at other settlements in northern Portugal, such as São Julião (Bettencourt 2000) or Coto da Pena (Silva 1986, 34–5), a process that spread across the north-west throughout the eighth century BC (Parcero-Oubiña *et al.* 2020, 163–4). During these first decades of occupation, Punta de Muros was a settlement of 8–10 dwellings (see Fig. 6). In addition to the absence of a well-defined layout (also applicable to A Graña), all the constructions correspond to the usual pattern of EIA domestic units.

Punta de Muros then experienced a significant if gradual demographic growth between the seventh and sixth centuries BC, a fact that can be attested through the  $^{14}\text{C}$  dating obtained in the households of structures X, XVI, or XXXII (see Table 1 and Fig. 6). This population increase, however, was not accompanied by a transformation in the social paradigm of the settlement. The new dwellings replicate similar patterns, which indicates the persistence of the same forms of social organization.

If we focus on the internal structure of the settlement and the notable absence of urban structuring, the attention paid to the formation of both defensive systems is noteworthy. Nor must one ignore the symbolism inherent in ramparts and walls that has been particularly highlighted in recent years (e.g. Von Nicolai 2014; Delfino *et al.* 2020). It is not only a matter of defensive potential, but also of its importance in determining your own limits as a community (González-Ruibal 2006–07, 182–4) and the value of defences as a symbol of social cohesion. Considering the non-existence of an internal layout, the absence of other collective buildings, the remarkable

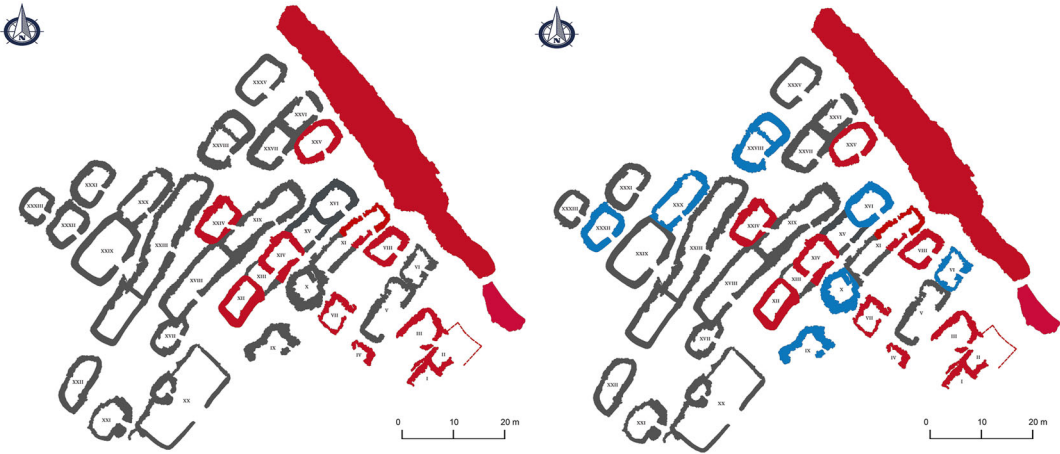


FIGURE 6

First occupation (left, in red) and demographic expansion (right, in blue) of Punta de Muros (ninth to sixth centuries BC).

simplicity and homogeneity of the domestic units, set against the single instance of mobilization of productive force towards defensive systems, each aspect seems to emphasize its value as a representative element of communal cohesion. Another factor that underlines this symbolic value and enhances it is the hallowing of its immediate surroundings through ritual activities. In the case of A Graña, for example, several intentional deposits consist of the remains of metal objects, ceramic vessels, and there is moreover abundant evidence of intentional bonfires around the wall (Acuña Castroviejo and Meijide Cameselle 1991, 51), something which has also been documented in other nearby settlements (Nión-Álvarez 2021, 254). At Punta de Muros, several structures have been excavated in which controlled fires of considerable intensity were lit at different points of the wall, unrelated to any activity linked to the defence of the ramparts (Cano Pan 2012, 131–6). In both cases, the development of these kind of ritual activities on the walls seems to indicate that the fortifications had transcended their original and defensive value and become a symbol of the community.

Finally, we must consider the metalworking activities in the settlements. During this period, metalworking was carried out in the modest and multifunctional domestic units described above. However, and in the case of Punta de Muros, this activity was initially thought to have taken place in a specialized area of the settlement (Cano Pan 2012, 735), which pointed to the site as a ‘metallurgical and commercial factory’ (Cano Pan 2012, 744). However, there is not much evidence to support this hypothesis: no imported materials have been recovered from the site (Nión-Álvarez 2021, 185), the production of metal objects is particularly limited in quantitative terms (Nión-Álvarez 2018, 349), and the characteristics of internal occupation do not hint at any kind of trade-oriented ‘industrial’ production. As evidenced by the significant amounts of kitchen and table pottery that have been recovered (Nión-Álvarez 2022, 494–5), everything seems to indicate that production areas, as in the case of Structures I–III, were a part of everyday life in spaces without internal divisions, used both for bronze production and as kitchen, storage, and even rest areas (Fig. 7).

As has been highlighted in other north-west Iberian hillforts, such as Vigaña (Farci *et al.* 2017), important metalworking activities are perfectly feasible within the framework of a

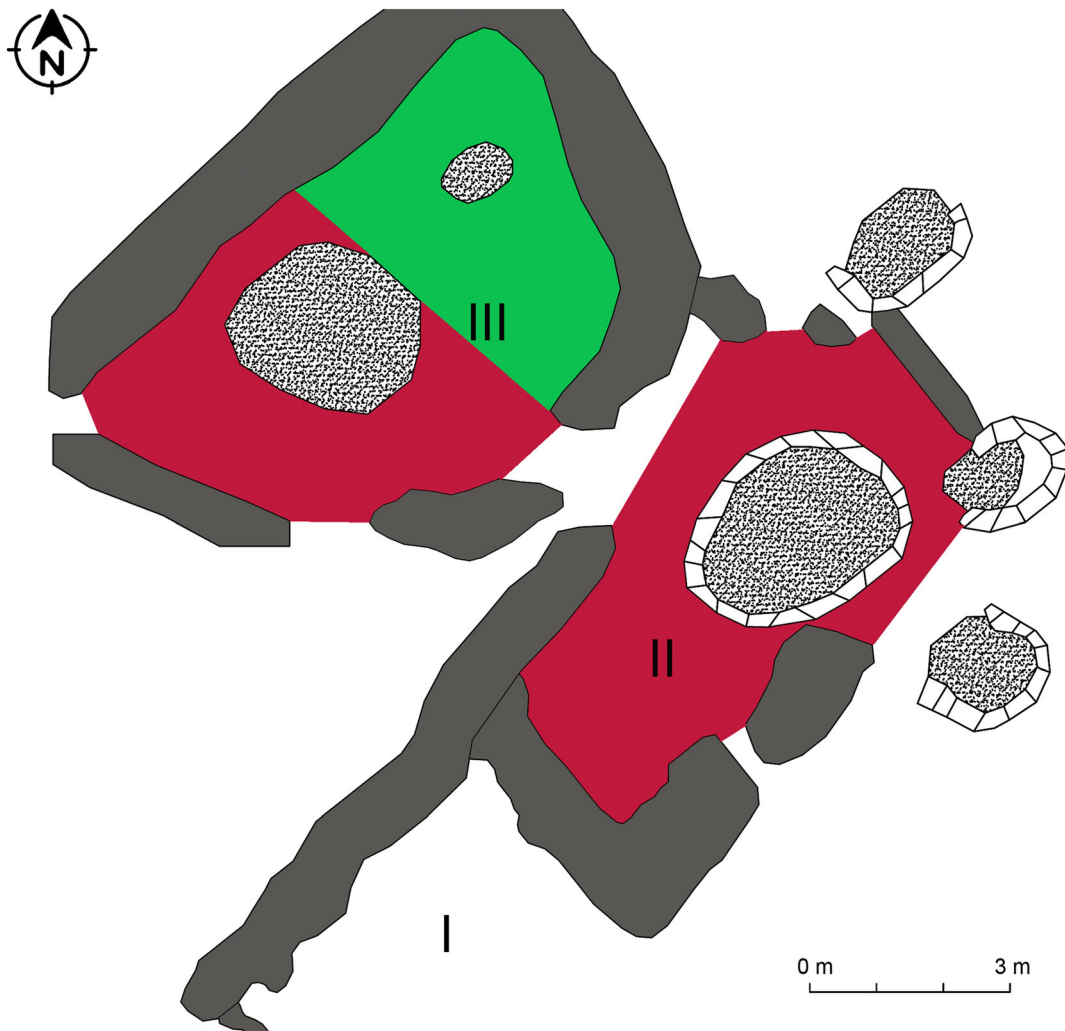


FIGURE 7  
Structures I–III (domestic activities in green, metallurgy in red) (Ni3n-3lvarez 2022, 494).

society with a strong egalitarian *ethos*. By itself, metal production does not imply the existence of greater social inequality (Welbourn 1985; Hingley 1997). The perception of metallurgy as a representative element of hierarchy, a relatively common approach in Iron Age studies (Hill 1995; Giles 2007), stems largely from the conceptualization of *le roi forgeron* in several anthropological studies of metallurgy in certain African societies and the similarities between the values of the good ruler and the blacksmith (Helms 1993; Herbert 1993). Without a proper questioning of its relevance, this type of model cannot be used as a predetermined scheme: it requires sufficient social and cultural analysis to support it. The role of the blacksmith, indeed, is eminently culturally influenced. While there are cases in which the metalworker holds a remarkable social prestige (see, for example,

the case of the Kuba of the south-west of the Democratic Republic of Congo: Vansina 1978, 67), their role is completely marginal in other communities. An example of exclusivity can be found in the Kenyan Maasai, whose social status forbids metalworkers to marry individuals who do not practice their profession (Childs and Herbert 2005, 288).

RESISTANCE AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY: TOWARDS A HETEROGENEOUS IRON AGE (SIXTH–FOURTH CENTURIES BC)

During the sixth and fourth centuries BC, north-west Iberia underwent notable changes in its social configuration (González-Ruibal 2006–07, 269), which can also be seen in our case study. In this period, in fact, it is possible to begin to trace divergences between the development of the two settlements. In the case of A Graña, it did not experience any significant transformation until the Roman conquest (29–19 BC), keeping its egalitarian *ethos* and its reluctance to social change and inequality until the change of era.

At Punta de Muros, however, a profound structural transformation in the settlement took place between the end of the sixth century BC and the beginning of the fourth century BC, apparently in response to a significant alteration in its social structure (Fig. 8). The reformulation of domestic units is perhaps the most representative archaeological expression of these transformations. In this phase, a concentration of family units in complex structures (and coexisting in smaller dwellings) can be noted. Many of the previous simple domestic units underwent significant alterations into new larger spaces (tripling or quadrupling in size). These new dwellings are also internally more complex, with internal compartmentalization and task specialization, which aspects were completely absent in previous phases. This transformation affected all the new constructions of the settlement (for a more detailed view, see Nión-Álvarez 2021, 188–203), but it is particularly representative in Structures X–XI. In the eastern sector of Structure XI (a common dwelling of the first Phase), a date was obtained corresponding to the first occupation of the settlement (PEC 8407), around the beginning of the eighth century BC. Structure X, on the other hand, seems to have been built at the height of demographic expansion between the seventh and sixth centuries BC (PEC 8425). Subsequently, both units merged to form a single domestic unit, eliminating the western wall of Structure X to double its size and reusing it for internal compartmentalization (Cano Pan 2012, 325). This joint occupation of both structures happened in the last phase, in the fifth century BC (PEC 9647).

This process also involved the construction of large dwellings *ex novo*, as in the case of Structure XXIII. This is the largest construction in the settlement, with an area of approximately 130 m<sup>2</sup>. Apparently built in a single phase, it is a domestic unit with an internal functional division and compartmentalized spaces, including an exclusive area for metalworking in its western sector (Fig. 9).

Along with architectural transformations, this process of domestic integration also reflects several shifts in the capacity to accumulate goods. As shown in Table 2, a greater storage capacity of goods (either due to the emergence of storage areas or to an increased amount of storage vessels) compared to previous phases can be observed. Moreover, this percentage increase accompanied the existence of different storage capacities between domestic compounds.

At the same time, there was also a shift in settlement planning. Now an axial urban grid was set out and the first collective and/or cultural buildings appeared. Structure XX stands out above all, albeit a small construction of about 7 m<sup>2</sup> with a bench along the entire wall, apart from a small

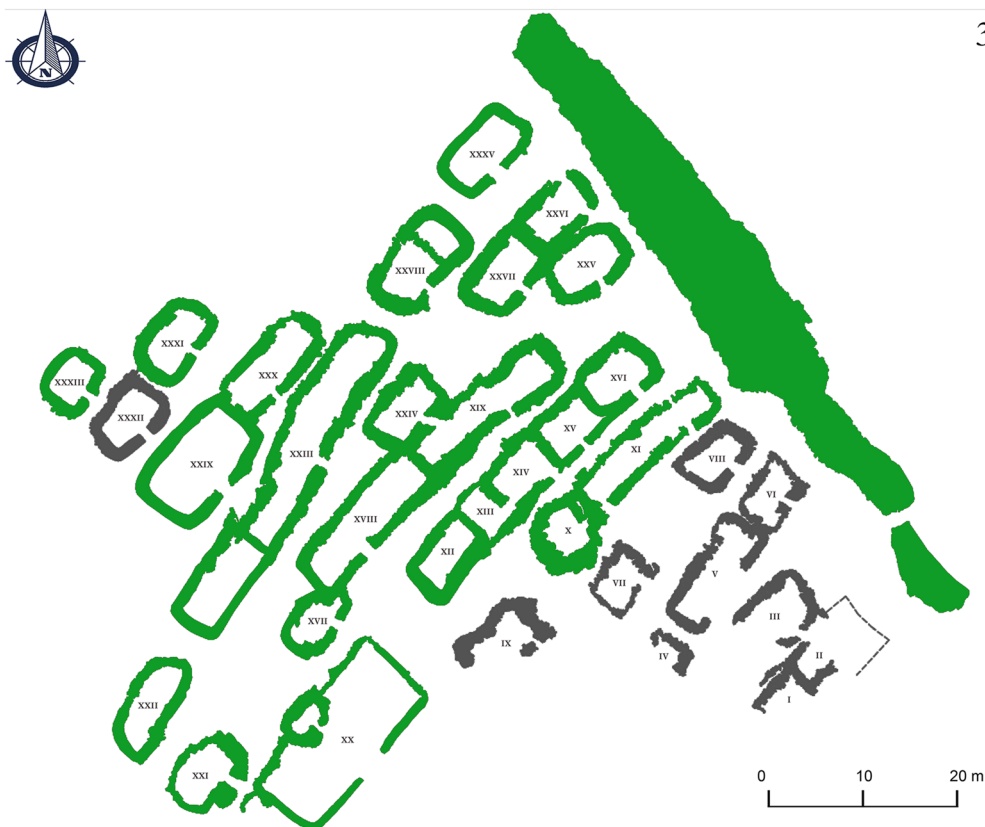


FIGURE 8

Second phase of occupation of Punta de Muros (sixth to fourth centuries BC; marked in green).

‘niche’ for a monolith with no apparent structural function (Cano Pan 2012, 431). In front of this building, there is an open courtyard of about 150 m<sup>2</sup>, thereby comprising a completely new architectural form. These peculiarities – the continuous bench (González-Ruibal 2006–07, 596), and the presence of the monolith – being typical characteristics of public or religious spaces, have contributed to its interpretation as a ritualistic space.

Finally, it is important to note the changes in metal production. Although there were no significant technical variations (the use of ternary bronze alloys persisted, while iron remained non-existent), production areas changed completely. Instead of being practised in multifunctional domestic spaces shared with other daily activities, metalworking was moved to specialized production areas completely dedicated to metal production and separated from any domestic activity. In some cases, these areas are located within a domestic complex, but with specialized rooms for bronze metalworking (documented in two of the six domestic compounds); in others, such as Structure XXXIII, they are not connected to any aspects of domestic life at all. Unlike the production areas of previous periods, these rooms are specifically devoted to bronze metalworking, pointing to a higher level of specialization.

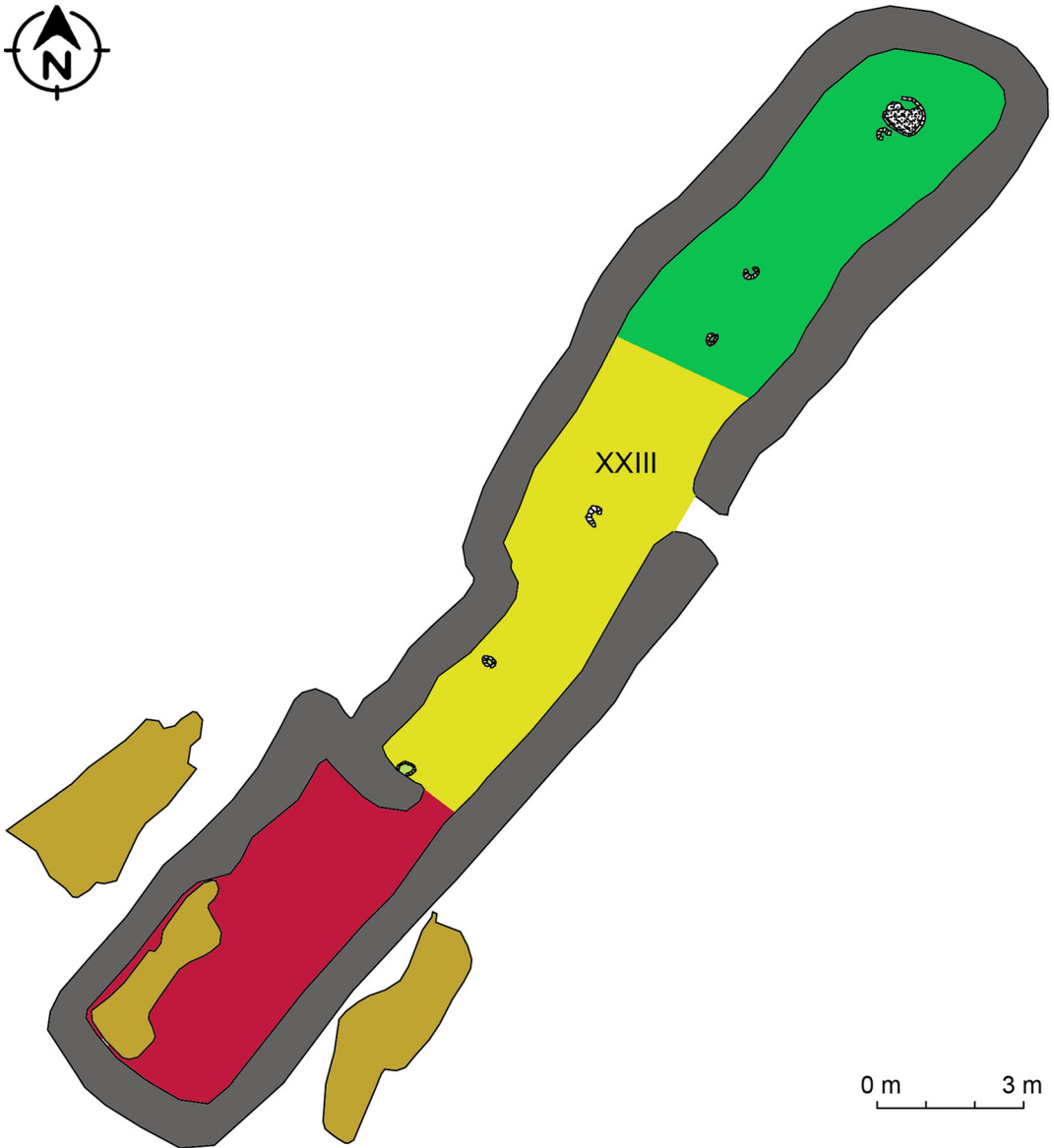


FIGURE 9  
Structure XXIII (domestic activity in green, metalworking in red, rest areas in yellow) (Nión-Álvarez 2022, 496).

#### METALLURGY AS A SOCIAL AGENT?

This change in social dynamics raises three points of considerable interest when analysing Iron Age societies. The first of these is the observation of two clearly heterogeneous trends in the development of the communities of the north-west, at least in those existing in this study area.

TABLE 2  
Data of Phase 1A/1B (above) and Phase 2 (below) dwellings (Nión-Álvarez [forthcoming](#))

Domestic Unit	Area(in m2)	% of storage vessels in overall pottery record	Has dedicated storage space	Radiocarbon Dating
<b>Phase 1A/1b</b>				
III	28.1	21.5		
VI	18.1	7.1		700-547 BC (PEC 8345)
IX	25.2	5.1		699-548 BC (PEC 8432)
				704-546 BC (PEC 8433)
X	21.8	–		697-546 BC (PEC 8425)
XI(b)	27.5	–		829-780 BC (PEC 8407)
XII	20.9	0.0		
XIV	27.7	–		853-796 BC (PEC 8429)
XVI	26.9	33.2		700-547 BC (PEC 8447)
XXIV	23.4	8.6		
XXV	28.0	0.0		
XXVIII	36.8	29.3		
XXX	34.3	17.7		654-549 BC (PEC 8529)
XXXII	19.8	5.8		701-547 BC (PEC 8536)
<i>Mean</i>	26.0	12.4		
<b>Phase 2</b>				
X-XI	68.8	37.5	Yes	518-401 BC (PEC 9647)
XII-XVI	114.3	27.7	Yes	
XVII-XVIII-XIX-XXIV	154.2	27.3	Yes	
XXII	25.8	–		
XXIII	130.5	58.4	Yes	517-399 BC (PEC 8498)
XXVIII	36.8	29.3		
XXIX-XXX	108.8	14.8		
<i>Mean</i>	91.3	32.5		

The documentation of divergent forms of social organization is not in fact so unusual in the north-west of the Iberian peninsula (González Álvarez 2011; González-Ruibal 2012), although it is at such an early stage. The choice of A Graña as a case study, in fact, is no accident: the site represents a common occupational pattern typifying a trend in north-west Iberian EIA societies, especially inland. These communities were more resistant to social change than the coastal societies, where social inequality began to emerge at the end of the EIA (Nión-Álvarez 2021, 215–20), as Punta de Muros seems to show. In this sense, recognizing regional differences helps to respect the temporalities of the past and to prevent undue standardizing narratives and thereby pre/misconceptions.

A second aspect to note is the emergence of social processes related to the breakdown of social cohesion and non-hierarchical trends in the earlier part of the Iron Age. The disappearance of simple, multifunctional dwellings in favour of large, complex, and specialized units points to the emergence of inequalities, especially if we consider that the need to define and demarcate one's own domestic space is often related to an increase in social complexity (Gerritsen 2007; Steadman 2015). This is complemented by an early development of settlement planning, a greater degree of productive specialization of certain tasks (such as metallurgy), and giving the practices of religion architectural form helping also to legitimize certain social transformations (Fernández-Götz and Roymans 2015; Golosetti 2017).

In this case, there is not enough data to suggest an effective hierarchy (nor to rule it out), but it does hint at a plausible rift in the egalitarian *ethos* of the settlement. This last could no longer

form the ‘basic core’ of the political organization, becoming rather the arena where were in play a multiplicity of lineages or collectives with different ranks or levels of prestige, capable of influencing the community to a greater or lesser extent. We cannot argue for any established seizure of power by any particular group in the village, but we can recognize the emergence of these potential centres of power as the first step towards social inequalities in some parts of the north-west Iberian peninsula. This phenomenon, which is particularly unusual in this region, has yet been already observed in other parts of Europe, such as the Rhineland-Palatinate (Fernández-Götz 2014, 128) or the south-east of the Gallia (García 2005). Both these last regions show a remarkable process of urbanization and social hierarchization at much the same time, as defined by an increase in social conflict and a notable development of planning and construction. These processes reflect the emergence of a structured social hierarchy and the first appearance of great central locales. In other areas, such as the Meuse-Demer-Scheldt, there is no evidence of such strong hierarchical processes, but even so the disappearance of the village as a nucleus of political organization can still be observed, with a social shift towards kinship and domestic units (Roymans and Gerritsen 2002). From a European perspective, the emergence of such processes in north-west Iberia should come as no surprise. However, it is still necessary to accent the need for a heterogeneous perspective that avoids standardization processes and narratives: even though the Germanic *Fürstensitze* of the Rhineland-Palatinate disappeared between the fifth and fourth centuries BC (Fernández-Götz 2017, 120–4), as happened with Punta de Muros, and in other regions too, such as south-east Gaul, this incipient and faltering hierarchization marks the beginning of a gradual process of endogenous urbanization that would not culminate until the Roman conquest (Golosetti 2014).

Finally, the third matter of interest requires us to hypothesize about some of the causes that may have encouraged, legitimized, or structured this path towards division and internal inequality. In this study, we have considered the possibility that the social role of metalworking and those engaged in it may have had an influence on the emergence and legitimization of this paradigm shift in the settlement. It should be noted here that metalworking, by itself, is not seen as the trigger in the emergence of these processes: complex changes are the result of a multiplicity of interrelated factors. However, a greater productive specialization, of which metallurgy is an obvious instance, and its link with some of the domestic units of the settlement suggest the possibility that the control of certain activities may have been considered a mark of prestige and linked to powerful groups. Hence, as we have suggested, it is necessary to embrace an understanding of metallurgy as a symbolic and social activity, not merely a technological one.

To some extent, this is not a novel question; the esoteric and symbolic component of metalworking has been studied from different ethnological and anthropological contexts in regions such as the British Isles (Gillies 1981) and Scandinavia (Barndon 2005). These investigations have not only addressed the link between metalworking and the magical component that assists in structuring its technical dimension, but have also explored the hypothetical position of the prestige accorded to the metalworker from prehistoric times (especially in the British Isles: Gillies 1981, 73–4; Scott 1987, 153–4; Dolan 2016, 31) and the close relationship between metallurgy and rituals (Haaland 2004, 149; Dolan 2016, 35). From our point of view, we aim to take this line of thought still further, to consider the social and symbolic dimension of metalworking as a relevant factor in the development of certain social dynamics. As mentioned above, the social position of metalworkers is eminently cultural, and their mere presence does not illustrate that of either hierarchy or prestige; an elucidation requires re-evaluating their relationship with all those elements indicative of any greater or lesser social prestige.

At the same time, it is also worth highlighting that the study of the rituality of metalworking has mostly focused on iron and steel, possibly as a result of two main factors in play: the prominent position of the blacksmith in medieval European texts and the very limited existence of copper working in traditional African metallurgy (where most anthropological studies have been conducted). Although the working conditions of the metallurgy of non-ferrous metals are radically different from those of iron (inevitably generating different narratives and symbolism), copper-based metallurgy yet offers many examples of its symbolic and esoteric value, as, for example, in India (Lahiri 1995). Bronze metallurgy is characterized by complex technical-operational chains (Lehoërff 2018, 117–52); the absence of a specific treatment such as heavy forging (Green 2002, 15–16) does not necessarily imply that the symbolic value or esoteric knowledge was any lesser with copper and bronze, but the resulting cultural phenomena will necessarily differ from those of iron metallurgy.

Returning to the case study, and focusing on Punta de Muros, the profound social change in the settlement in its last years of occupation is also indicated in a notable change in the manner of metallurgical production. Metalworking moved from multifunctional areas to specialized zones and became especially linked to some of the most complex households (Ni3n-3lvarez 2022, 496–7). The creation of specialized metalworking areas may have been related to a desire to keep it detached from the rest of the crafts and domestic work, away from outsiders. Maybe this suggests an attempt to keep certain phases or processes of metal manufacture and elaboration secret, as in African societies (Herbert 1993, 78–114) or, apparently, in protohistoric Ireland (Dolan 2016, 43–4). In this way, metallurgy may have increased its position as a prestigious activity through the reinforcement of its esoteric value in the hands of a few family units, as the appearance of these specialized areas in two of the six major domestic groups would seem to indicate. The control and knowledge of these activities observed may suggest that the link with these outstanding domestic units correlates to an increase in the prestige of the metal craftsman and the value of this activity within the community. In fact, the importance and symbolic value of metallurgy can also be tied to the appearance of Structure XX, a religious building that could even signal a change in the ways of expressing symbolism and rituality from those operating in the first centuries of its occupation. It should be remembered that a process of deification of metallurgy through the emergence of a ‘blacksmith deity’ cannot be ruled out either, as has been inferred from the relief of Vilar de Perdizes (Montalegre, Portugal) (Schattner 2019, 203–5), although, in this case, it can only be confirmed later.

The symbolic dimension of metalworking is essential in the process to legitimize prestige and relevant activities within the community: to guarantee the smooth functioning of society (initiation ceremonies, enthronement, etc.: Welbourn 1981, 37), to act as a source of power (Reid and MacLean 1995, 145), to supply royal symbols or insignia (Sassoon 1983), as an esoteric form of knowledge (Childs 1998, 112), or to be intimately linked to magic (Merwe and Avery 1987, 143; Barndon 2005, 41) and cosmological beliefs (Schmidt and Mapunda 1997, 75).

Coming back to Punta de Muros, the presence of metalworking activities in two of the six complex domestic units shows that metallurgy may have conferred a greater social status. Furthermore, its presence in only two domestic units could also highlight that it was probably a prestigious activity, but not a widely practised one, which may indicate the importance of preserving and concealing knowledge related to metalworking (this is common in iron metallurgy for the smelting process: Childs 1998, 114). This eminence fits well with the relocation of metalworking activities to their own specialized space, for secrecy.

However, not all large domestic groups produced metal; thus, metallurgy could not be the only route to social promotion or legitimization. While it is possible to assume several scenarios in which the knowledge of metalworking was an agent of social change, it was probably not the only one.

#### CONCLUSIONS

This paper has presented a review of the social dynamics of two EIA settlements in north-west Iberia using a holistic and diachronic perspective that has allowed us to reveal the emergence of divergent social trends in the EIA. This approach has favoured the adoption of a fluid element in social dynamics, which allows for the characterization of divergent or heterogeneous processes.

Thus, on the one hand, a clear resistance to social inequality and internal changes can be surmised for A Graña, a hillfort representative the dynamics operating in north-west Iberia in the EIA. At the same time, Punta de Muros underwent a profound social alteration throughout the fifth century BC. These transformations seem to be the consequence of a change to and in the social paradigm in the settlement, as a result of which a greater level of internal social inequality was produced, with the appearance of some potential groups and/or lineages enjoying greater power and prestige. Our arguments suggest that the knowledge of metallurgy and the social position of the smith may have been part of the legitimization of these new processes, given the remarkable change as to where and how they worked and the visible links with several of the most important domestic units in the settlement. This article is a wake-up call as to the relevance of metalworking in social dynamics. It is necessary to give greater weight to its social and symbolic dimension and impact when scrutinizing non-industrial societies.

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