RURAL SETTLEMENT

RELATING BUILDINGS, LANDSCAPE, AND PEOPLE IN THE EUROPEAN IRON AGE

edited by
Dave C. Cowley, Manuel Fernández-Götz,
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Cover: The cover illustration is a composite of the reconstruction of a semi-sunken structure at Josipovac-Selište in southern Pannonia, overlaid on a settlement density distribution in relation to visual coverage from hillforts in the area of Sarmizegetusa Regia, Dacia. (With thanks to Ivan Drnić (reconstruction: source Filipec, K. (ed.) 2009. Josipovac - Selište (AN 14). In Arheološke slike Slavonije. Zagreb: Odsjek za arheologiju Filozofskog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu) and João Fonte (map)).

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Chapter 29

Rural domestic patterns in northwest Iberia

An ethnoarchaeological approach to Iron Age household layout

Lucía Ruano & Luis Berrocal-Rangel

29.1 Introduction

This paper presents preliminary results of research on households and domestic space in north Iberia during the Iron Age, which draws on Archaeology of Architecture and Ethnoarchaeology. The current focus of our analysis is the fortified villages, known as *castros*, in the provinces of Asturias and Lugo, as well as the north of the province of León. Our principal interest is studying settlement using meso- and micro-spatial approaches, focusing on the domestic layout inside the settlement and also within the domestic structures, based on a corpus of sites where domestic structures have been identified. Traditional approaches to such material have a tendency towards descriptive texts, with functional or typological approaches, where forms, architectural evolution and cross-cultural influences are the main interests. There has been less attention paid to contextual factors that might influence domestic architecture and, as a result, house features and the distribution and use of space have not been deeply studied. Furthermore, the lack of standardised documentation in existing studies has made this study of different architectural possibilities more difficult.

The domestic sphere, with its expression in architectural structures and material culture, is very significant as a reflection of the social and cultural processes which are our focus. We approach this from the premise that domestic architecture and its associated elements respond to specific meanings, as well as conditioning behaviour. Thus, we have to be able to access the social, political, economic, symbolic and functional contexts where they developed, both within the household and the settlement. In undertaking this research we have built on work produced during the last twenty years in other areas (Ayán Vila 2005; 2012; Ayán Vila *et al.* 2003; 2009; González Álvarez 2016; Mañana *et al.* 2002; Marín Suárez 2011; Sastre *et al.* 2010). Following these studies, we have defined two objectives in re-examining the data from past archaeological interventions. Firstly, the review of published articles and monographs, amongst a range of sources including diaries, excavation reports, historic photographs and drawings, informs an understanding of how our current knowledge of domestic architecture has been produced, and what its limitations are. Our second, and main objective is to maximise

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the information from these archaeological remains, applying different theoretical and methodological tools from Archaeology of Architecture and Ethnoarchaeology. This approach has already supported the recognition of models of occupation and social and symbolic aspects of domestic space (Ruano 2016).

29.2 Methodology

Our methodological framework applies integrated analyses from Archaeology, Architecture, Anthropology and Psychology, following an approach developed by Galician researchers, who have termed it *Archaeotecture* (Ayán Vila *et al.* 2003; 2009). The first step in this method is the *formal analysis*, the study of the physical characteristics of the archaeological remains, which can be divided in to several stages. Firstly, constructional and stratigraphic analyses characterise building materials, their origins and qualities, different architectural techniques, and phases in the different stages of construction, abandonment and collapse of structures, as well as processes such as building tasks, resource investment, and the different stages of life of a building. Secondly, through *functional analysis* we try to identify the activities that took place in the different domestic spaces, followed by the study of *typological and morphological* aspects of constructions. Finally, we perform *spatial analyses* to try to understand the relationships between different spatial areas within household layouts and the settlement. As we believe that the organisation of household space is also related to human perception, *syntactic analysis* or *perception analysis* are undertaken using tools to analyse movement and visual perception (Hillier and Hanson 1984). Movement analyses are used to analyse spatial relationships within a building, with circulation analysis and gamma analysis to study permeability between spaces. On the other hand, analysis of visualisation conditions aims to study personal space inside and between structures to identify public and private spaces, as well as analysing perceptions of the settlement layout, trying to understand the landscape that is created within the settlement.

This methodology has allowed us to describe and systematically analyse architectural elements and associated material culture, as well as the organization of spaces, for the whole area of study. While this approach is helping to reconstruct the original context of the domestic sphere, we have found several limitations. These include a lack of scientific rigor in many archaeological interventions, a biased archaeological record, compartmentalised studies of domestic architecture and its material culture, lack of accurate plans and surveys and of extensive excavations, and, also, our contemporary western vision of some concepts, such as house, family, privacy, intimacy, and relations between people and animals.

29.3 Ethnoarchaeological approaches

The problems raised by a contemporary western ethnocentricity for our study prompted us to develop a study of traditional architecture. We believe that an ethnoarchaeological approach is fundamental to understand the potential of a study like ours to comprehend past societies (González-Ruibal 2003, 12). It can provide interpretative tools that help re-think our object of study, allowing us to consider a broader range of interpretations and meanings for the different patterns of architecture and domestic space amongst Iron Age communities. In this, an ethnoarchaeological approach challenges the role of preconceived concepts, about family, privacy and so on, to explain the archaeological record and past societies (González-Ruibal 2001)

For these reasons, we have studied the traditional architectures of southwest Asturias, northwest León and eastern Lugo, keeping archaeological research problems in mind. Here, in historically isolated regions, many traditionally built constructions have survived. However, profound socio-economic changes in these areas during the last fifty years are dismantling the traditional system of life, with negative consequences for this type of architecture. For example, in the recent past there were many structures with thatched roof used as houses, while today they are used as stables, garages, warehouses, ethnographic museums, temporary refuge, and haylofts, for example – if they are not completed abandoned. Although they have received economic support from The Office of Education and Culture of Asturias, the result of these efforts has not been so positive, since there has not been any further monitoring (Graña y López 2007; Menéndez 2008). This situation highlights the pressing need to document these traditional architectures and techniques.

Despite these circumstances, we have been able to identify different types of traditional buildings and structures (Figure 1). In southwest Asturias, and between León and Galicia, large round byre-houses were built of stone and wood and thatched with rye straw. On the other hand, in Asturias, in the municipalities of Somiedo and Teverga, there are better preserved examples with roofs made of stone or broom, in this case related to transhumance and seasonal livestock activities. In seeking to develop our integrated methodology and looking for fresh insights from the ethnoarchaeological perspective, we have applied our archaeological methodology to the study of these structures, though the progressive changes have limited us to a formal analysis of constructional features. Nonetheless, the observation of the structures that still remain standing has given us important architectural knowledge about the different possibilities that these materials offer as building elements. This is illustrated with reference to two types of structures in the municipalities of Somiedo and Teverga.

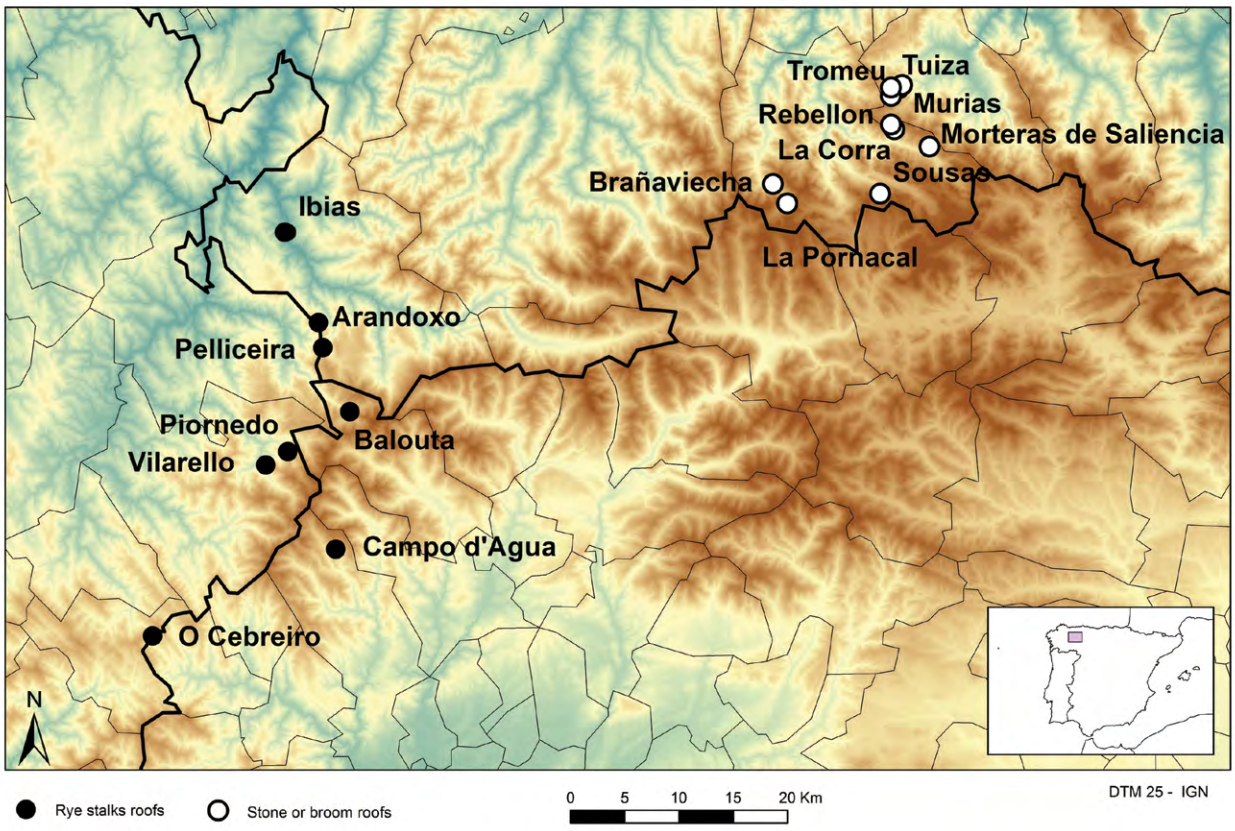

Figure 1: Ethnographic sites in Asturias, León and Lugo. (© Lucía Ruano).

29.3.1 Type I: Simple structures

In areas of grazing meadows in higher ground there are architecturally and typologically simple structures, used by herdsmen and the youngest cattle (Figure 2). These can be grouped into two types of building.

Firstly, there are circular structures, known as *corros*, that are built with dry-stone walls of limestone and sandstone, without foundations. They have a stone corbelled roof usually covered with turf which improves insulation. The majority have an earthen floor, with only a few examples of paved floors. The buildings measure between 2 and 3 m in overall diameter, with walls between 0.50 and 0.80 m thick and up to 3 m in height. They have a single small door of some 0.65 m width and 1.5 m height, whose jambs and lintels are usually made of large blocks of stone dressed around the door opening. There are no windows, or other fittings beyond an outer shelf or aumbry to store tools and cool milk overnight. There are some examples of conjoined pairs of structures while, in other cases, the internal area has been divided in two.

The second type of simple structure are also circular on plan with stone walls and a thatched roof of broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) known as *chozos*. These have an average diameter of 5 or 6 m and the drystone walls also do not have foundations and are no more than 1.5 m high. Some structures have an enclosure at the entrance, where the cattle were milked. The beech or oak timber frame of the roof is conical, with the rafters set directly on the wall and reinforced with subsidiary ones. The point of the roof is protected with turfs and large stones, which prevent water from seeping through the thatch. In some cases, it is also secured with forked branches. There is only one small entrance, which measures no more than 1.3 m high and 0.7 m across. The floors are earthen and there are usually timber mangers and the bed of the herdsman in the interior. Those types of buildings have close parallels, possible precedents, in Iron Age domestic architecture such as that excavated in the hillfort of Castiellu de Llagú, Oviedo (Berrocal-Rangel *et al.* 2002, 124).

*29.3.2 Type II: Structures with hayloft thatched with broom (*Cytisus scoparius*)*

Buildings with haylofts are the most abundant structures, and while they may be rectangular or circular on plan, the vast majority are rectilinear (Figure 3). They are usually found amongst meadows on valley bottoms or lower and medium slopes, and are used by herdsmen in spring and autumn enroute to and from higher meadows. Since the cattle are stabled at night, there is a need to store hay.

Figure 2: Simple structures (type I) at Somiedo, Asturias. Left: chozo; Right: corros. (© Lucía Ruano).

The circular examples are significantly larger than type I, measuring between 6 and 9 m of diameter, with a conical thatched roof. The rectangular structures measure between 6 and 10 m in length and 5 and 6 m across including the walls. Both of them have two floors – the ground level used as a stable with a hayloft above supported by a wattle floor. Today, the rectangular buildings have an attached structure housing the herdsman's bed and hearth, although previously these were in the stable. These buildings are always located on sloping ground, which provides easy ground-level access to the hayloft from a second entrance in rear of the building, which is levelled into the slope.

They are mainly dry-stone constructions of limestone or sandstone, although soil and dung mortar has been observed. The roof structure is made of oak or beech, with principal and subsidiary rafters, laths and purlins. These are joined with wood pegs or metal nails, with evidence also of different joining techniques, such as scarf joints, half-lap joints and mortice and tenon joints. A thin layer of brushwood or heather provides a base-layer for the roofing, over which is laid the broom thatch. With renew or repair, usually every year, old phases of thatching often survive below the most recent overcoat. These types of roof can provide a large capacity for storing hay as they can measure more than 10 m in height and a roof pitch of 55-60º, which has a positive influence on the roof's lifespan. Channels to carry surface water away from the building are sometimes protected by irregular masonry walls, which also keeps the cattle away from the thatch.

29.3.3 Type III: Round structures with hayloft thatched with rye straw

There is another set of structures in the southwest of Asturias and on the mountain range known as Sierra de los Ancares. These are large circular or oval byre-houses permanently occupied by people and animals together (Figure 4), which may measure up to 20 m in diameter. These buildings have dry-stone walls of regular masonry, on which is set a conical wood roof frame constructed using the same joining techniques outlined above in Somiedo and Teverga. The main difference is that the thatch is of rye stalks tied to the wood frame. Generally, these structures do not have windows, although there may be ventilation holes in the thatch. They do not have chimneys, as the smoke can seep through the rye stalks, while helping to preserve the organic roof and to cure foodstuff such as meat or chestnuts.

29.4 Possibilities of an ethnoarchaeological approach

The ethnoarchaeological approach to vernacular buildings has offered information about some important aspects of traditional architecture, which we believe is relevant to Iron Age archaeological research. Firstly, it has provided insights to the range of materials utilised to build structures, as well as different architectural techniques and the distribution of their internal building space. Comparing across each area it is evident that environmental, social and economic factors, among others, are fundamental to understanding how domestic spaces were built and articulated in the past.

Secondly, it provides a perspective on regional variability. For instance, the same material can be used in different ways more related to identity than practical or economic considerations. This is evident in the ways in which the plant matter is secured to the roof, as in Somiedo and Teverga, each valley has their own ways to secure the thatched roof. These include the use of turf to hold down the thatch, the use of beech or holly planks hung over the top with a little crosspiece, all of them joined by mortice and tenon, the use of forked sticks or branches, and beech bark placed over the apex. So too,

Figure 3: Structure with hayloft thatched with broom (type II) at Teverga, Asturias. (© Lucía Ruano).

Figure 4: Round structure with hayloft thatched with rye straw (type III) at Piornedo, Lugo. (© Lucía Ruano).

in the southwest of Asturias and in Sierra de los Ancares, there are several ways to secure the thatch. One is called *a paleta* and uses a wooden legget to work the bundles of rye stalk thatch that have been tied to the wooden frame with ropes of twisted straws. A second method is known as *a baguna*, and sees the stalks fixed to the roofing timbers with a braid of sticks.

The ethnoarchaeological evidence has also provided information about meanings and decoration. Although these structures are little ornamented, the good stonework around doors and external shelves, the apparently deliberate use of different colours of stones in the walls, and the carvings found on two rectangular structures at Somiedo provide insights into the ornamentation of structures. At Somiedo blocks of stone flanking the doorway bear two pairs of carved faces (Figure 5), whose different carving techniques could indicate two different dates. They may represent the owners of the structure, and while these are recent, they bear certain similarities with Celtic style and can be compared with similar finds of Late Iron Age or Early Roman date documented on several archaeological sites, such as Barán (Lugo) or San Chuis (Asturias) – (Álvarez Núñez 1991; Villa Valdés 2006, 334; Marín Suárez 2011, 446).

Figure 5: Carved faces from La Pornacal, Somiedo, Asturias. (© Lucía Ruano).

Finally, the varying states of abandonment, decay and collapse of many of these structures provides data that can help to better understand the post-abandonment processes that have affected archaeological structures.

29.5 Conclusions

The theoretical and methodological approach outlined above aims to offer new ways of looking at and thinking about household, domestic space and architecture of past societies. This approach takes a cross-disciplinary, integrated and holistic approach to the analysis of all the domestic excavated remains in a standardised manner, which facilitates comparison between sites. For the domestic archaeological record of the Iron Age in the north of Iberia, the ethnoarchaeological evidence can be extremely helpful to reconstruct aspects of the domestic environment, which is otherwise notably difficult to infer from the archaeological record alone. Indeed, there is a large amount of relevant ethnographic and ethnohistorical work on traditional architecture, and while little of this has been undertaken with archaeological problems in mind (Politics 2015, 43) it could provide a rich source to illuminate the range of potential practices that produce the archaeological record.

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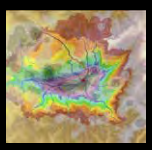

RURAL SETTLEMENT

The majority of humanity have lived out their lives in a 'rural' context, and even in our increasingly urbanised world almost half of the global population still live in rural areas. In the European Iron Age, the vast mass of the population clearly lived in small hamlets and farmsteads, and this overarching 'rurality' is important for understanding these societies. While there has been a pronounced focus in recent archaeological research on patterns of centralisation and urbanisation, there is a need to reincorporate 'rural life' or rurality into these discussions of how people lived.

This book is a contribution to the study of rural life in Iron Age Europe, collating case studies extending from southern Spain to northern Scotland and from Denmark to the Balkans. Papers are grouped thematically to open up cross-regional comparisons, ranging across studies of buildings, farms – the basic unit of Iron Age life consisting of its inhabitants, its livestock and associated agricultural lands – to wider settlement patterns and land use strategies. The 29 papers in this volume discuss the disposition, form and organisation of rural settlements, as well as underlying social and economic networks, illustrating both the variability between regions, and also common themes in cultural, economic and social interactions.

This volume provides an up-to-date overview of current research, presenting new results for the Iron Age specialist as well as a wider audience interested in the rich tapestry of rural settlement in Europe.

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