

Mapping changes in late prehistoric landscapes: A case study in the Northeastern Iberian Peninsula



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ABSTRACT

The temporal span of the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age (1300–550) saw the emergence of intense interconnectivity in the Mediterranean sea. The development of colonial trade dramatically increased cultural exchange along its coasts as can be observed in archaeological evidence. These large scale processes had an impact at all scales and territories close to the main trade routes. However, the process was extremely diverse in its forms.

This work presents a case study focused on two adjacent areas in the coast of the NE Iberian Peninsula. Spatial analysis has been carried out to explore the trajectories of settlement location dynamics during the whole period. Basic geographic variables, mobility and distance to trade routes have been explored to identify key differences over periods and areas. Results indicate that the factors guiding settlements location varied between the two zones. Moreover, one of the areas was radically influenced by trade routes in the Early Iron Age while the other did not seem to be affected by this external factor. The interpretation of these analyses suggests that the rise in connectivity was not homogeneous over the Western Mediterranean, but in the regions where it took place this factor was decisive to explain their historical trajectories.

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1. Introduction

From 1200 to 600 BC, the Mediterranean world saw a period of change, which resulted in the breakdown of Bronze Age civilizations, and the rise of Iron Age cultures in many locations. Despite the complexity of the process, the study of this crucial period covering the Late Bronze Age (LBA) and the Early Iron Age (EIA) has been traditionally focused on the Eastern Mediterranean and its grand civilizations.

The western zone did not see the emergence of cultures such as the Minoan and the Greco-Roman societies, which dominated the work of archaeologists for a long time due to its abundant material culture. However, fieldwork carried out in the last decades has extended our knowledge to include other islands and coastal areas of the Mediterranean Sea, thus balancing this view. The diversity of these studies has increased our knowledge of processes such as the ones that created the Maltese temples, *nuraghi*, *taulas* and *talayots*

(Knapp and Blake, 2005; Bevan, 2013; Berrocal et al., 2013; Babbi et al., 2015).

This wider perspective on the LBA–EIA Mediterranean is dominated by the concepts of mobility and connectivity. These linked processes of change were promoted by the intensive cultural and commercial interaction rising between the peoples all over the Mediterranean, from the Levant in the East, to the North African and the Iberian coasts in the West (Babbi et al., 2015: 6).

1.1. Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age in the NE Iberian coast

This is the research context of the present work. The aim of this paper is to explore and compare under to what extent variables connected to mobility and connectivity influenced settlement locations over the period LBA–EIA. To explore this question we have chosen to focus at a local scale in the North-Eastern coast of the Iberian Peninsula. Our case study includes two neighbouring areas divided by a river (Llobregat): Vallès, located at left bank, and Penedès, located at the right bank (see Fig. 1).

The election of this area has been based on the continued and intense occupation of the territory that the archaeological evidence suggests. In addition, the archaeological record we are dealing with

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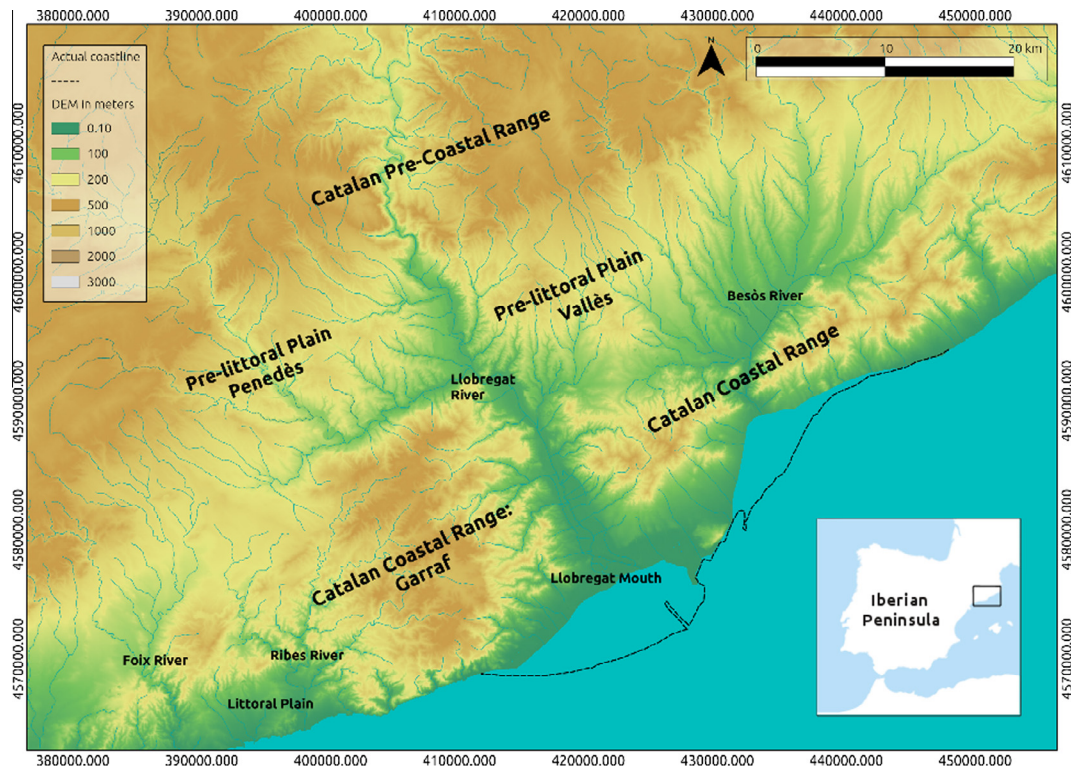


Fig. 1. Current geographical map and features of the case study: the current Catalan coast.

shows a great variety that allows us to link these settlements dynamics to the Mediterranean processes along this period.

During the Late Bronze Age (1300–750/700 BC), the material basis of these societies underwent a profound renewal. New metal typologies appeared during LBA showing an increase of inter-regional connectivity and trade products, as certain kind of metallic items or pottery decoration (López-Cachero and Rovira, 2012). The record also shows channelled pottery, which we find widely represented across the entire Northeastern Iberian Peninsula. Several new influences can be found on associated material culture, such as the first cremation necropolises by first millennium BC and the appearance of imported pottery in the Early Iron Age (750/700–550 BC). This pattern is strongly linked to the eruption of Phoenician trade near the Ebro River and the colony founded by the Phocaeans that would be known as *Emporion* (580 BC) (Aquilué et al., 2000; Santos Retolaza, 2003). These settlements are located south (Phoenicians) and north (Greeks) of the studied area (for a general overview see López-Cachero, 2007, 2011; López-Cachero and Pons Brun, 2007; Sanmartí Grego et al., 2009; Asensio i Vilaró, 2005; Garcia i Rubert and Gracia Alonso, 2011; Pons Brun, 2014).

For a long period of time, the weight of historical and cultural tradition put the focus of debate on the arrival of new human groups traditionally known as Urnfields culture and on the colonial factor as the key agents behind the changes taking place. Today, however, these stances have become much more moderate. The accent is now on local dynamics and special regional features as the differentiating facts of the territory. Further theoretical insights connected to local scale societies and postcolonial archaeologies have also been presented in recent works for this context (Garcia i Rubert and Gracia Alonso, 2011; López-Cachero, 2007; Fatás Fernández et al., 2012).

Previous works on the examined areas identified a general path of cultural continuity. This is particularly evident for the period between approximately 1800 BCE and the end of the LBA in the

two largest excavated sites in these areas: Mas d'en Boixos located in the right bank and Can Roqueta located in the left bank (Bouso et al., 2004). The only exception is the Penedès (right bank area) pre-coastal lowlands, where there are only a few documented sites from the Late Bronze Age onwards. This scarcity has been analysed before, and other authors have noted that it cannot be attributed to a lack of research in the area (Mestres, 2008). The alternate hypothesis is that occupation of certain caves and the use of high-elevation pastures provided an alternative to the low-level agricultural exploitation of the most fertile plains which did not developed here except for some coastal regions. The EIA would present a shift between these subsistence strategies, as can be seen from the evidence of numerous storage pits documented from that time. Evidences suggest a complementary exploitation model that took extensive advantage of lands more favourable for agriculture, with the possible rapid planting of grapevines (López, 2004). These activities would be complemented by herding, as shown by the appearance of walled enclosures (pens) at higher altitudes of the landscape such as Serra de la Font del Cuscó (Cebrià et al., 2003) or Sant Miquel d'Olèrdola (Mestres et al., 2009). Coincidentally some of these sites such as Turó Font de la Canya (Asensio et al., 2005), Font del Cuscó (Cebrià et al., 2003) and Olèrdola (Mestres et al., 2009) among others, have yielded evidence for intensive trade in the form of Phoenician amphorae and other containers. "Phoenician" pottery imitations, metal items such as sympula and iron spits also link this shift to Mediterranean influences (Asensio et al., 2005).

From the beginning of the sixth century BC evidence suggests a new major shift in the right bank area. We find the pens disappearing and new coastal enclaves being established, such as the citadel at Alorda Park. However, this transition to the Iberian world has not yet been fully and satisfactorily explained (Asensio et al., 2006).

The scenario described above contrasts with the dynamic described for the Vallès located in the left bank area. Thanks to

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