Social Inequality in Iberian Late Prehistory

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CHAPTER 7

Transegalitarian societies: an ethnoarchaeological model for the analysis of Copper Age Bell Beaker using groups in Central Iberia

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Abstract

Anthropologist Brian Hayden has coined the concept of "transegalitarian societies" for the various kinds of societies in which political leadership seems to surpass the boundaries of kinship, acting further afar than the strictly local sphere and extending beyond the life of the individual who exerts it, but in which there are neither institutionalised forms of power nor clear political centralisation. In this paper, I contend that this concept can be applied in the study of the Copper Age communities of the Iberian central plateau that were involved in the Bell-beaker networks of exchange. My aim is to suggest a more detailed interpretation of the societies that emerged from the collapse of the Neolithic communal structures and occupied the transition period that separates them from the Bronze Age chiefdoms. This interpretation seeks to carefully avoid simplistic conclusions either in terms of a prolonged egalitarianism or of an early social complexity.

Keywords: Transegalitarian Societies; Chalcolithic; Bell Beaker; Hayden; Social Ranking; Iberian Peninsula; Feasts.

Resumen

Se propone la aplicación al estudio de las sociedades calcolíticas de La Meseta implicadas en la red de intercambios campaniforme, del modelo que el antropólogo Brian Hayden ha elaborado para estudiar los variados tipos de sociedades en las que el liderazgo político parece rebasar los límites del parentesco, extiende su ámbito de acción más allá de la esfera estrictamente local y rebasa la vida de la persona que lo ejerce, pero en las que aún no existe la institucionalización del ejercicio del poder ni una clara centralización, y que este autor denomina "transigualitarias". Con ello se intenta realizar una interpretación más detallada y precisa de aquellas sociedades que surgen del colapso de las estructuras comunales neolíticas, ocupando el periodo de transición que las separa de las jefaturas de la Edad del Bronce, intentando no caer en atribuciones simplistas tanto de un pretendido igualitarismo prolongado como de una prematura complejidad.

Palabras clave: Sociedades Transigualitarias; Calcolítico; Campaniforme; Hayden; Jerarquización Social; Península Ibérica; Banquetes.

7.1.- Introduction

The study of the social and economic structure of Iberian prehistoric societies, especially of those occupying the Spanish central plateau (Meseta), is rather recent, because Spanish and Portuguese Prehistory has been largely dominated by the traditional culture-historical approach until the 1980's. Even today, this theoretical paradigm is still widely used by Iberian prehistorians. Works on this subject published in recent years (*e.g.* Delibes *et al.* 1995; Díaz-del-Río 1995; 2001; 2003; 2004; Garrido-Pena 1994; 1995; 1997; 2000; Garrido & Muñoz 2000; Muñoz 2000; Rojo *et al.* 2005) must therefore be regarded as tentative and preliminary steps of a line of research to be extended in the near future.

The topic itself has great complexity and is extremely demanding with what in fact is a rather complex archaeological record that often lacks enough detail to answer highly specific questions. At times, this ambiguity opens a wide territory for rather diverging or even diametrically opposed views. This is particularly true in a region like central Iberia, where the available data is still both quantitatively and qualitatively poor. Only the sustained application of new theoretical approaches which address the right questions to the archaeological record, and look for demonstration in the field, would change this situation. But this will take years of fieldwork. Therefore, it is now the high time for theoretical debate, looking for those models that could be tested at a later stage, and which could also help us to deal with the existing data in a fresh new way.

The state of the art of the research of social organisation during the Late Prehistory of central Iberia can be roughly characterised as follows. On one hand, the area is presented in many recent works (Díaz-del-Río 1995; 2001; 2004; Muñoz 1993; Bueno *et al.* 2000) as a paradigm of egalitarianism, without any major detectable economic or social changes before the Iron Age. It is, in a sense, an extension of the traditional view of the region as backwater land, isolated and remote from the mainstream

processes of change taking place in other regions of Iberia and Western Europe at large. However, it is also true that some recent articles perhaps overestimate the degree of social change in the Late Prehistory of this region, even claiming the existence of established chiefdoms during the Bell Beaker Copper Age (Delibes *et al.* 1995: 61; Delibes 1995: 79-87). As Chapman (1997) has pointed out, complex societies are being seen almost everywhere in the archaeological record, something dangerous and confusing for the future of our studies.

The theoretical models that have prevailed in the study of social change in Iberian Late Prehistory were designed in the 70's and 80's to deal with the problem of the origins of complex societies in the Southeast (*cf.* Gilman 1976; 1987; Gilman & Thornes 1985). These were indeed pioneering studies of social change in Spanish Prehistory, and are still quite interesting in their case-study areas. However, the regions for which those approaches were implemented have rather peculiar ecological contexts, with strong resources stress, all of which make those approaches relatively limited for the analysis of other Iberian regions. This is the case of the interior plateau, an area without resource shortages such as arable land or water, and where signs of ecological stress are less obvious.

It is also hard to understand how it could be possible that social and economic changes did not take place in a region as large and varied as inner Iberia, and during such a long period (three or four thousand years). This is especially true when considering that this was not an isolated area: there is already plenty of evidence for the presence of all the major "paneuropean" archaeological phenomena like megalithism or Bell Beakers, which in many other regions of the old world were related with profound economic and social transformations.

There are also theoretical and methodological problems. One good example is the widely established clear-cut distinction between egalitarian and ranked societies, based on a particular set of archaeological indicators: rich children burials or signs of centralization in the settlement patterns, for instance. This set of indicators may be useful for the analysis of prehistoric social inequality in a broad perspective, but fails when faced with the study of specific societies which do not fit easily in those simplistic categories: the reality of the archaeological and ethnographical record is much more complex (Hayden 1995: 16-17). In addition, it is important to observe that the very notion of egalitarianism demands some explanation, since all societies contain "seeds of inequality". We cannot take equality for granted as a "natural" starting point. The term "egalitarian" is rather complex, usually more related to a sort of egalitarian *ethos* or ideology than a real *de facto* egalitarian social structure (Roscoe 2000: 96, 104).

Amongst the many methodological problems which seriously affect the research of prehistoric social inequality, two deserve some preliminary consideration. Firstly, the ambiguity of the archaeological indicators, and secondly the extremely poor archaeological record that must be used as the empirical basis.

Regarding the first of these problems, two well known examples deserve some discussion:

a) Rich burials of infant or juvenile individuals are one of the supposed indicators of ranked societies, in which leadership is inherited. Leaders are no longer the most talented men of the group (as it happens in egalitarian societies, where leadership is unstable and also related with sex, age or kinship), but those individuals (and their descendants) who control political institutions. Now chiefs inherit their position and do not need to show their merits to gain power (Berreman 1981: 9; Feinman 1995: 262; Fried 1967; Hayden 1995: 63; Johnson & Earle 1987: 318; Service 1971; Wason 1994: 44; Roscoe 2000: 104). The problem with this line of argumentation is that rich infant grave-goods do exist in well documented egalitarian societies. Several ritual or symbolic factors, and not just inherited social status, can explain these funerary deposits (Hayden 1995: 16). In addition, as Wason (1994: 100) remarks, it is difficult to be sure whether these tombs indicate the status of the deceased or that of his/her family. Moreover, in egalitarian societies in transition to complexity, leadership can be also inherited. Even in the most egalitarian communities, an ideology of primogeniture sometimes occurs, something equally documented in transegalitarian groups, with hereditary political positions based on genealogical seniority (Roscoe 2000: 109). As Hayden (1995: 58) pointed out, nearly 75% of New Guinea big men leaders had fathers that were also big men. The difference is that in this sort of social context, leadership is unstable and can hardly last for more than one generation. It is also archaeologically difficult to assess.

b) Economic differences among domestic units within settlements. The main difficulty of testing those expected distinctions has even led some scholars to question the existence of real social complexity in contexts such as the Bronze Age Argaric groups (Gilman 1997), widely considered as chiefdoms or even primitive states (see Cámara & Molina in this volume). It is my opinion that this problem is closely related with the interpretative limits of the archaeological record. Far from the optimistic expectations of the first processual approaches, it has now become clear that site formation processes are much more complex than previously thought. Settlements suffer many additional disturbances of their original distribution patterns before they are finally abandoned (Cameron & Tomka 1993).

The only alternative to these problems is to try not to draw such abrupt and clear-cut distinctions, taking into account the great variety of factors defining a past social structure, and not forgetting the importance of widespread phenomena which simultaneously affect different

regions. An excessive emphasis on the local perspective could lead to serious misunderstandings and confusions: local scale is obviously the basic scale of study; but it must be adequately framed within more general scales of analysis.

The second of the two main issues mentioned above is the poor quality of the archaeological record available for the Prehistory of central Spain. Only recently major research projects have been carried out. Among these, the Ambrona Valley (Soria) project has implemented extensive fieldwork in Neolithic and Copper Age settlement and tombs, uncovering a much more complex and rich landscape for central Iberian Late Prehistory than previously thought (Rojo & Kunst 1999a, 1999b; 1999c; Rojo *et al.* 2003; 2004; 2005). But we are still right at the beginning of research. The majority of information belongs to old dispersed traditional works, or modern rescue excavations, mostly unfortunately unpublished, although some remarkable exceptions do exist (Díaz-del-Río 1995; 2001; 2003; 2004).

7.2.- The "transegalitarian societies" model as an alternative

As we have previously mentioned, the theoretical models put forward for other Iberian contexts such as the Southeast are not necessarily appropriate to explain the situation of prehistoric social inequality within the Spanish Meseta, a region with a rich and varied environment where no signs of resources stress have been documented. From the Late Neolithic to the Late Copper Age, different prehistoric social structures are found that cannot be properly described within the categories usually employed in this sort of studies. They are neither complex nor egalitarian societies.

To study this variety of societal contexts, widely recognized not only in the archaeological but also in the ethnographical record, Brian Hayden (1995) employed the useful concept of "transegalitarian societies", initially proposed by Clarke and Blake (1994). As Hayden (1995: 18) points out, the term is broad and involves much variability, including simple horticulturalists and complex hunter-gatherers. Because of this variability, Hayden made several further distinctions in a complex and detailed typology of social structures, supported by a huge *corpus* of ethnographic data from the American Northwest and New Guinea. However, it is also important to note that, in this last region, some recent critical accounts have questioned many of the (usually taken for granted) assumptions about leadership in big men societies present in the great majority of papers using New Guinea ethnographic analogies, which thus need to be carefully reconsidered (Roscoe 2000).

In transegalitarian societies, as Hayden (1995: 22) points out, individual or small group claims of special access to resources must be negotiated with the rest of the community. Moreover, the only situation in which people will tolerate privileged access to basic subsistence resources is when the majority has their survival insured in normal times, that is to say in situations of abundance and wealth. This approach contrasts with other theoretical positions relating the origins of socioeconomic differences to situations of resources stress or demographic pressure, or to the need to manage risk.

Hunter-gatherers suppress economically-based competition over resources because it is destructive for their limited economies and dangerous for their survival. Economically based competition emerges only when subsistence surpluses become available on a regular basis (Hayden 1995: 24). To explain how ambitious individuals in egalitarian societies can transform production surpluses into personal power, in conditions in which everybody has their survival assured, the clue must be searched in an important social and economic institution: competitive feasts involving contractual debts (Hayden 1995).

Feast-organizing leaders can benefit greatly from establishing a wide contractual debt-relationship network, thus motivating people to produce and surrender surpluses that they control. Supporters hope to profit from their investments in feasts by promises from leaders of repayment with interests for their contributions, as well as increased influence in the affairs of the community (Hayden 1995: 25). As long as the potential for producing surplus increases, socioeconomic inequalities also progress. Among the different types of leaders and "transegalitarian" societies distinguished by Hayden, Copper Age Western European Bell Beaker ones could be classified in his third "stage", the closest to chiefdoms, with the kind of leader he calls "entrepreneur". Potlatch type systems will be the classic example of this sort of community and competitive feasts.

However, is this model appropriate to further understand inner Iberia Copper Age Bell Beaker societies? It is clear that we lack many of the necessary archaeological indicators, but, in my view, a significant bulk of evidence supports this new approach.

7.3.- A previous testing: archaeological indicators

Despite the contribution of recent and major research projects, such as that of the Ambrona Valley (Rojo & Kunst 1999 a, b and c; Rojo *et al.* 2005), which are showing the importance and early arrival of the farming way of life in central Iberia, information about the Early Neolithic in this region is still very scarce. Since my first works (Garrido-Pena 1994; 1995; 1997; 2000) I have stressed the importance of wide scale phenomena, especially the so called "secondary products revolution" (SPR) (Sherratt 1981; 1997), in the processes of socioeconomic

change documented in this region during the IV and III millennia cal BC. This process would have probably affected inner Iberia since the beginning of the IV millennium cal BC, during the Late Neolithic, altering the economic systems and social structures by effectively generating an increase in the amounts of available surplus.

The ritual and social complexity of megalithic monuments, well documented in different parts of central Iberia, would perhaps be a first consequence of those large scale transformations. Another possible archaeological indicator of the arrival to the Spanish Meseta of some SPR elements is the spectacular increase in the number of sites from the Late Neolithic and the beginning of the Copper Age, according to observations made in many recent rescue excavations and surveys (Delibes *et al.* 1995: 46-49; Garrido-Pena 1994: 83; 1995: 143; 1997: 201; 2000: 193). The quantitative differences are still so striking that it is not unlikely that a certain demographic increase, a feature that characterises the evolution of "transegalitarian societies, especially those of "entrepreneur" type (Hayden 1995: 51), started during the Late Neolithic.

With the available data it is difficult to prove the supposed increase in economic surplus. Until the abovementioned research projects (now in progress) provide more solid evidence, one can just look for possible evidences in, for example, a characteristic settlement type that arose during the Neolithic and more clearly since the Copper Age. This is the so-called "campos de hoyos" sites, or open air dwelling sites, with rock-cut structures of several forms (oval, circular) and sizes, filled up with domestic residues (pottery sherds, lithic industry and faunal remains). Of complex interpretation (see *e.g.* Márquez in this volume), very few of them can be safely identified as hut floors because of their small dimensions (less than 1 metre of diameter), and are more probably related (at least originally) with storage, although the great majority ended up as rubbish-pits.

Pollen analyses carried out in different sites (López 1997; Delibes *et al.* 1997: 795) suggest an intense deforestation and increased anthropic impact since the Copper Age. At the same time, different faunal assemblages, such as those of the Copper Age settlements of El Ventorro in Madrid (Morales & Villegas 1994), Viña de Esteban García in Salamanca (Delibes *et al.* 1997: 796), and Las Pozas in Zamora (Morales 1992) show a clear predominance of adult individuals in every recorded species (ovicaprines and pigs mainly), which suggests a secondary exploitation of animals, which prolongs their life to obtain for example milk or dairy products (the consumption of the latter is also suggested by the widespread appearance of the so called cheese-strainers in many Copper Age sites of the area). However, the results of some of these faunal studies must be carefully considered, because they are based on collections that are in a poor state of preservation (Morales & Liesau 1994). The recent extraordinary finding of wool textiles in a Bronze Age argaric tomb in the Southeast (Molina *et al.* 2003) shows the importance of the SPR in Iberia. In addition, some recent settlement pattern analyses have documented the increasing importance of cattle-raising during the Copper Age in the central plateau area (Muñoz 1993; 2000; Rojo *et al.* in press a).

Those remarkable socioeconomic changes must be considered as a long process, which began in the first half of the IV millennium cal BC. When Bell Beakers appear in the Iberian plateau around the mid III millennium, they already were at an advanced stage of development. However, this process was significantly slower than in other areas of Iberia such as the Southeast. Thus, Bell Beakers would have occupied a transitional phase in the process of social change between mostly egalitarian Neolithic communities and the first chiefdoms of the Bronze Age. It is not until the Bronze Age that it is possible to see clear archaeological indicators of social complexity, for example in settlement patterns (Muñoz 1993; 2000).

Since Clarke (1976), Bell Beakers have been considered not as common domestic materials but as high value commodities that circulated through the fully developed exchange networks of the Western European Copper Age. Beakers must be understood as part of a crucial stage of social and economic change towards social complexity, in which emergent leaders consumed those special items in their legitimizing strategies.

In central Iberia, the expansion of long distance exchange systems since the Late Neolithic, and especially during the Copper Age, has been clearly attested by the characterisation of materials like copper (Delibes *et al.* 1995: 53; Montero *et al.* 1990), high quality flint (Delibes *et al.* 1995: 57), and luxury commodities used for ornaments such as callaite (Delibes *et al.* 1995: 59; Edo *et al.* 1997) or ivory (Espadas *et al.* 1987; Val & Herrán, 1995: 302). This earlier development of long distance exchanges could explain the fast and widespread adoption of Beakers when contact was made with a wider network (Garrido-Pena 1997: 202). In fact during Bell Beaker times those exchange systems clearly expand, as it is suggested by the general distribution of sites (Fig. 7.1), mostly related with the most important natural routes, mainly rivers, and also on visually-dominant emplacements (Garrido-Pena 2000: 46-47).

Those exchange systems must be understood not in the modern sense of a purely economic activity, but as a social strategy of the leaders. These social strategies are meant not to obtain basic resources or food, but special and exotic (*i.e.* rare and foreign) commodities to be used as part of strategies to reinforce their power and prestige. Among these strategies, alliances or political pacts, perhaps related with opportunistic marriages and competitive gift exchanges, in which large numbers of supporters and labour force could be obtained, are undoubtedly essential. In this view, Bell Beakers can be interpreted as symbols of status (Thomas 1987), and not just prestige items,

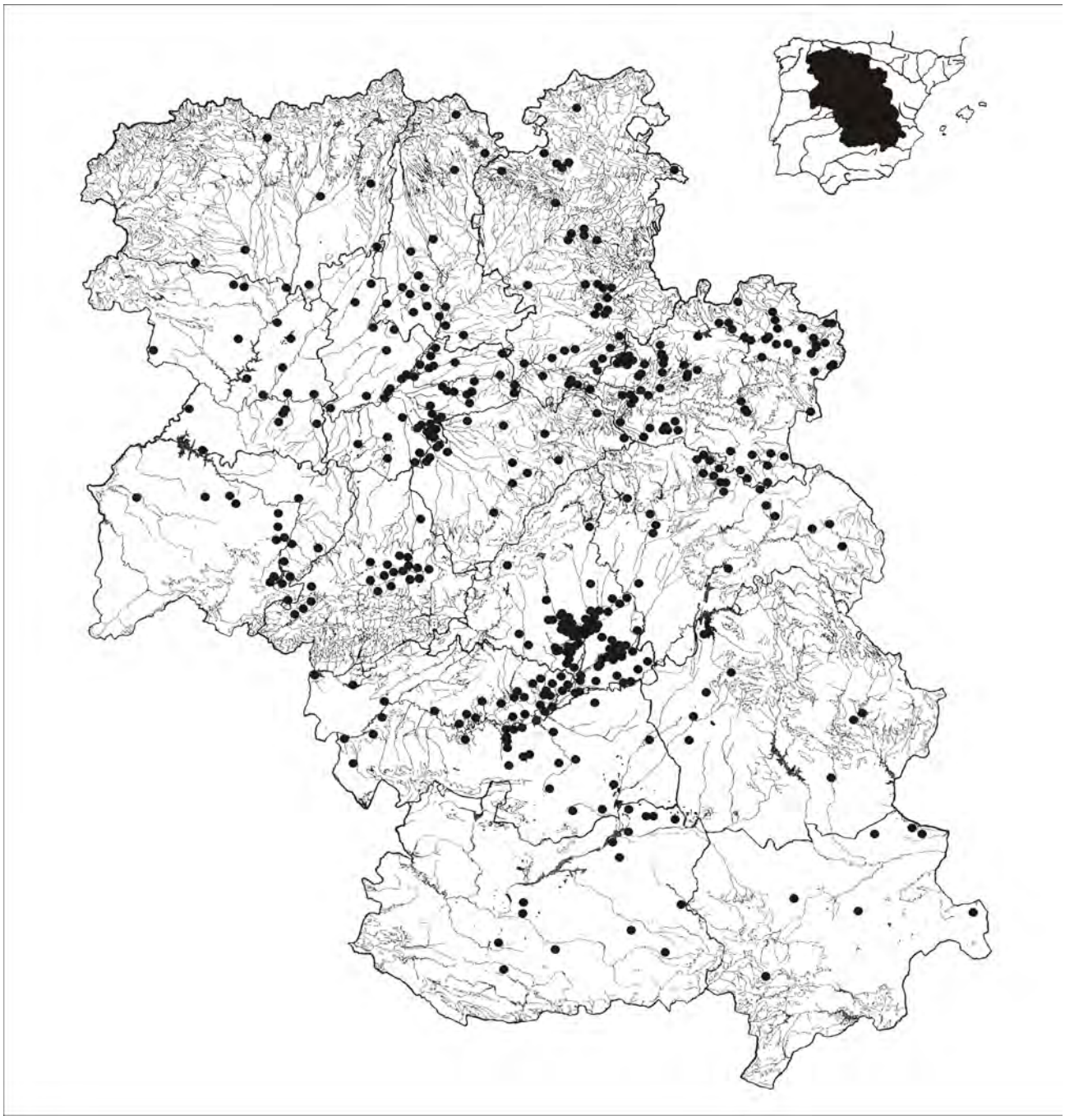

Fig. 7.1. Inner Iberia Beaker sites distribution (after Garrido-Pena 2000).

because they were used to display a powerful position previously obtained with the opportunistic manipulation of different strategies (marriage or competitive gift exchanges, for instance) upon which the whole system of inequalities was built.

Within the Beaker societies of central Iberia, leaders must have been constantly struggling to reinforce their still unstable position, and probably they just partly succeeded in doing so. It is likely that power was inherited during just one or two generations at most, as Hayden (1995: 58) suggests for New Guinea big men. They were not chiefdoms, and that would be the reason explaining the long duration of Bell Beakers in the interior of Iberia, contrasting with its short life in other regions such as the Southeast where the whole process was quicker and chiefdoms emerged soon in the Argaric Bronze Age, contemporaneously with Meseta Beakers. In fact, as the ethnographical record clearly shows, these sort of competitive exchange systems are characteristic of societies based upon unstable forms of leadership.

As it has been previously mentioned, it is extremely difficult to find true archaeological indicators of this sort of

unstable inherited status in child graves. Even the existence of rich infantile burials is a complex matter to be easily interpreted in terms of inherited status (Wason 1994: 100; Hayden 1995: 16). In Iberia, the only documented case is an isolated example of a child burial from the Aldeagordillo mound in Ávila (Fabián 1992).

7.4.- Beaker competitive feasts

As Hayden (1995: 51-52; 1996; 2001) suggests, in transegalitarian societies, leaders looking for supporters try to increase their economic surplus through labour intensification and exchanges, in order to organize larger and more elaborate feasts. The greater the return profit that leaders could offer to their supporters as contributions to competitive feasts, the stronger their motivation to produce surpluses, thus indirectly increasing the total contractual debt in the community. Leaders compete with each other organizing larger feasts to attract supporters and exchanges, with contractual debts involving interest payments as the underlying economic logic behind it.

Following Sherratt (1987; 1991) the Bell Beaker package may be defined as a successful combination of copper weapons, ornaments and pottery to drink a very special substance. As it was proposed in previous hypothesis of European (Childe 1947: 218; Sherratt 1987; 1991) or Iberian scale (Garrido-Pena 1994; 1995; 1997; 2000), those singular decorated vessels, which were deposited in single graves accompanied by other luxurious paraphernalia, probably contained an alcoholic beverage. Recent chemical analyses of samples collected in Bell Beakers from different sites of Spain, like those from the Ambrona Valley, have demonstrated that they contained beer (Rojo *et al.* in press).

Alcoholic beverages are part of social relations. They facilitate and moderate social interaction. They are part of hospitality etiquette, and construct networks of reciprocal obligations among drinkers (Vencl 1994: 313). The importance of alcohol in social relations has been widely recognised, especially within the context of struggle and support of power in preindustrial societies lacking political institutions. This struggle involves the creation of a body of supporters, with instruments such as hospitality rituals or work feasts, where leaders invite community members to abundant food and alcoholic drinking in exchange for their labour (Sherratt 1987: 98; Dietler 1990).

Prestigious alcoholic beverage production is a potential way to obtain power and richness. Surplus investment by certain members of the community, like beer consumed in feasting, might create obligations or deferred reciprocity, serving as an important instrument by which to gain power. There are many ethnographic testimonies about the value of beer in "primitive" societies. As Arthur (2003: 516-517) shows in his study of many African beer drinking groups, alcoholic beverage was a valued luxurious food, an indicator of status and wealth that required an important amount of grain and labour investment. Amongst the Tanzanian Chagga, beer creates reciprocal political and economic links between leaders and the common people. Chiefs offer generous quantities of this drinking to fulfil their redistributive obligations, and to maintain warriors who will fight for them. The Cameroon Koma elaborate beer and sacrifice cattle to improve individual status, through livestock redistributive feasts, where large amounts of beer are consumed (490 litres equivalent to 100 kg. of cereals). In the Ethiopian Gamo, beer production is related to the richest households and highest castes. They are usually the ones that possess land and special places where beer was elaborated (Arthur 2003: 518-519, 523).

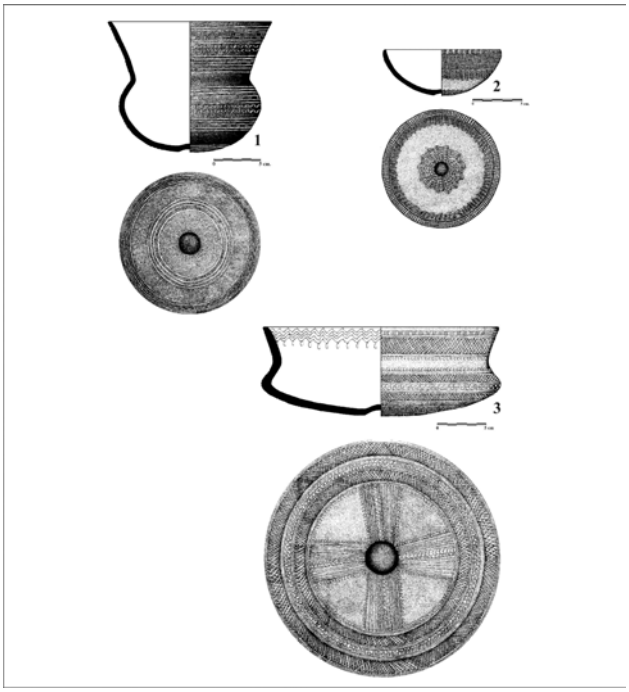

Fig.7.2. Bell Beaker vessels from the Ciempozuelos cemetery (Madrid): 1) Bell Beaker, 2) Bowl, 3) Carinated Bowl (after Garrido-Pena 2000).

In the Iberian Meseta, the analysis of the Beaker formal repertoire provides interesting clues about possible drinking rituals that could be displayed with that ceramic equipment (Garrido-Pena 1995; 1997: 204; 2000: 70-74). There are some pottery forms that could perfectly be classified within the range of measures typical of the individual drinking vessels, like the Bell Beaker itself. Nearly 70% of those documented throughout the region have capacities between 450-1250 cc. (Fig. 7.2: 1) (Garrido-Pena 2000: 84). Beaker cups, represented in the Spanish Meseta by the fragmented piece uncovered in the Madrid settlement of El Ventorro (Priego & Quero 1992), are clearly related with individual drinking, as predecessors of the famous Bronze Age Argaric ones. Open forms like the Beaker carinated bowl (the Spanish *cazuela*) are more likely to be related with solid foods (Figure 7.2: 3), as Harrison (1995) has pointed out for Late Bronze Age

troncoconic carinated bowls, which he suggest would have been used for meat presentation.

Many central Iberia Beaker grave goods, especially those of Ciempozuelos pottery style (Late Beakers), were composed by the well-known set of Bell Beaker, carinated bowl and bowl (Fig. 7.1 and 7.4), the latter being usually placed inside the second (Delibes 1977: 89-90). In this context, a careful analysis of the existing proportions between vessels of complete sets with ceramic grave goods provides interesting evidence concerning the features of the rituals displayed with them. Bell Beakers and bowls have a remarkable volumetric control, with a clear predominance of nearly 1 litre cases in the former and 500 cc. in the latter. Carinated bowls have a much more irregular behaviour. Together with their overall shape, too open for a liquid content vessel, they may have played a complementary role in rituals. They could have been related to the consumption of different kind of materials such as meat or cereal porridge.

The smaller vessels (bowls and small carinated bowls) could have been used for individual consumption of the eventual content of Bell Beakers and large carinated bowls. Their documented deposition inside both types of recipients in several central Iberia Beaker single grave goods suggests so (at Villabuena del Puente, Zamora, for example). The bowl is also the most closely associated form to Bell Beakers (Garrido-Pena 2000: figure 15), and there are many examples of tombs with just these two kinds of vessels (Aldeagordillo, Valdeprados, or Los Pasos).

The proportion between their respective capacities is remarkably varied, with the Bell Beaker always overcoming the bowl in size. Pearson coefficients of complete containers show a strong negative correlation between these two beaker forms. Thus, there is a clear tendency in Beaker bowls to have less capacity whenever the Bell Beaker is bigger. It seems that the bowl plays a distributive role of the Bell Beaker content (beer) between the participants in the ritual. Taking into account the proportions already mentioned, groups would have been formed of three to eight individuals (Garrido-Pena 2000: 72-73).

The problem is much more complex when complete single grave goods with three vessels are studied, because the two already mentioned ceramic forms are accompanied by a rather different kind of recipient, the carinated bowl (larger and more open), probably used to manage solid foods. In some of those graves, the bowl was deposited inside the carinated bowl, as a distributive element of its possible content. Pearson coefficients of the three types of recipients in the single complete grave goods studied showed that Bell Beakers used to be significantly larger than bowls, and that there was a strong negative correlation between the capacities of both. The bigger the Bell Beakers, the bigger the accompanying bowls. Carinated bowls were always the largest of the ceramic trio equipment, and had no correlation with Bell Beaker volume, but displayed a low and positive one with bowls. This clearly shows that Bell Beakers and carinated bowls would have probably played different roles in the ritual, the first related with the consumption of beverages (beer) and the second with solid foodstuffs.

Could those rituals reflect feasting activities of Copper Age inner Iberia Bell Beaker leaders? Is the same sort of vessel combination found on high status "entrepreneurs" tombs present in settlements? In Beaker habitats this luxury decorated pottery usually represents around 5% of the total ceramic assemblage, which suggests that it was also occasionally used in everyday life. Would they have been used during special high social occasions such as hospitality rituals or competitive feasts? Interestingly, Hayden (1995: 62) stresses that in transegalitarian entrepreneur communities, ritual feasting paraphernalia like prestige food-serving containers are frequently documented and used in all investment transactions, between individual partners or communities.

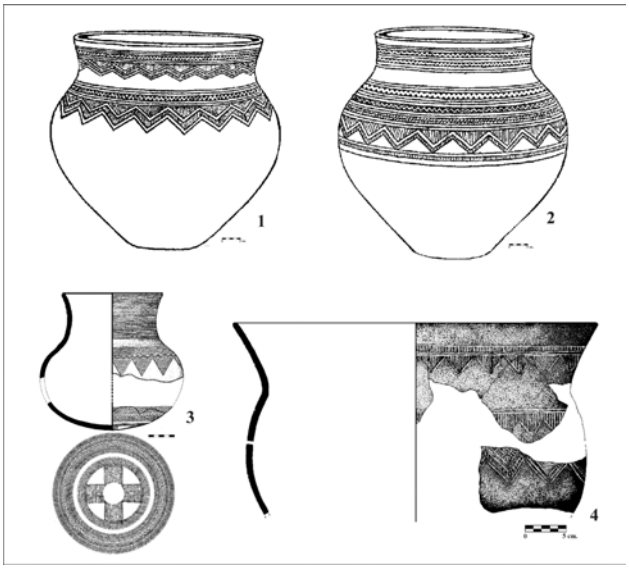

Fig.7.3. Inner Iberia Beaker Storage/Feasting vessels: 1-2) Molino de Garray (Soria) (after Schulten), 3) after Cajal (1981), 4) after Garrido-Pena (2000).

However, some scholars (Brodie 1997; Case 1995) have recently criticized the Beaker drinking model with different arguments. One of them is the widespread existence of large sized vessels with Beaker decoration throughout the European archaeological record, especially in settlements, which would prove the purely domestic and everyday use of this pottery, quite apart from elite rituals. Obviously, given their large size and volume (between 2 and 10 litres, and sometimes more than 20 litres), those large storage Beaker vessels (the Spanish Molino type) (Fig. 7.3) only found at settlements and widely documented in our case study area, were not used for individual drinking. It is unlikely that they would have participated in the exchange system (Garrido-Pena 2000: 126-129, figures 56-58).

However, those large Beaker vessels still only represent around 5% of the total ceramic storage recipients, with a clear predominance of the plain common ones. This is important because, along with their careful elaboration, it suggests they had a special role. Moreover, those vessels, likely to be related with storage or collective consumption, are strikingly similar to those employed in many African preindustrial societies to brew and serve beer in feasts (Arthur 2003: 522) (Fig. 7.3). Would those large Beaker recipients have been used in competitive feasts where the whole community drank beer celebrating the prestige and power of the host? This is an interesting hypothesis to be fully confirmed once the necessary chemical content analyses become available.

7.5.- Beaker entrepreneurs in Copper Age central Iberia

Another feature of typical transegalitarian leadership societies can be found within the archaeological record of Iberian Beakers. As Hayden remarks (1995: 56), entrepreneurs are ambitious individuals who try to concentrate all important roles of power in their hands, including economic, political, military and ritual. Recent approaches to the Beaker package stress the plural and flexible nature of the ideological meanings surrounding its components (Waldren 1995; Garrido-Pena 2000: 25-26). A "clash of symbols", according to Edmonds (1995): weapons, luxurious ornaments (golden jewellery), symbolic items (stone wrist guards), alcoholic beverages, and "magic" technologies like metallurgy (Brodie 1997: 309), many of them obtained through long distance exchange (Fig. 7.4). This flexibility would have been one of the reasons in explaining its success and wide geographical distribution.

It is also quite common in emergent leaders to use supernatural claims to legitimate their power, especially through the manipulation of ancestors in their own benefit (Parker Pearson 1993: 214-216; Wason 1994: 50; Hayden 1995: 56). In this sense, it is likely that the reuse of Neolithic megalithic monuments during the Copper Age to bury Beaker leaders was also a way of looking for the validation of newly emergent inequalities by the ancestors (Garrido-Pena 1994: 70; 1995: 127; 1997: 202; 2000: 55-58; Rojo *et al.* 2005).

As Hayden (1995: 57, 62) points out, leaders also tend to control access to both imported and locally crafted prestige goods through their regional connections. That is, a significant craft specialization should be present. Since Clark (1976), Bell Beaker pottery has been widely considered as a luxury commodity, a special craftsmanship product. Obviously, the careful and rich decoration of these vessels, sometimes affecting even the inner side, is not a functional or hygienic feature for a domestic cooking recipient. Dimple bases or sinuous profiles are hardly functional when cleaning them. They also provoke heating differences when used for cooking (Howard 1981: 9; Rice 1987: 241-242). Inappropriate for cooking are also the characteristic extremely thin walls, as well as the lack of handles for serving hot foods (Rice 1987: 240). These are fragile recipients, easy to break. Consequently, and taking into account the specialised work behind their manufacture, it is unlikely that they were used in everyday domestic activities.

In prehistoric societies pottery decoration was not a simple ornament, but had a valuable intellectual and religious background (David *et al.* 1988) that our Western modern accounts frequently forget. My detailed study of the dimensions and complex decoration of central Iberia Beaker pottery shows that it was not a vulgar domestic ceramic, but a very special product, with a strong symbolic dimension and profound meanings. There was not only a reduced decorative vocabulary, with certain motifs used only in particular places of the vessels, but designs were also structured around a reduced set of organization patterns with a clear symmetrical logic (Garrido-Pena 2000: 136-167).

Clear differences in the quality of Beaker pottery productions between and within sites are likely to be attributed to an emulation phenomenon. This has been widely documented in prestige item exchange systems, where lower status individuals try to imitate high ranking symbols in their social ascension strategies (Hodder 1982b: 208; Miller 1982: 89-90).

Grave goods are normally abundant in entrepreneur burials and include ritual paraphernalia. Funerals are manipulated in transegalitarian societies in order to reassert the debt structure created by the prominent deceased person (Hayden 1995: 61, 65-66) and where descendants claim their rights to inherit his advantageous and endangered position. Beaker funerals were also extraordinarily important events in Copper Age societies: grave goods were carefully chosen (often even elaborated for that specific purpose - Garrido-Pena 2000: 34-35 and 66) to clearly transmit the desired message to the community, which could explain the remarkable standardization of burial offerings (Thomas 1991a: 129; 1991b: 34-35). In fact, the typological study of central Iberia Beakers shows strikingly high degrees of standardization, especially in pottery forms (Garrido-Pena 2000).

There is an overall and major change in burial customs between the Late Neolithic communal and monumental graves and the Copper Age Beaker ones, stressing the increasing importance of individual burials accompanied by rich grave goods (Rojo *et al.* 2005). If in megalithic graves the main focus of attention during burial rituals was the tomb (itself a permanent reference in cyclic ceremonies), with the appearance of Bell Beakers that focus seems to have shifted to the dead person's corpse and his selected accompanying objects (Sherratt 1991: 60). Beaker graves of the Spanish Meseta are single primary crouched inhumations, mostly of adults, with unfortunately scarce information about gender, accompanied

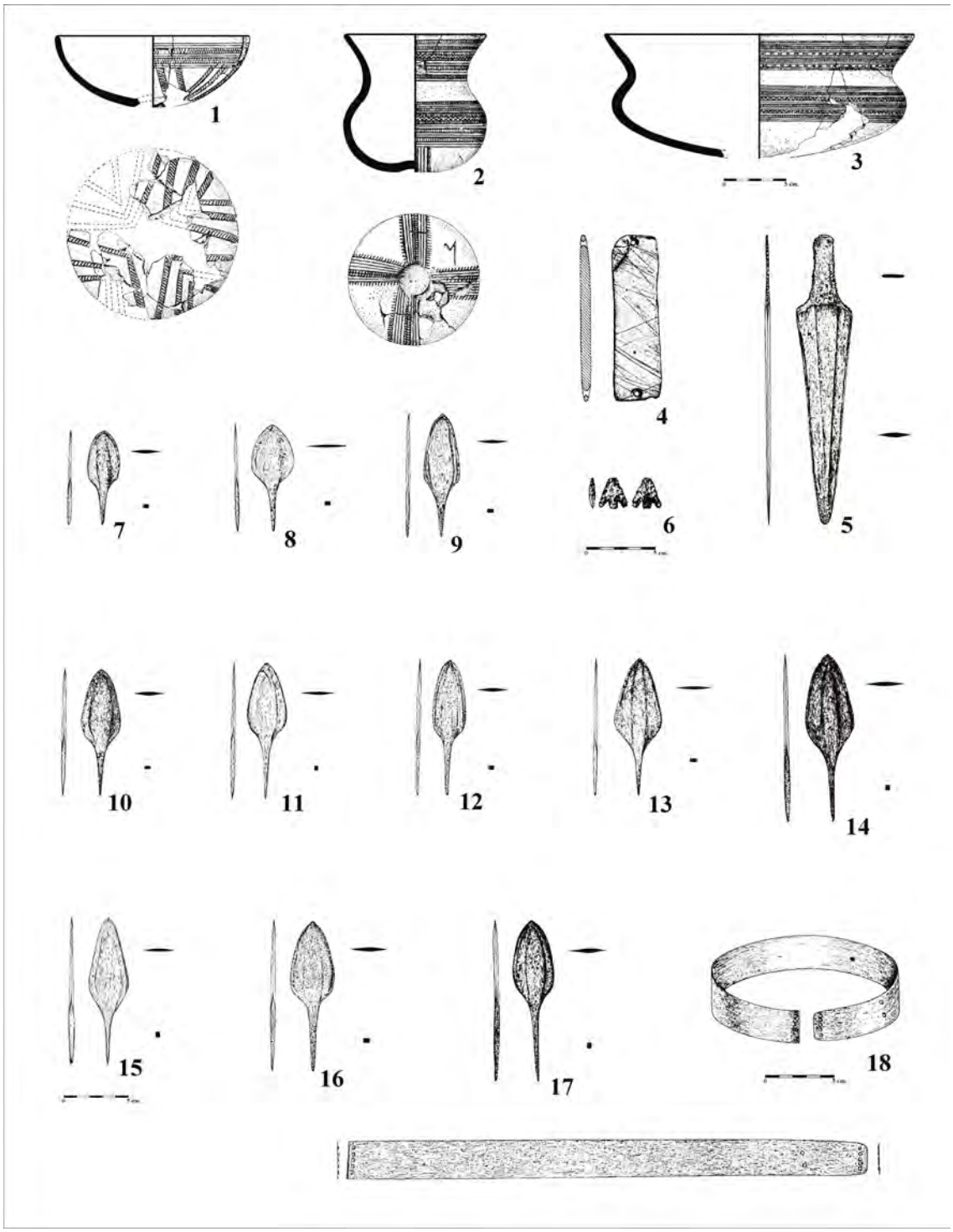

Fig.7.4. Fuente Olmedo (Valladolid) Beaker tomb grave goods (after Delibes 1977).

by rich grave goods (Fig. 7.1 and 7.4), usually arranged near the body or even in contact with it.

Those emergent Beaker leaders would have been interested in interregional exchange systems in their legitimating strategies. Not surprisingly, Hayden (1995: 62) notes that in entrepreneur communities, regional exchange networks should be the largest of all transegalitarian societies, involving generalized elite styles and values. In the absence of the necessary raw material source analysis, the exhaustive multivariate statistic analysis of the spectacular sample of central Iberia Beaker decorations gives important clues to study the different exchange spheres probably functioning during that period, at local, regional and interregional levels (Fig. 7.5, 7.6 and 7.7). The intense and sustained contact between neighbouring groups

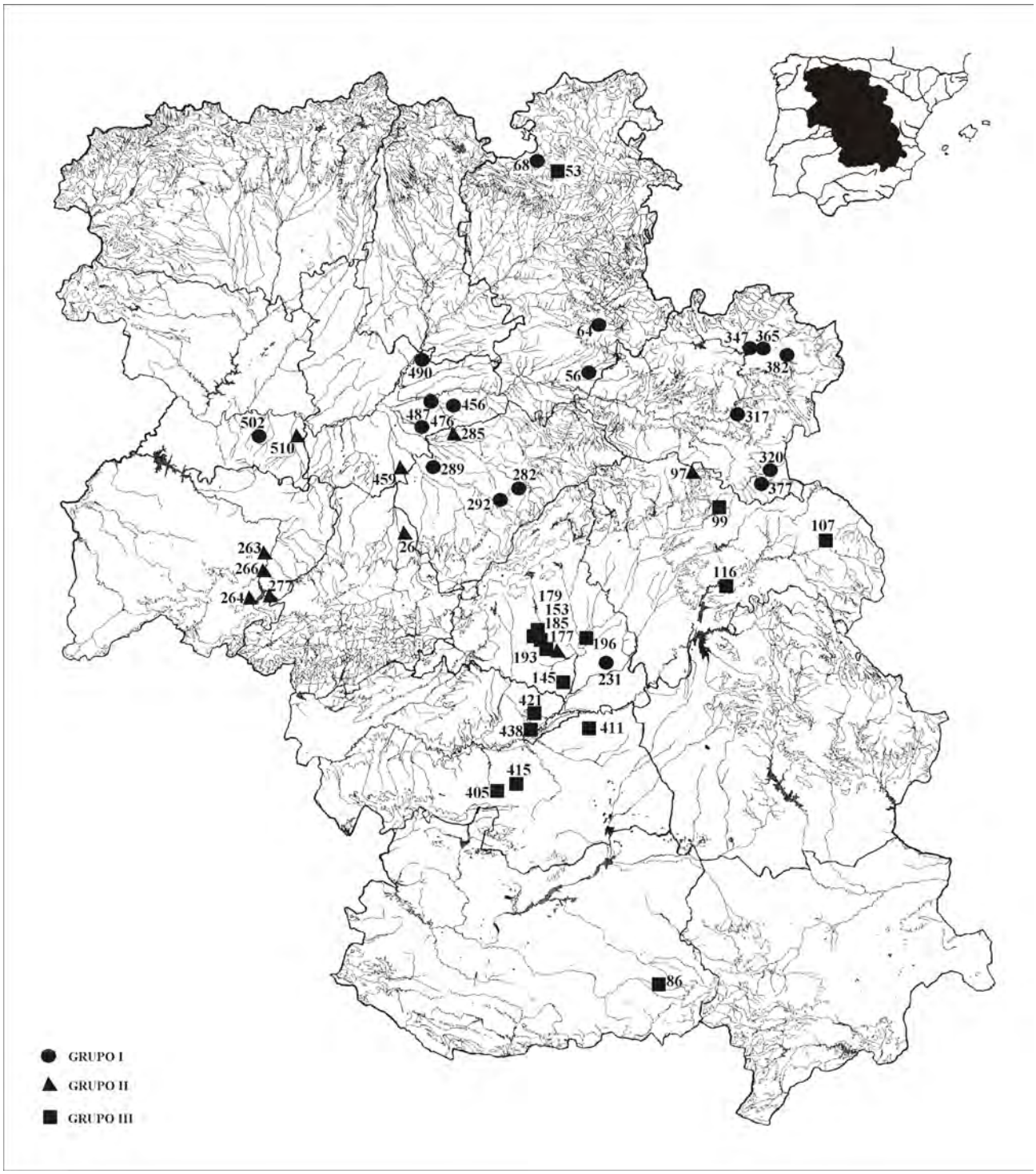

Fig.7.5. Stylistic areas of Ciempozuelos style Inner Iberia Beaker decorations (after Garrido-Pena 2000).

created local decorative patterns emerging from preferred use of some designs, but there was also an interregional continuous flux of exchanges which explains the widespread dispersion of some rare and specific motifs (Fig. 7.6) and schemes, as well as the overall similarities of Beaker decorations throughout so vast a region as central Iberia (Garrido-Pena 2000: 147-167).

Classic hypotheses arguing that the greater the intensity of contact amongst groups, the greater the resulting similarity of pottery designs, through mother-daughter learning designs and marriage exchanges, proposed by "new archaeologists" in the 70's (Plog 1978), have been extensively criticized during the last decade in postprocessual accounts (Hodder 1982a; 1990). This criticism has shown that, in fact, reality is much more complex than those pioneering studies thought, as became clear in diverse ethnoarchaeological observations. Those critiques

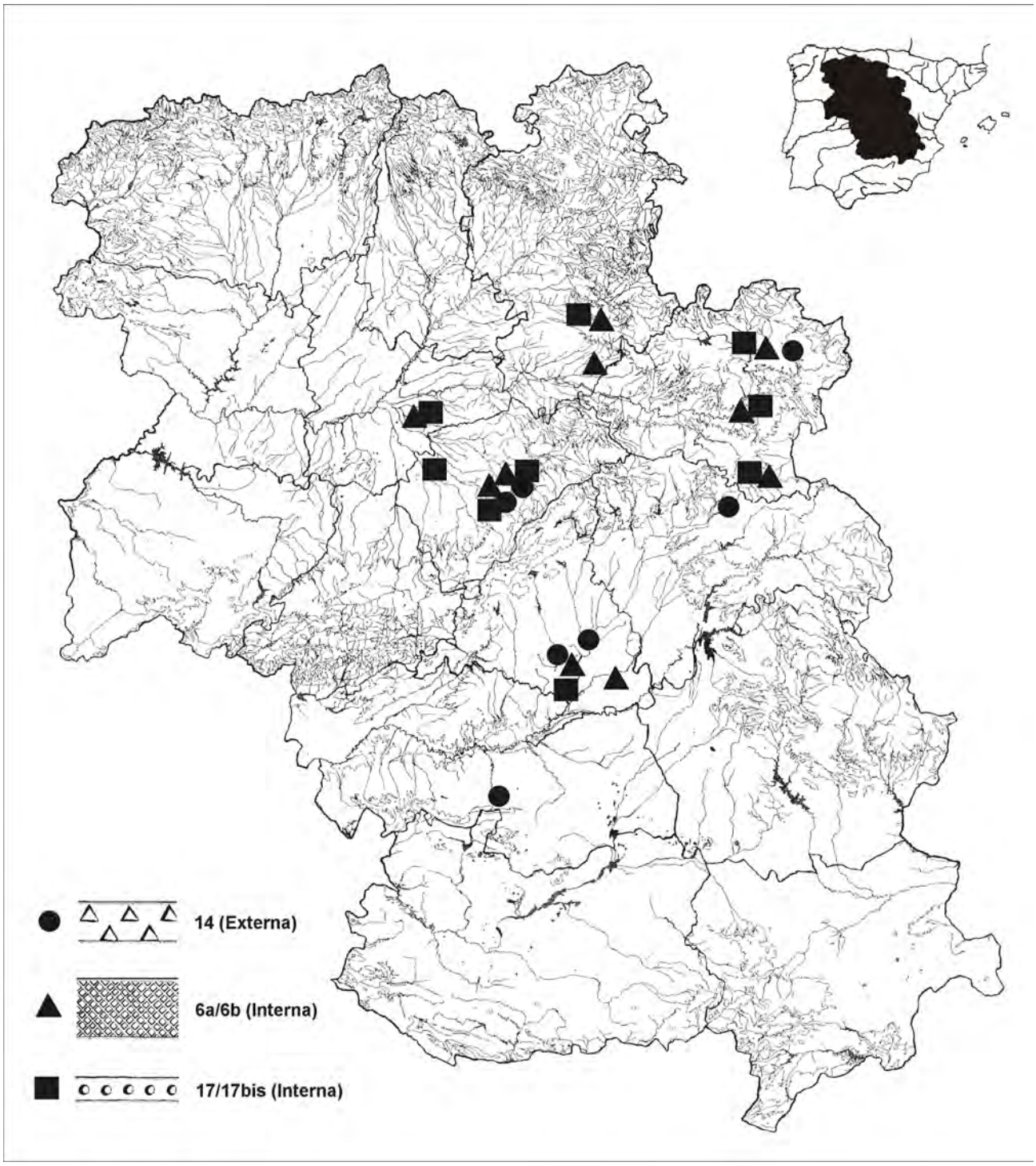

Fig.7.6. Wide geographic distribution of certain rare Inner Iberia Beaker designs (after Garrido-Pena 2000).

stressed the importance of material culture, not just as a passive reflection of past behaviours but as an active character in the social scenario. Style could function as an active communication instrument, and not just as a passive indicator of social contact intensity.

Style does structure people's thinking and approaches to reality (Shanks & Tilley 1987: 148; Hodder 1990: 46), and stylistic similarity is not a direct reflection of the degree of intensity of the interaction between groups. Instead, it is closely related to the sort of relationship that they hold with each other. When there is strong competition for resources and hostility, style tends to be strikingly different, actively marking that situation. When there is a cooperative and mutual economic benefit interaction, pottery designs, for example, tend to be rather similar, even among groups that are physically neighbouring (Hodder 1982a).

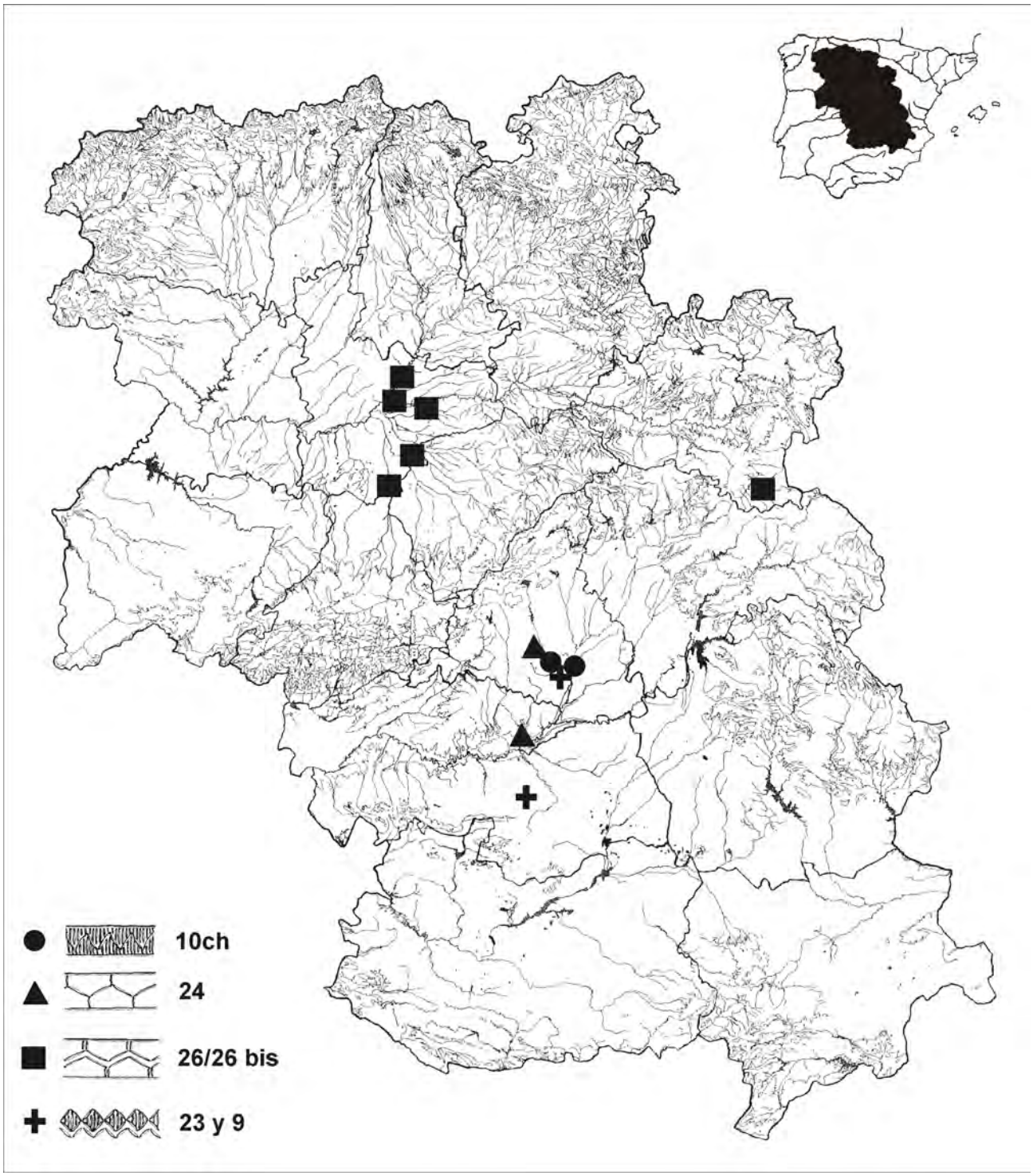

Fig.7.7. Regional and local geographic distribution of certain rare Inner Iberia Beaker designs (after Garrido-Pena 2000).

Perhaps, this is an interesting clue to analyse strong stylistic similarities documented in Copper Age central Iberia, where Bell Beakers exhibit surprising and profound regularities. Taking into account that they were probably luxury and high status commodities, only consumed by emergent leaders seeking to legitimate their unstable position, they may inform us not about interaction intensity between communities but about the kind of contact established between leaders. From this perspective, it is possible to assume that those stylistic similarities could reflect the entrepreneurial quest for mutual support, capable of manipulating those special symbols of power which distinguished the important people from the rest of the common ones, adhering to a successful inter-regional ideological complex.

Site	14C date	Calibration(2 σ) Ox-Cal v.3.9	Sample	Context and Beaker Style	References
Aldeagordillo (Ávila)	(GrN-19167) 3685±25 b.p.	2150-1970 cal BC	Charcoal	Tomb Ciempozuelos	Fabián (1992)
Cerro del Bu (Toledo)	(I-13.959) 3970±100 b.p.	2900-2100 cal BC	Charcoal	Habitat Maritime	De Álvaro and Pereira, (1990: 205)
Cerro del Bu (Toledo)	(I- 14.416) 3830±100 b.p.	2600-1950 cal BC	Charcoal	Habitat Maritime	De Álvaro and Pereira (1990: 205)
Fuente Olmedo	(CSIC-483) 3620±50 b.p.	2140-1820 cal BC	Human bones	Tomb Ciempozuelos	Martín and Delibes (1989: 81)
Fuente Olmedo	(OxA-2907) 3730±65 b.p.	2340-1930 cal BC	Human bones	Tomb Ciempozuelos	Hedges and others, (1992: 150)
Quintanilla de Arriba	3750±60 b.p.	2400-1960 cal BC	Charcoal	Habitat Ciempozuelos	Rodríguez and Herrán, (1988)
Pajares de Adaja	3870±50 b.p.	2470-2190 cal BC	Human bones	Tomb Ciempozuelos	Delibes and others, 1999: 162
La Sima III	(KIA 17999) 3860±30 b.p.	2460-2200 cal BC	Human bones	Tomb Maritime	Rojo and others, in press
La Sima III	(KIA 18000) 3862±28 b.p.	2460-2200 cal BC	Human bones	Tomb Maritime	Rojo and others, in press

Table 7.1 14C dates from Inner Iberia Beaker contexts.

7.6.- Concluding remarks

Although unfortunately the Copper Age central Iberian archaeological record is still scarce, and we lack many crucial data about socioeconomic changes, the available information seems to fit with the main features of the transegalitarian social model proposed by Hayden (1995), especially in the entrepreneur type. According to this model, emergent leaders use diverse means, such as marriage strategies, competitive feasts and gift exchanges, to reinforce their still weak and unstable position, increasing their economic base and also their personal prestige, with the help of ancestor cult manipulation as well as the control of exchange systems, in which high status and symbolic value items like Bell Beakers were circulating.

The process of social change towards complexity and more stable inequalities finally would have led to the establishment of the first Bronze Age chiefdoms of the Iberian Meseta, although there is still much research to carry out regarding this period. At least, Bell Beakers disappeared, and with them presumably the economic and social structure supporting and explaining them. Perhaps, there was no need for such constant and clear display of status, and competitive feasts and exchange gift systems seemingly faded away. In fact, as the ethnographical record shows, these ostentatious material displays become most pronounced when there is uncertainty in reckoning relative status and positions of power and competition for succession (Hayden 1995: 64).

In chiefdoms, the position of the chiefs tends to be strongly hereditary, competitive feasts no longer appear to serve as primary means of organizing the community and extending general control, and a high degree of economic intensification and settlement pattern hierarchy, involving warfare, are documented (Hayden 1995: 63).

The social and economic structures of Bronze Age central Iberia have barely been studied. But once again the available data seems to fit the model. This is at least the case of certain areas with decreasing testimonies of stylistic behaviour, certain degree of ranking in settlement patterns (Muñoz 1993; 2000), warfare, and significant fortified settlements (especially clear in La Mancha Bronze Age "Motillas"). In this sense, the presence of Bell Beakers could be interpreted as a kind of social "thermometer", characteristic of the presumable transition between Neolithic egalitarian communities and Bronze Age chiefdoms. The chronological development of Beakers in a given region would then be reflecting the rhythm of socioeconomic changes. These were probably slow in central Iberia, judging by their long temporal extension (*c.* 2500-2000 cal BC) (Garrido-Pena 2000: 195-198) (Table 7.1), and rather fast (just one or two centuries – see Harrison 1988) in other areas such as the Southeast.

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