A Tale of Exchange and Symmetry:
Intercultural Contacts between Northwest Iberia and the Mediterranean
(9th-7th Centuries BCE)

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Archaeology
School of History, Classics and Archaeology
University of Edinburgh
Abstract

Recent years have seen a wave of research in intercultural contacts between Northwest Iberia and the Mediterranean. This paper explores these contacts during the 9th-7th centuries BCE, a period of transition between the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. It revises the material evidence of Mediterranean origin found within Northwest castros, hillforts, specifically in the Rías Baixas. The analysis shows a typological diversity of artefacts of varied origins. This suggests that the Northwest was exchanging material goods and ideas with the Mediterranean, more specifically the Phoenicians and locals in southern Iberia. An attempt is made to understand the mechanisms behind these interactions, suggesting a hybrid exchange mechanism that integrates both communities and maritime routes from the Atlantic bronze circuit. This is used to propose a continuous transition between the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age in the Northwest. The exchanges are revisited through three ideas of symmetrical archaeology. Thing’s agency sheds light on the exchange’s network of relations between things and human as agents and patients. This also shows how foreign imports can disrupt a community’s habitual memory. Finally, the concept of a percolating time allows us to present the exchanges as a poly-chronic ensemble.
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### List of Abbreviations

Northwest – Northwest Iberia  
BA – Bronze Age  
LBA – Late Bronze Age  
IA – Iron Age  
EIA – Early Iron Age  
RB – Rías Baixas
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A special thanks to everyone who sailed this ocean with me
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The port that set the course
And all those who have ventured these waters before

_The ship is anchor’d safe and sound, its voyage closed and done_
1. Introduction

This paper can be contextualised within the research surrounding intercultural contact between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic coast of Iberia during the Bronze to Iron Age transition. Over the past 20 years, there has been a wave of interest in understanding these contacts – and their role in the Phoenician and Punic expansion – prompted by recent discoveries of Mediterranean presence in these areas. There is ample evidence along the Atlantic coast for regular exchanges with Phoenicians by the 6th century BCE, with typical Punic settlements in place by the 5th. However, these well-established Atlantic-Mediterranean exchanges need to have been preceded by some kind of contact, which is probably less visible in the archaeological record. This is the period from the 9th century BCE, with the start of Phoenician presence in southern Iberia, to the 7th century BCE. This appears as a time of transformation in Atlantic Iberian communities, key to understanding the shift from exchanges within the Atlantic bronze circuit of the second millennia to Phoenician and Punic trade networks.

OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, it aims to understand Mediterranean presence in northwest Iberia at the beginning of the first millennia BCE. This study will focus on settlements of the 9th-7th centuries BCE in the Rías Baixas, a series of inlets along the western coast of Galicia, a province in northwest Spain (see Figure 2); this will be referred to as the Northwest. Methodologically, it will entail an examination of material evidence for Mediterranean contacts that has been found within indigenous hillforts, castros, in order to identify artefacts’ numbers, origins and distributions. The analysis will aim to understand who in the Mediterranean was carrying out these contacts and to contextualise the nature of these contacts within the theoretical framework of exchange. This might help archaeologists understand the mechanisms behind these contacts and their relation to LBA exchange networks.
Secondly, this paper aims to approach the evidence and conclusions from an alternative perspective, that of symmetrical archaeology – as presented by B. Olsen (2004; 2007; 2010), M. Shanks (2007), T. Webmoor (2007; 2013) and C. Witmore (2007). Presented as ‘a defense of things’, this archaeological theory aims to reconfigure dualisms by focusing on the collectives and complex interactions between humans and things (Olsen 2010; Webmoor 2007: 563-5). This viewpoint – which is opposed to the social and linear ideas characteristic of studies of exchange, both of the formalist and substantivist schools – might allow one to suggest unusual avenues of thought within the wider debate of intercultural contacts between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic coasts of Iberia during the Bronze to Iron Age transition. The analysis will focus on applying three symmetrical concepts to the recollected material evidence and conclusions: things’ agency, memory and percolating time.

Overall, this dissertation aims to revise a traditionally marginal and isolated area and ‘dark’ time period, the Northwest in the 9th-7th centuries BCE, by examining its intercultural contacts with the Mediterranean. It seeks to set these contacts within a wider spatial and temporal framework, understand their exchange mechanisms and approach them through symmetrical ideas.

PAST STUDIES OF THE NORTHWEST AND THE MEDITERRANEAN: NATIONALISM, COLONIALISM AND POST-COLONIALISM

Interest in contacts between the Northwest and the Mediterranean has developed within the context of Phoenician colonisation in the western Mediterranean and the evolution of local Northwest communities. Ideas have broadly corresponded to the evolution of archaeological thought throughout the 20th century.

The first investigations were deeply entrenched within nationalist and colonial ideas. The mid-20th century saw the Spanish dictatorship start to manipulate the country’s proto-history (Ruiz-Zapatero 1996). Thus, autonomous

1 The term ‘thing’ will be used subsequently under Olsen’s (2010: 9) definition of things as ‘all those varied physical entities we by effective conventions refer to as “material culture”.

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communities in northern Spain started to build their regional identities upon the notion of a ‘Celtic Iron Age’, which clearly distinguished them from the ‘Iberian’ southeast Spain (Almagro-Gorbea 1991: 12). This inevitably led to archaeological interpretations of the Northwest as isolated. In the Mediterranean, Phoenician expansion was thought to have reached an end at the Strait of Gibraltar due to Helleno- and Mediterraneo-centric ideas dominating the intellectual discussion. These had derived from Ancient Greek beliefs, which saw the Strait as the end of the known world, and Braudel’s (1949) geographical focus on the Mediterranean. Overall, in these early stages, interaction between the Northwest and the Mediterranean during the LBA and the EIA was inconceivable.

The material evidence for Phoenician presence beyond the Strait of Gibraltar multiplied over the course of the 1980s-90s (Arruda 2009: 113). Interest in the Mediterranean presence in southern Iberia increased, with investigations into what were considered Phoenician settlements at Peña Negra, Alicante, and Gadir. Investigations then expanded to North African sites, such as Lixus, and Portuguese hillforts, such as Abul. These were all regarded as *emporia*, after the Greek colonial model, founded by Phoenicians as trading posts from the 8th century BCE onwards as part of their larger exchange network in the Mediterranean (Aubet 2001a: 348). This process started to be acknowledged as the Phoenician ‘colonisation’, suggesting it was both political and economic in character. As such, Phoenicians were seen to have arrived in the western Mediterranean to found colonies and exploit the local resources. Referring to this phenomenon as ‘colonisation’ is still deeply entrenched in archaeological writings (see Dietler & López-Ruiz 2009). Thus, when archaeologists identified Phoenician evidence in the western Mediterranean dating to the 10-9th centuries BCE, this period was inevitably referred to as ‘precolonisation’ (Celestino et al. 2009). Nevertheless, in the past 15 years, postcolonial ideas have steadily been incorporated to analyses of Phoenician presence in Iberia. Deeper insights into the so-called *emporia* revealed the co-existence of Phoenicians and local communities, suggesting a more equal relationship than originally proposed. In this context, Alvar-Ezquerra (2009) has criticised the terms ‘colonisation’ and ‘precolonisation’, proposing the use of ‘Systemic Hegemonic Mode of Contact’ and ‘Episodic Mode of Contact’ instead. Aubet (2001a: 200-211), drawing from the scarcity and isolation of items from the
12-10\textsuperscript{th} centuries BCE, has questioned the viewpoint of precolonisation. However, words like ‘founding’, ‘colonies’ or ‘precolonisation’ are still common and the debate remains open (see Celestino \textit{et al.} 2009). Both points of view currently coexist within the academic sphere.

During most of these developments, the Northwest was still regarded as an isolated area for the most part, home to the distinctive \textit{cultura castrexa}, hillfort culture. When evidence for Mediterranean presence in the coast from the 5\textsuperscript{th} century onwards – for instance in A Lanzada – became undeniable, these sites were contextualised within Punic colonial trading activities (González-Ruibal \textit{et al.} 2010). However, the discussion within the archaeological literature soon welcomed postcolonial ideas and began including matters of ethnicity, continuity or internal change. The chronology of Mediterranean contacts in the Northwest also expanded to include the LBA and EIA, as well as the area’s role in the Atlantic bronze circuit (Ruiz-Gálvez 2013: 314). Nowadays, thanks to Cunliffe’s (2001) and González-Ruibal’s (2004: 287-8) work, the Northwest has begun to be regarded less as a marginal or liminal location and more as a pivotal point between two areas, the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. The discourse of intercultural contacts between the Northwest and the Mediterranean is moving towards a theoretical, practical and scholarly holism.

\textbf{THEORETICAL STANDPOINT}

Drawing from this holism, an integrated approach will be use to analyse exchange. Furthermore, an alternative theoretical stance will be provided through the use of symmetrical ideas.

\textbf{Contact, exchange and trade}

When looking upon the nature of the interaction between the Northwest and the Mediterranean, three key terms are in need of definition: contact, exchange and trade. ‘Contact’ refers to the basic level of this interaction whereby the two groups meet. It is used within an intercultural context because each group is
distinctive enough from the other to distinguish two different types of communities: the Northwest and the Phoenician Mediterranean (see chapter 2). ‘Exchange’ has been given varied meanings within the interaction scale: from simply an ‘interaction between humans’ to the transfer of ideas and social practices but not material goods (Oka & Kusimba 2008: 340). In contrast, ‘trade’ is presented as a more complex activity that includes a material-economic component and a market (Oka & Kusimba 2008: 340). This paper will use ‘exchange’ to refer to the transfer of both the social and the material between groups. It will refrain from using ‘trade’ to avoid interpretation pitfalls, as the evidence in the Northwest is already sparse enough without having to face archaeologists’ difficulties of identifying a market in an ancient society (Kolb 2011: 150). This analysis will begin by viewing the interaction between the Northwest and the Mediterranean as intercultural contact. After the evidence has been examined, it will then contemplate whether there is enough evidence to suggest exchange.

Theoretically, exchange will be approached as a material and temporal process, just as material goods and ideas are produced, circulated and consumed. This process is continuous, complex, integrated and dynamic (Aubet 2001a: 105; Earle 2010: 209; Dillian & White 2010: 3). This continuity and dynamism of exchange will also allow us to approach its results from a temporal perspective. Finally, the approach will be substantivist in the sense that it will consider exchange to operate within a cultural context, that of Mediterranean presence in the Northwest.

**Symmetry**

Symmetrical theories have presented archaeology as ‘an ecology of practices [...] that work on material pasts in the present’; thus, it draws from several theories and approaches (Olsen et al. 2012: 2). All, however, are oriented to the same goal: a defense of things and collectives of things and humans. Nature-society is seen as an imbruglio of human-things (Webmoor 2007: 569). This does not imply equivalence, but does defend a variety of agencies (Witmore 2007: 547; 549). It is therefore a critique of ‘asymmetrical’ theories, both processual and post-
processual, that prioritise either the empiric or the social agent (Ruiz-Zapatero & Álvarez-Sanchís 2015: 217). Above all, it is a theory, not an approach, and therefore offers enough flexibility to apply to this dissertation’s specific research without envisaging a fixed outcome, but rather suggesting fields of inquiry. As in Witmore (2007: 547), this paper’s interest in symmetry is one of ‘proposition and construction’.

Three symmetrical ideas have been found especially relevant to the current topic. First is the idea of things’ agency, that is, that artefacts have their own properties and can affect the human agent. This might shed light on the ways in which Mediterranean artefacts might have affected the everyday lives of Northwest communities within the symmetrical interaction between both. Second is the distinction between habit memory, consequence of repetitious practice, and involuntary memory, caused by a disruption of habit. This could shed light on how Mediterranean artefacts might have influenced locals’ relationship to Atlantic BA artefacts, and how this perception could have evolved over time. Thirdly, the concept of time as percolating might offer an alternative interpretation to the linear narrative of Atlantic-Mediterranean contacts from the BA to the Iron Age.

**TIME AND SPACE**

The 9th-7th centuries BCE have been chosen as timeframe because they represent the connection between the LBA and the EIA (Figure 1). This shift has been pinpointed approximately to c.800 BCE. It is a period of transition during which local communities changed internally and contacts with the external world shifted focus (González-Ruibal 2004a: 294). As such it holds the key to understanding this shift of attention from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean and connecting both periods. This also follows symmetrical concerns with breaking neatly stacked chronological periods, and thus the wider theoretical standpoint of this paper (Witmore 2007: 554). Furthermore, the 9th-7th centuries BCE have been

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2 Calo-Lourido (1993: 15) has even argued that the term EIA should not be used as this metal was barely in use yet.

3 This transition deeply affected both Iberia and the rest of the Mediterranean, driving changes between different political, economic and symbolic systems (Olmos 2008: 8).
traditionally dismissed as a ‘dark age’, a time when local communities fragmented and isolated themselves from the outside world (Peña-Santos 1992a: 52; Snodgrass 2000: 2). Thus this period has been generally overlooked, ignoring a narrative that is key to understanding broader developments.

The geographical area analysed corresponds broadly to the RB, in Galicia, an autonomous community in northwest Spain (Figure 2). The area consists of four inlets (Figure 3) with a distinctive morphology (Pacheco-Ruiz 2009: 7) that differ greatly from the rest of the Iberian Atlantic coast. Here, it is assumed that the coastline has not changed much since the early first millennium BCE (Aubet 2001a: 182).

Figure 1. Chronological table comparison.
Figure 2. Location of the Rías Baixas in relation to: (a) the Mediterranean; (b) Iberia; and (c) Galicia. Map base © Google Maps.

Figure 3. Main geographical features of the Rías Baixas.
This region has been chosen as a subject of study for two reasons. First, the position of the RB in relation to the sea is unique. It is located between two areas of the Atlantic, facing both northern and southern cultural zones (Figure 4). As such, it is a pivotal point between two seas that can help archaeologists explore contact between the Mediterranean world and the Atlantic core (González-Ruibal 2004a). The sea's advantage for transport and communication in prehistory, especially around mountainous areas, is indubitable (González-Ruibal 2006-7: 62, 70). Therefore, arguments for the marginality of the area only pertain to the Northwest's location in relation to the rest of the Iberian Peninsula. Secondly, the geography of the RB favours movement. The inlets create easily accessible natural harbours for boats to go aground. The inlets also provide a route inland along valleys and their tributary rivers (González-Ruibal 2006-7: 246). This allows easy access inland, otherwise hindered by the mountain range of the 'Dorsal Gallega' (González-Ruibal 2006-7: 70).

![Figure 4. Major cultural zones in Late Bronze Age Atlantic Europe. From Cunliffe (2001: fig.7.20).](image-url)
2. Main players

Chapter 1 presented an introduction to the question of Northwest contacts with the Mediterranean during the EIA. In order to approach the material evidence in search of these contacts, it is necessary to understand the communities that would have been involved on both sides and the connection between them, that is, why they would be interested in each other. This necessarily raises the issue of how they could have established contact through the maritime routes.

THE COMMUNITIES OF THE NORTHWEST

The Northwest is widely regarded as a homogeneous archaeological assemblage called the cultura castrexa or castreja (‘castro culture’), characterised by fortified settlements, usually hillforts, with stone roundhouses. Bosch Gimpera (1921) first introduced the term within a historico-cultural paradigm, promoting regionalist and ethnic perspectives. Deeply rooted within the scholarly tradition, the term still prevails in publications both old and new (López-Cuevillas 1953; Blanco-Freijeiro 1960; Calo-Lourido 1993: 14; Acuña Castroviejo 1991). These present the cultura castrexa as inherent to Galicia, expanding into Portugal, Zamora and Salamanca. These ideas show referring to the Northwest as a unified ‘castro culture’ is out-dated; it overlooks diversity and oversimplifies local communities both typologically and chronologically (dos Reis Martins 1997: 145). However, the complex and dynamic character of Northwest peoples is starting to be acknowledged. For instance, González-Ruibal (2006: 130) has proposed their division during the 5th-1st centuries BCE according to identity into three types: heroic societies, house societies and deep rurals.

Forgoing the terminology of a ‘castro culture’ also means that the period between the 9th and 7th centuries BCE can no longer be regarded as its genesis, with the same characteristics as later hillforts slowly being solidified in stone. Instead, Northwest 9th-7th-century BCE settlements show varied patterns: some are located near major communication causeways, others closer to mineral resources (Calo-Lourido 1993: 80; Tereso et al. 2013: 3867). Coastal and interior
settlements differ typologically, with the former being more defensive in character (Acuña-Castroviejo 1991: 296). Coastal settlements are also generally located at more visible strategic points (Calo-Lourrido 1993: 89). There appears to be a dualism between innovative coastal settlements, located along important communication routes, and more isolated interior ones (Ruiz-Zapatero & Álvarez-Sanchís 2015: 215). Each settlement generally consisted of a series of stone roundhouses, with the progressive addition of stonewalls, palisades and embankments (Calo-Lourrido 1993: 819). Some were long-lived, from the late BA well into the IA (Pacheco-Ruiz 2009: 5). It seems that these settlements were steadily becoming more sedentary while evolving in individual autarchic ways, once again showing the inaccuracy of referring to them as a ‘castro culture’. This translated onto their economy. Animal husbandry was widespread and the 9th-7th centuries BCE have been regarded as a moment of agricultural intensification (López-Cuevillas 1966; Peña-Santos & Vázquez-Varela 1996: 44; Tereso et al. 2013: 3867). This might have been stimulated by the climatic change in the ‘Sub-Atlantic’ area that increased humidity (Calo-Lourrido 1993: 78; Peña-Santos & Vázquez-Varela 1996; Ruiz-Zapatero & Álvarez-Sanchís 2015: 213). Coastal settlements also exploited maritime resources (Pacheco-Ruiz 2009).

The settlements found along the RB are coastal. As such, they generally adhere to the aforementioned patterns: they would have had strategic locations, control over major communication routes, defensive character, easy access, and they could exploit coastal resources. These factors suggest that their communities could have easily been in contact with other settlements, both along the coast and inland. Coastal sites would be the most obvious settlements to have had contact with the sea and have been involved in exchange networks that might have been operating in the area.

THE COMMUNITIES OF THE MEDITERRANEAN: PHOENICIANS IN SOUTHERN IBERIA

The 9th-7th-century BCE western Mediterranean presented an even more varied picture than the Northwest. The Phoenicians had voyaged across it from
their eastern origins. In Southern Iberia, especially around the Strait of Gibraltar, they were settling and interacting with the local communities.

‘Phoenician’ is a term coined by the Greeks to refer to the inhabitants of the Levant; for instance the Odyssey (4.83, 14.291; Dimock & Murray 1995) uses ‘Phoenicia’ as a territorial homeland. The Phoenicians would have never referred to themselves as such. Instead they would have probably seen themselves as inhabitants of the individual cities along the Levant, just as Ugarit in the 14th-13th centuries BCE (Sherratt 2010: 122). Since the term is deeply embedded in scholarship, it would do little benefit to stop referring to these communities as Phoenician. Phoenicians were primarily traders and, over the beginning of the first millennia, they developed stable long-distance commercial networks throughout the Mediterranean. These would have replaced the LBA networks that disintegrated after the collapse of the palaces. Phoenician commercial ventures sought many products, but the quest for metals – gold, silver, tin and lead – was without doubt the most profitable. Whether prompted by Assyria’s demand for raw materials or by a combination of internal factors, their mercantile enterprise had started to impact southern Iberia by the early 9th century BCE (Aubet 2001a: 70, 73-85; Ruiz-Gálvez 2013: 309).

How and why the Phoenicians reached the Strait of Gibraltar is far from clear. Traditional interpretations have contextualised Phoenician arrival to Iberia as a period of reconnaissance of profitable territories, carried out by adventurous sailors through risky voyages led by trial and error (Ruiz-Gálvez 2013: 269; Cunliffe 2001: 297). This would have started a period of silent trade around the 11th-10th century BCE, eventually followed by a ‘precolonisation’ in the 9th and 8th centuries BCE. The 7th and 6th centuries BCE would have seen the establishment of substantial colonies in places like Gadir and the Guadalquivir valley, which were rich in metal resources. This period has received a considerable attention from scholars (see, for instance, the dates in Aubet’s 2001b chapter on Phoenician expansion in Spain; scope of focus of Bierling & Gitin 2002). Southern Iberia would have been one of the last areas to be explored. Phoenicians would have progressively founded colonies in Cyprus, Sicily, Sardinia and the Balearics before

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4This view has great similarities to Greek epics, especially the Odyssey, which represents Phoenicians as tramping maritime pirates (Sherratt 2010:122).
reaching Gadir, as part of a commercial chain (Aubet 2001a: 161) (Figure 5). If so, Phoenician presence beyond the Strait and in the Northwest would appear to have been contingent and late in date.

Figure 5. Phoenicians in the Mediterranean: mentioned colonies and maritime
Recent radiocarbon dates present an alternative picture. Adopting a low chronology for colony foundations (Gilboa & Sharon 2003), Aubet (forthcoming) has showed that Phoenician dates in the peninsula might be earlier than those in the east, for instance, in Kition. A recently uncovered material assemblage in Huelva with Phoenician artefacts dating to the middle and second half of the 9th century BCE further confirms this (Núñez 2014). Thus, it appears that Phoenicians would have travelled directly to the Strait of Gibraltar following a preconfigured goal (Ruiz-Gálvez 2013: 270). This would have been impossible unless Phoenicians had previous knowledge of southern Iberia: the route to follow and the raw materials they would find there. Aubet (forthcoming) suggests that Phoenicians would have had knowledge of the LBA metal circuit and they would have arrived at the Strait led by expert merchant parties with defined aims to identify – and trade – sources of tin, copper, silver and gold (Aubet 2001a: 279). Since contact is already materialised in the archaeological record by the early 9th century BCE, it is highly possible that interaction was already taking place in the 11th-10th centuries BCE.

Setting an earlier date for the start of Phoenician-Iberian interaction has consequences in the study of their intercultural contacts with the Northwest. If Phoenicians were following LBA metal circuits, access to the Northwest, as part of the Atlantic circle, would have been more straightforward than initially supposed. The Northwest need not have been a marginal community, but instead might have actively engaged in this movement. Secondly, Phoenician knowledge of BA routes suggests that contacts were not interrupted after the collapse of Near Eastern palaces c.1200 BCE. Ruiz-Gálvez (2013: 289-293, 309) has drawn upon from Mediterranean and iron evidence – at Peña Negra, Alicante, and Baiões, Portugal – to suggest that there were peoples, probably Sardinian, moving around the western Mediterranean and Atlantic during the 11th-10th centuries BCE. These would have been small private enterprises, supported by the existence of lead weights, following indigenous routes. Phoenicians might have endorsed these contacts. The picture of Mediterranean presence in southern Iberia between the 11th and 7th centuries BCE is becoming increasingly complex; by the 9th century BCE, Phoenicians were impacting upon local communities on both the Mediterranean and the Atlantic sides.
**Portugal**

Knowledge of the Atlantic circuit and maritime access to the Northwest would have inevitably led Phoenicians along the coast of Portugal. Contacts are now evident, despite being originally underestimated in the 1980s, (Mederos-Martín & Ruiz-Cabrero 2007), and signs of regular Phoenician shipping can be noted along the Portuguese coast (Aubet 2001a: 292). Cerro da Rocha Branca, Abul, Santa Olaia or Baião have all yielded Mediterranean bronzes (González-Ruibal 2004a: 239; Cunliffe 2001: 298; Peña-Santos 1992b: 25). These cultural contacts fed into Portuguese settlements, which, similarly to the Northwest, were establishing their local communities (dos Reis Martins 1997: 152). This area, then, smoothly connected Phoenicians in southern Iberia with the Northwest.

**THE CONNECTION**

If Northwest communities were open to maritime traffic and Phoenicians had knowledge of Atlantic routes to them, the question that remains is why they would have contacted each other, that is, what would have made their interaction profitable.
Raw materials and the quest for metals

Phoenician enterprises were interested in metals. This can be seen in the development of Gadir, and the securing of the Guadalquivir and río Tinto valleys in southern Iberia, allowing access to silver. In contrast, the Northwest is not rich in silver, but does have sources of tin and gold (Figure 7). The Northwest's involvements in the BA Atlantic metal circuit presumably must have profited from its local sources. By the 5th century BCE, the area was certainly famous for its tin in the Greek world. References to a series of ‘tin islands’ in the far west called Oestrymnis and Cassiterides can be found in Herodotus (3.115; Godley 1971), Avienus (Ora Maritima 92-106) and Strabo (3.5.10; Jones 1960). Some scholars, for instance Cunliffe (2001: 304), have maintained that these places were located off the Northwest coast; others remain undecided, as the writings could be referring to Britain or France (Aubet 2001a: 291). Either way, if knowledge of the Northwest’s tin sources was spread throughout the Atlantic in the LBA and throughout the eastern Mediterranean by the second half of the first millennium BCE, there is little reason to suppose that Phoenicians would have been ignorant of this information during the period in between.

Figure 7. Main Iberian metal resources.
The Northwest need not have been a passive receptor of Phoenician interest. For instance, González-Ruibal (2006: 143), looking at later Punic exchanges, has proposed that communities in the Northwest could have been selectively choosing those goods that could either be consumed collectively or transported easily. Phoenicians could have also traded in a variety of goods in the 9th-7th centuries BCE (González-Ruibal 2006-7: 138-9). Oil and good wine were characteristic of southern Iberia and can be found in the Northwest in Punic times (Aubet 2001a: 287). Mediterranean salt (Mederos-Martín 1999: 129), copper (González-Ruibal 2006-7: 139), colourful quality fabrics (Mederos-Martín & Ruiz-Cabrero 2007: 382-3) or exotic products could have been other options.

Maritime routes

The maritime route from southern Iberia to the Northwest would seem the obvious and fastest route between both areas. In contrast, the mountainous inland would have proven more hazardous to go anywhere beyond Tartessos (Aubet 2001a: 292). Phoenicians had sturdy, long-distance trading ships, *naves rotunda* (Aubet 2001a: 174). Northwest communities could very well have had their own boats. It has been shown how Phoenicians from the Levant probably reached southern Iberia via a direct route. The greatest challenge would have been to cross the Strait of Gibraltar, which is made difficult by a combination of anticlockwise currents and westerly winds (Aubet 2001a: 182-5) (Figure 8). Considering Phoenicians’ proficient seafaring, their knowledge of past routes and the existence of months of easterly winds, the task seems not only possible but also backed by archaeological evidence (see Phoenician presence in Portugal). Once the Strait has been crossed, it is easier to open the ships’ course towards the Atlantic instead of the Portuguese coast in order to travel north, which is called the *volta pelo largo* (Mederos-Martín & Ruiz-Cabrero 2007: 380). This route would have easily taken Phoenicians to the Northwest, or vice versa by sailing closer to the coast. This area also could have had indigenous maritime circuits in operation (Ruiz-Gálvez 2013: 295). These also could have incorporated routes of the Atlantic trading circuit of the BA, which would have been transporting tin, gold, ivory, copper, lead and salt (Aubet 2001a: 292). Unfortunately, its mechanisms and routes are not well known.
By the 9th-7th centuries BCE, maritime routes between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic were operative, and Phoenicians and the Northwest had reasons to be interested in each other. There is enough evidence to suggest that intercultural contacts could have been taking place during this period. A closer look at Mediterranean material assemblages in the archaeological record of the

**Figure 8.** Prevailing currents (a) and winds (b) in the western Mediterranean. From Aubet (2001: fig.38-39).
Northwest, specifically the RB, could shed light on the nature, scale and mechanisms behind this contact.
3. An analysis of the material evidence

It has been shown that settlements in the Northwest during the 9th-7th centuries BCE consisted of a mixture of open LBA settlements and incipient castros, hillforts. The latter make more reliable sources of evidence because they have been investigated in larger numbers and are more visible in the archaeological record. The analysis will therefore concentrate on these castros. Priority will be also given to coastal settlements, which appear to have been more engaged in communication, both inland and with the sea, and would have been key to reaching the metal sources inland. This leaves a total of twelve castros in the RB area with dates earlier than the 6th century BCE (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Known castros of the 9th–7th centuries BCE and their distribution.
WHERE TO LOOK?

The early stages of contact between two different communities are generally small in quantity and complexity, and thus characterised by their low visibility in the archaeological record. Furthermore, the first *castros* are problematic because they have usually been built over during the following centuries. Evidence of such contact will not be found in the design or layout of *castros*. Instead, artefacts are the key to understanding these contacts. Their dimensions make them easier to transport across long distances and to innovate upon. Thus, the analysis will look at evidence of either foreign artefacts of Mediterranean origin or local artefacts of Mediterranean technique.

Key materials

The presence of artefacts characteristic of the Levant but not of the Northwest inevitably suggests these materials or their processing techniques are imported. Early evidence of Phoenician presence in south Iberia has been associated with iron objects (Ruiz-Zapatero & Álvarez-Sanchís 2015: 220). Thus, the introduction of iron in the Northwest would show the movement of ideas through the Mediterranean and could be closely connected to Phoenician voyages to the area. In a similar way, faience or glass artefacts, especially beads, were typically traded materials in the Levant since the BA. Phoenicians continued producing and trading these materials throughout their networks. Once again, their presence in the Northwest would suggest contacts with these networks.

Secondly, the presence of typological or decorative characteristics of the Mediterranean in Northwest objects might suggest that either they are imported or the ideas behind the manufacture of the artefacts were imported. Bronze fibulae types are significant indicators of Mediterranean contacts in southern Iberia and Portugal, especially of the double-spring, ‘Sanguisuga or navicella’ and the Tartessian ‘Alcores’ types (Figure 10). Double-spring fibulae are the earliest type to have spread throughout southern Iberia in the 8th century BCE (Mederos-Martín & Ruiz-Cabrero 2007: 382-3; Cortegoso-Comesaña 2000: 130). ‘Sanguisuga’ fibulae are characteristic of Italy and are found in the Iberian Peninsula from the 8th
century BCE onwards, for instance at Alcacer do Sal (Fariña-Busto & Arias-Vilas 1980: 186). Their Iberian parallels are called ‘Acebuchal’ (Torres-Ortiz 2002: 201). Tartessian ‘Alcores’ fibulae are widely spread around southern Iberia by the 7th century BCE (Torres-Ortiz 2002: 199). Imported, or locally copied, fibulae are strong indicators of Mediterranean contacts in the Northwest, where communities did not seem to have a characteristic type of their own (González-Ruibal 2006-7: 215-6). Mediterranean-type curved knives, made of both bronze and iron, are also indicators of contact (González-Ruibal 2006-7: 138; Peña-Santos 1992b: 39). Ceramics can show Mediterranean influence. Local Northwest pottery is handmade. Thus, Mediterranean foreigners would have probably brought wheel-made sherds (González-Ruibal 2004a: 292). Decorative patterns could also show whether an artefact had a Mediterranean origin or influence. Local Northwest pottery is characterised by incised geometrical patterns along the neck and shoulders of the pot (González-Ruibal 2006-7: fig. 3.44). Any uncommon decoration with Mediterranean parallels could point to contact.

Figure 10. Fibulae types: (a) double-spring, after Ruiz-Delgado (1986: fig.D.r.1), modified; (B) ‘Alcores’, after Torres-Ortiz (2002: fig VIII.26); ‘Sanguisuga’ or ‘Acebuchal’, after Torres-Ortiz (2002: fig VIII.28).
Limitations

There are a series of limiting factors in the study of these sites and artefacts. Only a handful of 9th-7th-century castros have been excavated in detail – Torroso, Penalba, and Neixón Pequeño. Most of the sites were explored from the mid-20th century onwards and are lacking in detail. Some are currently being excavated with modern methodologies but their results have not yet been published and are, thus, inaccessible. Materially, the poor preservation of iron as compared to bronze might offer a biased picture of the use or availability of metal (González-Ruibal 2006-7: 244). Furthermore, because subsistence goods do not survive well in the archaeological record, analysis will be biased towards those that do (Dillian & White 2010: 9).

MEDITERRANEAN ARTEFACTS BY CASTRO

Of the twelve castros that have been dated between the 9th and 7th centuries BCE, nine have yielded artefacts that might be related to the Mediterranean (Figure 11). These will be individually analysed.

Figure 11. Castros with artefacts of Mediterranean origin.
**Torroso (Mos, Pontevedra)**

The *castro* of Torroso is strategically located on a hill in between two major communication routes: the Ría de Vigo to the north and the Louro valley to the south (Peña-Santos 1992b: 49). Originally dated to the 7th century BCE based on artefactual typology, radiocarbon dates have now been suggested for the 9th-8th centuries – 803, 794 CAL BCE in levels 4 and 5 (Mederos-Martín & Ruiz-Cabrero 2007: 368-9).

Several iron artefacts have been identified, but only a few can be reliably dated to the 8th and 7th centuries. Two curved iron knives were probably imported (Figure 12.a). A series of iron sickles (Figure 12.b), which were probably locally produced, show that locals were comfortably working iron by the 7th century (González-Ruibal 2006-7: 231). A bronze belt buckle with ironwork and damascene silver decoration points to contact with the Mediterranean (Figure 12.c). This technique has been traced to the eastern Mediterranean and could have been considered a prestige object (Peña-Santos 1992b: 31). Two bronze objects also show Mediterranean influences. The clearest of these is the foot of a double-spring fibula (Figure 12.d). Originally, Peña-Santos (1992b: 33) dated this fibula type to the 6th century, but its chronology has been pushed back (González-Ruibal 2006-7: 215). An elongated piece of bronze finished in an arch presents some controversy (Figure 12.e). Originally interpreted as tongs, it might have been part of a tripod or a skewer (Peña-Santos 1992b: 30). These last two options would link it to Mediterranean types, especially Mycenaean (Gamito 1989: 148-153). Although it was found in 8th-7th-century contexts, the piece might have been brought in before Phoenician presence in the area. Finally, a few ceramics are burnished with a technique similar to that of the Lapa do Fumo pottery from the Mediterranean (Peña Santos 1992b: 117; González-Ruibal 2006-7: 137, 239).
Figure 12. Mediterranean artefacts from Torroso: (a) curved knives, after Peña-Santos (1992b: fig.69); (b) iron sickles, after Peña Santos (1992b: fig.69); (c) buckle, after Peña Santos (1992b: fig.63); (d) double-spring fibula foot, after Peña Santos (1992b: fig.63); (e) unidentified piece, after Peña Santos (1992b: fig.62).
Torres de Padín (Teis, Pontevedra)

The *castro* at Torres de Padín is located at the mouth of the Ría de Vigo. Rescue excavations in 1989 determined a stratigraphic level of the 8th-7th centuries. To these belonged a wheel-made sherd with painted geometric motifs in red, similar to Mediterranean techniques (Figure 13) (González-Ruibal 2006-7: 248).

Montealegre (Moaña, Pontevedra)

The *castro* of Montealegre is located in the northern interior of the Ría the Vigo. It was excavated in the 1920s and during 2003-4, but this later season yielded mostly imports from the 2nd century BCE onwards (González-Ruibal *et al.* 2007). The earlier excavations yielded a fibula that could have been of the double-spring type, although only Losada y Diéguez’s (1943: 101-105) description survives (Fariña-Busto & Arias-Vilas 1980: 191). If it were of the double-spring type, it would be datable to the 8-7th centuries and perhaps of Mediterranean origin (González-Ruibal 2004a: 295). Iron slag was also found (Losada y Dieguez 1925-6: 6).

**Figure 13.** Painted sherd from Torres de Padín. After González-Ruibal (2004a: fig.4.2).

**Figure 14.** Painted sherd from Islas Cíes. After González-Ruibal (2006-7: fig.3.50.3).
Islas Cíes (Pontevedra)

The castro das Hortas is located on the Cíes islands. Excavated in the 20th century, it underwent a second season of excavation in 2011-13, which unfortunately has not yet been published. The former excavation yielded a lip sherd decorated with a white crisscross on a red background (Figure 14). Phoenician parallels from the 8th-7th centuries BCE can be found in Santa Olaia (Arruda 2002). Although a fragment that could have been brought in through Punic trade and dates back to the 4th-3rd centuries BCE has also been found in Garvao, this kind of decoration is more typically Phoenician (González-Ruibal 2006-7: 248). More dubious is its chronology, as the sherd, which has not been reliably dated, could also belong to the 6th and 5th centuries BCE.

A Lanzada (Noalla, Pontevedra)

The castro of A Lanzada is located on a strategic peninsula in between two of the inlets. Excavated continuously during the 1950s, 70s, 80s, and the beginning of the 21st century, it has become especially interesting due to its commercial relation with Punics by the 3rd century BCE (González-Ruibal 2004b). It has evidence of occupation from the 8th-7th centuries onwards – a bronze curved knife, of Mediterranean type, belongs to this era (Figure 15). This is similar to the one found in Torroso and it might have been adapting Mediterranean designs to bronze technology.

Figure 15. Curved bronze knife from A Lanzada. After Cunliffe (1985: plate XVIII.1).
Penalba (Campo Lameiro, Pontevedra)

The castro of Penalba is located inland. Radiocarbon dates have recently been published for the 9th-8th centuries (786, 759 CAL BCE – levels 4 and 5) (Mederos-Martín & Ruiz-Cabrero 2007: 367-8). These contexts have yielded three interesting finds. There is a curved iron knife, similar to those of Torroso and A Lanzada (Figure 16.a). A bronze spring piece from a double-spring fibula also shows correlation with Torroso (Figure 16.b) (González-Ruibal 2006-7: 215). Finally, a series of glass beads with Phoenician parallels have been dated to the period between the 8th-7th centuries (González-Ruibal 2006-7: 249).

![Figure 16. Mediterranean artefacts from Penalba: (a) curved knife, after González-Ruibal (2004a: fig.4.6); (b) fibula spring, after González-Ruibal (2006-7: fig.3.50.13).](image)

Alobre (Vilagarcía de Arousa, Pontevedra)

The castro of Alobre is located on the southern side of the Ría de Arousa. The 1980s’ excavations yielded a ‘Sanguisuga’ type fibula of unknown context (Figure 17). Its similarity to Italian types could point to contact with the Mediterranean through the southern Iberia. Although there is a slight possibility it could have arrived through mainland Europe, presence of these types in east and southern Europe suggests otherwise (González-Ruibal 2006-7: 248). On-going excavations in 2016 might yield new finds regarding this question.
Neixón Pequeno (Boiro, A Coruña)

The castro of Neixón Pequeño is the oldest of two hillforts located in the Ría de Arousa. Excavated during the 1970-80s, it was analysed in more detail in 2008. These last excavations have yielded iron slag, suggesting technical know-how of this metal (Ayán-Vila et al. 2011: 163). Unfortunately, they belong to an unknown level so they might date to the 6th century BCE (González-Ruibal 2006-7: 237, 244). However, the presence of iron materials in Torroso and Penalba in the 8th and 7th centuries BCE suggests that the metal was already being exploited in the Northwest in castros further inland and less accessible than Neixón. Thus, it is likely that it could also have been in use in Neixón from the 8th century BCE onwards.

A hook-shaped fragment of bronze could be the edge of a fibula of the ‘Alcores’ type (Figure 18), similar to the ones in the Guadalquivir valley (Torres-Ortiz 2002: 200). This would suggest that southern Iberians were maintaining contact with the Northwest.
**Castrovite (Orazo, A Estrada, Pontevedra)**

Castrovite, also known as the *castro* of Santa Mariña, is located at a strategic position between the west-east routes in the Ulla valley. Excavations in 1986, though reduced in area, yielded glass beads, similar to the ones in Penalba, and iron slag (Carballo-Arceo 1998: 12). However, their exact chronology is unknown. Punic ceramic sherds have been reliably dated to the 5-4th centuries (Carballo-Arceo 1998: 12). Thus, the beads and iron slag might belong to this timeframe too.

**DATA COMPILATION**

The number of *castros* with Mediterranean artefacts account for three quarters of the total number. As Croas, Monte do Facho and Punta do Muiño have not yielded Mediterranean evidence. This is probably due to the excavation methodology carried out in these *castros*. As Croas (8th-5th centuries BCE) has undergone a season of excavations in 1993, which showed that it is typologically very similar to Torroso and Penalba (Peña-Santos 2000: 155). Finding Mediterranean artefacts within this settlement might only be a matter of time. Excavations at Monte do Facho have focused on its Berobreo sanctuary dating to the 4th-3rd centuries BCE, while ceramics have allowed archaeologists to date the *castro* back to the 10th century (Schattner *et al.* 2004; 2006). Thus, Mediterranean artefacts of the 9th-7th centuries might not have been uncovered yet. Punta do Muiño might have undergone a similar bias towards the 5th century and its contacts with Punics. Thus, the overall picture appears more biased towards the lack of Mediterranean artefacts than previously thought.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Castro</th>
<th>Chronology (centuries)</th>
<th>Iron artefacts</th>
<th>Bronze artefacts</th>
<th>Ceramics</th>
<th>Beads</th>
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<tr>
<td>Torroso</td>
<td>8th – 7th BCE</td>
<td>Curved knives</td>
<td>Double-spring fibula</td>
<td>Burnished –</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Sickles</td>
<td>Belt buckle</td>
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<td>Unidentified piece</td>
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<tr>
<td>Torres de Padín</td>
<td>9th BCE – 1st AD</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Painted –</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montealegre</td>
<td>8th–7th BCE – 1st AD</td>
<td>Slag</td>
<td>Double-spring fibula</td>
<td>–</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cíes</td>
<td>8th BCE – ?</td>
<td>–</td>
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<td>Painted –</td>
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<tr>
<td>A Lanzada</td>
<td>8th BCE – 2nd BCE</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Curved knife</td>
<td>–</td>
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<tr>
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<td>8th BCE – 5th BCE</td>
<td>Curved knife</td>
<td>Double-spring fibula</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Glass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alobre</td>
<td>8th BCE – 4th BCE</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Sanguisuga fibula</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neixón Pequeño</td>
<td>7th BCE – 5th BCE</td>
<td>Slag</td>
<td>Alcores fibula</td>
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<tr>
<td>Castrovite</td>
<td>8th BCE – ?</td>
<td>Slag</td>
<td>–</td>
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<td>Glass</td>
</tr>
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Table 1. A synthesis of artefacts of Mediterranean origin by castro.

The artefacts of Mediterranean origin identified are varied. Approached individually by castro these artefacts may appear random, but when put together they start appearing as a more consistent assemblage (Table 1). Uses are varied: from iron know-how in everyday objects such as sickles to exquisite valuables such as a belt buckle, and anything in between, ceramics, weaponry, fibulae and jewellery. Of these, fibulae are the most frequently found, closely followed by
curved knives and ceramics (Figure 19.a). Both materials, such as ceramics and glass beads, and technical know-how have been imported (Figure 19.b). Fibulae and curved knives could have been either directly imported or stylistically copied by local metalworkers. Although diverse, the number of Mediterranean finds is scarce: a total of nineteen imports. However, there is something more important that suggests that the Northwest was open to contact and innovation: the introduction of the know-how, for instance, in the working of iron and the development of curved knives (Ruiz-Gálvez 2013: 286). The numbers of artefacts, then, point to an early stage of interaction (González-Ruibal 2004a: 291). Furthermore, the artefacts can be traced to several points in the Mediterranean. The ‘Sanguisuga’ type fibula can be traced to Italy; the double-spring and ‘Alcores’ types fibulae to southern Spain, especially the area around Tartessos; ceramic burnish to Portugal; glass beads and ceramic painted decorations to the Levant; and curved type knives and iron simply to the wider Mediterranean (Figure 19.c).
The distribution of these artefacts is also varied and encompasses most of the RB, except the Ría of Muros e Noia (Figure 20). Mediterranean artefacts are found both in coastal settlements and inland ones overlooking valleys. These are strategic points throughout the landscape and communication routes. The distribution shows that different artefact types do not concentrate in adjoining *castros* but are dispersed throughout the area. Overall, it seems that these
Mediterranean artefacts were moving around the RB. Whether this local movement was being promoted by indigenous people or by foreigners, there must have been enough on-going contact with the Mediterranean world to bring these artefacts to the Northwest in the first place. Since the coast of Portugal has a trail of evidence for Mediterranean contacts from the 9th century BCE (see chapter 2), this appears a plausible route or contact point. Furthermore, it must not be forgotten that these Mediterranean objects are found within material assemblages that, although are dominated by local artefacts, also have older and contemporary Atlantic imports. For instance, at Torroso, the castro with the largest number of finds in this study, these Mediterranean characteristics appear to be mixing with Atlantic and continental ones, all foreign to the Northwest (Peña-Santos 1992b: 34). The Northwest seems to have been moderately engaging in contacts both with the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. The questions that need to be addressed now are theoretical, including what kind of contacts these were and what mechanisms drove them.

Figure 20. Distribution of artefacts of Mediterranean origin.
4. Theoretical considerations on exchange and symmetry

Chapter 3 has assembled the material evidence of Mediterranean origin that has been found within 9th-7th century castros of the Northwest. This has been shown to be low in number but of diverse nature and distribution. Thus, these are enough to suggest early contact between the Northwest and the Mediterranean and raise questions regarding exchange and its participants, mechanisms and circuits in the Atlantic. An alternative perspective will also be considered in the hope of providing new avenues of approach to the topic: symmetrical archaeology. This will allow us to explore intercultural contacts in the Northwest in terms of three key concepts: things’ agency, memory and time.

INTERCULTURAL CONTACTS IN THE NORTHWEST IN THE 9TH-7TH CENTURIES BCE

Data compilation has shown that the Northwest was in contact with the Mediterranean since at least the 8th century BCE. However, considering the Northwest’s richness in metal resources and the Mediterranean demand for them, it seems likely that these were more than just contacts – they were part of a system of exchange. If exchange is understood as the transfer of people, ideas and material goods between two or more parties (see introduction), this view would be further supported by the mixture of import types (Figure 19). The complexity of this exchange demands attention.

The nature of exchange: Phoenicians, southern Iberia and an active Northwest

Considering the Phoenician commercial venture in the rest of the Mediterranean, it would be fitting to suggest that this group was the agent promoting these exchanges with the Northwest. However, the artefacts found in the Northwest have shown influences of varied origin. There could be three possible explanations to this phenomenon. First, it could be argued that these
objects arrived to the Northwest through fortuity, perhaps elite gift-giving or a few lone travellers. Considering the insight into iron know-how and the wide distribution of these artefacts in the RB, such a view would once again be underestimating the Northwest as a marginal and isolated area. Secondly, it could be suggested that the Northwest was in direct contact with all these areas. Despite having challenged the marginality of the Northwest and acknowledged its active engagement with the Atlantic Ocean, it would be foolish to argue that the area had direct links with all these eastern areas, considering its rooted local characteristics. Thirdly, it could be argued that someone, with the means to either voyage to all these places or gather objects with multiple points of origin, was bringing these artefacts near or directly to the Northwest. Chapter 2 has shown that the Phoenicians not only had the motives, means and knowledge to do so but were also firmly settling in southern Iberia and moving along the coast of Portugal by the 9th century BCE. Thus, the varied origins of the Mediterranean artefacts outlined in Chapter 3 would most probably have been the result of Phoenician enterprises.

Nevertheless, these need not have been Phoenicians from the Levant. Chapter 2 has shown how Phoenicians were blending with the local communities of southern Iberia and slowly establishing mixed settlements in strategic locations, such as Gadir. These sites, due to their Phoenician influences, were increasingly sophisticated, leading complex exchanges and housing hybrid societies, especially in eastern Iberia (Vives-Ferrándiz 2008). These settlements would then make the perfect centres from which to organise ventures to the Northwest: they would be connected to local maritime routes, closer to the sources of metal, would have allowed people to maximise profits, and would have fed into the western Mediterranean demands. Seeing this area as headquarters for the western Phoenician venture would also explain the trail of Phoenician engagements, and the early stages of hybrid settlements, for instance Santa Olaia, along the coast of Portugal.

As trading communities, the only reasons that Phoenicians would not have engaged with exchange in the Northwest is if this had not profitable been enough for them or if local communities would have prevented it. Exploit of tin and gold would have certainly made the venture profitable, just as the silver in the
Guadalquivir valley led them to Gadir. However, the picture presented in the Northwest is different from the one in southern Iberia. *Castros* were not hybridising communities, but distinctively local sites – at least until Punic presence in the 4th century BCE. González-Ruibal (2004a: 292) has suggested that Phoenicians never established distinctive settlements along the Northwest coast because they were unable to engage in profitable, long-lasting relationships with the locals. This happened because indigenous communities of the Northwest were deeply involved in their own internal developments (Dietler 1998: 289). Perhaps an alternative view could be put forward: Phoenicians need not, or could not, have established a permanent presence in the Northwest because the indigenous communities were selectively engaging in the exchange of their own metals. This might explain why evidence for Phoenician presence in the Atlantic decreases gradually northwards, despite its increasing proximity to the sources of metals that they were clearly pursuing. The distribution of Mediterranean artefacts in *castros* exceptionally located for connecting the interior with maritime trade could also support this view. Giving the Northwest a more active role in these contacts with the Mediterranean can also help provide a dynamic picture of the exchange mechanisms between the Atlantic and the western Mediterranean.

**Exchange mechanisms: a dynamic Atlantic**

Analyses of prehistoric exchange mechanism have not been short of contrasting theoretical models, and studies of Phoenician exchange networks have made use of several. Diffusionist ideas presented the Phoenicians as harbingers of innovation, but these models were eventually challenged by post-colonialism (Aubet 2001a: 280). Core-periphery models that situated the Mediterranean as the centre and Europe as marginal, for instance Sherratt & Sherratt (1993), also promoted Phoenician maritime networks (Mederos-Martín 1995:137). Centrality of the Mediterranean – and Phoenician ventures – have been key in world-system models, with some authors even arguing that it was already established by c.3000

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5 This view was mostly derived from an overreliance on Classical texts. Herodotus (4.152) narrates how silver was accidentally discovered in the Peninsula after a great fire, but without the local knowledge to extract or work it, only when the Phoenicians arrived could it be exploited.
BCE (Gills & Frank 1990). The study of Phoenician exchange networks has not been excluded from the formalist-substantivist divide either (Dillian & White 2010: 5-6). Despite this variety of approaches, these theories all have one thing in common: their starting points are rigid models of exchange. Thus, they are disadvantageous to apply to the current topic of study, which is characterised by its dynamic position between two worlds, the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, and two time periods, the LBA and the EIA.

Instead, it might be more effective to approach the exchange mechanism between the Northwest and the Phoenicians through an understanding of prehistoric exchange as a continuous, complex, integrated and dynamic process (Aubet 2001a: 105; Earle 2010: 209). This then becomes an attempt to use an inclusive approach uniting the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. An alternative picture arises of how exchange mechanism with the Northwest might have worked when the Northwest is seen as an active participant in the exchange (Oka & Kusimba 2008: 363). This is a picture that integrates Phoenician routes and the Atlantic bronze circuit.

On the one hand, it has been shown that the Northwest was involved in the Atlantic Bronze circuit at the end of the second millennium (Aubet 2001a; see chapter 2). Furthermore, Cunliffe (2001: 287), in his division of Atlantic Europe into spheres of influence during the end of the BA, separates the Northwest from southern Portugal. The former directs its attention north towards the Cantabrian Sea and western France, whereas the latter looks towards the southern Atlantic and the Strait of Gibraltar (Figure 5). On the other hand, traditional academic maps show the Phoenician advance north through the Atlantic coast of Iberia as a straight route, designed solely by Mediterranean advances (Figure 21.a). However, knowledge of metal sources in the Northwest suggests that the Atlantic bronze circuit routes could have still been in use. There is a high probability that Phoenician exchanges with the Northwest might not have been solely dependant on their own advances north. Thus, the exchange mechanism proposed between the Phoenicians in southern Iberia and the Northwest is one formed by a combination of these two systems (Figure 21.b). Phoenicians would have arrived in southern Iberia in the early 9th century BCE and started mixing with the locals, where hybrid communities would have developed. These would have served as
entry points to the Atlantic, with indigenous knowledge of maritime routes and raw material resources. Portugal’s BA sphere of influence, which directed its attention south, would have allowed for an easier establishment of contacts, and eventually the genesis of hybrid settlements. The Northwest, however, was within a different sphere of influence and so it would not have had the same reaction to Phoenician advances. Thus, it is suggested that Northwest locals were moving south to the central coast of Portugal where they obtained Mediterranean artefacts. This would explain why hybrid settlements of the type of Santa Olaia never occurred in the Northwest during the 8th and 7th centuries BCE.

Figure 21. Exchanges between southern Iberia and the Northwest: (a) traditional models and (b) proposed hybrid exchange mechanism.

This gave rise to a flexible and dynamic exchange mechanism connecting two different networks of exchange, the BA Atlantic circuit and the Phoenician IA Mediterranean sea-routes. It was in no way part of a world-system in which the Atlantic and the Mediterranean meet midway along the coast of Portugal, as the Sherratts (1993: fig. 1c-d) have proposed for the 7th and 6th centuries BCE. The
constraints of such a model have already been highlighted. Rather, it emphasises hybridity within an exchange network, instead of just within settlements. Hybridism emerged as a concept within postcolonial ideas to describe periods of cultural intermixing (Bhabha 2004). As such it has been used to refer to the ‘Orientalising period’ in 8th-century-BCE Greece (Lydon & Rizvi 2012: 25) or to Phoenician interactions with local communities in eastern and southern Iberia (Vives-Ferrándiz 2008). It is a term generally applied to communities and their cultures, not exchange systems. However, it could be applied to the exchange between the Northwest and Iberian Phoenicians because it took places between two distinctive cultural communities and it is suggested that interaction routes encompassed two distinctive spheres of cultural exchange circuits. The 9th-7th centuries BCE on the edges of the Atlantic and Mediterranean were a period of change, both internally and externally. Thus, this allows archaeological perspectives to abandon constrictive models of exchange and, instead, argue for increased mixing and connection between different participants.

**Bridging the divides**

A hybrid exchange mechanism between the Northwest and the Phoenicians in southern Iberia can also help bridge wider geographical and chronological divisions in archaeological interpretations. It shows how exchange networks move beyond cultural (Phoenicians-‘castrexos’) and geographical (Strait of Gibraltar) boundaries to fulfil the needs of their participants (Oka & Kusimba 2008: 359). This dismantles the separation between the Mediterranean and Atlantic, which can no longer be regarded as active participants and passive receptors, respectively. Instead, it connects both areas geographically and connects both communities’ agency. From a chronological perspective, this mechanism can help blur the traditional division between the LBA and the EIA in western Iberia (Figure 22.a). Combination of both exchange circuits also connects the cultural transition that took place in the Mediterranean and Europe in the turn of the first millennium BCE. Uninterrupted knowledge of maritime routes, raw material sources and movement of communities all point to transition and continuity, instead of the disintegration of Atlantic and Mediterranean BA societies and the emergence of
new ones (Figure 22.b). This fits in with wider views challenging the LBA ‘collapse’ and the ‘dark ages’ characteristic of EIA societies, for instance, in Greece (Lemos 2006: 87; Morgan 2009; Bintliff 2012). This is especially characteristic in the Northwest, where changes within castros and the introduction of iron appears to have been a slow process. Overall, intercultural exchanges between the Northwest and the Phoenician Mediterranean in the 9th-7th centuries BCE show a picture of coherent continuity both geographically and chronologically.

![Figure 22](image)

**Figure 22.** Bridging the chronological divide in the Northwest: (a) traditional model; and (b) continuity model.

**A SYMMETRICAL INTERPRETATION**

This hybrid exchange mechanism contributes to themes within the current postcolonial debate on the topic. However, since archaeological theory appears to be facing a moment of paradigmatic lack of definition (González-Ruibal 2012: 104) – whether this means a ‘death’ of theory, a new paradigm or “post-paradigm” period (Bintliff & Pearce 2011; Kristiansen 2014: 12) – it would be interesting to approach the topic from an alternative perspective. Symmetrical archaeology provides an interesting platform to do so, as it is one of the most complex additions
to 21st-century archaeological theory. Symmetrical theories, as presented in the introduction, work towards a common goal: the defense of things. This does not imply equivalence, but does defend a variety of agencies and, therefore, the reclamation of an equal treatment of things and humans (Witmore 2007: 547; 549). Presented as a theory, and not an approach, it allows us to pick and choose concepts to apply to the intercultural contacts between the Northwest and the Mediterranean in order to propose as new interpretative framework. Thus, three ideas have been selected: the agency of things, the disruption of memory and the concept of percolating time.

**Things’ agency**

Conceiving the world as an imbroglio of human-things whereby collective entities have a variety of agencies allows scholars to move beyond anthropocentric views of agency. A symmetric view of agency is not attributed to entities by themselves, but rather to the whole network in which these entities are imbued, to their associations and relationships (Knappet 2002: 100; Malafouris 2013: 127). This has helped advance two ideas. On the one hand, the Actor-Network Theory (ANT) argues that agents are the effects of networks and that there is no primacy of the human actor (Law 1999). Instead of engaging with the contradiction between agency and structure, ANT ignores it in a ‘bypassing strategy’ (Latour 1999: 16-7). On the other hand, Malafouris (2013: 136-44) removes human primacy over agency. He uses Searle’s ‘Background’ (1983: 143) to eliminate intentionality’s definition as the diagnostic feature of agency. This allows Malafouris (2013: 145-6) to define agency as a fluid dialectic whereby actors and patients exist in a dynamic tension that is in constant shift and mediation. The actor or agent is any element that bends the space and entities around it (Malafouris 2013: 147). For instance, the car is an agent insofar as the person is the patient and vice versa (Gell 1998: 22). Agents and patients engage and interact, just as things and humans do, and owe their definitions as such to their relationships in a certain ontological moment (Malafouris 2013: 145). Therefore, not only can things have agency but also the question now shifts from ‘what are

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*Symmetrical archaeology’s nature as an ecology prevents us from encompassing the totality of its scope.*
things as agents’ to ‘when and how does an agent occur’ (Malafouris 2013: 143, 147).

This agency of things enriches the network of exchange between the Northwest and the Phoenicians in southern Iberia. Seeing the exchanged goods as agents allows us to move beyond the description of movement, route and interaction mechanisms between the two communities. These exchanged goods can be regarded as what was bringing both communities together by providing channels of interaction (Malafouris 2013: 44). Therefore, a dynamic network of actors and patients, of both material artefacts and human interests, guided these exchanges. Some of these have been represented in Figure 23. The presence of Northwest metals is what brought the Mediterranean imports to the Northwest, perhaps even allowing the local communities to produce some of the bronze objects themselves. Yet at the same time, the Mediterranean imports were allowing Northwest metals to be transported south. The relationship between the Northwest metals and the Mediterranean imports is what allowed a two-sided exchange to take place, with both communities having an active role in it. Yet at the same time, the human goal of obtaining profit or establishing social relations from exchange established the quantity and quality of Northwest metals and Mediterranean imports. Thus, approaching this exchange through things’ agency provides insight into a complex network of agents and patients that was in constant motion and reciprocal relation. The mechanism of the exchange between the Northwest and the Phoenicians in southern Iberia could have been more than just a network of maritime routes, coastal settlements and artefact distributions.
**Memory**

Acknowledging things’ agency can show their influence on memory. This might provide insight into how Mediterranean imports could have impacted upon the Northwest communities’ relationship to local objects. Olsen (2010) outlines three types of memory. Habit memory is bodily memory preserved by repetitious practice of which humans are not aware because it is embedded in their practices (Bergson 2004). These practices are only made possible through things, just as a piano player’s habit memory is inconceivable without a piano (Olsen 2010). Recollective memory involves a conscious, wilful, voluntary gaze at a particular part of the past (Olsen 2010: 109, 116). Involuntary memory is triggered by the interruption of habitual memory (Olsen 2010: 169). Thus, it is a conscious acknowledgement of the habitual memory of things. Olsen applies this role to ruins, pieces of past material culture that interrupt the present (Olsen 2010: 170). However, things need not be in ruins to cause involuntary memory. Foreign artefacts could disrupt habitual memory towards local objects by highlighting the technical, material or aesthetic differences between them.

An example of foreign artefacts causing involuntary memory can be drawn from iron and bronze know-how (Figure 24). Exchanges in the Northwest with the
Phoenicians from southern Iberia probably introduced the know-how of iron technology. After many centuries working bronze in the Northwest, by the 9th century BCE, that technical know-how would have been part of its communities’ habitual memory. The introduction of iron know-how would have prompted a period of coexistence of both metals. This would have forced communities to see the working of bronze under a new light, thus disrupting the habitual memory of it. For instance, involuntary memory might have regarded bronze as representative of a long local tradition in metalworking. Eventually, as iron know-how became established by the end of the 7th century BCE, it would have become part of the communities’ habitual memory. In contrast, bronze know-how would have become part of a recollective memory, consciously recalled perhaps through technique, tradition, aesthetics or cult. A similar thought process could be applied to each of the Mediterranean artefacts that have been found in the Northwest. Overall, a symmetrical approach to things’ agency over memory provides an interpretation to the Northwest’s reception of Mediterranean artefacts and its evolution over time.

Figure 24. Imports and the disruption of memory: the introduction of iron know-how in the Northwest.

Time
The symmetrical understanding of time, however, is not linear. To conceive time as a transitive flow marked by episodes of progress or regression is considered an
oversimplification of the concept (Olsen et al. 2012: 138). A symmetrical approach presents time as complex and chaotic, after the Greek word kairos – simultaneous time – instead of chronos – successive time – (Olsen et al. 2012: 156). This does not seek to debunk linear time, but rather to give primacy to a percolating time, one that bends and folds (Olsen et al. 2012: 146, 153). This is possible when things are conceived through the etymological root tenku, that is, as having an additional temporal dimension (Olsen 2010: 109). Their materiality allows them to connect the folds in the fabric of time (Witmore 2007: 556; Serres 1995: 60). Thus, the past lives in the present, what Olsen (2010) refers to as the ‘present-past’.

The character of exchange between the Northwest and the Phoenicians in southern Iberia has revealed the coexistence of knowledge, maritime routes and artefacts. This has been used to argue for a continuous transition between the LBA and the EIA (Figure 22.b). When time is conceived under symmetrical ideas, a richer picture of these exchanges emerges. Instead of following a linear succession, the 9th-7th centuries BCE in the Northwest could be regarded as a complex polychronic ensemble in which a part of the past survives (Figure 25). This is a ‘present-past’ where the 9th-7th centuries BCE constitute the present. A fraction of this ensemble would be constituted by the Northwest’s exchange with the Mediterranean in which its components blur the boundaries of time periods. It is almost like a melting-pot, allowing the coexistence of, for instance, BA knowledge of metal resources and maritime routes with EIA know-how, a 9th-century BCE trend of curved knives and 8th-7th century BCE fibulae designs. Thus, the exchange mechanism in place between the Northwest and the Phoenicians in southern Iberia would also be polychromic and temporally chaotic, just like the symmetrical conception of time.
Symmetrical archaeology has provided new avenues of approaching exchange between the Northwest and the Mediterranean in the 9th-7th centuries BCE. The agency of things, memory, and time constitute some of the ideas that can be applied and show the potential of introducing a symmetrical theoretical standpoint. They do not seek to debunk or annul the conclusions reached through understanding exchange as a dynamic process. Rather, they seek to show that both views can coexist. This coexistence shows a tip of the iceberg that is exchange in the Northwest, which, traditionally presented as marginal, fortuitous or one-sided, now appears as a complex network of things, communities and relations.
5. Conclusion

This paper has shown that intercultural contacts between Northwest Iberia and the Phoenician communities in southern Iberia in the 9th to 7th centuries BCE were a complex phenomenon. It has aimed to understand Mediterranean presence in the Northwest and to suggest new analytical perspectives through symmetrical theory. An introduction of the character of the communities in the Northwest and the Phoenicians in southern Iberia has established a material and geographical connection between both. Analysis has focused on revisiting the material evidence of Mediterranean origin within the castros of the Rías Baixas. Results have shown the typological diversity of the artefacts, their varied origins and wide distribution throughout the area of study. Therefore, it has been proposed that the Northwest was not just in contact with the Mediterranean but that these communities were maintaining exchanges. More specifically, it has been argued that they were actively interacting with settlements in southern Iberia, which served as headquarters for Phoenician ventures into the Atlantic. A hybrid exchange mechanism has been developed that unites Phoenician advances with local maritime routes along the Northwest, in place since the BA. This has also been used to suggest a continuous transition between the LBA and the EIA in the Northwest. Additionally, the results and conclusions have been approached through three notions proposed by symmetrical archaeology. The idea of things' agency has allowed us to present exchange as a network of agent-patient relations between things and humans. This has also helped show the importance of imported artefacts in the disruption of habitual memory in the communities of the Northwest. Finally, the idea of percolating time has introduced the poly-chronic nature of the 9th-7th-centuries exchanges. Overall, by presenting these intercultural contacts between the Northwest and the Mediterranean as a hybrid – and dynamic – exchange mechanism and a symmetrical network of things and communities, this paper has managed to challenge traditional ideas of marginality and, hopefully, open new avenues of research.
Future directions

This paper’s research on intercultural contacts between Northwest Iberia and the Mediterranean could be developed in several directions. First, it would benefit from broadening its area of study. Geographically, analysis could expand to settlements inland and along the northern coast of Galicia. Eventually, if regional archaeological excavations and investigations in the area continue to advance, there might be enough evidence to explore open-air settlements as well. Secondly, the material evidence could be approached through scientific methods, for instance, investigating the origins of Mediterranean artefacts, especially bronzes, through provenance studies. Thirdly, other theoretical areas of exchange could be explored, for instance, the meaning and value of the imported Mediterranean artefacts in the Northwest. Finally, perhaps chance will prompt the discovery of a shipwreck off the Northwest coast, a local ‘Uluburun’, that may answer the burning questions regarding the mechanisms and participants in the exchanges.

Further studies could also tackle the two most important limitations of this paper. The most obvious one is the absence of a social perspective, not only in symmetrical theory (Fernández-Martínez 2007: 317). Moving beyond arguing the active role of the Northwest in these exchanges, the social side of these interactions could be approached perhaps through questions of social hierarchy, gender division or the role of exchange in the construction of identity (Dillian & White 2010: 11). Less obvious, but more important, is the issue of closure caused by a symmetrical interpretations (Malafouris 2013). When the world is conceived as an imbroglio, where humans and things form relations and time percolates, boundaries blur. The dimensions of exchange, then, appear almost limitless and the challenge is to understand where to stop constructing to avoid falling into speculation.
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