Myth, Science and Community: the archaeological project of San Lourenzo hillfort (Galicia, Spain)

ABSTRACT

Every night a saint flees the Parish church of Cereixa, a small hamlet in Atlantic Europe. It rushes back to its home, upon the hillfort of San Lourenzo, an Iron-Age fortified settlement. Despite having been Christianized in the Middle Ages, the hillfort is still home to mythical dwellers – the *mouros* (moors). In 2016 the villagers of Cereixa decided to recuperate and research this archaeological site. This article reviews the crucial role played by community archaeology throughout this particular process of heritage empowerment. Our work-team’s strategy draws on popular religion, folklore and traditions to test the powers of science in its efforts to provide a tourist resource that can foster local development while consolidating identity references. This experience elicits some reflections on the methods of community management as part of an alternative and counter-hegemonic model.

KEYWORDS

Galician culture; ethnoarchaeology; empowerment; identity building; emotional archaeology.

INTRODUCTION

The economic crisis beginning in 2008 has substantially modified archaeological practice across western Europe. Spain and Portugal provide two cases of the dismantling of the greater part of its professional sectors (Criado 2011; González 2013; Parga 2019). The crash has also had a major impact on the relationship between practitioners and local communities, whose participation as volunteers of archaeological projects they often regarded as forms of intrusion (Ayán 2014; Laužikas et al. 2018; Jiménez 2019). The economic crash further debilitated a community archaeology which was beginning to flourish across southern Europe (Díaz-Andreu 2016). The process has been further
compounded by theoretical reflections reclaiming a certain monopoly over the past, and cut-throat defences of scientific authority before the dangers of populism (González-Ruibal et al. 2018; La Salle and Hutchings 2018). At a time of post-truth and fake news, the discipline would appear inclined to hide archaeological vestiges back behind the fyi.

The 2008 crisis has also taken other grave tolls. Our rural areas had, since 1986, enjoyed the benefits of European Union (EU) cohesion funds now redirected towards new eastern-European member-states. Heritage has arisen amid these technocratic policies as a useful tool to attract lavish EU funding, and today constitutes the last resort of a political class clinging onto the assets of heritage management (Alonso and Macías 2014). Such is the case in the region known as Ribeira Sacra, a centuries-old riviera in the backcountry of Galicia (NW-Spain) (López 2019). The past few years have seen the region’s autonomous government foster a process of ‘heritagisation’ around two pillars: UNESCO’s declaration of the riviera as a World Heritage site and the invention/recovery of an old pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela known as the Winter Route. Local peasant communities have been marginalised from the entire process and stand as the mere passive subjects of these top–down heritage projects. Similar issues have emerged globally at many of UNESCO’s places of intervention. A large archaeological literature exists about these far-reaching heritagisation processes, where conflicts emerge between power and subaltern communities (Conforti et al. 2015; Fernandes and Pinto 2016; Ming Su et al. 2016; Meskell 2019, Matthews 2019). In this type of contexts, can a community archaeology usefully and effectively engage in finding alternative social models for the protection and promotion of heritage?

The aim of this article is to provide an answer to this question by presenting the community archaeology project we have been developing since 2016 at a small 250-persons rural community known as Cereixa and located in the Ribeira Sacra (province of

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1 The San Lourenzo hillfort project, beginning in 2016, brings together an international and interdisciplinary team of 22 professionals (12 men and 10 women) from four different countries (Argentina, Brazil, Great Britain and Spain): five field archaeologists, one art historian, two forensics anthropologists, one journalist, one museum manager, two curators, one ethnographer, one cultural tourism professional, one designer, three camp instructors, three musicians and one poet.
Lugo, Galicia). The focus of the project has been the recovery of an Iron-Age fortified settlement known as the San Lorenzo hillfort. A local association took the first steps and received the assessment of academic institutions including the University of the Basque Country, the CSIC (Spanish National Research Council) Institute of Heritage Sciences and the Universidade Nova de Lisboa. In the following pages I review the experience of a project based on the attractive and explosive cocktail of myth, science and community.

This is the context in which we experience community archaeology. The last few decades have seen many new papers and guides to good practice concerning this discipline (Creighton 2005; Castillo 2015), model international projects (Clack and Brittain 2011) and different theoretical trends reflecting on the social construction of heritage (Waterton and Smith 2010; Moshenska and Dhanjal 2012; Richardson and Almansa 2015). However, we do not intend our project to serve as a guide or reference. There are probably as many community archaeology projects as there are communities (Gould 2016; Oldham 2017). Each sociocultural context defines the possibilities and limitations. In our case, we have appealed to an emotional archaeology (Tarlow 2012; Hamilakis 2017) for which we have drawn on key factors such as identity, commensality, popular religiosity, myth and science.

FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL

Parroquias (Literally Parishes) originated in upper-medieval Galicia. They are made up of several hamlets sharing the same church. They are enclaves of a religious nature and territorial basis and, despite having no recognition by the Spanish state, they nonetheless remain the identity reference for Galician rural communities. They presently make up the territory of town halls, which were created in the nineteenth century.

The parish of San Pedro de Cereixa, municipality of A Pobra do Brollón, is part of the historical region of Terra de Lemos, in the south of Lugo province. This small rural community of just 250 inhabitants exemplifies the processes inland Galicia has experienced in the early twenty-first century: demographic desertification, the dismantling of the productive fabric (the agriculture and fishing sector) and loss of
services in rural areas. Despite these problems, the local population remains attached to the landscape and resists dying out.

Labels such as *ultraperiphery* or *deep Galicia* do not apply to a rural community such as Cereixa. This small village has always been closely connected to the outside world. Migration across the Atlantic started in the late nineteenth 19th century. It began with the construction of the Panama Canal, which led to an exodus to Cuba and the USA. Then from 1955 onwards, people emigrated to Argentina and particularly Venezuela; later, among others, to Belgium, France and Australia... Many retired men and women in the parish are polyglots and have spent a lot of their life in other countries or in regions such as the Basque Country and Catalonia. They have watched their children and grandchildren return and settle in the birthplace of their parents and grandparents. Therefore, the people of Cereixa connect the local with the global; they are constantly constructing and re-constructing their collective identity and presenting it to the world. The people from Cereixa living in Paris, Caracas, Miami and Sydney are following the San Lourenzo project online whilst the farmers and ex-farmers, second home owners and the immigrant population of Cereixa are making it happen.

In this context we must first look at the cultural codes of a rural community in the early twenty-first century; a society that combines tradition and postmodernity, sense of place and globalisation, in which the dismantlement of the rural dweller’s world view has resulted in a new playing field in which identity and past habits are highly influential (González-Ruibal 2005). A world in which dichotomous areas of reality are unified: elite culture/popular culture, Catholic religion/popular religiosity and local identity/supra-territorial identity.

**MYTH**

The parish remains the main reference for identity in rural Galicia, representing as it does a community of small villages spread out over the region. The religious festivals that pay homage to highly popular saints are milestones in the local calendar that heighten the collective identity. Everybody, religious or not, participates in these events. If a parish does not hold a festival it is considered a failure, a sign of decadence (Lisón
And if it does, it competes with the neighbouring parishes’ festivals in terms of
the number of bands or the quantity and quality of the fireworks. The community’s
prestige is at stake. Taking this into account, we have based the hillfort’s revival project
on two main pillars: identity and popular religiosity.

Because of this, we chose to promote the project through the ‘María Castaña’
Neighbourhood Association (created in Cereixa in 1990), named after a wealthy peasant
from the fourteenth century, María Castaña, who alongside her family rebelled against
their feudal lord in Cereixa, the bishop of Lugo (Portela 2007, doc. 516). We soon
became aware of the huge potential of this historical figure, not only to connect with
the local past, but also to promote a gender perspective. The Argentinian designer Juan
Pablo Venditti created a new logo for the association that represents a ‘pop’ María
Castaña, following the trend for innovative designs of Galician icons, such as the t-shirt
prints of the national writer Rosalía de Castro in Andy Warhol style (Fig. 1).

Figure 1. Logos of the ‘María Castaña’ Neighbourhood Association and the
archaeological project of San Lourenzo (Design by Juan Pablo Venditti).

María Castaña as an identity model was joined by a male icon – none other than San
Lourenzo (St Lawrence), after whom the hillfort has been named since the medieval
period. In the first year of the project, we drew on popular religiosity as its driving force.
Using the saint was a pragmatic strategy to recuperate a sense of place. According to the older residents, the priests brought the statue of San Lourenzo from a chapel that was in the hillfort. The saint, tired of not being paid the ferrado de fabas (a tax-in-kind), kept escaping back to his hillfort. San Lourenzo is invoked for rain. In Cereixa, in periods of drought, the saint was taken out in procession to the hillfort, and his feet were dipped in the River Saa on the way. Older residents tell us that this tradition existed well into the nineteenth century. All the locals have heard about the existence of the saint's chapel in the hillfort. It is certainly easier to connect with the local community by searching for a chapel and recuperating a festive tradition, rather than explaining what an Iron Age hillfort is, something that is hidden underground. Scepticism vanishes in the former case, whereas it increases in the latter.

This tactical decision guaranteed support from the parish priest and from an important group of women who are actually the ones in charge of the temple and the local religious calendar. Two cousins stand out among these women, Mari Carmen and Carmiña. The former looks after the elderly members from the hamlets on the southern side of the river going through the ‘parroquia’. The latter takes care of those living north of the river. Both of these super-grannies (and there are many of them across all of Spain) constitute the everyday care network of the small and aged rural communities. They inspired us to embark on the adventure of reviving an old tradition, evidence of which remains on the church’s altarpiece and in the local oral tradition.

The strategy behind this decision was to revive the tradition of a saint who enjoyed moving from the church to the hillfort (Fig. 2). Following the restoration of the saint’s statue, we planned to return the saint to the parish church in 2016 on his patron day, the 10th of August, under the catchphrase ‘The saint has returned’, and then from there to the chapel ruins that we were excavating at the time. The plan turned out well thanks to three factors: the collaboration of the parish priest and women like Mari Carmen, our information transparency, and the use of the pulpit to speak to the community. All these factors legitimized our project. The saint came first, the hillfort was secondary.
Mari Carmen gave us an essential piece of advice: if we intended to recuperate the saint’s day, we must stick to the date, regardless of the day of the week it coincided with. The 10th of August became a milestone date and we designed the whole excavation strategy around it. At this point, it was not the hillfort settlement setting the archaeological research agenda, but rather a teenager who was born in the northeast area of the Iberian peninsula near the Pyrenees Huesca in the third century called San Lourenzo. This is an innovative characteristic of our project: merging the collective imagination into our narrative. There are other archaeological initiatives in Europe that aim to contribute to sustainable development through research of Iron Age hillforts and oppida; for instance, the interesting REFIT project (Resituating Europe’s First Towns), led by Durham University (Moore and Tully 2018). However, we go one step further – beyond the mere analysis of the social perception of the aforesaid sites and the organization of participatory events. We aim to fully integrate the local inhabitants in the process of knowledge construction. Popular culture is the key to delve into the
historic (or prehistoric) origin of a community. Myths are the fabric of dreams and, together with science, give prodigious results. Local neighbours from Cereixa practice a form of “popular Christianity” read the landscape in a symbolic key and trust both the archaeological record (which they can see for themselves) and the legends about *mouros*\(^2\) that have been handed down to them by their mothers and grandmothers.

**COMMUNITY**

The San Lourenzo hillfort project is an initiative led by multiple voices\(^3\), specific individuals who for different reasons have clung on to the hillfort and its saint as identity symbols. These people are the true authors of this article. First, we have *O’Regueiro*, 85 years old, the custodian of the memory of Cereixa’s landscape. When he passes away, no one will remember the names of the individual plots of land, the boundaries and sizes of all the properties, the microhistory of every corner of the parish. *O’Regueiro* is the intangible World Heritage. Even with Google Earth, LIDAR and digital modelling it would have been impossible, without *O’Regueiro’s* cooperation, to really know what lay beneath the jungle-like vegetation that covered San Lourenzo hillfort. He is confident that we will find gold, as told in the legends. He also gave us a piece of advice: ‘Better choose a saint that cures illnesses; that’s what makes money’. But in Cereixa we already had San Blas for that.

*O’Corbal* comes from a family line of artisans, carpenters and blacksmiths. He earns a living restoring old houses and laying slate roofs. Following the hillfort clearing he began carving his own San Lourenzo in ash. He finds inspiration in television series to design swords in his workshop. He is particularly interested in the metallurgy of the Romans

\(^2\) The *Mouros* (Lit. Moors) are mythical creatures who inhabited the North West Iberian Peninsula prior to the arrival of Apostle Santiago. They live underground and hide their treasures beneath visible landmarks and prehistoric monuments such as hillforts and megalithic tombs. They are very similar to other creatures in Atlantic Europe, such as the Basque Mairiak, Brittany’s Korrigans, Scandinavian Elves and Irish Leprechauns.

\(^3\) This heritagization process initiated by the community in 2016 is perfectly illustrated in the short documentary *As pedras de San Lourenzo* (*The Stones of Saint Lawrence*, 2016), directed by Manuel Gago. It is available on YouTube with English subtitles. The film won first prize in the 2\(^{nd}\) Archaeology Film Festival of Castilla y León (Zamora, Spain) in 2017.
and Iron Age people. We also have to mention Don José, the parish priest, who sees the hillfort revival as an opportunity to re-Christianize the locals and increase church attendance. In spite of being suspicious of these early Christian martyrs and not quite believing in their fantastical hagiographic stories, he still made a point of passing by my house bringing with him a book dedicated to San Lourenzo that was published in the 1990s by the diocesan publishing house in Seville.

O’Corenta is, among many other things, a drummer and composer. His grandmother used to tell him tales of the *mouros* and *mouras* in the hillfort and he knows all the oral traditions first-hand. From the older members of his family he heard the litany that used to be recited during the procession to invoke rain: ‘*San Lourenzo vén a nós, que o ferrado das fabas pagámolo nós!*’ (‘San Lourenzo, come back, we will pay the bean tax!’). O’Corenta recruited his friend O’Netzer, a local policeman based in the region’s capital, Monforte de Lemos, to clear the vegetation covering the stretch of old road that leads to the *Porto do Santo* (‘The Saint’s Ford’), the section of river the saint must cross when he is taken out in the procession to the hillfort on the 10th of August. At half past seven in the morning they both set out with strimmers to clear the way for San Lourenzo. The *Porto do Santo* is a female space. As late as the 1980s, women still used to wash the laundry there. On one side of the river would be the women from A Ría (A Zapateira neighbourhood) and on the other side, those from A Ponte. There they would sing and exchange news. *Carmiña d’A Regueira*, who had once been a Venezuelan emigrant, decided to set up a performance with her cousin, the abovementioned Mari Carmen. On the 10th of August, when the procession with the saint reached the river, the two of them knelt down next to the river with their washboards and headscarves, just like in the olden times. This initiative was a defence of a sense of place, a symbolic appropriation of a premodern space in postmodern times carried out by the women, the most subordinate members of the traditional agricultural community. The two women also chose to carry the saint during the last stretch of the procession before going up to the hillfort.

Candela is 11 years old and lives at the foot of the hillfort, in the Alende neighbourhood. She is the only girl of her age in the whole parish. She knows the surroundings of San Lourenzo hillfort well because her grandmother, who raised her, used to take her to
fetch water from the spring nearby or to go for a stroll in the area. When we started digging the hillfort, Candela would come up and spend the afternoon with us. Carrying her notebook and wearing her María Castaña t-shirt, she would sit under one of the cork trees and do portraits of the archaeologists or pencil drawings of the landscape. She once told us that she is happy about the work at the hillfort because she is all alone in Cereixa but now, with the excavation, more boys and girls will come from other places and she will be able to play with them.

O’Modesto worked as a bus driver in Madrid. Now, recently retired, he has gone back to working the land and spends long periods in Cereixa. He loves his village and is one of the few people who still know the language of church bells, the codes of the badaleiros (bell-ringers). On the day of the San Lourenzo festival, he perched on the bell tower for the whole hour that it took the procession to reach the hillfort from the church (Fig. 3). He received constant WhatsApp messages informing him of the stops the procession made on the way.

Figure 3. The Cereixa community’s procession toward the hillfort. Second San Lourenzo festival, 2017 (Photograph by Manoel A. Franco).

O’Lagoa emigrated to Caracas, Venezuela, in the 1960s, when he was only fifteen. He shared this difficult experience with other families from Cereixa. His case is a good
example of the American dream. Today, this self-made businessman lives between North America and Cereixa. O’Lagoa could be described as a twenty-first century *indiano*⁴. He is an art-lover and Galician nationalist determined to protect, restore and promote the cultural heritage of his birthplace. His patronage is covering the vacuum left by the government organisations. So far, the project has not received funding from any government body, except from the local government of A Pobra do Brollón, who collaborated with the clearing of the archaeological site. Our being financially independent of the government is a key aspect of the project; it means we are not subject to political circumstances or political party/personalist interests. There are two key factors behind the project’s success: its involvement of the whole community regardless of ideological differences and it being totally independent and self-managed.

**SCIENCE**

Wide sectors of society are drawn to archaeology, a science that allows us to approach mysteries from the past and enjoys a prominent role in collective imagination and popular culture (Holtorf 2005; Carman 2011). And yet this is not always the case in the rural world. The state has gradually undermined the bases of these communities’ self-management (the communal use of mountains, water network maintenance) and regulated, when not prohibited, their traditional practices (pig-slaughtering, grape-harvesting and home liquor-brewing). Official environmentalism and heritage-protection have played major roles in dismantling this entire peasant world. In this context, archaeology acts as yet another state agency, and is met by the distrust of local communities. The (generally ageing) members of these communities consider environmentalism and heritage protection as discouraging obstacles for the development of prospective (slate or quarrying) companies which might prevent their youths from emigrating. As far as locals know, archaeology imposes prevention and

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⁴ *Indiano* is a term used to refer to the (usually male) migrants who returned rich to Galicia from America. *Indianos* contributed private funding to the construction of public works such as schools, dance halls, cinemas and parks as well as to the restoration of chapels and churches which attracted a local, popular devotion (Cardesín 2008).
protection areas and prohibits customary agrarian exploitation and foresting of sites and their surrounding areas.

Such initial distrust towards archaeology is compounded by wariness toward the technicians and specialists coming in from outside of the community. The project of the San Lourenzo hillfort was made possible only because the directing archaeologist (myself) is at the same time a Parish member and the director of the village association. The reality is similar as experienced by indigenous archaeologies elsewhere (Nicholas 2011; Smith et al. 2018). This relationship of trust has allowed the owners of the plots around the hillfort to sign the necessary permits.

But there is still yet a third handicap, besides lack of trust towards archaeology and land property: this is the need to prove that there is actually something in the earth. If anything, my experience in community archaeology has taught me that there are no second chances. The slightest mistake is penalised and there is no possible correction. After all the work done to involve and excite people, of mobilising resources and creating expectations, we cannot possibly afford not to find anything. The researchers’ authority and credibility are at stake here. It must be remembered that scepticism was rife within the community. The elders could not remember there ever being anything inside the hillfort, except the visible ruins of the chapel.

Our strategy in approaching the first campaign in the summer of 2016 was based on one clear premise: to use the ‘magic’ of archaeology. We first clear the vegetation from inside the fortified settlement and carried out geophysical prospecting. The resulting map portrayed an entire urban grid of rectangular constructions. Of course, nobody thought that any of this could possibly exist underground. In order to show the efficacy of our technical know-how, we decided to dig up a sample space of the detected cabins. We predicted that a room of old hillfort inhabitants would be uncovered, and so it was. This small triumph was completely revolutionary. The community began to believe in archaeology.

The second step was exhuming the remains of the old chapel of San Lourenzo. This temple remained a reference in collective memory and was a way of reaching out to popular religion. It was fundamental to honour the narrative of oral traditions in order...
to valorise collective memory. Over the following campaigns, from 2017 to 2019, we have excavated this area of the hillfort primarily. The chronological sequence is overwhelming. We documented the pre-Roman occupation level, with remains of huts and clear evidences of metallurigic production of iron. Upon these remains lies an Upper-Medieval Christian metropolis, which has so far yielded 60 tombs. The cemetery was later abandoned, and a church was built over it, and intensely used between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Finally, in the 1870s, the space in the chapel was reused over a short period of time before the community dismantled the building.

By the end of the second campaign in the summer of 2017 the first tombs had appeared, and the project was definitively consolidated. Even the most sceptical of villagers had surrendered to the evidence. The community considered that this was the place of the ancestors, the founders of the parish of Cereixa, the *grandparents*. In this respect, the role of archaeology has been merely to prove the villagers right. Legends about the saint escaping from the present church at night to return to the hillfort did nothing but index the community’s origins. In this context, archaeology emerges as the means to access the knowledge of the forebears, quite literally. The knowledge of the men, women and children who built this landscape a thousand years ago (Fig. 4).

Figure 4. A Cereixa family by the saint during the archaeological excavations at the San Lourenzo chapel. In the front of the picture, medieval tombs. Second San Lourenzo festival, 2017 (Photograph by Ursula Neilson).
We call our approach to such sensitive heritage an emotional archaeology, a truly public one. We have turned the local association’s meeting place into a laboratory to process archaeological materials open to all. The local community, children included, have helped us with archaeological excavations and exhuming the ancestors. The excavation itself is an experimental field in new ways of practising archaeology. For the first time in Galicia, an exhumation took place live on public radio, and was broadcasted on Facebook Live and via TV regional channel V. In the summer of 2018, we began hosting an international work camp with the regional government of the Xunta de Galicia, and have received boys and girls between 10 and 30 years old from Taiwan, Russia, France and Italy. Volunteers exchange experiences and help village locals organise the festive pilgrimage of San Lourenzo on the 10th of August. The fieldwork camp has been an effective tool for the project’s internationalization. On one hand, the regional government and the town hall can promote tourism in the region while the neighbour association can increase the project’s symbolic capital. Local neighbours in the parroquia whose relatives have emigrated to Europe, America and Oceania, are proud that their hillfort is now known worldwide. At the same time, seeing their parish full of young people has brought a true emotional boost to hopes for the future of the rural world.

The project’s media impact and its international repercussion have strengthened pride in local identity and a sense belonging among the people in Cereixa. We have overcome reluctancies towards archaeology. Science grants prestige. Such are the pillars of an research which interacts on a par with the mythical knowledge handed down over generations. A research which is revealed in real time and with full transparency, and which changes it hypotheses as knowledge progresses. We had set out from the assumption that the hillfort was a Roman mining one, and we now know that its origins are prior to this. A research which is open to all (Figure 5). It is no coincidence that in July 2020 the San Lourenzo hillfort is to host the second Scientific Festival of Galicia. Such is the change operated by community archaeology. In June 2016 the hillfort was merely a jungle-like forgotten and abandoned place, where only hunters ventured.
THE PROJECT’S SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT

The municipality of A Pobra do Brollón is a good example of interior Galicia. If in 1910 it counted almost 9,000 inhabitants, by 2019 there were barely 1,800. The 18 parishes it comprises are home to an ageing population. Emigration is still a major feature of the economic life of youths, who mostly live and work outside. The few existing businesses (bars, food-stores, services and shops) are mainly concentrated at the municipal capital and the parishes of Salcedo and Cereixa. A Pobra do Brollón hosts two funerals homes and the much-expected great project is the construction of an elderly home. There are reasons for pessimism towards the future. In this context, what impact can a humble and modest community archaeology like the Castro de San Lourenzo have?
When we began in 2016 our aim was to convince people that the future also lies in the stones. That archaeology and heritage can indeed be sources of economic wealth and social welfare. Obviously, the nearby city of Monforte de Lemos (19,000 inhabitants, 10 km. away) provides better services to house an archaeological team. But this is barely the point. We had to make our presence at a Pobra and Cereixa visible. The first year, a modest one-month archaeological campaign brought 10,000 euros to the municipality, including blacksmith expenses, supermarket shops, maintenance, lodging, housing expenses and spending at the bars. All local businesses benefitted to some extent. This first campaign caused town-hall authorities to regard heritage promotion and the heritage around the Winter Road as one of its priority policies. Their support allowed us to organise two editions of the international work camp (2018 and 2019), which encouraged the opening of a municipal pilgrim hostel in 2018. The work camp brought 40 people to the village, from technicians to archaeologists and young volunteers. In Cereixa, the archaeological team resides in the village and has had a major impact in relaunching the restaurant O’ Fogón,(founded in 1973). After a time of decay, the new owners have seen the hillfort as an opportunity. The bar’s grill is the starting point of guided visits to the hillfort and the locus of diffusion activities. Pilgrims visiting the excavation are persuaded to eat and spend their money in the Parish.

Beyond its economic effects, the project has also had a major social impact. We have projected a brand image collaborating with other local businesses. The hillfort experience is therefore combined with a gourmet pack including the San Lourenzo bica, an exquisite sponge desert made at the Herbella bakery at A Pobra del Brollón, and the Santo Graal wine, a young brand inspired by the legend of San Lourenzo. This gastronomic merchandising is an apt ambassador of the project and contributes to financing the interventions at the hillfort.

In turn, the Council has integrated the hillfort into its annual cycle of heritage activities. During excavations in July and August, the local culture functionary takes groups on guided visits at weekends. The official data collected in 2017 reflect 700 visitors, a daily average of 12, and expenses at around 5 average. As for their origins, 55% were local, 30% from elsewhere in Galicia, 11% from Catalunya, the Basque Country and Madrid, and 4% foreign (France, Cuba, Venezuela, Sweden and England). The figure of 700 does
not take into consideration weekday visits, and thus we expect the total number of visitors during July and August to be probably at least double this figure.

A tourist resource has been created thanks to the economic contributions of Community. This initiative has finally drawn attention from local authorities, who are beginning to support the project. The model’s success has caused heritage to be regarded strategically by both the town hall and other parishes in the region. Hillforts had traditionally been seen as an obstacle. In neighbouring Abrence, the hillfort known as Cerca dos Mouros (lit. Moors fence) was practically destroyed by rock collecting during the 1980s. Today it is covered in pine trees. In also neighbouring Chavaga, the hillfort has suffered substantial alterations due to wood-extracting machinery used in the 1970s. Cereixa, thus, has truly changed the course of history, sets a powerful example and inspires other forcoming local projects to recuperate archaeological heritage, such as the site at Proendos (Sober), the Babela hillfort (Monforte de Lemos) and the hillforts of Saa and A Roda do Castro (A Pobra do Brollón).

DISCUSSION

The economic crisis triggered in 2008 has also brought new opportunities and heritage management models (Cleary et al. 2014). Many of Galicia’s rural communities have come to understand the economic potential of the vestiges standing amid their communal possessions, beyond mere forest replanting and quarrying. Therefore, at a separate instance from the state, these communities are at the head of an unprecedented process of heritage empowerment. Examples like that of Cereixa prove that community archaeology can be a powerful tool in satisfying the demands of Europe’s last peasants. To achieve this, our strategy is based on a model which does not lack controversies and is based on an emotional and committed archaeology.

The rise of populism and neofascism in Europe highlights the need for archaeology not to act as an accomplice when it comes to articulating essentialist or excluding identity-based discourses (Hodder 2010). However, it cannot be forgotten that heritage is a repository of collective memory and that it therefore generates identities (Stephens and Tiwari 2014). This simply cannot be disregarded if we intend to work at a Galician parish with its thousands of years of history which continue to shape the identities of its
inhabitants, whether in Galicia or in South America. The parish is a perfect identity machinery, and it brings together people from different continents, several ethnic groups included. In this context, a site like the San Lourenzo hillfort is reactivated as a mnemotechnic resource and a space of sociability. Ruins involve themselves in the experience of authenticity and can achieve a form of magical communion with the past (Jones 2010). Archaeology brings to the fore individuals who are conceived by the local community as ancestors. Once we have access to the DNA and the strontium isotopes analyses, we might scientifically conclude that there is no continuity between those of the past and these of the future. And such results will be grappled with by a present community who, no matter what happens, is linked to their hillfort because it is their identity reference, as are the figures of San Lourenzo and María Castaña.

Why have the hillfort, María Castaña and the saint been so successful? Because they are symbols of social cohesion that allow us to look towards the future with a certain degree of hope and optimism. The parish is still thriving and is proud of reviving its cultural landscape (Endere et al. 2018). Some of the neighbouring parishes believe that the people of Cereixa are throwing away their money, that they are mad because they did a procession without a priest (the parish priest was off sick and his substitute could not walk much due to his own health problems). On the 10th of August, which was a Wednesday, i.e. a working day, every single family from Cereixa gathered at the hillfort. There were people who had not been to church in decades but went on the 10th to hear Marien González talk about the restoration of the saint statue. San Lourenzo does miracles; he makes atheist archaeologists (and even a few communists) carry the saint statue to the hillfort. He even manages to transform the official CSIC (Spanish National Research Council) car into mobile publicity for the event.

Over the past few years, claims have been made to scientific authority and the role of specialists in managing archaeological ruins, after years when respect was demanded towards the multiple voices converging around heritage (Hodder 2008; Rivolta et al. 2014). In our opinion, authority is not something to be imposed but gained. Another lesson I have learnt from experience is that people can go about their lives quite happily without archaeologists. We think we are more important than we actually are. At Cereixa, like in any rural community in the world, archaeology is something external,
foreign and strange. In order to be able to integrate archaeology into a community in a humble way, we have understood that it must be placed in parallel with mythical accounts about *mouros* and saints who escape at night. We ought to start, first, from the community’s own cultural codes, from their intangible heritage, in order to be able to approach the materiality of the past we wish to exhume. Secondly, we must incorporate the community itself into the process of constructing knowledge. The villagers set the agenda of the investigation, co-participate in the construction of narratives, and also interpret the archaeological record (Lasker and Guidry 2009). Among other reasons, because it is their hillfort (Fig. 6). In 2019, Mrs Manuela donated the plot she owns inside the archaeological site. It are the neighbours who manage this place.

Figure 6. Iván and his daughter Iria, from Cereixa, help us excavate a child burial at the hillfort’s medieval necropolis. Archaeological campaign of 2018 (Author’s own photograph).
The San Lourenzo project has coincided in time with another quite different process of heritagisation, one which is promoted by the Galician autonomous government (Xunta de Galicia) for UNESCO to declare the entire region a World Heritage site. The single official initiative that has included the inhabitants of the Ribeira Sacra was the one sending a bus around to collect signatures in favour of the initiative. Local people have been excluded from the process. The previous step to sending the proposal to UNESCO has been to declare the area a Place of Cultural Interest, the highest existing legal figure for a cultural asset in Spain. The Counsel for Galician culture, a consulting institution of the autonomous government, recommended recognising parishes as a valid interlocutor for government to manage the entire heritage. The Xunta – regional government – refused them such powers, arguing (correctly) that the law does not recognise such entities. In summary, the declaration as Place of Cultural Interest has paved the way for the entire process to be controlled by technicians, specialists and politicians seeking to order the territory.

The project of the San Lourenzo Hillfort sets a humble example of how things might be done differently. A way of managing heritage that departs from civil society, from the communities themselves (Brumann 2015). The parish of Cereixa has succeeded in creating a resource through the generous donations of its members and the attraction of private sponsorship (115,000 euros since 2016). The community’s role has been to cover the spaces left by a government who has turned the crisis into a pretext to cut investments in culture and heritage. As a consequence, UNESCO is today requesting two conditions to consider Ribeira Sacra’s candidacy for World Heritage: to include the local community who maintains the landscape as an active part of the entire process and to provide accurate and contrasted scientific data to support its authenticity and shed light on the genesis and historical evolution of this landscape. At present, the community archaeology project at the San Lourenzo hillfort is the only one to meet such requirements in the entire Ribeira Sacra. In this respect we are optimistic towards the future, in the hope that another management model is possible, if politicians learns their lesson: before seeking recognition as World Heritage, we must reach out to that humanity who builds, maintains, interprets and actualises this heritage (Bortolotto 2015).
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