The Iberians in the Valencian Country.
Iron Age societies and landscapes on the central Mediterranean area

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Abstract

This study analyses the organisation of the landscapes and socioeconomic and political structures of the Iberian period in the Valencian Country during the first millennium BCE. Using spatial analysis, it offers an interpretation of the historical dynamics and the evolution of Iberian societies within the urbanisation process of the western Mediterranean. Despite clear evidence of social differentiation, it proposes a general model of the sociopolitical organisation of groups, with both strong social stratification and corporate behaviours.

Keywords: Iron Age, Iberian culture, Valencian Country, Urbanisation, Heterarchies.

Iberian culture developed around an extensive region that spans from the southern Iberian Peninsula to southern France. In this area, an entire series of Iron Age peoples shared similar material culture and socioeconomic processes in the first millennium BCE. The central area in this broad region covered what is today the Valencian Country (Fig. 1), and it had its own history and cultural expressions, even thought they are related to neighbouring sectors. Likewise, significant differences can be found within this extensive region as well.

The century of Iberian research in the Valencian Country[1] has received a major impetus in recent decades. Thanks to studies conducted by both local and regional institutions, museums and universities, we now have considerable archaeological evidence that is constantly increasing. But most importantly, the theoretical models for understanding the social and territorial dynamics of these people, who created one of the most prominent cultures in the ancient Mediterranean, have matured. Drawing from the archaeological record, the purpose of this article is to provide a summary of the sociopolitical, culture and territorial dynamics of the Iberians in the Valencian Country

There are very few references in Greco-Latin texts, and they only enable us to geographically locate the ancient Iberian peoples in the region.[2] These descriptions refer to two important moments in time. The oldest sources, Hecataeus and Avienus, describe the peoples who occupied the region between the sixth and fifth centuries BCE.

FIGURE 1. Main peoples cited by ancient sources. In Roman type, the peoples from the sixth to fifth centuries BCE; in italics, the peoples from the imperial period in the first to second centuries AD. Source: Author based on ICV maps.

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The *Gimnetes* (see Fig. 1) were in the south, occupying the area from the Segura to the Xúquer Rivers and bordering on the *Mastiens*, who had spread around the eastern part of Andalusia and the southeast coast. Around the Xúquer River, which the sources call the *Sicano*, were the people of the same name, *Sicani*, and to the north were the *Esdetes*, who occupied the central area of Valencia. The sources mention the *Ilaragautes* peoples further north, in the current lands of Castelló.

The second group of sources, based on Pliny and Ptolemy, illustrates the geographic situation in the imperial era five centuries later. This time we find the *Contestani*, located in the area previously occupied by the *Gimnetes*. Starting at the Xúquer River, which is called the *Sucro* in these texts, were the *Edetani*, who spread around the region of Valencia formerly occupied by the *Sicani* to the south and the *Esdetes* to the north. Finally, the *Ilercavones* appeared in the region of Castelló.

The existence of some spatial overlap and the similarity of some of the ethnic names, like *Esdetes-Edetani* and *Ilaragautes-Ilercavones*, have led scholars to propose that the distribution of the most ancient peoples remained stable, and that the primitive ethnic groups had evolved by the imperial period. It is also interesting to note that the two oldest peoples in the southern region, the *Gimnetes* in the coastal regions and the *Sicani* inland and around the Xúquer River, correspond with distinguishable geographic areas in the region: plains opening onto the sea around Baix Vinalopó-Baix Segura and an inland mountainous region around the Serpis and Xúquer valleys. Furthermore, the name *Gimnetes* connects the coastal areas with the nearby islands of the same name, the Gymnesian Islands. This toponymic connection correlates with the relationship that has been archaeologically proven based on the heavy influence of Eivissa's Phoenician-Punic world in the region.

The ancient geography of the Valencian Country shown in this mosaic of peoples has been confirmed by archaeological record, which reveal considerable differences in settlement patterns and socioeconomic organisation, albeit within the framework of shared cultural features and similar historical dynamics. In fact, one of the main challenges facing research today is analysing the overall processes that shaped the Iron Age peoples while also acknowledging the variability of the different territories, attentive to the dynamics of the local structures.

One unique, determining feature of this region may be the fact that it is open to the Mediterranean, which facilitated the genesis of colonial spaces in some sectors, especially in the southernmost regions, which in turn fostered the adoption of outside influences and early integration into supra-regional economic networks. These external influences shaped the different social and territorial forms when integrated into the local dynamics. Today, this scenario is interpreted from a perspective focused on connectivity; we no longer aim to identify the primacy of endogenous or exogenous phenomena on the mechanism of

change but instead recognise the role of both factors. Thus, the Iberian Iron Age is part of the dynamic in the Mediterranean that has promoted interpretative approaches stemming from studies of modern globalisation.[3]

The formation of the landscapes and societies in the early Iron Age, eighth to sixth centuries bce

Socioeconomic trajectories, Mediterranean impact and political structures

Primarily between the eighth and sixth centuries BCE—though they started slightly earlier—there were profound historical transformations which gave rise to a new model of society. The groups from before the late Bronze Age had developed a sedentary peasant farming model with agglutinating territorial components. The circulation of certain prestige goods among few people and the existence of burials reveal some social distinction processes, but they were not especially prominent. Long-distance trade networks connecting the Atlantic and Mediterranean regions of the Iberian Peninsula were being created to supply metals and other raw materials. During the early Iron Age in the eighth century BCE, trade started to intensify over this preexisting structure thanks to Phoenician merchants who had settled at the mouth of the Segura River, first in Cabeço Xiquico de l'Estany and shortly thereafter in La Fonteta.

These local economies' integration into regional and supraregional frameworks entailed a shift in the traditional schemes towards models that sought to boost production. Economic growth, driven by the leading groups and partly channelled in trade, resulted in the demographic increase that sustained population concentration and economic expansion processes.

On the other hand, interaction with Mediterranean peoples introduced fundamental features that characterised Iron Age economic models, including technological innovations like iron metallurgy and the pottery wheel, which fostered the expansion of productive forces and the increasing specialisation of production. It also transformed the agriculture of the period with the adoption of new crops, like vine, and the development of other fruit trees, which joined the grains and legumes cultivated until then. These plants' cycles last more than one year, which changed people's relationship to the land in that the longer time needed to await the harvests and longterm investments must have fostered rights over plots of land and intensified connections with the soil.

The prime expression of all these changes was a new sites model based on the advent of large fortified settlements perched in high places which controlled small territories with networks of rural settlements, called *oppida* in Iberian research. The evidence points to population concentration and fortification processes within a period spanning from the late Bronze Age to the early Iron Age,

that is, from the ninth to the seventh centuries BCE, which reveals the complexity of the process and the different local responses. Distinct dynamics can be pinpointed within this overall process, as we shall discuss below.

The expansive nature of these processes prompted friction among competing groups over lands and communication routes, which led to rivalry and conflict among the communities settled in each territory. This explains why the main settlements sought dominant locations reinforced by walls, where residential concentration was a strategy to deal with these challenges.

Urban aggregations and coalescent societies in the central and southern lands of the Valencian Country

In the southern counties, we find a good example of this population aggregation process in Penya Negra, which started in the transition from the late Bronze Age to the early Iron Age in the ninth century BCE (Fig. 2). A large population was concentrated on a spacious hilltop and clifftop, seeking overlooks, which reveals defensive concerns; this later led them to build fortifications in around the seventh century BCE. The centre's economic ascendancy, and its high level of artisanship, came with the profound social transformations documented in the settlement and the funerary record of its necropolis in Les Moreres. This cemetery was the prelude to the funerary space model which developed later in the Iberian period, where exclusive groups were cremated.[4]

Another early example of this population aggregation process can be found on the southern slope of Xàtiva Castle, which also appeared in the ninth century BCE when an extensive settlement with spacious houses with apsidal layouts was built on terraces that occupied much of the hill's slope. The habitat area was protected by a powerful containing wall that may have had a tower or an outer reinforcement.[5]

The settlements mentioned thus far show the population coalescing into fortified nuclei which were phased in over centuries, which leads us to deduce the existence of diverse, complex dynamics, with reinforcements in fortifications which can be related to times of conflict. The process must have started in the late Bronze Age, perhaps associated with control over the interregional trade networks prior to the arrival of the Phoenicians.[6] This process later intensified, especially after the seventh century BCE, when it had spread to most of the counties, where centres developed that aimed to control the territory and communication routes.

The historical dynamics of this territory should be framed within contexts of cooperation and interaction between local groups and Phoenicians involved in control over production and trade. L'Alt de Benimaquia in Dénia stands out in the Marina Alta region; it is an elevated, solidly fortified indigenous settlement where the first presses to produce surplus wine are found on the Iberian Peninsula. The interaction with the Semites explains their acquisition of the technological knowledge needed to produce this alcoholic beverage, whose distribution must have proven essential to the creation of networks of power and the consolidation of the local leaders' prestige through ritualised consumption. In La Marina Baixa, the strong imprint of Mediterranean influences is documented in La Vila Joiosa, perhaps associated with the Semite hub in the neighbouring Eivissa. This is particularly visible in the cremation necropolises like Les Casetes, dating from the late seventh and sixth centuries BCE. The graves have prominent elements from the East, including orientalising jewellery, amulets and Egyptian pottery, which reveal intense relations with the Semite world and the redefinition of the local communities based on these encounters.[7]

The valleys and mountains in southern Valencia and northern Alicante show this same dynamic of settlements emerging to serve as central control points over the production and distribution of trade goods. Near Alcoi, we find El Puig d'Alcoi, La Covalta and El Cabeço de Mariola, and
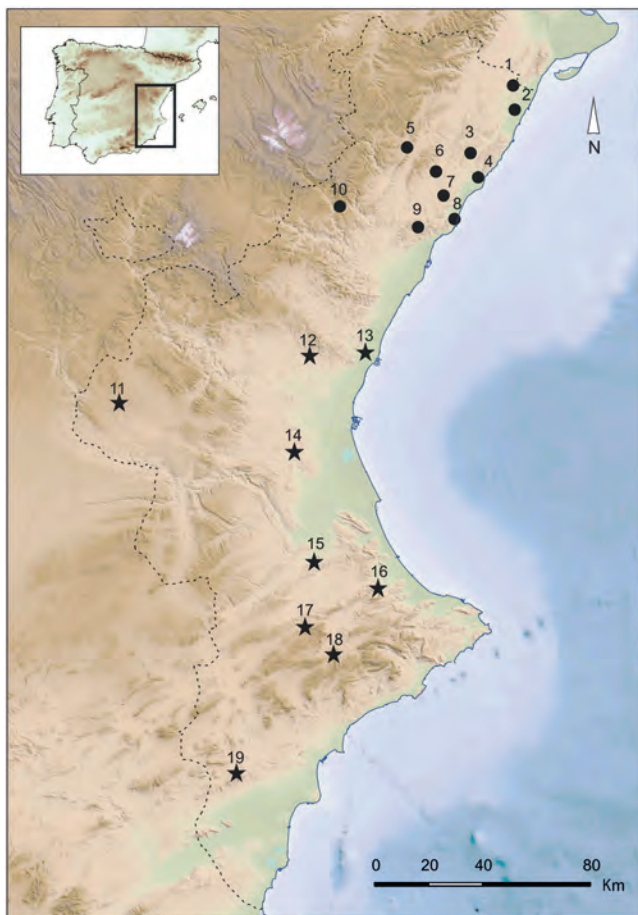

FIGURE 2. Settlements in the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age cited in the text. 1: Puig de la Misericòrdia; 2: Mas de Fabra; 3: Castell de Xivert; 4: Santa Llúcia; 5: Tossal de la Vila; 6: Tossal de Subarra; 7: Tossal de Mortorum; 8: Orpesa la Vella; 9: El Tossal del Galdó; 10: Los Morrones; 11: Los Villares in Caudete de las Fuentes; 12: Tossal de Sant Miquel in Llíria; 13: Sagunt Castle; 14: La Carència; 15: La Solana del Castell in Xàtiva; 16: Tossal del Morquí; 17: El Cabeço de Mariola; 18: El Puig d'Alcoi; 19: La Penya Negra. Source: Author based on ICV maps.

along with these *oppida*, a dense rural settlement seems to be associated with the intensification of agricultural activity.

Continuing northward, the territory was divided into autonomous entities corresponding to the main valleys in the region, like the Magre or the Túria. Population concentration in nuclei can also be seen between the ninth and seventh centuries BCE, and these nuclei became prominent because of their role in the production or articulation of local and regional trade networks. Los Villares in Caudete de las Fuentes-*Kelin*, Sant Miquel in Llíria-*Edeta*, Sagunt Castle-*Arse* and La Carència in Torís-*Kili* are some of the centres which appeared in this phase and later organised the territories for much of the Iberian period.

The characteristic funerary pattern of these zones is small burial sites in rural areas. Examples include El Mas del Regall in Alcoi, El Collado de La Cova del Cavall in Llíria and Sant Cristòfol in Sagunt. They have few graves, which may have helped to root the populations in the new territories through the rural tombs of their ancestors. This type of burial is set apart from the larger and more articulated necropolises, like the aforementioned ones in La Vila Joiosa and Les Moreres, which indicates different social processes.

Small power centres in the northern part of the Valencian Country

While all this was happening in the central and southern counties of the Valencian Country, different kinds of territorial processes were underway in the northern lands in the Castelló counties, which are revealed in the configuration of different nuclei (see Fig. 2). Here we witness the construction of small nuclei, the largest of which did not exceed half a hectare, equipped with powerful fortifications like thick walls and solid fortified towers. This settlement model primarily developed between the late eighth and the seventh centuries BCE, within the historical context of early Phoenician contacts in these lands.[8] The opening of the local communities to these trade exchanges was the catalysing effect leading to the creation of this type of enclave, examples of which include Los Morrones in Cortes d'Arenós[9] and Tossal del Mortòrum,[10] which we shall use to illustrate the model.

Los Morrones is a small enclave measuring around 0.11 hectares which was initially occupied in the transition from the eighth to seventh centuries BCE. It features a powerful defensive system comprised of a tower, lateral support terraces and walls, which define the space and determine the settlement's internal organisation. According to its excavator, the defensive features served not only for defence but also to display power and prestige. Within the community, there was apparently a family living in the settlement's main house, which stands out from the other homes, which are characterised by the simplicity and homogeneity of their domestic repertoires.[11]

Tossal del Mortòrum is a settlement from a similar date and with analogous features. It occupies a space measuring approximately 0.12 hectares and is solidly fortified. Its occupation also began in the early Iron Age, although this settlement was actually a reoccupation of the enclave after a hiatus in the Bronze Age levels.

The economic bases of these settlements came from nearby livestock farming and possibly iron mining, which provided the resources to exchange for the Phoenician goods found in their repertoires. Current studies temper the importance of metallurgical activities, which had been overstated and are now viewed as complementary within the economic structure, judging by the fact that the processed metals are from elsewhere.[12]

This type of small settlement in the counties of Castelló was usually heavily protected by walls and fortifications from the early Iron Age, which continued during the early Iberian period. The cases described above could be joined by Santa Llúcia, Puig de la Misericòrdia in Vinaròs, Puig de la Nau in Benicarló, Mas de Fabra in Vinaròs, Torrelló del Boverot in Almassora, Orpesa la Vella in Orpesa and Vinarragell in Borriana (see Fig. 2).

As mentioned above, the earliest Phoenician contacts led to an adaptation of the local communities' lifestyles and their integration in the cultural dynamics of the Mediterranean coast. Yet beyond the cultural processes, we want to emphasise that the configuration of small settlements that expressed their power in prominent defensive architectures indicates a different social model than in the southern settlements. Here, aggregation seemed to be limited and did not seek to create extensive settlements to manage the territories; instead, what seemed to prevail was a conception of autonomous cells that banded together for mutual assistance. Within the settlements, the domestic areas do not show any significant distinctions in economic and social status. Even though main houses can be found, I do not believe that they express major social distances; instead, the entire group of residents must have seen themselves as a tightly-knit community united against other nuclei.

Within this context, we can view the fortification, which is the main feature, as a form of cohesion and identification for the community to counter the risk of accentuated forms of social inequality emerging. These monumental works entailed channelling collective material resources and deflecting possible frictions inside the group towards rivalries with different communities. The influence of P. Clastres can be seen in this view; he assigned war a prominent role among the mechanisms that prevented group schisms and kept them socially united.[13] In this case, competition, friction and conflict among these small nearby communities must have led them to build these solidly fortified enclaves.

Different territorial trajectories for different social models

Given this state of affairs, the features of the fortified enclaves enable us to recognise distinct social dynamics and models in the different areas of the Valencian Country.

The southern lands had large population centres and agglutinating territorial tendencies which lasted over time and developed further in the ensuing centuries. Meantime, the northern counties primarily contained small power cells with a limited existence over time: most of them ended in the early Iron Age, and only a few prominent examples, like Puig de la Nau, continued until the fifth century BCE. They are two different responses framed within the context of local societies' opening to Mediterranean exchanges, the competition for local resources and the formation of each community's own territories.

THE EARLY IBERIAN PERIOD (SIXTH TO FIFTH CENTURIES BCE): THE CONSOLIDATION OF CULTURAL AND TERRITORIAL CHANGES

The onset of the Iberian period in the late sixth century BCE is a clear case of historical continuity that follows the social and spatial processes mentioned above: the communities in this area moved towards creating fortified landscapes and exclusive territories. At the same time, the cultural features that would define Iberian culture were also being shaped and consolidated, primarily the spread of Iberian pottery made on the wheel, iron tools and weapons, writing and cremation necropolises, along with large stone sculptures in some regions.

The gradual craft specialisation associated with metallurgical and pottery techniques, as found in El Puig de la Nau,[14] *Kelin*[15] and El Puig d'Alcoi,[16] just to mention a few settlements, fostered a more complex and diversified economic model which consummated the social division of labour. The use of iron tools enabled crop fields to be enlarged, leading to increased productivity and farm yields, which was reflected in a dense rural settlement that prompted the agricultural intensification that had started in the preceding centuries.

Pottery produced on the wheel made it possible for many of the vessels used by the domestic group to be made in pottery workshops. This and other changes to household activities liberated much of the workforce, mostly women, who were able to undertake tasks that increased exponentially, like textile-related activities. While the use of ceramics made on the pottery wheel spread, there were also qualitative changes in working with slender threads in new spinning techniques, as proven by the spread of bone spindle whorls[17] and especially an exponential increase in textile tools. In my opinion, this textile production far exceeded families' needs and readily became accumulable, transportable and transferrable goods, which were unquestionably used in trade exchanges and generated wealth.

Another noteworthy feature in this phase was the hiatus in the flow of Phoenician goods. This points to changes in the trade circuits and systems, which were concentrated in coastal hubs like El Oral, La Vila Joiosa, El Grau Vell in Sagunt and El Puig de la Nau but only very occasionally reached the hinterland. Foreign goods may have gradually been replaced because of the development of local productions, like the highly prized wine, which began to be produced locally and replaced Phoenician imports. This necessarily affected the social relations built upon the redistribution of valued goods, as well as commensality rites.

These changes were expressed in the consolidation of the territorial schemes mentioned above, with different dynamics in the different territories. In the northern lands, the small power centres continued to gain ground, reflecting limitations in the residential aggregation process, which was perhaps constrained to power groups, families and affiliated groups who rose to the top of society.

The numerous cremation necropolises are associated with these power cells, with their characteristic *urnes d'orelletes* (urns with handles) and goods comprised of some weapons, like spears, and clothing and body adornments as elements of distinction, like belt buckles, clasps and earrings. These cemeteries are small in size, with several dozen graves, and they are quite numerous and each associated with the fortresses in the area. These necropolises were for exclusive groups, as the small number of graves indicates that most of the population did not have the right to be buried there. Thus, they shaped a landscape atomised into small territorial units with the emergence of leadership among some families and groups, who stood out in their fortified residences and funerary distinctions.

In the territories in the central area of the Valencian Country, broader processes of centralised territorial aggregation continued. There was an increase in settlements with signs of hierarchised territorial organisation in *Kelin*, *Edeta* and *Arse*. This came with the development of the rural population, with villages and farmsteads like La Senya in the *Edeta* region, which indicates an increase in agrarian activity associated with the demographic expansion and the development of the political economy.[18]

The earlier trends of rural densification and hierarchisation of the population continued in most of the southern Valencia and northern Alicante counties. The mouths of the Xúquer and Serpis Rivers and La Marina Baixa area developed into connectors between the coast and the inland regions, as attested to by L'Alter de la Vint-i-huitena in La Ribera Baixa, La Vital-Hospital de Sant Marc in La Safor and the powerful hub of La Vila Joiosa. There was a profound transformation in the lands of the Baix Segura and Baix Vinalopó with the end of the Phoenician presence in this region and the increasing prominence of Iberian enclaves like El Oral, which reshuffled the territorial structure.[19] This territory might have been presided by l'Alcúdia d'Elx, as proven by the important sculptural vestiges around it, as we shall see below, and the evidence of occupation related to this period, still largely yet to be studied in depth.[20]

Though they developed differently in each area, the transformation of the economic model and the advances in social hierarchisation were expressed in the way the power groups' social dominance strategies materialised

ideologically. Thus, in the southern half of the Valencian lands, large stone statues appear during the late fifth century BCE as the way the social hegemony of the powerful dominant groups was expressed. As mentioned above, the territory around L'Alcúdia d'Elx became an extremely important hub. Several examples, like warrior breastplate and the celebrated Lady of Elx, clearly reveal this phenomenon. These monuments are usually associated with the development of cremation necropolises after the second half of the fifth century BCE, examples of which include Corral de Saus, Cabezo Lucero, El Molar, Les Casetes and Poble Nou, which reveal the development and symbolic sanction of social inequalities. Funerals and monuments were used to build and express the power of the dominant families in the community and their immediate kin.[21]

While all of this was happening in the southern lands, north of the Xúquer River the social distinction strategies did not use these sculptural manifestations, nor were cremation necropolises developed, at least not as profusely, given that some sculptures that can be related to graves or monuments occasionally appear in places like Sagunt and La Carència. In any case, it seems clear that the symbolic strategies used in this territory avoided ostentatious ways of expressing power, which must reflect a different kind of social structure. These symbolic and other cultural patterns point to regional differences which are in line with the Greco-Latin sources' mentions of different peoples.

Middle iberian period (fifth to third centuries bce): shaping urban landscapes

The increase in social complexity and inequality

There was a period of settlement expansion in the late fifth and early fourth centuries BCE with the appearance of new *oppida* and the development of the rural population. These changes came with a series of archaeological indicators that reveal economic growth and increasing social complexity. They were built upon agricultural land husbandry, which provided the subsistence goods and income that could be used to maintain a growing population and a specialised economy, along with crafts and trade exchanges. The technologies introduced earlier were consolidated, and the economy came to be articulated in increasingly complex schemes. Trade exchanges also developed considerably, as attested to by the frequent appearance of Mediterranean prestige goods like fine Attic vessels and packaged Punic foodstuffs.

Regarding trade activities, it is essential to mention the development of writing, which was particularly important in this region. There is documentation of a concentration of written testimonies in the southern, northeastern and Greco-Iberian writing systems, primarily on lead and graffiti on ceramics. The Greco-Iberian writing, which used Ionic script to write in Iberian, is exclusively found in the regions of Alicante and Murcia, with the exception of the lead tablet in Sagunt, and it reveals such a close coexistence among the Greek and Iberian communities that it led to the emergence of this script.[22]

All these processes reinforced the political economy and the increase in social inequality. The testimonies found in settlements, landscapes and necropolises and the circulation of prestige goods reveal a clear increase in social hierarchisation. The prime expression of this unequal order is found in the funerary landscape formalised in the previous period, which now reached its peak. However, despite this context of increasing inequality, we can also find differing degrees of hierarchisation alongside egalitarian and cooperative tendencies.

The necropolises that became common in the southern lands starting in the late fifth century BCE, as mentioned above, expressed the existence of a social order defined by three major groups. The first was people buried in graves with sculptures or remarkable grave goods, primarily weapons and jewellery. A second group was made up of people who had access to the necropolises but no sculptures or important grave goods. Finally, the majority of people were not buried in cemeteries due to their status. In short, this attests to society's split into an echelon of the powerful and the commoners who depended on them.

The legitimisation of this inequality was also based on strategies like the manipulation of symbolic violence and the figure of the protector of the community, as gleaned from the importance of the warriors found on graves. Other representations, like the celebrated *Iberian ladies*, most notably the Lady of Elx, reveal other female power referents. Thus, genealogical bonds with preeminent ancestors, both men and women, must have served as the foundation of power, which was becoming hereditary. Other social distinction strategies used often were based on the control of goods used in feasts and banquets, like wine and fine vessels from other Mediterranean regions. The mastery of rituals and esoteric practices was another way of creating and sanctioning social differences.

The elements materialising these inequalities are distributed differently in the diverse territories, and they also appear at different times in history, indicating distinct ways of exercising power and domination and their temporal dynamic. As stated above, sculptures and necropolises are lacking in the northern half of Valencian lands, which would indicate attenuated forms of control and power displays within the framework of unequal structures. However, the southern necropolises that were so common in the fifth to fourth centuries BCE had practically disappeared by the end of the latter century. In my opinion, this may signal the mitigation of the exclusionary strategies that segregated the powerful groups and asserted their predominant role in society with funerary honours and the survival of their memory in the necropolises. Starting then and throughout the third century, the main focus of ritual activity shifted to sanctuaries, where community rituals were held that fostered social aggregation and the creation of new communities and urban identities.[23]

The shaping of the urban landscapes

The regional differences were still clear in territorial organisation and the courses they took, with different sociopolitical structures. The northern area experienced a period of some occupational weakness, with a low population and a dearth of urban centres that would attract people and organise the territory (Fig. 3). Only several settlements, like El Torrelló del Boverot, La Balaguera and La Punta de l'Orley, seem to have remained occupied, while the other major nuclei, like El Puig de la Nau, were abandoned during this period.[24]

In contrast, in central and southern Valencia, the forms of territorial organisation based on each *oppidum* and its local domains gave way to new forms of county-wide cohesion. In other words, the dispersed territories coalesced to give rise to new agglutinating political structures on a county scale encompassing around 700-1,000 km². The processes were gradually organised over time, and while this urban centralisation seems to have been reached in the central lands in the fourth century, it came to the southern lands several generations later, in around the third century.[25] Let us take a tour of these Iberian cities from north to south.
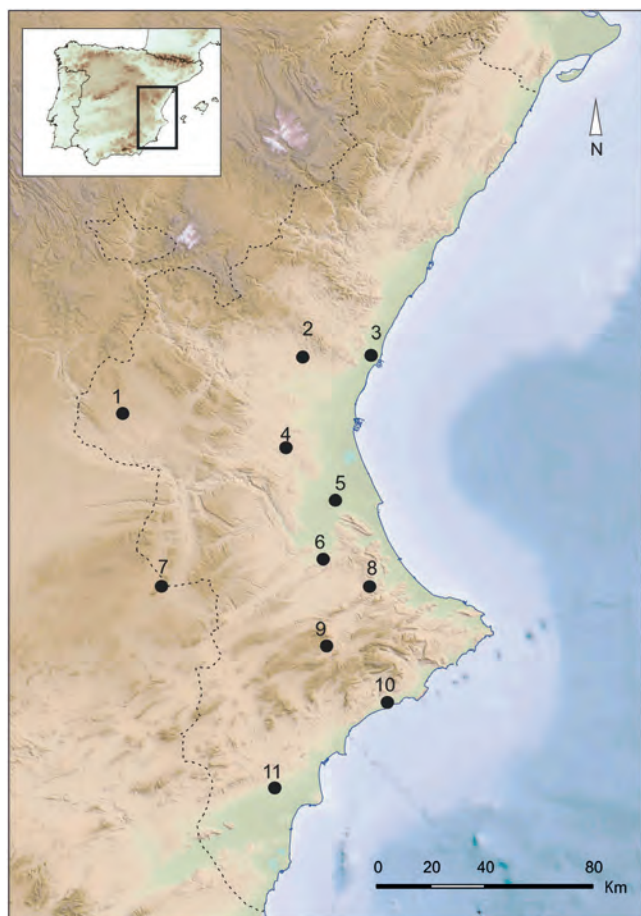

Figure 3. Main cities in the Middle Iberian period cited in the text. 1: *Kelin* / Los Villares in Caudete de las Fuentes; 2: *Edeta* / Tossal de Sant Miquel in Llíria; 3: *Arse* / Sagunt; 4: *Kili* / La Carència; 5: *Sucro* / L'Alter de la Vint-i-huitena; 6: *Saitabi* / Xàtiva; 7: Castellar de Meca; 8: Tossal del Morquí; 9: La Serreta; 10: Alon / La Vila Joiosa; 11: *Ilici* / L'Alcúdia d'Elx. Source: Author based on ICV maps.

Los Villares in Caudete de las Fuentes is one of the best-known Iberian cities, especially its cultural evolution and territorial structure, thanks to extensive research over the course of many decades. Placed on a smooth hill that overlooks the Magre River valley and spreading extensively over around ten hectares, this Iberian city has been associated with the second-century *Kelin* mint thanks to numismatic research, which provides the Iberian name and shows the city's importance in the late Iberian period, even though its importance in the county dates back to the early Iron Age, as described above.[26]

In the fourth to third centuries BCE, Los Villares developed a complex urban layout which included large houses measuring 80-100 m² with considerable storage capacity, along with simpler houses, which points to its inhabitants' different social statuses. Control over extensive farmlands, where a large subordinate population lived, must have been this city's main source of wealth, in addition to its domain over an important road network.

The other large Iberian city in Valencia where we have extensive knowledge of its main urban and territorial features is Tossal de Sant Miquel in Llíria, the site of the ancient *Edeta*,[27] which presided over a broad territory of approximately 900 km² in the Turia River valley. With ancient origins, it stood out in the Middle Iberian period for its position of territorial control, its extensive surface measuring around ten hectares, the homes of the ruling elite and the presence of an urban temple, which asserted its status as a capital both symbolically and ideologically.

The study of the urban grid and domestic spaces have enabled us to identify the homes of the preeminent groups on what is known as block 7, near other prominent buildings and the temple mentioned above. The homes of these preeminent groups had infrastructures for management and the transformation of farm crops, such as wine presses, oil mills and ovens, which indicate control over the land and farm yields as a major source of their wealth. Symbolic domination is expressed in their self-representation on richly decorated prestige vessels, in addition to their control and use of Mediterranean imports. These same elements can be found in the prominent homes in the territory and identify the preeminent social groups scattered about the land, revealing a decentralised power model.

In the Middle Iberian period, its territory was clearly defined and articulated by a complex settlement system with forts and fortified farmsteads, like El Puntal dels Llops and El Castellet de Bernabé, which were visually connected to the city and charged with monitoring and exploiting the peripheral territorial spaces. An entire series of hamlets and villages, like La Monravana and La Sénia, farmed the other lands in the valley.[28]

The Iberian city of *Arse*, in Sagunt Castle, stands out in the central coastline of the Valencian Country. Its importance is proven by the historical events of the conquest and destruction by the Carthaginians, the *casus belli* which impelled Rome to join the war. Located on a hill near the

coast, it dominates maritime and land communications along the coastline and an extensive agricultural area in El Camp de Morvedre. All signs seem to indicate that the city primarily developed in the Middle Iberian period, when it had a large walled area encircled by a space measuring eight to ten hectares. It was at the head of a complex system with large settlements, like El Rabosero, along with smaller villages and lookouts similar to the ones in the neighbouring settlement of *Edeta*, even if it is less known.[29]

The remains of the Iberian city can only be very partially identified, as they are concealed by subsequent historical occupations. To foster the management of supraregional exchanges, a port neighbourhood developed in El Grau Vell, where structures and materials associated with this activity have been documented, along with Iberian imports and inscriptions. The minting of silver coins in *Arse* since the late fourth century BCE is also related to trade exchanges.

The settlement of La Carència-*Kili* in Torís dominates the valley midway along the Magre River. The city came to be known through research and studies conducted several decades ago, which have recently resumed and described the morphology, duration, functions and territorial organization of the Iberian city.[30] It was divided into three contiguous walled areas of differing sizes that comprise a structure that flattens out into broad landings.

With its ancient origins, like other nuclei, it dates from the Middle Iberian period, between the fourth and third centuries BCE, when the Iberian city gained a foothold there with fortifications that enclosed two upper areas within the settlement.[31] This extensive area was joined by other prominent features, like the presence of Iberian inscriptions and figurative pottery. This city has traditionally been related to the *Kili* mint, although numismatic studies do not confirm this with complete certainty.

El Castellar de Meca is an impressive settlement located on a rocky mass that looks inaccessible, where it dominates an intersection of roads that joins the coastline of Valencia with the hinterland and controls a large agricultural space. The city spread over more then fifteen hectares, with evidence of fortifications, paths carved into the rock and the remains of several houses. The furniture repertoire has prominent features that match up with its urban status, including Mediterranean imports, Iberian pottery with figurative decoration and several epigraphs. The city originally dated from the early Iron Age, but it reached its peak in the Middle Iberian period and was violently destroyed at the turn from the third to second centuries BCE.[32]

The ancient city of *Sucro* was located in the region at the mouth of the Xúquer River. It is primarily known in relation to the events in the Second Punic War and the Sertorian War, although there is no consensus about which settlement this city might be. The first option is L'Alter de la Vint-i-huitena, at the ford in the river at Albalat de la Ribera. The existence of an extensive settlement with materials in a lengthy time sequence spanning from the early Iron Age to the Republican period would

support this option. The second one is L'Alt del Fort in Cullera, on the coast. Vestiges of pottery and several structures from a settlement dating between the fifth and second centuries BCE have been found at different locations on the peak and slope of the hill.[33] Given these information gaps, we have to await further studies to provide information that can shed light on the urban and territorial situation at the mouth of the Xúquer River.

The city of *Saitabi*, which we know about from the sources and the mint that struck coins there since the late third century BCE, was located on the peak and southern slope of Xàtiva Castle. It was an extensive settlement spread over more than ten hectares that was occupied a long time due to its strategic location overlooking the Cànyoles River Valley, where Via Heraclea ran, as well as its dominance over rich farmland. The city's Iberian phases have been found through partially conserved structures and stratigraphic layers with materials from varied dates, including imported materials. Some texts recounting the events of the Second Punic War point to the city's importance during this period.[34]

The importance of the neighbouring La Bastida de les Alcusses in the fourth century BCE is worth noting;[35] it was a powerful walled city located at the far west of this county unit. The two nuclei may have been so close that it was impossible to avoid some territorial friction, which may have led them to engage in conflict until La Bastida was completely destroyed in the late fourth century BCE. Beyond conjectures, the fact is that the city of *Saitabi* remained occupied and may have augmented its territorial importance after the destruction of La Bastida de les Alcusses.

El Tossal del Morquí is an extensive archaeological site composed of funerary and residential spaces with a long occupation sequence from the late Bronze Age to the third century BCE. It kept watch over the passage connecting the Vall d'Albaida county with the Safor coast and dominated extraordinarily rich farmland. The settlement primarily stretched along the densely occupied terraced slope and encompassed more than five as a minimum account. This makes El Morquí one of the largest *oppida* in the central region of Valencia, with a unique building that served a ritual purpose.[36] There is little doubt regarding its core role in organising the territory until the late third century BCE, during the Iberian period immediately after the Roman conquest. It may have later been replaced in its leadership role by El Rabat in Rafelcofer, in the heart of La Safor county.

The city of La Serreta (Alcoi, Cocentaina, Penàguila) was perched in a dominant position in the territorial structure of Alcoià-Comtat in the third century BCE. The settlement had been occupied since the early Iron Age, but during that period it could hardly be distinguished from other *oppida* in the county. However, in the third century BCE it experienced urban growth that led it to occupy an area of around six hectares. In addition to its size, it also performed a series of urban functions, such as serving as a territorial sanctuary where the faithful would come to de-

posit their offerings, primarily in the guise of terracotta votive offerings. It was the hub of trade exchanges, as evidenced by a major set of Iberian epigraphy in Northeastern and Greco-Iberian alphabets and extensive import repertoires. It also features a complex fortification system and its own iconographic repertoire rendered on pottery vessels. The city was destroyed during the events of the Second Punic War in the late third century BCE.[37]

The Iberian centre located under the urban nucleus of La Vila Joiosa has been associated with the ancient Iberian city of *Alon*, later the Roman *Alone*. The main documentation of this settlement, in addition to several probes in the urban centre, comes from the necropolises, which have ancient origins and show a great deal of dynamism during the Middle Iberian period, with necropolis areas in the city's northern and southern sectors. These necropolises and other crafts areas surrounded the inhabited centre of the old quarter on the hill, where several probes have identified the habitat levels. The territory of *Alon* did not seem to suffer from the effects of the Roman conquest as intensely as other territories, and many indicators show activity in this centre and its territory during the second century BCE.[38]

The city of *Ilici*-L'Alcúdia d'Elx is located on an artificial mound that controls the communication routes of the Baix Vinalopó and a large portions of the more fertile lands in southern Valencian country. A review of the known evidence suggests the existence of an initial nucleus from the late Bronze Age to the Middle Iberian period, which may have been located on the north of the hill and later expanded until it covered the entire area of L'Alcúdia.[39] Recent excavations have identified important fortification works from around the fifth century and the remains of houses, although right now the information is still quite limited.[40] The main evidence regarding the importance of the site is the prominent collection of Iberian sculptures associated with a funerary or sacred space[41] in the transition from the Early to Middle Iberian period.

Cities, political structures and social organisation

Thus far we have sketched the political map of the leading centres in the Iberian territory falling in the current Valencian Country, but it is a low-resolution picture that becomes even blurrier as we zoom in on a more detailed scale. Despite these limitations, we shall present several overall assessments in the scheme described, and especially a remark on the Iberian society that undergirded this entire territorial reality.[42]

Cities in practice

The current state of research has yielded limited information that can shed light on the practical functioning and political and economic management of the cities. Beyond assuming their prime role in defence and their centralisation of agricultural or trade goods, we still have a long way to go before we understand the specific mechanisms of their functioning and economic and administrative structure.

The cities were never the home to all the population in their respective territories, and there were also secondary urban nuclei in this region, usually perched on hilltops, which replicated the city model on a smaller scale and concentrated specialised activities like trade, the transformation of products and defence. More importantly, there were constellations of rural settlements that orbited around the cities and secondary *oppida*, which may reveal limited centralisation of the functions and powers in this region.

Country-city relationship

The elevated topographical locations of many Iberian cities forced local peasants to make journeys, sometimes costly ones, and rendered it logistically complicated to transport large volumes of farm yields to the cities. As a result of these conditions, Iberian centres did not tend to have major farm transformation or craft infrastructures. Facilities related to specialised agricultural production, like winepresses, flour mills and pottery workshops, were scattered around the nearby countryside. Likewise, part of the population lived in rural hamlets near the urban nuclei to facilitate the agrarian activity.

This form of land management, with peasants who had close ties to diverse plots and lands, generated the wealth found in the cities. The agrarian systems that have been proposed for the Valencian Country show the development of orchards and mixed yields which are distinct from the kind of husbandry found in other areas more focused on cereal production.[43] This intensive agrarian model forced different domestic or corporate groups to work for longer times and sometimes to apply very specific knowledge to the management of the agrosystems. Thus, forms of labour management, the organisation of tasks and social relations of production were introduced, which unquestionably conditioned the development of institutions different to those found in other areas with different rural models and settlement patterns. Future research should examine these aspects in order to understand the Iberian socioeconomic foundation and its correlate in the urban network.

Physical structure and social analysis

Thus far, we only have vague notions of what the towns were like because the only information we know about many of them is their supposed area, walled perimeters and important vestiges like writing or prestigious pottery. Despite these limitations in our knowledge of the urban structure and its architecture, we can suggest a few patterns.

The mobilisation of collective labour in building the Iberian cities in Valencia is comparable to the erection of monuments in other regions. Some of the best-known cities, like El Tossal de Sant Miquel in Llíria-*Edeta*, Xàtiva-*Saetabi* and La Serreta, have spacious terraces of dry-stone walls filled in with sediment, some of them more than two metres tall, which formed platforms on which houses and

other structures were built. These constructions were shared by different houses and neighbourhoods, which reveals collective works in the form of compact cubic blocks which are community-scale architectural initiatives. The walls and fortifications can also be considered true massive communal works.

Therefore, the absence of other public buildings like monumental temples should not be considered a limitation in these Iberian cities' technical and economic capacities; instead, they must be a cultural matter based on the inhibition of expressing certain forms of power, which distinguishes Iberian cities from classical Mediterranean cities. We could even posit a pattern of cooperative architecture made by all city-dwellers for themselves, which stresses community design and thus avoids conspicuous, hierarchised forms aimed at clearly distinguishing the prominent groups and marking social distances. Here, these building patterns would instead foster cooperative, corporate behaviours.

Cities and decentralised powers

Right now, the only spaces excavated extensively are located in the cities of La Serreta and El Tossal de Sant Miquel, in both cases with the limitations inherent to the archaeological record of ancient excavations. However, we can offer several interesting reflections on the urban model based on the available data. The main conclusion is the decentralised nature of the power structures that can be observed in the urban areas. The main features indicating control over economic resources, the ideological sphere or administration are distributed in different households within the city, with no single, clearly defined focus of economic, social or ideological power delimited in the space, like the palaces or prominent houses found in other Iberian settlements. And these same elements indicating power are also present in other settlements in the region.[44]

We have associated this dispersion of diacritical elements with the lack of centralising institutions common to ancient societies, like palaces or temples, and the scant monumentality of Iberian centres. All of this leads us to propose a social model which did not emphasise clearly defined social distances between a small, powerful group and the common people. Instead, without denying the existence of political and social hierarchisation, we believe that collective and corporate behaviours were encouraged in the social strategies and exercise of power.

In my opinion, more than extremely hierarchical systems that would entail the clear imposition of a dominant line over the rest of the population, the social structure in the Valencian Country provides a picture of similar social units with powers that were distributed and heterarchical in nature, competing for positions of domination. These basic social units could correspond with Houses (in Lévi-Strauss's sense), factions or other corporate groups that would maintain competitive attitudes but within certain strictures to mitigate their more aggressive aspects, and with mutual collaboration.[45]

We can find a spatial expression of this in the fact that the houses of the powerful families are distributed around the *Edeta* region, or the *Contestania* region of La Serreta. Another feature that would express this structure of competing groups can be found in the existence of different necropolises in the city of *Alon*. Indeed, funerary areas comparable in composition, chronology, structures and gradient of wealth can be found north and south of the city, articulated by different roadways.[46] This polycentric structure differs from the concentration of the funerary space in a single location as the place of memory and ritual of a single leading group and instead suggests similar power groups sharing the urban space.

In short, this scene painted with broad brushstrokes merely aims to be a point of departure for future studies that should provide further insight into the urban structure of the Iberian landscapes, especially the social schemes that they materialised. Iberian society must have been articulated from the base with corporate groups with a similar structure competing to access and maintain their power quotas. This scheme would help make sense of the largely decentralised model of Iberian cities in the zone and, more importantly, explain the scant differences among the main centres and the secondary *oppida*, which only vary in scale and size, but not in structure. Thus, an urban structure took shape that shares components with other systems but is a clearly original model within the urban processes in the ancient Mediterranean.

Cities and systems of governance

These cities must have been governed by powerful groups, as reflected in the rich iconographic programmes of *Edeta* and La Serreta in Alcoi. Groups of dancers, equestrians, processions and hunting and combat scenes were painted on the pottery vessels used by the ruling classes to display their status.[47] If we transfer this collective expression to political terms, we can conclude that the images do not show the pre-eminence of one great leader, nor a single person who stands out over the others, which would be common in a personal leadership system. Instead, we find depictions of a group of men and women, and families, which would lead us to suggest collegial or competitive power among the different heads of lineages and factions.

We could conclude that these expressions do not necessarily show objective scenes but instead are symbolic representations of the aristocratic ideal. Nonetheless, even if they are ideal representations, if the goal had been to symbolically reinforce the individual identity and personal pre-eminence, we would find depictions associated with one figure representing the leadership. In my opinion, we should frame this expression within collective, negotiated, competitive forms of power among different people who shared the leadership of society and its different segments.

Late iberian (second to first centuries bce): the iberian territories in the face of roman domination

Starting in the last third of the third century BCE, territorial and political pressure from *Carthago*, the North African metropolis, began to be felt via the Barcid dynasty. After settling in *Qart Hadasht*, today Cartagena, the Carthaginians undertook a territorial domination campaign that strengthened the intense economic interaction that had been underway for centuries. They embarked on a variety of actions, from pacts with local *oppida* to open clashes, and the attack on and capture of Sagunt-*Arse* is precisely what unleashed the war between the Carthaginians and Romans that extended over much of Iberia.

Continuities and changes in the political geography

The war gave rise to the start of Roman domination and thus a new era in which the Iberian territory was gradually integrated into the hegemonic new Mediterranean power, even though in practice it continued to enjoy a high degree of autonomy and considerable cultural development. The circumstances of the wars of annexation, hostile attitudes or—conversely—alliances led to the abandonment and survival of many of the *oppida*, which created a new territorial structure. Different types of processes can be identified which converged to shape a new political geography that marked the end of Iberian culture and society (Fig. 4).[48]

First, we find the abandonment of some of the aforementioned cities which were the capitals of their respective territories and had created state-like political organisations. Perhaps the main restructuring can be found in the territories of Sant Miquel in Llíria-*Edeta* and La Serreta, two cases that have been thoroughly studied by archaeologists. Other territories also suffered from the effects of the Roman conquest, and the fall of core nuclei reveals the dissolution of the political projects that had led them; this dynamic included El Castellar de Meca, in the southwest extreme of the Valencian Country; El Tossal del Morquí, halfway between La Vall d'Albaida and La Safor; and La Escuera[49] in the Baix Segura.

An opposite process was the survival of important population nuclei, including the main cities that were the centers of their respective regions, like *Kelin, Arse, Kili, Saitabi, Alon* and *Ilici*. Likewise, some secondary *oppida* were reinforced during this period and exerted control over their territories, like El Pico de los Ajos,[50] Cerro Lucena,[51] El Rabat in Rafelcofer, El Cabeçó de Mariola and El Monastil. This survival of many important Iberian nuclei should be viewed as the continued existence of the local social and political structures, always under Rome's acquiescence.[52]

Newly founded towns reinforced the territorial design based on important nuclei in sites that had not been occupied by regional organisation nodes and political decision-making hubs until then, including the founding of the Roman colony of *Valentia* in 137 BCE. This city was
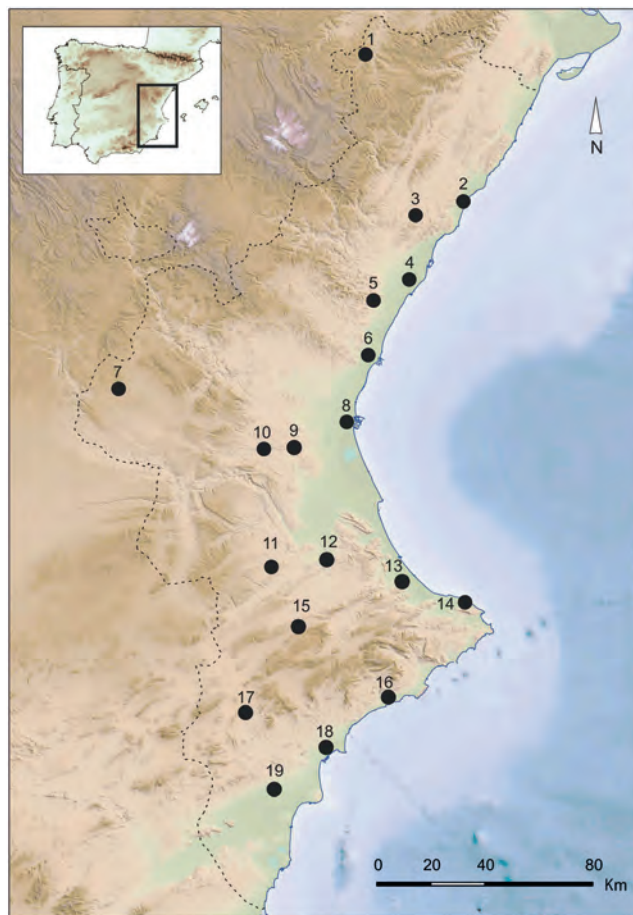

Figure 4. Main settlements in the late Iberian period cited in the text. 1: La Moleta dels Frares (Forcall); 2: La Torre de la Sal (Cabanes); 3: Tossal de la Balaguera (La Pobla Tornesa); 4: La Torre d'Onda (Borriana); 5: La Punta (La Vall d'Uixó); 6: *Saguntum-Arse*; 7: *Kelin*-Los Villares in Caudete de las Fuentes; 8: *Valentia*-València 9: *Kili*-La Carència (Toris); 10: El Pico de los Ajos (Iàtova); 11: Cerro Lucena (Enguera); 12: *Saetabis*-Xàtiva; 13: El Rabat (Rafelcofer); 14: *Dianium*-Dènia; 15: El Cabeçó de Mariola (Alfafara; Bocairent); 16: *Alon*-La Vila Joiosa; 17: El Monastil (Elda); 18: *Lucentum*-Tossal de Manises (Alacant); 19: *Ilici*-L'Alcúdia d'Elx. Source: Author based on ICV maps.

located at the mouth of the Túria River and reinforced the supraregional urban network after the abandonment of the city of *Edeta*.[53] One prominent centre was the port nucleus of La Torre de la Sal (Castelló), an urban agglomeration that must have articulated the northernmost lands of the country in a location that until then had not been occupied by urban centres with the same size and importance as those in other counties.[54]

There was intense activity in the regional sanctuaries as hubs where new communities aggregated and were created within the framework of the ethnic redefinition stemming from the Roman conquest and domination. Some sanctuaries that were reinforced at the time were the ones in Muntanya Frontera, La Carrasposa, La Serreta, La Malladeta and Guardamar. These sites of worship did not have monumental building processes in the late Iberian period, as there were in La Encarnación and El Cerro de

los Santos in the neighbouring zones of Albacete and Múrcia, but they did share an upswing in ritual activity. These sanctuaries took on the functions of territorial aggregation and collective identity construction in a period prior to Roman municipalisation during the reign of Augustus.[55]

The last noteworthy process in this period was the considerable increase in the rural settlement in the form of farmsteads and hamlets within the phenomenon of the intensification of agrarian production. The need to pay the Roman tributes and demands on the conquered territories may explain this increase in production. Furthermore, the pacification that came about by Roman domination allowed for the occupation of territorial spaces that had previously been deserted due to territorial frictions and the instability inherent to the context of Iberian conflict. The forms of settlement reflect the Iberian tradition in the region, and instead of deducing that there was colonisation by Italic peoples, it was more likely the resettlement of local populations, when the abandonment of the *oppida* led to the subsequent occupation of the plains.

Roman power was situated at the peak of all this and was exercised from two important sites: the old city of *Carthago Nova* and the colony of *Valentia* in the Valencian Country. These two cities necessarily required the coexistence of Iberian powers and the continuity of many of the indigenous political and domain structures at the beginning of Roman domination. Rome allowed some degree of autonomy in the management of the Iberian communities' spaces with acknowledgement of its dominion and for the purpose of extracting resources through taxation.

All this documentation falls within the historical context of the second century BCE, which can be considered a period when Rome was pursuing its drive for domination, especially in the central years of the century. At that time, the defeat of Viriathus and the seizure of Numantia brought peace to the inland regions of the peninsula, which enabled Rome to channel its efforts into organising the conquered territories. In the area we are studying, clear advances can be found in this regard, like the aforementioned founding of *Valentia*. Around those years, specifically in 132 BCE, a commission of ten senators was sent to Hispania to organise the conquered territories.[56]

The impetus of these actions must have reflected Rome's centralising decisions that sought to reinforce its domination and more effectively manage the conquered territories. However, far from being taken for granted, the scope of these initiatives should be assessed within the local context and the framework of the participation of the Iberian groups, the absolutely predominant peoples at that time. Any Roman domination strategy in the eastern part of Iberia had to enlist the complicity of the local peoples, bearing in mind the breadth of the territorial project and the location of the preferred areas, which were subject to direct control in other peninsular regions.

Economic and social processes in a changing world

Along with political domination systems, new economic control and exploitation strategies were implemented, like the introduction of currency as a new instrument of exchange and the creation of roads for new forms of connection between territories based on increased traffic. The former is attested to by the striking of coins at the mints in *Arse, Kelin, Kili* and *Saiti-Saitabi*. Evidence of the latter are the cobblestone roads documented in *Alon*, La Costera county and other zones,[57] which are the harbingers of the major road construction projects that started to be undertaken during the reign of Augustus. Trade activities were also fostered by this urban grid and its redistribution centres, leading to a swift increase in trade with Italy and the massive arrival of Italic wine amphorae and fine vessels from Campania and Cales regions.

Evidence of the importance of Iberian social and power structures comes from the revitalisation of necropolises like the ones in El Corral de Saus, Poble Nou and Les Casetes in La Vila, which show changes in both the composition of the grave goods, with the disappearance of weapons, and the shape of the graves. These cemeteries attest to social strata sanctioned in the ritual field of funerary rites.[58]

Finally, there was a blossoming of rich symbolic styles on pottery. The well-known Illicitan figurative paintings were joined by other pictorial circles, like the one in Alcoi, the ones from La Vila Joiosa and the depictions of hybrid beings from Valencian lands found in *Kelin, Kili* and *Valentia*, the expression of a complex ideological and symbolic world.[59]

This late period in Iberian culture, while the Iberian political and social structures remained active, is when some of the most important cultural expressions appeared, like the aforementioned figurative pottery. This early moment of domination may be when collaboration strategies were employed, and Rome showed permissive attitudes that facilitated the control and exploitation of the domains conquered in Iberia as they focused their attention on annexing other more distant territories far away this Mediterranean strip.

The civil wars and the end of an era

The territorial and socioeconomic processes described above shaped an initial stage in Rome's dominion which we can broadly fit within a period that ends in around the 70s BCE. The milestone was the Sertorian War, which had intense effects in Valencian lands and signalled a turning point in the region's territorial dynamics, as proven by archaeological evidence and literary testimonies.[60] This was the time of the historical episode of civil wars between the supporters of Sertorius and the Senatorial side. Much of this confrontation was waged in Valencian lands; the Greco-Latin sources mention *Dianium* as a main naval port base, as well as the battles of *Lauro, Sucro, Valentia* and *Saguntum*.[61]

This conflict entailed the destruction of *Valentia* in 75 BCE, and an entire series of Iberian cities were destroyed

in this war. These historical events had a huge impact on the local peoples, who suffered from the effects of the war in their territories or were either directly or indirectly involved. This historical milestone prompted a drastic change in the longstanding Iberian societies, and we can pinpoint it as the start of a new era which entailed direct Roman domination and served as a prelude to the processes in the ensuing decades under the impetus of new cultural and territorial forms with a clearly Roman pattern.

Final remarks

This brief analysis of the landscapes and societies of the Valencian Country in the Iberian period contributes to our understanding of Mediterranean sociopolitical dynamics in the first millennium BCE. Even though further archaeological information is needed to gain a deeper understanding of these processes, we can assert that the research has achieved a significant level of maturity in recent decades. The tireless investigation undertaken by university departments, museums and other institutions has placed knowledge of the Iron Age here on par with that of other Mediterranean regions, and the new methodologies and theories in Iberian studies enable us to come up with updated syntheses, such as the one in this article.

This paper has made a comparative analysis of the different territories in the Valencian Country in an effort to understand culturally specific processes and identify variations among areas via micro-scale research. We are aware that many features were shared by the different peoples, all of whom fell within Iberian culture, but studying them with sensitivity to the specific setting has revealed changing territorial, social and economic forms, as well as their own temporal and historical dynamics.

Thus, the northern counties show an intense dynamic of creating small fortified centres that since the early Iron Age marked a heterarchical landscape with competition among power cells that declined in the late fifth century. This scene contrasts with the agglutinating tendencies in the central and southern counties of Valencia, which created large urban centres in the same period that lasted longer and developed intensely in the Middle Iberian period, precisely when the centres in the north were in decline. However, we also find other differences between the south, which was intensely visited by colonial populations and land of large burial necropolises with sculptures, and the central counties, which lacked these elements and built larger urban centres.

The ethnic identities recognised by the Greco-Latin authors may explain these regional variations and many others we could cite. But the story does not end there: if we zoom in with our scale of analysis, we can find even more differences in historical dynamics, structures and processes which appear in a fragmented way in the Iberian geopolitical space. Far from the generalising views of Iberian society and history written in the past, today the research ranges between general processes and attention to the particularities of this intricate period in our history.

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