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Arturo Ruiz Rodríguez.
Dpto. de Patrimonio Histórico
Centro Andaluz de Arqueología Ibérica
Universidad de Jaén. Jaén (Spain)
arruiz@ujaen.es



THE IBERIANS IN THE LANDS OF HIGH ANDALUSIA

Between the VII and I centuries (B.C.), the Eastern part of the Iberian Peninsula developed a complex Mediterranean culture with urban characteristics whose cultural emblem was the construction of powerful fortified towns, called oppida, a sign of the importance of the princes who inhabited them. Among all the Iberian territories that stretched from the south of France to the Portuguese border, one of the most important was the region starting from the south of Valencia and reaching the High Andalusia, especially the areas of Jaen, north of Granada and the east of Cordoba. These areas, which the Romans named Contestania, Bastetania and Oretania, were famous for such outstanding towns as Castulo or Ipolca in Jaen, Ategua in Cordoba, Ilici in Alicante or Basti in Granada and, over all, for their magnificent groups of sculptures in cemeteries and sanctuaries which definitely characterized the image of the Iberian landscapes together with the fortifications of oppida, the Mediterranean forests of holms, oaks and pine trees and countryside sown with cereal and ploughed by fruit trees, olive trees and vines; arboriculture was, in fact, together with modular homes and a geometric concept of the inhabited space, the potter's wheel, writing, the coinage and iron metallurgy, one of the most important innovations developed during this period.

The lands of High Guadalquivir River, especially what today is the province of Jaen, are an outstanding example in this historical environment for their excellent and varied Iberian heritage. The oppidum fortification of Puente Tablas in Jaen was built in the VII century (B.C.). It was a strong wall on

a slope, more than five metres high, made of stone in its base, adobe in its higher part and crowned with towers. The structure was rendered and from the V century the stone was left seen until the IV century when the prince of the town left the place, moved to Santa Catalina's' hill and founded the town of Auringis (Jaén). In the VI century (B.C.), the oppidum was urbanely defined in accordance to a more rational model based on blocks divided by walls that distributed the houses in parallel streets, a separated area where the prince had settled in and probably sacred areas where people could worship their ancestors.

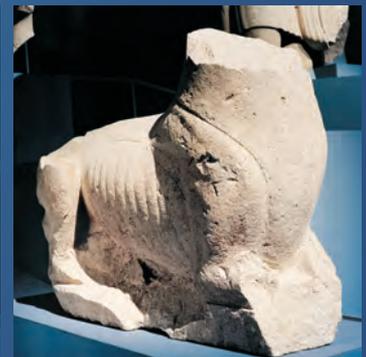
At the same time, by the end of the VI century (B.C.), in Peal de Becerro, nearer to the sources of Guadalquivir River, the prince of Tugia built a burial chamber, sculpted in a limestone hill whose cylindrical shape eventually made up his burial mound. Isolated in middle of the river Toya scenery, painted in red, with the altar in the higher part of its structure, where the aristocratic couple, after being cremated, laid under the burial vault dug in the rock, the funeral milestone defined the appropriate landscape for the aristocratic lineage in which the ancestors set the limits on the land property. Later, in the IV century (B.C.) the prince burial was already an extraordinary masonry chamber where the aristocratic family which controlled the oppidum was buried and, surrounding it, the serves' graves.

At the opposite edge of the present day province of Jaen, in Porcuna, the prince of Ipolca, by the middle of the V century, built a great monument with sculptures in Cerrillo Blanco: a collective burial mound

two centuries old that probably held the remains of his ancestors. The sculptural collection of more than forty pieces told the history of his lineage and, by the way, the life of the Iberian prince: From his early childhood when he learnt the skills and techniques for hunting and the hand-to-hand fight to the adult stage as a warrior whose spear goes through the loser's face or as a winning warrior on a suit of double armour. In the collection of sculptures it is highly remarkable both the presence of the ancestors and the actions that enhanced heroic deeds such as the fight against the gryphon. Finally, a possible divinity dominates two billy goats completing the whole collection with sacred legitimacy, all this in a mythic scenery shown by animals like gryphons, sphinxes or harpies.

In the IV century, the Iberian princes of High Guadalquivir had already controlled all their territories getting their people to identify themselves more with the oppidum where they lived, which belonged to the aristocrat, than with the old tribal reference which characterized them a long time ago.

By then, the oppidums started to expand, first, to colonize those lands that were not under the control of other fortified towns and, after that, to compete among them in order to manage political unities controlled by only one aristocrat from his oppidum. The prince of Iltiraka in Ubeda la vieja is one of the most famous examples of this model of expansion, as he built a shrine devoted to a hero, probably one of his ancestors, in the sources of the river Jandulilla, which thirty kilometres north flows into the river Guadalquivir. In that place a big tower was built, with a scene with sculptures in which, before two





gryphons and a young man, probably a wolf prey, the Iberian hero killed an enormous wild carnivore with his falcata. A similar example, although there were two shrines devoted to a female divinity this time, was carried out by the prince of Castulo, to the north of Guadalquivir valley: the objective was to control the valley of river Guadalen. The hundreds of votive offerings of bronze ex-votos are a sign of a change compared to the previous example where we can observe more participative practices and characteristic of a public political model. Picasso was the first to value those bronze figures from the IV century and especially the III century, apparently primitive which, however, offered a whole vision of the Iberian society, more urban and civilised. By the year 206 B.C. Roman historians emphasized how a prince from Chulchas controlled 27 oppida.

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