Abstract

In this paper we examine the structure of politically complex societies in the north-east of the Iberian Peninsula during the first millennium BC, using the Lower Ebro region as an example. Drawing on data provided in recent years by archaeological research, we discuss the combination of territorially hierarchical and heterarchical phenomena. At the same time we reassess the chronological framework in which this sociopolitical process took place. To do so, we rely more on information about the evolution of the protohistoric societies in the region under study than on information about material culture. We present a model that may serve as a starting point for future research.

Introduction

In the last 30 years, archaeological surveys in the Lower Ebro region – which in this article is regarded as present-day southern Catalonia, the northernmost area of the Valencian country, and the south-eastern strip of Aragon – have provided a great deal of data going back approximately 3000 years about how the inhabitants of the Ebro area had managed to shape a unique and fully-formed society. Research groups from the universities of Barcelona, Lleida, Zaragoza, Toulouse-Le Mirail and, naturally, the Rovira i Virgili University in Tarragona have conducted intensive archaeological work on pre-Roman sites in the area. This work has put the Ebro region on the map of prehistoric and protohistoric studies in Spain. In this paper we report the results of our study in which we use a multifocal approach, innovative theoretical concepts, and a new sociopolitical model to explain the emergence of complex societies in the lower Ebro area (Fig. 1).
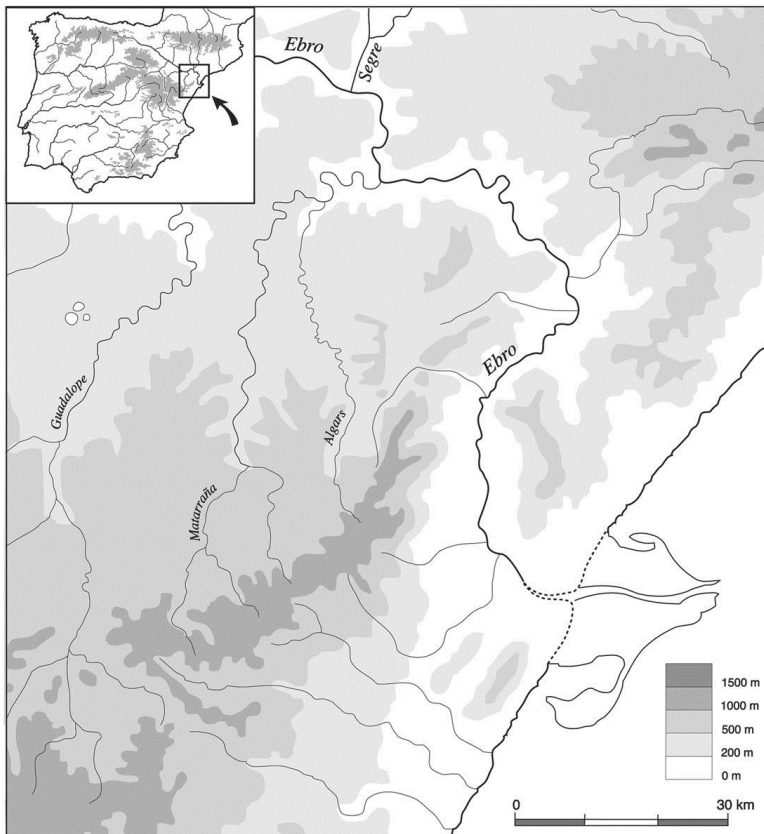
The Quest for Political Complexity. Theoretical Models

The analysis of power structures in ancient societies has gone beyond mere ethnological comparison with the application of new thought from radical sociological schools and such major figures as Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu [10]) and Michel Foucault (Foucault [22]), the leading theorist on institutionalized violence. In the last few decades, interesting studies on political organization have been published by authors who have generally based their models on hierarchical-type organizations of settlements and territories. The aim of our study is not to deny that such models may have existed. However, we draw attention to the possibility of non-hierarchical (heterarchical) structures. We also distinguish between the organization of a territory, which may be hierarchical or heterarchical, and the organization of the inner community itself, which is generally hierarchical.

Service ([45]) suggested that political and social organization generally evolves towards hierarchical complexity. He defined a framework that described the evolutionary process from a politically simple group to the state: 'band, tribe, chiefdom and state'. This approach gave more flexibility to the initial stages ('band' and 'tribe'), but greatly limited the room for manoeuvre of stratified societies ('chiefdom' and 'state'). The essential difference between the stages was that of 'growing complexity'. This was not defined as the richest network of systems, but it was the most hierarchically organized one, as manifested by hierarchies of

power and the attention given to communication systems (Crumley [14]). Service noted, however, that in this increasing complexity from 'band' or 'tribe' to 'state', the term 'hierarchy' did not capture all the possible relationships involved in an organized social and political system (for example, federations, leagues, associations, communities etc.) which would be equally important in a state-wide group organized along more equitable lines. However, social and archaeological theories did not take Service's ideas fully into account and concentrated on determining how the power structures of the hierarchical pyramid worked. The truth is, however, that power flows through various channels and is manifested in hierarchically organized structures (Crumley [14]).

Hierarchies are made up of a variety of elements, some subordinate to others, and can be classified into different types (Crumley [12]). Crumley determined two types of hierarchy: 'scalar' and 'control' (Crumley [13]). In 'scalar hierarchies', all levels can affect all the others. In 'control hierarchies', on the other hand, only top-level decisions affect the other levels. Historical and archaeological analyses have often confused these two terms. Many biological and social structures, however, are not organized hierarchically, which is where the concept of 'heterarchy' comes in: 'Heterarchy may be defined as the relation of elements to one another when they are unranked or when they possess the potential for being ranked in a number of different ways' (Crumley [13], 3). The concept of heterarchy, as opposed to hierarchy, does not envisage only one way of distributing different system inputs into levels; rather it envisages various ways of organization, one of which may be horizontal. Items are related in a way that, though not hierarchical, is certainly complex. In heterarchies, the dominance of one subsystem over the other is never complete nor even almost complete. In hierarchy, complexity increases when the most complex subsystems add new restrictions on those at a lower level of complexity. In heterarchy, however, there is no ordering of these restrictions (Morales [30]).

To sum up, heterarchical social structures are organized differently from hierarchical structures: all items and elements are placed on the same relational plane and treated as equals. At the level of territorial political control and power, for example, in a heterarchical network one settlement does not dominate the others. This does not mean that individual settlements did not organize themselves internally, in particular territories, along hierarchical lines. In fact, we must assume that they did. But in the broader political structure none of them would be more important than any other and formulas such as pacts and cooperation were not required for the whole system to run smoothly.

The concept of heterarchy in protohistoric archaeology in the Iberian Peninsula is used in the works of Alonso Rodríguez in the region of Extremadura (Rodríguez Díaz [38], Rodríguez Díaz et al. [39]). In this area, in the seventh century BC, during the so-called orientalizing period, a political system of territorial control was set up on hierarchical lines, with focuses emerging at such places as La Alcazaba of Badajoz and Medellín. The presence of Tartessian values and symbols provide evidence of increasing socioeconomic differences. A new ideological and religious apparatus was adopted that legitimated power by taking control of ancestral memory, the parental social model was abandoned and was replaced by a pyramidal system with considerable differences between the top and the base (Rodríguez Díaz [38], 190). The new model of social power and hierarchy was based on giving greater importance to the ownership of land than to how it was worked, and the ownership would have been in the

hands of lineages. However, by the end of the sixth century BC the Tartessian regional network had collapsed, causing the hierarchical system to be redefined. Land was still central to the new system and it soon became its main competitive value. In Extremadura, this is known as the post-orientalizing period. The principal change was progressive decentralization: the former 'central places' lost their power and the country gained more influence than the cities. The structure that had emerged from the process of agricultural colonization collapsed and power ended up in the hands of the rural aristocracies, who resided in elegant buildings such as La Mata (Campanario, Badajoz) or Cancho Roano (Zalamea de la Serena, Badajoz). These aristocracies set up a heterarchical system of power and control that was in stark contrast to the territorial hierarchies of the orientalizing period and which lasted until the turn of the fifth to fourth centuries BC.

In the north-east of the Peninsula, the theoretical approach to hierarchical and heterarchical models has provided new explanations for phenomena that have hitherto been explained from neo-evolutionary and material-culture perspectives (Sanmartí [41]). A dichotomy has appeared between hierarchical and heterarchical societies that in some areas compensates for the explanatory shortcomings of the neo-evolutionary model. In regions where there is no clear evidence of urban centres around which the territories are organized, some researchers (Sanmartí [42]) have proposed a heterarchical-type development (Ferré [21]): i.e. new models that may help us to understand the historical evolution of the territory under study.

Taming a Land: the Lower Ebro Protohistoric Landscape

The Lower Ebro is region with a common historical tradition set around the lower course of the river Ebro. The region may be thought of as built up of units: together they encompass the area from the inland watershed of the river Matarraña (a tributary of the Ebro) and Lower Aragon all the way down to the sea and from the north of the Valencian country, with the mountains of Els Ports, across to the Móra basin and the Tivissa mountains (Fig. 1). In the paper we will make reference to these sub-units by name.

First Iron Age I (700–550 BC). Outbreak of segregational elites

From the seventh century BC onwards, substantial social, economic and political transformations took place in the territorial structure of the lower Ebro area that left their mark on the archaeological landscape (Fig. 2). The inhabitants of the region came into contact with the Phoenician traders from the south of the peninsula at what is now generally accepted as being around 700 BC. The family-based communities had to provide the local agents to negotiate with the newcomers. Over time, these agents would come to hold the power over exchanges of prestigious products, in particular wine, a product that was unknown to the natives, and which was redistributed to pay for loyalties, dowries and work, creating a network that increased the power of the individuals who controlled this political capital and who

accordingly became ever more separated from the rest of the social group (Sardà [44]). The importance of wine in the process of growing political complexity is, therefore, huge. To handle the concentration of this luxury product in the territory, buildings such as the one at Aldovesta (Benifallet) (Mascort et al. [29]) were clearly built for the purpose of storage and redistribution (Fig. 3). A small group of the native people controlled the distribution of Phoenician wine among the local population and guaranteed that the metal from the Priorat would end up in the hands of the Phoenician traders. Aldovesta is an isolated building where nearly a hundred Phoenician amphorae and evidence of mineral storage were found.
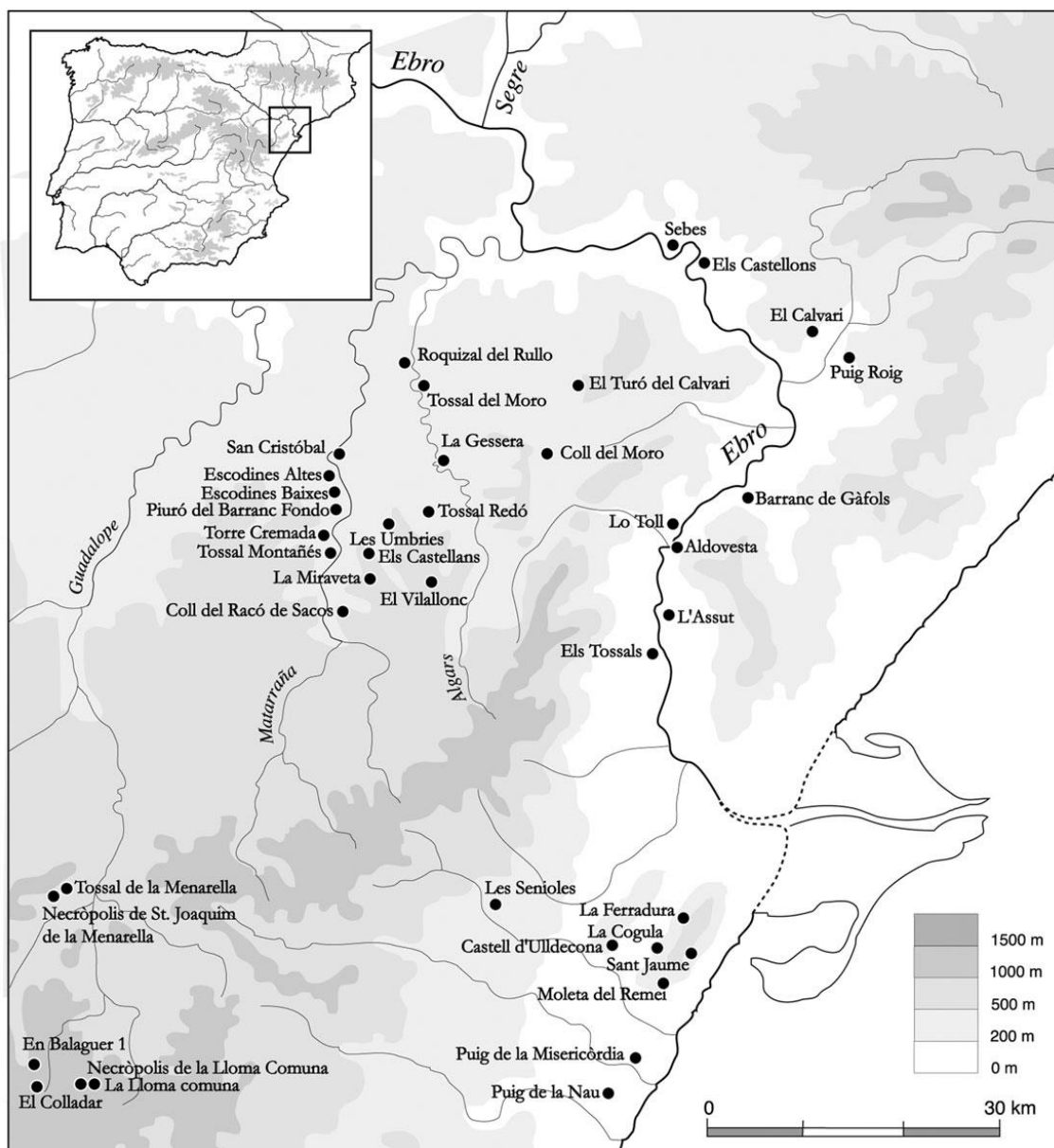

Figura 2. Main First Iron Age I archaeological sites (700–550 BC). (© GRESEPIA).
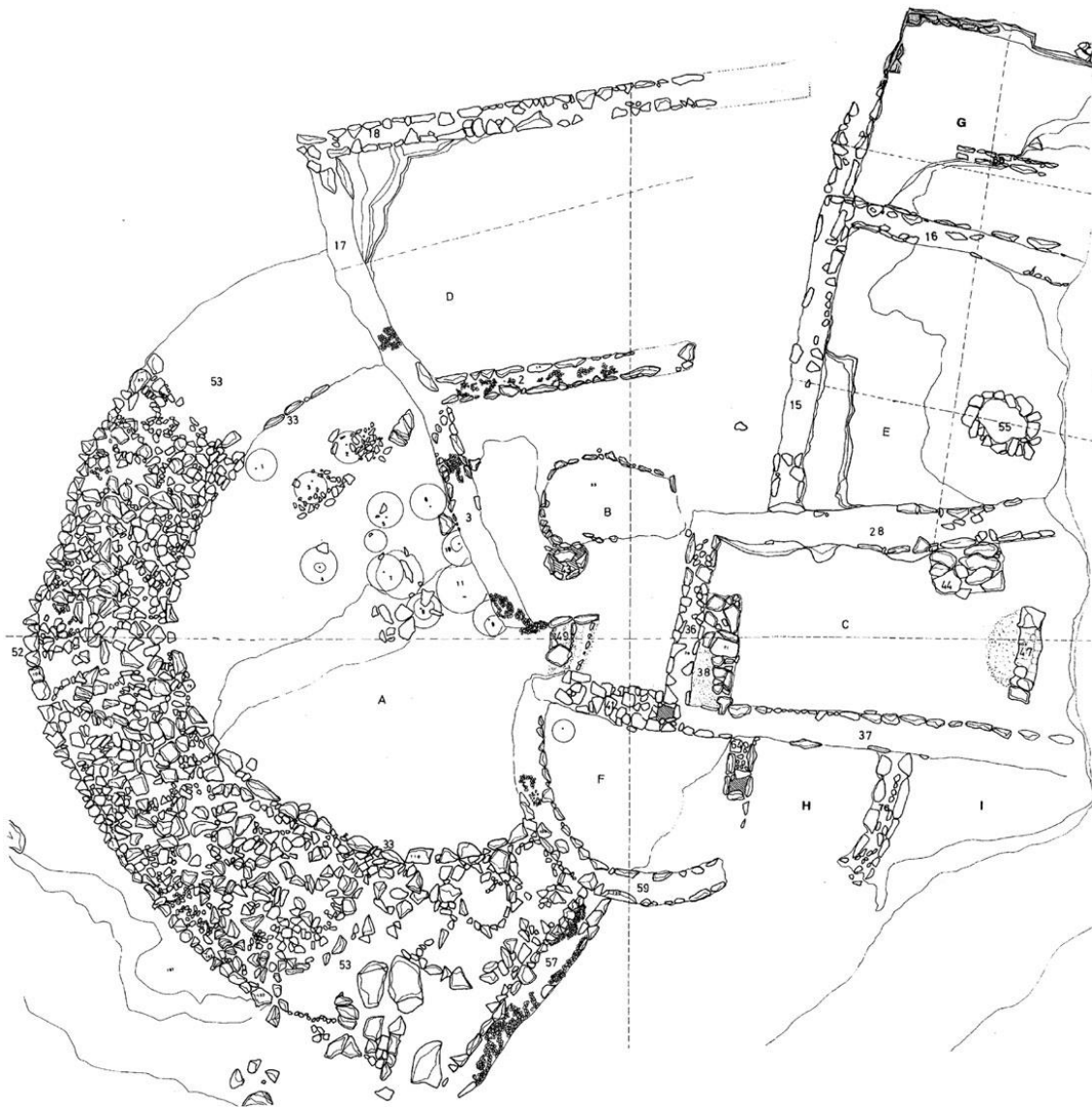
Figura 3. Aldovesta (Benifallet, Baix Ebre, Tarragona). http://calaix.gencat.cat/handle/10687/30937

Up until that point, residential architecture had been of great simplicity and seasonality. At the start of the early Iron Age, however, things began to change and the first forms of proto-urbanism began to emerge. Along with these early settlements, in some regions of the Ebro, fortified buildings of considerable size, such as that at Sant Jaume (Alcanar), were constructed (Garcia [23]; Garcia and Moreno [25], [26]) (Fig. 4). Thus, a strongly symbolic architecture began to emerge, designed specifically to encapsulate the new power relations. There is no doubt that contact with the Phoenicians provided the ideological mind-set required. The fortified structures perfectly express the concept of 'differential architecture' in conjunction with that of 'prestigious architecture' (Bea et al. [8]; Bea [4]). Much has been written about the true functionality of the defensive structures in the Ebro, and much of this is also applicable to the late Iron Age. The first consideration is whether these defensive elements merely served as a way to justify power. In our opinion, their purely protective role cannot be ignored. In addition to their symbolic role, such elements prevent assaults or attacks and define the urban perimeters against an external world of fields and forests. The fortification, then, is an architectural expression that can be clearly distinguished from other more habitual

forms and acquires the status of prestigious architecture when it reaches the rank of a symbol. One clear example is the Turó del Calvari site (Vilalba dels Arcs) (Bea and Diloli [6]; Bea [4]), where the architecture is prestigious and expresses power. Beyond the political symbolism in buildings such as those at Sant Jaume, we need to assess matters such as the protection and defence of the community that lived there and the prestigious goods that were stored there.
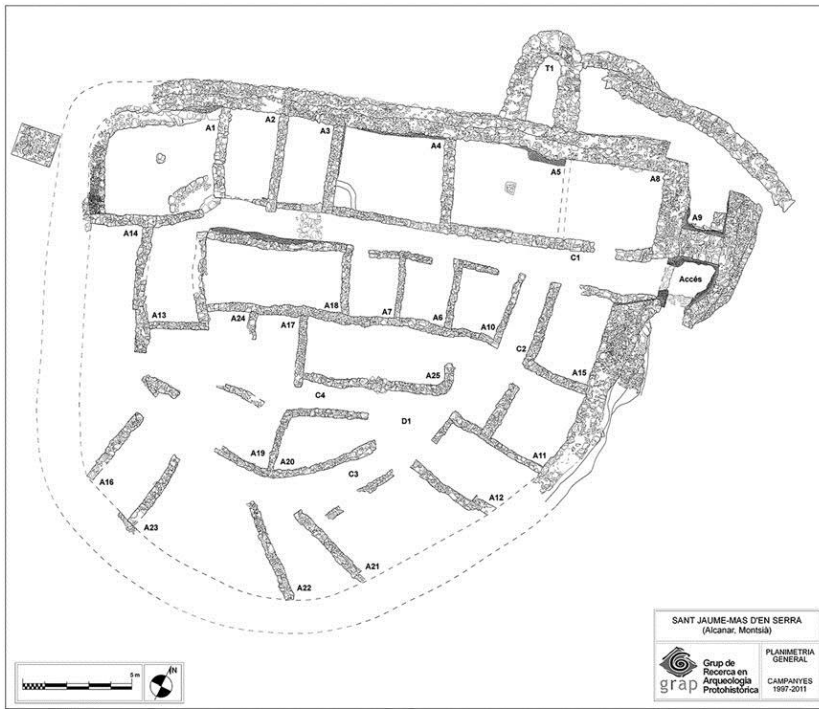
Figura 4. Sant Jaume (Alcanar, Montsià, Tarragona). Map (Bea et al. 2012a, 55, fig. 3) and image (http://www.ub.edu/grap/jaciment1.htm).

The emergence of differential and prestige architecture must have been linked to definite settlements and stable proto-urban areas. It is important to remember that the settlement patterns soon became established with central spaces and streets, and that they are to be

found in the Ebro valley (especially on the western plain). These are particularly located in the region along the courses of the rivers Segre and Cinca. The oldest examples are found in the inland areas of the Lower Ebro region, e.g. at the settlement of Roquizal del Rullo (Fabara), which is relatively close to the confluence of the above-mentioned rivers and the Ebro; they date back to the ninth and eighth centuries BC (Ruiz Zapatero [40]). The central space mentioned above was the easiest way to impose order on the stable proto-urban formula of the early Iron Age. However, there exists more than just one pattern of the habitational area. In some cases, such as La Ferradura (Ulldecona) (Garcia et al. [24]; Bea et al. [7]) and Les Escodines Baixes (Mazaleón) (Fatás [20]), the domestic units were arranged in a single line. However, in the second quarter of the sixth century BC new approaches to spatial organization have been found. For example, Barranc de Gàfols II was laid out in what looks like an attempt at a Hippodameian street-grid, if a little askew (Benifallet) (Sanmartí et al. [43]).

Determining exactly what sort of social and political structures developed in the lower course of the Ebro as a result of contact with the Phoenician traders is also a complex issue. In our opinion, from the seventh century BC onwards, a fully hierarchical control system was established with no differences detectable throughout the territory. The arrival of Phoenician wine and its distribution by leading figures in society led to a considerable concentration of political capital in the hands of those who controlled the bartering system in the territory, from centres of power such as Aldovesta or Sant Jaume. The rest of the population settled in small villages with proto-urban plans. In some cases, such as Barranc de Gàfols II, the inhabited area had already been occupied in the late Bronze Age. In other cases, new settlements were created. At the current point of our research, it seems quite clear that territorial control was hierarchical: centres of power (Sant Jaume, Aldovesta, etc.) redistributed prestigious assets so as to create an agricultural territory of small nuclei (Barranc de Gàfols, la Ferradura, etc.).

Opinion is divided about whether the system was aristocratic. Researchers at the Sant Jaume site argue that there was a political entity south of the Ebro estuary in the seventh century BC (Garcia and Moreno [25]), called the 'Complex Sant Jaume (CSJ)', with a clear array of aristocratic arrangements and the establishment of lineage and inheritance. However, we believe that this first attempt to politically hierarchize the territory did not last long enough to establish a pattern of aristocratic elites. Clearly, this would have occurred if the system had not collapsed sometime around the first half of the sixth century BC. In our opinion, what had been established was a full hierarchy of simple entities that did not yet have a system of aristocratic lineage and inheritance, at least as expressed in the way that has been observed in other Mediterranean societies such as the Etruscan (Bea [4]). This process though occurred in the next phase, the First Iron Age II (roughly 550–450/425 BC).

This territorial structure came to a violent end around 550 BC. Many of the settlements, including Sant Jaume and Aldovesta, were abandoned after violent fires. Though it is still open to debate, it appears that the disappearance of the Phoenician trade from the south of the Peninsula in roughly 575 BC resulted in a loss of political capital among the emerging elites, causing social tensions that led to riots and the destruction of settlements. Thus, this first attempt at the hierarchization of the territory collapsed after a short time and a new, clearly heterarchic and aristocratic system emerged.

On the move. The corporate elites

At this juncture, we need to explain the role of an exceptional and prestigious architectural structure: the Turó del Calvari at Vilalba dels Arcs in the inner lands (Bea and Diloli [6]; Bea [4]) (Fig. 5). It was a rectangular two-storey building with two rooms and two rounded apsidal ends, set on a platform carved into the natural underlying rock. It had a double perimeter wall that was roughly 1.50 m wide and a total occupied area of 100 m2. The floor area for each room was around 48.5 m2. Located by itself on an isolated hill, it was perfectly visible from the surrounding countryside. It also faced the entry to a ravine through which a stream flowed northwards into the Ebro some 20 km away. The chronology of its use is short, running roughly from 590 to 550 BC. The construction of this isolated enclosure with such ostentatious architecture and which contained numerous clearly liturgical items (ceramic vessels for holding offerings, altar tables, Phoenician-type crockery, wine amphorae, and pithoi, etc.) (Sardà [44]) illustrates the emergence of social and political segregation. The centre also had certain specialised functions that clearly involved ritual practices and may have been related to astronomical cycles (Pérez et al. [34]).
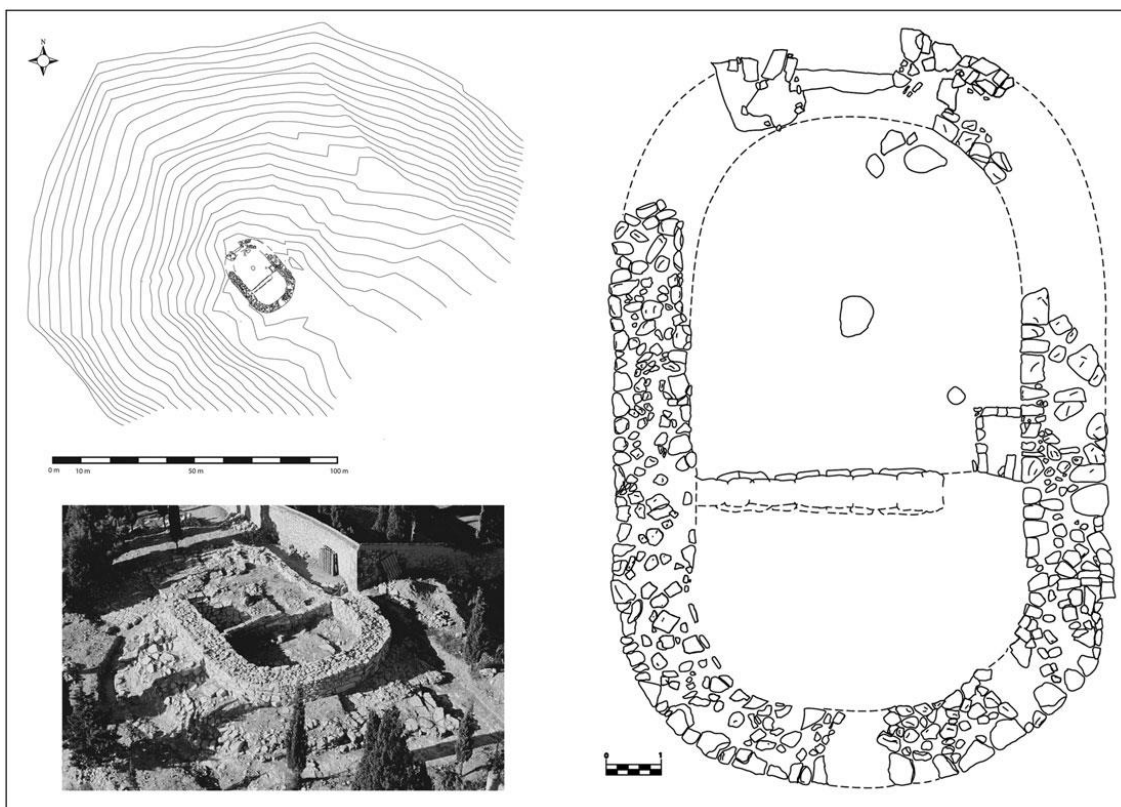
Figura 5. Turó del Calvari de Vilalba dels Arcs (Terra Alta, Tarragona). (© GRESEPIA).

The building is located in the centre of the plateau currently known as the Terra Alta, half way between the Ebro and the Matarraña river valley, which flows through Lower Aragon. At present there are no known occupied sites around the building. We believe that it may have been located on the boundary of a stretch of uninhabited land acting as a buffer zone, a

population black hole, between the Ebro and the inner lands of the Matarraña area. We agree with the hypothesis that the building was maintained by an integrated system of corporate elites controlled by several heads of lineage, who used it as a representative and perhaps ritual site (Bea [4]). The celebration of exclusive feasts may symbolize this corporatism, together with a sense of cooperation in consolidating the various segregational powers (Sardà [44]). When these corporate elites matured sufficiently to establish their own relational networks in a non-dependent structure, the Turó del Calvari must have lost significance: it ceased to exist at the same time as the emergence of sumptuary burial sites, such as the tomb at Les Ferreres or La Clota (Calaceite), and the probable deposition of heirlooms (Rafel [35], [36]). In this regard, it is important to remember the role of shrines devoted to heroes, as well as other symbolic sites, that epitomize this frontier spirit (Lavin [28], Birge [9]). Moreover, the Turó del Calvari is situated at the boundaries of areas where traditional funerary mounds existed: these emerged in the latter stages of the Bronze Age and the beginning of the early Iron Age. Perhaps this fact explains the absence of a settlement around this strange building.

First Iron Age II (550–450/425 BC). Aristocrats and warriors

About the middle of the sixth century BC, a new attempt was made to establish an aristocratic system of power (Fig. 6). The most visible manifestation of this was the emergence of fortified houses. This phenomenon implies the post-crisis emergence of an isolated aristocratic population that essentially represents the victory of the old segregational approaches practised between 650 and 550 BC (Moret [31]; Moret et al. [33]; Bea [4]). This population uses a different type of architecture, among other things, to show off their power (Diloli and Bea [16]). Territorially speaking, this model was much more widespread; its start can be traced to the first half of the sixth century BC (at least in the case of En Balaguer 1 and the Coll del Moro). It was not limited to the inner lands, since examples of this architecture in the mountainous region of Els Ports (En Balaguer 1), the Terra Alta-Lower Aragon region (Tossal Montañés and Coll del Moro; Figs. 7 and 8, respectively) and near the Ebro estuary (Tower T-3 of L'Assut; Fig. 9) illustrate that the phenomenon was quite extensive (Barrachina et al. [3]; Diloli [15]). There are several reasons why we postulate an aristocratic model in which the inheritance or sharing of power must have played a major role. Firstly, the system itself, whereby the territory is controlled by establishing tiny fortified communities, implies that the people know how to exploit local resources and subsist; but these communities had also to be integrated into a network of relationships with the rest of the scattered population. More important, perhaps, are the prestigious tomb markers such as those at Les Ferreres, with its offering stand and exquisite bronze armour; La Clota, with its imitation of a Cypriot rod tripod (Rafel [35]); and the loculi necropoleis of the lower course of the Ebro, with its many weapons and prestigious items. In the inner lands, where funerary mounds were the traditional burial system, the progressive replacement of these structures by loculi is clearly observed, for example, in the Sector Maries of the necropolis at Coll del Moro (Gandesa) (Rafel et al. [37]). This pattern indicates that something was changing socially and politically in the middle or perhaps in the second quarter of the sixth century BC. There also seems to be an association between fortified houses and sumptuous tombs at the Torre Cremada site, which is relatively

close to the fortified residence of Tossal Montañés II (both in Valdeltormo) (Moret et al. [33]), at the Les Ferreres tomb, and at the Les Umbries (Calaceite) settlement (Fatás [20]), where a bi-apsidal structure has been documented that may be a fortified house.
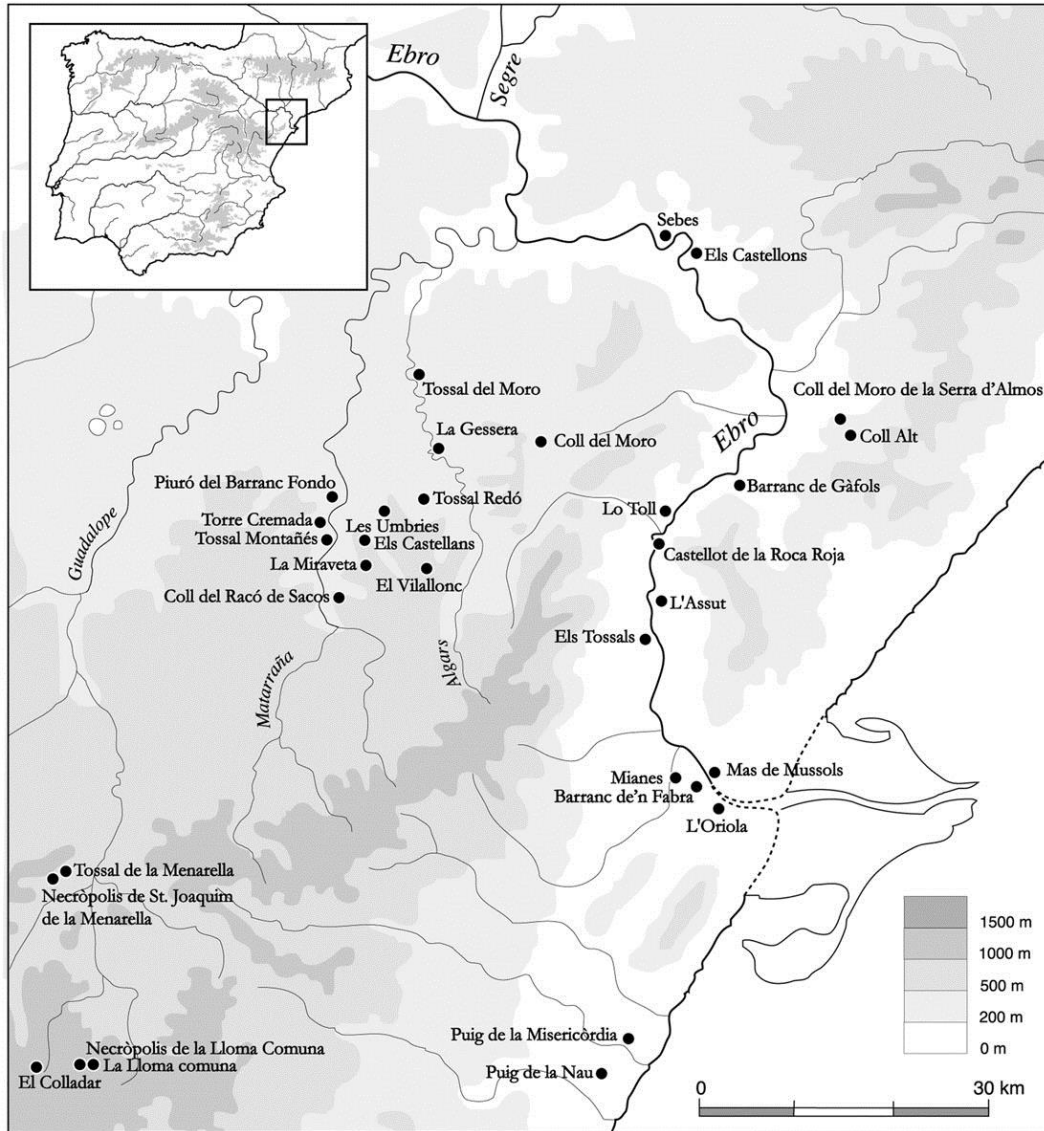

Figura 6. Main First Iron Age II archaeological sites (550–450/425 BC). (© GRESEPIA).
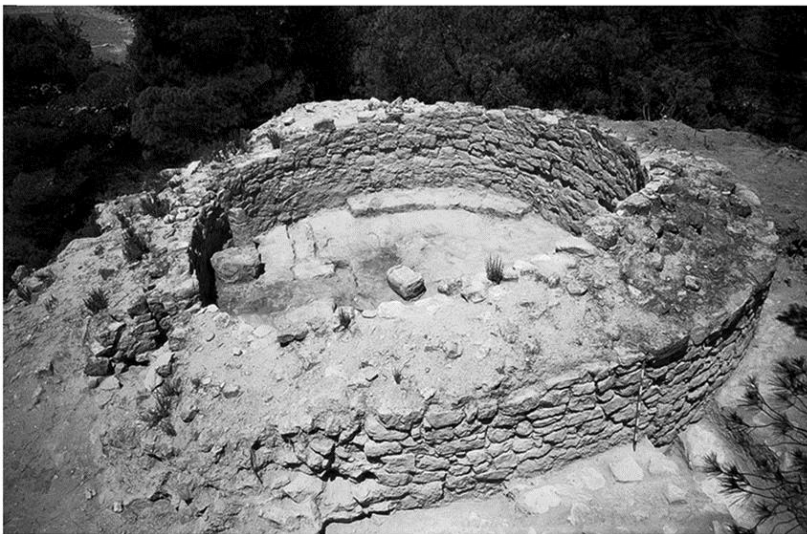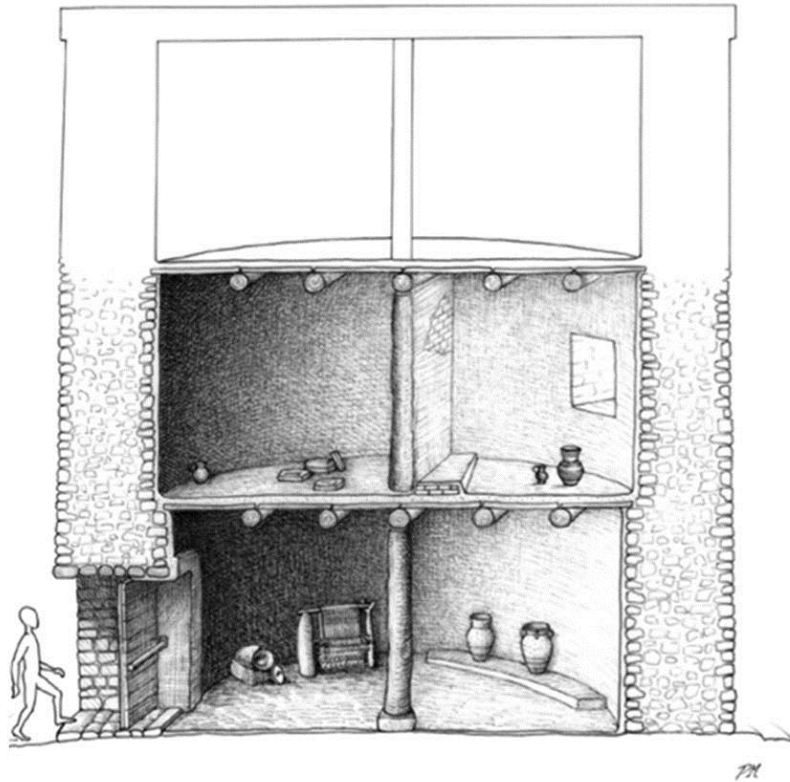
Figura 7. Tossal Montañés (Valdeltormo, Matarranya, Teruel). Hypothetical restitution of the tower-house, after Moret (Moret et al. 2006, 46, fig. 34) and view of the tower-house (ibid., 32, fig. 17).
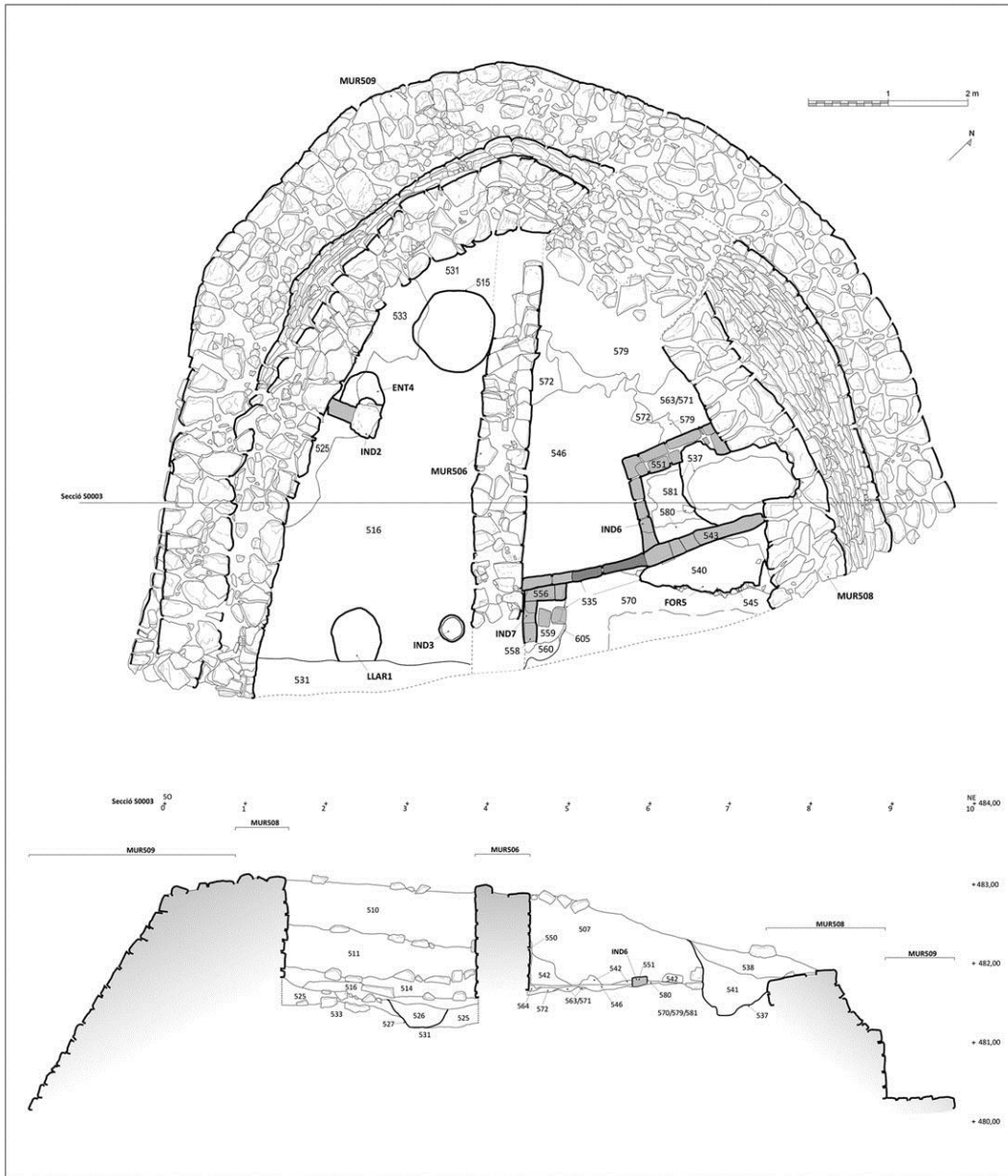
Figura 8. Coll del Moro de Gandesa (Terra Alta, Tarragona) (Rafel et al. 2014, 120).
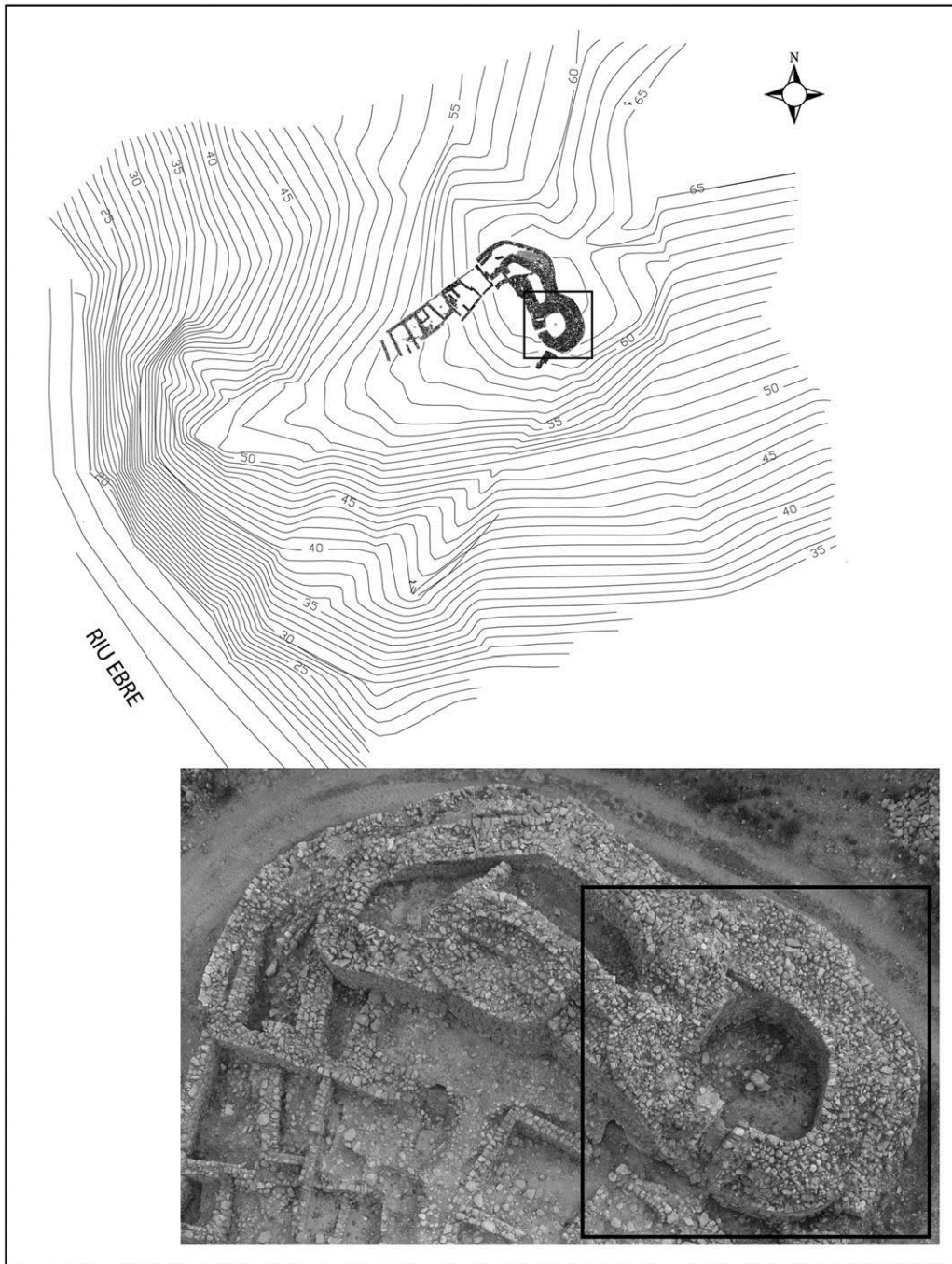
Figura 9. L'Assut (Tivenys, Baix Ebre, Tarragona). Detail of tower T-3. (© GRESEPIA).

The emergence of an elite can be thus observed: one that transformed the prevailing system of social relations, adopted aristocratic features such as demonstrating their status through residence and funeral rites, abandoned earlier necropoleis, and developed new funeral sites with different rituals and different ways of treating the remains and grave goods and where aristocratic elements, especially weapons, were on display (Rafel et al. [37]). The presence of the graves of children associated with weapons demonstrates the existence of an accepted familial status irrespective of the actual age of the deceased, an affirmation of lineages immersed in processes of competition and ideological self-identification (Rafel et al. [37]).

Archaeological evidence reveals an organization based on small territorial spaces controlled from fortified residences that made up a heterarchic network of power, although to date we have still been unable to prove the existence of a major centre that hierarchically organized the territory. Rather, there existed numerous strong hierarchical micro-territories formed into a network of horizontal relations. The archaeological landscape is mainly made up of fortified residences: towers (circular fortifications) or fortified dwellings (non-circular constructions) with considerable defensive features, inhabited by powerful groups that governed territories populated by small villages or proto-urban settlements. This exemplar may be the best model for explaining the concept of heterarchy and heterotopic territories at a similar organizational phase. So settlements such as Coll del Moro de la Serra d'Almos, in Tivissa, phase 1 (tower T3) of L'Assut, in Tivenys, the tower at Coll del Moro, in Gandesa, Gessera de Caseres (Fig. 10), Tossal Montañés, in Valdeltormo, Puig de la Misericòrdia in Vinaròs, En Balaguer, in Portell de Morella or the Lloma Comuna al Forcall all had this role of fortified residences, from which the region could be ordered and controlled, with no evidence of any hierarchical organization amongst themselves.
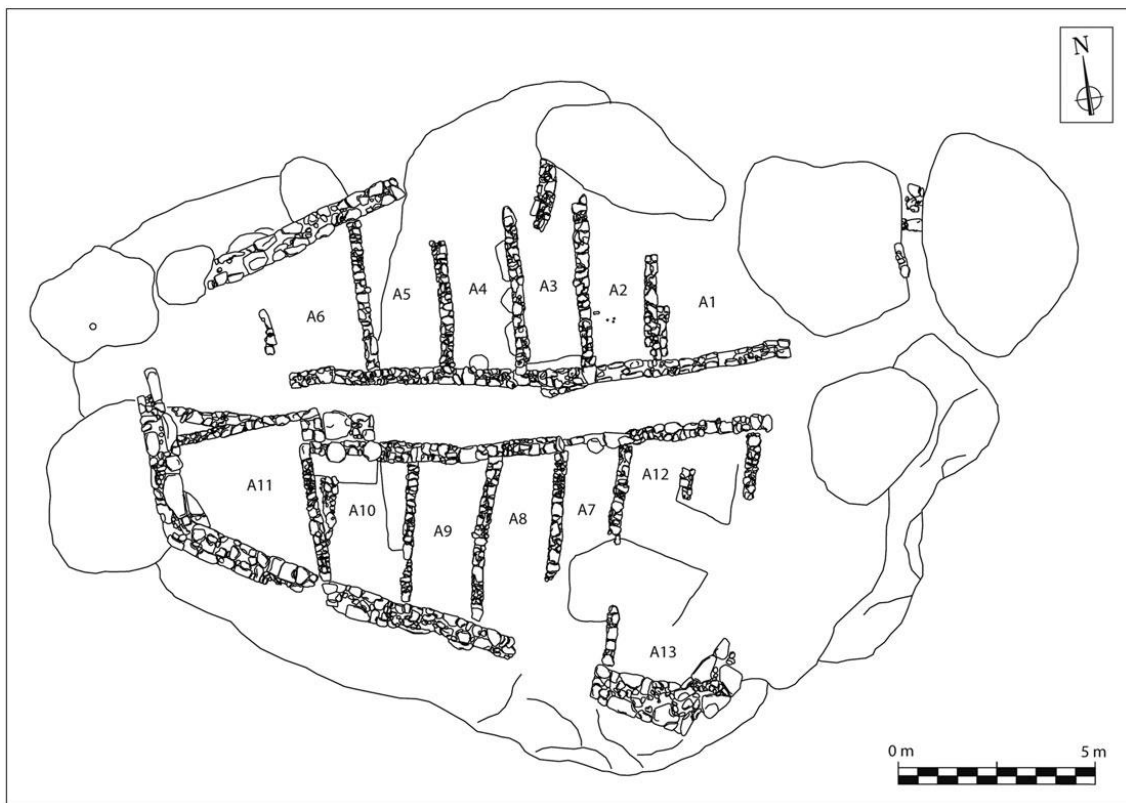
Figura 10. Map of La Gessera (Caseres, Terra Alta, Tarragona). (© GRESEPIA).

The situation collapsed around the middle of the fifth century BC, when the fortified houses were destroyed, although this reading of circumstances is still under study. Researchers have sought to provide a reason for this collapse. One proposal is that a relationship expressed by coercion and tight control of the land by the elites of the fortified houses, increasingly possessive of the means of production, must have gradually increased social discontent, which led to the failure of the system (Moret et al. [33]). According to its proponents, this

explanation would apply to the Matarraña and, by extension, to the whole Lower Aragon region, since this is the only area where ostentatious graves have been documented. However, we believe that it could also be applied to the lower Ebro region since the importance of segregation and resultant social tension, as witnessed by the loculi of the river slopes, should be considered (Sardà [44]; Bea [4]). Another suggestion is that while social leaders gradually increased their possession of prestige goods, those whose labours underpinned production did not. This would have led to greater social inequality and the imposition of forms of domination differing from those of parental schemes, and would lead ultimately to the failure of the aristocratic system. The hierarchization process would never actually reach fruition under these conditions, because the cultural and productive basis underwent insufficient changes (Rafel et al. [37]).

Without rejecting these theories, we can use the archaeological data to make another proposal: this suggests that this system came to an end when new population groups arrived in the territory as from the middle of the fifth century BC (Diloli et al. [17]). Their appearance not only signalled the end of the aristocratic tower-houses, but was also one of the most obvious reasons for the emergence in the region of the high density of small- and medium-sized Iberian settlements that can be dated to 450–425 BC (Diloli et al. [17]). This account would also explain the integration of some of these earlier residences in new settlements (for example, the T3 tower at L'Assut de Tivenys or the tower at Coll del Moro in Gandesa.

Second Iron Age I (450/425–250/225 BC). The heterarchy of Iberian chiefdoms

As mentioned above, during the second half of the fifth century BC, the Ebro territory underwent an important transformation (Fig. 11). A network of village-type settlements, all of a similar size and type, was set up: they were all located at high points, walled, and controlled small agricultural areas. This became the pattern of occupation that was to remain in place until the arrival of the Romans. The demographic increase that caused this growth can be explained only by the arrival of human groups from some territory from not too far afield. There was established a pattern of medium-sized settlements (many with an area of about 1000 m2 and only a few with an area of 3000 m2) that could manage a territory of a size to offer considerable agricultural potential. According to the mechanics of migration (rejection/attraction phenomena) such as those described in the wave-of-advance model (Anthony [1]), the low population density in this area before the middle of the fifth century BC cannot have given rise to such a dense population at this time. We have found no explanation for this demographic boom that does not involve the injection of a new human contingent (Diloli et al. 2014). Perhaps crises in the aristocratic systems of other areas caused small-scale migrations to economically attractive lands where the impact of the collapse was not thought so severe.
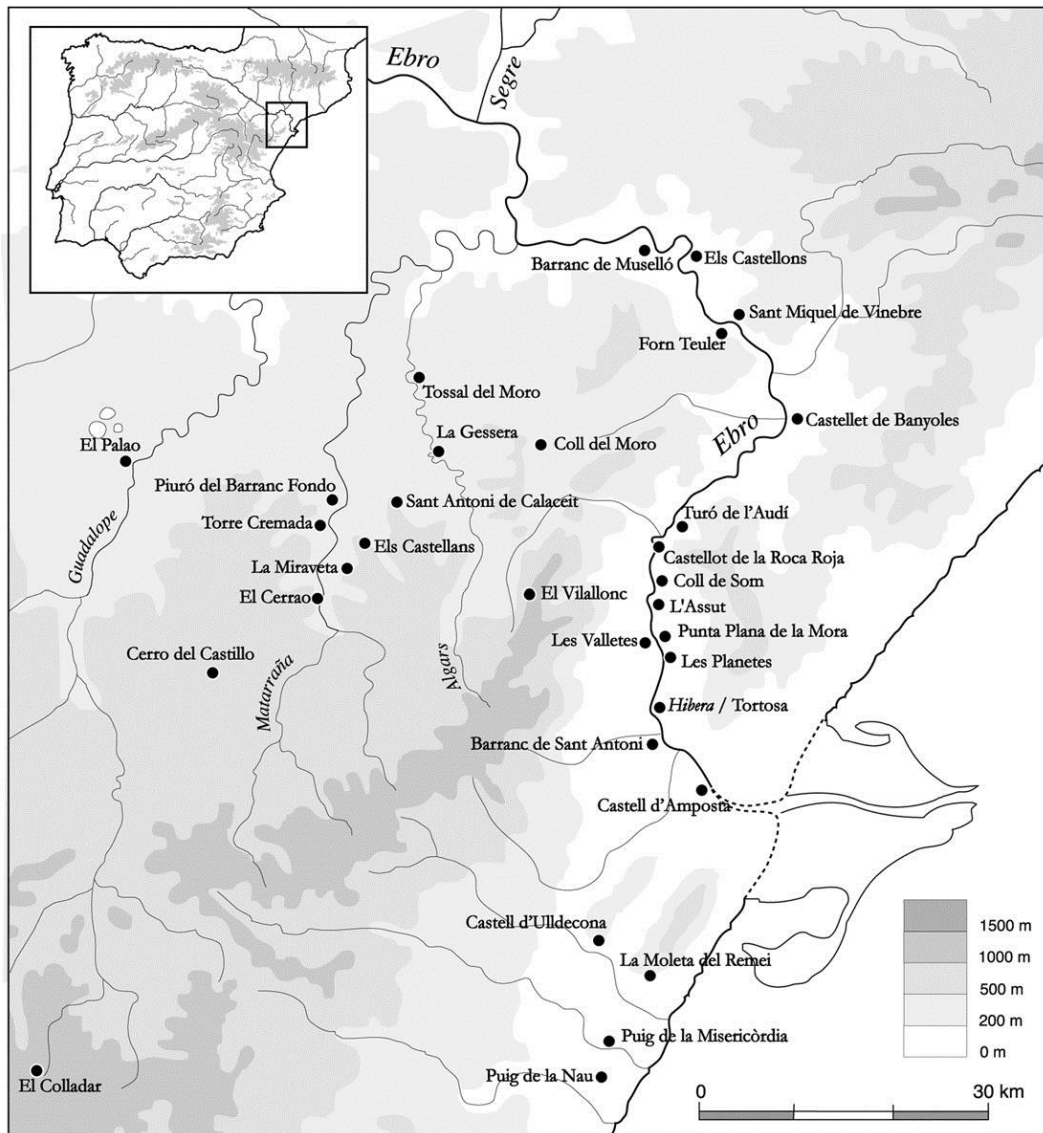
Figura 11. Main Second Iron Age archaeological sites. (© GRESEPIA).

Thus, the last quarter of the 5th century BC saw the emergence of settlements such as El Barranc de Muselló, Els Castellons 2, Turó de l'Audí, Castellot de la Roca Roja, L'Assut, Les Valletes, Les Planetes, Castell d'Amposta, Sant Antoni de Calaceit, Coll del Moro, and the re-occupation of settlements abandoned during the early Iron Age such as La Moleta del Remei or La Gessera.

Located on high points of great strategic importance, the settlements appear to belong to a hill-fort-chiefdom model such as the one proposed by Earle, with no clear hierarchical prevalence at a regional level (Earle [19]). From what we know of these villages, there is no reason to believe that they are secondary nuclei, dependent on or subordinate to a theoretical core. In the territory in which they were located, up to the third century BC they all formed part of a group of higher rank settlements with areas of less than one hectare. The supremacy of a large settlement in Tortosa on La Suda or Sant Joan hill, though possible, has not been archaeologically confirmed, or at least not before the end of the third century BC (Diloli and Ferré [18]). The settlements were very similar, or at any rate had very similar patterns of occupation. There is no sign of individual prestige and any differential architecture, at least up

to the end of the third century BC, consisted merely of numerous fortifications with the undoubtedly functional purpose of protecting the inhabitants of the village. We also have to accept the possibility of some sociopolitical system in which a visible manifestation of the power representing the independence of the community is not created in response to a potential threat, but to more to demonstrate the eminence of the aristocracy.

Other markers are also significant at a sociopolitical level. The disappearance of necropoleis in the early fourth century BC throughout the Lower Ebro region has been interpreted as a sign that the aristocratic way-of-life was gaining in strength (Sanmartí [42]). However, in our opinion, there are no signs in the record of a 'powerful aristocracy'. What is clear to us is that the ritual of death changes, perhaps as a result of the new sociopolitical reality observable from roughly 450/425 BC onwards, where death is not manifested differently for different members of the community, but is expressed by an equality that leaves no visible traces in the archaeology. Perhaps this is a sign that social divisions had diminished and that a class system operating even in the world of death was no longer needed, just as there was no clear class distinction in the land of the living.

This scheme, which lasted with few changes up to the end of the third century BC, should also be interpreted in terms of a heterarchical network. The settlements appear to have belonged to the same formal category and therefore to have been politically equal, forming a multiplicity of small local authorities that operated on the same level in a network and were not subordinate to a hierarchically superior political core. However, in other aspects the territory may have been hierarchically organized internally with constant and multidimensional interaction. The economy, for example, depended mainly on production capacity and access to resources. We would therefore be observing a specific settlement model for the territory, one made up of villages with similar characteristics that control small adjacent territories and that may be organized along some form of territorial hierarchy, but that yet have no substantial differences between them. It was not until the third century BC that this structure underwent a change. This change, which was linked to the emergence of urban centres such as Castellet de Banyoles and Hibera, generated a new model that, as we shall see, did not last very long.

Second Iron Age II (250/225–125 BC). Cities, aristocratic hierarchies and early states

The panorama changed again at about the second half of the third century BC. For the first time, the settlement pattern was substantially transformed and in some sub-regions politically dominant centres were set up, e.g. at Castellet de Banyoles (Tivissa) (Fig. 12) (Asensio et al. [2]; Moret [32]; Bea et al. [5]) and especially at the large fortified oppidum in Tortosa (Fig. 13) (Diloli and Ferré [18]).

Figura 12. Map of Castellet de Banyoles (Tivissa, Ribera d'Ebre, Tarragona) (Asensio et al. 2012, fig. 1, 174).

Figura 13. Iberian archaeological remains located at the foot of La Suda hill – Hibera (Tortosa, Baix Ebre, Tarragona).

As stated above, the emergence of cities comprises the first clear expression of a fully hierarchical organization, at least in the territory identified by the ilercavoni ethnic niche, in a polynuclear model in which the La Suda-Sant Joan hill in Tortosa, probably Iltirca-Ilerca (Hibera) (Diloli and Ferré [18]), became the political centre of the southern territory, and the oppidum of Castellet de Banyoles in Tivissa became the political centre of the northern. In

Lower Aragon, from the third century BC, the settlement of El Palao in Alcañiz should also be interpreted as the head of a hierarchized territory, probably associated with the ositani ethnic grouping (Burillo [11]). Sant Antoni II (Calaceite) (Moret et al. [33]), with its large houses, cellars and weaponry, may also be a response to these changing political dynamics. If we consider that the stelae of Lower Aragon can be dated to the end of the third century BC (Moret et al. [33]), the political system should be that of a strong warlike aristocracy or, at least, one with a greater presence than that observed in the first two centuries of the second Iron Age. The site at Castellans II (Cretas) indicates a small settlement with a strong axial defensive structure that may represent the need or desire for segregation by prominent aristocratic groups (Fatás [20]).

This sociopolitical reality has tended to be interpreted as an archaic state: the evidence does seem to point in this direction. At Castellet de Banyoles there are samples of writing and coinage (Tarradell-Font [46]; Burillo [11]) and obvious signs of an aristocratic cult in a possible sanctuary paved with mudbricks (Asensio et al. [2]) and a set of silver vessels that were recovered in the early twentieth century. The issuance of coins with the legend Usekerte in the Lower Aragon region illustrates a similar dynamic (Moret et al. [33]). Most evident, however, is the centrality of the political system, whether or not this was polynuclear. However, things are probably not so simple in actuality. It is difficult to determine whether some structures approximating statehood were in place or whether social structures were still those of chiefdoms in some form or another, perhaps the staple-finance ones defined by Earle (Earle [19]) or, more specifically, a system of complex entities in which the oppida control the various simpler chiefdoms through the persona of an aristocratic and dominant figure like paramount chiefs, though not invested with the attributes of royalty (Bea [4]). Nor can we ignore the possibility of systems similar to those defining the archaic state, such as confederations and super-complex chiefdoms (Grinin [27]). What seems eminently clear though is that the political relationship had changed and that the hierarchy of the territory and the organizational form of power was much stronger, which coincides with references to sources of ilercavoni and ositani ethnic consciousness. This ethnic consciousness may not have arisen at this time: perhaps it first appeared between the fifth and the fourth centuries BC at the time of the heterarchic simple chiefdom model. However, it seems reasonable to suggest that these ethnic groups, which behaved in different ways in different sub-regions, achieved their political entity only when the territory became fully hierarchized. Whether we are dealing with archaic state structures or not, it is reasonable to believe that if it had not been for the Roman conquest, these complex entities – at least the ilercavoni – would have become highly centralized states.

Second Iron Age III (125 BC–change of era). Conquest and Roman domination

From the first quarter of the second century BC onwards, the presence of the Romans led to a series of changes in the region. Though the Iberian settlements survived, they had to adapt to the new Roman sociopolitical and economic ways. The territorial structure was not further destabilized because the Roman treasury required continuity in production. Only in some cases was there any systematic total (Castellet de Banyoles) or partial (L'Assut Tower T3)

destruction, and this was always the result of military or political necessity. At the end of the second century BC, the nascent Iberian states saw their emergence cut short and their elites were forced to adapt to new ways and submit politically to Rome.

Romanization was a period of continuous, uninterrupted change spread over several phases (Bea et al. [5]). During the first phase, which lasted up to the third century BC, pre-existing Iberian establishments were largely maintained, though, as we have mentioned, one of the main regional centres – Castellet de Banyoles – was violently destroyed. From the last third of the second century BC onwards, these settlements were abandoned and sometimes replaced by small rural communities without fortifications that adapted to the ways of Roman production. The cities that survived depended politically on Rome and may have received incentives to play the role of regional intermediary. This would have boosted their growth and given them a new, more clearly defined control over the territory. From the second century BC onwards, therefore, a very indigenous political process was truncated and the native population had to adapt to a new geopolitical model that gradually morphed into a much more globalized model run by Rome. In this region, the municipalization of Hibera at the time of Caesar put a final end to the Iberian political, social and economic ways, which were ultimately replaced by those of the Romans.

Conclusions

The political process we propose in this paper is quite complex. Although it is obviously a theory and must be evaluated as such, it could be used as a new avenue for developing research. Further archaeological work should increase the volume of data available and determine whether our hypotheses can be accepted.

The first conclusion from our study is that the sequential model, at least for the Lower Ebro region, which includes inland areas such as Matarraña and the north of the Valencian country, needs to be re-assessed. Our new proposal is based solely on sociopolitical evolutionary parameters (i.e. we have defined the chronological phases that structure the process drawing on the social and political perspectives and without considering questions of material culture). The result is an early Iron Age extending from approximately 700 BC to 450/425 BC, divided into two sub-periods. The most important consequence of this is the elimination of the so-called 'ancient Iberian period'.

In our opinion, the process of political evolution that began at the end of the seventh century BC developed continually until the collapse of the aristocratic pattern of living based on fortified dwellings. As we have seen, it continued from the beginning of the Iron Age to the year 550 BC and the failure of the first attempts at the development of an aristocracy. After this date began a secondary period in which the aristocratic model predominated until about 450/425 BC, when there was a sudden increase in the population now organized in the territory by the construction of small or medium-sized settlements at highly strategic points. This was the start of the so-called Iberian period. This system seems to have changed further

from the middle of the 3rd century BC, when the territory was directed by centres of power in a structure that resembled that of the archaic state.

In the second aspect of our analysis we also depart from linear evolutionary patterns based on hierarchical powers and introduce that of heterachic variables. We propose a series of ups and downs in the evolution of sociopolitical peasant communities during the first millennium BC: their main objective (i.e. the creation of a territorially hierarchical system rooted in aristocratic values) undergoes adjustments, collapses and revivals that clearly slow down the development of early state models. The emergence of solutions such as corporatism between elites clearly suggests that an effort was made to create strong aristocratic hierarchies, though in our opinion this was not achieved until the end of the third century BC. We believe caution is required even regarding the implementation of the concept of the state: though if the Roman conquest had been delayed, the hierarchical city model would probably have led to this end. In any case, the Romans, who dismantled the indigenous models in favour of their own, nevertheless allowed ancient ways – albeit subordinate to Rome's – to survive for almost a century. The conquest and romanization of the territory finally put an end to Iberian culture.

Joint hierarchical and heterarchical models go beyond the linear evolutionary dialectics that have generally been used to study the structure of societies. Local communities of little political complexity are no longer the starting point that gradually develops into a state. Rather the path proposed is that models that theoretically appear to be verging on state levels in some eras can be replaced by heterarchical ones in subsequent ones. Although in the seventh century BC the system in the lower reaches of the Ebro tended towards a developing hierarchy and each weakly coupled subsystem acted in its own interests, yet as from the middle of the sixth century BC a heterarchical period was initiated. The emerging aristocracies were on an equal footing, though controlling the land and other resources and living in fortified homesteads. At this point, no hierarchy existed amongst them: that is to say, the centre-periphery dynamic did not play a major role. However, each heterarchical subsystem did organize its own portion of territory in its own hierarchical way.

In fact, it was not until the emergence of the city (Ilerca-Hibera, Castellet de Banyoles at Tivissa) that a clearly hierarchical organizational system was to be seen for the first time, not at the community level but in the form of a political, economic and social territorial network. Perhaps we can speak of an archaic state or a system of complex entities in which the oppida, or the major settlements, controlled the various local leaders of the fifth and fourth centuries on into the first half of the third century BC. In these centres of power, a major aristocratic figure (a paramount chief, as it were) held the reins of power, though still he lacked the attributes of royalty.

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