

THE OLIVAL DO SENHOR DOS MÁRTIRES NECROPOLIS (ALCÁCER DO SAL, PORTUGAL) DURING THE LATE IRON AGE: NEW SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND CULTURAL INSIGHTS

La necrópolis de Olival do Senhor dos Mártires (Alcácer do Sal, Portugal) en la Segunda Edad del Hierro: nuevas lecturas sociales, políticas y culturales

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ABSTRACT: In the necropolis of Olival do Senhor dos Mártires (Alcácer do Sal, Portugal) the transition to the Late Iron Age was marked by an important transformation both in burial rites and in material culture which seems to point to significant ideological, social and political changes. These changes can be compared to those documented around the same dates in other areas of the Iberian Peninsula and the Mediterranean basin. It is in fact possible to track the emergence of warrior elites in the funerary record, a trend that could be part of an overall transition towards aristocratic political forms. The development of this new political status quo seems to be accompanied by a reorientation of the supra-regional relations of the community of Alcácer do Sal. This is particularly reflected in a number of convergences with the social representation formulae of the Iberian elites of the Southeast and the Levant.

Key words: Archaeology of Death; funerary practices; social identities; ideology; ‘iberization’.

RESUMEN: La transición hacia la Segunda Edad del Hierro en la necrópolis del Olival do Senhor dos Mártires (Alcácer do Sal, Portugal) estuvo marcada por importantes transformaciones a nivel de los ritos y de los ajuares funerarios. Estos parecen señalar cambios ideológicos, sociales y políticos igualmente importantes, comparables con los que se documentan por las mismas fechas en otros ámbitos peninsulares y circunmediterráneos. Se aprecia, de hecho, la aparente afirmación de élites guerreras, quizás en el marco de una transición hacia fórmulas políticas de tipo aristocrático. El desarrollo de esta nueva realidad política parece ir acompañado por una reordenación de las relaciones suprarregionales de la comunidad de Alcácer do Sal, como atestiguan múltiples convergencias con las fórmulas de representación social propias de las élites íberas del Sureste y Levante peninsulares.

Palabras clave: Arqueología de la Muerte; prácticas funerarias; identidades sociales; ideología; ‘iberización’.

1. A brief introduction

The necropolis of Olival do Senhor dos Mártires –henceforth OSM–, roughly one kilometre to the

west of the corresponding settlement which lays beneath the castle and the historic centre of Alcácer do Sal (Fig. 1, no. 1; Fig. 2), is perhaps the most extensively studied Iron Age necropolis in the southern

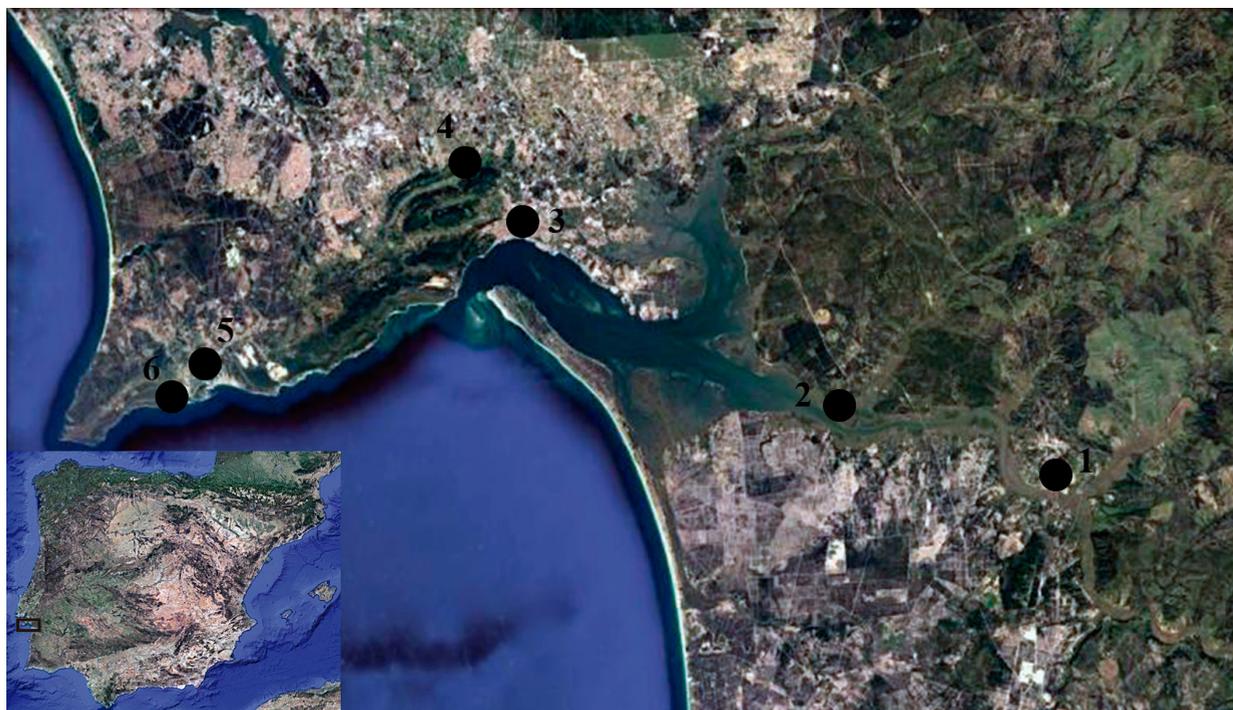


FIG. 1. Late Iron Age settlement network in the Lower Sado valley and the surrounding area: 1) Alcácer do Sal and its necropoleis; 2) *Abul B* (Alcácer do Sal); 3) Setúbal; 4) Chibanes (Palmela); 5) *Lapa do Fumo* (Sesimbra); 6) Casalão necropolis (Sesimbra).

Portuguese territory. Its discovery dates back to the late 19th century, when agricultural works in the terrains surrounding the hermitage of Senhor dos Mártires unearthed a substantial number of archaeological finds which were rapidly divulged in a note by J. Possidónio da Silva (1875).

Despite the immediate interest raised by this important material, no systematic archaeological intervention was made at this time; the first controlled excavation in the area of the necropolis wouldn't in fact take place until half a century later, by the hand of V. Correia, who undertook four excavation campaigns in the necropolis between 1925 and 1927 (Correia, 1925, 1928).

Unfortunately, the untimely demise of this researcher meant that the information gathered during his campaigns was never fully published. Nonetheless, he produced a number of advances of their results (Correia, 1925, 1928) which still constitute the basis for the analysis of the sequence of use of the necropolis.

In fact, his extensive excavations in this funerary area allowed him to recognise a significant diversity of funerary solutions, which he organized in a typology of tombs that remains the most complete approximation to the funerary record of the OSM (Correia, 1928). This typology comprises four basic types:

- 1st Type: Urn burials –biconic urns and Greek *kraters* were used as cinerary containers– deposited in relatively superficial ditches excavated in the ground, without any protective super-structure –these correspond to the Late Iron Age phase of the necropolis (see below)–;
- 2nd Type: ‘Cruz del Negro’ type urn burials deposited in pits excavated in the bedrock –not very abundant, they can be attributed to the earliest phase of the necropolis–;
- 3rd Type: *in situ* cremations in simple gullies –*busta*– excavated in the bedrock – this type of tombs seems to be present since the early stages

of the necropolis, becoming predominant in the later phase of the Early Iron Age;

- 4th Type: *in situ* cremations in stepped profile gullies –‘central canal’ tombs– excavated in the bedrock –these are among the earliest tombs in the necropolis, being in use throughout the first part of the Early Iron Age phase–.

In the following decades no further fieldwork took place on the necropolis, but a certain number of material studies (Arthur, 1952; Pereira, 1962; Schüle, 1969; Ferreira and Almeida, 1971) brought to light some of the elements exhumed both in the 19th century and during the excavations of the 1920s.

The excavation of the OSM was not resumed until the late 1960s, when A. Cavaleiro Paixão assumed the direction of a new campaign of excavations, the results of which were thoroughly presented in his BA dissertation¹. The same researcher would undertake new excavations in the site during the late 1970s/early 1980s, the results of which were unfortunately never fully published (Paixão, 1983, 2001).

In these new campaigns, however, only part of the tomb types defined by V. Correia was documented, namely Early Iron Age tombs of the 3rd and 4th Types, probably as a result of the restricted distribution of the other tomb types, namely the Late Iron Age tombs of the 1st Type, which V. Correia (1928: 171) himself noted to be concentrated in a particular area corresponding to the zone most affected by the 19th century agricultural works.

During the following decades the knowledge regarding this funerary area was incremented by new material studies, unfortunately always partial in their scope (Ponte, 1985; Rouillard *et al.*, 1988-1989; Frankenstein, 1997), and in particular by the first attempts to organize the disperse information regarding the necropolis and to establish a seriation of the available data (Arruda, 1999-2000: 72-86)².

¹ Paixão, A. C.: *A necrópole do Senhor dos Mártires, Alcácer do Sal. Novos elementos para o seu estudo*. BA dissertation presented in 1970 to the Faculty of Letters of the University of Lisbon; cf. also Paixão, 2014.

² Cf. also Fabião, C.: *O Mundo Indígena e a sua Romanização na Área Céltica do actual território português*: 350-366. PhD thesis presented to the University of Lisbon in 1988.

The latter works, apart from attempting to establish the internal phasing of the OSM, also put in evidence the very long period of use attested in this funerary area, which was then considered to span from a relatively early moment of the Early Iron Age –mid-7th century– to the Late Iron Age –mid-4th century–. This fact in itself is very significant, as the continuity of an Early Iron Age necropolis through to the Late Iron Age is a virtual *unicum* in the southern Portuguese territory.

These syntheses, which were fundamental in establishing a clear picture of the chronological, historical and cultural setting of the necropolis, were however based on a very fragmentary and incomplete information, as was already mentioned. The absence of a significant part of the field records and the partial and selective nature of the studied material hindered any attempts to make sense of the complex funerary record of the OSM.

The first of these difficulties –the absence of field records– seems, for the moment being, impossible to overcome, since the documentation of the campaigns of the 1920s and 1970s/1980s, if it still exists, remains unaccounted for. The second issue, however, was recently addressed through a new systematic analysis of the totality of the material exhumed in the site³ which resulted in the identification of significant new elements relating to the Late Iron Age phase of the necropolis.

This contribution aims to present a general overview of these new elements and to contribute to an in-depth discussion of the characterization of that phase, while attempting to shed some light on the regional historical process during this period. However, before turning to these issues, it seems important to briefly present the state of the knowledge regarding the Late Iron Age in the Lower Sado valley and its immediate area of influence.

³ Gomes, F. B.: *Contactos culturais e discursos identitários na 1 Idade do Ferro do Sul de Portugal (séculos VII a V a.n.e.): leituras a partir do registo funerário*. PhD thesis presented to the University of Lisbon in 2016.

2. The regional context: the Late Iron Age in the Lower Sado valley and its surroundings

Although the number of sites occupied during the Late Iron Age in the Lower Sado valley is higher than those which present occupations from the preceding Early Iron Age, our current knowledge of this historical period is somewhat less detailed, mostly due to the incomplete publication of part of the sites and excavations which have yielded evidence dating to the second half of the first millennium BC.

Alcácer do Sal is a good example of this general difficulty. During this period it seems to have maintained its status as the head of the regional

settlement network, like in the previous periods. However, this can only be glimpsed from the substantial evidence from its necropolis, the OSM, as very little is known regarding the settlement itself at this point.

In fact, only the excavations of the Museu de Arqueologia e Etnografia do Distrito de Setúbal –MAEDS– in the eastern area of the castle have been published in some detail (Silva *et al.*, 1980-1981) (Fig. 2, no. 2). This intervention documented a long sequence of occupation covering most of the 1st millennium BC, with a well attested Late Iron Age horizon corresponding to the Phase IV defined by the MAEDS team (Silva *et al.*, 1980-1981: 171-188), which could date to an early stage of this historic period.



FIG. 2. Areas with Late Iron Age occupations in Alcácer do Sal and its surroundings (over an aerial view from the 1960's extracted from Paixão, 1970): 1) OSM; 2) Castle-MAEDS excavations; 3) Castle-Araceli Monastery excavations; 4) Necropolis of S. Francisco.

Later on, in the 1990s, a larger intervention took place in the area of the Araceli Monastery, also in the castle, under the direction of Paixão (2001) (Fig. 2, no. 3). The results of this intervention remain mostly unpublished, but the available references suggest the existence of a Late Iron Age urban sanctuary in this area, near which a large number of votive bronze figurines –*ex votos*– seems to have been retrieved⁴.

Apart from this data from the settlement it is also worth mentioning that a second funerary area was documented in Alcácer do Sal, to the north of the Castle hill. The necropolis of S. Francisco, excavated by J. C. Faria (2002: 63-64) (Fig. 3, no. 4), also remains mostly unpublished, but the short references available indicate its use started during the Late Iron Age, as the reference to Greek pottery strongly suggests (Paixão, 2001: 160).

As for the immediate hinterland of Alcácer do Sal, two other sites can be mentioned. The first is the small open air sanctuary of Abul B (Fig. 1, no. 2), whose origins date back to the final stages of the Early Iron Age (Mayet and Silva, 2000: 175-229). This site, which may have inherited some of the religious functions of the neighbouring Early Iron Age Abul A complex, was kept in use during the earliest phases of the Late Iron Age, being abandoned towards the end of the 5th century BC (Mayet and Silva, 2000: 175-229).

As for the other site, possibly located further inland in Herdade de Corte Pereiro, it is known only due to the find of a bronze figurine of a bull whose stylistic characteristics point to a chronology in the 5th-4th centuries BC (Gomes, 1986). Nothing else is known about the context of this figurine.

Further towards the mouth of the Sado, the settlement underneath the city of Setúbal (Fig. 1, no. 3) –whose foundation, possibly by Alcácer do Sal, dates back to the transition to the Iron Age (Soares and Silva, 1986)– also continues to be occupied during the Late Iron Age, as attested by the contexts attributed to Phase III defined by the MAEDS

team in the sequence of Travessa dos Apóstolos (Soares and Silva, 1986: 96-99) and by some materials from other interventions in that city's historical centre (Silva *et al.*, 2014: figs. 6-7).

Finally, several sites with Late Iron Age occupations have been documented in the Arrábida hill range and its surroundings. In a strict sense, these occupy a somewhat peripheral position with respect to the Lower Sado valley settlement network, but their geographic proximity and the historical complementarity between both regions warrants their inclusion in this brief overview.

Among these sites, the one closest to the Sado Estuary is Chibanes (Palmela) (Fig. 1, no. 4), a small fortified settlement on the top of the Louro hill range occupied during a relatively late phase of the Late Iron Age, between the 4th and the early 2nd centuries (Silva and Soares, 2012). This settlement then became part of the Roman sphere of influence, and has also yielded significant evidences of a Roman Republican presence.

Further to the West, Lapa do Fumo (Sesimbra) (Fig. 1, no. 5), a cave facing the sea probably used as a sanctuary since the Late Bronze Age, has also yielded significant material pertaining to the Early and the Late Iron Ages, recently published (Arruda and Cardoso, 2013). This suggests the site may have maintained its religious significance throughout this period, possibly in connection to coastal navigation.

Finally, this overview wouldn't be complete without a mention to the necropolis of Casalão (Sesimbra) (Fig. 1, no. 6), a small group of cist tombs excavated in the 1950s by E. da Cunha Serrão which can be dated to the 4th-3rd centuries BC (Serrão, 1964). Unfortunately, the corresponding settlement was never clearly identified.

As is probably apparent by now, despite the number of Late Iron Age sites in the broad regional surroundings of Alcácer do Sal and its necropolis the quality of the information regarding each of these contexts is very uneven, which makes it difficult to integrate all the aforementioned sites in one coherent regional sequence capable of clarifying the historical evolution of this area throughout the second half of the first millennium BC.

⁴ Gomes, E.: *Os ex-votos proto-históricos do Castelo de Alcácer do Sal*. Master thesis presented to the Faculty of Letters of the University of Lisbon in 2008.

In this context, and despite its own limitations, the documentation from the OSM necropolis is useful in trying to work out a general framework of reference, as it has been possible to organize the available evidence into a coherent phasing proposal which sheds some light into the social, political and cultural dynamics of this region throughout the period under study.

3. The OSM necropolis during the Late Iron Age: an overview of available data

As was previously mentioned, the only direct testimonies available regarding the nature and contents of the Later Iron Age tombs of the OSM necropolis are those from V. Correia. This researcher did in fact identify and excavate some preserved funerary contexts dating to this period –the exact number is unknown– which he later designated as 1st Type tombs (Correia, 1928: 171).

Luckily, and despite the preliminary and therefore generic nature of his description of the tombs he groups in this type, most of the elements he mentions can nowadays be clearly identified with specific classes of archaeological materials. This makes the task of reconstituting the general contents of this type of tomb somewhat easier, especially when compared to the more problematic tomb groups of the Early Iron Age (*cf.* Gomes, 2015)⁵.

However, as the global study of the material of the OSM progressed, it became apparent that the material which could be ascribed to the Late Iron Age did not necessarily suggest a clear cut, homogeneous panorama. The existence of differentiated periods within the Late Iron Age became apparent, particularly as the position of this historical period began to be weighed against the backdrop of the overall sequence of the necropolis.

This resulted in the necessity to divide the Late Iron Age phase of the necropolis –Phase II– into separate subphases, each with its own physiognomy and corresponding to a different stage within the

dynamic historical process of the second half of the first millennium BC.

The attribution of specific materials to each of those subphases is not always clear-cut, and the suggested associations commented below were based in a thorough typological analysis of each type of piece, in an exhaustive search for parallels and in the in-depth analysis of the few contextual data available. The rationale behind these attributions cannot be detailed in this context, but can be found in a previous monographic study of the OSM⁶.

The documentation for each of this subphases is very uneven, which in itself affords significant insights into the intensity of the use of the necropolis and into the social discourses which were projected and represented in the funerary sphere. It is nonetheless possible to attempt a general characterization of each of these periods.

3.1. *Subphase IIa (c. 475/450-400 BC): the transition to the Late Iron Age*

The disappearance of the typical Early Iron Age tombs, namely the *busta* of Correia's 3rd Type (Correia, 1928: 175-177), towards the second quarter of the 5th century BC marks the beginning of the Late Iron Age in the sequence of the OSM necropolis. The following period is, however, very difficult to characterize, as the absence of contextual data makes it difficult to differentiate any elements that are specific to this subphase.

This is probably the period in which the cremation of the bodies in *ustrina* with the secondary deposition of the ashes in cinerary containers becomes generalized. The introduction of the bi-conic urns of 'Turdetanian' tradition (Fig. 3) which become the most common cinerary containers throughout the Late Iron Age (Frankenstein, 1997: láms. 53-56) dates back in all likelihood to this period. Other types of funerary containers, namely globular urns of common, painted and grey wares may also have been used during this stage (Frankenstein, 1997: lám. 52).

⁵ Also Gomes, *op. cit.* n. 3: 337-343.

⁶ Gomes, *op. cit.* n. 3.

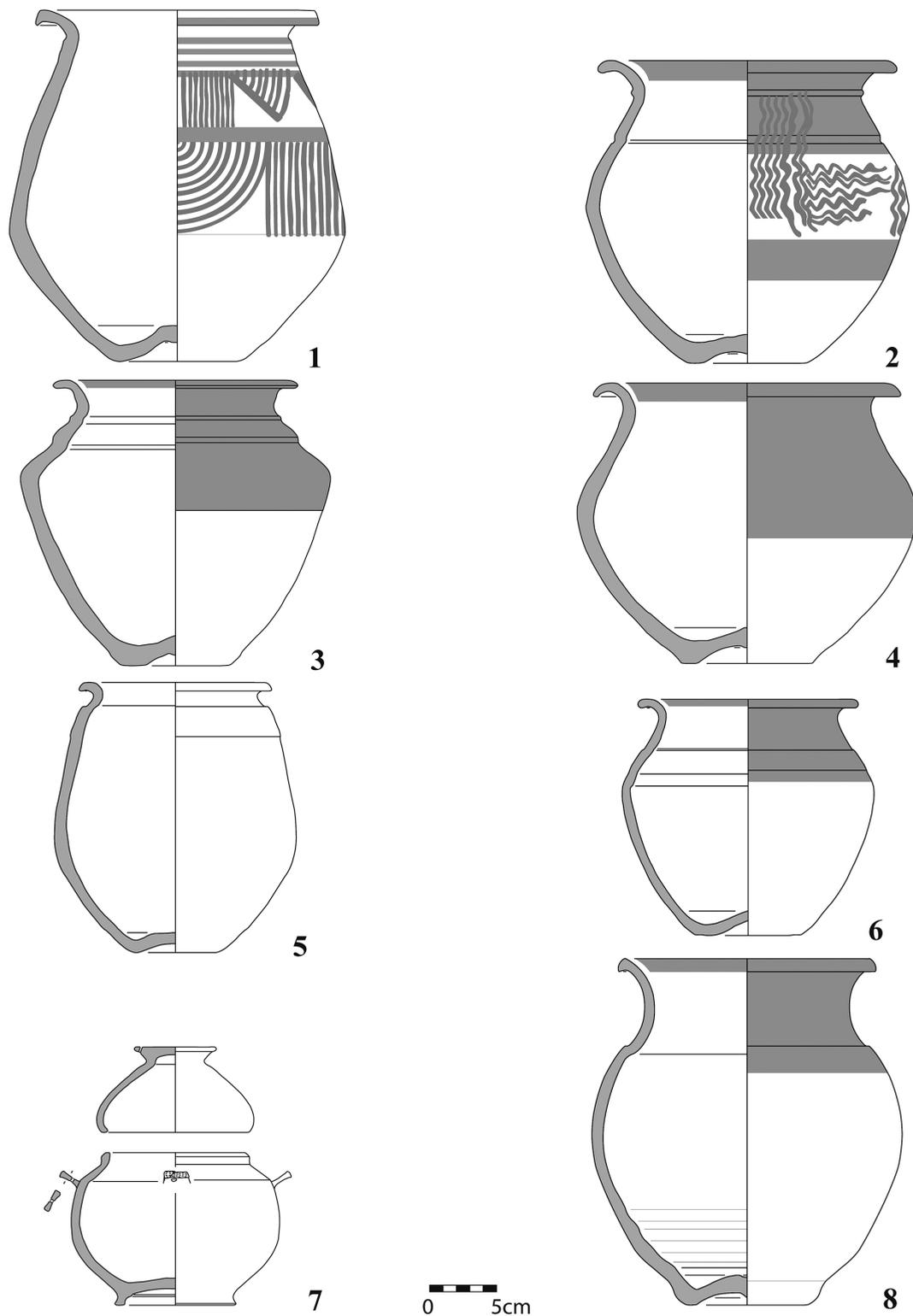


FIG. 3. Late Iron Age urns from the OSM: 1-6) biconic urns of 'Turdetanian' tradition; 7) hermetic-seal urn; 8) high-necked urn.

It is difficult to assess whether this change in funerary ritual constitutes a break with the Early Iron Age. If it is true that during that earlier period *in situ* cremations in tombs excavated in the bedrock were largely predominant (cf. Gomes, 2015)⁷, it has also been established that urn burials –2nd Type tombs– were present since the earliest moments of the necropolis. These could have given rise to a so far unrecognised secondary funerary tradition which under the right conditions –namely the generalized spread of this rite in the Southern Iberian Peninsula– became dominant during the Late Iron Age.

As for the material that may have accompanied these depositions, very little can be said. The earliest Attic imports of the ‘classical’ horizon may have arrived still during this subphase, being represented by a single *bolsal* dated by Rouillard *et al.* (1988-1989: 76) to 425-400 BC, that is to say towards the end of this subphase.

Based strictly on chronological considerations, the introduction of some of the weapons which constitute the characteristic Late Iron Age panoply in the necropolis can also be dated to this stage. Some early sword models –namely one example of the so called *espada de frontón* (Schüle, 1969: taf. 94, no. 1) (Fig. 4, no. 1), but also some antennae swords (Schüle, 1969: taff. 96-97) of Quesada’s Type III (Quesada, 1997: 207-212) (Fig. 4, no. 2)– as well as the earliest falcatas and *soliferrea* (Schüle, 1969: taff. 98-101) may well have been deposited in the necropolis during this subphase.

All in all, this subphase seems to constitute a rather culturally undefined period. The general impression given by the study of the material is one of possible retraction, although this could well be the result of an absence of good chronological markers. In fact, a certain continuity with the material culture of the preceding phase is to be expected based on geographically close contexts of this same period, such as Abul B (Mayet and Silva, 2000), Phase IV of Alcácer do Sal (Silva *et al.*, 1980-1981: 210-211) and Phase III of Travessa dos Apóstolos, in Setúbal (Soares and Silva, 1986: 100).

⁷ Gomes, *op. cit.* n. 3: 345-347.

However, on the basis of the materials commented above, this Sub-Phase may also have witnessed a slow increase in the contacts with the ‘Turdetanian’ area of Lower Andalusia, as signalled by the typology of the aforementioned cinerary urns, but also with the Iberian areas of the South-east and the Levant, where the models for the weaponry commented above seem to have originated (cf. Quesada, 1992, 1993, 1997). This relations, as we will see, become much clearer in the following subphase, whose general physiognomy is also much easier to ascertain.

3.2. *Subphase IIb (c. 400-350 BC): an apogee period*

The massive arrival of Attic imports in the beginning of the 4th century BC (Rouillard *et al.*, 1988-1989; Gomes, 2017a) marks the start of this new subphase. Furthermore, the well-established chronology of these imports and the relatively detailed descriptions of the material accompanying them in some tombs, relayed by Correia (1928: 172-174), allow for a much more detailed reconstitution of this subphase’s material culture.

During this period, biconic urns, both in common and painted wares (Fig. 3, nn. 1-6), are certainly the primary type of cinerary containers, although at least some Greek bell *kraters* were also adopted for this purpose (Correia, 1928: 172-174). These containers were accompanied, as mentioned before, by a variety of Attic vessels (Fig. 5), namely red-figure vases (*pelikai*, *kylikes*, *skyphoi* and fish plates, apart from the above-mentioned bell *kraters*) and black glaze vessels (*kylikes*, *bolsals*, outturned rim bowls, saltcellars and rolled rim plates) (Rouillard *et al.*, 1988-1989; Gomes, 2017a), deposited as votive offerings (Correia, 1928: 173).

Some other elements of the pottery repertoire identified in the site can also be safely attributed to this subphase, among which a group of small high-necked jars and in particular a series of small bi-conic and similar jars of common, painted and grey wares (Fig. 6), possibly perfume or unguent containers, for which the best parallels can be found in the Iberian

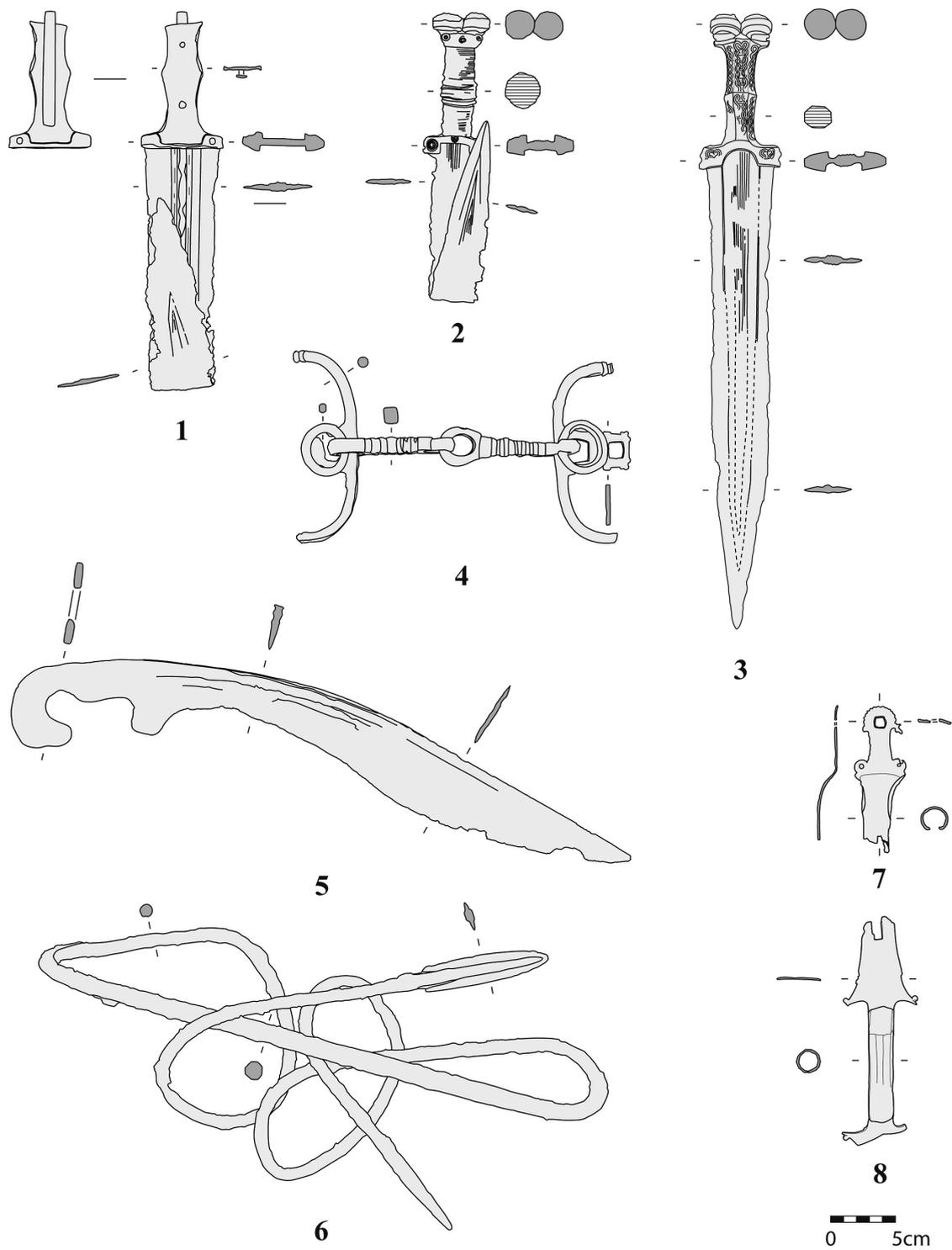


FIG. 4. *Late Iron Age weaponry types documented in the OSM (1): 1) espada de frontón; 2) antennae sword-Quesada's type III; 3) antennae sword-Quesada's type IV; 4) horse muzzle of Carratiermes type 4.2.; 5) falcata; 6) soliferreum; 7) shield handle of Quesada's group II; 7) shield handle of Quesada's group III.*

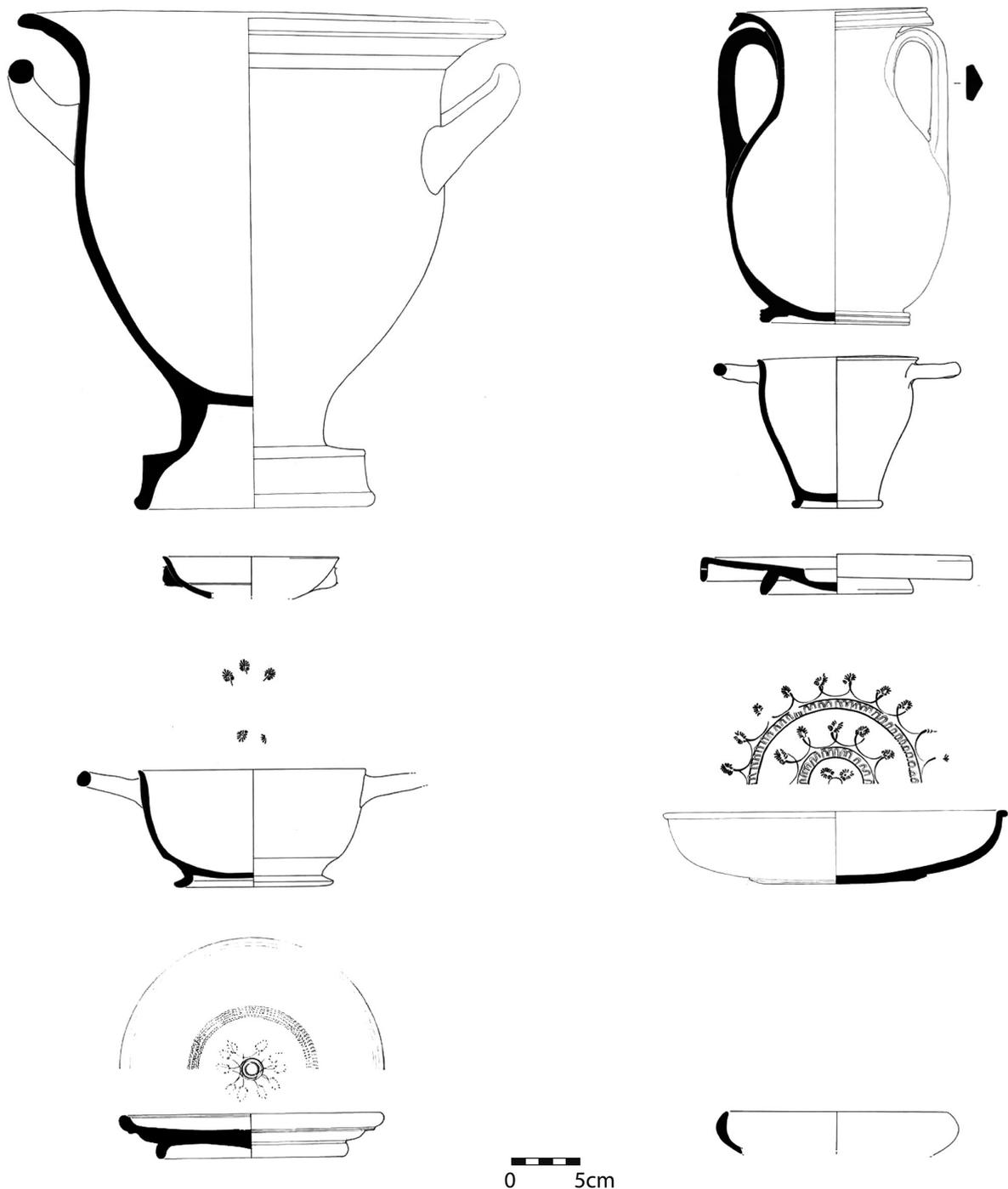


FIG. 5. *Greek vases in the OSM: the documented shapes (after Rouillard et al., 1988-1989, adapted).*

area of the Southeast and the Levant (Mata and Bonet, 1992: 135). Spindle-whorls are also present in these tombs (Correia, 1928: 173).

The dress and adornment elements are well attested in this subphase. These comprise a small group of plaque belt-buckles of the so-called “Iberian”

type (Schüle, 1969: taf. 108) as well as fibulae of the annular Hispanic type (Ponte, 1985).

However, one of the most characteristic elements of this subphase is the profusion and diversity of the weaponry and associated elements deposited in the tombs. The swords, which as seen above may already have made their appearance in the preceding subphase, are now represented by antennae models of Quesada's Types III and IV (cf. Quesada, 1997) (Fig. 4, nn. 2-3); they are also accompanied by a relatively substantial group of falcatas (Schüle, 1969: taff. 98-99) (Fig. 4, no. 5).

Among the remaining types of weaponry, the spears, which were the predominant weapon type during the Early Iron Age (cf. Paixão, 1970, 1983), remain present (Correia, 1928: 173), and the pieces corresponding to Quesada's IIB, IICb, VA, VB, VC, VIA and VIIbA variants (cf. Quesada, 1997) (Fig. 7) attested in the site (Schüle, 1969: taf. 103-104)⁸ could, at least in part, be attributed to this subphase.

The *soliferrea* (Fig. 4, no. 6) and the broken-ridge knives of the type known as *afalcatado* are also present in the tombs of this period (Correia, 1928: 173). Finally, defensive weapons were also a part of the inventories of these tombs, as attested by the presence of several handles (Schüle, 1969: taf. 105, no. 8)⁹ belonging to Quesada's Groups II and III (Quesada, 1997: 502-506) (Fig. 4, nn. 7-8).

⁸ Cf. Gomes, *op. cit.* n. 3: 281-282.

⁹ Cf. Gomes, *op. cit.* n. 3: 295-297.

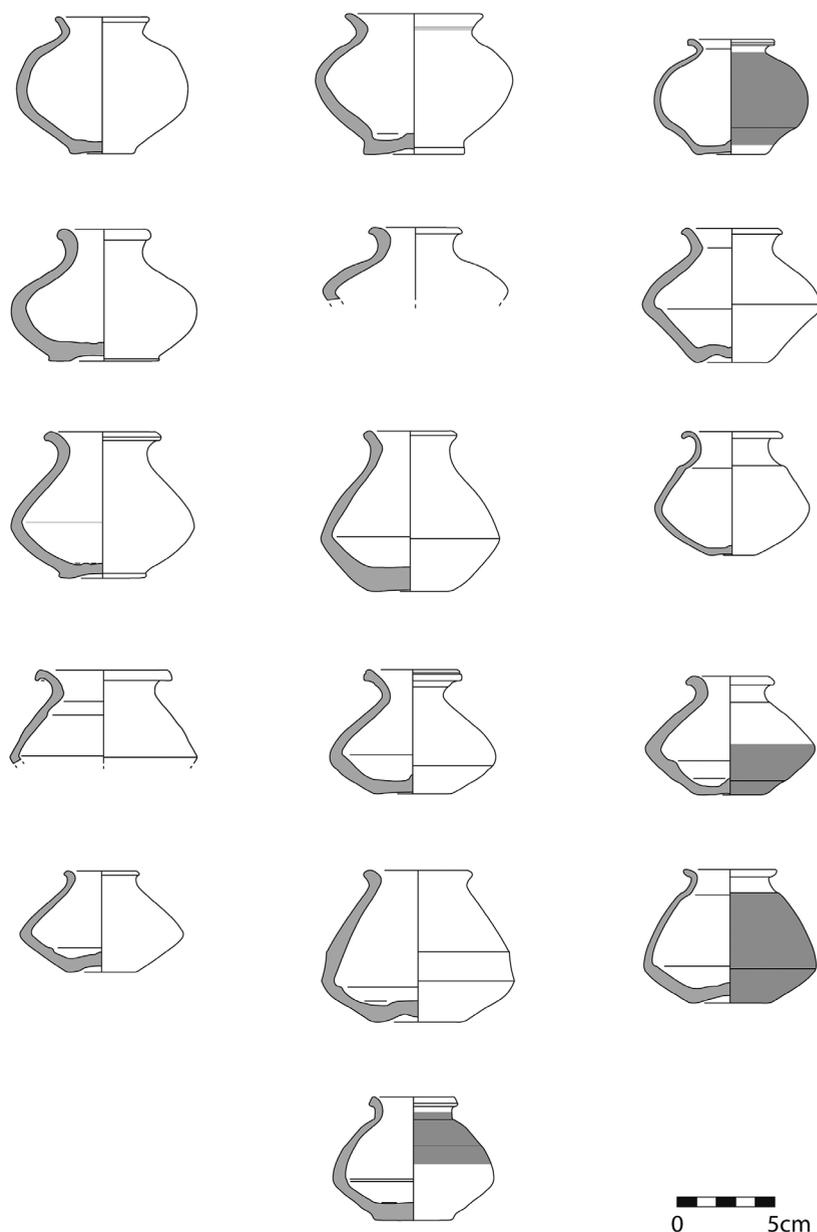


FIG. 6. *Biconic jars and associated shapes of possible Iberian influence from the OSM.*

Another interesting group of pieces which can be attributed to this subphase relates to equestrian practices. This comprises a small group of bronze horse muzzles, the most complete of which belongs to the type 4.2 of the necropolis of Carratiermes (Argente *et al.*, 2000: 74) (Fig. 4, no. 4). These pieces seem to point to a growing social importance of

horsemanship, which is an innovation with regard to the preceding phase.

Despite the already commented contextual issues, the analysis of all these elements seems to suggest that the use of the necropolis was particularly intense during this period. Other evidences also suggest that this was a particularly prosperous moment for the community of Alcácer do Sal: the main period of use of the probable sanctuary exhumed in the castle¹⁰ could well correspond to this subphase, while the foundation of a second funerary area, the necropolis of S. Francisco (Faria, 2002: 63-64), could either indicate a period of demographic growth or a growing social differentiation within the community.

The available data also appears to indicate a renewed investment in the funerary sphere, with the conspicuous consumption of high-status elements, such as the Greek vases, the weaponry and new and by all accounts rare dress elements, such as the “Iberian” belt-buckles. Furthermore, all of these seem to be part of well-articulated representational formulas aimed at the projection and legitimation of an elite group which asserts and justifies its power by means of certain social practices.

What is more interesting, however, is that such new social practices seem to emulate those of the elites of the Iberian areas of the Southeast and the Levant of the Iberian Peninsula, suggesting an enlargement of the supra-regional contacts of the community of Alcácer do Sal, and perhaps even a preferential relationship with that area during this subphase –see below–.

The duration of this subphase is hard to ascertain. In fact, the use of the necropolis has traditionally been considered to end in the mid-4th century BC, corresponding with the sudden break of Greek imports around 350 BC (*cf.* Arruda, 1999-2000: 81). This, however, could result from the distortion caused by the well-established chronology of Attic pottery as well as the lack of any good chronological markers for the later stages of the Late Iron Age.

¹⁰ *Cf.* Gomes, *op. cit.* n. 4.

There are indications that not all tombs of the 1st Type contained Greek pottery (Correia, 1928: 173), and not all of the material mentioned above as characteristic of this period must have forcibly been associated with those imported vases. Therefore, the chronological bracket for this subphase does not necessarily have to coincide with that of the Greek imports.

On the other hand, it is worth noting that the break in Greek imports towards the mid-4th century is not a specificity of Alcácer do Sal, but rather a generalized phenomenon (Rouillard, 1991; Arruda, 1997), and so the absence of imports after c. 350 BC does not entail that the necropolis was no longer in use.

Furthermore, and although the production chronology of the OSM’s Attic vases is firmly set in the first half of the 4th century BC, this doesn’t necessarily mean they were deposited in the necropolis immediately, and it is at least possible that some of them went through a more or less prolonged period of use before being definitely parted with (Gomes, 2017a: 13-14), a phenomenon that has been observed in other regions of the Iberian Peninsula (Sánchez Meseguer and Quesada, 1992: 363-364; García Cano, 1999; Rouillard, 2009: 368-369).

Nonetheless, and since the absence of contextual data precludes a more sustained discussion of these issues, Subphase IIb can be provisionally said to end in the mid-4th century BC. There are however good reasons to believe the funerary use of the OSM went on after this date, although the available evidence is very scarce; the characterization of the following subphase is therefore a rather complex task.

3.3. *Subphase IIc (c. 350-150 BC): the final stages of the Late Iron Age*

Subphase IIc seems in fact to have been a period of marked retraction in the use of this funerary area, possibly as a result of the foundation of the necropolis of S. Francisco, which appears to have been active throughout this subphase, reaching at least the Roman Republican period (Faria, 2002: 63-64).

This fact, added to the complete absence of good index fossils for the later portion of the Late Iron Age in this region, as commented above, makes it almost impossible to delineate the internal dynamics of this subphase, which on the other hand is not very well documented either in the settlement or in the immediate hinterland of Alcácer do Sal. In fact, only the sites of the Arrábida hill range and its surroundings show clear evidences of occupations dating to this period, but the data they provide is not particularly useful for the characterization of the necropolis' sequence.

This being said, it should be noted that some of the elements attributed to the previous moment may well have continued to be used during this subphase. In fact, the bi-conic urns, the small offering vessels and good part of the weaponry commented above present rather broad chronologies, so in the absence of contextual evidence the continuity of their use between the late 4th and the late 3rd-early 2nd centuries cannot in many cases be excluded.

The task of identifying any materials that are specific to this subphase is, on the other hand, much more difficult, but the global study of the material from the OSM has revealed some elements that could tentatively be associated with this chronological bracket.

As far as the cinerary containers go, and apart from eventual bi-conic urns, similar to those of the preceding moment, only a very few painted ware high-neck urns (Frankenstein, 1997: lám. 55) (Fig. 3, no. 8) can be attributed with security to this phase, as their parallels in the Lower Andalusian area appear to be rather late (Belén, 1982).

Regarding the pottery, the most expressive elements that can be attributed to this subphase correspond to a group of common, painted and grey ware vessels which reproduce some shapes of the Greek repertoire, namely saltcellars and fish plates (Fig. 8). These pieces are not an isolated case, as the imitation of Greek shapes is further attested at a regional level by a grey ware *skyphos* from Lapa do Fumo (Sesimbra) (Arruda and Cardoso, 2013: 738-739).

The production of these 'Hellenistic' pieces, despite its apparently small scale, could be part of an

attempt to fill the void left in the local markets after the abrupt break in the trade of Greek products c. 350 BC, a process that is nowadays very well documented in other areas of the Southwestern Iberian Peninsula (Niveau de Villedary, 2003; Sáez Romero, 2014; García Fernández, 2014).

It is however unclear whether the pieces from the OSM reproduce the Attic models directly or through the mediation of the Hellenistic Kuass ware (Niveau de Villedary, 2003), which appears to also have reached Alcácer do Sal during this period¹¹. Either way, their chronology would certainly ascribe them to this advanced stage of the Late Iron Age (late 4th-3rd centuries BC).

Little can be said about the dress elements during this subphase, except that the annular Hispanic brooches *-fibulae-* of the previous period could easily have still be used during this time. However, a few, unfortunately very incomplete examples which could belong to late, La Tène-scheme models have also been documented on the site, and at least part of them could be attributed to this period¹².

Regarding the weaponry, most of the elements documented during the preceding period may once again have still been used during this later stage, while some new spear models appear to have been introduced specifically during this subphase. The chronology of Quesada's (1977) variants IVC, VIB, VIC, VIIA and especially of his variant IX, all documented in the necropolis¹³ (Fig. 7), indicates that these pieces belong to this last stage of the Late Iron Age.

The panorama formed by these elements suggests, as stated above, that the funerary activity in the OSM dropped sharply throughout this period, and despite eventual continuities with the preceding subphase these final moments of the Late Iron Age seem to be characterized by a lower investment in the funerary apparatus, which strongly contrasts with the conspicuous consumption of high-status elements typical of the first half of the 4th century.

Until further data regarding the settlement and the necropolis of S. Francisco is published it

¹¹ M. Ferreira, pers. comm.

¹² Gomes, *op. cit.* n. 3: 243.

¹³ Gomes, *op. cit.* n. 3: 283-284.

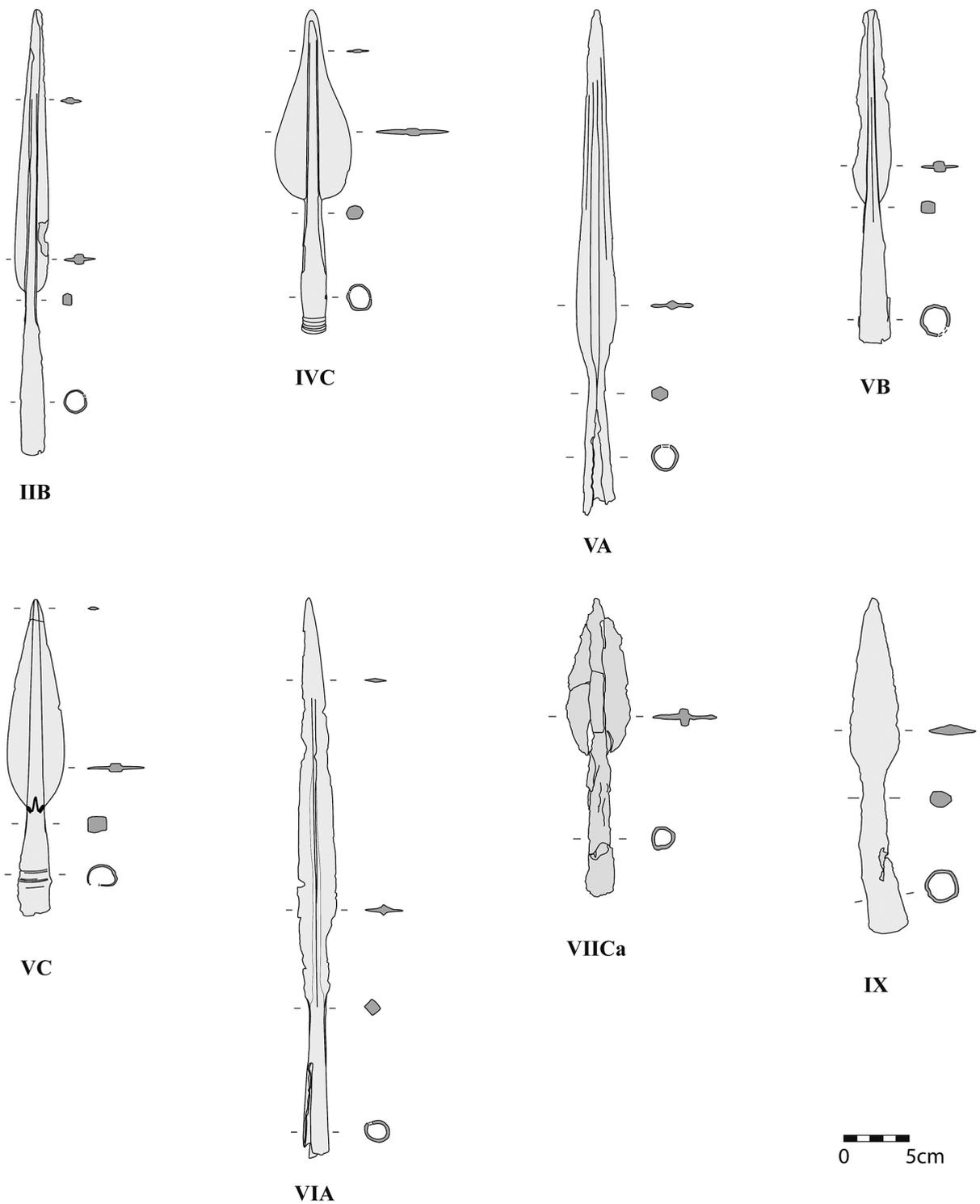


FIG. 7. *Late Iron Age weaponry types documented in the OSM (2): sample of the documented spear models (after typology of Quesada, 1997).*

is impossible to tell if the retraction of the OSM during this phase was a site-specific phenomenon or a reflection of broader changes in Alcácer do Sal's society, although in the current state of our knowledge the first hypothesis seems preferable.

Nonetheless, the presence of significant material of Roman Republican chronology in the OSM area, apparently associated with a continued funerary use of this zone (Gomes and Alves, 2017; Gomes, 2017b), suggests that despite this long period of less intense use the necropolis preserved its function throughout the final moments of the Late Iron Age, continuing to receive funerary depositions even after the Roman conquest, around the mid-2nd century BC, which marks the beginning of a new phase for the site –Phase III–.

4. Interpreting the Late Iron Age horizon of the OSM necropolis: social and cultural insights

As can be inferred from the previous overview, the funerary record of the OSM strongly suggests that, far from being a homogenous period, the Late Iron Age constituted a very dynamic historical phase in Alcácer do Sal and in the Lower Sado valley in general.

In fact, and despite its own limitations, the information from the necropolis shows, on the one hand, clear fluctuations in the intensity of its use, which could correlate to changes in the representational strategies of the community, which in turn entailed more or less investment in the funerary rituals. On the other hand, it also appears to show an evolution in the supra-regional relations of the local community, which allows to set its specific historical process against the larger backdrop of the southern Iberian Peninsula's Late Iron Age.

In fact, the relatively undefined character of the earliest stages of the regional Late Iron Age could be seen as a belated consequence of the general restructuring of the regional commercial, social and political networks of the Southwestern Iberian Peninsula during the final stages of the Early Iron Age, sometimes subsumed under the '6th century crisis' label.

However, if we accept that the earliest 'Turdetanian' type bi-conic urns were introduced during this period, then OSM's Subphase IIIa could also be said to have witnessed a continuation of the contacts with the Lower Andalusian area, where this model of cinerary containers clearly originates (Ferrer and García Fernández, 2008).

The introduction of some typical Iberian elements of weaponry, such as the early models of sword mentioned above, also suggests that some preliminary contacts may have been established with more distant regions, such as the Southeast and East of the Iberian Peninsula.

The generalization of the deposition of the cremated remains in cinerary containers, which can tentatively be dated back to this period, can also be said to be parallel with similar processes taking place in other regional areas –such as the inner Alentejo (Correia and Beirão, 1994; Fabião, 1998), the Lower Andalusia (Belén and Escacena, 1992) and the Iberian area (Cuadrado, 1989)– which would suggest that Alcácer do Sal remained at this time an integral part of historical processes of broader geographic and cultural scope.

This being said, this process of reconnection to supra-regional social, political and commercial networks only seems to have crystallized in the transition to the 4th century BC, as the evidences pertaining to Subphase IIIb clearly show that Alcácer do Sal had become firmly embedded in a larger geo-political framework.

The links with the Lower Andalusian area are clearly attested during this period, as the 'Turdetanian' biconic urns seem to become the standard cinerary container in the necropolis; at least some of these pieces even seem to have been produced in the Bay of Cádiz, which is a good indicator of enduring commercial ties.

During this subphase, however, a reorientation in the supra-regional connections of Alcácer do Sal seems to have taken place, as several classes of evidence suggest close ties with the Iberian communities of the Southeast and Levant of the Iberian Peninsula.

First of all, the repertoire of Greek imports shows clear similarities with that documented in

the Iberian Higher Andalusia¹⁴. The typical 'Andalusian set' defined by Rouillard (1991: 184), composed of bell *kraters* and *kylikes*, is well documented in the OSM, as are the works of some of the vase painters most commonly represented in that area, such as the Black Thyrsus Painter and the Vienna Group 116 (*ibidem*).

In fact, its physiognomy clearly sets this ensemble apart from the general trends for the distribution of Greek products in the Western Andalusia, in which Cádiz is usually considered to be the main intermediary (Cabre-
ra, 1994). It is therefore possible to admit that, in this case, the Iberian communities of the South-east Iberian Peninsula may have acted as intermediaries in the distribution of Greek products to the site, a hypothesis that has already been argued for other contexts (Rouillard, 1991: 325-326; Jiménez Ávila and Ortega, 2004: 217-219) and which would explain the selection of shapes and painters and the apparent commonalities in taste between these regions.

The use of Greek vases as cinerary containers, in particular, is very rare in the Southwestern Iberian Peninsula, while it is common and even typical in the Iberian necropoleis of Higher Andalusia (Rouillard, 1991: 80; 2009: 366). This peculiar use, which entails a drastic local repurposing of vessels originally conceived for the preparation of drink, could thus be a further aspect of the emulation of high-status Iberian funerary practices by the community of Alcácer do Sal.

This being said, it is worth noting that the exceptionality of this funerary practice documented

¹⁴ Sánchez Fernández, C.: *El comercio de productos griegos en Andalucía oriental: siglos V y IV a. C. Estudio tipológico e iconográfico de la cerámica*. PhD thesis presented to the Complutense University of Madrid in 1992.

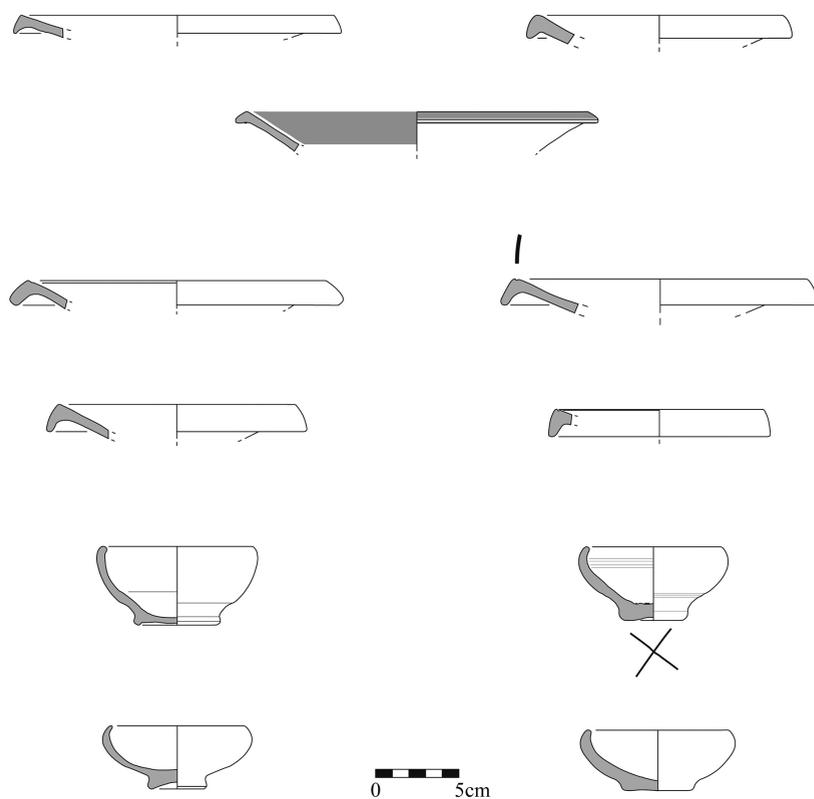


FIG. 8. 'Hellenistic' pottery from the OSM.

in the OSM may well be the result of a persistent lack of information regarding Late Iron Age funerary practices in the Southwest and in particular in the southern Portuguese territory.

In fact, the recent publication of two Greek vases from the necropolis of Cerro Furado, Beja (Arruda and Lopes, 2012) –a bell *krater* by the Black Thyrsus Painter and a *skyphos* of the Fat Boy Group–, similar in shape and decoration to some of the pieces from Alcácer do Sal, could suggest that this type of funerary use of Greek vessels may have been more common than hitherto suspected. The presence of red figure *kylikes* in the necropolis of Mesas de Asta, Jerez de la Frontera (González Rodríguez *et al.*, 1994: 253) could point in the same direction.

However, other elements of the pottery repertoire offer an even more direct link to the Iberian Southeast. In fact, several types of vessels documented in the OSM show clear similarities with

typically Iberian shapes¹⁵, but none more so than the small bi-conic and assimilated jars, which appear to clearly reproduce Iberian prototypes (Mata and Bonet, 1992: 135).

These small vessels could well have been used as unguent or perfume containers, and perhaps their popularity in Alcácer do Sal, attested by their local production, could be the result of the circulation of Iberian perfumes either as trade products or as high-level gifts. It is worth mentioning that such vessels are rare in the Southwestern Iberian Peninsula, although some occurrences are attested, namely in the Lower Andalusia (González Rodríguez *et al.*, 1994: 253 and lám. 4, no. 31), in inner Alentejo (Beirão *et al.*, 1985: fig. 24; Nolen, 1985: 165-170) and also in Extremadura (Esteban *et al.*, 1988), an area where contacts with the Iberian region are well attested (Jiménez Ávila and Ortega, 2004: 217-219).

The weaponry also constitutes an expressive reflection of these close ties between the local elites and their Iberian counterparts. The panoply documented in the OSM is, in fact, and for all intended purposes, similar to that of the Iberian area during this period (Quesada, 1997). The concentrations of such characteristically Iberian weapons as the *falcata* (Quesada, 1992) and the *soliferreum* (Quesada, 1993) is very significant in this context, as is the presence of defensive weapons which also follow typical Iberian models (Quesada, 1997: 502-506).

More than the introduction of new combat strategies, the extensive adoption of these elements in the funerary sphere seems to suggest they represented high-status elements which were actively used to promote an elite identity based on a warrior ideology, which is also well attested by the bronze warrior figurines retrieved in the castle¹⁶.

The presence of horse muzzles in the necropolis, together with the representations of horses also discovered in the castle¹⁷, suggests that an equestrian ideal may also have been an integral part of this warrior ideology, which would be perfectly in line with contemporary social developments in

other areas of the Peninsula (Quesada, 1998; Almagro-Gorbea, 1996; 2005).

All these elements could point to an important shift in the political structure of the community of Alcácer do Sal, with the emergence of urban aristocratic institutions in a process similar to that which has been suggested for the Iberian area during the same period (Almagro-Gorbea, 1996). The presence of an urban sanctuary in the area of the castle¹⁸ would also strongly suggest the emergence of new, urban institutions, closely related to the aristocratic elite.

In this context, the social codes of representation of the Iberian elites may have been locally appropriated and adapted as part of a strategy by the local dominant groups to affirm their power, not only through the ostentation of their wealth and status but also by asserting their role as the representatives of the community in supra-regional socio-political networks. The emulation of the apparatus of Iberian aristocrats may also have served as an active mean of furthering social, political and economic relations with the Iberian groups, whose supra-regional influence had grown considerably since the late 5th century BC (Almagro-Gorbea, 1977: 109; Cerdeño *et al.*, 1996).

Further evidences of close relations with the Iberian area can be traced in the archaeological record of Alcácer do Sal. First and foremost, the presence of a significant collection of bronze votive figurines in the area of the castle¹⁹ has clear parallels in religious contexts of the Higher Andalusian area, while the *ex votos* themselves bear a striking resemblance to their Iberian counterparts (Nicolini, 1969; Prados, 1992).

The presence of an urban sanctuary is, in itself, an uncommon occurrence in the Southwest during the Late Iron Age, while it is fairly common in the Iberian area (Almagro-Gorbea and Moneo, 2000). The little information available on the architecture of this sanctuary²⁰ also suggests some similarities with the urban religious structures documented in that cultural area (Almagro-Gorbea and Moneo, 2000).

¹⁵ Also Gomes, *op. cit.* n. 3.

¹⁶ Cf. Gomes, *op. cit.* n. 4.

¹⁷ Cf. Gomes, *op. cit.* n. 4.

¹⁸ Cf. Gomes, *op. cit.* n. 4.

¹⁹ Cf. Gomes, *op. cit.* n. 4.

²⁰ Cf. Gomes, *op. cit.* n. 4.

Finally, another element that should be considered in this discussion is the coinage minted in Alcácer do Sal during the Roman Republican period (Faria, 1988; 1992). Despite their much later date (late 2nd-1st century BC), the earliest series of this mint's coinage are relevant to the issue at hand in the sense that they present a legend in a Pre-Roman script. This has been identified as corresponding almost exactly with the 'southern' or 'southern Iberian' script (Faria, 1992), a writing system originating in the South-eastern quadrant of the Iberian Peninsula and used predominantly for writing in the Iberian language (Untermann, 1990; Rodríguez Ramos, 2002; Velaza, 2004: 98).

This script was used mostly for commercial purposes (Velaza, 2004: 98), which could explain how it was transmitted to the local community of Alcácer do Sal. This community may then have kept it in use throughout the Late Iron Age, with minor adaptations, possibly resulting from its use for a local language (Faria, 1992), which would explain its use still during Republican times in a coinage bearing the depiction of magistrates that could well be the descendants and successors of the Late Iron Age aristocratic elite (Faria, 1988).

Moving away from Alcácer do Sal, however, traces of an Iberian influence are very faint in the Late Iron Age of southern Portugal. Some other elements can however be mentioned which might point to more diffuse contacts with the Southeast and the Levant (Fig. 9).

Among these, perhaps the most characteristic are the so-called 'Iberian barrels' –*toneles* or *barris*, in the Spanish and Portuguese terminology, respectively—. These large containers, which present a very peculiar morphology, originate in the Iberian Levant, where most of the finds are concentrated (Fletcher, 1957; Gamito, 1983).

However, a secondary concentration of vessels of this type has been documented in the Western Iberian Peninsula (Fig. 9), where the model seems to have been reproduced locally, a phenomenon that has been studied by several researchers (Gamito, 1983; Fabião, 1998: 59-61; Dias *et al.*, 2004). This group's characteristic heterogeneity, together with

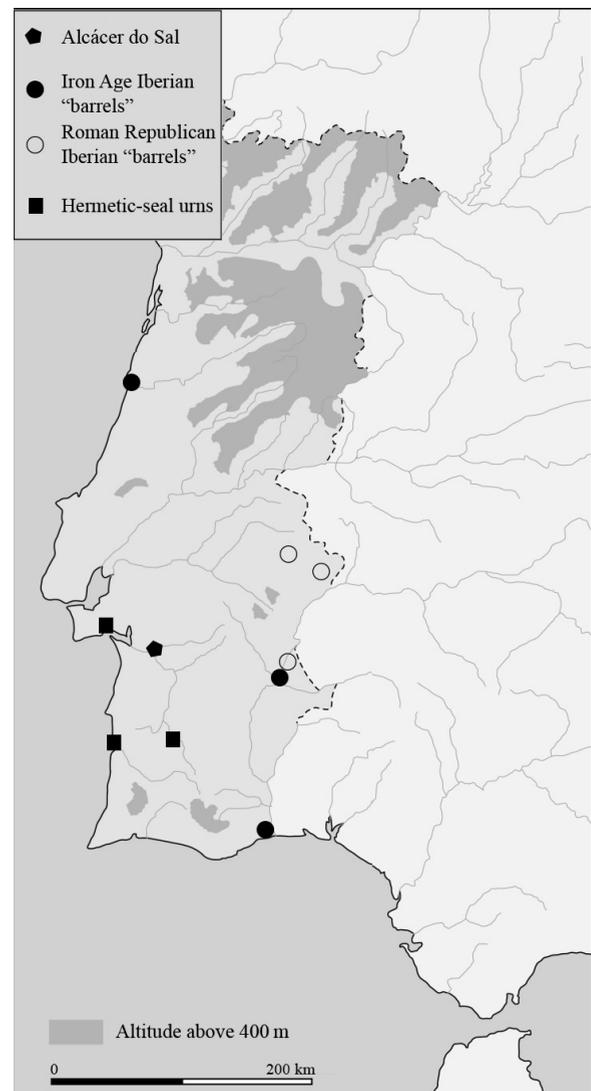


FIG. 9. *Distribution of the Iberian-type materials commented in the text in the Portuguese territory.*

the uneven distribution and the chronological incongruence of the finds, has however made it difficult to correctly assess the dynamics underlying the diffusion of the prototypes for these vessels and their local adoption and interpretation.

The available evidence suggests, in fact, that despite corresponding to a more or less unitary group –local and regional differences aside–, the western barrels should be divided into two distinct chronological horizons, which would suggest that the diffusion of this shape –always quantitatively

residual— took place in two distinct moments, corresponding to different historical circumstances.

There is in fact a group of finds which, by their general context, can be placed firmly in the Iron Age, which comprises the pieces of Castro Marim (Arruda, Freitas and Oliveira, 2008: 432-8) –6th-5th centuries BC–, Azougada, Moura (Antunes, 2009: 366-8) –5th to early 4th centuries BC–, Cancho Roano (Celestino Pérez *et al.*, 1996: 247) –5th century–, and La Mata (Rodríguez Díaz, 2004: 233) –early 4th century–, and possibly also those from Villasviejas del Tamuja, Cáceres (Hernández Hernández, 1979), Valdegamas and La Dehesilla, Badajoz (Fabião, 1998: 59). In the Atlantic façade, a further occurrence of this type of vessels during the Iron Age is attested in Santa Olaia, Figueira da Foz; the chronology of these pieces is however uncertain (Pereira, 1991; 1994: 42).

This would suggest a distribution upstream through the Guadiana, with Castro Marim –where this type of vessels seems to be present at an uncommonly early date– possibly playing a significant role in this process. A second route of diffusion for this model, through the interior of the Peninsula, cannot however be dismissed (Antunes, 2009: 367-368). The presence of this model in Santa Olaia would further suggest a third, coastal line of diffusion in the western façade of the Peninsula, which, if we accept a Late Iron Age chronology for these pieces (Pereira, 1994: 42, *contra* Pereira, 1991), could correspond to an extension of the commercial route linking Alcácer do Sal and the Iberian area.

As for the remainder of the western barrels –those of Vaiamonte (Monforte), Segóvia (Elvas), Castelo das Juntas (Moura), Castrejón de Capote (Badajoz) and possibly Raso de Candeleda (Ávila) (Gamito, 1983; Fabião, 1998: 59, with bibliography; Dias *et al.*, 2004)–, they seem to relate to a different and later historical context, that of the Roman conquest of the Western Iberian Peninsula.

The diffusion of Iberian-type material accompanying the progress of Roman troops in the West is not an unknown phenomenon, as was recently demonstrated for the Iberian *kalathoi* (Muccioli, 2014), and the model of the ‘Iberian barrel’ may

easily have been reintroduced at this later stage after being locally abandoned throughout the final stages of the Late Iron Age.

All this being said, it is important to note that the available data for the study of this class of containers is somewhat deficient, as many pieces are lacking in context, and further studies may prove that the diffusion of this model was even more complex than it currently appears.

Their presence at a very early date in Castro Marim (Arruda *et al.*, 2008: 432), in particular, could suggest an independent occurrence of this shape, as none of the Iberian examples seem to date back to the 6th century BC (Fletcher, 1957). If further consistent data regarding such an occurrence comes to light in the future (*cf.* Pereira, 1991), the overall scheme proposed here would have to be entirely revised.

Despite all these reservations, the consideration of these pieces in this study seems nonetheless relevant, since they constitute one of the few possible evidences of a more diffuse Iberian influence in the southern Portuguese territory and its bordering areas.

Finally, one last group of evidences that can be mentioned in this context includes the hermetic-seal urns with vertically perforated appendages usually known in the Spanish bibliography as *urnas de orejetas perforadas* (Fletcher, 1964; Jully and Nördstrom, 1966; Pereira and Rodero, 1983; López Bravo, 2002), a type of cinerary container with a well-documented Iberian origin (López Bravo, 2002: fig. 1).

This type of urn, although extremely rare in the western Iberian Peninsula, is represented in the Southern Portuguese territory by three pieces (Fig. 9): a lid from the aforementioned settlement of Chibanes, Palmela (Beirão and Gomes, 1983: fig. 12, no. 7), a complete urn from the necropolis of Galeado (Vila Nova de Mil Fontes) (*ibidem*: 219-221) and a profusely decorated urn which formed part of the votive deposit of Garvão, Ourique (Beirão *et al.*, 1985: fig. 23).

The OSM necropolis itself yielded a piece (Frankenstein, 1997: lám. 61, n. A6) (Fig. 3, no. 7) which, despite not being a typical example of this group of urns –as it appears, in fact, to be an *unicum*–,

shows some conceptually similar characteristics, such as four appendages vertically perforated and aligned with perforations in the handle of the lid, forming a closing system much similar to that of the hermetic-seal urns.

Considering their contexts, only two of these pieces –the ones from Galeado and the oSM– seem to have been used for their original purpose, and could, with all due reservations, constitute a further evidence of the Iberian influence in the funerary rituals of the western Atlantic façade during the Late Iron Age. The piece of Chibanes unfortunately has no context, while that of Garvão was repurposed for a religious use, having probably been offered as a votive in the associated sanctuary.

All in all, the evidences of an Iberian influence beyond Alcácer do Sal seem to be very diffuse, thus emphasizing the idiosyncratic nature of the relations of the local community with the Southeast and the Levant, a full explanation to which can only be devised with further data from the settlement and its hinterland.

In this regard, it is worth mentioning the hypothesis put forward by Quesada (1994: 204) who suggested Alcácer do Sal could be one of the main centres for the recruitment of ‘Iberian’ –*latu sensu*– mercenaries by the great Mediterranean military powers of the second half of the 1st millennium BC.

This hypothesis, based on the presence of an unusual military panoply in the oSM and in the supposed presence of now lost Greek coinage in Alcácer itself (García y Bellido, 1948: 27, *apud* Quesada, 1994: 204), is very suggestive, and it would help explain the strong Mediterranean ties of the site during the Late Iron Age.

Furthermore, it could help account for this site’s relationship with the Higher Andalusia and the Southeast. In fact, the other main mercenary recruitment centres identified by that researcher (Villaricos, Cástulo and Elche) are all located in that area (Quesada, 1994: 204-205), and it is likely that the participation of local elites in this recruitment ‘network’ would help forge social relationships between them.

All this being said, this influence seems to have been relatively episodic, as the data from the oSM suggests that the high-status elements commented above disappear for the most part during Subphase IIC. The break in the trade of Greek products may be one of the factors underlying the interruption of these long-distance ties, but other causes should probably be looked for in the future both in the local and in the Iberian political and social dynamics throughout the late 4th and 3rd centuries.

Nonetheless, and despite the scarce evidence pertaining to these final stages of the Late Iron Age, the available information seems to suggest that the links with the Lower Andalusia, which as commented above were never severed, seem to endure, as the further introduction of a new type of cinerary container of meridional model –the high-necked urn– and the possible incorporation of Kuass wares in the local market suggests.

The iconographic similarities between the local coinage and that of *Gadir* (Faria, 1988) further suggests that these ties lasted until Roman times, which in turn would help to explain why Ptolemy (*Geograph.* II, 5, 2-4) counted *Salacia* among the Turdetanian cities.

The low intensity in the use of the necropolis during this subphase precludes any definitive characterization of the socio-political evolution of the local community and any clear assessment of the intensity of its supra-regional connections during this period, issues that once again can only be clarified by the publication of further archaeological sequences and contexts.

Hopefully, by emphasising the vitality and dynamism of the local community of Alcácer do Sal during the Late Iron Age the framework established in the preceding pages will stimulate further research regarding the settlement, its necropoleis and its hinterland, which will allow for a more detailed account of the historical evolution of a site which clearly still holds a great deal of potential for the study of the Iron Age in general, and of its later phases in particular.

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