

**THE MATTER OF PREHISTORY:
PAPERS IN HONOR
OF ANTONIO GILMAN GUILLÉN**

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**THE MATTER OF PREHISTORY:
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Katina Lillios
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CONSEJO SUPERIOR DE INVESTIGACIONES CIENTÍFICAS

Madrid, 2020

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XV.

THE ORIGINS OF SOCIAL INEQUALITY IN PREHISTORIC EUROPE: RITUALS AND MONUMENTS TO CONTROL WEALTH IN THE BRONZE AGE OF LA MANCHA

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Abstract

The studies of Professor A. Gilman and his team, carried out since the eighties on the settlement of eastern La Mancha, have served to interpret the landscape and society of this geographical area during recent prehistory. His work has allowed us to advance knowledge about the role that the control of territory, water and capital played throughout the process of the emergence of social inequality in prehistoric Europe.

With this work as a foundation, recent contributions from the fields of paleohydrogeology, paleoecology and archaeoastronomy provide insights into the solutions that Chalcolithic communities adopted with the arrival of the environmental crisis caused by the 4.2 ka cal BP climate event. The resilient society of the Bronze Age of La Mancha sought groundwater to create, for the first time in Europe, a regional network of large supply wells in a region where a cattle ranch was developed mainly sheep. As a means of legitimizing, controlling, and protecting their access to these wells, they monumentalized the landscape and created a solar cult linked to ancestral rites. Complex ceremonial centers with burial mounds and sun-oriented corridors were built on strategic locations and were used for at least a millennium, as in the case of Castillejo del Bonete (Terrinches, Ciudad Real).

This work presents the current state of knowledge about the Bronze Age of La Mancha, an exceptional culture that Professor A. Gilman helped to define.

Keywords: prehistoric archaeology, paleohydrogeology, paleoclimate, archaeoastronomy.

Resumen

Los estudios del profesor A. Gilman y su equipo, desarrollados desde los años ochenta sobre el poblamiento de La Mancha Oriental, han servido para interpretar el paisaje y la sociedad de esta zona geográfica durante la prehistoria reciente. Su trabajo ha permitido avanzar en el conocimiento acerca del papel desempeñó el control del territorio, del agua y del capital a lo largo del proceso de aparición de la desigualdad social en la Europa prehistórica.

Sobre esta base, las recientes contribuciones de los campos de paleohidrogeología, paleoecología y arqueoastronomía aportan información sobre las soluciones que las comunidades calcolíticas tuvieron que adoptar con la llegada de la crisis ambiental causada por el evento climático del 4.2 ka cal BP. La resiliente sociedad de la Edad del Bronce de La Mancha buscó agua subterránea para crear una red regional de grandes pozos de suministro en una región en la que se desarrollaba una ganadería principalmente ovina, por primera vez en Europa. Para controlar y proteger sus recursos, utilizaron como argumentos la monumentalización del paisaje, un culto solar y la legitimación que proporciona el rito a los antepasados. Los complejos centros ceremoniales con túmulos funerarios y corredores orientados al sol se construyeron en lugares estratégicos y se utilizaron durante un milenio al menos, como es el caso de Castillejo del Bonete (Terrinches, Ciudad Real).

Este trabajo presenta el estado actual del conocimiento sobre la Edad de Bronce de La Mancha, una cultura excepcional que el profesor A. Gilman ayudó a definir.

Palabras clave: arqueología prehistórica, paleohidrogeología, paleoclima, arqueoastronomía.

15.1. INTRODUCTION

Motillas are a type of archaeological site present only in the region of La Mancha (Spain). They were characteristic of the oldest culture that was able to tap groundwater in the Iberian Peninsula: the Culture of the *motillas* (Martín Morales et al. 1993; Fernández-Posse, Gilman and Martín 1996, 2008; Aranda et al. 2008; Mejías et al. 2015; Benítez de Lugo and Mejías 2016, 2017). The inventory that is most accepted by the scientific community can be consulted in Benítez de Lugo (2011) or in Mejías et al. (2015). Increasingly new *motillas* have been cataloged (Lenguazco 2015). An updated inventory of the *motillas* is presented in this work (fig. 15.1). At present, 45 sites are known. A remarkable concentration of *motillas* exists in the environment of Las Tablas de Daimiel National Park and Lagunas de Ruidera Natural Park (fig. 15.1).

It was assumed for many years that the *motillas* were surrounded by water at the time they

were in use, and that they were fortified villages where people from similar social classes lived and controlled strategic resources, such as cereal and water (Molina et al. 2005).

In this chapter, it will be argued that, in fact, the *motillas* were built in a dry environment in order to access groundwater at a time of arid climate when surface water had dried up. Some paleopalynological studies in areas of the Central Plateau of the Iberian Peninsula indicate that there was an especially prolonged dry and arid period, interspersed with some wetter subphases, in the second half of the third millennium cal BC (López Sáez et al. 2009). Thus, the beginning of the Bronze Age in La Mancha coincides with that abrupt climate event, known as the 4.2 ka cal BP event (Bond et al. 1997; Blanco-González et al. 2018), dated to between 2350 and 1850 cal BC, approximately. This climatic event was considered one of the most severe aridification events of the Holocene period in the Iberian Peninsula and has been related to the origin of the *motillas*

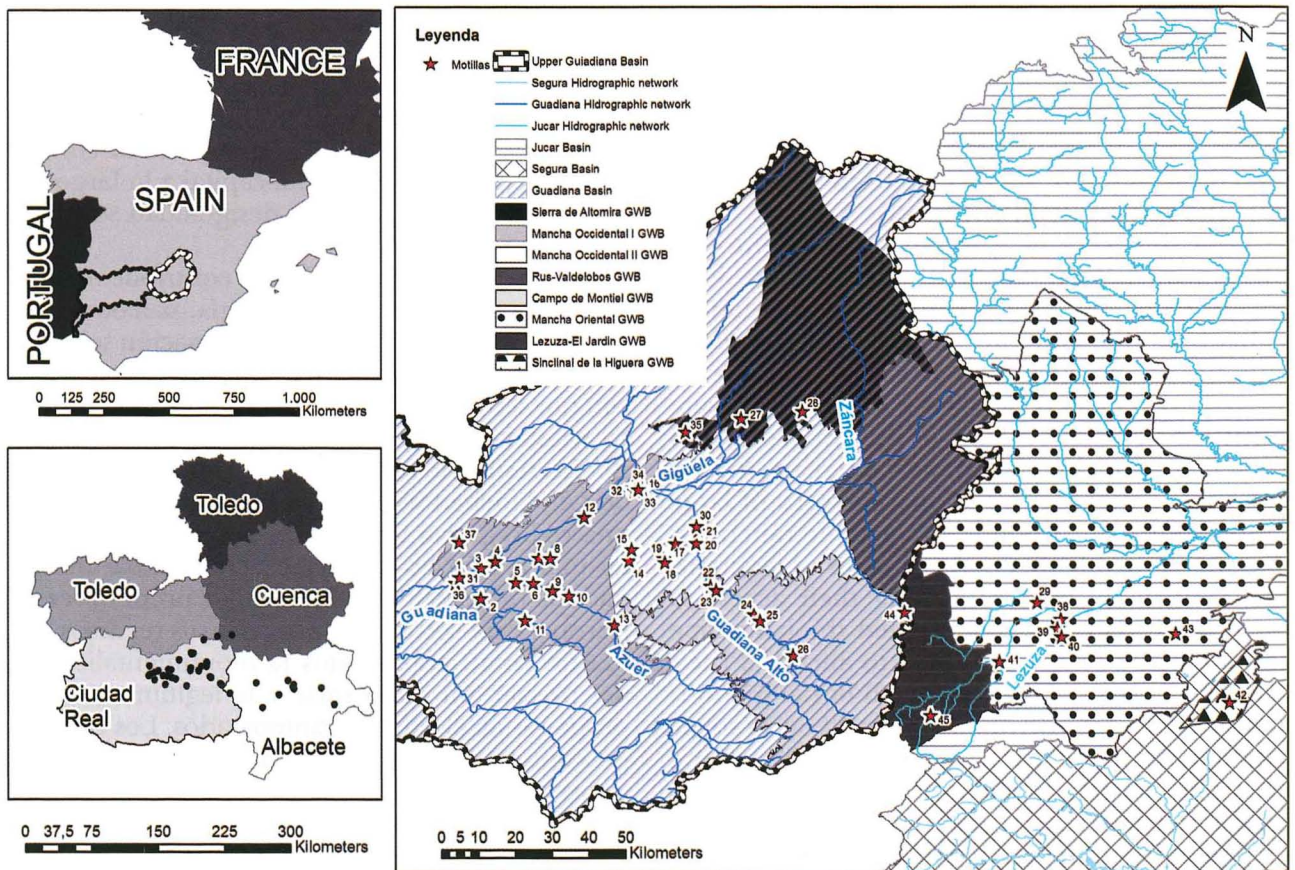


FIGURE 15.1. Major river system in the plain of La Mancha and location of *motillas*. Distribution of the *motillas*: El Quintillo (1), Torralba (2), El Cura (3), Las Cañas (4), La Albuera (5), Daimiel (6), La Máquina (7), Zuacorta (8), La Vega Media (9), El Azuer (10), Los Palacios (11), La Vega (12), El Espino (13), Pedro Alonso (14), Los Romeros (15), Brocheros (16), Casa de Mancha (17), Barrios (18), Perales (19), La Membrilleja (20), El Juez (21), Santa María (22), El Retamar (23), La Moraleja (24), Laguna de Cueva Morenilla (25), La Jacidra (26), El Morrión (27), El Pedernoso (28), El Acequión (29), El Cuervo (30), Malvecinos (31), Pedregosas (32), Camino de Herradero I (33), Camino de Herradero II (34), Huerta de Triviño (35), Antonino (36), Malagón (37), Ojo de San Jorge (38), Hoya Vacas (39), Gorrineras (40), Balazote (41), Hoya Rasa (42), Prado Viejo (43), Chavillo (44), Arquillo (45).



FIGURE 15.2. Aerial view of the motilla of El Azuer (Daimiel, Ciudad Real, Spain).

(Benítez de Lugo and Mejías 2014, 2016, 2017). Most likely, the most intensive construction of the *motillas* coincides with the periods of most severe drought and aridity, while the collapse of this culture can be dated to around 1400 cal BC, after the gradual return and consolidation of more humid and warmer ambient conditions. The *motilla* of El Azuer (Daimiel, Ciudad Real-Spain) is the most thoroughly studied from the archaeological point of view, although its relation with the local hydrogeology had not been considered in depth until recent years (Mejías et al. 2014, 2015). It has been established that it was occupied for almost a millennium. The well of the *motilla* (fig. 15.2) reaches the limestones of the Pliocene regional aquifer at about 20 m deep (fig. 15.3).

On the other hand, recent studies indicate that the *Motillas* culture used ceremonial places located in strategic locations of great visibility and territorial control. These enclaves were monumentalized by large burial mounds, in which solar rituals related to the death/resurrection cycle of the sun and the ancestors are detected. The archaeological site of Castillejo del Bonete (Terrinches, Ciudad Real-Spain) has burial bar-

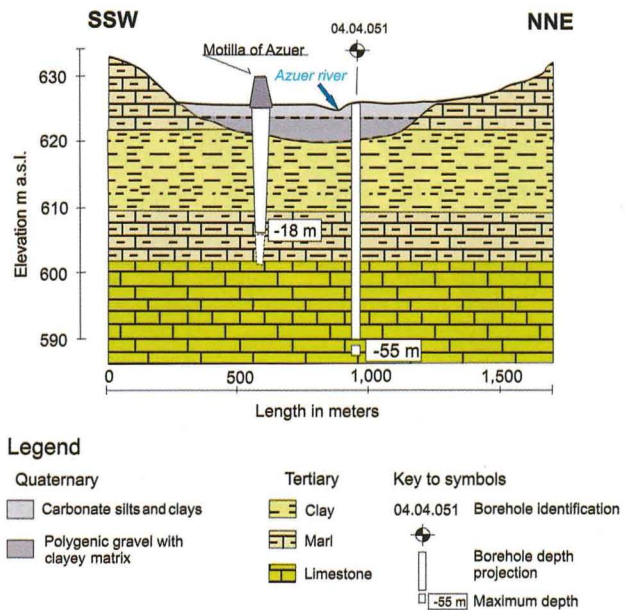


FIGURE 15.3. Transverse geologic cross section of the river Azuer and its homonymous motilla.



FIGURE 15.4. *Castillejo del Bonete.*

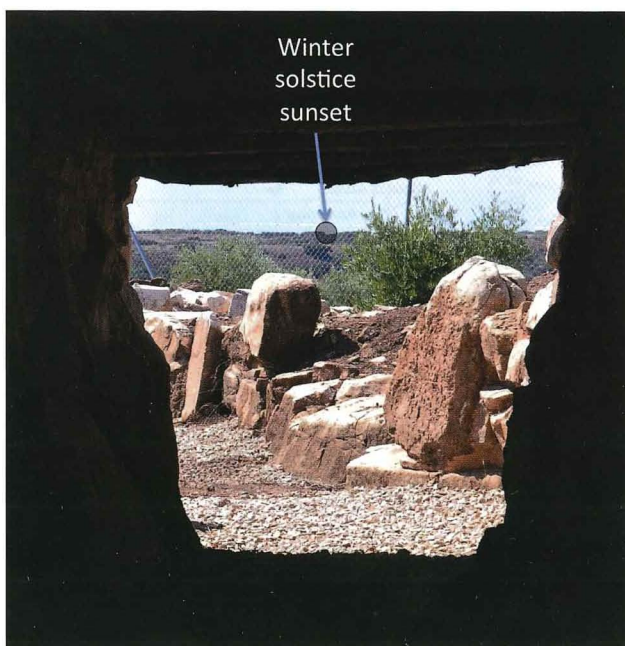


FIGURE 15.5. *Castillejo del Bonete, corridor 1.* Photo taken from the initial part of corridor no. 1 and looking to the southwest horizon. The circle represents the position and size of the solar disc at the winter solstice sunset of 2000 BCE. The end of the corridor is no longer aligned with this astronomical event, twisting to bind to a nearby mound.

rows, the largest of which was located on a natural cave that contains stone structures and rock art (fig. 15.4). The mounds are connected by corridors, some with astronomical orientations to the winter solstice (fig. 15.5). Corridor 1 is over 20 m long.

15.2. GEOLOGICAL AND HYDROLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

From a geological point of view, the *motillas* rest on Quaternary deposits of various kinds. The geological setting in which most *motillas* are located is the southwestern margin of the plain of La Mancha. Here are found detrital sediments (silts, clays, sands and conglomerates) and carbonate sediments (limestones and marls), which form the Miocene-Quaternary filling of a pit of, basically, upper and middle Tertiary Age.

The plain of La Mancha occupies the central sectors of the basins of Júcar and Guadiana rivers. The vast majority of the *motillas* are situated in the Guadiana river basin and its tributaries, but some are located over lagoons. All these rivers share the common feature of their flows being conditioned by seasonal and climatic factors, alternating long dry weather periods with shorter wet periods. In a natural flow regime, rivers contribute water to

the aquifers and other aquifers contribute flow to the rivers. This situation of delicate balance becomes easily alterable due to two main factors: changes in precipitation and the intensive use of groundwater resources in modern times. Beginning in the 1970s, and especially in the 80s and 90s, the rate of withdrawal caused significant declines in the regional piezometric head, up to 30 m in 25 years (Mejías, López-Gutiérrez and Martínez-Cortina 2012). The transfers of water from the surrounding groundwater basins, the predominantly flat topography, as well as the existence of regional aquifers near the topographic surface, assure the presence of the piezometric head being, in natural conditions, relatively near the surface.

The research methodology of this study involved the production of detailed hydrogeological cartography; the compilation, analysis and correlation of the lithostratigraphic columns from the aquifer points and the elaboration of hydrogeological profiles based on these data. In addition, we applied two geophysical techniques: ground-penetrating radar and Electrical Resistivity Tomography (ERT) (Ibarra 2015), which have allowed us to contrast the distribution of the lithologies and to

determine the possible existence of wells. In fig. 15.5 dashed lines represent the probable zone where wells could be located.

The geological and hydrogeological characterization of the surroundings of each of the four *motillas* studied in detail yields the following results (fig. 15.6) (Mejías et al. 2015).

15.2.1. MOTILLA OF EL CURA

The *motilla* of El Cura is approximately 35 m in diameter, 4.91 m in height and 907 m² in area. It is located in the Guadiana river basin in the municipality of Daimiel (Ciudad Real, Spain). There are no related studies on this site to date drilled to a depth of 14 m. The water level in the borehole is detected at 4.88 m depth (January 24, 2015). The geological profile reveals that the *motilla* lies on Quaternary deposits linked to the bed of the Guadiana river that overlie the Pliocene limestones aquifer.

The existence of a hypothetical supply well within the *motilla* is entirely feasible, since it is located in a settlement where the water resource is abundant and relatively close to the surface. This well could reach the alluvial aquifer formed

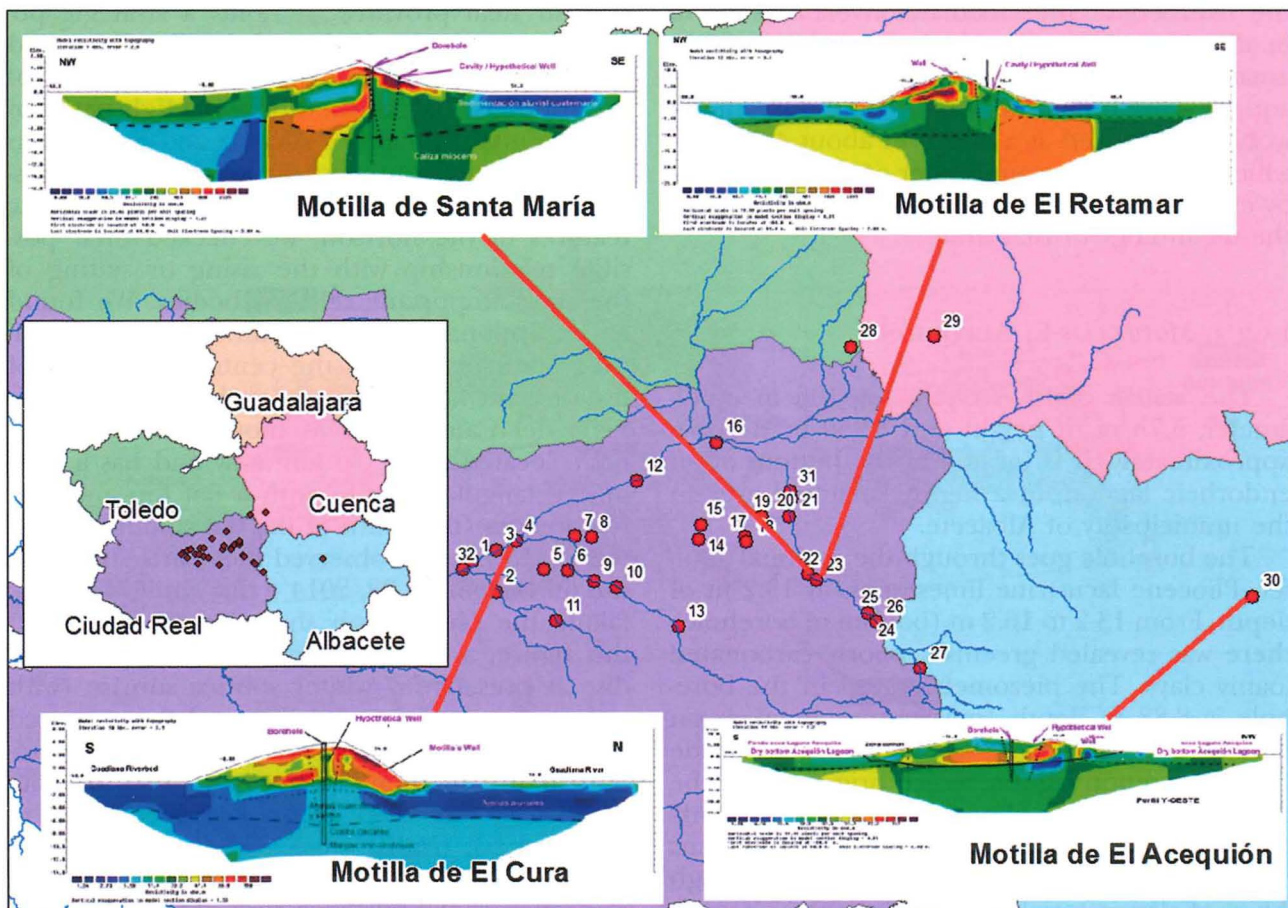


FIGURE 15.6. ERT profiles.

by the Quaternary deposits of the valley floor of the Guadiana basin and is connected to the underlying Pliocene carbonated aquifer, located at a depth between 8 and 10 m from the base of the *motilla*. This well depth, about 10 m, would be easily reachable with the drilling techniques of that time.

15.2.2. MOTILLAS OF SANTA MARÍA AND EL RETAMAR

The *motilla* of Santa María is 40 m in diameter, 3.61 m in height and 1,460 m² in area, approximately. It is located in the bed of the Guadiana river in the municipality of Argamasilla de Alba (Ciudad Real, Spain). There are no available studies of this site, except those presented below.

A 15.7 m deep borehole was drilled in order to evaluate the possibility of withdrawing groundwater. From 13.2 to 15.4 m there are red limestones from the Cretaceous, which lie at the top of the Mesozoic carbonate series. The piezometric level is 15.43 m deep (January 23, 2015), consistent with the piezometric level of the Mesozoic regional aquifer. Therefore, the regional aquifer would be reached at about 15 m, which was absolutely possible with Bronze Age technology.

The *motilla* of El Retamar is located very near the *motilla* of Santa María, upstream and also near the riverbed of the Guadiana river. It is 58 m in diameter, 5.7 m in height and 2,990 m² in area, approximately. In this *motilla*, the regional aquifer – the Jurassic limestones and dolomites – would be reached at a depth of about 4 or 5 m, which means that groundwater could be reached by excavating a shallow well, easy to achieve with the technology of that time.

15.2.3. MOTILLA OF EL ACEQUIÓN

The *motilla* of El Acequión is 106 m in diameter, 5.75 m in height and 8,950 m² in area, approximately. It is located at the bottom of an endorheic lagoon, in a highly karstified area in the municipality of Albacete.

The borehole goes through the regional aquifer, Pliocene lacustrine limestones, at 13.2 m of depth. From 13.2 to 16.2 m (bottom of borehole) there was revealed greenish, poorly carbonated loamy clays. The piezometric level in the borehole is 8.88 m depth (measurements taken on January 23, 2015). The *motilla* is located inside the El Acequión lagoon, which originated in the depression resulting after the formation of a sinkhole. The use of water would be made by means of a well that would have to be drilled through 4.6 m of clay materials. From this depth, alternating levels of marl limestones and clay form the

Pliocene upper aquifer, with sufficient resources to supply water to the *motilla*.

15.3. CASTILLEJO DEL BONETE, A SACRED PLACE IN A MOMENT OF CLIMATE AND SOCIAL CHANGE

This impressive monument dates from the second half of the 3rd millennium cal BC to the half of the 2nd millennium cal BC. Several radiocarbon dates have been obtained on human and non-human material, all yielding dates between 2465–1565 cal BC, a moment of climate and social change in Iberian Peninsula (Benítez de Lugo et al. 2014, 2020; Benítez de Lugo and Esteban 2018). Rites performed at this site were related to death and the resurrection of the Sun, human death, and veneration of ancestors. Some examples are feasting rites, offerings to the dead, and architecture oriented towards the winter solstice. A natural cave was monumentalized and used as funerary chamber, and cave art can be found within it. Above this cave was built a large tumulus with megalithic corridors connected radially and tumuli associated with funerary remains and votive deposits. The largest tumulus was about 20 m of diameter.

Castillejo del Bonete is located at the southern edge of the Castilian Meseta with great visibility controlling a natural pass along the southeast of Ciudad Real province. It holds a strategic position between the basins of the Guadiana and Guadalquivir rivers and has a dramatic view of the southern half of the horizon. High peaks of the mountain ranges of Alcaraz and Segura can be seen to the southeast of the site. After measuring the coordinates of different topographic features of the horizon, we checked their possible relationship with the rising or setting of the most important celestial bodies. We found an exceptional event: the sunrise at winter solstice takes place over the centre of the top of the most striking mountain visible from the site: Peña del Cambrón. This mountain is 1,550 m high, located about 30 km away and has a curious rectangular profile, with a flat top and very steep edges (the width of the flat summit is 1.8°, see fig. 15.7A). We observed the sunrise from the site on December 22, 2014 – the winter solstice – taking the photograph shown in fig. 15.7A. In this figure, are seeing the position of the solar disc at present-day winter solstice sunrise (with a declination of $\delta = -23.45^\circ$) and the expected position at 2000 BCE ($\delta = -23.45^\circ$). The position at the moment of occupation of the site ($\delta = -23.9^\circ$ at 2000 BCE) would coincide to the southern (right) edge of the mountain top. Our calculations indicate that the time interval elapsed since the southern edge of the sun touches the northern edge of the Peña del Cambrón

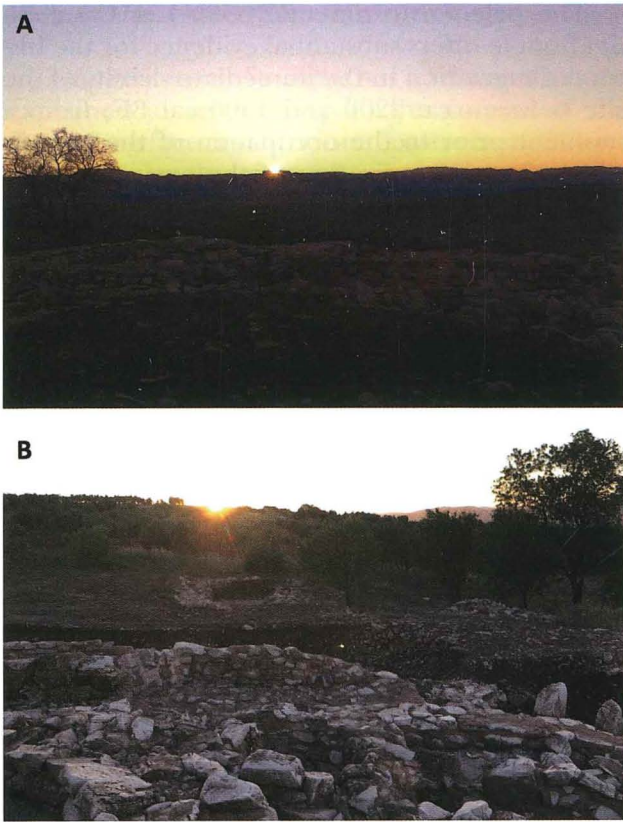


FIGURE 15.7. A: Winter solstice sunrise of 2014 (December 22nd) from the tumular tomb of Castillejo del Bonete. The solar disc appears on the central part of Peña del Cambrón. B: Summer solstice sunrise of 2018 (June 21st) from the tumular tomb of Castillejo del Bonete. The solar disc appears aligned with the Enclosure 4.

until the winter solstice is about 18 days. That is, the sun travels for 18 days along the flat summit of the mountain, moving slower southward as it approaches the winter solstice. During the last days before the solstice, the sun almost stops, moving only 0.1° in that period and finally touching the southern edge of the mountain. After winter solstice, the sun reverses its movement on the summit, taking another 18 days to abandon completely the flat summit of the mountain. We believe that an experienced observer counting the days that elapsed between the successive transits of the sun between the edges of the Peña del Cambrón might have been able to estimate the exact day of the winter solstice. Therefore, this striking coincidence may have been used as a calendrical marker and/or an indicator of a winter solstice funerary ritual.

Besides the analysis of the horizon that surrounds Castillejo del Bonete, we also took bearings of the longest and more linear corridors and tumuli walls, which connect from the centre of the main tumulus outward. The results are of great interest and suggest an astronomical planning of the monument (fig. 15.8).

Corridor no. 1, the longest excavated corridor, has a long rectilinear initial structure that curves, linking tumulus no. 2. The straight part of the corridor seems to point (with an uncertainty of $2^\circ-3^\circ$) to the point in the horizon where the winter solstice sunset occurs (see fig. 15.4).

The north and south walls of Enclosure no. 4 are parallel and oriented similarly to corridor no.

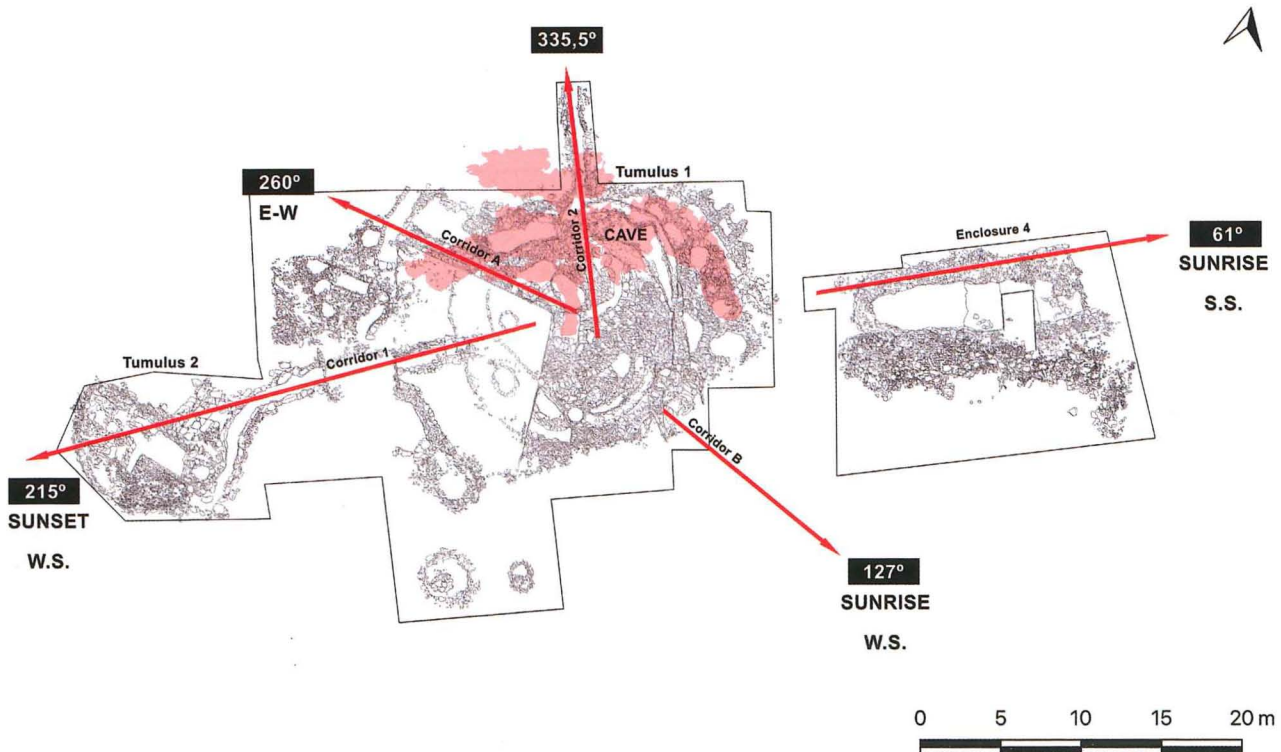


FIGURE 15.8. Plan of the tumular tomb of Castillejo del Bonete with the azimuth of the orientations of some of its structures (José Luis Fuentes Sánchez).

1 but are about 6° apart. The north wall – the best-preserved one – faces the summer solstice sunrise with great precision (uncertainty between 1°–2°) (see fig. 15.7B).

The walls of corridor A are not parallel; the south wall – the longer and best preserved one – is highly rectilinear and is oriented in an east-west line (within an uncertainty of between 1°–2°). Therefore, it could be related to the sunset at the equinoxes or dates close to them. Corridor B is rather badly preserved, but its few standing elements are oriented towards the Peña del Cambrón, the point on the horizon where the winter solstice takes place (see fig. 15.5). Corridor no. 2 is oriented northerly, about 25° from true north (uncertainty between 1°–2°), and cannot be related to any solar position. However, a possible orientation to the rising points of bright stars of the southern hemisphere has been speculated (Benítez de Lugo and Esteban 2018).

The detailed palynological studies carried out in Castillejo del Bonete, together with those made in the Tablas de Daimiel and in the *motilla* of El Azuer, allow us to reconstruct the history of vegetation in La Mancha during the Bronze Age and to correlate it both with anthropic dynamics and with paleoclimatic variability (fig. 15.9). This information helps to establish a general framework of plant evolution and climate during the Bronze Age in the immediate surroundings of the *Motillas* culture. A phase of extreme aridity is verified between ca. 1950–1800 cal BCE, this climatic contingency can be found in direct relation to the existence of the *motillas* and the use of Castillejo del Bonete.

The paleoenvironmental record of Castillejo del Bonete offers substantial evidence for the history of vegetation in the immediate vicinity of the site between ca. 2200 and 1500 cal BC, from a moment prior to the occupation of the cave in which the anthropization of the environment is null, to a later one in which the tree cover gradually decreases and the pastoral pressure manifests itself. This occurred in a paleoclimatic framework typical of the Chalcolithic-Bronze Age transition and corresponds to the so-called abrupt climate change of 4200 cal BP. In our study area this is manifested by an exceptionally arid period between 2200–1800 cal BC, which continues with another of progressive increase in rainfall in the three subsequent centuries.

Recently genetic studies have determined that Castillejo del Bonete provides some evidence for the rapid disappearance of Iberian men in Recent Prehistory due to the arrival of settlers from the eastern steppes of Europe with Y chromosome R1b. One of these individuals is buried in tomb 4 together with a woman genetically compatible with the Iberian populations of the Copper Age, without ancestry from the steppes. This woman had a diet of marine resources (thus, she did not come from La Mancha, but from the coast). She wore buttons and personal objects of ivory. This tomb included objects of everyday life as trousseau: a carinated bowl, a globular bowl containing an awl and a small very worn knife, both made of arsenic copper, two ivory buttons on the woman's body and, on the man, a copper knife with a rivet on his waist and an archer's bracelet on his forearm (Benítez de Lugo et al. 2014a, 2014b; Olalde et al. 2019).

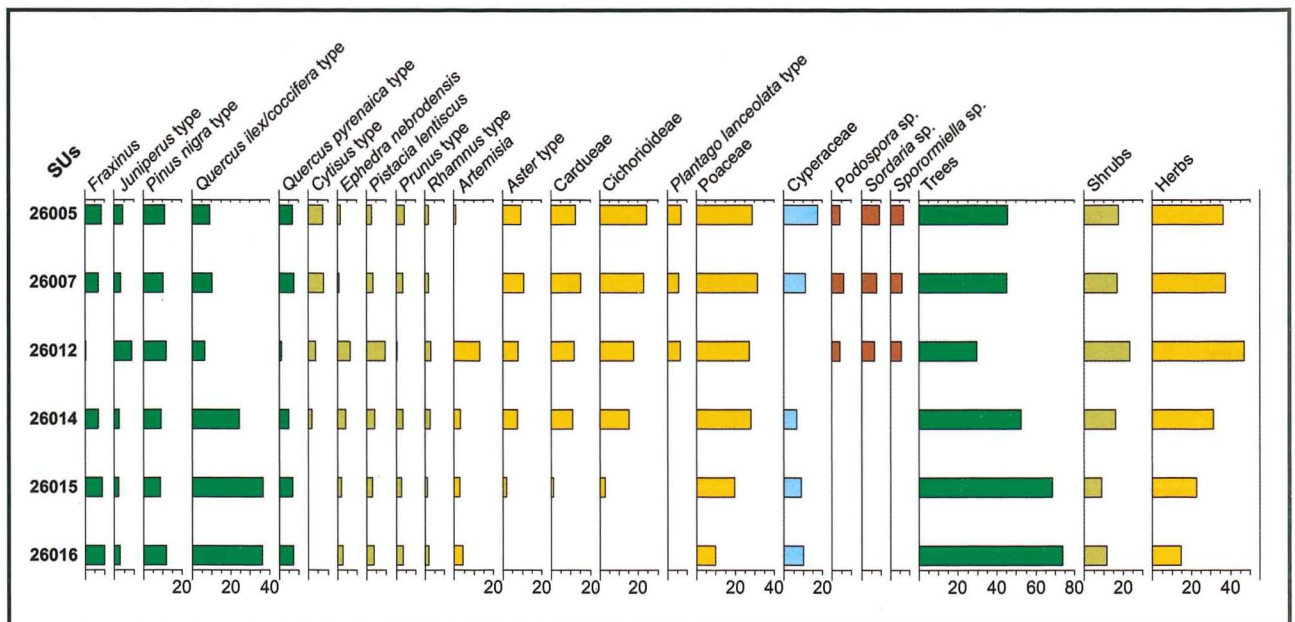


FIGURE 15.9. Pollinic histogram of Castillejo del Bonete.

15.4. CONCLUSIONS

The existence of *motillas* has traditionally been explained in relationship to the control of the flow of surface water, winter pastures and drovers' roads, or the existence of a ruling class that dwelt in villages in higher locations and dominated those who inhabited the *motillas*. This model viewed them as fortified villages built on the plain to defend strategic resources.

Current evidence indicates that there is a close relationship between the *motillas* location and the geological and hydrogeological substratum, probably derived from an environmental crisis characterized by a severe drought that lasted for centuries. It has been shown that the Bronze Age society of La Mancha had gained enough knowledge to dig relatively deep wells and determine empirically the location of aquifers in a period of great aridity. The stress generated by this event required a group response. The resilient society of the Bronze Age of La Mancha sought groundwater to create a regional network of large supply wells in a region where sheep were primarily raised. Around the wells were erected *motillas*, which protected—physically and symbolically—the resources that guaranteed the survival of the community.

Motillas were primarily constructed in the floodplains of rivers, where groundwater stays underground on the alluvium or other underlying formations. The groundwater could be withdrawn by means of wells of shallow depth (less than 20 m). We suggest that the ultimate goal of the wells was to reach the upper part of the Pliocene or Mesozoic limestones that constituted the regional aquifers. The survival of the animal domestics, which were primarily sheep, must have been related to this hydraulic network that was strategically arranged in places of passage.

Although the outer form of Castillejo del Bonete might look like a *motilla* or a *morra*, in this case it has been demonstrated that it is not a settlement and there is no possible access to the water table with the technology available at that time. The repertoire of materials found at Castillejo del Bonete is similar to that found in the *motillas* (Mejías et al. 2015; Esteban and Benítez de Lugo 2016; Benítez de Lugo 2018). With the data available, it can be said that Castillejo del Bonete was a sacred place endowed with a deep symbolic, ritual and monumental significance.

Documented architectural spaces show no evidence of having been dwelt, but they do show the usual features in prehistoric burial mounds. The place is clearly a monumental and symbolic space, which also has immense archaeoastronomical interest. It presents a very striking and precise marker of winter solstice sunrise on the most conspicuous topographical feature in the horizon surrounding the site, Peña del Cambrón (Cambrón crag). The orientations of several passages of this solar monument seem to have an astronomical and/or landscape meaning.

Castillejo del Bonete is an archaeological site of great importance toward understanding the *Motillas* culture. It is a place where ritual activities were practiced repeatedly during the Chalcolithic and the Bronze Age, whose purposes were related to the death-resurrection cycle of the Sun as well as the management of the ancestors and death. All this was carried out in an ideological context in which the ancestors were conferred importance, at a time of increasing social hierarchy and the replacement of the ancestral lineage of Iberian males.

The construction and management of hydraulic buildings has been understood for decades as an important factor in the origin of the first complex societies (Wittfogel 1957). The intensification of agricultural and livestock production around the *motillas* due to the hydraulic practices associated with them must have changed relationships not only within the community but also between these groups and their neighbors. More water means more wealth, and the goods produced with this water must be defended against the greed of other groups.

The farmers' efforts to increase their vital security through the construction of hydraulic systems, such as *motillas*, may also have reduced their social security, by promoting the emergence of a system of violence for the appropriation of goods (Gilman 1987).

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