

Archaeology of the Tartessian Culture Periphery: Settlement Dynamics and Socio-Technological Transformations Between the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age in the Bonhabal and Harnina Valley

The spectacular archaeological discoveries in the Guadiana River valley at sites such as Casas de Turuñelo compel us to reconsider the notions of core and peripheral areas within the ancient region known to the Greeks as Tartessos, regarded as the first civilization in the West (Fig. 1). Until recently, the Guadalquivir River valley was considered the cultural heartland. Between the Guadalquivir and Guadiana rivers lie vast areas of northern Andalusia and southern Extremadura that have not yet been systematically investigated, yet are crucial for understanding the transformations occurring within Tartessian culture during the Bronze-Iron Age transition.

To address this research gap, systematic archaeological surface surveys are planned in the valleys of the Bonhabal and Harnina streams (Fig. 2), located south of the Guadiana River valley. This area was not chosen arbitrarily. Its location is strategic due to its position along the ancient communication route Vía de la Plata (now a modern highway) and its proximity to permanent water sources, essential for successful settlement development.

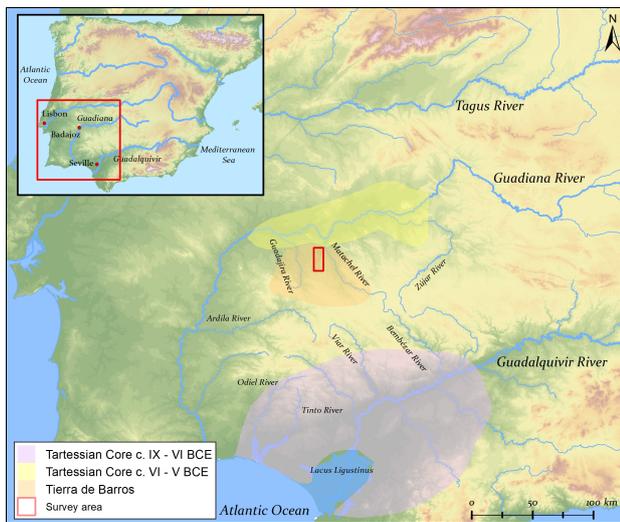


Fig. 1. Key regions of Tartessian culture.

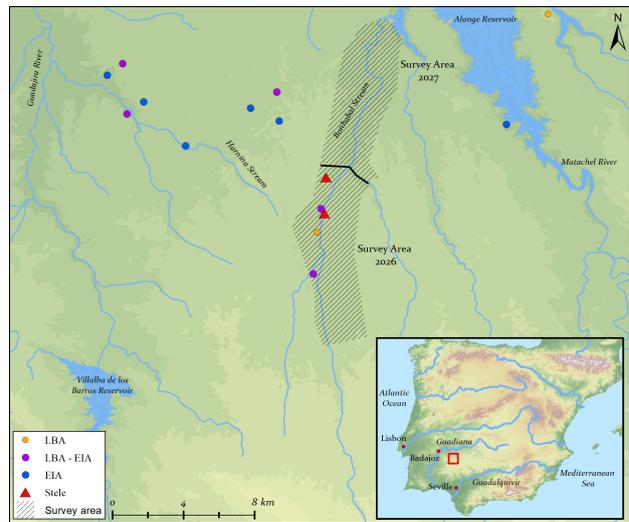


Fig. 2. Study area (map preparation: Pablo Paniego).

The research aims to discover new archaeological sites and systematically examine already known ones using non-invasive techniques. This will enable determining the degree of connection between the peripheral areas of the Bonhabal and Harnina valleys and the core regions of Tartessos (Guadalquivir/Guadiana). Within the project framework, the team intends to investigate whether settlement patterns and spatial organization of archaeological sites in peripheral areas replicate those of the core zone or develop distinct local characteristics.

In addition to systematic surface surveys involving research teams surveying an area of over 50 square kilometers in transects, the following techniques will be employed: GIS (analysis of spatial features of individual sites and their relationship with the landscape), LiDAR (search for new sites and identification of topographic features), magnetometry (non-invasive identification of structures at archaeological sites), geochemical analyses (identification of human activity areas at specific archaeological sites), geo-environmental methods (drilling, characterization of physical and chemical processes in individual layers, reconstruction of paleoenvironmental conditions), as well as petrography and X-ray fluorescence (internal structure, elemental composition and provenance of archaeological ceramics).

Conducting research in this understudied area, discovering new archaeological sites, and obtaining data about the internal structures of both previously documented and newly identified sites, along with the analysis of archaeological materials and geo-environmental samples, may yield significant findings regarding the nature and expansion of Tartessian culture. It is possible that areas currently considered peripheral may have actually played a much more important role than commonly assumed.