

[·2·]

**RUTA ARGÁRICA**  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL GUIDES



**LA ALMOLOYA**  
[PLIEGO · MURCIA]

VICENTE LULL  
RAFAEL MICÓ  
CRISTINA RIHUETE HERRADA  
ROBERTO RISCH  
EVA CELDRÁN BELTRÁN  
MARÍA INÉS FREGEIRO MORADOR  
CAMILA OLIART CARAVATTI  
CARLOS VELASCO FELIPE



**RUTA ARGÁRICA**  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL GUIDES

VICENTE **LULL**  
RAFAEL **MICÓ**  
CRISTINA **RIHUETE HERRADA**  
ROBERTO **RISCH**  
EVA **CELDRÁN BELTRÁN**  
MARÍA INÉS **FREGEIRO MORADOR**  
CAMILA **OLIART CARAVATTI**  
CARLOS **VELASCO FELIPE**

[ · 2 · ]

**LA ALMOLOYA**  
[PLIEGO · MURCIA]





Edited by: Integral, Sociedad para el Desarrollo Rural © ASOME-UAB, 2015

Collaborations: Lourdes Andúgar · Selina Delgado Raack

Translated by: Joana Catarina Araújo Bruno, in collaboration with Robert W. Chapman

Covers: © ASOME-UAB

Layout and design: EDITORIAL MIC

Printed by: EDITORIAL MIC

D.L.: MU1306-2015

ISBN: 978-84-09-34966-1

Originally published as La Almoloya (Pliego, Murcia) © 2015

It is strictly prohibited, without the express authorization of the Copyright holders, under the sanctions established by Law, the total or partial reproduction of this work by any means or procedure, including reprography or treatment computer, and the distribution of copies of it through public rent or loans.

# INDEX

<b>THE STONES SPEAK</b>	11
1. SITUATION	16
2. A FIRST LOOK	16
3. AN ASTRAL CONFLUENCE	25
4. THE FIRST EXCAVATIONS: THE 1944 SEASON	28
5. RECENT FIELDWORK	30
6. THE THREE OVERLYING SETTLEMENTS OF LA ALMOLOYA	40
<b>THE FIRST PHASE</b>	45
7. THE FIRST PHASE 2200-2000 BCE	46
<b>THE SECOND PHASE</b>	51
8. THE SECOND PHASE 2000-1750 BCE	52
9. POWER TO THE WARRIORS	56
10. ELITE, CITIZENS AND SLAVES	66
<b>THE THIRD PHASE</b>	71
11. THE THIRD PHASE 1750-1550 BCE	71
12. THE FIRST EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT?	77
13. THE FIRST WESTERN PALACE?	87
14. THE ROYAL TOMB	90
15. THE ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES OF LA ALMOLOYA	104
<b>SOCIAL CONFLICTS AND THE END OF THE ARGARIC</b>	113
16. THE PEOPLE OF LA ALMOLOYA	121
17. THE FUNERARY SYSTEM	130
18. THE PEOPLE	133
NOTES	140
BIBLIOGRAPHY	143
SCIENTIFIC TEAM	144



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A SAFE VISIT

La Almoloya still does not meet all the conditions to ensure the safety of the site and those who visit it. The structures of the Argaric settlement have undergone consolidation and conservation work to avoid deterioration. The definitive consolidation of the site will include further work such as the provision of adequate access, as well as properly marked itineraries. Therefore, those who visit the site in its current state should take into account that it is a steep hill and that the perimeter protections at the summit of the hill are also part of this second phase of consolidation. Going to La Almoloya is not an extreme sport, but we must inform you about the precautions your visit requires.



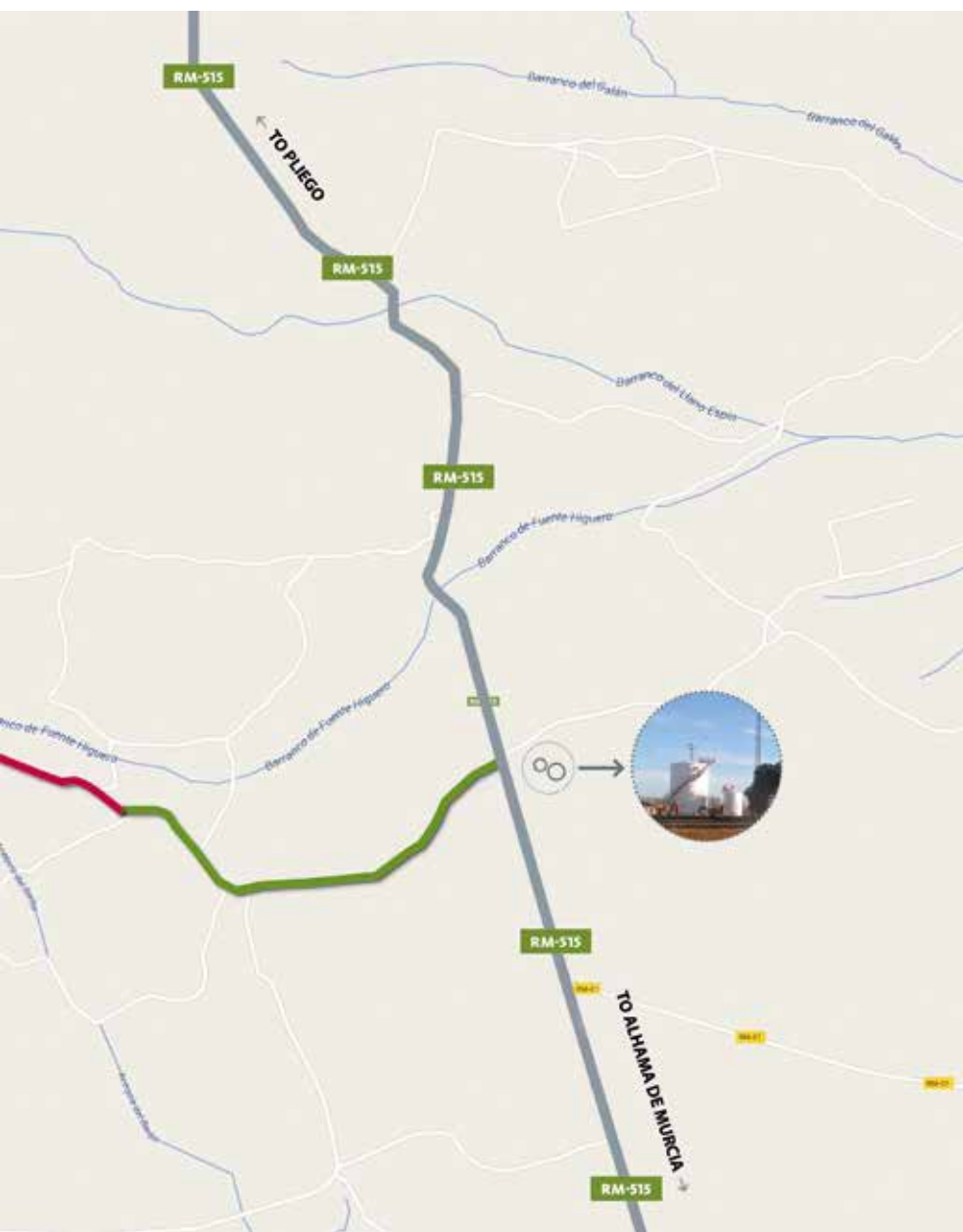
## HOW TO GET TO LA ALMOLOYA

### FROM MULA

Take the road in the direction of Alhama de Murcia (RM-515) to the city of Pliego. Exiting Pliego towards Casas Nuevas, follow the road to the left towards El Sangrador de Las Anguilas. There is a sign where it reads C4, but it should be C24 instead (the number 2 is missing). Next, at the fork, turn right. Follow this path straight ahead, always keeping on your left side until you reach the settlement. Sometimes Google Maps suggests a faster route, but we are describing the only direct way to reach La Almoloya from Pliego. Finally, there is a very sharp turn to the left and 200 metres ahead you will find a dirt road that takes you to the base of the site. You may park the car here and walk along the path recently created to access the settlement.

To reach the top, you will be using the steps carved in the rock by the Argaric people themselves.









# LA ALMOLOYA

---

THE STONES SPEAK

---

---

---

---

---





## LA ALMOLOYA THE STONES SPEAK

“The stones speak” is a common catchphrase among those who dedicate their lives to Archaeology. However, what people usually say after visiting an archaeological site is something very different. Together with gestures of tiredness or disappointment, one can hear: we have seen nothing but “a pile of stones”! And the word “pile” is usually pronounced emphatically.

There are two reasons for this. The main one is that archaeological remains hardly preserve the appearance or monumentality of the original constructions. Most of the time, these ruins do not even let us imagine the intention behind their construction, their function or what they enclosed. The second, and no less relevant, is the absence of adequate explanatory on-site guides and itineraries. When you do have these resources, it is a matter of concern to find that they in no way replace the people who can communicate and explain in person what we can see in front of us. This makes it clear how inadequate static resources are for educational purposes; they are evidently needed, but not enough to communicate the rich contents offered by any archaeological site or reply to the questions raised by the interested visitor. This guide aims at filling these gaps.



View of La Almoloya from the East, at the end of the 2015 excavation season.



When the settlements are prehistoric, as it happens in this case, the visit can become a dull experience because the characters and stories known from the written sources of Antiquity are missing. If we are not able to appeal to historical or literary figures, the “cinematographic charm” is diluted. The possibility to refer to names like Hannibal and Hamilcar, as well as many consuls, generals and Roman emperors, or even allude to the works of Plato, Aristotle and Homer, grabs the visitors’ attention and provides a reference to an ancient authority, even if none of these characters had anything to do with the settlement itself. In short, a prehistoric settlement requires a greater explanatory and interpretive effort to be of interest to the public.

It is common knowledge that there are three types of archaeological sites. Within the first type, we include those settlements without any protection or maintenance measures because they were left unattended by the public bodies. In many of them, as they are located within private properties, the owners decide whether or not they will permit the fieldwork, hence making room for the obstruction of conservation programmes. This circumstance is the most recurrent both in Spain and worldwide. The second type of settlement enjoys certain privileges that may occur due to the monumentality of its remains or because they have acquired notoriety through cinema or television. In other cases, these ruins might be used to strengthen the origin of the identity of a particular group of people. These examples are few but fortunate, as tourism becomes the means for their cultural survival. The third type includes those archaeological sites that are so surprising or unusual that their contribution to the current state of research is invaluable. This is the case of La Almoloya.



## SITUATION

La Almoloya is located in the northern foothills of Sierra Espuña, in the municipal boundaries of Mula and Pliego. It is located on a plateau 585 m above the sea level, which stands as the only trace of a bioclastic limestone stratum that survived the sinking of its surroundings. The plateau has an extension of approximately 3,100 m<sup>2</sup> and an oval shape, 85 metres long and 35 metres of maximum width.

From the platform, it is possible to see wide plains of Miocene formations made of marls, conglomerates and sandstones that can also be found north of Sierra Espuña. It would have been possible to reach the farmlands near the Pliego river located 3 km away, as well as the springs that feed the waters of Espuña, such as La Portuguesa, Las Anguilas and Fuente Higuero.

Before the 2013 excavations, the surface was crossed by two terraces where wheat was grown. These lands have been ploughed at least since the middle of the nineteenth century. However, by the end of the 1920s the plateau was already covered by rosemary, thyme and mallows. Maybe some tomb shattered by the plough contributed to creating the legend that on the hill there was some hidden treasure, something, fortunately, confirmed in 2014.



## A FIRST LOOK

When reaching the top of La Almoloya, a hill that seems to have been flattened by a gigantic roller, one will find a wonderful landscape of amazing breadth and beauty. The extensive views of the Sierra Espuña behind it will not leave you indifferent, with the city of Murcia in the background and, in the distance and to the northwest, the




---

First visit  
of Ricardo Codornú  
to the Sierra Espuña  
in 1892.

basins of the Mula and Pliego rivers with the mountains marking the horizon as far as the interior upland plateaus. To the southwest, you will see the beginning of the pass towards Lorca. You will feel like sailing over a sea of pine trees, heirs to that first reforestation experience that Ricardo Codornú carried out in 1889<sup>1</sup>.

La Almoloya overlooks a territory of at least 1000 km<sup>2</sup>, which is equivalent to almost the whole Region of Murcia. Without a doubt, that wide visibility of great strategic value was one of the reasons why a group of people decided to live here about 4,200 years ago. Soon enough, La Almoloya would become one of the most remarkable political centres, perhaps the most important one, of one of the richest and most outstanding societies of the European Bronze Age: the Argaric.



La Almoloya, as seen from the Northeast.



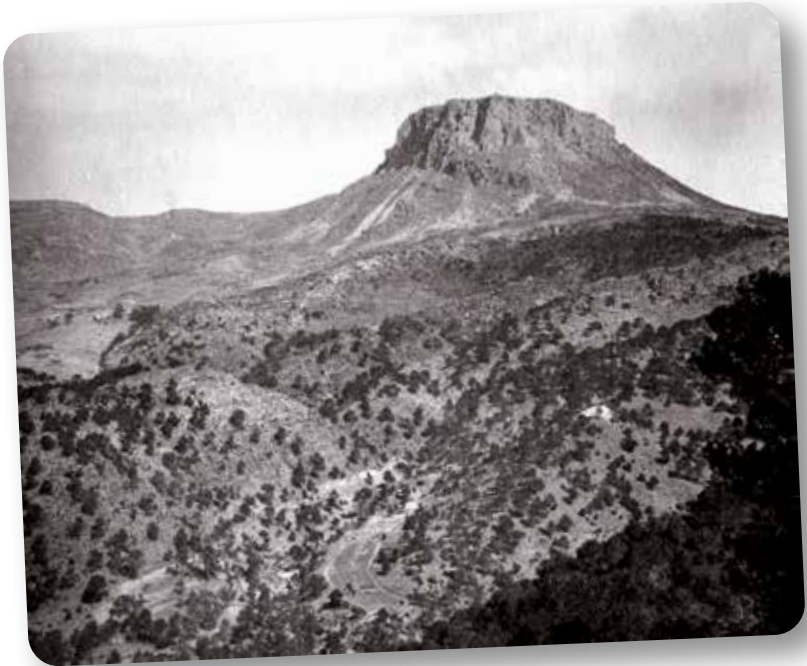
La Almoloya, as seen from the Southeast.

The El Argar has been known since the nineteenth century, especially thanks to the brothers Henri and Louis Siret, two Belgian engineers who lived and worked in Almería and Murcia, where they excavated numerous pre-historic sites. The Argaric society lasted about 650 years (between 2200 and 1550 BCE, or before the Christian era) and extended over a territory of 35,000 km<sup>2</sup> in the current provinces of Murcia, Almería, Granada, Alicante, Jaén and Ciudad Real.

---

Barranco de Enmedio and Morrón de España, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>3</sup>.

While the landscape surrounding La Almoloaya is impressive for anyone who loves nature, those who visit the site will enjoy another unique experience. No one until now has had the opportunity to contemplate and walk around an almost complete settlement from the Bronze Age, one of the first urbanised layouts in Europe. The visitor will be impressed while gazing at the neatly





distributed buildings on the surface of the hill, the housing complexes, rooms, workshops, a cistern, a council or assembly room, almost a hundred tombs, and narrow streets that together are laid out in what we could call a “prehistoric grid”. La Almoloya offers a snapshot of what a small but decisive city was like in the final phase of the Argaric, around 1750/1550 BCE, with unparalleled planning and construction quality in continental Europe at that time. Something similar did not occur again in the peninsula until many centuries later when the Phoenician, Punic and Greek colonisations shaped the Iberian societies of the Iron Age.



Around 1550 BCE, about 3550 years ago, the Argaric communities ceased to exist. Since then, no one has lived in La Almoloya again, and that has favoured its exceptional urban and architectural conservation. As if it were a prehistoric Pompeii, the remains have a great monumental and historical importance that persists as a social



heritage. Furthermore, they provide a personal and intimate dimension by being able to see these remains closely, touching them and walking among them, entering homes and workshops or sitting in the assembly hall where the main political decisions were taken, as in current assemblies or parliaments.

---

Aerial view in 2015  
of the urban plan  
of the final phase  
of La Almoloya.

---

View of the fortification, still to be excavated, that protects the entrance to the village.



---

Ramp used to access the settlement.

On the right, a ramp with similar characteristics in the archaeological site of Ifre (Mazarrón).



---

Wall of orthostats (square stone blocks) that would have delimited a second entrance, at the top of the hill.



After enjoying the surrounding nature and stepping aboard a time machine that has transported us to 4000 years ago, we are now at the top of the plateau. In order to get here, we have to follow the same sloping path that its inhabitants designed, carving steps in the rock and positioning stone blocks where appropriate. To access this ramp from the bottom of the hill we have to go through an entrance between a large defensive bastion and a sizeable wall. These are still waiting to be excavated, but it is quite obvious that they were erected with the same technique as the fortifications of other Argaric settlements, such as those protecting the city of La Bastida (Totana). Once at the top, a second entrance marked by a wall that retains some of its orthostats was the last obstacle before entering the inhabited area. Right at this point, a path in the bedrock allowed to walk around the periphery of the site.



## AN ASTRAL CONFLUENCE

If we were superstitious, we would have to assume that a planetary alignment allowed the preservation of this jewel of Prehistory. We do not know if the stars conspired for it, but the truth is that the recent history of La Almoloya is the result of the fortunate confluence between a team of the Department of Prehistory of the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB) dedicated to the investigation of the Bronze Age in the Mediterranean basin (Research Group in Mediterranean Social Archaeoecology - ASOME); the owners of the property where the site is located (CEFU S.A.), who were always committed to the social heritage they had to look after; and a diligent regional administration that supported conservation works, ensuring that this legacy of the past can be visited by the general public.



▲  
View of La Bastida  
(Totana).

Aerial view of Tira  
del Lienzo (Totana).



By the end of 2015 La Almoloya had been excavated by a large group of professionals during three seasons of variable duration (three, four and six months). There is still 20% of the area left to explore, as well as a large part of the deepest strata.

►  
Images of the fieldwork at La Bastida  
and Tira del Lienzo.



The research is carried out under the umbrella of the “Bastida Project”, which is also dedicated to the excavation, study and professional and public dissemination of our knowledge of two other important archaeological sites of the Argaric Bronze Age: La Bastida and Tira del Lienzo (Totana). While La Bastida had intermittent fieldwork from 1869 to 1950, previous work at La Almoloya was limited to a single fieldwork season in 1944. Unfortunately, as the settlements became widely known, looting and “treasure hunting” left both places splattered with holes.



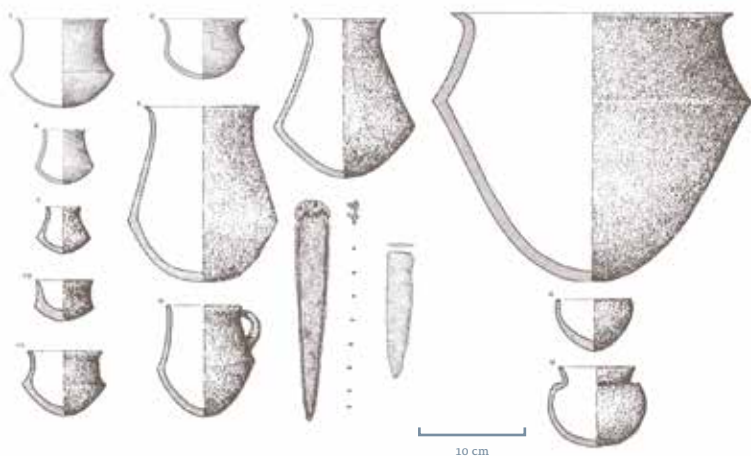
## THE FIRST EXCAVATIONS: THE 1944 SEASON

Before we started fieldwork in 2013, knowledge about La Almoloya was limited to an intervention by Emeterio Cuadrado Díaz (engineer) and Juan de la Cierva López (owner of the farm). They excavated for only four days in 1944, between the 5th and 7th of June and on the 11th of August, and discovered eight tombs and the remains of a house. Fortunately, these results were published in two twin articles<sup>5</sup>. However, these papers also had the misfortune of making the site well-known, paving the way for the significant plundering recorded, especially since the late 1960s. In the visit made in 1976 by one of the members of the current investigation team, the traces of clandestine interventions were already very obvious, although the worst was yet to come in the following years. Heritage losses<sup>6</sup> are difficult to assess and often irreversible. Despite this, a professor from the University of Murcia prepared a third publication, in which she rescued some of the objects from the hands of private collectors and made them available for new research<sup>7</sup>.



Images of the beginning of the 1944 excavation<sup>8</sup>.

Archaeological materials recovered for study by María Manuela Ayala.




**RECENT  
WORK**

Together with the new excavations, we tried to recover the information and scattered finds from previous works in La Almoloya<sup>9</sup>. In this way we know that the artefacts from 1944 were initially deposited in the Provincial Archaeological Museum of Cartagena before they were transferred to the Archaeological Museum of Murcia. The original photographs from that campaign are kept in the General Archive of the Region of Murcia. On the other hand, newspapers like “La Verdad” and “Línea” also made reference to the excavations.

---

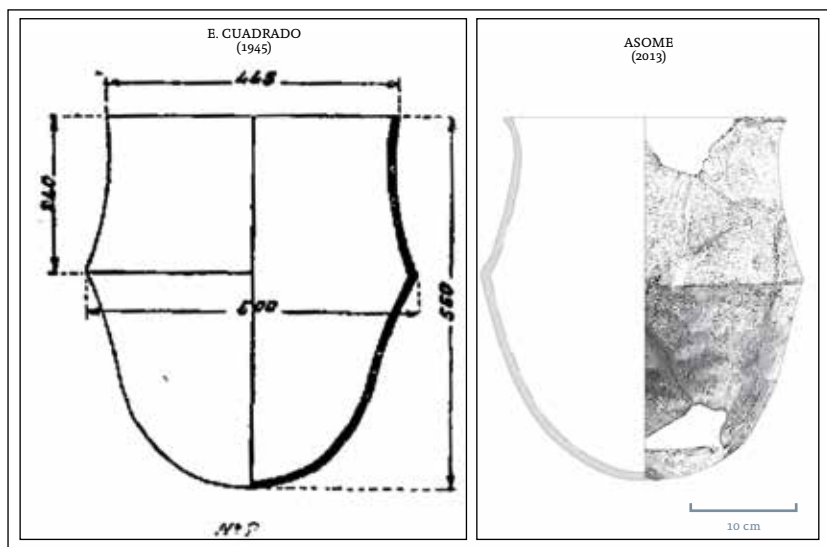
Eastern view  
of La Almoloya in  
August 1944<sup>10</sup>.

Before starting the fieldwork, we also had to estimate the extent to which looters had damaged the plateau. To do this, we created a topographic plan with all the holes resulting from clandestine excavations that in this region are called *toperas* or “molehills”.





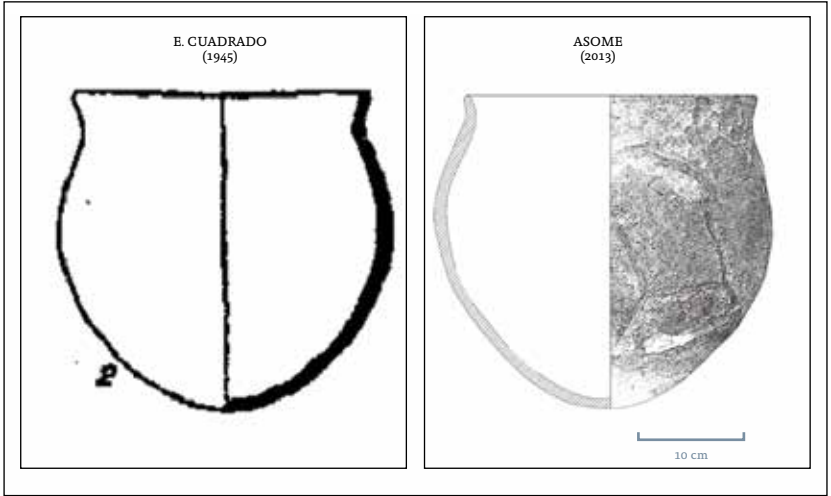
Plan of La Almoloya after the surface cleaning carried out in 2013. The “molehills” are marked with numbers, while the pillaged tombs were assigned the abbreviation AYE, followed by a number. The hatched areas to the south and northwest correspond possibly to sectors excavated by Cuadrado and de la Cierva in 1944.



47- Urua lei troncoscaica. Totana (La Bastida). Rob  
 La Almoloya (Plaza) - <sup>2</sup> <sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup> <sup>5</sup> <sup>6</sup> <sup>7</sup> <sup>8</sup> <sup>9</sup> <sup>10</sup> <sup>11</sup> <sup>12</sup> <sup>13</sup> <sup>14</sup> <sup>15</sup> <sup>16</sup> <sup>17</sup> <sup>18</sup> <sup>19</sup> <sup>20</sup> <sup>21</sup> <sup>22</sup> <sup>23</sup> <sup>24</sup> <sup>25</sup> <sup>26</sup> <sup>27</sup> <sup>28</sup> <sup>29</sup> <sup>30</sup> <sup>31</sup> <sup>32</sup> <sup>33</sup> <sup>34</sup> <sup>35</sup> <sup>36</sup> <sup>37</sup> <sup>38</sup> <sup>39</sup> <sup>40</sup> <sup>41</sup> <sup>42</sup> <sup>43</sup> <sup>44</sup> <sup>45</sup> <sup>46</sup> <sup>47</sup> <sup>48</sup> <sup>49</sup> <sup>50</sup> <sup>51</sup> <sup>52</sup> <sup>53</sup> <sup>54</sup> <sup>55</sup> <sup>56</sup> <sup>57</sup> <sup>58</sup> <sup>59</sup> <sup>60</sup> <sup>61</sup> <sup>62</sup> <sup>63</sup> <sup>64</sup> <sup>65</sup> <sup>66</sup> <sup>67</sup> <sup>68</sup> <sup>69</sup> <sup>70</sup> <sup>71</sup> <sup>72</sup> <sup>73</sup> <sup>74</sup> <sup>75</sup> <sup>76</sup> <sup>77</sup> <sup>78</sup> <sup>79</sup> <sup>80</sup> <sup>81</sup> <sup>82</sup> <sup>83</sup> <sup>84</sup> <sup>85</sup> <sup>86</sup> <sup>87</sup> <sup>88</sup> <sup>89</sup> <sup>90</sup> <sup>91</sup> <sup>92</sup> <sup>93</sup> <sup>94</sup> <sup>95</sup> <sup>96</sup> <sup>97</sup> <sup>98</sup> <sup>99</sup> <sup>100</sup> <sup>101</sup> <sup>102</sup> <sup>103</sup> <sup>104</sup> <sup>105</sup> <sup>106</sup> <sup>107</sup> <sup>108</sup> <sup>109</sup> <sup>110</sup> <sup>111</sup> <sup>112</sup> <sup>113</sup> <sup>114</sup> <sup>115</sup> <sup>116</sup> <sup>117</sup> <sup>118</sup> <sup>119</sup> <sup>120</sup> <sup>121</sup> <sup>122</sup> <sup>123</sup> <sup>124</sup> <sup>125</sup> <sup>126</sup> <sup>127</sup> <sup>128</sup> <sup>129</sup> <sup>130</sup> <sup>131</sup> <sup>132</sup> <sup>133</sup> <sup>134</sup> <sup>135</sup> <sup>136</sup> <sup>137</sup> <sup>138</sup> <sup>139</sup> <sup>140</sup> <sup>141</sup> <sup>142</sup> <sup>143</sup> <sup>144</sup> <sup>145</sup> <sup>146</sup> <sup>147</sup> <sup>148</sup> <sup>149</sup> <sup>150</sup> <sup>151</sup> <sup>152</sup> <sup>153</sup> <sup>154</sup> <sup>155</sup> <sup>156</sup> <sup>157</sup> <sup>158</sup> <sup>159</sup> <sup>160</sup> <sup>161</sup> <sup>162</sup> <sup>163</sup> <sup>164</sup> <sup>165</sup> <sup>166</sup> <sup>167</sup> <sup>168</sup> <sup>169</sup> <sup>170</sup> <sup>171</sup> <sup>172</sup> <sup>173</sup> <sup>174</sup> <sup>175</sup> <sup>176</sup> <sup>177</sup> <sup>178</sup> <sup>179</sup> <sup>180</sup> <sup>181</sup> <sup>182</sup> <sup>183</sup> <sup>184</sup> <sup>185</sup> <sup>186</sup> <sup>187</sup> <sup>188</sup> <sup>189</sup> <sup>190</sup> <sup>191</sup> <sup>192</sup> <sup>193</sup> <sup>194</sup> <sup>195</sup> <sup>196</sup> <sup>197</sup> <sup>198</sup> <sup>199</sup> <sup>200</sup> <sup>201</sup> <sup>202</sup> <sup>203</sup> <sup>204</sup> <sup>205</sup> <sup>206</sup> <sup>207</sup> <sup>208</sup> <sup>209</sup> <sup>210</sup> <sup>211</sup> <sup>212</sup> <sup>213</sup> <sup>214</sup> <sup>215</sup> <sup>216</sup> <sup>217</sup> <sup>218</sup> <sup>219</sup> <sup>220</sup> <sup>221</sup> <sup>222</sup> <sup>223</sup> <sup>224</sup> <sup>225</sup> <sup>226</sup> <sup>227</sup> <sup>228</sup> <sup>229</sup> <sup>230</sup> <sup>231</sup> <sup>232</sup> <sup>233</sup> <sup>234</sup> <sup>235</sup> <sup>236</sup> <sup>237</sup> <sup>238</sup> <sup>239</sup> <sup>240</sup> <sup>241</sup> <sup>242</sup> <sup>243</sup> <sup>244</sup> <sup>245</sup> <sup>246</sup> <sup>247</sup> <sup>248</sup> <sup>249</sup> <sup>250</sup> <sup>251</sup> <sup>252</sup> <sup>253</sup> <sup>254</sup> <sup>255</sup> <sup>256</sup> <sup>257</sup> <sup>258</sup> <sup>259</sup> <sup>260</sup> <sup>261</sup> <sup>262</sup> <sup>263</sup> <sup>264</sup> <sup>265</sup> <sup>266</sup> <sup>267</sup> <sup>268</sup> <sup>269</sup> <sup>270</sup> <sup>271</sup> <sup>272</sup> <sup>273</sup> <sup>274</sup> <sup>275</sup> <sup>276</sup> <sup>277</sup> <sup>278</sup> <sup>279</sup> <sup>280</sup> <sup>281</sup> <sup>282</sup> <sup>283</sup> <sup>284</sup> <sup>285</sup> <sup>286</sup> <sup>287</sup> <sup>288</sup> <sup>289</sup> <sup>290</sup> <sup>291</sup> <sup>292</sup> <sup>293</sup> <sup>294</sup> <sup>295</sup> <sup>296</sup> <sup>297</sup> <sup>298</sup> <sup>299</sup> <sup>300</sup> <sup>301</sup> <sup>302</sup> <sup>303</sup> <sup>304</sup> <sup>305</sup> <sup>306</sup> <sup>307</sup> <sup>308</sup> <sup>309</sup> <sup>310</sup> <sup>311</sup> <sup>312</sup> <sup>313</sup> <sup>314</sup> <sup>315</sup> <sup>316</sup> <sup>317</sup> <sup>318</sup> <sup>319</sup> <sup>320</sup> <sup>321</sup> <sup>322</sup> <sup>323</sup> <sup>324</sup> <sup>325</sup> <sup>326</sup> <sup>327</sup> <sup>328</sup> <sup>329</sup> <sup>330</sup> <sup>331</sup> <sup>332</sup> <sup>333</sup> <sup>334</sup> <sup>335</sup> <sup>336</sup> <sup>337</sup> <sup>338</sup> <sup>339</sup> <sup>340</sup> <sup>341</sup> <sup>342</sup> <sup>343</sup> <sup>344</sup> <sup>345</sup> <sup>346</sup> <sup>347</sup> <sup>348</sup> <sup>349</sup> <sup>350</sup> <sup>351</sup> <sup>352</sup> <sup>353</sup> <sup>354</sup> <sup>355</sup> <sup>356</sup> <sup>357</sup> <sup>358</sup> <sup>359</sup> <sup>360</sup> <sup>361</sup> <sup>362</sup> <sup>363</sup> <sup>364</sup> <sup>365</sup> <sup>366</sup> <sup>367</sup> <sup>368</sup> <sup>369</sup> <sup>370</sup> <sup>371</sup> <sup>372</sup> <sup>373</sup> <sup>374</sup> <sup>375</sup> <sup>376</sup> <sup>377</sup> <sup>378</sup> <sup>379</sup> <sup>380</sup> <sup>381</sup> <sup>382</sup> <sup>383</sup> <sup>384</sup> <sup>385</sup> <sup>386</sup> <sup>387</sup> <sup>388</sup> <sup>389</sup> <sup>390</sup> <sup>391</sup> <sup>392</sup> <sup>393</sup> <sup>394</sup> <sup>395</sup> <sup>396</sup> <sup>397</sup> <sup>398</sup> <sup>399</sup> <sup>400</sup> <sup>401</sup> <sup>402</sup> <sup>403</sup> <sup>404</sup> <sup>405</sup> <sup>406</sup> <sup>407</sup> <sup>408</sup> <sup>409</sup> <sup>410</sup> <sup>411</sup> <sup>412</sup> <sup>413</sup> <sup>414</sup> <sup>415</sup> <sup>416</sup> <sup>417</sup> <sup>418</sup> <sup>419</sup> <sup>420</sup> <sup>421</sup> <sup>422</sup> <sup>423</sup> <sup>424</sup> <sup>425</sup> <sup>426</sup> <sup>427</sup> <sup>428</sup> <sup>429</sup> <sup>430</sup> <sup>431</sup> <sup>432</sup> <sup>433</sup> <sup>434</sup> <sup>435</sup> <sup>436</sup> <sup>437</sup> <sup>438</sup> <sup>439</sup> <sup>440</sup> <sup>441</sup> <sup>442</sup> <sup>443</sup> <sup>444</sup> <sup>445</sup> <sup>446</sup> <sup>447</sup> <sup>448</sup> <sup>449</sup> <sup>450</sup> <sup>451</sup> <sup>452</sup> <sup>453</sup> <sup>454</sup> <sup>455</sup> <sup>456</sup> <sup>457</sup> <sup>458</sup> <sup>459</sup> <sup>460</sup> <sup>461</sup> <sup>462</sup> <sup>463</sup> <sup>464</sup> <sup>465</sup> <sup>466</sup> <sup>467</sup> <sup>468</sup> <sup>469</sup> <sup>470</sup> <sup>471</sup> <sup>472</sup> <sup>473</sup> <sup>474</sup> <sup>475</sup> <sup>476</sup> <sup>477</sup> <sup>478</sup> <sup>479</sup> <sup>480</sup> <sup>481</sup> <sup>482</sup> <sup>483</sup> <sup>484</sup> <sup>485</sup> <sup>486</sup> <sup>487</sup> <sup>488</sup> <sup>489</sup> <sup>490</sup> <sup>491</sup> <sup>492</sup> <sup>493</sup> <sup>494</sup> <sup>495</sup> <sup>496</sup> <sup>497</sup> <sup>498</sup> <sup>499</sup> <sup>500</sup> <sup>501</sup> <sup>502</sup> <sup>503</sup> <sup>504</sup> <sup>505</sup> <sup>506</sup> <sup>507</sup> <sup>508</sup> <sup>509</sup> <sup>510</sup> <sup>511</sup> <sup>512</sup> <sup>513</sup> <sup>514</sup> <sup>515</sup> <sup>516</sup> <sup>517</sup> <sup>518</sup> <sup>519</sup> <sup>520</sup> <sup>521</sup> <sup>522</sup> <sup>523</sup> <sup>524</sup> <sup>525</sup> <sup>526</sup> <sup>527</sup> <sup>528</sup> <sup>529</sup> <sup>530</sup> <sup>531</sup> <sup>532</sup> <sup>533</sup> <sup>534</sup> <sup>535</sup> <sup>536</sup> <sup>537</sup> <sup>538</sup> <sup>539</sup> <sup>540</sup> <sup>541</sup> <sup>542</sup> <sup>543</sup> <sup>544</sup> <sup>545</sup> <sup>546</sup> <sup>547</sup> <sup>548</sup> <sup>549</sup> <sup>550</sup> <sup>551</sup> <sup>552</sup> <sup>553</sup> <sup>554</sup> <sup>555</sup> <sup>556</sup> <sup>557</sup> <sup>558</sup> <sup>559</sup> <sup>560</sup> <sup>561</sup> <sup>562</sup> <sup>563</sup> <sup>564</sup> <sup>565</sup> <sup>566</sup> <sup>567</sup> <sup>568</sup> <sup>569</sup> <sup>570</sup> <sup>571</sup> <sup>572</sup> <sup>573</sup> <sup>574</sup> <sup>575</sup> <sup>576</sup> <sup>577</sup> <sup>578</sup> <sup>579</sup> <sup>580</sup> <sup>581</sup> <sup>582</sup> <sup>583</sup> <sup>584</sup> <sup>585</sup> <sup>586</sup> <sup>587</sup> <sup>588</sup> <sup>589</sup> <sup>590</sup> <sup>591</sup> <sup>592</sup> <sup>593</sup> <sup>594</sup> <sup>595</sup> <sup>596</sup> <sup>597</sup> <sup>598</sup> <sup>599</sup> <sup>600</sup> <sup>601</sup> <sup>602</sup> <sup>603</sup> <sup>604</sup> <sup>605</sup> <sup>606</sup> <sup>607</sup> <sup>608</sup> <sup>609</sup> <sup>610</sup> <sup>611</sup> <sup>612</sup> <sup>613</sup> <sup>614</sup> <sup>615</sup> <sup>616</sup> <sup>617</sup> <sup>618</sup> <sup>619</sup> <sup>620</sup> <sup>621</sup> <sup>622</sup> <sup>623</sup> <sup>624</sup> <sup>625</sup> <sup>626</sup> <sup>627</sup> <sup>628</sup> <sup>629</sup> <sup>630</sup> <sup>631</sup> <sup>632</sup> <sup>633</sup> <sup>634</sup> <sup>635</sup> <sup>636</sup> <sup>637</sup> <sup>638</sup> <sup>639</sup> <sup>640</sup> <sup>641</sup> <sup>642</sup> <sup>643</sup> <sup>644</sup> <sup>645</sup> <sup>646</sup> <sup>647</sup> <sup>648</sup> <sup>649</sup> <sup>650</sup> <sup>651</sup> <sup>652</sup> <sup>653</sup> <sup>654</sup> <sup>655</sup> <sup>656</sup> <sup>657</sup> <sup>658</sup> <sup>659</sup> <sup>660</sup> <sup>661</sup> <sup>662</sup> <sup>663</sup> <sup>664</sup> <sup>665</sup> <sup>666</sup> <sup>667</sup> <sup>668</sup> <sup>669</sup> <sup>670</sup> <sup>671</sup> <sup>672</sup> <sup>673</sup> <sup>674</sup> <sup>675</sup> <sup>676</sup> <sup>677</sup> <sup>678</sup> <sup>679</sup> <sup>680</sup> <sup>681</sup> <sup>682</sup> <sup>683</sup> <sup>684</sup> <sup>685</sup> <sup>686</sup> <sup>687</sup> <sup>688</sup> <sup>689</sup> <sup>690</sup> <sup>691</sup> <sup>692</sup> <sup>693</sup> <sup>694</sup> <sup>695</sup> <sup>696</sup> <sup>697</sup> <sup>698</sup> <sup>699</sup> <sup>700</sup> <sup>701</sup> <sup>702</sup> <sup>703</sup> <sup>704</sup> <sup>705</sup> <sup>706</sup> <sup>707</sup> <sup>708</sup> <sup>709</sup> <sup>710</sup> <sup>711</sup> <sup>712</sup> <sup>713</sup> <sup>714</sup> <sup>715</sup> <sup>716</sup> <sup>717</sup> <sup>718</sup> <sup>719</sup> <sup>720</sup> <sup>721</sup> <sup>722</sup> <sup>723</sup> <sup>724</sup> <sup>725</sup> <sup>726</sup> <sup>727</sup> <sup>728</sup> <sup>729</sup> <sup>730</sup> <sup>731</sup> <sup>732</sup> <sup>733</sup> <sup>734</sup> <sup>735</sup> <sup>736</sup> <sup>737</sup> <sup>738</sup> <sup>739</sup> <sup>740</sup> <sup>741</sup> <sup>742</sup> <sup>743</sup> <sup>744</sup> <sup>745</sup> <sup>746</sup> <sup>747</sup> <sup>748</sup> <sup>749</sup> <sup>750</sup> <sup>751</sup> <sup>752</sup> <sup>753</sup> <sup>754</sup> <sup>755</sup> <sup>756</sup> <sup>757</sup> <sup>758</sup> <sup>759</sup> <sup>760</sup> <sup>761</sup> <sup>762</sup> <sup>763</sup> <sup>764</sup> <sup>765</sup> <sup>766</sup> <sup>767</sup> <sup>768</sup> <sup>769</sup> <sup>770</sup> <sup>771</sup> <sup>772</sup> <sup>773</sup> <sup>774</sup> <sup>775</sup> <sup>776</sup> <sup>777</sup> <sup>778</sup> <sup>779</sup> <sup>780</sup> <sup>781</sup> <sup>782</sup> <sup>783</sup> <sup>784</sup> <sup>785</sup> <sup>786</sup> <sup>787</sup> <sup>788</sup> <sup>789</sup> <sup>790</sup> <sup>791</sup> <sup>792</sup> <sup>793</sup> <sup>794</sup> <sup>795</sup> <sup>796</sup> <sup>797</sup> <sup>798</sup> <sup>799</sup> <sup>800</sup> <sup>801</sup> <sup>802</sup> <sup>803</sup> <sup>804</sup> <sup>805</sup> <sup>806</sup> <sup>807</sup> <sup>808</sup> <sup>809</sup> <sup>810</sup> <sup>811</sup> <sup>812</sup> <sup>813</sup> <sup>814</sup> <sup>815</sup> <sup>816</sup> <sup>817</sup> <sup>818</sup> <sup>819</sup> <sup>820</sup> <sup>821</sup> <sup>822</sup> <sup>823</sup> <sup>824</sup> <sup>825</sup> <sup>826</sup> <sup>827</sup> <sup>828</sup> <sup>829</sup> <sup>830</sup> <sup>831</sup> <sup>832</sup> <sup>833</sup> <sup>834</sup> <sup>835</sup> <sup>836</sup> <sup>837</sup> <sup>838</sup> <sup>839</sup> <sup>840</sup> <sup>841</sup> <sup>842</sup> <sup>843</sup> <sup>844</sup> <sup>845</sup> <sup>846</sup> <sup>847</sup> <sup>848</sup> <sup>849</sup> <sup>850</sup> <sup>851</sup> <sup>852</sup> <sup>853</sup> <sup>854</sup> <sup>855</sup> <sup>856</sup> <sup>857</sup> <sup>858</sup> <sup>859</sup> <sup>860</sup> <sup>861</sup> <sup>862</sup> <sup>863</sup> <sup>864</sup> <sup>865</sup> <sup>866</sup> <sup>867</sup> <sup>868</sup> <sup>869</sup> <sup>870</sup> <sup>871</sup> <sup>872</sup> <sup>873</sup> <sup>874</sup> <sup>875</sup> <sup>876</sup> <sup>877</sup> <sup>878</sup> <sup>879</sup> <sup>880</sup> <sup>881</sup> <sup>882</sup> <sup>883</sup> <sup>884</sup> <sup>885</sup> <sup>886</sup> <sup>887</sup> <sup>888</sup> <sup>889</sup> <sup>890</sup> <sup>891</sup> <sup>892</sup> <sup>893</sup> <sup>894</sup> <sup>895</sup> <sup>896</sup> <sup>897</sup> <sup>898</sup> <sup>899</sup> <sup>900</sup> <sup>901</sup> <sup>902</sup> <sup>903</sup> <sup>904</sup> <sup>905</sup> <sup>906</sup> <sup>907</sup> <sup>908</sup> <sup>909</sup> <sup>910</sup> <sup>911</sup> <sup>912</sup> <sup>913</sup> <sup>914</sup> <sup>915</sup> <sup>916</sup> <sup>917</sup> <sup>918</sup> <sup>919</sup> <sup>920</sup> <sup>921</sup> <sup>922</sup> <sup>923</sup> <sup>924</sup> <sup>925</sup> <sup>926</sup> <sup>927</sup> <sup>928</sup> <sup>929</sup> <sup>930</sup> <sup>931</sup> <sup>932</sup> <sup>933</sup> <sup>934</sup> <sup>935</sup> <sup>936</sup> <sup>937</sup> <sup>938</sup> <sup>939</sup> <sup>940</sup> <sup>941</sup> <sup>942</sup> <sup>943</sup> <sup>944</sup> <sup>945</sup> <sup>946</sup> <sup>947</sup> <sup>948</sup> <sup>949</sup> <sup>950</sup> <sup>951</sup> <sup>952</sup> <sup>953</sup> <sup>954</sup> <sup>955</sup> <sup>956</sup> <sup>957</sup> <sup>958</sup> <sup>959</sup> <sup>960</sup> <sup>961</sup> <sup>962</sup> <sup>963</sup> <sup>964</sup> <sup>965</sup> <sup>966</sup> <sup>967</sup> <sup>968</sup> <sup>969</sup> <sup>970</sup> <sup>971</sup> <sup>972</sup> <sup>973</sup> <sup>974</sup> <sup>975</sup> <sup>976</sup> <sup>977</sup> <sup>978</sup> <sup>979</sup> <sup>980</sup> <sup>981</sup> <sup>982</sup> <sup>983</sup> <sup>984</sup> <sup>985</sup> <sup>986</sup> <sup>987</sup> <sup>988</sup> <sup>989</sup> <sup>990</sup> <sup>991</sup> <sup>992</sup> <sup>993</sup> <sup>994</sup> <sup>995</sup> <sup>996</sup> <sup>997</sup> <sup>998</sup> <sup>999</sup> <sup>1000</sup>

Alt: 0'54m. Diam. boca: 0'435m.  
 Recup





◀

Vessel from the 1944 excavations at La Almoloya, drawn by E. Cuadrado in 1945 (upper left image). In 1966 it was transferred from the Municipal Archaeological Museum of Cartagena to the Archaeological Museum of Murcia but with an erroneous reference, as shown in a handwritten record (central image). Thanks to the photograph that accompanied it (lower left image), we were able to identify it correctly, redraw it (upper image of reject) and photograph it (lower right image).

▲

Comparison between the drawing of a vessel published in 1945 by E. Cuadrado and ours (above). Photograph of the display of the Archaeological Museum of Murcia in the 1980s (bottom, left), next to a photograph of the piece today (bottom, right).

# Más excavaciones con éxito en la provincia de Murcia

## Una estación argárica en Pliego

En las estratificación de la Sierra de Espuña, y como avanzadas de su inmensa mole, se levanta a siete kilómetros de Pliego y en plena finca de don Juan de la Cueva y López, el cerro de la AlmoLOYA, cuya cumbre es una amplia meseta de verticales acantilados que le dan el aspecto y la convertían en la antigüedad en natural y casi inexpugnable ciudadela. Plantado en lo más alto, un mojón marca la línea divisoria de los términos de Muña y Pliego.

Desde tiempo inmemorial, como siempre ocurre en tierra a estos montes de difícil acceso o de profundidades desconocidas, tallo la imaginación popular fantástica conjeturas, entre las que no podía faltar la del secular tesoro que los reinos antepasados dejaron enterrado en la AlmoLOYA con ocasión de alguna de sus precipitadas huidas ante un enemigo aguerrido que devastó los valles de la serranía. En consecuencia, buscadores ilusionados remanían con algún rizado de su altigüedad, pero la destitución sufrida y la dificultad del acceso impidieron, por suerte, el desmoronamiento de los restos del poblado argáico



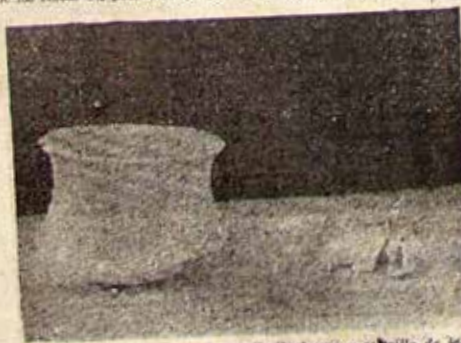
El director del Museo muestra a la señorita de La Cueva y al alcalde de Pliego, cómo se servían de las piedras holladas para la cocción del grano.

que allí tuvo su asiento y que ahora hemos tenido el placer de visitar atentamente invitados por su ilustre propietario y gracias a

la munificencia del excelentísimo señor gobernador civil que puso su coche a nuestra disposición. En compañía del dinámico señor Herrero, redactor gráfico de LA VERDAD; del señor alcalde de Pliego, interesado por la prehistoria de su patria cívica, y del señor practicante de aguas pintoresco pueblo, emprendimos la no fácil ascensión, siempre con. (Continúa en la plana siguiente)

### La tormenta de e: a punto de impedir la

A la una treinta de la madrugada se dejó sentir en nuestra ciudad una fuerte tormenta con grandes descargas eléctricas y ligero aguacero. Una avería en la Central Eléctrica interrumpió el servicio durante dos horas, paralizándose nuestras máquinas e impidiéndose la recepción por tele tipo



Una argárica talpiforme, puzón de hueso y conchillo de hueso, encontrados dentro de aquella.

Cover story in the newspaper La Verdad (Murcia, September 1, 1944).



Location and present state of some of the pillaged tombs.



The plateau as  
seen from the  
Northwest before  
the beginning of the  
fieldwork in 2013.





The plateau as seen from the East, at the end of the third archaeological season in 2015.






## THE THREE OVERLYING SETTLEMENTS OF LA ALMOLOYA

Looking at snapshots of before and after can be quite useful in getting an idea of how much the surface of the hill changed throughout the three archaeological seasons (2013-2015).

We can observe a very sophisticated urban planning structured in nine architectural complexes separated by narrow alleys. Each complex is subdivided into a variable number of rooms, workshops and warehouses and, beneath them, almost a hundred tombs have been documented. In addition, one of the northern complexes has a cistern. There is an enclosed area that stands out above the others: it is a large meeting room, which was the first space that was explicitly political and permanent in the prehistory of continental Europe.

All of this architectural network was in use during the last two centuries of Argaric society. The radiocarbon dating method places this phase between 1750 and 1550 BCE. La Almoloya also has older remains in the strata located a few metres below the most recent urban complex. We have accessed these deposits in a small area in the south of the plateau, without damaging the rich heritage of this last phase. Thanks to this, we know that there were two “Almolyas” before that of the final, peak phase.

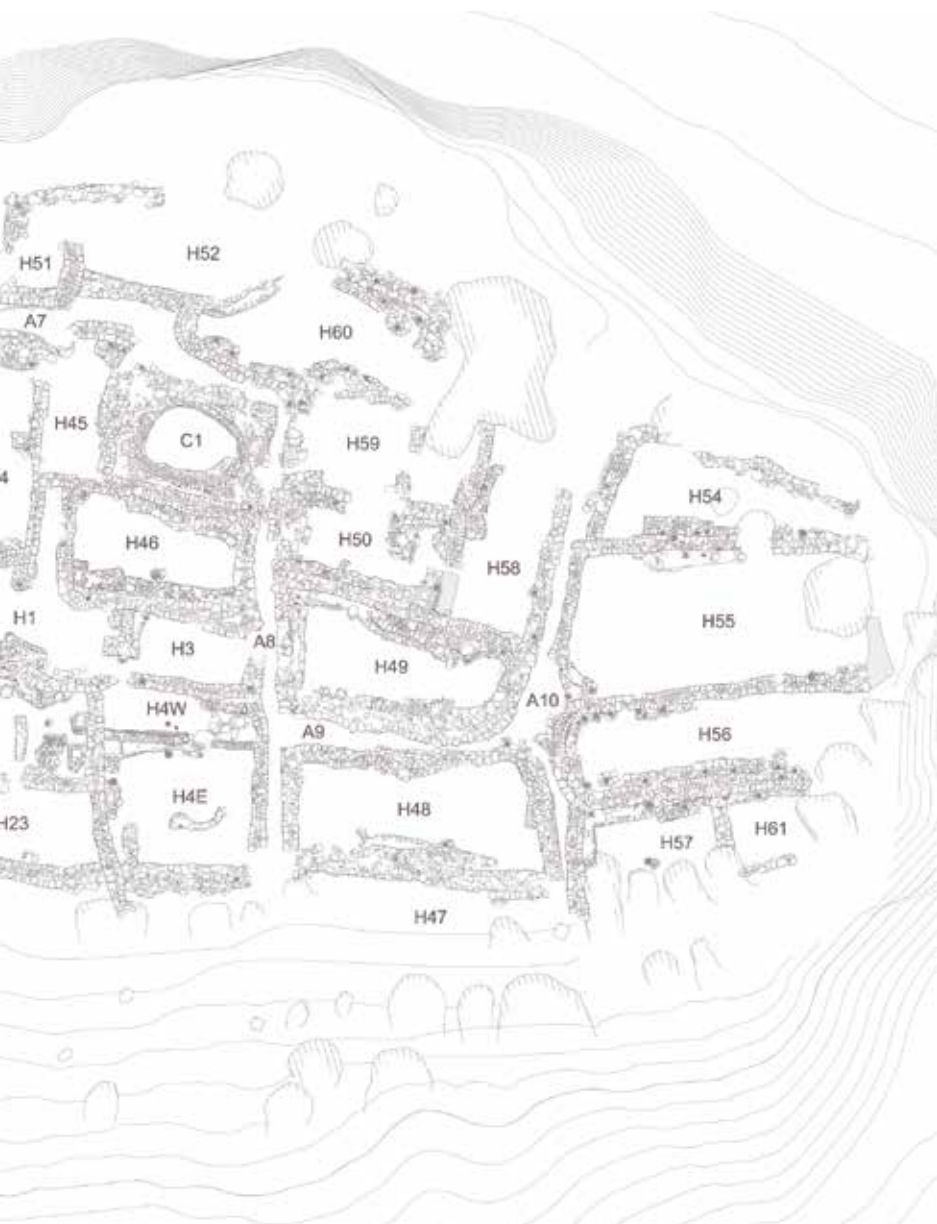
These two underlying villages were organised differently and had different quality buildings and layout from the one that today occupies the surface. To the south of the plateau, and occasionally in other areas, we have managed to reach the bedrock or geological substrate. The sedimentary sequence, that is the superposition of strata corresponding to the three main phases in the occupation of La Almoloya, illustrates a surprising social development with notable changes in architecture, tools, weapons, rituals and, above all, in the manifestations of power.

  
In red, the areas where we excavated below the levels of the latest occupation phase and found the two underlying ones.





Plan of the final phase  
of La Almoloya (1750-1550 BCE)





# LA ALMOLOYA

---

THE FIRST PHASE

---

---

---

---

---



## THE FIRST PHASE

2200-2000 BCE

Highlighted with colours, the structural remains of the first phase of occupation.

During the first phase of occupation, the trend was to build houses with curved or sometimes rectilinear walls. They had stone bases with one or two horizontal rows of slabs, lightly compacted mud walls, wooden poles embedded in, or adjacent to them, and roofs made of branches and clay. The houses were orientated to the west and their ends were protected by the natural rock. The latter presented a strong slope to the east and, it is precisely in the eastern sector where, for the moment, the first houses have been discovered.





Room H16, from the northeast, with its south wall and a large grinding stone in situ. These remains were subsequently disturbed by the burial of AY21, whose side slabs we see in the centre of the image.



View of room H14 from the southwest. H14 was built over the rubble of H16.



Bracelets found on the floor of rooms H14 (left) and H31 (right).

Among the most notable objects are a closed shell bracelet and an ivory bracelet formed by two semi-circular halves with distal perforations where the threads would pass through to join them together.

These pieces and some vessels of uncertain form accompanied a set of Argaric vessels. The abundance of animal bones concentrated in certain contexts is of great economic importance. The cut marks in many of them reveal processes of dismemberment and butchery, although their high number and density would also point to redistribution and meat consumption practices that are still to be clarified. In any case the abundance of remains of various species reveals the remarkable amount of livestock and subsistence hunting during the initial occupation, in contrast to what is known in the later occupations.

►  
Globular vessel located in room H42 of zone 3 and a group of faunal remains from H14 and H16.

The ivory objects are also in the process of analysis to determine if the raw material came from Africa or the Near East. In any case, they are a good example of the breadth of the exchange networks in which the first settlers of La Almoloya were integrated.



5 cm







# LA ALMOLOYA

---

THE SECOND PHASE

---

---

---

---

---



The “boat deck”, seen from the “bow”.



## THE SECOND PHASE 2000-1750 BCE

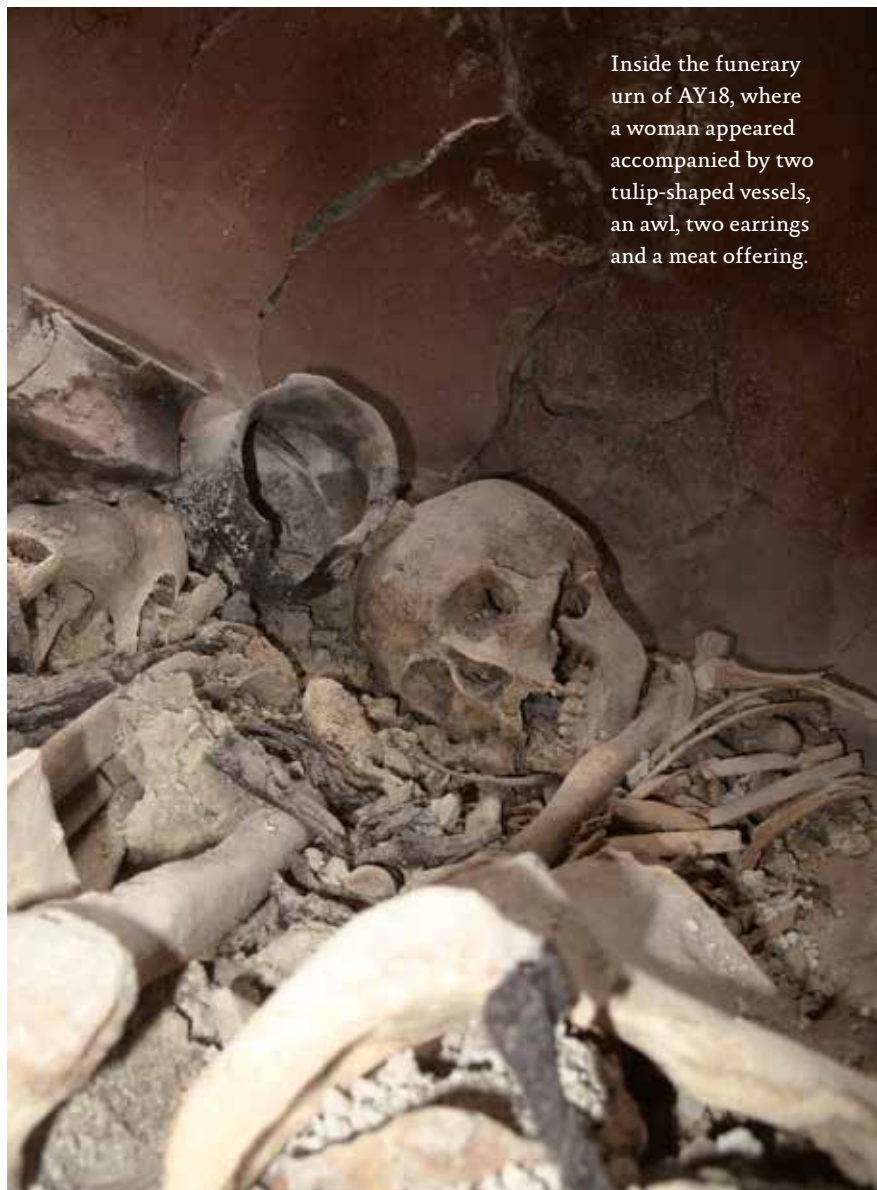
▲  
▼  
Aerial view of AY19, a children’s grave that was accompanied by a tulip-shaped vessel (F5), two earrings and a necklace with cyprea and conus shell beads.



In the second occupation phase, the steep slope to the east was significantly reduced thanks to the accumulation of debris from earlier houses. In the last phase, this slope is still evident, although more attenuated, which gives the top of the hill the appearance of a boat listing to starboard.

The domestic traces of the second phase are scarce in the southern area since only a transitional structure kept its earlier functions. One unexpected find is the first manifestation of domestic wall painting detected in an Argaric settlement and one of the few known in the European Bronze Age. Although in a secondary position, we find a good number of fragments with lunar motifs, linear borders and triangles filled with red paint and, finally, some artistic representations that are difficult to interpret for now. Some of these were covered by one or more layers of whitewashes that concealed the decoration but recorded the renovation work. We will have to wait for future excavations to certify the quality and extent of the domestic areas. On the contrary, funerary remains such as tombs AY15, AY18, AY19, AY21, AY24, AY60 and AY71 are plentiful (we identify the tombs with these codes; they are composed of the abbreviation “AY”, for “Almoloya”, followed by a number that matches the order in which they were discovered).

The visit to La Almoloya allows you to contemplate, in the extreme southeast, the traces of some tombs of this second phase and remains of the oldest buildings.



Inside the funerary urn of AY18, where a woman appeared accompanied by two tulip-shaped vessels, an awl, two earrings and a meat offering.

FIGURATIVE REPRESENTATIONS



PAINTED DOTS



HORIZONTAL SEQUENCES OF TRIANGLES



LINEAR PATTERNS



Motifs painted  
in plaster.



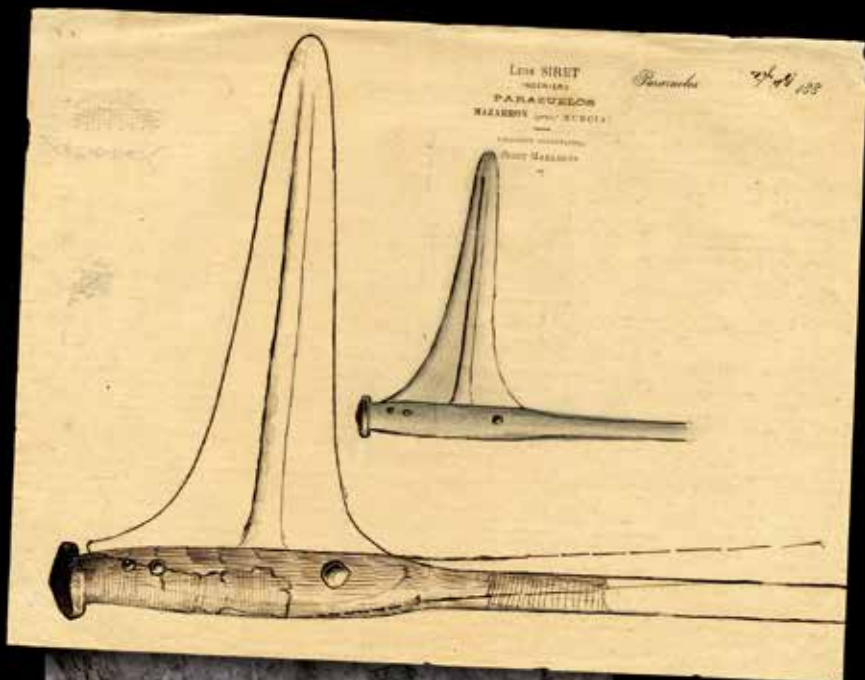
## POWER TO THE WARRIORS

We still have no record of the presence of warriors in the earliest phase of La Almoloya because we have not found burials from that occupation. However, deer antlers were recorded on the floor of some houses. Since their characteristics are similar to that of halberds, it is possible that they are their prototype and that they were present throughout their development. These antlers were also recorded in early levels of La Bastida.

The halberd is the first specialized weapon we know in the Argaric. It is a blunt object, made for striking blows and composed of a wooden handle that incorporates at one of its ends a copper tip between 14 and 24 cm in length, and with a more or less triangular shape.

Deer antler picks  
found in La Bastida.





▲  
Drawing by  
Louis Siret  
illustrating how  
the metal halberd  
would fit into  
the handle. The  
drawing is preserved  
in the National  
Archaeological  
Museum (Madrid).

Deer antler pick  
found in room H14 at  
La Almoloya.

▶

Tomb AY60. The disarticulated bones of the woman were repositioned on top of the body of the man. In the photo below, the AY60 halberdier viewed with its grave goods once the woman's remains were lifted. Note the forced flexing of elbows, knees, ankles and wrists.

▼

Burial AY60. Moment when the skull of the warrior begins to appear with the halberd next to his face.

Although we cannot be sure of the warlike character of the people who founded La Almoleya, some tombs from 2000 BCE onwards contained men accompanied by halberds that suggest a warrior status.

During the last campaign in 2015, we found two tombs with halberds that are still being studied. The first was tomb AY60, which contained the skeletons of a middle adult man and an elderly woman. The woman was buried first, although her disarticulated bones were repositioned above the body of the man. The second tomb was AY71, which contained a young adult man.

The AY60 man had the halberd in position, that is to say, with the handle upwards and the blade on the right shoulder. The wooden shaft was not preserved, but it would have been on the right side of the body. A dagger







5 cm

5 cm



found on the chest was displaced from its original position near the forearm. At the feet and next to the woman's displaced skull, there was a vessel and bones of the leg of a sheep or goat.

The AY71 halberdier was also wrapped in a very compact and tight bundle, like the previous one. It occupied the centre of a large cist, where there was plenty of space to place at least another body. The halberd was in position and across the face, with the tip facing one of the sides of the tomb. A vessel and a portion of meat were deposited at the foot of the body, just as in the previous tomb.

▲  
The great cist burial AY71, still sealed by the stone slabs.

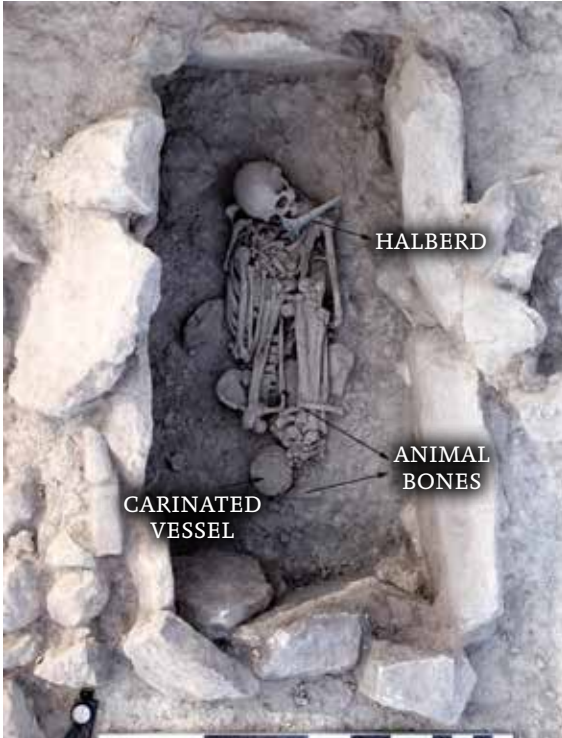
◀  
On top, complete grave goods belonging to the halberdier of the AY60 tomb. Below, halberd (left) and dagger (right).



The moment when the bones of the AY71 halberdier, its weapon and a pottery vessel at its feet began to appear.

We noticed the absence in this tomb of a dagger, a common object in tombs with halberds. Possibly the heavy halberd he had, one of the largest known so far, was sufficient for combat. If he wielded it with two hands, he would not need the use of a dagger as well.

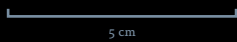
In the examples we know of the position of the halberd and the length of the skeleton shrouded in a bundle, we assume that the wooden shaft would have been between 50 and 70 cm long. In these cases, the weapon could have been wielded with one or two hands. However, the grave goods of a halberdier (39 well-contextualized tombs are known) usually also have a dagger, in addition to ornaments and meat offerings. In the combat system



The warrior of AY71 with the weapon next to the face and the remains of the food offerings at his feet. Note the forced position of the joints, although there was no lack of space inside the cist.

that involved the combined use of both objects, the halberd acted as a blunt weapon and the dagger as an opportunistic one.

It is well known that, to fight, it is not enough just to have a weapon. You need to know how to use it. Undoubtedly this type of fighting would have required specific training. Weapons not only require a new technology, that of weaponry, but also a new behaviour that demands skill and training, as well as cunning and tactics. The training required for this behaviour shaped the gestures and movements of the weapon bearers, instructing them with the discipline necessary for their survival.



5 cm

As some members of the La Almoloya team have written elsewhere<sup>11</sup>:

*“Therefore, the Argaric halberd is an unambiguous weapon, just like the sword, since unlike an axe, dagger or knife, it is useless outside the sphere of coercion and its symbols. Axes, daggers and knives are multifunctional: they can be used as weapons, but that is not their exclusive function. Conversely, halberds were weapons proper, derived from a specific and costly manufacture and used as means of destruction and intimidation until they were deposited as funerary items – the only moment in which they attained an exclusively symbolic function.”*

*“Halberds increase the magnitude of the bearer’s strength and establish new physical and spatial limits to the contest, by moving the opponent away or deterring him from conflict. The best weapons are those that, with their intimidating presence, do not need to be used.”*

*“The value of the use of the weapon may vary, but it is always based on the material principle of its power of annihilation. We can imagine the weapon as an obstacle, or as a sign of respect, admiration or prayer, but everything emerges from its power for destruction, from the fact that it is a destructive force.”*

*“Weapons are the productive forces of destruction, destructive forces par excellence. Therefore, the halberds materialise and create deterrent and destructive power in the initial Argaric”*

◀ Complete grave goods found inside the AY71 halberdier tomb. Below, the halberd that was deposited in his grave.



## ELITE, CITIZENS AND SLAVES

Detail of AY21, with the bones of the baby highlighted.

Thanks to other investigations, we know that bearing halberds means belonging to the Argaric ruling class<sup>12</sup>. Only 10% of the population belonged to this elite who, over time, made their rights inheritable<sup>13</sup>. The rest were people with certain social rights or “citizenship” (50%) and servants or slaves (40%). In the second phase of La Almoloya, burials of all these groups have been documented. Tombs AY21 and AY24 are a good example of the offerings that were deposited in the funerary rituals of individuals with citizenship rights.



General view of tomb AY21 depicting the remains of a woman and a newborn baby.



The first one, AY21, contained the remains of a woman and a baby. Both were buried simultaneously, as their limbs appeared entwined: the woman's right arm is resting on the baby's head, while one leg of the baby rests on her right leg. The two bodies were oriented in the same direction and with semi-flexed legs, but the new-born rested on his left side, while the woman lay on her back with the limbs to the right.



Dagger found in  
AY21 with remains  
of textile adhering to  
the blade.





The offerings included a copper awl found on top of the baby's remains, near to the woman's right elbow. Here, we also found a copper dagger and the bones of two meat portions of a sheep. Throughout the Argaric, copper awls only appear in female tombs. The typical grave goods of these women include, besides the awl, a knife or dagger.

Another burial of the Argaric "intermediate class" is AY24. It is a very interesting tomb because the large stone tomb contained a wooden "coffin" whose traces have been preserved.

It is, again, a double tomb. The remains of the man buried first were moved to make room for a woman who, as expected, lay on her right side. The grave goods were formed by the well-known association of dagger and awl, in addition to two pottery vessels and a portion of meat.

---

On the left, AY24 with the roofing slabs fallen inside the tomb.





# LA ALMOLOYA

---

THE THIRD PHASE

---

---

---

---

---





## THE THIRD PHASE 2000-1750 BCE LA ALMOLOYA

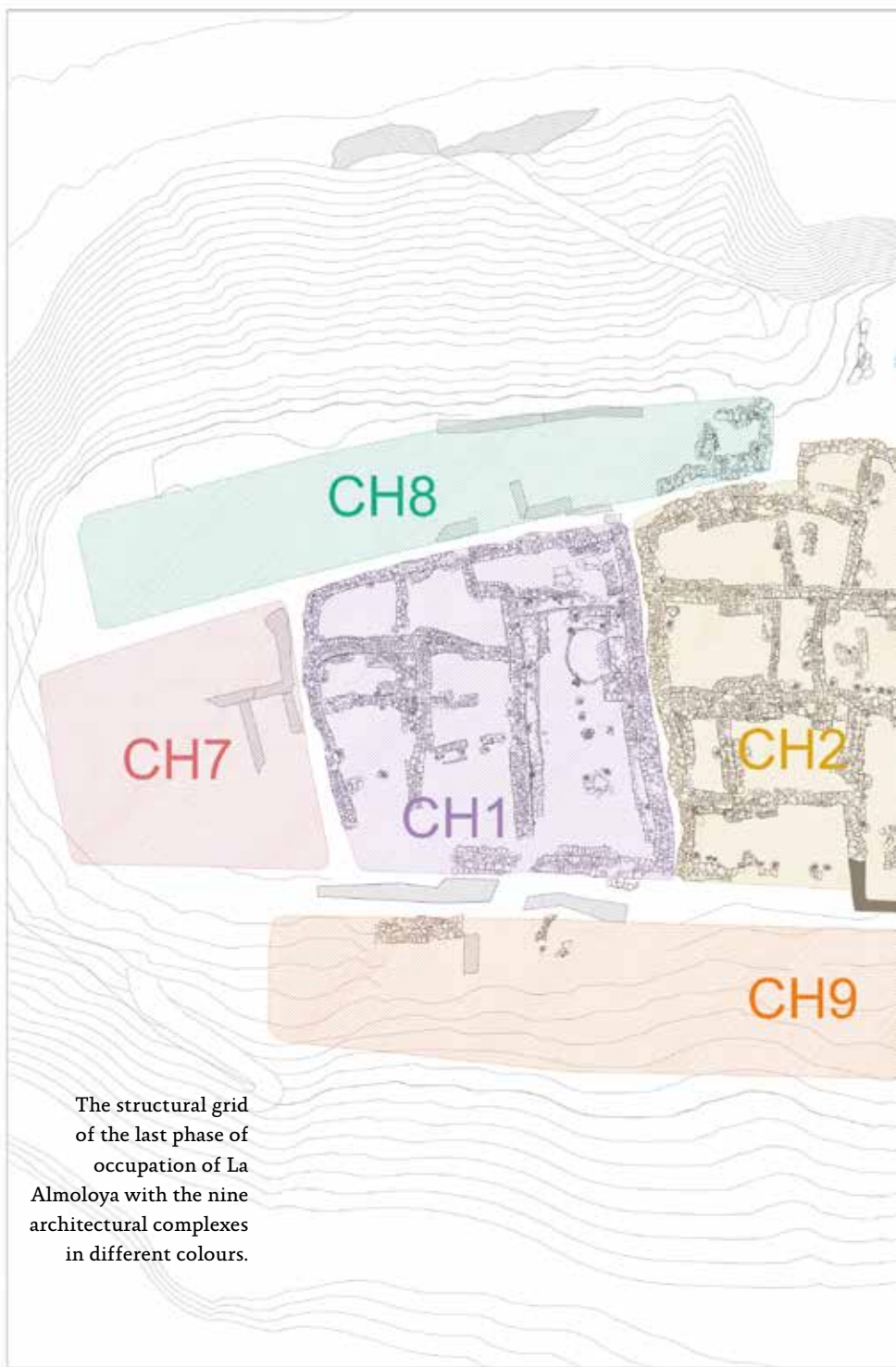
Around 1750 BCE, the large urban area that covers the entire surface of the hill was levelled. So far, we have excavated, although not completely, six of the nine architectural complexes that can be identified on the surface. Eleven very narrow streets or alleyways separate them from each other and, in addition to allowing passage, they served as means of drainage and water evacuation.

The urban “islands” that make up these architectural complexes vary in size and number of rooms: from 156.56 m<sup>2</sup> in Complex 5 to 332.12 m<sup>2</sup> in Complex 3; and from two or three rooms in Complex 5 to ten in Complex 2.

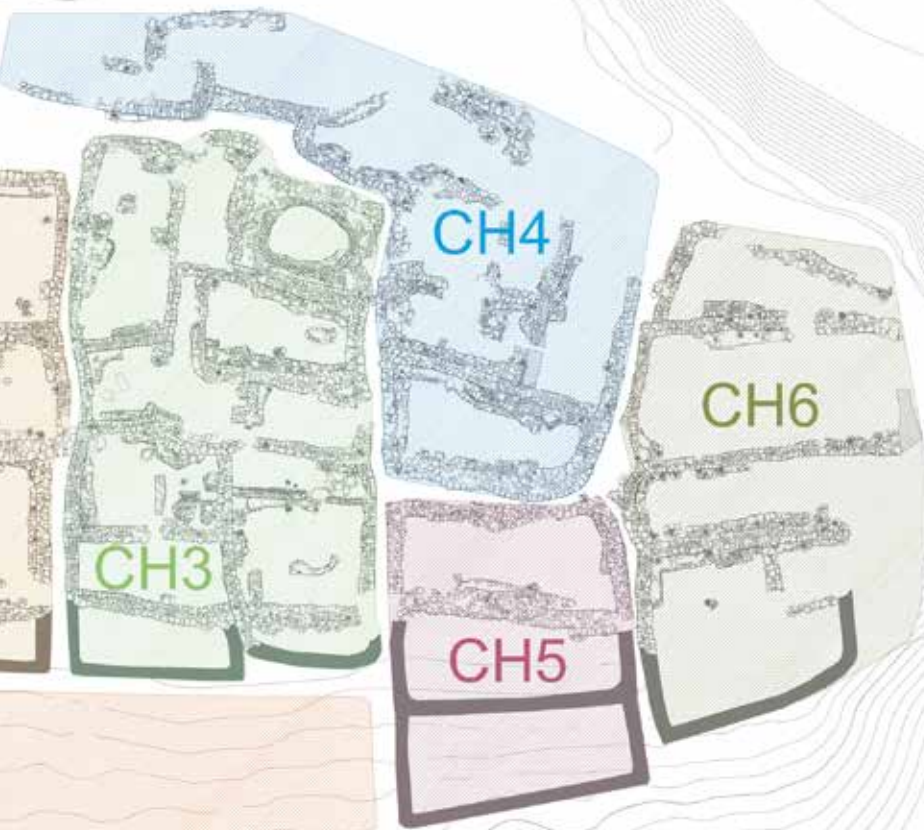
Complex 6 would have had one more room than we have been able to detect so far and Complex 5, probably, two more. These three rooms would be located near the eastern corner of the hill, one of the areas most affected by clandestine activity and still to be explored. Complex 7 would have occupied the southern limit of the plateau. The intensity of illegal excavation in this sector is so much that it is practically destroyed. However, remains of some walls can be seen between the large holes of this illegal digging. Complexes 8, to the west, and 9, to the east, albeit very altered now, would have completed the urban plan.



The urbanized area covers almost all the available space on the plateau, taking full advantage of the 2,280 m<sup>2</sup> of the 3,050 m<sup>2</sup> available and making the whole area look very compact and dense. The narrow streets that separate these architectural units barely let two people pass each other, as they vary between 40 and 80 cm in width. The only exception is the passage that marks the backbone of the structural grid, as one of its sections expands up to 1.20m in width.

◀ The disarticulated remains of the male from grave AY24 were set aside and partially repositioned on the body of the woman.



The structural grid of the last phase of occupation of La Almoloya with the nine architectural complexes in different colours.



-  ORIGINAL STRUCTURES
-  HYPOTHETICAL STRUCTURES

16 m





## THE FIRST EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT?

The large building located in Complex 1 is unique both from an architectural point of view and for its social function. It is so important that we would not understand the rest of the town without its presence.

It is not surprising that this unusual structure in the Argaric and in the Early Bronze of Continental Europe has been documented at the peak of La Almoloya and El Argar in general. The period between 1750 and 1550 BCE marks the maximum territorial expansion and the reaffirmation of state power in the communities. However, the social contradictions that led to the destruction of a way of life with 650 years of history also increased exponentially.

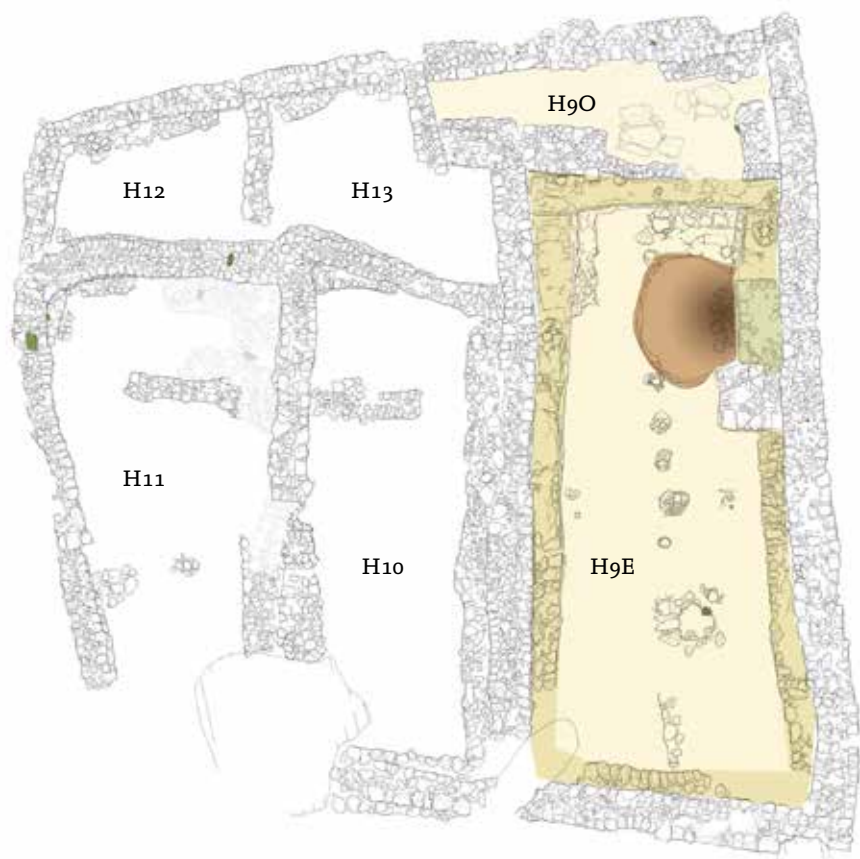
The large building would have been completely roofed. It is 127 m<sup>2</sup> in size and is divided into two rooms. The largest room still has up to 2,20 m of its original height in one of its walls.

Its walls are on average 1m thick and are made of two very solid faces of medium size stones placed in more or less parallel courses. The surface of the walls was covered with a lime and clay plaster from which up to six overlapping layers have been documented. The floor was paved with similar material, and at some points, it reaches 30 cm in thickness, due to the successive layers added to repair damage.

The central axis of the main hall was crossed by a row of seven post holes, embedded in a solid underground base made of stone and mortar. This structure warranted the stability of the wooden column shafts that supported the roof, together with 11 posts attached to the walls as pilasters and two outer reinforcements.

◀ Different perspectives of some access ways that make up the urban grid and separate the housing complexes from the last phase of occupation of La Almoloya.

A large continuous bench was attached to the wall base, interrupted only by staircase for access and a podium. We estimated that at least 50 people could sit on this bench. Near the north-western corner and at the base of the podium, we found a large hearth of just over 4 m<sup>2</sup>. This structure had a smoke outlet with a supplementary roof supported by four wooden columns.



A wall of small stones, also covered in plaster, separated the main hall from a subsidiary room to the west. This room could be accessed through an opening and two steps.

The interior layout of the great hall follows a hierarchy of three levels. The highest structure is the podium, which is over 1 m tall. It is located next to a staircase of which three steps are preserved. Through it, one descended from the outside to the hall. The podium may have been the support of the seat of honour of an important person. There would be a fire burning in the great hearth surrounded by its four columns in the corners. Perhaps the purpose of this fireplace was to keep and maintain the eternal fire of which Oriental written sources speak and that some researchers interpret from similar structures documented around the Aegean. A small area in the centre of the hearth, about 50 cm<sup>2</sup> and greatly affected by the fire, could support this suggestion.

The second hierarchical level corresponds to the western section of the bench, which is much higher than in the rest of the area. This elevated bench could have had an important significance as it is arranged at the head of the room, to the right of the podium and “above” the rest. In the segment closest to the podium, the bench serves as the third step of access to the floor of the small adjoining unit. Perhaps the principal character at the meeting would come through the small room and make its “appearance”, as was the case in the Roman-era curial buildings.

What were 50 people doing in this room? We do not know for sure, but from a few positive and negative pieces of evidence, we suggest that we are looking at the first political architecture in continental Europe.

Highlighted in colour, the two most outstanding spaces inside of Complex 1 of La Almoloya. The floor is highlighted in light yellow; the benches are marked in a darker yellow; the podium is depicted in green; and, with a gradation from grey to orange, the large fireplace located opposite it.





3D recreation of the  
large meeting room,  
Parliament Hall



---

The Parliament Hall seen from the east. Note the longitudinal axis of holes that would have held posts designed to support the roof.

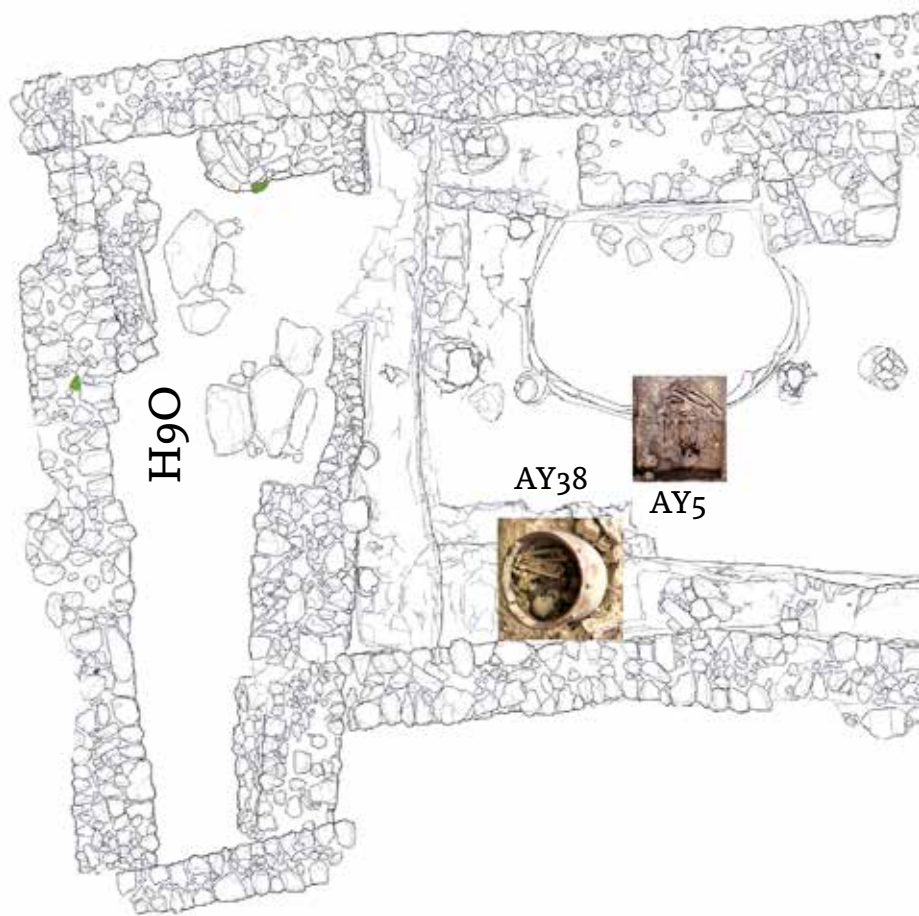


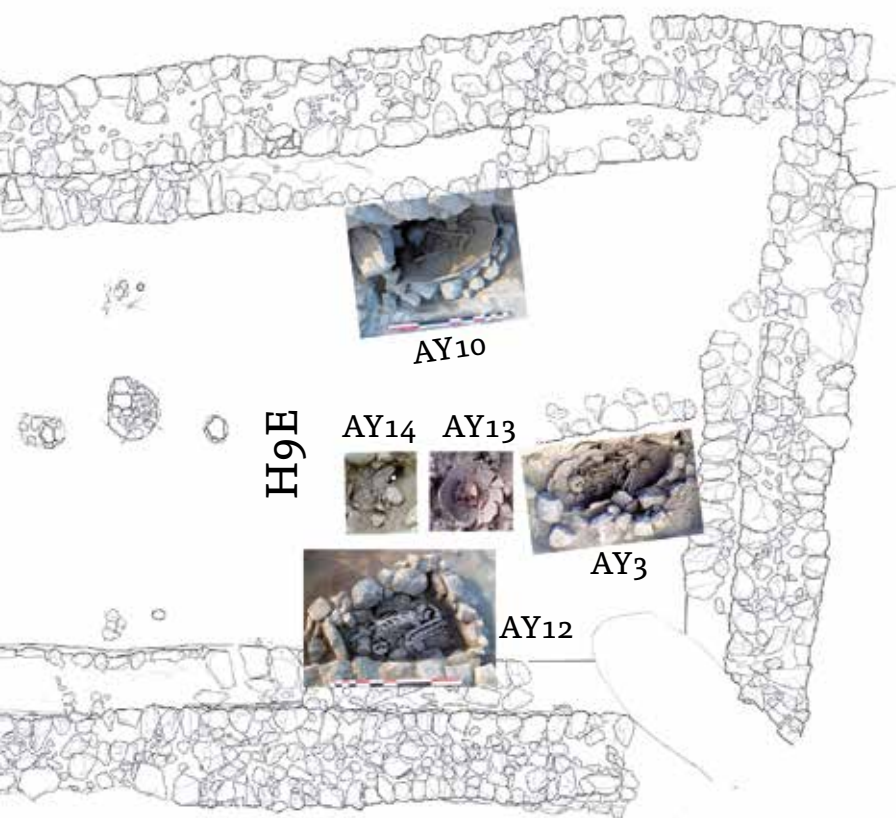
There are many reasons for this interpretation. In the first place, we found no cultural or religious elements and, unlike the rest of the rooms we know in the Argaric, there were no remains of food consumption or evidence of work-related tasks. That is, no subsistence or craft activities were carried out in this room. We only found a small number of exquisite containers.

We may be looking at the evidence for the first buildings dedicated to politics, places of debate, agreement or decision, like our assemblies and parliaments. If in 500 or 1000 years from now, the headquarters of the present congresses of deputies and senators were excavated, we would mainly find devices to record ideas and words, together with specific tools to communicate and archive them and, perhaps, some identity and membership emblems.

---

View of the southwest corner, where we found a 2.20 m high wall partially plastered with stucco.





Tombs found  
beneath the  
Parliament Hall.



---

The Parliament Hall  
seen from southwest.

La Almoloya documents that possibility. The archaeological evidence found in this building is the total opposite of what we found in the remaining rooms. This, together with its size and relevance, points to a permanent and central structure of a political-social order.

When we excavated the subsoil of part of the room in 2013, we were astonished by the tombs discovered there. All occupants seemed to be individuals of humble condition, deeply affected by severe pathologies and traumas. How was it possible that a stratified society, with a pyramidal organisation, decided to bury servants and slaves in the room where political decisions were made?



## THE FIRST WESTERN PALACE?

We were trying to solve this paradox for a whole year until the 2014 excavations finally gave us an explanation. In a privileged place in the room, in front of the podium, we excavated an exceptional burial of the kind that Bronze Age archaeology in Spain had not seen in the last 130 years.

The pair of individuals discovered beneath the southwestern corner of the great hall were buried with a treasure made up of about thirty objects, mostly silver and gold. This “royal” tomb provided us with clues to better understand the function of the building and integrate it within the political reality in line with previous knowledge about Argaric society. From 1750 BCE, this society seems to have been under the command of important individuals who controlled and organised it. There was a genuinely vertical structure, with an almost individual power that ruled during the last Argaric phase and took over a system of oligarchic pairs that divided the power among them.

This hypothesis also suits the architectural hierarchy that organised the large space of the great hall. However, this structure is not an isolated building but is part of an architectural complex formed by several adjoined rooms. Although the study of the findings has just begun, it seems that the content of these rooms does not differ from those of the remaining complexes: food production areas and multi-functional workshops for different crafts, as well as food and tool warehouses.

Maybe Complex 3 departs a little bit from this description because it is the only one that incorporates a cistern. Its shape resembles that of an irregular conical trunk. The walls are preserved a little more than 2 m in height and, together with a flat base that takes advantage of the



Northeast aerial view  
of the cistern.

calcareous mantle of the hill, were covered with yellow waterproofing clay. This structure could collect almost 18,000 litres of water.

We wonder who and how many people could live surrounded by so many production workshops. The shortage of housing in a strict sense raises exciting questions



that we hope to clarify as the research progresses. In other places, such as certain regions of the Mediterranean Levant, combinations similar to those of the housing complexes of La Almoloya are usually called “palaces”; that is, an organisation that merges residential and productive functions with the highest decision-making of political power.

---

Detail of the north wall of the cistern, with a portion of the preserved plaster.



## THE PRINCELY TOMB

In August 2014, we discovered the extraordinary tomb we have already mentioned, number 38 of La Almoloya. Most of the grave goods were silver objects, a few were made of gold and others of copper or bronze. Furthermore, there were necklaces made of beads of various materials, pottery vessels and offerings of beef from cattle. This wealth of materials usually defines royal burials in archaeology.

---

View from the inside of AY38, depicting the position of the skeletons and some of the grave goods.



The tomb had two bodies inside the same large pottery vessel, which was very well sealed by big stone slabs. The first was of a man deceased between 35 and 40 years of age, and the second was a woman aged 25 to 27 years, placed on top of him.

Ancient DNA analysis has revealed that both individuals were biologically unrelated but had offspring. Their kin connection has been confirmed by a baby girl buried under a nearby building which was found to have been their daughter.

The man was 1.65 m tall and his skull shows a healed traumatic wound in the frontal bone. He has a strongly asymmetric development of the upper body, as well as joint remodelling of the hips and knees that suggest the practice of horseback riding. Considering this picture, it is hard not to relate this individual to the figure of a warlord. The woman had a slender appearance, standing about 1.55 m tall and with evidence of continuous activity in the right forearm. Although there is no conclusive evidence about the cause of death, she was suffering an inflammatory or infectious process of the pleura that left its imprint on the anterior aspect of most of the ribs.

The articulated position of the skeletons suggests that not much time elapsed between the two burials, something that was corroborated by C14 analysis. This is uncommon in Argaric double tombs with two adults because there is usually a period of one to three generations between the two burials. Both people were buried around 1650 BCE, during the peak of the Argaric.

The grave goods belong to the three usual groups in the Argaric funeral world: tools or weapons, ornaments and food offerings. However, on this occasion, every single object can be considered exceptional for various reasons.

▶  
The main European magazines dedicated to the dissemination of archaeological news reported the exceptional discovery of this tomb, with some of them featuring it on the front cover.





---

The moment of the discovery of the first of the gold and silver ear plugs, along with several spiral earrings made of silver.

The ornaments are striking and some are of current style, such as the four ear tunnel plugs, two gold and two silver. From some of them, silver and bronze spirals hang. In total, ten earrings were documented, eight made of silver and two of copper, the majority in the form of spirals of four or five coils. There are also three bracelets, two of silver and one probably of bronze, two silver rings and two necklaces made of amber, bone, shell, metal and semi-precious stones. On the woman's head the most valuable object of all was found, a distinctive emblem that we will describe later.

The ear plugs were made by applying a novel technique back then: the anticlastic technique, which allows



achieving a continuous concavity in a metal band that closes in a circle on itself. The gold dilators also have a decoration of embossed continuous dots.

---

Gold ear plugs from the grave 38.

Other artefacts, such as the dagger or the awl, are also magnificent. The first one has four silver rivets to fix the handle. These rivets did not provide any technical or functional advantage, but clearly demonstrate the importance of their owner. In the entire Iberian Peninsula, only thirty-five prehistoric weapons with silver rivets have been documented (twenty-five of which are in the Argaric territory). The awl is even more remarkable because it retains a handle made of oak wood completely covered with silver using a complex assembly technology.



terpiece of the Argaric goldsmith, the product of a workshop at the service of the elites in power.

Finally, two portions of the front quarters of a bovine were deposited in the tomb, as well as undetermined beverages and/or food inside three vessels: a bowl and two carinated pots. The most sophisticated is the smallest. This is a unique object bearing one silver band around the ridge, and another covering the rim. It almost seems as if the hands and mouth of the person who used it could not touch anything that was not silver.



Some of the objects included in the AY38 burial.



▶  
Dagger with silver  
rivets from  
tomb AY38.

5 cm



Awl with a wooden handle covered in silver sheet from tomb AY38.

We have saved to the last the most emblematic piece: a silver diadem with a disc-shaped appendage that crowned the woman's head. There are four other diadems of this type and material from the El Argar site, in Almería. Three of them are scattered in European museums (Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, British Museum in London and Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels). We do not know the whereabouts of the fourth.

The diadem was placed on the head with the disc facing down, fixed by a headdress that allowed this element to cover part of the forehead.

The total weight of the silver objects of AY38 is about 230 g. Just to have an idea, in the Babylon of Hammurabi, which was more or less contemporary of the two rulers of La Almoloya, this amount of silver would be enough to acquire almost 4500 liters of barley. This amount of barley would be enough to pay the wages of at least 938 workers in Mesopotamia.

Linen fabric was also documented inside the tomb. The width of the strands that make up the warp and weft is very thin and reveals an exquisite weaving. In different societies of the Ancient East, flax had a high value for practical and ideological reasons. First, its cultivation needs special conditions of moisture and nutrients and its use for producing textiles requires laborious processes. Second, the linen fabric was considered "pure" because it comes from a plant, unlike wool that, being of animal origin, was believed to be "impure." The linen had to be an element of great value at this time because four centuries after AY38 was sealed, during the reign of Ramesses XI in Egypt, ten fine linen shirts were worth 36.5 g of silver. The clothes usually indicate the social condition of those who wear them, as now happens with famous brands.



◀  
Silver diadem with  
discoid appendage  
found in grave AY38.

▼  
Grave goods found  
together with silver  
diadems in the  
excavations in El Argar,  
Antas, Almería, at the  
end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century  
(adaptation based on  
Siret's drawings<sup>14</sup>).



The significance of this tomb and its immediate context suggests an exciting scenario filled with questions. The grave goods place it among the five richest tombs in the Argaric world, so it certainly belongs to leading members of the ruling class. Now, the details take us further. The silver diadem is a symbol of power and superiority reserved for a few women. The diadem of La Almoloya is practically identical to the other four from the El Argar settlement, located more than 100 km to the south, as the crow flies (Antas, Almería). It is safe to assume that these pieces were produced by a single specialized workshop, in the same tradition of the famous Caravaca gold diadem. The morphological, technological and symbolic similarity shared by all of them, leads us to think that there was a close relationship between the aristocratic groups from 1750 BCE onwards. In this way we can understand how communities located so far apart can share the same social and symbolic guidelines that make La Almoloya a capital centre in political decision making.

For this reason, we can conclude that this tomb brings together objects whose exchange value remained high over several centuries within the societies that wrote the ancient texts. Unfortunately, the people of the Argaric left us no texts, but the distribution of the objects in the tombs allowed us to calculate the social value that their members attributed to them<sup>15</sup>. This way, we can conclude that this tomb is the one that demanded the greatest extravagance of all so far.

Adding to what has already been said about the diadem, if we look at the geographical distribution of other unusual symbols such as the gold and silver ear plugs, we see that they only appear in a few sites: El Argar (Antas, Almería), La Bastida (Totana, Murcia), Monteagudo (Murcia) and Cabezo de la Escoba (Villena, Alicante)<sup>16</sup>.

In sum, the most emblematic elements of the Argaric “royalty” were concentrated in the nuclear areas of the Vera basin and the Guadalentín corridor, on the northern foothills of Sierra Espuña and, perhaps, towards the frontier in the Northwest regions (Caravaca). It is possible that they define a large political entity created after a process of unification and centralization. At the head of this entity, we can imagine a leading group consisting of members related by marriage (a dynastic lineage?), in which certain women were able to play a decisive role in the management and transmission of power.

Considering all the data, we suggest that La Almoloya was the headquarters of an institution linked to the government of a large territory. Its relations with the settlement of El Argar are clear, although we still do not know if it was a regional delegation or the place where the leaders congregated periodically to deliberate or to receive the orders that were going to affect the lives of thousands of people. In any case, we are recovering the material expressions of a divided society, where political decisions markedly benefited a restricted sector of the population.



## THE ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES OF LA ALMOLOYA

La Almoloya produced an outstanding quantity and quality of food and household goods. They were also distributed and consumed, although we have not yet had the opportunity to calculate in what proportion, nor what changes occurred over time. Despite this, we can glimpse the nature of the economic changes that occurred in the final phase.

Objects made with deer antler rosettes, possibly spindle whorls, used in spinning.

From 1750 BCE, the relative importance of stockbreeding and cereal cultivation changed. We believe that the contribution of hunting and livestock did not have the importance of the previous phases and that, instead, there was a development of agriculture centred on the cultivation of barley.





Loom weights found in a number of rooms.

When it comes to manufacturing, La Almolya provided materials that we knew little about until now. Thus, the abundance of spindle whorls is surprising and highlights the importance of spinning production. In the same way, the distribution of numerous loom weights in different rooms and the conservation of linen sheaves at the base of a tomb and of linen fabric in others, attest to the whole process of textile production. In sum, there are reasons to think that La Almolya had a chief role in this manufacturing.

Metalworking can be inferred from certain objects. One of the most significant is a clay crucible, which is among the very few specimens found in Argaric deposits. We should also highlight a mould for casting axes and another for rods or chisels, several hammer anvils and a few residual copper fragments. All these tools and remains of production suggest that casting and forging were carried out in the settlement.

The high social value given to metals was evident in the amazing grave goods of the royal tomb. However, we do not believe that the most prominent objects were

Group of loom weights in room H48.



A group of more than 20 loom weights found *in situ* in room H55.



▶  
Microphotograph of the mineralized flax in the dagger of AY21.



5 cm



---

Deer antler picks  
found in La  
Almoloya.

manufactured in La Almoloya: the diadem, the awl, the dagger and the silver plated cup could have been made in other places, such as Tira del Lienzo (Totana), where we have found a workshop where silver sheets were forged.

For the first time, we documented areas dedicated to producing deer antler tools, such as spatulas, spikes and probably spindle whorls. In these areas, we found both deer antlers ready to work, as well as elaborate objects.



Some of the axes and stone adzes recovered in La Almoloya.

Among these, the “antler picks”, which are manufactured by sectioning the antlers’ crown and keeping the main beam, creating a tool from the hardest and most resistant tip. Deer antlers were obtained by collecting annual moults and also by hunting.

In La Almoloya, the number of axes and stone adzes is surprising, as they were very common in previous periods (Neolithic, Copper Age) but were seemingly out of use during the Bronze Age. A few were reused as hammers, but it seems that a good number retained their cutting function. Initially, we thought that the Argaric people reused tools from other times, but their large number and arrangement in the workshops led us to question our first impression. We will have to wait for more detailed analysis and results to clear these doubts.

In any case, the abundance of stone adzes points to the importance of woodworking, whether in the collection of firewood, the preparation of beams and posts for construction or other carpentry work. This is also evident from an artefact that rarely occurs outside the tombs: a copper or bronze axe on a room floor.

---

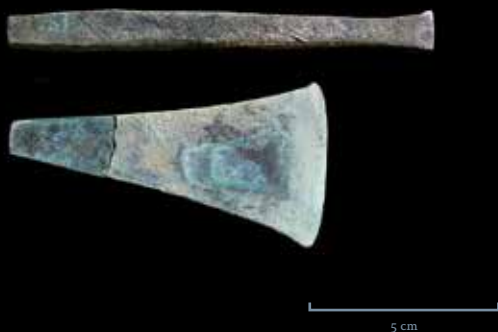
Crucible recovered in  
the collapsed levels of  
room H4W.



---

Axe mould recovered  
in H55.





---

Chisel and axe from domestic contexts.



---

Arrowheads recovered from domestic contexts.



---

Spatulas made with deer antler and found at La Almoloya.





# LA ALMOLOYA

---

SOCIAL CONFLICTS AND

---

THE END OF THE ARGARIC

---

---

---

## SOCIAL CONFLICTS AND THE END OF THE ARGARIC

The three overlapping villages of La Almoloya were probably destroyed as a result of conflicts with other Argaric sites. These internal struggles have been identified in many other sites, such as El Argar, Gatas, Fuente Álamo (Almería) or Cabezo Negro (Murcia). Perhaps they were the consequence of rivalries for power, attempts to win territories of influence or for subsistence needs due to the food shortages in other regions. These struggles culminated in the massive destruction and abandonment of Argaric settlements around 1550 BCE.

The hypothesis of a violent end because of an internal revolution is gaining strength by relying on several kinds of evidence:

1. The abandonment of the majority of the Argaric towns took place more or less simultaneously.
2. In the few places that remained inhabited, the Argaric materials, so characteristic and homogeneous, were replaced by others in which innovations and contributions of diverse traditions were mixed: the Argaric boundaries had disappeared.

Evidence of fire and collapse in room H18.

Under the collapse of the roof and walls, a group of storage vessels was kept in excellent condition.





Some fragments of burned constructive materials. They retain imprints of trunks (above), branches (below - right), and final coatings (detail below - left).

3. The signs of “Argaric identity”, both physical (symbols of power, standardized objects) and conceptual or metaphysical (funeral rituals “at home”, learning and obedience mechanisms) ceased to be apparent.

As of 1550 BCE, the political Argaric entity was diluted. People ceased to submit and be subjects.

An example of the destruction of 1550 BCE is illustrated at La Almoloya. As if they were photographic snapshots that stopped time and transported us there, some rooms retain evidence of devastating fires that consumed wood from walls and ceilings, completely destroying buildings.

One of the clearest cases is that of the grinding area with two grinding slabs still in their position to facilitate the collection of flour. In the room, there were large vessels to store cereal and flour, which broke and spilt their contents when the roof collapsed.





---

The expectation  
before the appearance  
of a collection  
of charred barley in  
the later levels.

We recovered a large amount of barley, wheat and beans in many of the rooms. We suspect that many more seeds still remain under the pieces of collapsed walls and ceilings that, because of their magnificent conservation, we decided to leave where they fell.

The thermal impact led to the conservation of some architectural elements that are almost always missing. One of the most striking examples corresponds to the jambs of a door, identified due to the burning and harden-

Grinding basins located in one of the areas dedicated to cereal processing, with remains of the collapse of walls and roof in the foreground (H2).



The H2 room where the grinding basins were located. The burnt levels have those grey and orange tones caused by the effect of fire. Paradoxically, the destructive fire allowed excellent preservation of many of the workshops and their contents.



ing of the layer of clay and lime that covered the wooden slats. In the same way, the fire preserved the plasters in large sections of the walls of several rooms.

The impact of the destruction was so severe that either there were not many survivors, or very few decided to continue living among the ruins of the town.

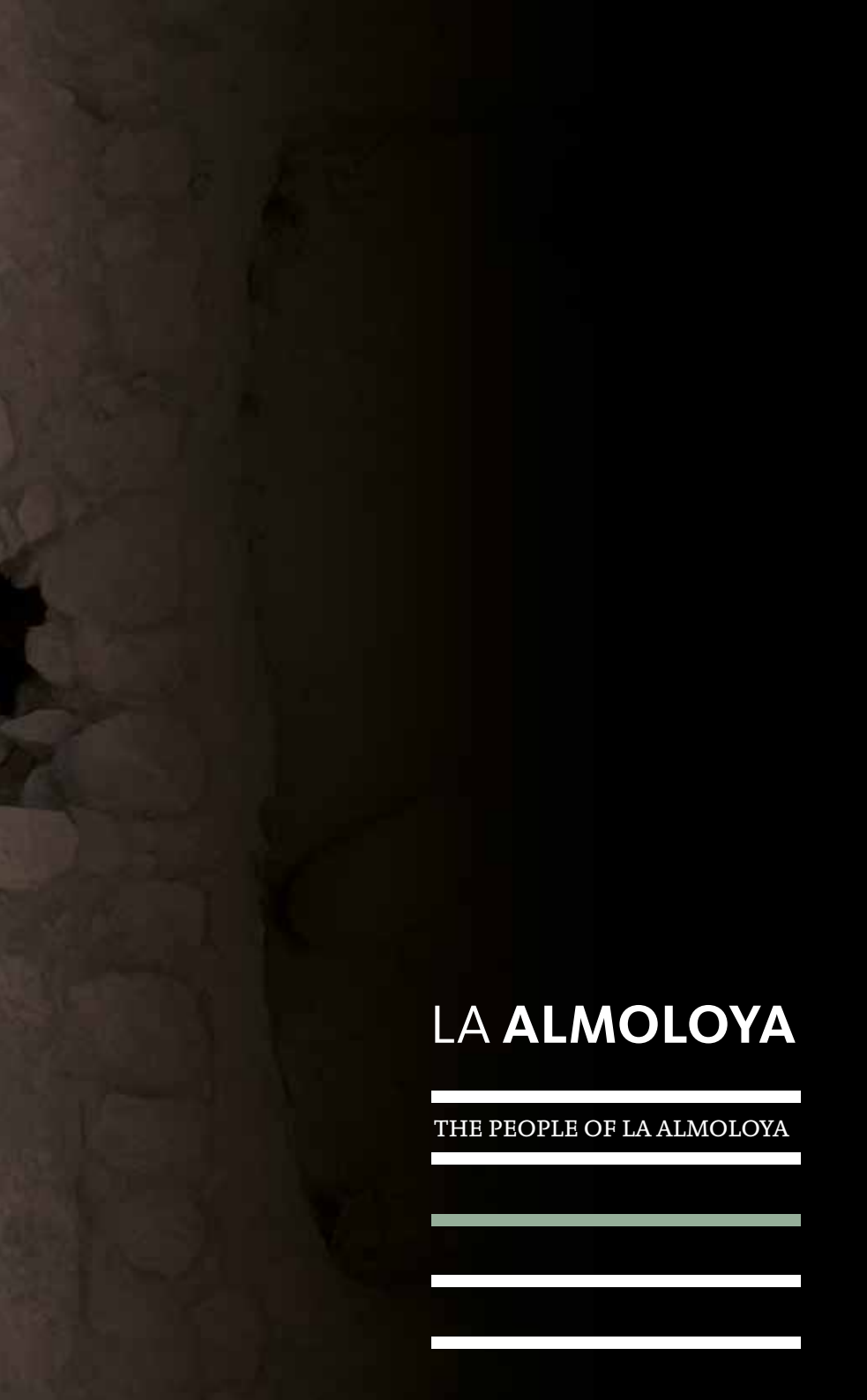


Detail of one of the door jambs that allowed passage between the eastern and western areas of H4.



Structures (fireplace, low benches, etc.) covered with plaster in H48.





# LA ALMOLOYA

---

THE PEOPLE OF LA ALMOLOYA

---







## THE PEOPLE OF LA ALMOLOYA

We have kept for last the story of the main characters: the people who changed the history of the Iberian Peninsula with their different way of life. Peninsular societies were never the same again after the Argaric era. Particular differences, social division and conflicting interests were detrimental to the collaboration, solidarity and mutual support that should characterise all communities. The exclusive identities will proliferate and impose the struggle as a mechanism to survive. Competitiveness among people will be harmful to competence in crafts, and conflict will eventually prevail as the basis of the social system. Competence and competition have little to do until the second swallows the first.

So, what were these people like? The Argaric society is one of the few that can answer that question since it used to bury its people under the floor of its buildings or next to them. This habit has greatly favoured archaeology.

Until 2015, we had unearthed 76 tombs with 86 individuals, specific testimonies of each life and a compact image of collective history, of how and who they were. Although we label these people with technical, aseptic and orthopaedic expressions such as "AY5", "AY12" or "AY38", these codes reveal sometimes cruel and sometimes illustrative biographies.



AY5 burial with a stone placed between the maxillae.



Skull of AY5 shortly after its discovery. On the ocular orbit, we can observe remains of the mortar that formed the flooring.

Between the flooring, the skull and the face of AY5 appears. In the insets on the right, we can see how the excavation process begins.



AY5, for example, designates a deceased man 40 years old, socially maltreated and who did not deserve the funeral expected by any Argaric person. His skeleton was literally trapped between the renovated pavements of the great hall: he did not even have a tomb. People who frequented this building would constantly step on his face, resting just a few centimeters below the surface. A stone in his mouth seemed to want to silence him forever, as if death was not enough. There was little in that burial that would fit the Argaric rite.

---

View from above  
of AY12 cist.

AY12 was totally different. Buried in a cist of masonry and slabs, he had a modest burial with few funerary offerings: a pot and a portion of meat placed next to his head. The interesting thing about this 40-55-year-old



male and 1.63 m tall, was his skeletal eloquence, which is summarised in a painful biography of trauma and disease. He lived around 1700 BCE, the phase of major development of the town. However, this “progress” passed by him or, worse, ran roughshod over him.

A badly healed wound in his right foot caused a permanent limp that seriously limited his mobility. Intense toothache is also evident in premature tooth loss and infection. He also suffered serious pain because of long-standing joint damage in both wrists and the neck. Fractures of the left index finger and of two cervical vertebrae must have also caused considerable distress. Whether they were the result of one or many accidents it is impossible

---

Different views  
of the severe joint  
wear on the wrist  
bones of AY12





---

Funerary urns and pottery offerings  
of AY11. Inside it, a woman aged  
30-34 years was buried with two  
silver earrings and a band of cinnabar  
around her head

to know. Neck trauma was the possible outcome from a blow to the head, but we are not sure if it was casual or due to a violent episode. Nevertheless, it is quite obvious that he would not have lived that long without care and assistance.



---

AY11 woman's face with traces of cinnabar-dyed cloth. With the photographic treatment the original placing of the cloth can be observed first as a headband, and then its subsequent sliding towards the face.

Each of these burials has a life to tell, a life that cold codes and numbers seem to standardize and set aside. However, it is necessary to use these numbers to outline the general characteristics of the people of La Almoloja.



## THE FUNERARY SYSTEM

The people of the Argaric era used to bury their dead in vessels (funeral urns), stone “coffins” (cists), pits or small artificial caves (“covachas”), after the 72 hours needed to overcome *rigor mortis*.

Tomb AY26.  
Disarticulated bones  
belonging to a man  
buried in the first  
place (right), and then  
replaced above the  
body of a woman (left).

Among all kinds of tombs, the urns are usually the most frequent in the eastern regions of the Argaric territory. On the other hand, La Almoloya has provided a fairly similar proportion between funeral urns (39) and cists (32). Another interesting fact is that urns placed inside stone cists have been documented and, on one occasion, we have been able to detect a wooden coffin inside a cist. Likewise, their unusually large size and the high proportion





Detail of the arrangement of the cranial bones of the AY26 man covering the skull of the woman.

---



Double tomb AY22 with the two skeletons disarticulated but repositioned simulating the foetal position.

of double tombs, almost 15%, somewhat higher than usual in the Argaric settlements, are surprising.

Double tombs usually contain two adults, a man and a woman. The bones of the first interment are moved aside to deposit the second or the latter is placed, carefully, on top of the former. In some shocking cases (AY26) the bones of the skull of the first interment were placed covering part of the head of the second, manifesting an intimate intention that eludes us. In others, skeletons were carefully rearranged emulating the original anatomical position (AY22) and even in some other cases already disarticulated limbs that had been moved due to some unwanted intrusion were carefully re-buried.

Most of the bodies were shrouded in funeral bundles. This procedure enabled the introduction of the corpse in the narrowest tombs and made it easier for carrying.

---

Illustration of the burial positions according to sex in the Argaric funeral rites: on the left, woman from the AY11 tomb, placed on her right side; on the right, man from the tomb AY45, laying on his left side.



Other bodies were bound by ropes, and a few simply placed carefully in a flexed position in larger tombs. Generally, the women were lying down on their right side and the men on their left side, following a general Argaric trend.

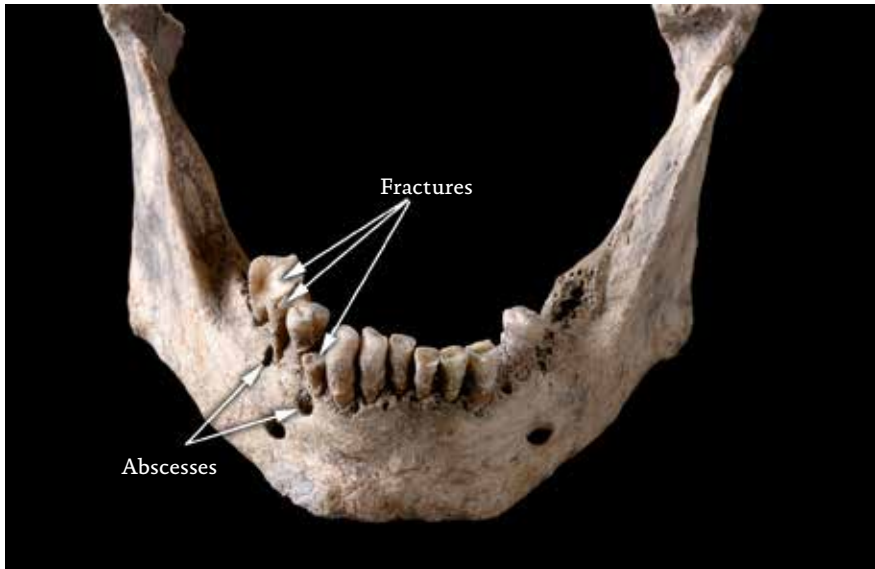
## THE PEOPLE

Of the 86 individuals recorded until 2015, 57 were adults, 28 infants and only one juvenile. 37 were women and 24 men of different ages.

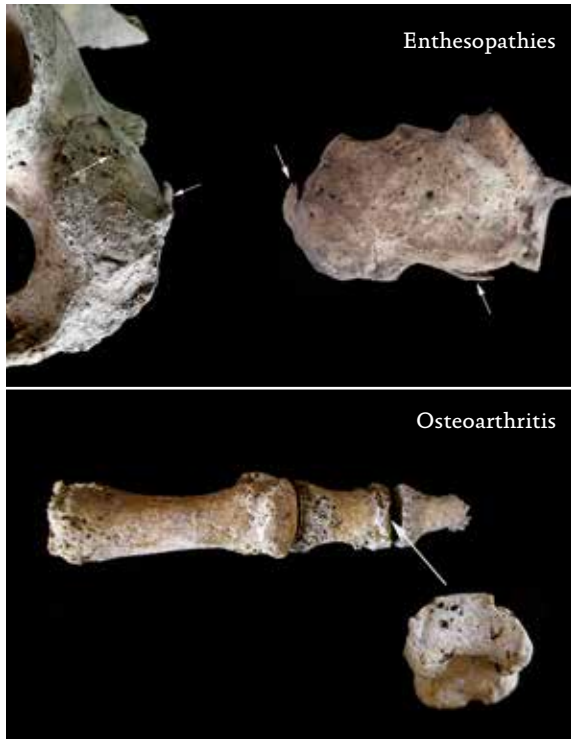
There are two remarkable pieces of evidence in La Almoloya. In the first place, infant mortality is slightly lower than what is expected. Secondly, in La Almoloya two out of every three individuals die in adulthood, unlike the

---

Dental lesions and premature loss of molars in the AY12 man.

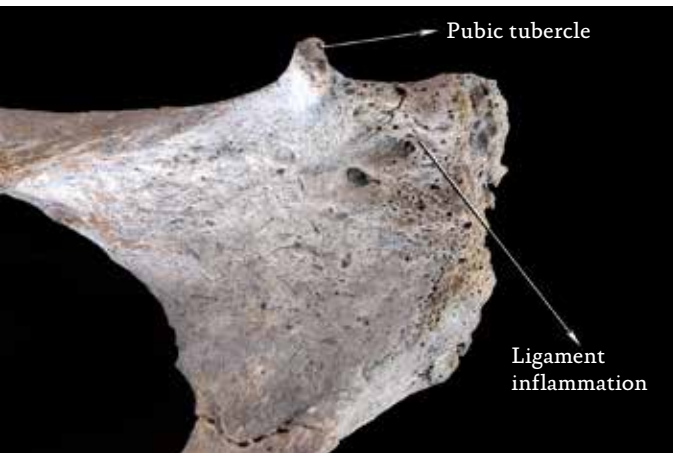


Examples of common pathologies detected in burials: top right, inflammation, in the form of spurs, in the insertion of the Achilles tendon. This causes the painful plantar fasciitis of the calcaneus of the left foot of AY12. Top left, inflammatory reaction in the gluteal insertion in the left pubis of AY22/1. Below, thumb with severe osteoarthritis in interphalangeal joint (man of AY42).



other settlements that present contrary figures. La Almoloaya is also the site with the lowest juvenile mortality (only 1%), unlike the rest of the towns where this proportion ranges around 5%.

Do these figures and percentages mean that the inhabitants of La Almoloaya lived longer and better? We should probably answer yes but with caution, since these figures do not ensure that their daily life was also healthy and, in any case, they are still just a fraction of the full population actually buried at the site.



Woman's tomb (AY3) of two opposing urns with the burial in a standard foetal position lying on the right side.

Osteological indicators of pregnancy in the left pubis of women of AY3.

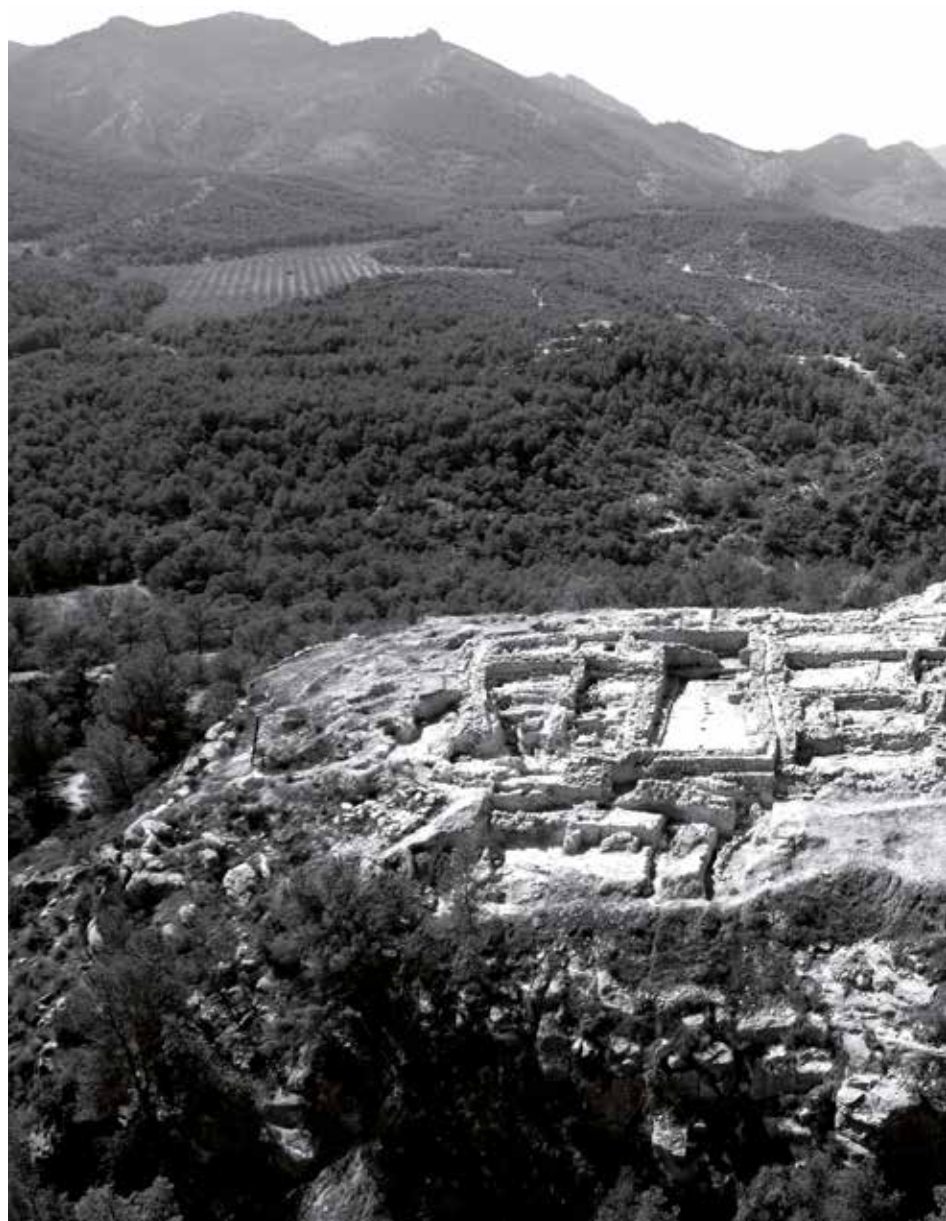
View of the skeleton  
of the pregnant  
woman of AY3  
who died during  
childbirth. Below,  
positioning of the  
foetal remains  
identified.

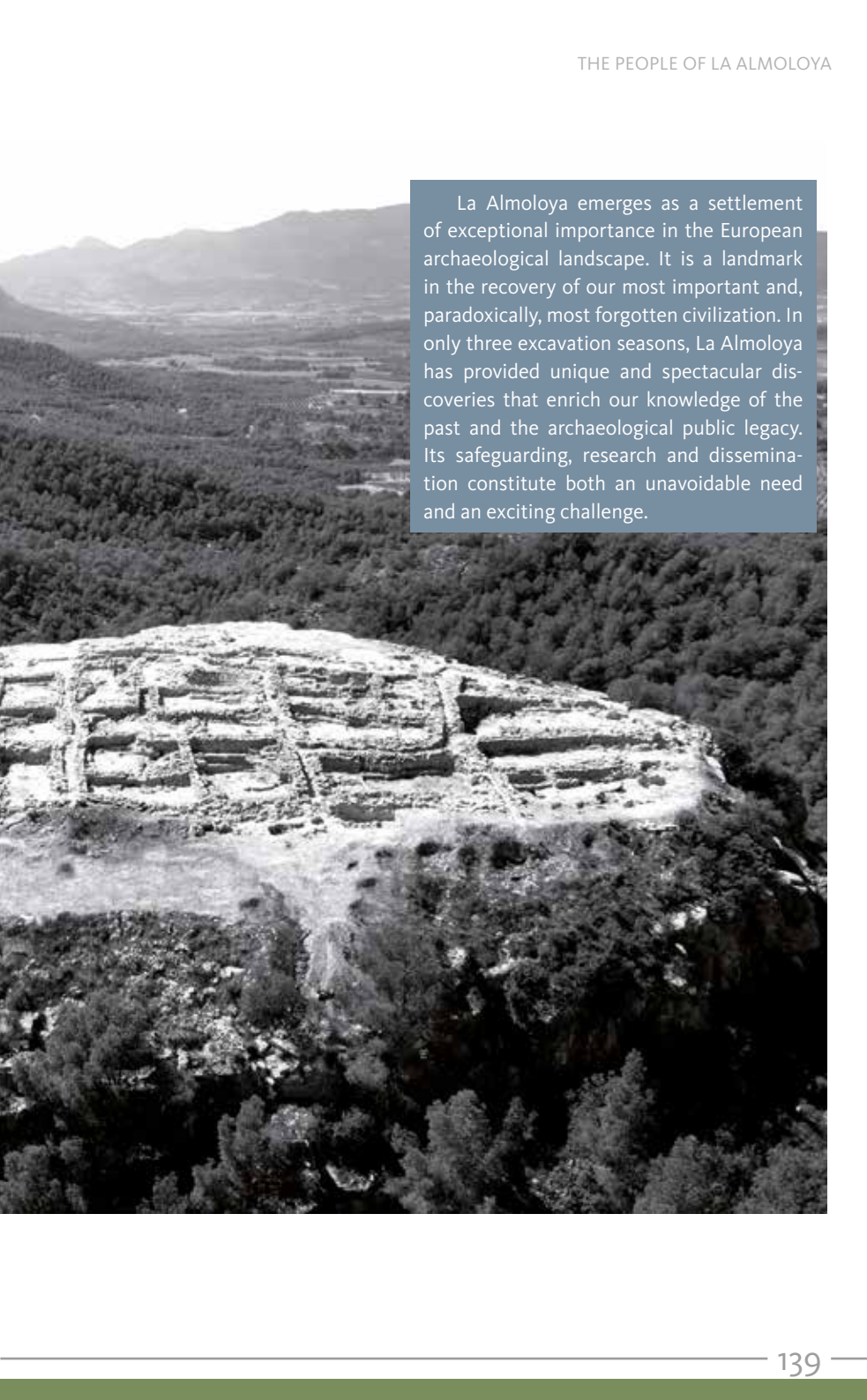


There was a multitude of afflictions and pathologies of different origins plaguing the people from La Almoloya. All of them were common diseases in other Argaric towns and included degenerative processes, inflammations in muscle insertions (enthesopathy), caries, abscesses and other infections. However, unlike their Argaric contemporaries, people from La Almoloya suffered a greater number of traumas, fractures and bruises. This makes us think that to survive all of this, they would have received greater care and attention from their peers, however hard it was to live in that environment. Curiously, urban overcrowding did not punish them as hard as it did in other towns. Plus, they likely had a healthier environment due to the constant circulation of breezes from Sierra Espuña hills behind them.

It seems that caring for the people, no matter how hard they worked, combined with the environmental conditions they enjoyed, somehow alleviated the hard and tiring way of life they were forced to endure. Despite everything, a stressful way of life would seriously undermine anyone's resistance. A good example of the care provided by the community is the burial of a woman we call AY3. She died during childbirth from either a preterm or an obstructed labour. Since only part of the foetus skeleton has been preserved, it is also more than possible that some form of mutilation was performed (embryotomy) in order to save the mother's life. In any event, we know that she was a young but not first-time mother, as her pelvis shows skeletal correlates of previous pregnancy and labour. Nevertheless, the assistance she was given was not enough and both mother and baby died.

We must learn to hear these voices of the past and learn from their successes and mistakes. We must recover the historical memory to build the story of our own life. Without the past, we lose awareness of who we are and end up forgetting where the social thread that brought us here is taking us.





La Almoloya emerges as a settlement of exceptional importance in the European archaeological landscape. It is a landmark in the recovery of our most important and, paradoxically, most forgotten civilization. In only three excavation seasons, La Almoloya has provided unique and spectacular discoveries that enrich our knowledge of the past and the archaeological public legacy. Its safeguarding, research and dissemination constitute both an unavoidable need and an exciting challenge.



## NOTES

1. In 1890, the afforestation program was approved and, in 1891 the first funds finally arrived. [http://www.murcianatural.carm.es/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=10819ba2-458f-48df-8c39-8829978adb9&groupId=14](http://www.murcianatural.carm.es/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=10819ba2-458f-48df-8c39-8829978adb9&groupId=14)
2. Archive of the Dirección General del Medio Natural de la Región de Murcia.
3. Archive of the Dirección General del Medio Natural de la Región de Murcia.
4. CEFU S.A. (Grupo Empresarial Fuertes) co-funded fieldwork together with the UAB. Roque Ortíz, the owner of one of the pathways, also provided us with all the facilities for the work to come to fruition.
5. The texts are very similar: CUADRADO, E. (1945a), “Un nuevo yacimiento argárico: La Almoloya (Murcia)”, *Boletín Arqueológico del Sudeste Español*, 1, pp. 89-90 and CUADRADO, E. (1945b), “La Almoloya, nuevo poblado de la cultura de El Argar”, *Anales de la Universidad de Murcia, Letras*, 3: 355-382.
6. The word “Patrimonio” (meaning Heritage, in Spanish) is an anachronism today, as it comes from the combination of two Latin terms: pater (“father”) and the suffix monium (“quality of”) and refers to assets acquired by inheritance from male to male. It shows, therefore, an unhappy journey for women, since it revives those times where only men were able to inherit. The term “social inheritance” is more appropriate. However, considering the current use of “patrimonio”, when we employ it, we hope that the exclusive patriarchal character that originated it is overcome.
7. AYALA, M<sup>a</sup> M. (1986), “Materiales argáricos de la Almoloya de Pliego-Mula (Murcia)”, *Anales de Prehistoria y Arqueología de la Universidad de Murcia*, 2: 29-37.
8. AGRM Emeterio Cuadrado Fund FOT\_NEG-017\_008 (left) FOT\_NEG-017\_020 (right).

9. Lull, V., Micó, R., Rihuete Herrada, C., Risch, R., Celdrán, E., Fregeiro, M<sup>a</sup> I. and Velasco, C. "La Almoloya de Pliego antes de las excavaciones de 2013", *Verdolay*, 14: 46-66.
10. AGRM Emeterio Cuadrado Fund FOT\_NEG-017\_002
11. Lull, V., Micó, R., Rihuete Herrada, C., Risch, R. and Escanilla, N. (2017), "Halberdiers and combat systems in the Argaric", *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, 36 (4): 375-394.
12. Lull, V. and Estévez, J. (1986), "Propuesta metodológica para el estudio de las necrópolis argáricas", in *Homenaje a Luis Siret (1934-1984)*, Consejería de Cultura de la Junta de Andalucía, Dirección General de Bellas Artes: 441-452; Castro, P.V., Chapman, R.W., Gili, S., Lull, V., Micó, R., Rihuete, C., Risch, R. and Sanahuja, M<sup>a</sup> E. (1993-4), "Tiempos sociales de los contextos funerarios argáricos", *Anales de Prehistoria y Arqueología*, 9-10: 77-105; Lull, V: (2000), "Argaric society. Death at home", *Antiquity*, 74: 581-590.
13. For property and inheritance issues, see: Lull, V., Micó, R., Rihuete Herrada, C. and Risch, R. (2005) "Property relations in the Bronze Age of southwestern Europe: An archaeological analysis of infant burials from El Argar (Almería, Spain)", *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, 71: 247-268.
14. Plate 43, 44 and 45 in: Siret, H. and Siret, L. (2006 [1890]) "Las primeras edades del metal en el sudeste de España". Museo Arqueológico de Murcia, Murcia. I could not find this note anywhere in the original text. I am assuming it refers this plate.
15. Lull, V. and Estévez, J. (1986), see note 12.
16. We would like to thank J. A. Zapata for the information about Monteagudo, from his unpublished excavations.





## RECENT BIBLIOGRAPHY ABOUT LA ALMOLOYA

- LULL, V., MICÓ, R., RIHUETE, C., RISCH, R., CELDRÁN, E., FREGEIRO, M. I., and VELASCO, C. (2015), “La Almoloya de Pliego antes de las excavaciones de 2013” *Verdolay*, no 14, pp. 43-66.
- LULL, V., MICÓ, R., RIHUETE, C. and RISCH, R. (2015), “La Almoloya. Premier palais de l’age du Bronze occidental”, *Archéologia*, no 530, pp. 58-63.
- LULL, V., MICÓ, R., RIHUETE, C. and RISCH, R. (2015), “La Almoloya. 11 potere in Occidente”, *Archeologia Viva*, n° 173, pp. 12-21.
- Current World Archaeology (2015), “Spain: Rise and fall of the Argar. How revolution toppled a Bronze Age civilisation”, no 69, pp. 16-22.



## SCIENTIFIC TEAM

### **COORDINATION**

Vicente Lull, Rafael Micó, Cristina Rihuete Herrada and Roberto Risch (UAB, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona)

### **DIRECTION**

Eva Celdrán, M<sup>a</sup> Inés Fregeiro, Camila Oliart and Carlos Velasco Felipe (UAB)

### **COLLABORATORS**

#### **Charcoal analysis**

Mireia Celma (Departament de Prehistòria, UAB)

#### **Faunal analysis**

Lourdes Andúgar (Departament de Prehistòria, UAB)

#### **Analysis of plant remains**

Hans-Peter Stika  
(Universität Hohenheim, Stuttgart, Alemanya)

#### **Isotopic analysis of botanical materials**

Jordi Voltas (Departament de Producció Vegetal i Ciència Forestal, Universitat de Lleida)

#### **Compositional analysis of pottery pastes**

David Gómez-Gras  
(Departament de Geologia, UAB)

#### **Analysis of organic residues in pottery vessels**

Elena Molina and Antoni Rosell  
(Departament de Prehistòria i Institut de Ciència i Tecnologia Ambiental, UAB)

#### **Compositional and isotopic analysis of minerals and metal objects**

Ernst Pernicka (Institut für Geowissenschaften, Universität Heidelberg, Alemanya) and Nicolau Escanilla (Departament de Prehistòria, UAB)

#### **Lithic analysis**

Selina Delgado-Raack and Mireia Ache  
(Departament de Prehistòria, UAB)  
e Ignacio Martín Lerma (Departamento de Prehistoria, Arqueología, Historia Antigua, Historia Medieval y Ciencias y Técnicas. Historiográficas, Universidad de Murcia)

<b>Isotopic and DNA analyses on human remains</b>	Kurt Alt (Center of Natural and Cultural History of Teeth, Danube Private University, Krems, Austria) and Wolfgang Haak (Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History, Jena, Alemania)
<b>Radiocarbon Dating</b>	Ronny Friedrich (Curt-Engelhorn-Zentrum für Archäometrie, Mannheim, Alemania)
<b>Chemical analysis of construction materials</b>	Franziska Knoll (Institut für Ur- und Frühgeschichte, Friederich Schiller - Universität Jena, Alemania)
<b>Aerial Photography</b>	Ginés Martínez, Totana; Grupo Anainte, Murcia; Habitat Serea, Murcia
<b>Studio Photography</b>	José Antonio Soldevilla, Barcelona
<b>Scientific Illustration and Forensic Facial Approximation</b>	Joana Bruno (Departament de Prehistòria, UAB)
<b>3D Modelling</b>	Sergio Celdrán (Otra Perspectiva, Ávila)
<b>3D Scanning</b>	Hendaya Serrano (Departament de Prehistòria, UAB)
<b>Conservation and Archaeological Restoration</b>	Claudia Molero (Departament de Prehistòria, UAB); Bernat Burgaya and Margalida Munar (RestArq, Mallorca); Eva M <sup>a</sup> Mendiola (Universidad Politécnica de Valencia); Ioanna Ruiz de Torres (Escuela Superior de Conservación y Restauración de Madrid)
<b>Archaeological field technician</b>	Jordi Aguelo Mas (Departament de Prehistòria, UAB)
<b>Topography</b>	Antonio López Meca, Murcia

## Fieldwork assistants

Jacinto Martínez, Fernando Martínez,  
Francisco Romera, Alejandro Cayuela, Pedro Navarro,  
Pedro Sánchez, Francisco Ortiz, Manuel Pino

## Laboratory assistants

### 2013

Amaia Aguirre, Judith Alejandre, Bárbara Bonora,  
Javier Cámara, Robert Carracedo, Sergio Contreras,  
Eloisa Ferratges, Anna Franch, Antonio Jesús García,  
Joan Garriga, Laura Juanola, Laura Leiva, Adrià Moreno,  
Josep Joan Navalón, Daniel Martínez, Irene Navarro,  
Jordi Pedrerol, Margalida Rivas, Paula Roigés, Eva Ros,  
Guillem Salvador, Hanna Marie Steffen, Nadia Tarifa,  
Laura Tenorio, María Villarroya

### 2014

Francisco Javier del Águila, Dídac Andrés, Jordi Batlle,  
Bárbara Bonora, Juan Sebastián Corrales, Eloisa  
Ferratges, Rubén de la Fuente, Laura Leiva, Vicente  
Martínez, Míriam Montañés, Adrià Moreno, Isabel  
Orozco, Jordi Pedrerol, Catherine Puello, Jerónimo  
Rueda, Xavi Sánchez

### 2015

Francisco Javier del Águila, Patricia Alvarez,  
Carla Álvarez, Jordi Batlle, Bárbara Bonora,  
Sergio Contreras, Marina Eguiluz, Xenia Fructuoso,  
Carla Garrido, Natalia Giménez Bautista, Natalia Hioe  
Lu, Noemí Hostalet, Álvaro Ibáñez, Míriam Montañés,  
Daniel Martínez, Vicente Martínez, Adrià Moreno,  
David Mortimer, Inmaculada Novell,  
Patricia Núñez Cabezón, Marina Ortíz, Jordi Pedrerol,  
Asunción Toral Morales, Jerónimo Miguel Rueda,  
Guillermo Vidal-Quadras

## Occasional collaborators

Teresa Azorín, Paz Balaguer, Ana Celdrán,  
Álex González, José Ángel González, Tréder Jáuregui,  
Pedro Lucas, Teresa Sanz, Felipe Zapata











