

TEXTILES AND RITUALITY IN IBERIAN CULTURE

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ABSTRACT:

The aim of this article is to examine archaeological finds related to textile production in the Iberian Culture, particularly between the fifth and third centuries BC. We focus especially on ritual activities and consider both their presence in Iberian funerary contexts and sanctuaries and their links to activities carried out by women. We also highlight the presence and strong symbolic implications of objects related to the world of yarn making and weaving. On the one hand, the presence of these objects reveals the distinct intention of representing productive activities which, as in other Mediterranean contexts, are intimately linked to the female gender. On the other hand, and through certain images and the prominence of grave goods, these objects also envisage ideas about status, as they always appear associated with women of the aristocracy. As well as gender and social hierarchy, these symbols also represent a high level of skill in the practice of certain activities, which only a few women – all members of the most privileged groups – would be qualified to perform.

Key words: Iberian Culture, Textile Production, Funerary Contexts, Sanctuaries, Gender Archaeology.

RESUMEN:

En este artículo vamos a tratar de examinar brevemente, las evidencias arqueológicas que encontramos relacionadas con el ámbito de la producción textil en la Cultura Ibérica, sobre todo durante los ss. V-III a.n.e., y su papel, en las actividades rituales, especialmente a partir de su presencia en los contextos funerarios y en los santuarios de la Cultura Ibérica, así como su clara relación con las actividades de las mujeres. La presencia de objetos relacionados con el mundo del hilado y el tejido, posee también una importante carga simbólica. Por un lado muestra la intención de representar unas actividades productivas vinculadas, como en otros contextos mediterráneos, claramente con el género femenino. Pero al mismo tiempo, y a través de determinadas imágenes o destacados ajueres, proyectan asimismo una idea de estatus, ya que son las mujeres aristocráticas las que se muestran con estos símbolos que, además de género y jerarquía social, representan también la destreza a la hora de realizar una actividad, para cuya alta cualificación solo estarían capacitadas unas determinadas mujeres, pertenecientes todas ellas a las esferas más elevadas de la sociedad.

Palabras clave: Cultura Ibérica, Producción Textil, Contextos Funerarios, Santuarios, Arqueología de Género.

INTRODUCTION

In the first part of this article we will briefly analyse several archaeological finds related to textile production, and examine their significance in the funerary contexts and sanctuaries of Iberian culture between the fifth and third centuries BC. In order to adequately frame the importance of their presence in these contexts, we will refer first to textile tools – such as spindle whorls, loom weights, and, to a lesser extent, needles – which are most frequently found at various settlement, funerary or sanctuary sites. Following this, we will review the less frequently-found tools such as tablets, tensioners, weaving reels, etc. The presence of textile remains preserved in both funerary and votive contexts will also be examined. Next, we will highlight the significance of iconographic representations on painted ceramic vessels, stone sculptures and small bronze figurines, which can provide valuable insights into understanding textile production through the images of spindles and looms, and textile products, through the depictions of luxurious garments such as mantles, tunics, etc. Finally, we will examine the productive value and strong symbolic character of these materials. Both aspects are closely linked to the construction of gender and, in some cases, to the status and social prestige attached to women's mastery in textile production skills. The emerging picture suggests the great symbolic importance of a number of tools and images related to textile production in a wide range of Iberian contexts, from settlement to funerary contexts and sanctuaries.

TEXTILES AND SETTLEMENTS

Textile tools in settlement contexts often pose the challenge of reduced visibility for archaeologists. Spindle whorls and loom weights tend to have a greater size and are made of more durable materials, like terracotta, which make them more noticeable. However, many other tools have often gone unnoticed, either due to their size – as in the case of needles – or due to being made of organic materials, although the presence of spindles and spindle whorls, for example, has been widely documented in other Mediterranean contexts (Gleba 2008; 2009). In other cases, where textile tools have been recorded, their importance has often been overlooked by archaeologists. In settlement contexts where such finds have occurred, a lack of attention prevents a deeper understanding of their possible

significance: beyond merely the production and self-supply of each domestic unit. Yet their presence, especially in some *distinct buildings* featuring prominently in several large settlements, could also denote symbolic links with home-protecting cults. A good example of this is Department 1 of El Tossal de Sant Miquel de Lliria, where spindle whorls and loom weights have been found among other notable materials, such as oil lamps and fragments of red-figure *skyphoi* (Bonet and Mata 1997: 133, fig. 6). Equally remarkable is the iconography recorded on a ceramic plaque recovered at what is known as the *sacred room* at the La Serreta settlement in Alcoy (Alicante). The plaque's surface features a scene whose protagonist, a lady, is holding a spindle in her hand (Tortosa Rocamora 2007: 243; Grau *et al.* 2008).

Another frequent find at settlement sites are shears, such as those found at La Bastida de Les Alcusses (Mogente, Valencia) (Bonet *et al.* 1994). As demonstrated below, such objects have also been found deposited at burial sites. Still, it is highly likely that in those Iberian sites where textile production was of some importance – such as the Castellet de Bernabé (Guérin 1999), a divine entity may have protected its practitioners, as seems to be the case in many other Mediterranean contexts of that time (Gleba 2009: 70).

In any case, Iberian textile products must have been of high quality. Among the few references available, a truly striking example is a dismissive remark by Athenaeus of Naucratis regarding the Massaliots, who he calls effeminate for importing and wearing Iberian tunics (as mentioned in Garcia Cardiel 2015: 198, note 514; Ate. XII, 25). This provides one more piece of evidence for the potential of Iberian textile production to reach beyond the domestic realm and, in some cases, become an important commercial item. A workshop for linen production was found at Coll del Moro in Gandesa, dated to 250-200 BC. Its 107 loom weights and imprint of a vertical loom imply the existence of a possibly supra-domestic work structure, which would require specialization (Rafel *et al.* 1994: 134; Rafel 2007: 118).

The presence of objects related to textile activities also raises important questions about recent interpretations of their symbolic significance as votive elements in the foundation rituals of certain domestic spaces. An example of this is the site of El Puig d'Alcoi (Grau *et al.* 2015: 67-84), where rituals carried out in what is known as Space 7000 involved the deposition of three ovicaprids, a falcata-shaped knife, loom weights and the remains of a perinatal

individual. The finds have led archaeologists to propose the existence of foundation ritual reflecting both the internal importance of textile activities for groups, and the unique mastery of this particular craft, over the craftspeople of other settlements, by members of one specific group.

Images of women weaving or spinning are widespread in the Mediterranean, especially among aristocratic groups. Thread making and cloth production were important domestic tasks. Iberian iconographic representations, especially stone funerary images, but also painted ceramics, also illustrate the ideas of aristocratic women devoted to textile activities. As we have presented, textile production was of great importance in the domestic economic sphere. The need and demand for this type of product related to everything from personal use as garments to other economic activities and their likely role in pacts, gifts, presents, certain civic ceremonies, exchange of goods, etc. Spinning and weaving required good lighting, so vertical looms were probably transported to better-lit areas, such as yards or the entries to dwellings. We have already mentioned how, in certain occasions, domestic production extended beyond the domestic sphere, becoming a commercially-oriented and specialized activity. In fact, Iberian women's cloth-making skills have also been highlighted by many ancient written texts. Ephorus of Cyme underlined the importance of these activities by noting that every year Iberian women made public displays of the cloths they had woven and an appointed group of men would evaluate these by vote, and honour the woman who had worked the hardest (Nicol. Dam. frag. 102, *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum*, III, 456). This suggests the importance of yearly public displays of a characteristically domestic type of work.

Iberian women wore multi-layered garments of different colours and shapes, decorated with folds. The raw materials they used – wool and linen – were coloured with natural dyeing materials, which we can reconstruct mainly through iconographic representations. The famous Dama de Baza is a remarkably well-preserved example of the skilful use of polychromy (Chapa and Izquierdo 2010: 35; Gómez *et al.* 2010: 113) (fig. 1).

Another important source of Iberian iconography is pottery, which provides various representations of women at work. Ceramic pots found at La Serreta (Alcoy, Alicante) (Tortosa Rocamora 2007: 243; Grau *et al.* 2008: 5-29) depict women working on vertical looms, and an interesting fragment found at the Tossal de Sant Miquel de Lliria depicts two women spinning and weaving (Izquierdo and Pérez Ballester 2005: 85-103) (fig. 2).



Fig. 1: Dama de Baza (Museo Arqueológico Nacional).

Thus, images in a variety of different media, whether stone or ceramics, reflect the intention of representing certain production activities. As in other Mediterranean contexts, these are closely linked to the female gender. At the same time, certain sculptures or grave goods also project ideas about status and gender, as suggested by the fact that it is women of the aristocracy who chose to represent themselves through these symbols. The sculptures and grave goods also display the level of skill required to carry out certain activities, which only certain women – all of them from highly privileged sectors of society – would possess (Rafel 2007; Gleba 2008; Prados 2016).

THE FUNERARY WORLD

One of the best-known funerary scenes is the so-called Albufereta couple, which is sadly now missing from the Alicante museum (Llobregat 1972: fig. VII). This sculpture is closely linked to the funerary world and has been interpreted as a farewell scene where each character



Fig. 2: Women working on vertical looms: a. La Serreta (Alcoy, Alicante) (Museo Arqueológico de Alcoy); b. Edeta, Tossal de Sant Miquel de Lliria (Museo de Prehistoria de Valencia).



Fig. 3: Albufereta (Alicante), a funerary couple (MARC).

is carrying elements suited to their gender roles and status: weapons for the man, textile tools for the woman (Guerin 2005: 2) (fig. 3).

Many Iberian female burials contain elements related to textile activities, such as spindle whorls, loom weights, or small perforated tablets, as in the case of tomb 200 at El Cigarralejo (Cuadrado 1987; Rafael 2007; García Luque and Rísquez 2008). Their frequent recurrence in female burials also marks the gender-symbolic value attached to these tools of textile activity. As we will present below, these objects were also present at sanctuaries, where they were deposited as offerings to a female divinity. Other equally remarkable finds include shears, such as those found in tomb 161 at El Cigarralejo, and a skin-tanning scraper (Cuadrado 1987), similar to those documented at several Italic sites (Gleba 2008a: 123). Their presence at these sites could either indicate the trade of the person buried there or could be symbolic of local sheep owners.

Conversely, one of the precautions to be taken when analyzing the connection between textile production and funerary contexts is the need to avoid direct identifications between funerary grave goods and gender. Although direct associations of weapons with male individuals and spindle whorls with female individuals usually tend to match, there are also exceptions. The most representative and significant example is the one found inside Tomb 155 at the Baza necropolis in Granada (Presedo 1973; 1982), the original context of the *Dama de Baza* (the *Baza Lady*) mentioned above (fig. 1). This is a funerary context with the greatest number of panoplies in Iberian culture found to date. Despite being a female burial, as attested by analyses of the bone remains (Díaz-Andreu and Tortosa 1998; Chapa and Izquierdo 2010; Trancho and Robledo 2010; Prados 2010; 2016; Quesada 2010; 2012), no objects related to the world of textile production were deposited

as grave goods. The textile world is still clearly present at this burial, although not in the form of the tools – spindle whorls, loom weights, etc. – but through the female sculpture's dress, which in itself is a funerary urn, and, in our view, through the decoration of some ceramic vases among her grave goods, which seem to imitate textile motifs, at the expense of imported – e.g. Greek – pottery.

Thus, as Gleba (2008) has noted with respect to the various necropoleis on the Italian Peninsula, the highly elaborate hems of certain cloth materials were a tribute to the great skill of those who had made them. Not only were such skills restricted to women of the elite, but, at the same time, by being buried wearing such garments women indicated both their gender identity and their belonging to these elites. On the other hand, it is highly likely that such elaborate garments suggest the existence of grades within the different categories of women involved in textile activities. These would range from those women – possibly including children – in charge of more basic tasks to more specialised responsibilities, probably undertaken by women of higher status and of a certain age – who were capable of working at a level of technical skill only attainable by a small minority. We should also contemplate the possibility, put forth by Masvidal *et al.* (2000), that the productive needs of Iberian culture in its most developed phases may have required the growth of certain activities, including textile work. Thus, the often-recorded coupling of luxury ware and textile elements within these communities would reflect the importance of textile activities within them, as has been documented in the *distinctive rooms* mentioned above (Grau *et al.* 2008; 2015).

The presence of spindle whorls in male burials – although in many examples there is no conclusive osteological analysis – has been explained in a number of different ways, from suggestions that they might have been offerings made by female members of the families of the deceased, to assertions that individuals buried there might have been textile traders or the owners of textile workshops (Cabrera and Griñó 1986: 194, note 3). The possibility has even been contemplated that these spindle whorls might have been used as closing devices for no longer preserved bags of clothing. In any case, it seems evident that since a large proportion of textile tools and their components were made of organic materials, it would be difficult, except in rare cases, to record such components as spindle whorls, loom weights, thread tensioners and, in some cases, punches. As for wool combs, they would probably be made of wood or bone.

Still, to fully tackle the topic of textile-related finds in Iberian contexts, we must mention the necropolis of El Cigarralejo, excavated by Cuadrado (1987) in Mula (Murcia). As already noted, one of the most interesting burials at this necropolis is Tomb 200. Although a lengthier interpretation of this complex topic lies beyond the scope of this article, this tomb seems to contain a rich set of instruments linked to the textile world, including 56 spindle whorls, four or five tablets and two loom thread tensioners. This burial site also yielded a carved piece of boxwood which Cuadrado (1987) interpreted as a turned wooden leg, whereas Alfaro (1984:77) states that this and other pieces of wood could have been thread reels, as is also supported by Rafel (2007: 127). Finally, based on their similarity to Roman spindles, Rísquez and García Luque (2008: fig. 2) proposed that these objects could also be the remains of spindles.

Another remarkable aspect of this burial is the existence of small loom pieces whose size would, in Alfaro's (1984: 89) view, require that the user should necessarily be an expert. We must also mention the presence of large bone needles, some of which could have been used as awls (Rísquez and García Luque 2007: 159). Another remarkable aspect of Tomb 200 is the presence of cloth remains – linen and wool – preserved through charring in the funeral pyre, indicating the existence of fabrics of varying degrees of thickness and different qualities.

For all the reasons stated above, the textile work at this site cannot possibly be reduced to a single element symbolised by a spindle whorl. On the contrary, we would like to highlight the way in which specialized textile production becomes a symbol of both high status and the highly-skilled work deployed in cloth making. Similarly, the presence of loom weights may also be connected to the commercialisation of these materials. In this sense, Rísquez and García Luque (2007) emphasise a highly interesting aspect, already suggested by Cuadrado (1987) – the possibility that a truly great number of the articulated bone-pieces, knucklebones, found among grave goods (some 300), could reflect a specific form of accounting for textile activities (Rísquez and García Luque 2007: 162). In our own view the presence of these bone pieces allows other interpretations with closer links to the technical aspects of cloth making. These could have been used as reels for thread storage, as separators – markers – for different types of threads, or even as an auxiliary element to spindles to prevent them from unreeling during spinning. The latter function seems confirmed at the

Roman necropolis of Almenara de Adaja (Valladolid), where a perforated piece of bone was found which perfectly fitted the spindle present in the same grave (García Merino and Sánchez Simón 2011: 239-255). Whether or not one accepts this particular interpretation, these remains emphasise the productive importance of textile activities along with aspects such as gender, status and possibly age.

In turn, studies about Pre-Roman textile production in the Italian Peninsula carried out by Gleba (2008; 2009) highlight that the symbolic importance of some textile tools present in graves becomes manifest when these are made in precious materials. When spindles or spindle whorls are made of ivory or amber, loss of these tools' practical qualities would render their symbolic character even more prominent. Since spindles and spindle whorls are the most visible textile tools and can be easily transported, they would have eventually come to make these activities visible, as well as the women in charge of them.

PLACES OF WORSHIP

A detailed analysis of the various spaces that could be considered sacred in the Iberian world – a complex issue which also raises questions about the regional and chronological spectrum of such sacred spaces – lies beyond the scope of this article. In this brief review about the ritual character of textile production we will only mention the presence of some of the more typical textile tools – spindle whorls, loom weights, and needles – at several worship places, such as votive wells, sanctuary caves, territorial sanctuaries, etc. We will also consider the presence of different types of *fibulae* – sometimes in truly striking numbers – which are undoubtedly to be considered in relation to the offerings of articles of clothing at sanctuaries on the occasion of certain festivities.

If there is something clearly distinguishable about the iconographic representations of the various *ex-voto* figurines – whether made in stone, terracotta or bronze – it is the importance of clothing for the followers who were present at the sanctuaries. A strict dress code appears to emerge, which the entire community would be familiar with and willing to replicate, also with respect to haircuts, gestures, etc. An entire body language was used, which would contribute to constructing and defining gender, age and social status.

An important aspect regarding textile tools at places of worship is the age of the excavations that yielded them. This makes it hard to tell, for example, whether spindle whorls and loom weights were found together or not – possibly indicating the *in situ* production of these articles of clothing – or whether other objects such as plaques, thread tensioners, spindles, spindle whorls, etc. – were recorded too, which might indicate the development of specialised textile activities at the sanctuary. Those present at the first (early 20th century) stages of the excavation of Collado de los Jardines (Santa Elena, Jaén) describe up to 50 spindle whorls. However, the proportion of these finds in comparison with the rest of the offerings is difficult to determine, as the early archaeologists were likely to have overlooked them, in their greater concern to find more valued objects such as bronze votive figurines and better-preserved pieces (Calvo and Cabré 1918). Similarly, it is reasonable to assume that needles, spindles, spindle whorls, etc. might have been found on site but were neglected in the inventories and records written up to the first quarter of the 20th century (Calvo and Cabré 1918-1919; Casañas and Del Nido 1959).

Also remarkable is the presence of spindle whorl and *fibula* offerings at various sanctuary caves in the Spanish Mediterranean area. The cave at Cerro Hueco, Valencia, has yielded a truly remarkable number of spindle whorls (González-Alcalde 2002-2003: fig. 6). The cave Cueva de la Nariz, Moratalla (Murcia), is also yielding interesting results (Alfaro and Ocharán 2014: 35-53), which we will review below.

We would also like to mention the votive well at El Amarejo which, according to archaeologists in charge of the excavation, was active between the late fourth and third centuries BC (Broncano 1989). It should be noted that other authors, such as Uroz Rodríguez, date it a century later in the final stages of the settlement's history. Among other finds, the well has yielded numerous materials related to textile activities, including four loom weights, 14 spindle whorls, 25 sewing needles, four punches, various remains of string and 17 fragments of fibre materials, such as esparto grass and wool. A comb and a wooden spindle whorl were also found (Broncano 1989: 63).

The votive deposit of Libisosa (Lezuza, Albacete) was in proximity to the El Amarejo site and its rich materials deserve due attention. This very deep trench – possibly a water well originally – was later used for votive offering deposition. Excavated and dated to the last third

of the first century BC (Uroz Rodríguez 2012: 442), the votive deposit yielded, among other objects, several needles, loom weights, and spindle whorls. The team in charge of the excavation have proposed that the latter might have been used to close bags, a hypothesis we do not share. Finds at this site also included remains of a bone needle and various ankle-bone fragments. Finally, an *oinochoe* has been found, with a depiction of a small female figure emerging among birds holding a spindle (Uroz Rodríguez 2012: 325; Uroz Rodríguez and Uroz Sáez 2016).

The sanctuary at the cave of La Lobera, in Castellar (Jaén), yielded needles, which, in combination with the great number of votive bronze figurines, could indicate greater female devotion for the – possibly female – divinity represented there (Nicolini *et al.* 2004; Prados 2007; 2014; Rueda 2013). One of the most remarkable results of the excavations carried out by Nicolini and the team from the University of Jaén at this site is the presence of pins and many *fibulae* (Nicolini *et al.* 2004). While most of these *fibulae* are ring-shaped, there are also some La Téne types. Both Lantier (1917) and Calvo and Cabré (1917-1918) had already described great numbers of *fibulae* of this type from this sanctuary at the start of the last century. The team excavating in the last years of the 20th century, on the other hand, highlighted that all the *fibulae* they had found were small and, in many cases, could even be considered miniatures – being less than 30 mm in diameter (Nicolini *et al.* 2004).

Finally, we will analyse some *ex-voto* from the most prominent Iberian sanctuaries in detail. A well-known example are the stone figurines from the Cerro de los Santos site in Albacete where both male and, especially, female figures wear mantles, veils, tunics, skirts, shoes, hairpieces and jewellery in an attempt to affirm their status (Chapa 1984; Ruano 1987; Ruiz Bremón 1989; Brotons *et al.* 1998; Sánchez Gómez 2002; García Cardiel 2015) (fig. 4).

As mentioned above, the body language of bronze *ex-voto* figurines is highly expressive, as shown by their appearance at different rituals, or at different points in the course of these. Both male and female figures appear in dress or nude. The males are often depicted bearing weapons and are often shown nude, while female figures sometimes wear a belt. The *ex-voto* figurines which are represented in dress wear specific clothes which could possibly indicate their participation in different rites of passage or coming-of-age ceremonies, possibly prior to

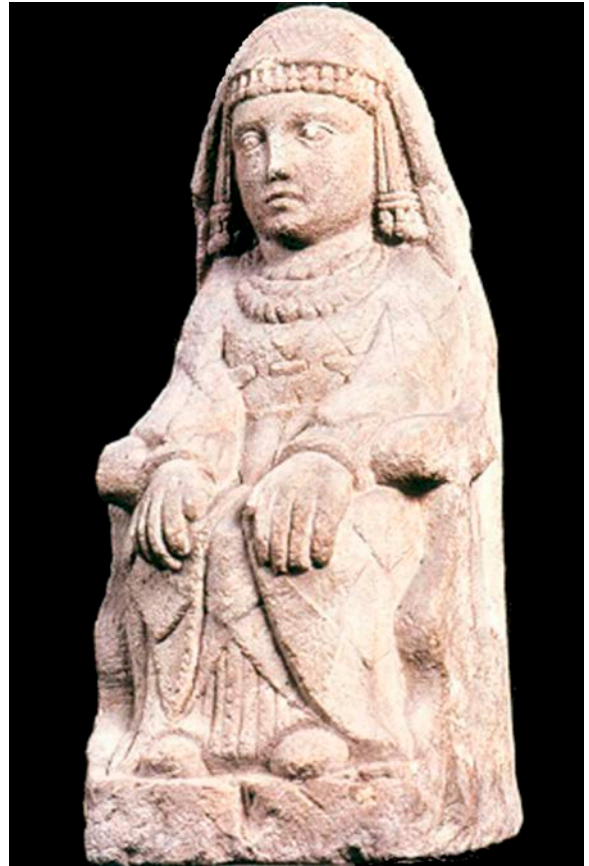


Fig. 4: Stone *ex-voto*, Cerro de los Santos (Albacete) (MAN).

marriage. Such could be the case with votive figurines of young women wearing a long, narrow-waisted tunic and other symbols of age such as braided hair. Other women who have already been through the ritual offer their own images as women covered with a certain type of veil (Nicolini 1968; 1969; Prados 1992; 1997; 2018; Rueda 2011; 2013; 2015; 2018). Similarly, those offerers who place *ex-voto* figurines of babies wrapped up in sheets, bundled up for divinities to protect them – as happens in other Mediterranean sanctuaries – also show the importance of textiles (Prados 2013). However, gender and status – as expressed through dress and personal adornment – are also made manifest through a wide range of textile materials, as we have seen for funerary sculptures or the various textile items preserved at the necropolis at El Cigarralajo. These materials include mantles and tunics made in wool, but also very fine – almost transparent – pieces in linen, possibly used for veils and certain types of tunics, as appears to be the case in the sanctuaries of



Fig. 5: Bronze figurines wearing fine tunics, Jaén (Archive Nicolini).



Fig. 6: Bronze figurine, Collado de los Jardines (Santa Elena, Jaén): a. female; b. male (MAN).

Collado de los Jardines and Castellar, in Jaén, where both male and female votive figurines are wearing such fine tunics that they outline the figures' nipples and belly-buttons (fig. 5a-c). These tunics were probably ordered to

be made specially for certain festivities, and are likely to have been subjected to precise rules, both with regards to dress and attitude and to hairstyle, as some male *ex-voto* votive figurines wearing these clothes have shaved hair. Some of these tunics also show decorated hems which would require extreme textile skill on the part of those in charge of making them. In any case, the presence of this type of textile material would mean that both those wearing them and those making them would show their prestige through these public displays of textile production (fig. 6). The same type of decorated hem is also present in various textiles and garments, worn by both men and women, as shown by the short kilt-like *shendyt* worn by some votive figurines representing men (fig. 6). We have already mentioned that the fact that offerers presented themselves nude or in dress would probably be prescribed and depend on ritual regulations, as can be seen in a number of different examples of votive figurines. In fact, when either men or women appear dressed they are wearing different types of garments: short tunics and *shendyt*s, covered or not in different *sagum*-type clothes, fine linen tunics, long tunics sometimes covered in veils, etc.

Some of the most characteristic clothes, especially those of warriors, can be most clearly appreciated in the stone sculptures represented by individual funerary

sculptures, and especially through the great stone monuments from Pozo Moro, Albacete (Almagro-Gorbea 1983; López Pardo 2006), Cerrillo Blanco, Porcuna (Navarrete 1987; Negueruela 1990; Ruiz and Molinos 2015), and El Pajarillo, Huelma (Molinos *et al.* 1998; 2015), the last two in the province of Jaén. Social organisation would probably condition these monuments to be arranged in such a way that their presence at the sanctuaries sanctioned each communities' regulations – as attested through the depositing of *ex-voto* figurines (Prados 2014). In this sense, it is highly likely that the significant numbers of *fibulae* at sanctuaries could indicate offerings made to this end by either individual women or groups of women, as in other Mediterranean contexts. As well as displaying their delicate work, these women thus highlighted the importance of textile production and possibly different levels of social participation in community rituals (Prados 2016; 2018).

Finally, we would also like to mention the presence of bronze *ex-voto* figurines found wrapped in cloth, for example at the sanctuaries of la Cueva de la Nariz (Alfaro and Ocharán 2014) and at La Luz (Comino 2016; Tortosa and Comino 2018).

FINAL REFLECTIONS

To summarise, we would like to highlight that Iberian culture presents textile-related tools in habitation contexts, in necropoleis and in sanctuaries. Although we lack sufficient data from habitation contexts to fully explain the connection between textile production and the cult of domestic entities, or to any specific divinities that might protect this activity, the presence of textile materials at so-called *distinctive buildings* has to be noted – perhaps as offerings as part of foundation rituals. Also, the proportion of objects deposited as part of female grave goods is evidently greater than their presence at sanctuaries, as is also the case in other Mediterranean Iron-Age contexts. On the other hand, we should not lose sight of problems of preservation, both with respect to the funerary ritual of cremation and concerning the very dynamics of excavation. These processes may have caused data loss from the archaeological record, either because tools are made with organic raw materials – especially wood and bone – or because their small size, as in the case of needles, may have caused them to be overlooked in recording. Few remains of textile materials

are present in either sanctuaries or burials. Among the examples preserved, Tomb 200 at El Cigarralejo (Mula, Murcia) is remarkable for both the quantity and variety of its textile tools. Both elements would encourage us to suggest a visible desire to perpetuate the importance of the person buried through the funerary ritual. However, most Iberian necropoleis only feature spindle whorls or the occasional loom weight as part of the grave goods assemblage, primarily found in female burials – although these have also been occasionally recorded in male burials. It is also quite clear that textile tools deposited in burials are broadly connected to the symbolic character of gender construction but also, in some cases, with a fundamental display of a woman's status, both on the part of the rich person occupying the burial, and on that of the skilled maker of textile materials. Such technical craft skills were far beyond the reach of most women and were only possessed by those in the highest social sectors. Similarly, the appearance of tablets and thread tensioners indicates the high quality of some garments, which were comparable to those made elsewhere in the Mediterranean. Such borders can be observed in extraordinary funeral sculptures such as the Dama de Baza, or some stone and bronze votive figurines.

In some cases, similar to finding women buried with weapons – as is the case with the Dama de Baza – spindle whorls may occur at male burials. This makes it difficult to tell whether their symbolic character is lost, or if the construction of their gender is somewhat blurred. The finds could also indicate that the individuals buried there were textile traders; or could constitute an offering on the part of a female member of the buried person's family. These objects could even point to the possibility that spindle whorls might have been used as clasps for bags made of clothing containing food, flowers, etc.

Regarding their importance as offerings at sanctuaries, we believe that their scarce presence in older excavations may have been due to their durability and size – wool combs for example could have been made of wood or bone and thus did not survive, while other small tools, such as needles, may not have been recorded as systematically as the more artistically valuable objects, such as the *ex-voto* figurines. Neither spindle whorls nor loom weights are often recorded in groups, which precludes the possibility of looms being present at sanctuaries to make clothes for the divinity, as might be suggested by the significant quantities of *fibulae* recorded at them.

Some of the higher-quality garments, which some votive figurines appear to be wearing, may have been deposited as offerings at these sacred spaces. The use of objects linked to textile production in rites of passage and coming-of-age rituals should also be taken into consideration. Rather than marking the fact that someone might have reached an adequate age to spin or weave – a task that young girls were probably taught with the guidance of an older woman – these rituals may have marked an aristocratic women’s role in maintenance activities. These items could therefore symbolise age and status, both within the family group and the community. Thus, the presence of textile tools and the iconographic representation of high-quality garments in Iberian culture burials and sanctuaries reveal the economic and symbolic importance of textile activities, both in the construction of gender and in defining status and social prestige.

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