Summary: Vettonia was one of the most important Celtic regions in Iberia which emerged in the Iron Age. It corresponds largely to western Spain, between the Duero and Tagus valleys. The archaeological evidence indicates that the formation of this ethnic group lay in an historical process whose roots went back to the Late Bronze Age-Early Iron Age, when we begin to find a regular association between the first fortified sites and stable populations. These groups did not consolidate before the second half of the first millennium BC, in parallel with the development of other peoples of the interior of the Iberian Peninsula. This period can be recognized in particular through the spread of the ritual of cremation, ironworking, the adoption of the potter’s wheel and the expansion of some settlements — oppida — which were ultimately to disappear with the Roman conquest. This paper sets out to examine the evolution of the area from an indigenous perspective, examining the process of change before and after the evidence referred to by Greek and Roman writers.

THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

European prehistory has developed under the premise that there is a direct relationship between technological change and changes in the exploitation of natural resources. Thus, the origins of the Iron Age have been seen in two separate developments: on one hand the use of new types of tools and the technology necessary to produce them and, on the other, taking possession of land and the introduction of new crops. The transition to the Iron Age also marks the change between two different ways of conceiving the past. The ephemeral nature of the dwellings gave way to fortified settlements which indicate permanent occupation. The emergence of these hillforts was an important development, perhaps the most important in the transformation of nature. They helped to create a new sense of place and time and were, to some extent, the result of adopting new technologies that were part and parcel of a general process of economic intensification, and promoted a stable way of life. There is little doubt that the most recent prehistory of the Iberian Peninsula was witness to this fundamental change in the landscape: certain kinds of pottery, sites and structures disappear or become extremely scarce, and others appear. But all too often it is assumed that the adoption of a sedentary lifestyle was more sweeping than it was. Traditionally, researchers propose models of analysis advocating a nomadic and impermanent pattern of settlement before the new stage, and only
after that time (c.500–400 BC) do they accept that there were permanent and complex societies, capable of generating surpluses that could be traded and devoting more energy to other activities. There are two different ways of approaching this transition: either assuming that new tribes arrived and settled in the region or, on the other hand, examining the role which the indigenous communities played in the process of change before the evidence provided by the first known historical references.

I shall argue that this process was a gradual one, and that today we can recognize certain stages of this transformation at different times and places. Firstly, I shall look at how the significance of some sites was marked in an archaeologically identifiable way in the Late Bronze Age and how the importance of these places helped to create the conditions necessary for the development of stable settlements. Then I shall try to show how they provided a focal point for subsequent territorial developments in the Iron Age, especially after the impact of the Carthaginian and Roman armies in Hispania during the Second Punic War. To do this I shall use the evidence provided by patterns of settlement in the centre and west of the Iberian Peninsula (Fig. 1), where the fortified sites constituted the cornerstone of the whole system.

TAKING POSSESSION OF NATURE. LATE BRONZE AGE IN CENTRAL IBERIA

At the end of the second millennium BC the Bronze Age groups who formed what is traditionally known as the ‘Cogotas I Culture’ in the lands of the interior pursued a fairly homogeneous way of life, the salient features of which were temporary settlements consisting of simple huts, characteristic ‘boquique’ pottery with incised and impressed decoration, a poorly represented funerary ritual of pit burial with few grave goods, and a subsistence economy based on stock raising and the cultivation of cereals (Delibes and Romero 1992). These characteristics, together with the scarce indications of metalworking in situ and the fact that the storage vessels found are not particularly large, would indicate that production was essentially domestic in character, and surpluses were not accumulated.

A first reading of the data suggests that these social groups were organized at a tribal level, and it would seem difficult in principle to determine their territoriality. However, the data at our disposal on the type of habitat are not unanimous. Approximately half the known sites which have provided materials from the Late Bronze Age coincide with Iron Age sites. They were situated in high places, difficult to reach, on grazing land with good visibility over the surrounding area. This is illustrated in the case of Las Cogotas and Sanchorreja in the province of Ávila, El Berrueco and La Corvera in the province of Salamanca, or El Risco and La Aliseda in Cáceres. Stone enclosures or walls, sometimes over four metres wide and rebuilt on several occasions, have been preserved in most of them. That these settlements were not transient is clear if we take into account: (1) the stratigraphic sequences, which indicate unbroken occupation until Iron Age levels, (2) the dwellings, in stone and mud, which contrast with the traditional huts made of a framework of plant materials supported by posts, and (3) the objects found in them, such as elbow-arc fibulae, bronze axes, spearheads and gold jewellery, which suggest the existence of dominant groups that participated in the trading networks. Thus, not only did more and larger settlements exist in this period than at any previous time in the Bronze Age, but we also find settlements whose occupation sequences indicate a more stable way of life after 1200 BC. They controlled the routes from Tartessos in the south-west towards the Tagus and Duero valleys in the Meseta, the standard route from the Mediterranean coast to the interior. The increasing interest in access to these regions is also demonstrated by finds of
bronze weapons and other offerings in rivers. As Ruiz-Gálvez has shown (1995, 31–2), these repeatedly appear in fords and deltas. Their distribution is comparable with that of the decorated stelae (Galán 1993) and treasures found at points of transit or crossroads, the latter interpreted as grave goods, a pattern which is repeated in other parts of Atlantic Europe (Bradley 1990, 122).

It could be argued, as Ingold (1986) does, that nomadic communities’ perception of the landscape differs to some extent from that of farming communities. The first define resources and land in terms of routes and places, in which natural features of the landscape often act as landmarks. Sedentary arable farmers, on the other hand, enclose their resources and define them by creating artificial boundaries. The hillforts which emerged at the end of the Bronze Age would therefore have been a visible point of reference for anyone crossing inhabited, but not clearly delimited, territory. This situation would be in keeping with the idea of groups undergoing increased social differentiation, partly due to the establishment of regional trading

Figure 1
Map of western and central Iberia, showing the location of Iron Age and Roman Republican sites cited in the text, and the focus of Vettonian Culture with the names of the principal Celtic tribes (in larger capitals) according to written sources.
networks with other privileged areas and the phenomena of emulation which this produced (Ruiz-Gálvez 1995), but where political rôles were not yet fully institutionalized (Bradley 1990; Fernández-Posse 1998, 120 ff.). In Ingold’s terms, these differences would mark the transition of the landscape into land.

**BRONZE AGE/IRON AGE TRANSITION: THE STIMULUS FOR LONG-DISTANCE EXCHANGE**

At the beginning of the Iron Age the lands of the interior of the Iberian Peninsula were inhabited by differentiated groups that produced a major transformation of the area. In the Duero valley we witness the emergence of a very considerable number of open settlements, covering an area of between 1 and 5 ha, which systematically farmed the alluvial soils of the plain (San Miguel 1993). Recent analyses have shown that in this period there was a woodland landscape that was not very dense in the immediate area of the sites, and arable farming which specialized in wheat, barley and oats (Delibes et al. 1995). This group is known by the name of ‘Soto de Medinilla Culture’ and today defines the Early Iron Age in the centre of the Iberian Peninsula (Delibes and Romero 1992). However, occupation of the mountainous areas of the region does not conform to the typical pattern of these settlements, and it would be reasonable to assume there was greater emphasis on stock raising. In any event, what can be recognized in the archaeological record is that most of the Late Bronze Age lowland settlements had now been abandoned, while those located in the uplands were still occupied (Álvarez-Sanchís 1999). To these features must be added the disappearance of the pottery characteristic of the Bronze Age groups, which was ‘replaced’ with a tradition of vases decorated with painting, a nascent iron industry, and changes in domestic architecture involving the systematic use of stone, adobe and mural decoration of houses. The reasons why these kinds of settlements appeared are complex. Four arguments have been put forward: (1) the transformation of the trade networks in response to the first Phoenician settlements in the south of the Iberian Peninsula, in the ninth and eighth centuries BC (Aubet 1994), (2) the breakdown of the Atlantic economy of the Late Bronze Age with the appearance of iron, which obliged metallurgical centres to increase the output of bronze (Rowlands 1980, 45–6), (3) new advances and improvements in food production and preservation (Ruiz-Gálvez 1991, 287 ff.), and (4) the transition from the Sub-Boreal to the Sub-Atlantic climate, a phase which must have led to increased rainfall in the northern half of the Iberian Peninsula and the possibility of developing new crops (Esparza 1995, 139–40).

After 700 BC Phoenician and Tartessian trade began to require products from the more northerly regions. This is borne out by imports destined for an élite that availed itself of these markets as a prerequisite for establishing alliances and commercial relationships. These products were very specific in terms of their use and significance, associated with clothes, the funeral banquet, religious worship and the new technologies. They included new types of fibulae and belt buckles, indicating changes in customs of dress associated with high status; bronze jugs, spits and cauldrons, which emphasize the ritual consumption of meat and wine; and alabastrons and aryballoi, which show that perfume was used (Fig. 2). The existence of an orientalizing precious metal industry indicates a process of acculturation, in which craftsmen copied prototypes from the eastern Mediterranean, which even affected religious beliefs. The Etruscan figurine from El Raso (Fernández Gómez 1986, 479–80) and the oriental goddess in bronze found in El Berrueco provide conclusive evidence in this respect (Almagro-Gorbea 1977, 254 ff.). This ideological assimilation is also evident in the adoption of new funerary
Figure 2
Commodities associated with orientalizing industry in the Early Iron Age: thymiateria and Tartessian jug from El Carpio (1); iron tools, axes and spearheads from Sanchorreja (2); aryballoi from El Raso (3); oriental goddess made in bronze from El Berrueco and fibulae and belt buckle from Sanchorreja (4) (after Fernández Miranda & Pereira 1992, González-Tablas et al. 1991–92, Fernández-Gómez 1986, Álvarez-Sanchís 1999).
practices: the Tartessian brasiers, *thymiateria* and jugs found in the Tagus Basin demonstrate rituals in honour of the highest ranking dead (Fernández Miranda and Pereira 1992). The spread of ironworking would seem to be assured in the Sanchorreja and El Berrueco sites around the ninth–eighth centuries BC (Almagro-Gorbea 1993). There are knives, axes, razors, chisels and needles, which implies a knowledge of how they were used and made. The razors are based on Atlantic and Mediterranean bronze prototypes, thus reflecting the first contact with and use of this metal. They represent personal toilet items identified with a very particular aesthetic practice — grooming the beard — and, as in the case of ivory combs or tweezers, would have been a symbol of age and status (Goody 1982).

What were the traders in these inland regions looking for? The perishable nature of some products, the probability that local aristocracies traded with intermediaries, or that exchanges took place in particular settlements, make it difficult to evaluate what kind of commodities they were obtaining. There were *a priori* three basic tradable products: cattle, metal and men. An indication of the importance of the first can be gathered from the analyses of the fauna found at sites in the Duero valley and the part they played in the diet and economy of the settlements (Delibes *et al.* 1995). To the south, in the Guadiana valley, settlements such as Medellín reveal a high proportion of cattle at this time (Almagro-Gorbea 1977, 500). Their increase and greater height were attributed to Phoenician influence (Amberger 1985), although they were also common in Central Europe at this time (Härke 1982, 200). The west of the Iberian Peninsula was also rich in iron ore, tin and gold. There is no evidence, on the other hand, of a slave trade at this stage, but the heavy demand for slaves in the Mediterranean during the seventh and sixth centuries BC (Nash 1985, 53 ff.) means it may have existed. This encounter between the indigenous peoples and the Phoenician colonists of the south of the Iberian Peninsula generated territories with political and economic influence. In the landscape this took the form of a very significant increase in the distance (50–75 km) between the most important settlements, while the smallest ones are concentrated around them within a 10–15 km radius. This model reinforces the idea of small hierarchies and differs from the previous stage, although in many cases the upland settlements survived. It would therefore seem reasonable to suggest that these were groups involved in an economy of prestige goods which they traded with more complex political organizations, in a way fairly similar to the models proposed for warrior societies and chiefdoms of the Late Hallstatt Culture in Central Europe (Frankenstein and Rowlands 1978; Härke 1982; Wells 1990), studies of which have, furthermore, emphasized the rôle of pre-existing hierarchies in the construction of the new trading networks, in this case with the Greek and Italic world (Brun 1991; Pare 1991). This is the model that Aubet (1990) and Cunliffe (1995, 16–17) have proposed for the groups which inhabited the Guadalquivir and Guadiana valleys, in the south of Iberia. The existence of centres of the palatial and religious type, such as Cancho Roano in Badajoz province (Celestino 1996), would support this thesis. The hinterland of the orientalizing world known as Tartessos therefore produced prestige objects for local chiefs on the lands situated to the north, thus ensuring a regular supply of raw materials which would in turn be reinvested in their dealings with the Phoenicians of the coast. This interpretation is probably consistent with the custom of exogamous marriage in the Tagus valley. The El Carpio burial in the province of Toledo must be interpreted in this way (Pereira 1989). It is that of a woman of high social position and is extraordinary for the wealth of the grave goods and the oriental origin of the items: a clepsidra, Phoenician flagons, a silver vessel whose origin should be sought in the *phialae mesomphaloi*, wheel-made bowls, etc. A similar explanation could be suggested for the Tartessian bronze vessels found in Las Herencias or the
gold treasures of Pajares and La Aliseda. In other words, there were exogamous relations in a ‘frontier’ area that made it possible to establish political alliances between increasingly defined territories (Martín Bravo 1998; Álvarez-Sanchís 1999). The map in Fig. 3 shows fairly well the limits of these centres in western Spain between the Duero and Tagus rivers. What is more, the coincidence of these Early Iron Age sites with the large *oppida* of the Late Iron Age suggests that the population of the region were the immediate ancestors of the Vettons, one of the Spanish tribes of Celtic stock recognized by the Greek and Roman authors.

**THE PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION IN THE IRON AGE AND THE CAUSES OF CHANGE**

The oldest historical reference known to us concerning the pre-Roman peoples of Spain and Portugal is in Avienus’ *Ora maritima*, the work of a Latin author writing in the fourth century AD, but which is thought to included material facts from a Massaliot *periplus* of around 600 BC (Mangas and Plácido 1994). According to the ancient *periplus*, the Celts displaced the Ligures from the European Atlantic seaboard, forcing them to emigrate southwards. The work mentions other peoples, the *Cempsi* and the *Saefes*, who were associated with the Celtic tribes of the west of the Iberian Peninsula. The affiliation of these groups and their relationship with the known archaeological record had considerable weight in the Spanish historiography of the 1930s, and they were considered to provide the ethnic substrate out of which the pre-Roman peoples developed (Bosch Gimpera 1932). This would point to the existence of a Celtic entity at the end of the Early Iron Age and could justify the use of the expression ‘Ancient Celts’ in the region, as in the case of the later Hallstatt peoples of Central Europe. However, it is important to emphasize that the information from the *periplus* is used exclusively for its geographical content and a specific social, political or cultural identities cannot be deduced from it (Ruiz Zapatero 1991). The most complete ethnographic references relating to the Celtic tribes of the Iberian Peninsula (*Celtiberi*, *Vettones*, *Lusitani*, *Gallaeci*, *Vaccaei*, *Astures* . . .) refer only to the Late Iron Age and come from the classical authors — Posidonius, Strabo, Pliny — who gathered information from those who accompanied the Carthaginian and Roman armies in the conquest of Hispania.

From 450/400 BC we witness what could be called the full Iron Age, which was basically a continuation of the previous stage, as the stratigraphy of some sites demonstrates, but with several very significant new features. For various but little-studied reasons, amongst which must be considered the slump in Tartessian trade, internal crises in the power structures and the pressure of the Celtiberian tribes of the eastern Meseta (Burillo 1998), there was a major readjustment in the social landscape of the Early Iron Age groups, with the re-siting or abandonment of some of the most important centres of wealth, and a very drastic reduction in luxury imports. The most striking features which ushered in this stage may be summed up as: (1) an increase of more than 70% in the number and size of settlements, with evidence of prehistoric fields, (2) the construction of new walls, defensive systems and sanctuaries, (3) the spread of the cremation ritual, associated with large cemeteries with marked differences of wealth between the tombs, (4) widespread development of the iron industry, (5) the introduction of the potter’s wheel, and (6) evidence of arable farming (rotary querns) and storage of food on a large scale (storage pits, granaries). It is clear that this attests to a very significant transformation when compared to the previous phase. The sites represent a new strategy of exploiting the territory, and apparent demographic growth (Fig. 4). Can we, therefore, be sure that this was a result of ethnic penetrations or, on the contrary, was the local
Figure 3
Map of western Iberia in the eighth–sixth centuries BC. Model proposed to explain interactions and exchange systems (after Álvarez-Sanchís 1999; for the settlements of Guadalquivir and Guadiana valleys see Martín Bravo 1998, with additions).
Figure 4
Vetton settlements distribution in western Salamanca and Amblés and Tajo valleys. Percentages (%) of continuity between the Early-Second Iron Age and new settlements in each region (after Álvarez-Sanchís 1999).
population ‘converted’ to new rites and aesthetic tastes? A reading of the data set forth so far has led us to reconstruct a gradual evolution, which, as we have seen, produced different situations in the Late Bronze Age and during the ‘expansion’ of the Hispano-Celtic populations. But there is a more significant way of looking at this entire historical process, in that there is a substantial correlation between the various sites and periods analysed. The agricultural intensification facilitated a gradual identification of specific regions with particular populations. This situation would not have been possible if, from the end of the second millennium BC, a major trading network had not developed which encouraged the spread of new ideas and technologies (Ruiz-Gálvez 1991). Emphasis has been placed on how the improvement of agricultural tools, the arrival of new crops — for example legumes such as the bean — and the use of salt encouraged soil fertility, crop rotation, the preservation of foodstuffs and population growth (Jäger and Lozek 1982, 173; Sherratt 1993, 34). The recent discovery of Mycenaean pottery deep inland at Montoro — Córdoba province — points to some kind of maritime traffic from the east Mediterranean, at least as early as the twelfth century BC (De la Cruz 1988; Almagro-Gorbea and Fontes 1997). In Central Europe the number of settlements reflects a very significant increase in comparison with preceding phases and it is no coincidence that many regions also saw the division of land during this stage (Harding 1989, 177; Cunliffe 1990, 323 ff.; Thomas 1997). We should therefore give close consideration to what is meant by the beginning of the Iron Age (Ruiz-Gálvez 1998; Fernández-Posse 1998, 127 ff.), since the influences which would transform the interior of the Iberian Peninsula were arriving at the end of the Bronze Age, before or simultaneously with the establishment of the first Phoenician colonies on the Andalusian coast.

Everything would seem to indicate that in the course of the first half of the first millennium BC the habitat became integrated into this agricultural cycle, and thus we begin to find a regular association between places and settled populations. The significance of these sites was marked in a visually identifiable way by establishing limits and building walls, and even, if the domestic context of some Late Bronze-Early Iron Age burials is accepted (Esparza 1990, 130 ff.; Romero and Jimeno 1993, 196), these would attest to the symbolic appropriation of the ground. Infant burials have been found in dwellings, a custom which demonstrates concern for the fertility and possession of the land. If this is accepted, it could be that the nomadic populations of the Late Bronze Age consecrated some high places in their pre-existing territory, offering a focal point for subsequent developments in the landscape. Their construction would, moreover, contribute to the reinforcement of the distinctions between groups inhabiting the same territory. The impression which one gains from the data available is that the settlements of the Early Iron Age developed independently, and experienced periods when they were used or abandoned or when more or less activity went on in them, until the emergence of new fortified places from the fifth–fourth centuries BC onwards (Figs. 5–6). Hillforts such as Sanchorreja or El Berrueco ceased to be actively used in the course of time while others, such as Las Cogotas, La Mesa, El Raso, Ulaca or Salamanca which were intensively occupied, with walls re-built at various stages, had become important centres of regional distribution by the end of the Iron Age (Álvarez-Sanchís 1999). Why a few of them should have been more successful than others and survived for longer is not an easy question to answer. The ritual and sacred significance of some of them before they were walled, their position on communication routes or the agricultural resources of the surrounding area may provide a clue in this respect. Cunliffe (1990 and 1998) has studied this process by interpreting the emergence of the fortified Iron Age settlements in the south of England as the result of a
gradual change in the systems of land ownership. He suggests that a major transformation occurred between the end of the second millennium and the sixth–fifth centuries BC that entailed the conversion of communally worked land into enclosed spaces, which from then on emphasized individual or group rights. In the Spanish Meseta a broadly similar model could apply, both in the sphere of the living and of the dead. This implies that a system in which prestige lay in the control of trade and trading routes (c.1200–500/400 BC) gave way to one in which power lay in the ownership of land and the basic means of production. The need to define new territories in the Second Iron Age therefore suggests a major emphasis on the productive capacity of the land, exacerbated perhaps by an increase in the population. If this is accepted, the development of fortified Vettonian settlements could be associated with major divisions of the landscape in which these powerful relationships operated.

In this respect particular attention should be paid to the siting of the sculptures generically known as ‘verracos’, stone effigies of bulls and pigs — more than 400 are known — spread over the west of the Spanish Meseta and Portugal (Fig. 7). It was traditionally thought that these sculptures were of religious significance, related to the sacred protection of livestock, or were funerary monuments because a few bore Latin inscriptions to that effect (Martín Valls 1974). However, the work invested in these sculptures — many of them over 2 m long and weighing 3–8 tons, such as the bulls of Villanueva or El Tiemblo (Ávila) — would make more sense if they were used to establish visual points of reference in the landscape in order to indicate specific resources: the pastures of the valleys and the nearest sources of water (Álvarez-Sanchís 1994). There is evidence that they acted as stone landmarks dividing different pieces of land (Fig. 8) and marking the boundaries between territories, and some of them were also found next to the main gates of pre-Roman hillforts. The value of the grazing lands was marked from the fourth century BC onwards in an archaeologically identifiable way by these zoomorphic sculptures. It would thus not seem unreasonable to associate their erection with the development of a socio-economic model which was controlling and limiting access to the basic resources needed for stock raising. We know that a policy of this kind did exist in antiquity, particularly in relation to the regulation of cultivated fields (Fowler 1981, 94–119), grazing land (Cherry 1988, 22–6), the movements of livestock (Gómez Pantoja 1995) and even access to springs (Wilkes 1974, 258–9). If all this is interpreted as action designed to establish authority over the land, it was very probably based on a hierarchical social organization. The cemeteries excavated in the provinces of Ávila and Cáceres, well-dated between the fifth and second–first centuries BC, reflect these hierarchical relationships: the existence of groups of tombs separated by barren areas, the evidence of tombs of individuals with a high social status in each area (Fig. 9), the similarity of the funeral ritual and the great diversity of grave goods suggest internal contrasts in the social and family structure (Castro 1986; Martín Valls 1986–87). The contemporary nature of the various areas is indisputable and it is reasonable to assume that the funerary areas reflect a system of lineal descent in family groups, with an economy that was based on the control of the means of production (Kurtz 1987). They were buried separately to reinforce their rights by ideological means. These funeral customs must be linked with the changes that were occurring in agricultural practices and inheritance customs. In other words, they tell us about the social structure of the group, the settlement and the territory.
Figure 5
Comparative plans of Second Iron Age hillforts in western Spain (after Álvarez-Sanchís 1999).
THE OPPIDA

This entire process reached its culmination in the centuries leading up to the Christian era. Two important events are attested in the historical record: the incursion of the Carthaginian armies led by Hannibal into the Meseta region in 221 and 220 BC, and the subsequent conquest of Hispania by Rome (218–19 BC). At the same time some fortified settlements became major centres of social, political and economic activity. The examples of Salmantica — conquered by Hannibal in 220 BC — Las Cogotas, La Mesa de Miranda, Ulaca or El Raso are particularly interesting (Martín Valls et al. 1991; Álvarez-Sanchís 1993; Ruiz Zapatero and Álvarez-Sanchís 1995 and 1999; Fernández Gómez 1986). In most of these settlements we find major modifications to defensive systems and a very substantial increase in size. Three other criteria can serve us as a starting point: (1) evidence of hierarchical relationships and specialization between sites, with a nucleated system of oppida fed by small satellite communities, (2) evidence of a complex internal organization based on function and hierarchy (Fig. 9): differentiated districts, livestock enclosures, industrial areas and areas of collective services, places designed for worship . . . and (3) evidence of changes in the material culture: the use of industrial potteries and high temperature kilns, a wide range of iron tools which required complex production systems and specialized craftsmen. The overall impression that can be gathered from all this is of a booming economy which points to an ‘urban’ model of organization. However, the process by which these settlements were transformed into others that were more complex is still unclear. One important question is whether these modifications occurred in response to an internal process of evolution or, on the contrary, to a change in the model of society, behind which would be Carthage and Rome. The question has given rise to a considerable debate, centred on identifying the theoretical concept of oppida in the archaeological record (Buchsenschutz 1988; Woolf 1993; Almagro-Gorbea 1995) and on the factors which determined the emergence of these large urban centres (Collis 1984 and 1995; Wells 1984; Cunliffe 1994). Not all the oppida were contemporaneous ex novo creations of the Roman conquest. The archaeological evidence from the interior of the Iberian Peninsula demonstrates the existence of settlements that were already major centres in the fourth and third centuries BC and which implied that inter-regional trade was already an important factor. Only at the end of this period must the historical circumstances brought about by the Second Punic
Figure 7
Map showing the distribution of zoomorphic Iron Age sculpture known as 'verraco's' (after Álvarez-Sanchís 1999), and comparative sizes of some of them (after Álvarez-Sanchís and Ruiz Zapatero, forthcoming).
War and its consequences in Hispanic territory, which encouraged the process even further, be taken into account. The question, therefore, implies that in the final centuries before the Christian era major transformations occurred that involved both what was happening within the indigenous communities themselves and also external factors.

(1) From the fourth century onwards, these settlements provide numerous indications of iron production, bronze smelting, pottery manufacture, textile production and stone cutting, which show that manufacturing was taking place on a scale never previously achieved (Martín Valls and Esparza 1992). A very important aspect of this intensification was the existence of inter-regional trade, which would explain the transportation of products over long distances and the evidence of itinerant specialists. For example, in the case of the Vetton cemeteries of Las Cogotas, El Raso and La Mesa, we can use the evidence provided by the types of swords, daggers, belt buckles, bronze bowls, fibulae, Greek pottery, Campanian ceramics and other grave goods found in the tombs to demonstrate the existence of contacts with the Celtic tribes of the Duero valley, with the Iberian peoples of Upper Andalusia and with the Greek colonies of the Mediterranean coast. The first iron swords and spears date to the fifth century BC in the west of the Iberian Peninsula. But it is at the end of the fourth century BC and particularly during the third century BC that the archaeological record becomes richer and more varied, coinciding with a change in the type of weapons used and in the characteristics of grave goods in general (Fig. 10). This context is parallel to the growth of the Celtiberian, Vaccei and Vetton peoples, who from this time onwards and up until the wars against Rome, considerably increased their output of iron weapons (Lorrio 1997; Sanz 1998; Álvarez-Sanchís 1999). Some visible signs which explain why economic activity intensified from now on have already been evaluated and relate to emphasizing the productive capacity of the land. The need to obtain food surpluses in order to gain access to the trading networks would have led to an expansion of arable farming and stock raising. These surpluses would in turn stimulate specialist production in the areas best endowed with natural resources.

A brief reference to the settlement pattern in the best known areas of western Spain can provide us with a starting point. The surface area of the oppida in the Ambles valley (Ávila), from Las Cogotas and La Mesa to Ulaca — with 15, 30 and 80 ha respectively — is considerable (Ruiz Zapatero and Álvarez-Sanchís 1995, 226) if it is compared with the large European oppida (Collis 1984, 124). There were also small open settlements on the plain, which may have been dependent on them. In general the population of the valley appears to have established a dual economy: the oppida in the upland areas, with good resources for stock raising, and the small settlements on the plain, exploiting the fertile agricultural soils along the river. The settlements along the Tagus valley give us a different picture. The abundance of land for cultivation, particularly for vegetables, must have been one of the most important factors in the organization of settlements (Mangas and Carrobles 1992). Their proximity to the fords of the river probably favoured the access to the trading networks. Finally, another interesting phenomenon is the hillforts to the west of Salamanca, such as Yecla or Irueña, whose development must be linked with the mineral wealth surrounding the area, in particular iron, gold and tin (Salinas 1992–93). This would explain their very concentrated pattern of settlement, with small but heavily-fortified sites (1–5 ha). Such contrasts, although scarce, are sufficient to suggest a different pattern of settlement and different socio-economic specialization in each region.

One particularly interesting aspect which relates to what I have just said is artistic style. If workshops were developing different decorative traditions, this could be a good...
reflection of the desire of these groups to establish their identity using visual symbols. For example, a detailed analysis of the motifs decorating the incised pottery found in the neighbouring cemeteries of Las Cogotas, La Mesa and El Raso demonstrate marked differences at the settlement level (Fig. 11). They probably replicate textile designs associated with other items of clothing or weapons, but undoubtedly the identification of these motifs reveals that there was some kind of intentional separation between communities which inhabited the same region. In other words, the stylistic identities displayed by the pottery must have been an expression of social identities, of communities that differentiated themselves and recognized each other as different, but shared the same types of pottery and the same decorative techniques. Something similar could be said about the funerary ritual: the cremation is basically the same, but different customs are displayed in the tumulus structures and the grave goods with abundant offerings in the cemetery of La Mesa (Cabré et al. 1950) compared with the cemetery of Las Cogotas — less than 20 km away — with its fields of stelae, a single urn in each tomb and poorer offerings (Cabré 1932). These differences could thus indicate that, within a geographically clearly-defined ethnic grouping, there were settlements with decision-making power that were beginning to reveal their independence.

To summarize, a social and economic development of these characteristics would encourage conflict and a strong degree of competition between the settlements. In this context it
Distribution of grave goods in Vetton cemeteries, considering the number of items per tomb (information starting from Cabré 1932, Cabré et al. 1950, Fernández Gómez 1986, Hernández and Galán 1996), and plan of the oppidum of Ulaca – Solosancho, Ávila – indicating the ‘zoning’ of activities based on an interpretation of the structures found (after Álvarez-Sanchís 1999).
Grave goods in Vetton cemeteries known in Ávila province. The types of pots and weapons used in the Second Iron Age suggest two phases in their development (after Álvarez-Sanchís 1999).
is thus easy to understand the attention given to finding defensive sites and constructing towers, walls, pits and stone spikes (‘Chevaux-de-Frise’), as shown by the fact that nearly 70% of the settlements known in the region are fortified. Some settlements were beginning to resemble major urban centres, and this, to some extent, threatened the tribal structure of the territory. Thus, by the end of the third century BC the socio-economic system had become so complex that its transformation seemed inevitable.

(2) The emergence of a new market in the context of the Second Punic War and the conquest of Hispania by Rome changed the course of native transformation. A system of large-scale trade with the Mediterranean world meant meeting an enormous demand for metals, livestock, salt, other raw materials, mercenaries and slaves. We know that the payment of tribute from indigenous cities was frequently demanded in the form of supplying men, sheep’s wool, ox skins, gold and silver (Diodorus 33, 16; Livy 34, 46; 41, 7). On the other hand, products such as wine, olive oil, perfumes, cloth and luxury ceramics made their way into the interior. The first imports of Roman manufactured goods are dated to between the end of the third century and the second century BC, as the finds of Campanian pottery and Republican *denarii* in Salamanca, La Mesa and El Raso testify (Martín Valls and Esparza 1992, 272). The archaeological record does not provide us with sufficiently detailed information on the mechanism of diffusion, or the value and volume of the products involved in these first phases of the process. The imports most frequently mentioned in the Graeco-Roman sources do not leave material traces but their impact must have been very important from the commercial point of view. That wine and oil were transported in amphorae by river and sea, in some cases reaching the interior, does not exclude the use of other more utilitarian containers, such as wooden barrels and animal skins, both of which are mentioned in temperate Europe (Cunliffe 1994, 79). This argument would also be true of certain Carthaginian and Roman ceramics, which would have been imported not so much for the value of the container as for their contents. The problem raised is important because it enables a basic artefact of this period to be evaluated: wheel-made pottery. The first local products in the region can be dated to around 400–350 BC thanks to the chronology furnished by various Greek cups associated with them in the cemetery of El Raso (Fernández Gómez 1986, 827–8). However, most of the wheel-made pottery must have been produced there after 200 BC, and it displays a varied repertoire of shapes and decoration. From this time onwards, potters’ workshops are found in centres such as Las Cogotas, providing proof of standardized production and a level of specialization that must have been exclusive (Ruiz Zapatero and Álvarez-Sanchís 1995). Thus, if the large-scale introduction of the new model occurred rapidly after that time, it suggests that socio-economic factors were much more crucial than the strictly technological ones, i.e., just when the indigenous communities were beginning to operate in markets that required a varied output for a wide range of demanding customers.

Another very important aspect was the rôle of the Roman army as a potential consumer of food supplied and other products. The goods obtained in the workshops of the *oppida* and the acquisition of new imports encouraged the peasants to produce more and more food surpluses. The payment of taxes would in turn have stimulated agricultural output, mining and deforestation (Edmondson 1992–93). One indication of this process might be the emergence at the end of the Iron Age of small open settlements devoted to farming on the valley floors, and it is possible that new relationships of dependence developed with the larger settlements. These factors imply that production intensified and distorted the old systems of exchange and that an economic model developed which was based on surpluses, which could only operate with a
good knowledge of industrial processes, a larger labour force and the organization of the centralized power. As a result, some of the hillforts lost their primacy in favour of others which had the advantage of being sited on the main communication routes and were easy to supply. This process accelerated the development of the *oppida* even further (c.200 BC), especially when the conflict between indigenous tribes had been developing for a century. The wealth of these centres would have attracted people from different regions, which would have dangerously increased the degree of competition for access to the new markets. These changes must have led to tensions over property and must be taken into account in order to understand the crisis of kinship groups — linked to small territories — and the advent of a new system of impersonal relationships, based exclusively on economic interest (Jimeno and Arlegui 1995, 121). The private hoarding of personal ornaments, silverware and coins must be understood in this context, since they are archaeological evidence of status symbols which replaced the weapons in the cemeteries as a mark of social rank. At the other extreme would have to be put practices such as banditry, cattle raiding and migration, well testified in the sources (Diodorus 5, 34, 5–6; Strabo 3, 3, 5), a situation which was aggravated by the Lusitanian and Celtiberian wars against Rome (154–133 BC). The construction and enlargement of some settlements in the second and first centuries BC have been related to the phenomenon of ‘sinécisme’ (Almagro-Gorbea and Lorrio 1991, 37), a process similar to developments in other parts of
Europe (Frey 1984): cities which attracted new contingents of population on the basis of their political and economic interests.

But the system only had a few decades of independent development. Roman domination determined the characteristics of the indigenous habitat, stimulating amongst other factors four developments in particular which would act in concert: (1) the organization of the territory on the basis of the agricultural uses of the land, (2) unprecedented political and administrative centralization in the region, (3) the rôle of the military camps, which proved to be a very important focus and stimulus for urban development and (4) a new communications network, which forced the indigenous society to perceive the landscape and move around in it in a different way from before. These elements would constitute a new ‘cognitive map’ of the territory for those who inhabited it (Edmondson 1990). To what extent these changes affected subsistence strategies and the exploitation of the countryside is not easy to determine, but there is one fact which is very significant from the archaeological point of view: the evidence provided by the fortified settlements, whose history we know in sufficient detail to be able to deduce that they either coincided with lands rich in mineral and farming resources, a situation which in many cases guaranteed their continuity; or they occupied defensive positions surrounded by grazing land, in which case they were more likely to be abruptly abandoned. This would appear to be indicated by the duality that can be observed in the regions of Ávila and Salamanca: the abandonment of the oppida in the Amblés valley in the first century BC contrasts with the continuity of a number of hillforts to the west of Salamanca province under the Roman Empire, which must without doubt be attributed to their connection with mining. On the other hand, the Roman occupation of towns sited on river terraces during the second–first centuries BC and the first century AD — Caesarobriga, Salmantica, Obila, Toletum (modern day Talavera, Salamanca, Ávila and Toledo) — should be associated with the use of the land for farming. It can therefore be asserted that the Roman presence strengthened some new settlements and others that already existed for economic purposes, with the result that part of the indigenous system continued to operate together with a decentralized pattern of settlement of small farms and hamlets.

All these elements would constitute a new landscape and an entirely different way of perceiving it, a process which would culminate from the second century AD onwards with the Roman urbanization of the countryside through the construction of villae and other rural facilities. But the golden age of the hillforts and oppida of Celtic Hispania had come to an end, and the archaeological study of the romanized indigenous tribes has other implications which are beyond the scope of this work.

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