

Dealing with the outside: social power and legitimation in the South-East Iberian Peninsula during the Iron Age (6th–1st centuries BC)

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ABSTRACT – *The aim of this paper is to analyse some strategies of power, social control and legitimation during the Iberian Iron Age (6th–1st centuries BC). It addresses how the Iberian elites exploited the domain of the ‘outside’ to legitimize and retain their status. A diachronic approach is presented seeking to analyse the role of the outside realm throughout all the examined period and the variety of its expressions within the Iberian societies. In particular, the paper focuses on the south-east of Spain, an area with a rich archaeological record which, however, has never been examined from this approach.*

KEY WORDS – *Iron Age; Iberian Peninsula; legitimation; elite; society*

Spoprijemanje z zunanjim: družbena moč in legitimacija na jugovzhodnem iberškem polotoku v železni dobi (6.–1. stoletje pr. n. št.)

IZVLEČEK – *V članku analiziramo strategije moči, družbenega nadzora in legitimacije v iberški železni dobi (6.–1. stoletje pr. n. št.). Raziskujemo, kako so iberške elite izkoriščale domeno ‘zunanjega’, da bi legitimirale in ohranile svoj status. Predstavljamo diahron pristop pri analizi vloge zunanjega sveta skozi celotno preučevano obdobje in pri preučevanju raznolikosti teh izrazov v iberških družbah. V članku se bolj podrobno osredotočamo na jugovzhodno Španijo, območje z bogatimi arheološkimi zapisi, ki pa do sedaj še niso bili raziskani s takšnim pristopom.*

KLJUČNE BESEDE – *železna doba; Iberški polotok; legitimacija; elite; družba*

Introduction

From the end of the 6th century BC to the beginning of Roman influence in the 2nd to 1st centuries BC, the Mediterranean territories of the Iberian Peninsula were marked by significant changes at various levels, which also found expression in the landscape. These are particularly remarkable in the 5th and 4th centuries BC, when a hierarchical landscape was defined through the consolidation of a number of fortified sites (*oppida*). They were located in strategic positions along the main regional valleys, controlling the territory and other secondary rural settlements around them. These changes were one of

the diverse expressions of a wider process of transformations which led to an increasing social complexity defined by the territorial consolidation of the socio-political elites and the development of a new social framework based on client networks (*Ruiz, Molinos 2007.188–190*).

Within this changing framework, the analysis of the strategies of power and legitimation used by the local elites emerges as a key issue in order to understand this process from a comprehensive perspective. In particular, this paper focuses on the south-

east of Spain (Fig. 1) and the current region of Murcia, an area which provides a rich and wide material record and where some of the most remarkable peninsular sites of this period are located. Regarding the analysed record, it is important to outline that most of the data have been provided by necropolises and sanctuaries linked to the main fortified settlements, while little is known about domestic contexts, where very little fieldwork has been carried out. In any case, funerary areas and cult places provided us with remarkable examples to illustrate our analysis and explore this issue which, however, has been never approached in the area from this perspective. In fact, the few studies addressing these territories have hardly ever dealt with socio-political issues, paying attention to the archaeological study of main sites and necropolises (amongst others, *Gallardo et al. 2017; Lillo Carpio 1981; Page 1998; Page, García 1993*) or, more recently, focusing on individual sites (*González et al. 2014; López-Mondéjar 2016*). Fortunately, some works have examined these aspects in the nearby regions (*Grau 2014; Ruiz, Molinos 2013*), providing an interesting framework to examine for the first time the territories in question from a global and integrative perspective. Since our current knowledge about every regional site is very different and not all of them have been object of systematic archaeological fieldwork, any comparative analysis is clearly difficult. It is for this reason that our final objective here is not to present a distinction between *oppida*, but to provide a global picture of the study area and a first insight into the legitimation strategies of the south-east Iberian communities.

A review of the rich archaeological record provided by funerary areas and cult places associated to the *oppida* of the study area from 6th to 1st centuries BC suggests that space and distance were not neutral

concepts for these societies. On the one hand, there is evidence of the existence of a dual conception of the world by the analysed societies, and not only was this not strange to the ancient Mediterranean world in which they were inserted, but it also appears to be clearly reflected through both their material record and their organization of the landscape (*Grau 2010.108; Ruiz, Rueda 2009.71*). From this perspective, space should be understood as an active element, embedded and implicated in social action (*Tilley 1994.10–11*). As a result, and as indicated by Durkheim, dimensions such as geographical space and distance should be understood as categories that were replete with symbolic meanings (*Durkheim 1915.11; Helms 1988.8*). On the other hand, by examining the materials we assume the significance of the external realm for these communities, whose images and symbols reveal its socio-political use by the ruling groups throughout the Iron Age, constituting a powerful strategy of social control and legitimation in the hands of the Iberian elites. Of course, we are aware of the fact that internal and external factors played a significant role in the socio-political processes of this period (*Ruiz, Molinos 2007; Padilla, Arboledas, López 2019.372; Sanmartí 2008.279*) and that diverse strategies of legitimation were used by local elites. Any different approach would mean a simplified view of a much more complex process. Keeping this in mind, this work aims to address the role played by the external realm as one of those strategies, a key aspect which has not been previously examined by the regional research and which, however, is essential if we are to obtain a complete picture of these communities during the centuries in question.

While not beyond criticism, Helms' studies provide us with a first and interesting anthropological approach to this issue. They offer a number of ideas

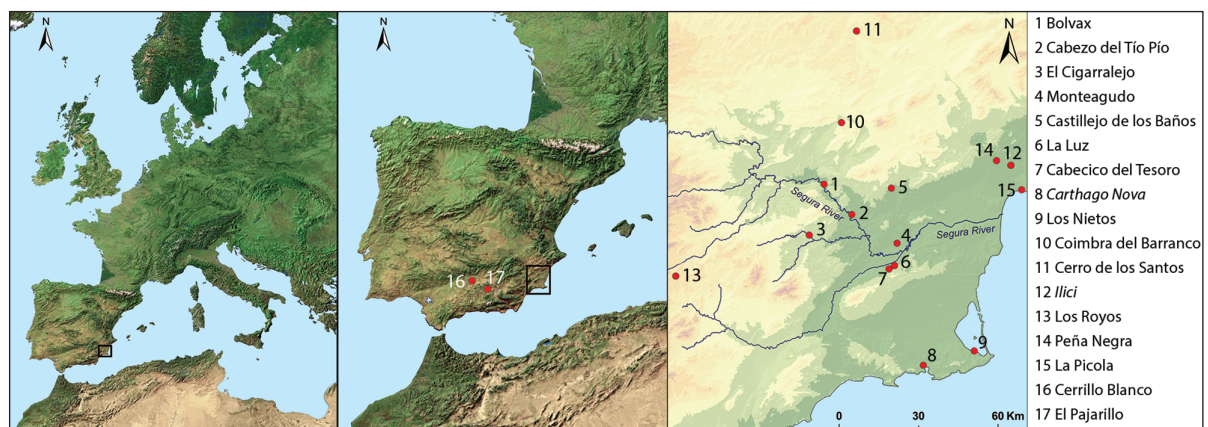


Fig. 1. Location of the study area and main sites cited in the text.

and perspectives through which to address the processes of social and political legitimation during the Iberian Iron Age. In examining traditional societies, Helms highlights the importance of the external realm as a key element for legitimating ideologies (Helms 1992.157–158; 1993.160–169). Through her analysis of different chiefdoms, tribes and states, she argues the existence of two realms within which human activity is developed. On the one hand, the ‘inside’, the ordered world of any society and culture, and on the other, the ‘outside’, the external world, ruled by cosmological and natural forces. According to Helms, the individuals, objects and activities which link both realms, and especially those that come from ‘outside’ have a special significance. In particular, she highlights the symbolic meaning of foreign goods and crafts which become crucial elements for individuals seeking socio-political power (Helms 1993). In addition, Helms’ ideas also express the significance of both space and distance. On the one hand, space has a well-defined extension and an ideological significance in traditional societies and is full of power (Helms 1988.4; 1992). According to this idea, the symbolism and connotation of certain places also gives a precise meaning to the actions, peoples, and objects linked to them (Helms 1992.158). Distance becomes another essential characteristic of the outside realm. As noted by Helms, in traditional societies both people and objects associated with distant places acquire an aura of prestige. This is the case with socio-political and ideological leaders, and certain ‘liminal’ specialists such as religious practitioners, hunters and warriors (Helms 1993).

To return to my main theme, and considering the concepts of space and distance, in the case of the Iberian communities the outside realm appears expressed through two different but complementary levels, clearly reflected in the archaeological record. The first one would be linked to the concept of space and identified with the undomesticated and wild territories located beyond the *oppidum*, the community, and its farmlands. The second level is related to the concept of distance, implying a wider framework and going beyond those territories around the *oppidum* to include, in the case of the area being analysed, other Iberian and Mediterranean regions. This second level of analysis will be especially interesting at the end of the examined period, with the integration of the Iberian communities in the Roman sphere of influence.

Bearing these two levels of analysis in mind, we have organized this paper as follows. Firstly, we ap-

proach the first level, addressing the images and symbols associated with it. Secondly, we focus on the second level, examining the connections with the Mediterranean and Roman world, and their significance in the processes of social legitimation. Finally, we propose a diachronic view of the subject, by exploring how the relationship with the ‘outside’ was shaped, and how the elites used it as one of their legitimating tools throughout the period in question.

The territory beyond the *oppidum*: symbols and images of the ‘outside’

In the case of the first level of the ‘outside’, an overview of the archaeological record of the territories in question reveals its importance in the ideology of these communities. As indicated for European societies (Wells 2008.14–15, 25), an increasing number of images appeared in the south-east of Iberia during the Iron Age. A review of this rich iconography, documented through different supports such as sculpture or pottery, provides us with good examples to approach and to illustrate our ideas. In addition, studies dealing with these images and iconography in other Iberian territories constitute examples to address their meaning and symbolism in the study area (Grau and Olmos 2005; Olmos 2003a; 2003b; Sala 2007; Santos 2003; Tortosa 1996; 2006; Uroz 2013).

Although we only have fragmented data, some examples offer interesting information, such as the sculptures found in Monteagudo (Murcia), close to the Segura Valley. Here, amongst others, fragments of a gryphon, a lion and a warrior have been documented (Fig. 2.a). In a similar vein, one sculpture found at El Cigarralejo (Mula, Murcia) has been also interpreted as part of an individual taking part in a heroic combat (Sala 2007.70–71), where an aristocrat defeats these exotic animals and mythological creatures, showing his control over the undomesticated world, and becoming protector and guardian of the community. In both cases, the images have been related to funerary areas, and consequently linked to the local elites whose tombs usually include these types of funerary monuments in the south-east Iberian Peninsula (Castelo 1995) (Fig. 2.b-d).

In general, these images refer to mythological fights and exotic animals, showing parallels with other examples which reveal a similar conception of the outside to the communities of other nearby territories. This is the case of two examples located in the region of Jaén (Andalusia). The first is the site of

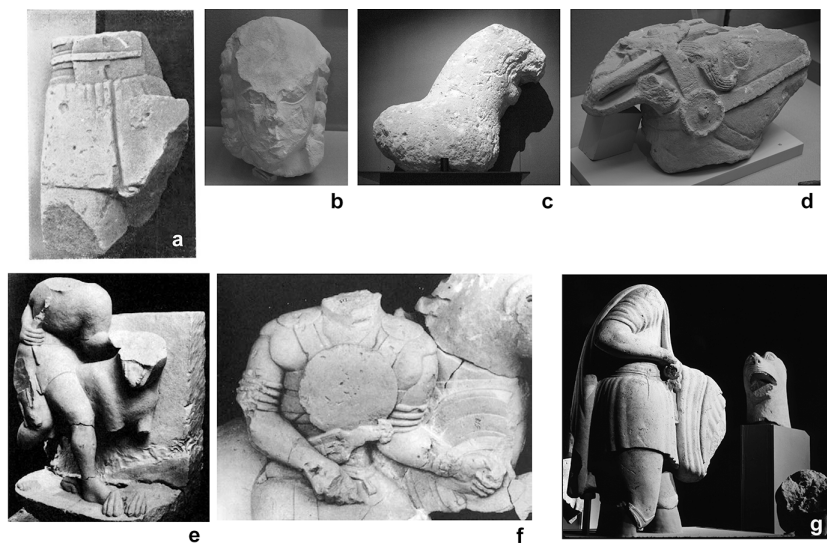


Fig. 2. a-d *Sculptures from the study area* (a after Muñoz Amilibia 1981; b-d Photos by the author), e-f *Cerrillo Blanco* (after Blanco Freijeiro 1987; 1988), and g *El Pajarillo* (after Ruiz et al. 2010.Fig. 4).

Cerrillo Blanco, in Porcuna. Here, a group of sculptures consisting of more than 40 figures dated to the 5th century BC has been documented (Fig. 2.e-f). They mainly represent warriors, as well as mythological creatures and animals such as bulls, lions, and sphinxes. The second example is the site of El Pajarillo, which provided another interesting group of sculptures, in this case dating back to the beginning of the 4th century BC (Molinos et al. 1998; Ruiz, Rueda 2009) (Fig. 2.g). In this case, as indicated by R. Olmos, a key element is the fact that the group of sculptures from Porcuna was located on the site of a former necropolis dating from the 7th century BC, in an attempt to link the ruling lineage to the individuals buried there (Olmos 2003a.21). Moreover, the complex iconographic program of this site justifies and explains how the group ruling over this territory achieved power (Olmos 2002; Ruiz, Molinos 2007.157–173), with the intention of representing the appropriation of all the different spheres of nature, of the undomesticated world, by the elite (Ruiz, Rueda 2009.78). In the same vein, the fight scenes against potential enemies such as the wolf documented in El Pajarillo have been interpreted as a symbol of the struggle of the elites to maintain power and control the territory (Sala 2007).

These earlier examples allow us to understand how power was conceived during the initial centuries of the Iberian period, mainly with a cosmogonic and mythical base, where ancestors and heroes linked to the ruling lineage played an active role. Moreover, these images confirm the existence of a dual conception of the world by these communities, divided into

two different realms (Grau 2011; Olmos 1998.153; Ruiz, Rueda 2009.71). On the one hand, there is domestic space, including the *oppidum* and the territory exploited by the community. Not only was it delimited by the walls of the *oppidum* (Bonet, Mata 2009.124), but also through the selected location of certain necropolis and cult places. In this sense, some rural cult places located in the near territories of Granada have been also proposed as key points which defined the limits of that domestic space from the end of the 5th century BC (Adroher, Caballero 2012). On

the other hand there is also a wild realm, consisting of undomesticated and unmarked space that was represented through different symbols, mainly animals.

More examples of fantastic and exotic animals such as lions or gryphons, expressions of the external realm, have been documented in the south-east of the Iberian Peninsula, dating to the end of the 5th century and to the first half of the 4th century BC. Furthermore, along with the sculptures, the first decorated pottery documented in the study area also provides interesting data. An early example is the so-called Campillo Vase, found in an unknown location of the district of Calasparra (Murcia), where amongst other figures a lion and a gryphon are represented (Lillo Carpio 1990) (Fig. 3.a). However, it is from the end of the 3rd century BC when painted images become the main vehicles of expression of both the outside and its links to the local elites. This change in the main support used for the images was joined by new forms of expression by the local elites, and must be associated with cultural and socio-political transformations that took place in the Late Iberian period (Grau, Rueda 2014). During this period, figurative painted vases constitute one of the most characteristic products from the south-east Iberian Peninsula, and some main production centres of these vessels have been located in the study area, such as the sites of Elche (Alicante) and Cabezo del Tío Pío (Archena, Murcia).

These items express the ideology of the community, in the same way as other elements did before, and

consequently they were highly appreciated by individuals seeking to maintain or promote their status (Brumfield, Earle 1987.9; Earle 1990.74–76). In this sense, it is not only the concentration of these products in the main sites that relates them to local elites. The figurative motives used to decorate them have been linked to specific codes that would have encompassed the socio-political ideology of the ruling elite (Tortosa 2006). In fact, some vases have been defined as ‘bespoke vases’, based on the argument that the images and scenes represented were ordered by persons of certain social status (Olmos 1987.24; Page, García 2021.251; Tortosa 1996.145). Consequently, the artisans who made them were well aware of the symbolism of the iconography

and the particular codes represented, meaning that the motifs were not randomly picked, but specifically chosen. Some well-known vases of the study area reflect the clear symbology of the selected images and their socio-political meaning. A good example is the decorated vase found at Cabezo del Tío Pío, the so-called ‘vase of the warriors’ (Fig. 3.b), whose analysis has demonstrated how the artisan changed a few details of the painted scene. Since they had a clearly symbolic meaning, it has been explained as an attempt by the artist to adapt it to the preferences and interests of the individual who commissioned it, who would have been a member of the elite (Olmos 1987.41).

Considering the special nature of the painted vases, it is easy to understand why we can very frequently find symbols, images and scenes related to the outside. Bearing in mind the iconography of the previous centuries, it is essential to consider the figure of the wolf. Previously represented in sculpture, it becomes one of the most repeated painted images in the south-east Iberian Peninsula during the Late Iberian period (Mata 2021). Amongst their various characteristics, also linked to the afterlife, this animal usually appears as symbol of the undomesticated realm (García 2014; 2016; Robles et al. 2021), be-



Fig. 3. Painted vases from: a *El Campillo* (after Lillo Carpio 1989–1990. 141); b *Cabezo del Tío Pío* (photo by Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, National Archaeological Museum); c *Cabecico del Tesoro*; d *El Cigarralejo*; e *Bolvax* (photos by the author, Archaeological Museum of Murcia).

coming one of the main iconographic expressions of the first level of the outside (Fig. 3.c). Moreover, its character as a symbol of the external dangers and the wild world located beyond the community is underlined during this final period by the appearance of a new image that is also represented on the vases of this area: the feminine divinity. Unlike the wolf, she is an expression of the ‘inside’, of the community and the civilized world ruled by the local elites, emphasizing in this way the opposition between both realms. She is represented through specific symbols that become very frequent in the decorated pottery of the study area, where we can find a wide number of examples (Tortosa 1996.157–159; 2006.162–163). In general, these iconographic changes reflect the interest of the local elites in legitimizing their status in a changing scenario. However, the world is still divided into two realms, and ruling groups are represented as leaders and protectors of the community, against the outside and its dangers.

Along with the figure of the wolf, and regarding the first level of the outside, it is also interesting to pay attention to the representation of specific scenes and activities. In the study area we can find very good examples of vases on which scenes of hunting and war are linked to the ruling groups. On such vases

these activities are represented together, with the aim of highlighting the significant social roles of the related individuals (*Olmos 2003b.88*). Two excellent examples documented in the study area are the so-called ‘vase of the warriors and the musicians’ from El Cigarralejo (Mula, Murcia) (Fig. 3.d) and the aforementioned vase from Cabezo del Tío Pío (Archena, Murcia). In both of these, the figures they show are clearly characterized as members of the elite, as expressed through their clothes (cross braces, v-neck tunics) and showing them as warriors and in a hunting scene, activities linked to the ruling groups and which were carried out on the outside. In this sense, and returning to Helms’ arguments, both war and hunting are associated with the outside, as they take place in the wild, undomesticated space beyond the *oppidum*. Hence, it is easy to understand why they are very common images on painted vessels from the Late Iberian period and have usually been associated with the Iberian elites (*Tortosa 2006.162–163, 179*).

In the case of hunting scenes, these were not exclusive to painted vases, as reflected by the aforementioned sculpture group from Porcuna (*Olmos 2003a.25–27*) where a young man is shown hunting with his dog. However, the painted pottery provides us with some interesting examples to approach this activity in the study area, where it is frequently represented (*Tortosa 2006.162–163*). A good example is the fragment found at the site of Bolvax (Cieza, Murcia) with a scene where two horsemen are practicing falconry, as indicated by the birds of prey on their shoulders (*Olmos 2003b.88*) (Fig. 3.e). Another example is the vase of Cabezo del Tío Pío, on which a warrior is shown with his horse, indicating his social level, and hunting in the outside, in the limits of the territory of the *oppidum*, indicated through the presence of wild boars (Fig. 3.b). As noted by Helms, the undomesticated character of the outside is expressed through this liminal activity. The fact that it is carried out between both realms associates this activity and the people who practice it with the outside, facing wild nature and unknown dangers (*Helms 1993.8, 153–156*). Once again, these scenes express control over the territory by the ruling groups, who appropriated the natural realm in this way (*Olmos 2003a.25–27*). The elites are shown carrying out an activity that would not have been open to all of the members of the community.

A similar role could be suggested for warfare. A prime example of the links between this activity and social prestige is provided in the study area by the

previously mentioned ‘vase of the warriors and the musicians’ of El Cigarralejo (Fig. 3.d). The scene has been interpreted as a ritual march, possibly associated with a rite of passage or other important moment for the community, where music also played a significant social role, becoming one more element linked to the elite (*González 2008.77; Tortosa 2006.179*). A group of warriors with spears, shields and masks are shown marching accompanied by musicians. All of them have clothes and symbols which allow them to be identified as members of the ruling elite. According to Helms, warfare is necessarily associated with the outside and consequently those who shared the warrior ideology would have also had a certain link with this realm (*Helms 1993*). The fact that war took place either in territories that were not directly controlled by the community, or in distant and exotic locations, means that it was an activity with a prestige that was enjoyed by those who took part in it. Consequently, it would have legitimized the social role of certain individuals, and in the case of the local elites, their political and ideological control over society.

Beyond these painted images, the link between war and the ‘outside’ is also expressed in the archaeological record of the study area. In particular, the analysis of important funerary sites such as El Cigarralejo reveals the existence of a group of individuals who took part in this activity and achieved a certain social prestige and influence (*Santos 1989; Luley 2016.30*). In the case of the funerary record, it is interesting to note that from the end of the 5th century BC and during the first half of the 4th century BC, an increase in the number of weapons found in the tombs has been documented in the study area (*Quesada 1997.611–613*). Amongst them a number of imported weapons have been found, a particularly exciting aspect as this once again associates warfare and the people who took part in it with the outside, in this case with the second level of this external realm, beyond Iberia.

In summary, different symbols and symbolic scenes allow us to consider the first level of the outside from the beginning of the Iberian Iron Age, finding its first and most direct expressions in sculpture. All of the examined images, including those documented in the nearby Andalusian territories, show the elites acting between the inside and outside, fighting with external forces, domesticating outside powers and, consequently, legitimating their authority over the limits of the territory controlled by the *oppidum*. As indicated by Helms for other contexts,

the outside seems to have been perceived by the Iberian societies as “*supernatural, mythical and more powerful*” (Helms 1988.4–5), functioning as a crucial element in the legitimation of the local elites. In Iberian Iron Age societies, this natural and undomesticated space located beyond the *oppidum* was usually related to power, a place where there was room for myths and all that is supernatural and hazardous. Since this space was not claimed or controlled by anybody, it became an ideal scenario for individuals, lineages or groups seeking to express their power and control over nature and, finally, over the territory. Not only do these images show the significance of the outside in the ideology of Iberian societies, but also how ruling groups took advantage of it in social and political terms. From this perspective, all of these images became powerful tools within the analysed communities serving to create discourses of power, and later as a means of legitimizing and demonstrating status in the society.

Distant places and Mediterranean connections: the ‘outside’ beyond Iberia

The second level of our analysis leads us to widen the scale beyond the *oppidum* and the territories surrounding it, inserting the Iron Age Iberian communities within a broader framework. Throughout the analysed centuries, participation in the exchanges and interactions intended to obtain long-distance goods has been mainly linked to the ruling groups in the study area. This issue is not exclusive to the south-east Iberian Peninsula. In fact, studies dealing with very different areas and chronological contexts coincide in the remarkable role of the elites in these types of interactions (Wells 2016.172), and how they used certain symbolic goods in order to achieve their objectives and interests (Knapp 1988; Mann 1986). There is a wide number of specific anthropological and archaeological studies focused on these issues which have analysed the role of specific objects as active indicators of social prestige and the role played by the long-distance exchanges (Aubert et al. 1996; Frankenstein 1997; Frankenstein, Rowlands 1978; Sahlins 1983.244, 246; Schortman, Urban 2011). Since those imported goods constitute only some of the aspects analysed in this second level, our purpose here is not so much to examine these aspects from a theoretical perspective, as done by those earlier studies, but more importantly to focus on the role played by the goods, images and symbols that originated beyond the *oppidum* and its surrounding territories, as another key power strategy of the south-east Iberian communities. Hence,

at this second level we will address very different aspects such as the Greek and Attic pottery, foreign weapons, bronzes and amulets, the presence of mercenaries and foreign traders and craftsmen, and finally the related iconography, paying special attention to the adoption of Roman symbols. Of course, we are aware of the wide diversity of artisans developing their work in the Iberian communities. We focus here on those working on some particular activities such as architecture, sculpture or the decoration and production of painted vases, activities which have been clearly defined in some sites of the study area such as El Cigarralejo (Blech, Ruano 1998.305–307).

Firstly, regarding the imported pottery, we assume that every object should be mainly understood and considered according to the specific context in which it was used (Chang 2008.55; Flad, Hrubí 2007.9–11; Thomas 1991.35–36; Tripcevich 2010.59; van Wijngaarden 1999.4–5). Therefore, since prestige was by no means a static or essential attribute, we assume that foreign items did not have the same prestige and symbolism during all the focal period. However, their continued appearance in burials indicates that they maintained a certain social significance from the 6th to 4th centuries BC, although it is likely that it was not exactly the same throughout this period, an issue that is more complex to clarify.

Having these ideas in mind, studies dealing with chiefdoms and princeps in the European Iron Age have highlighted the significance of the goods provided by long-distance exchanges and the redistribution of foreign objects, associating them with the increasing power of elites during this period (Baray 2003.386–387; Brun 2001.34–35; Dietler 2007.272–273; Herring 1991.122). They have usually been linked with richer tombs belonging to individuals with high social status, showing their prestige and use as objects for achieving social distinction (Bagley, Schumann 2013.126; Brumfiel, Earle 1987.5). Unlike other objects documented in the study area (such as bronze belts, ritual braziers, curved knives, or jewellery), one of the reasons for the symbolism and power of imported goods as legitimating elements would have been related to their foreign origin (Earle 1991.5–7; Schortman, Urban 2011.165–166; Thomas 1991.35–36). Of course, as we will explain later, we are aware of the fact that they were not high-status goods simply because they were not local, but that their foreign origin was further aspect used by local elites in order to achieve their legitimating goals. In a similar vein, Helms’ ana-

lyses of traditional societies outline how distance becomes a dimension full of symbolic meaning, power and value for these societies, and how objects and individuals related to distant lands, peoples and situations acquired an aura of prestige that made them powerful (Helms 1993.8–9).

Examples of long-distance interactions are documented from the 6th century BC in the main necropolises as well as in the most important cult places from the study area, even though they have hardly ever been analysed from the proposed perspective. Studies dealing with the Iron Age communities of the south-east Iberian Peninsula have mainly focused on funerary areas, providing us with an extensive and complete knowledge of a large number of foreign goods documented in the burials from this period. Amongst them, it is essential to pay attention to Greek products since some interesting examples have been documented in the region in question from the beginning of the study period, such as a krater attributed to the Painter of Black Tirso from El Cigarralejo (Mula), a droop cup from Cabezo del Tío Pío (Archena) or the Greek vessel from La Luz (Murcia) dating from the 6th century BC. The social significance of this imported pottery is widely accepted for the Iberian communities of this period and clearly expressed in the archaeological record, as most of these vases were documented as part of the grave goods from the tombs of wealthier individuals (Adroher, Rouillard 2017) (Fig. 4.a). From this perspective, they could be defined, following Hirsch's expression, as 'positional goods', since it is precisely

their rarity and the difficulty of accessing them which would explain that social value (Hirsch 1976). We also have examples of vessels that were repeatedly repaired, such as an Attic vase (825–842-incurved rim bowl (Sparkes, Talcott 1970)) located in tomb 29 of Castillejo de los Baños (Fortuna). These therefore appear as symbolic objects, with the ability to be inherited and transferred (Earle 1997.155; Castillo, DeMarrais, Earle 1996.21). Moreover, as has been indicated for other European regions during the Iron Age, exchanges, and especially the arrival of Greek products, have also been traditionally defined as key aspects in both the socio-political and economic development of Iberian societies and the geopolitical consolidation of the local elites (García 2003). This is not to say that there were not other factors that played a significant role in their development (Chapman 1990.265), although these foreign commodities must be seen as part of the trappings of power that were used within these communities to mask relationships of inequality and dominance (Brun 2001; Earle 1990.75; Loren 2010). From this perspective, the differences in the funerary record seen through the presence of these goods clearly denote their relevance as markers and, ultimately, as elements that sanctioned the individual's status within the community, presenting them as agents who played an active role in society.

Special attention has been given to Attic pottery in the south-east Iberian Peninsula, although the reasons behind the interest in acquiring these goods has not been examined in the study area. Studies have usually highlighted the scarcity of these vessels and the limited access to them for most of the members of the community in order to explain their significance. This could be accepted for the first few centuries of the Iberian period, but not in the later stages. The changes that took place from the end of the 5th century BC suggest other factors are needed to explain the interest in these foreign goods. Studies have highlighted the increasing number of these products that arrived in the region from the Middle Iberian period, and particularly during the first half of the 4th century BC. An analy-



Fig. 4. Elements with Mediterranean influences and imported goods documented in the study area: a Attic pottery and other imported products (photos by the author, Archaeological Museum of Murcia); b Bronze cuirass from Cabeceo del Tesoro and detail of its decoration (after Graells 2012.Figs. 49–50); c Helmet from El Cigarralejo (photo by the author, Archaeological Museum of El Cigarralejo).

sis of the funerary record of some of the main necropolises of the area has provided quite remarkable data: for example, 60% of the Attic vessels documented in the region arrived during this period, reaching as high as 80% in sites such as the necropolis of Cabezo del Tío Pío (Archena) (*García 1982.87*).

In general, this increase in the number of Attic goods found in the funerary record is indicative of a larger number of individuals having access to them, even though they were not members of the ruling groups. Good examples of this can be found in the necropolis of Castillejo de los Baños (Fortuna), not far from the Segura Valley, where these Greek products are present in half of the tombs, and that of El Cigarralejo, where they are documented in almost a third of the burials (*Santos 1994*). This has been interpreted as a result of the development of clientelism (*Ruiz, Molinos 2007*): this meant that although the redistribution of those goods continued to be controlled by the local elites, kinship ties would have allowed more individuals to have access to them. Also in this context is the notable appearance of local imitations of some of the most characteristic Attic vases in the study area, such as kraters, clearly linked with a local preference for those imported items. Considering this scenario, an interesting fact is that this change does not seem to have affected the importance of these elements. They continue to appear as an expression of social status, even when they increased in number and were no longer exclusive to the local elites. This suggests another factor to be taken into account in order to understand their significance in this new context: it was mainly their geographically distant origin that gave both these goods and the people who acquired them a certain aura of prestige. From this perspective, we can understand the continued presence of these vessels in the grave goods throughout the whole of the 4th century BC.

Together with these Attic products, other interesting imported elements have been documented in the study area. Although not all of these exotic goods came from other Mediterranean areas, such as a number of special swords documented in Castillejo de Los Baños and El Cigarralejo which probably came from other Iberian regions, most of them were a result of long-distance exchanges and links with the Mediterranean. Unfortunately, considering their scarce number, it is difficult to address the significance of those items coming from other Iberian regions. However, their appearance in a reduced number of burials, where we find also other exotic ele-

ments, could suggest a similar importance to those objects coming from more distant places. In general, all these items are excellent examples of the symbolic role these foreign goods played within the societies we are analysing, and were associated with rich burials of people with a certain social status. The most remarkable examples are a Greek bronze lion from tomb 277 and the Etruscan bronze cauldrons from tomb 200, in El Cigarralejo, the Greek bronze centaur in Los Royos (Caravaca de la Cruz), and the Egyptian amulets found at the richer tombs of Coimbra del Barranco Ancho (Jumilla) and Cabecico del Tesoro (Murcia) (*Padró 1983.129–138*).

Amongst the goods that originated from the Mediterranean regions, it is also interesting to note the presence of a number of imported weapons, whose type and decoration connect them with the Mediterranean area. Examples are the ivory handles documented in some main sites of the study area such as El Cigarralejo and Coimbra del Barranco Ancho, which have been defined as prestige goods (*Mata et al. 2020.83*). Along with these, perhaps one of the most interesting examples is the bronze disc cuirass found in the tomb of Cabecico del Tesoro (Fig. 4.b). A detailed analysis of its decoration and style have led to it being identified as having connections with the Central Mediterranean region. In fact, the main motif, showing an eagle hunting a pigeon, comes from this area, as revealed by similar designs on coins from Agrigento (Sicily, Italy) dating from the end of the 5th century BC (*Graells 2012*). Other weapons documented in the study area, such as the helmet from tomb 277 in El Cigarralejo (Fig. 4.c) and horse trappings found at Coimbra del Barranco Ancho reveal a foreign origin.

At this point we should return to Helms' ideas. As she has argued, the acquisition of these products for local elites became a "*mark of exceptionality, exclusivity and ability to control, and allows the cultivation of a kingly image*" (*Helms 1993.165*). Considering the examined archaeological record, there is no doubt that in the Iberian Iron Age, individuals who joined the networks bringing and redistributing long-distance goods took socio-political and ideological advantage of the values associated with distant places. However, there is one aspect that is not usually indicated by related studies that we should note: the acquisition of these long-distance goods is also connected with the 'outside'. In fact, as noted above, we assume that these objects cannot be defined as goods that conferred status simply because they were not local, and the relationship be-

tween other aspects such as distance or the socio-political context of which they formed a part must also be considered (*Tripcevich 2010.59*). Therefore, in the case of the region in question, they obtained their prestige and power from their links to the outside, consequently becoming of interest for individuals seeking legitimation. All the indicated goods have something in common that transformed them into valuable objects: they were brought from the outside to the inside, from other foreign, symbolically charged places to the community. Once there, they could have been modified or symbolically reinterpreted in order to adapt to specific political and ideological requirements (*Helms 1993.4*), as probably occurred with the previously mentioned amulets and Etruscan cauldrons. In any event, regardless of the specific meaning they had within these Iberian communities, the individuals whose tombs contain all these elements participated in this process by acquiring them and possessing their symbolism and prestige. As Helms has indicated, not only did the objects themselves have a political value, but also the intangible knowledge of the distant regions they represented, which was acquired directly or indirectly (*Helms 1988.3–4*). The elites acquired power in this second way, through their connection with long-distance networks of exchange, and by monopolizing the foreign contacts and the goods obtained through these transactions (*Schortman, Urban 2011.165*).

In addition to all the indicated elements and Mediterranean influences, it is important to note two interesting aspects related to the acquisition of these foreign goods in the study area. On the one hand, it has been suggested that Iberian mercenaries took part in the hostilities that took place in the Central Mediterranean area during this period (*Graells 2012.159–160*), something that is quite likely if we consider the images of Iberian warriors on Italian vessels, and the similarities that can be seen in certain elements. By bringing these weapons and symbols to inside their communities, Iberian mercenaries would have established a clear connection with the external world. On the other hand, a second aspect to be borne in mind is the presence of foreign traders and craftsmen working in the coastal areas, who would have played a key role in the production and acquisition of certain goods. From the 7th and 6th centuries BC, the south-east Iberian Peninsula was characterized by being an area of great dynamism, with the presence of Greek and Phoenician people who had a definitive impact on the development of the communities settled in these territories. Either as itinerant traders or settlers living togeth-

er with indigenous peoples, the presence of Phoenician and Greek traders has been documented in the site of La Picola (Santa Pola), and possibly in other settlements such as Peña Negra (Crevillente) and Los Nietos (Cartagena) (*Dietler, Ruiz-López 2009.301–302*), meaning cultural interactions were frequent in these areas from the start of the Iberian period and throughout the centuries we are analysing here. Their presence could have been the reason for the appearance of certain exotic types of decorations, perhaps local reinterpretations of other Mediterranean motifs, as well as the Mediterranean influences documented in sculpture, pottery, and craftsmanship in precious metals. This would explain the rich iconography and impressive material record of these territories, where sculptures representing male heads, enthroned individuals, horses, lions, bulls and sphynxes, together with a wide variety of painted pottery with exceptional representations of wolves and winged figures, have been found in Iron Age sites such as El Cigarralejo, Coimbra del Barranco Ancho and Cabecico del Tesoro (*Page, García 1993; 2021.240*). Analyses of the painted vessels and sculptures in the study area have revealed that the artisans who created them were well aware of different Mediterranean motifs and, in some cases, could have even come from distant lands. In fact, based on the previously cited example of Porcuna, it has even been proposed that specialists from the Greek colonies of southern Italy lived in this area and worked for the Iberian elites at the end of the 6th century BC (*Blánquez 1993; Blánquez 2014.116–117*). In the case of craftsmanship in precious metals, these Mediterranean influences and interactions are well documented in the south-east Iberian Peninsula and, in particular, in the lower basin of the Segura Valley. Here, studies have revealed the wide assimilation of Mediterranean models and the high technical capacity of the craftsmen working with precious metals, resulting from interactions with other Mediterranean artisans and the large amount of imported goods (*Graells 2012.159–160*).

One final aspect we would highlight with regard to this second level of the 'outside' refers to the changes that can be seen in the iconography. They must have been related to the socio-political and ideological transformations these communities experienced from the second half of the 4th century BC, and especially during the 3rd century BC. The links to a heroic and mythical ancestor that marked the initial Iberian period (6th and 5th centuries BC) were displaced by a different social framework defined by new situations of dependence (*Ruiz, Molinos 2002;*

Santos 1994). Moreover, the permanent presence of Punics in the coastal areas from the 3rd century BC, together with the later Roman conquest of the Punic city of *Qart Hadasht* (whose name was changed to *Carthago Nova* (Cartagena)) also entailed significant changes to the communities in question, and an increasing Roman presence throughout the entire study area.

Amongst the most remarkable changes at the iconographic level, and considering the second level of the 'outside', it is essential to highlight those that affected the way in which the local elites were represented during the Late Iberian period. They are particularly well defined in certain votive figurines, as well as in the sculptures found in the sanctuaries of the study area, which are characterized by the adoption of Roman symbols. Defined as 'hybrid,' these images constitute one of the main expressions of this second level of the 'outside', revealing how it was used by the ruling elites as part of a renewed strategy to maintain their status. Although these images were found in indigenous sites and within local contexts, it is striking that they show typically Roman clothing and symbols. A number of examples of these images can be found in the south-east Iberian Peninsula: the sculptures located at Cerro de Los Santos (Montealegre del Castillo, Albacete) and the bronze figurines of Monteagudo and La Luz (Murcia), all of which represent the local elites, are shown wearing typical Roman clothing such as the *toga*, *calcei* and *bullae* (Fig. 5) (*Noguera, Rodríguez-Oliva 2008; Jiménez-Díez 2011. 105–107*). Adopting these symbols allowed the local elites to be linked to the new Roman power, whose presence challenged their status and authority within the community. So once again, these new external elements appear to have played a key role in socio-political terms within these communities.

To summarize, all the indicated goods, from Attic pottery to Roman symbols, including a large number of prestigious and symbolic objects, constituted a clear expression of that second level of the outside, mainly identified in these territories with

the Mediterranean world. From this perspective, they should be understood as useful tools for legitimating the power of the local elites.

A diachronic approach to the 'outside' from the Iron Age until the arrival of the Romans

Having reviewed the different elements, images, symbols, and activities linked to the 'outside' as well as their influence and significance in Iron Age Iberian society, it is clear that social prestige and configuration of the socio-political situation were undoubtedly more complex issues than traditionally thought, and that the outside was another of the factors which played a significant role in both of them. Of course, it was not the only strategy of power and social control of the Iberian elites, but they exploited the domain of the 'outside' as another key tool to legitimize and to retain their status. However, as seen in the previous pages, it did not play the same role during the long period considered and was expressed and used in different ways during these centuries, which were marked by significant

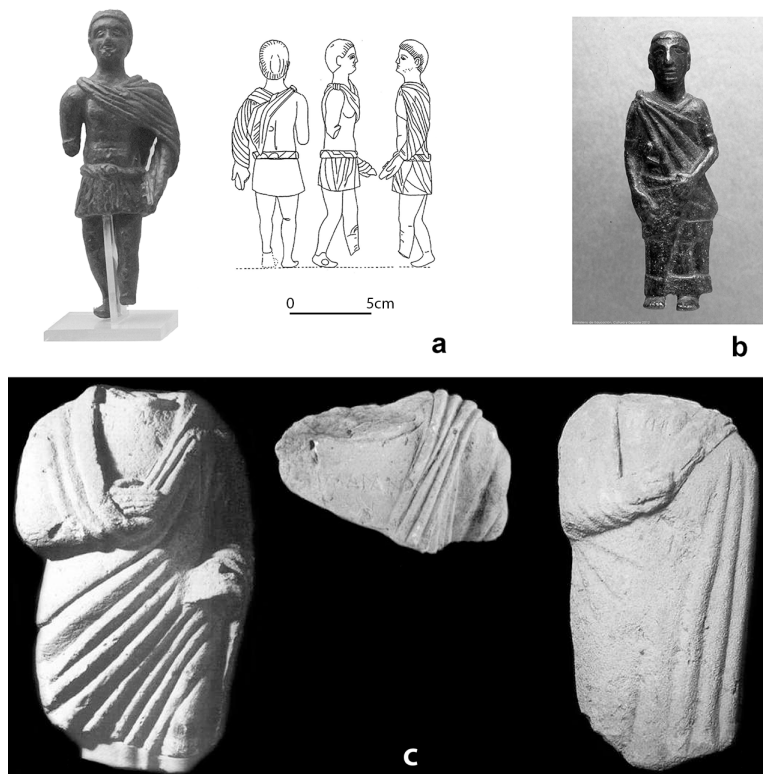


Fig. 5. *Bronze votive statuettes and sculptures documented in the south-east of the Iberian Peninsula: a Bronze statuette from La Luz representing a high-ranking Roman military man dressed in a very short cloak that evokes the legionary paludamentum (after Lillo Carpio 1991–92.131, 133); b Bronze warrior with cloak from Monteagudo (photo by the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, National Archaeological Museum); c Togati from el Cerro de los Santos (after Uroz 2008.Fig. 7).*

changes and transformations in the socio-political organization of these communities. Therefore, in order to complete our approach, it is essential to consider the ‘outside’ and how it was exploited by the local elites from a diachronic perspective. Of course, we are aware of the different chronologies of elements such as those painted vases and the earlier sculptures, however, all the analysed examples constitute expressions of the society and illustrate how that external realm was key for these communities throughout the analysed centuries. From this perspective, all of them allow us to approach the focal question diachronically.

As we have seen in the different examples, during the Ancient Iberian period (6th and 5th centuries BC) and until the end of the 5th century BC, the ‘outside’ was mainly associated with the mythical time and space where heroes and ancestors legitimated the ruling lineage. Although it is not exactly located in the south-east Iberian Peninsula, Porcuna in the nearby region of Andalusia is the clearest and most representative example of this expression of the ‘outside’, which played a visible role in legitimizing the ruling lineages throughout these early centuries. The presence of that undomesticated realm, as well as the symbols associated to it, such as the wolf, and their legitimating power within the Iberian societies continued throughout the whole of the Iron Age in the study area (*García 2014*). The appearance of the wolf in painted pottery from the Late Iberian period is the best example. However, from the end of the 5th century BC and during the following centuries, new symbols, activities and elements also expressed this same ‘outside’, playing a vital role within these communities.

From the beginning of the 4th century BC, and during the Middle Iberian period (4th and 3rd centuries BC), the transformations that took place in the societies of the south-east Iberian Peninsula and which were expressed through the material record in the new distribution of the tombs within the funerary areas and the development of cult places, led to a change in the previous ideological and socio-political framework. These transformations were also reflected in how the ‘outside’ was expressed during this new period. On the one hand, warfare, as an activity carried out beyond the *oppidum* and, in some cases, even in other Mediterranean territories, along with the material record and symbols related to it, became links to this external realm. On the other hand, the increasing number of imported elements documented in this area reflects the development of

long-distance interactions and exchanges, and consequently, the importance acquired by individuals who obtained these exotic products. People who became familiar with these objects and the distant lands from where they originated partook in their prestige and significance. In any case, it is clear that the relationship between both aspects, the warrior ideology and the long-distance exchanges, with the outside is essential in order to understand their social importance during these centuries, and how they also played an essential role in these communities, legitimizing the elite, creating links of interdependence and, finally, configuring the new clientele society that defined these centuries in the study area.

In the case of the Late Iberian period (from the 2nd century BC), and bearing in mind Helms’ ideas, there is one main activity that allow us to address the concept of the ‘outside’: craftsmanship and, in particular, in the case of the study area, its figurative decorated pottery. New and ancient symbols continue to emphasize a dual conception of the world documented from the beginning of the Iberian period, underlining the role of the elites to protect and lead the community against external dangers and enemies.

Precisely in connection with this idea, there is one last aspect to be considered, where the ‘outside’ took shape indirectly during this final period, and during the process of integration of this local communities in the Roman sphere. While the ‘outside’ had been identified with the undomesticated realm and with exotic distant lands in the previous centuries, at the end of the Iberian period and with the Roman presence it came to be identified with a ‘new,’ different external world, that was now represented by Rome. The previously mentioned examples of Cerro de Los Santos (Montealegre del Castillo, Albacete), Monteagudo and La Luz (Murcia), amongst others, clearly illustrate the appropriation of Roman elements by certain individuals. By embracing these external symbols, creating a ‘hybrid’ iconography, the elites sought to be associated with Rome, the new power located outside the community but whose influence was increasingly tangible from the end of the 3rd century BC throughout the whole of the study area. In any case, what is clear is that the elites created new links to this outside world by adopting these elements, and continued to use them to legitimate their position within this changing framework, seeking to retain their status and power in the eyes of the community.

Based on this, it seems that although the symbols and expressions of the 'outside' were transformed during the period in question, its powerful social and legitimating role was still evident at the end of the Iron Age in the study area. As a result, the legitimation of the elite was defined, albeit in different ways, by its relationship with this external realm. Initially linked to the figures of the mythical hero and fantastic animals, this relationship would soon be defined by the arrival, acquisition, and redistribution of Greek products. Finally, the 'outside' evolved to justify the elites' leadership of the community in opposition to other developed and consolidated Iberian cities and, finally, in opposition to Rome.

Conclusions

All the issues analysed in this article allow us to go beyond the traditional view of the Iron Age communities in the south-east Iberian Peninsula. They provide us with a new image of them, in which the 'outside' appears as a key element to be considered in order to understand the processes of legitimation, and how they were expressed through the rich Iberian iconography. Although the 'outside' had been previously indicated as framework through which the local elites justified their power and identified with a mythical space, especially during the Ancient Iberian period, a close analysis of this concept has allowed us to reveal its significance beyond these initial centuries and throughout the Iberian period, displaying the variety of its expressions within the societies in question. Several interesting ideas have arisen from our analysis.

Firstly, it is evident that the elites derived part of their power from this external realm during the Iron Age in the study area. It was used as one of the tools to legitimize their authority and their socio-political status within the community. This role is visible throughout the whole of the analysed period, and during the early moments of the Roman presence in the south-east Iberian Peninsula. However, every one of these facets of the 'outside' acquired a different prominence in each century, and different aspects can be remarked at each given moment.

Secondly, this relationship was not only direct and associated with a mythical space where ruling lineages acquired their status, as indicated by some studies based on examples provided by iconography. It was much more complex, as there were diverse elements linked to the outside, and two levels of this realm can be defined. In this sense, and beyond the

territory of the *oppidum*, usually identified with this external realm, these communities must be inserted within a wider framework that links them to the Mediterranean world. The examples we have analysed, such as the appearance of Attic pottery in the funerary record or the Mediterranean influences reflected by the iconography, clearly reveal these connections and cultural contacts (Page, García 2021). Consequently, in order to understand how the links to the outside were organized, it is necessary to keep all of these elements in mind, including craftsmanship, long-distance exchanges, and foreign goods, which were used to negotiate power and status.

Thirdly, the 'outside' is not a space that was exclusive to the elites, as is usually suggested for these societies. Other actors benefited from its prestige and advantages, albeit to a different degree than the ruling groups. These included the clients who were dependent on the elite, as well as certain long-distance traders and craftsmen who had a close relationship with this ruling group. These can be considered amongst the 'liminal' specialists indicated by Helms, who carried out their activities between the 'outside' and the community. The codes represented through the painted vases from the study area are one of the best examples. They reveal the special status of craftspeople and artisans, expressed through the specific goods deposited in their graves intended to highlight the special social status they enjoyed, and the prestige they would have acquired within Iberian society.

Finally, from a more global perspective, and even though the presence of these other factors and actors also played a significant role, it is clear that the transformations that affected how the 'outside' was expressed during the centuries in question must have been associated with the changes in how power was represented and expressed in the Iberian societies. These progressed from the mythical and heroic narrative of the Ancient Iberian period, through to the urban and civic discourse of the following centuries (Domínguez 1998). As a result, the transformation of how the 'outside' and its associated elements were represented went hand in hand with the consolidation of different types of urban organization. Consequently, it is not possible to approach the Iron Age period as a whole, but instead we must analyse the particular situation of this area during the different centuries, taking into account the transformations these communities experienced in order to understand the processes that configured their relationship with the outside and, finally, the socio-political organization of these societies.

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