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The transformation of cult places during the Roman expansion in the Iberian south-east (third–first century BC)

Leticia López-Mondéjar

Introduction

Beyond their importance in the development of cults and rituals, sacred spaces were essential points in the Late Iron Age landscapes of the Iberian Peninsula from the fourth century BC. Some aspects, such as their development, their position in the landscape or their links with the main sites of these territories, show them either as points that politically legitimised the territorial control of the elites and the main fortified sites ('oppida'), or as places of social and ideological aggregation for the community (López-Mondéjar 2014). Rome soon noticed this crucial role, especially at a territorial and socio-political level, and cult places became strategic elements during the Roman expansion in this area. As a consequence, they constitute key sites to approach the processes that defined the integration of the Iberian communities in the Roman orbit from the end of the third to the first century BC.

The Iberian south-east and the territories corresponding to the current region of Murcia (Spain) (Fig. 4.1) constitute a very interesting area in which to explore those aspects. Not only were some of the most important peninsular Iron Age sites, and particularly sanctuaries, located here, but some of them also had very interesting developments from the third century BC. Moreover, this was a very dynamic area, in continuous contact with the Mediterranean world, and the Roman city of Cartagena was located here, which meant a continuous Roman presence in the coastal area from the end of the third century BC and consequently a growth in the political and economic influence of Rome over all the surrounding area. All these aspects define this territory as an ideal area of study in order to analyse the transformations related to the Roman expansion in the Iberian Peninsula and provide us with a good deal of information with which to address many of the issues concerning the

transformations undergone by Iberian cult places during the indicated period.

Unfortunately, despite the fact that the research developed in other Mediterranean areas has shown how necessary it is to explore cult places within their historical context (Polignac 1984; Alcock and Osborne 1994; Tagliamonte 2004; Stek 2009), regional studies have always focused on the archaeological record and structures of these sites, paying scarce attention to their role within the landscape and to the socio-political dynamics of this period.

Taking into account that scenario, this paper aims to explore the role and the development of cult places in the Iberian south-east from the third to the first century BC and to analyse them for the first time within both the strategies of territorial control and integration followed by Rome, and the changes undergone by the native communities.

Besides understanding these sites as mirrors of the transformations taking place at these periods in the Iberian south-east, I will approach them as active tools and agents in those processes of change. I shall attempt to offer a new way of looking at the cult places of this area, exploring that double role and approaching for the first time some aspects which have been traditionally ignored by the studies focused on this territory. Hence, it is hoped that this perspective provides interesting data for reflection on the Roman expansion process in this area and a more complete picture of Iberian cult places, shedding new light on the transformations experienced by them and their connection with the complex historical and socio-political context of these centuries.

In order to investigate these aspects, two case studies, both located in the current Murcia region, are presented here from a comparative view: the sanctuaries of La Luz and La Encarnación (Fig. 4.1). Both constitute prime examples

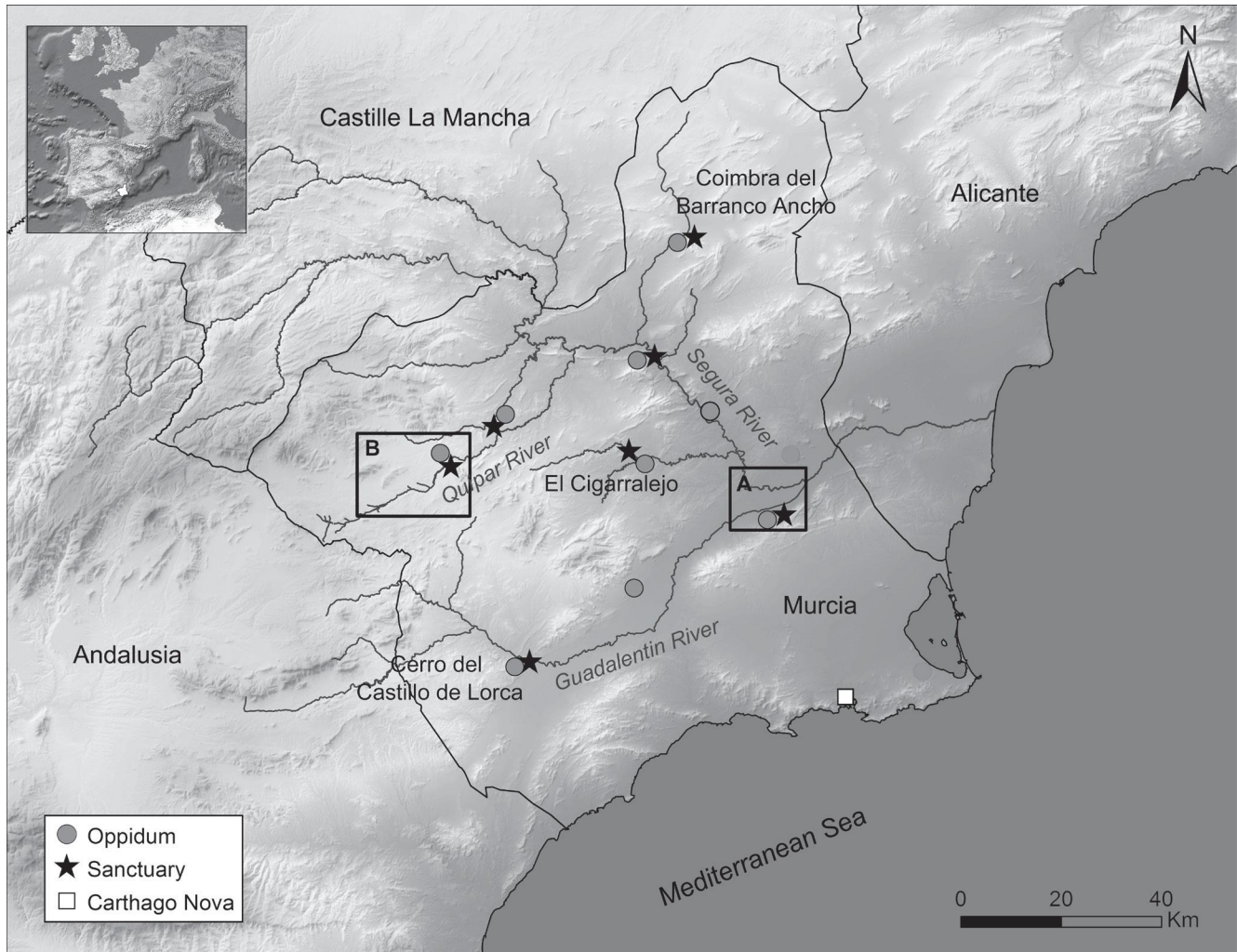


Fig. 4.1. Study area in the Iberian south-east with the location of the main sites and the two case studies (A. La Luz area; B. La Encarnación area).

since they were monumentalised during the indicated period. However, whereas the former followed Hellenistic patterns (Lillo 1995–6), the latter was monumentalised along Roman lines (Ramallo 1991).

The context: the Iberian south-east at the end of the third century BC

The emergence and development of cult places in the Iberian south-east date back to the fourth century BC, a moment defined by significant social, territorial and ideological transformations (López-Mondéjar 2014, 5). This is the case of La Encarnación and other regional cult places, such as El Cigarralejo and Coimbra del Barranco Ancho. Others with a previous occupation, among them La Luz, experienced a new development in this century (Lillo 1991–2, 111; Fig. 4.1). However, beyond those sanctuaries, what was the scenario found by Rome upon its arrival at these territories at the end

of the third century BC? It is worth providing some background information on the situation in the area prior to the Roman conquest by paying attention to the landscape that defined the Late Iron Age in the study area, the so-called ‘Iberian period’.

The term ‘Iberians’ designates those peoples who inhabited the southern area and the coast of Iberia from the Pyrenees to Andalusia during the Late Iron Age and before the Roman arrival. This wide territory led to the existence of clear particularities in every Iberian area, which were expressed not only through the material culture or the settlement patterns of those communities, but also through their different responses to contact with other Mediterranean cultures and particularly with the Roman world (Keay 2013).

The Iberian south-east and in particular the two areas of study constitute singular territories in this period due to their economic and cultural dynamism and their closeness

to the Punic capital in the Iberian Peninsula, the city of *Qart Hadash* (modern Cartagena), on the Mediterranean coast (Fig. 4.1). Those cultural contacts boosted the native communities of the territories that adapted and integrated the most different Mediterranean traditions. All these previous influences would play a decisive role during the Roman conquest and would be essential to the consolidation of the new Roman organisation and the adoption of the Roman cultural forms.

Beyond those influences, a close look at the Iberian south-east during the Late Iron Age shows a hierarchised landscape. The period between the fourth and third centuries BC was characterised by the consolidation of both the major centres of the Iberian south-east and their political territories. A small number of fortified oppida occupied strategic positions along the main rivers and functioned as landmarks in the landscape, being also residences of the local elites (Fig. 4.1; López-Mondéjar 2012).

In the surrounding area of those oppida, new secondary settlements emerged in the lowlands. According to their location and material record, most of them can be related to farming activities and they would have been dependent on the oppida, especially at a defensive level since they do not show any kind of defences (López-Mondéjar 2012). At the same time, adjacent cult places were established next to those main centres (Fig. 4.1). They determined symbolically the oppida's territorial domain in the landscape and politically legitimised the elites' territorial control (Ruiz and Molinos 2007; López-Mondéjar 2014).

This is the context in which our two case studies, La Luz and La Encarnación, should be understood. Similar to other cult places, they were linked with major oppida and situated at strategic locations, controlling the main natural axis of communication (Fig. 4.2). Moreover, both developed a key role at different levels during the Late Iron Age. Firstly, they functioned as territorial markers within the political territory controlled by their adjacent oppida. Secondly, they became ideal spaces in which to enhance the social position and prestige of the elites. Finally, they represented spaces of aggregation and identity for the entire community. All these become essential in order to explain the transformation and monumentalisation of these sites from the end of the third century BC onwards.

Scipio's arrival in Iberia in 211 BC and the conquest of the Punic capital, *Qart Hadash*, in 209 BC was an important turning point in a scenario that resulted in increased contacts with the Roman world, noticeable through the material record documented in the sites of this period. Although the direct control and exploitation of these peninsular territories was not yet a priority for Rome, its stable presence in *Qart Hadash*, from what was then Carthago Nova, meant the beginning of Roman interventionism in this area which can be traced to the creation of two provinces in 197 BC. From this moment, the first transformations became visible in the

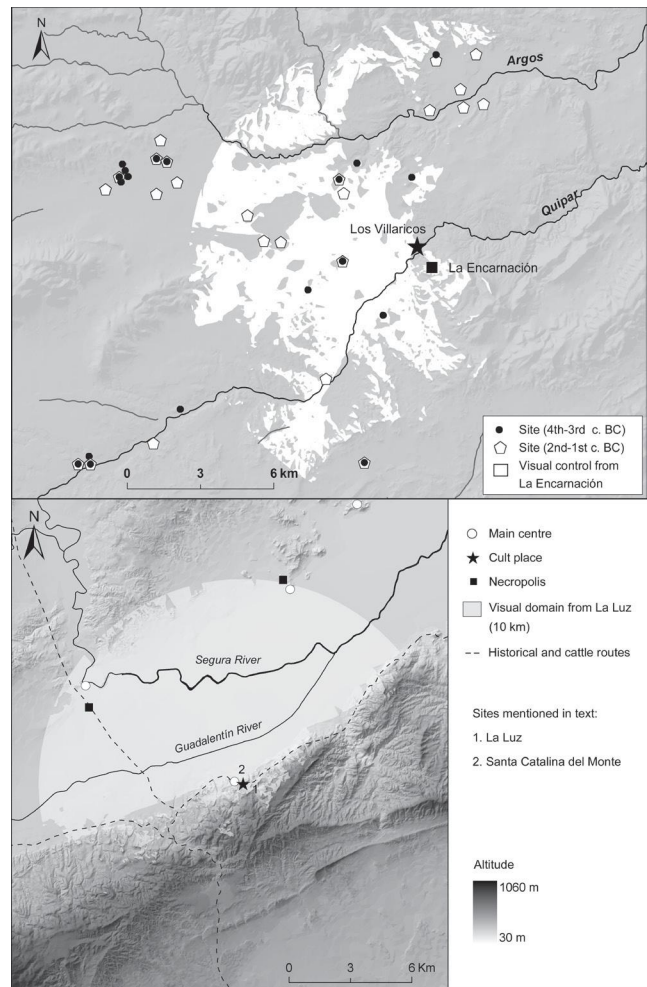


Fig. 4.2. Visual control of the two case studies in the Quípar and the Segura valleys.

indigenous landscape (López-Mondéjar 2010). Therefore, from the end of the third century BC and during the next century, certain sanctuaries, such as Coimbra del Barranco Ancho and El Cigarralejo, were abandoned (Fig. 4.1), while other cult places experienced a significant new development marked by the introduction of new elements and models in the previously native sanctuaries. It is precisely to this period that the transformation of the two case studies can be dated.

The sanctuary of La Encarnación (Caravaca, Murcia)

The first case study is La Encarnación, located in Caravaca de la Cruz (Murcia). It is integrated in the archaeological and historical area of El Estrecho de Las Cuevas, occupied from prehistoric times as it is a crossing point in the natural route between the Iberian Levant and Andalusia through the Segura and Quípar valleys (Figs 4.2 and 4.3). Moreover, different traditional transhumance paths also run through

this area. The cult place is located in a forest and natural environment, widely visible from the valley and which, even nowadays, has a sacred and special character. In fact, a hermitage was erected here in the sixteenth century and a pilgrimage is still celebrated once a year from the nearby village of La Encarnación.

The indigenous sanctuary, located beyond the oppida limits, had a suburban character. It was linked with the fortified site of Los Villaricos which has been identified with the later *municipium* of Asso, mentioned by Ptolemy and cited in one of the inscriptions found in the area (Brotóns 2007, 315; CIL II 5941).

The origins of this cult place can be dated to the fourth century BC (Brotóns 2007, 315–16), though the remains of this first phase are very scarce. Although no structures dated to the fourth and third centuries BC were found, field-works carried out during the 1990s revealed the presence of circular holes carved in the rock, which may suggest a building made of perishable materials (Ramallo 1991, 50). In addition, remains of milk and honey were documented, probably related to libation rituals (Brotóns 2007, 325; Ramallo and Brotóns 1997, 261), a very common ritual in

the Mediterranean and also documented in other Iberian sanctuaries during the Late Iron Age (Rudhart 1958; Lillo 1995–6; Izquierdo 2003, 126–8; González-Alcalde 2009).

The archaeological record of this first phase offers a wide variety of artefacts, including Greek imports, votive offerings realised in metal, stone figurines of warriors, miniature weapons, terracotta figurines and indigenous pottery (Fig. 4.4; Ruano and San Nicolás 1993). The presence of certain specific types of pottery can also be linked with libation rituals. Along with its strategic location and its topographical link with the oppidum, all those materials reveal the cult place's important role for the community and also for the elite during the centuries prior to Rome's arrival. In this respect, the presence of some figurines, such as horses, warriors and miniature weapons, can be related to the Iberian aristocracies since they were key symbols within their ideology during this period (Moneo and Almagro 1998, 95–6; Brunaux 2002). There are also other elements that point to the participation of the indigenous elites in this cult place, such as the richness of some of the votive offerings. In particular, almost a hundred fragments of gold and silver votive pieces were discovered under the successive floors of one of the later Roman buildings (temple B; Brotóns and Ramallo 2010). Among them, there is a carved representation on a small silver plaque of an individual whose dress and features identify him as someone who played a priestly role in the cult place, usually a position held by members of the aristocratic group in Iron Age Iberian communities (Fig. 4.4; Chapa and Madrigal 1997).

These clear links between the local elites and the ceremonies developed in the site, along with the volume of its archaeological record and its parallels with other sanctuaries of the Iberian south-east, lead us to define this cult place as a key point in the indigenous landscape of the Quípar valley from the fourth century BC and to explain its later development.

From the beginning of the second century and during the first century BC, once Rome had consolidated its presence in the Iberian south-east, the native cult place was transformed into a monumentalised sacred complex. The archaeological research has revealed that the entire area was remodelled on Italic patterns and two temples were constructed whose decorations were directly imported from Roman workshops in Latium, based on stylistic parallels and the results from mineralogical analyses (Ramallo and Arana 1993). A first building, the so-called Temple A, was a temple *in antis*, probably a treasury. It shows clear parallels with many temples documented in the Italian Peninsula during this period, including that of Portunus located in Rome's Forum Boarium (Ramallo 1991, 52).

The second edifice, Temple B, was larger and more monumental. It also followed Italic patterns, being subsequently remodelled in various stages. The first phase dates back to the beginning of the second century BC and corresponds

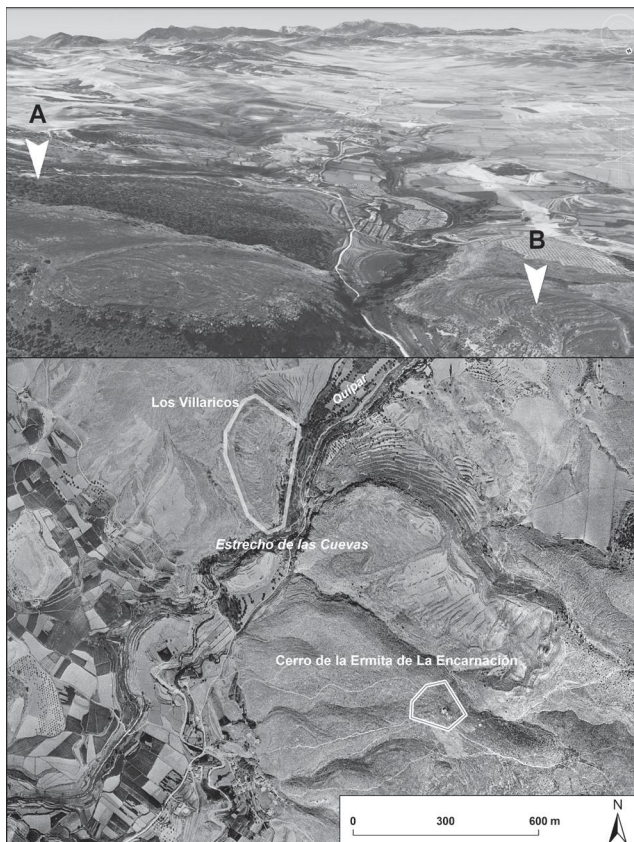


Fig. 4.3. Aerial view of El Estrecho de las Cuevas with the location of the sanctuary of La Encarnación (A) and the oppidum of Los Villaricos (B).

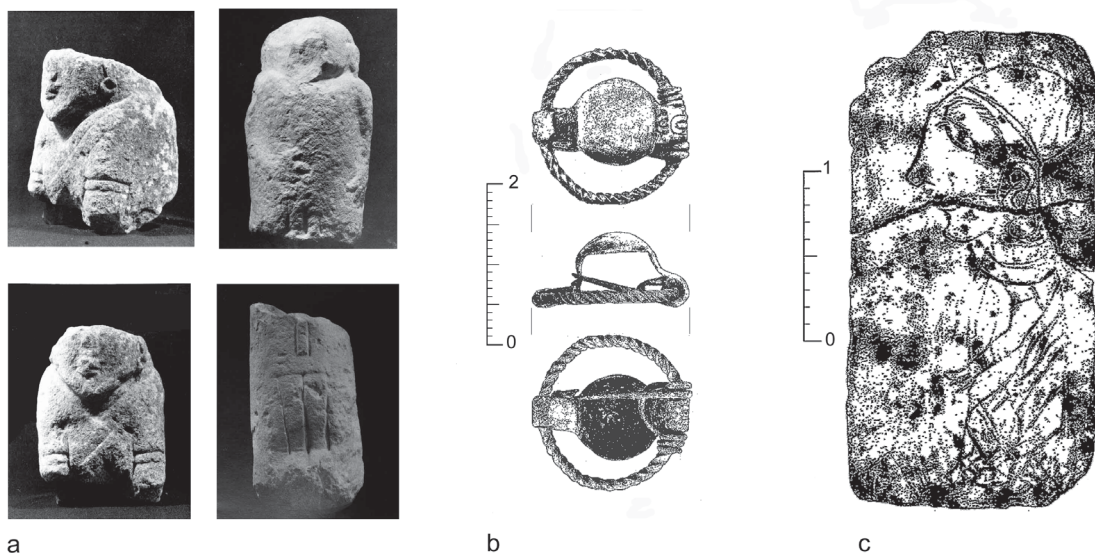


Fig. 4.4. Archaeological record of the sanctuary of La Encarnación: a. Stone figurines of warriors (after Ruano and San Nicolás 1993); b. Silver miniature brooch (fourth–second centuries BC) (after Brotóns and Ramallo 2010, figs 17, 91); c. Engraved silver plaque (after Brotóns and Ramallo 2010, figs 17, 92).

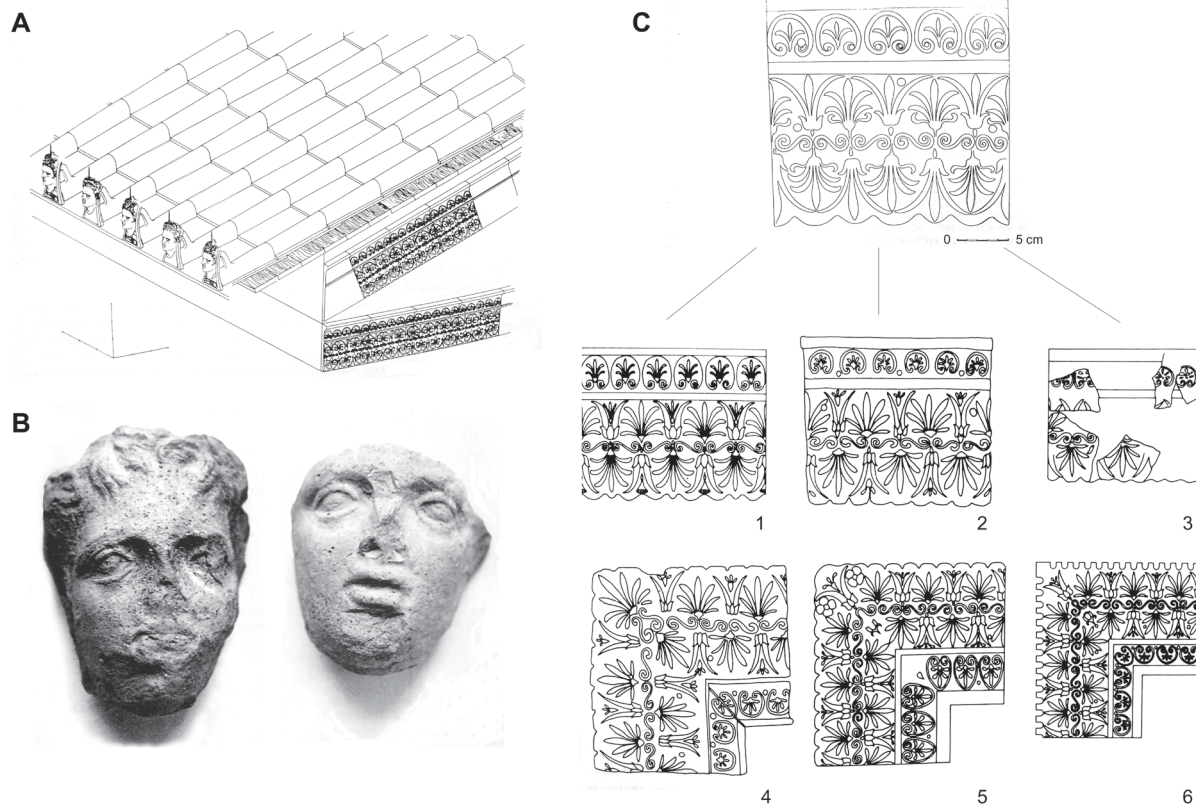


Fig. 4.5. Decorations of the temples of La Encarnación (after Ramallo and Arana 1993, figs 6, 8, 10–11): a. Proposal for the location of the antefixes and plaques; b. Antefixes with satyrs' head from the sanctuary; c. Plaque of La Encarnación (above) and main parallels found at Pyrgi (1), Lo Scasato (Civita Castellana) (2, 4), Ardea (3) and Cosa (5, 6).

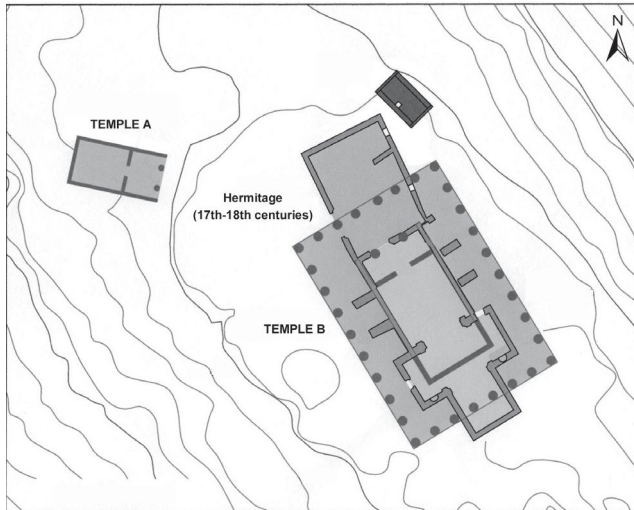


Fig. 4.6. Plan of the sanctuary of La Encarnación at the end of the first century BC with the two Roman temples (after Pozo, Robles and Navarro 2006, fig. 1).

to an Etrusco-Italic temple whose decoration was imported from Italic workshops. Studies have revealed the similarity of its revetment plaques with those known from many cities in the Etruscan area (Fig. 4.5; Ramallo and Arana 1993, 79–83). Also, the fragments of antefixes found in the area of the sanctuary, representing satyrs' and maenads' heads framed by vine leaves, share the same characteristics as those from Rome and central Italy during the third and second centuries BC (Fig. 4.5; Ramallo and Arana 1993, 90).

In the next phase, between the end of the second century and the beginning of the first century BC, the building was remodelled and entirely built in stone, presenting now a *pronaos* and a *portico in antis*. During the last phase, in the first century BC, it became an octostyle pseudoperipteral temple whose archaeological evidence indicates continuous use during the next centuries of the Roman Empire (Fig. 4.6; Ramallo 1991, 52–3).

As a result of those changes, the indigenous appearance of this cult place changed completely, and, along with it, the sacred landscape of this inland territory. The sanctuary's strategic location made the new Roman buildings visible to all the inhabitants of the valley, inserting them in a new 'hybrid' landscape defined from now by both native and Roman traditions.

Considering all these transformations, some questions arise. Firstly, what was the broader scenario in which those changes took place? Secondly, why did Rome decide to intervene in this inland area of the Iberian south-east, and why do it in this way? And, finally, why did Rome intervene in a cult place, and in particular in La Encarnación, instead of choosing any other site or a major settlement?

Regarding the first two questions, it is essential to understand the situation of Rome at the beginning of the second

century BC. The analysis of the ancient texts of this period has focused on Cato's campaigns in Iberia, revealing that the Roman contingents were not always numerous enough to face the alliances of indigenous peoples and to deal with the logistics of the Roman conquest during the initial years of the second century BC (Martínez 1992, 175). Within this context, the changes undergone by this sanctuary should be explained in connection with Rome's interest to assure the status quo in the area. However, how would have Romans done that? Considering the indicated scenario and the fact that the direct domination and exploitation of these territories, distant from the coastal area and from Carthago Nova, was not yet a priority for Rome, the Romans should have looked initially for alliances with the local elites. Thus, they were interested in maintaining the previous territorial structure, assuring the continuity of the situation in this area and avoiding possible indigenous rebellions. Since the support of the Iberian aristocracies was a key factor for that stability, Rome looked to strengthen their control over the territory. Therefore, the main oppida seem to have kept their role in the articulation and organisation of these regional territories and no destructions have been documented in this area as a direct consequence of the Roman settlement in Cartagena at the end of the third century BC.

In relation to the last question, the aforementioned role of cult places of the Iberian south-east from the fourth century BC, their strategic locations and their links with the elites and the oppida become the main aspects to be taken in consideration. All these issues show La Encarnación as an ideal space for the Roman interests in these inland territories and allow us to understand why Rome focused on this cult place for its initial intervention in the area. Moreover, despite the fact that it was monumentalised with the support of the local elites, it is clear that the new sanctuary was ultimately a symbol of the presence of a new authority beyond the native elites. The temples, their iconography and the ideology linked with them were new for the native communities and were expressions of Rome, who had two main objectives by monumentalising this site.

Firstly, the role of this sanctuary as a key territorial marker was also reinforced within the new historical context. Not only did this confirm the power of the local elite through its alliance with the new Roman power, but it also assured Rome an indirect control over these territories. Thus, it avoided possible conflicts in the region during these initial years of the second century BC, while Rome was involved in diverse military campaigns in other areas (Martínez 1992).

Secondly, even though the cult place continued to be used by local communities, since there is no evidence to suggest the presence of Roman people in the area during this period, the new Italic patterns of the sacred complex should have contributed to the spreading and the progressive adoption of the Roman ideology by the Iberian society (Millett 1995, 98; Vermeulen 1995). In this context, it is easy to understand

Rome's interest in bringing architectural terracottas from Italy and using them as part of the new buildings erected at La Encarnación. It is precisely in Rome, centre of that new ideology, and particularly in the Palatino and in the Temples B and C of Largo Argentina, where the clearest parallels of the antefixes of La Encarnación have been documented (Ramallo and Arana 1993, 91).

Regarding the local elites, they also took advantage of these changes since they kept their control over those territories (Keay 1995, 38). At the beginning of the second century BC, while Romans were immersed in diverse military campaigns, the support of the local aristocracies was of vital importance for Rome, and it knew how to attract them into its orbit. The monumentalisation of the cult place meant the strengthening and confirmation of La Encarnación as a key site in the landscape of the valley and it indirectly reinforced the power and the importance of the adjacent oppidum of Los Villaricos, which continued to be occupied over the following centuries and is attested as *municipium* during Hadrian's reign (AD

117–138; Brotóns 2007, 315). From this perspective, both temples should be read, ultimately, as symbols of the alliance between Rome and the local elites who would have offered Rome their loyalty, in return for keeping their control over the territory and their privileges during the first period of the Roman presence in the area (third to second centuries BC).

The Iberian sanctuary of Nuestra Señora de La Luz (Verdolay, Murcia)

Our second case study, the sanctuary of La Luz, is part of the Verdolay archaeological complex that also comprises the oppidum of Santa Catalina del Monte and the necropolis of Cabecico del Tesoro. The site has been known since the early twentieth century due to incidental findings. Since then, the sacred area has been systematically excavated and its archaeological record has been published in numerous studies, especially during the 1980s and 1990s (a compilation of those works can be found in García *et al.* 2007).

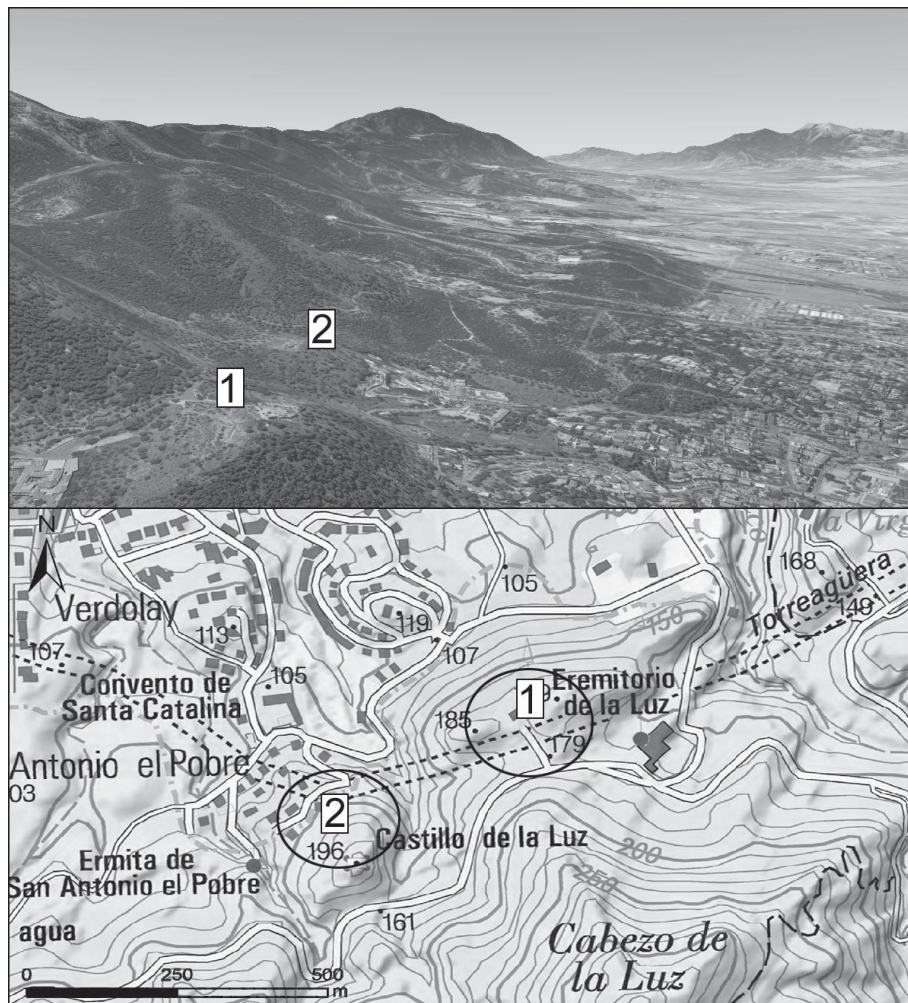


Fig. 4.7. Location of the sanctuary of La Luz (1) and the oppidum of Santa Catalina del Monte (2) in the area of Verdolay (Murcia).

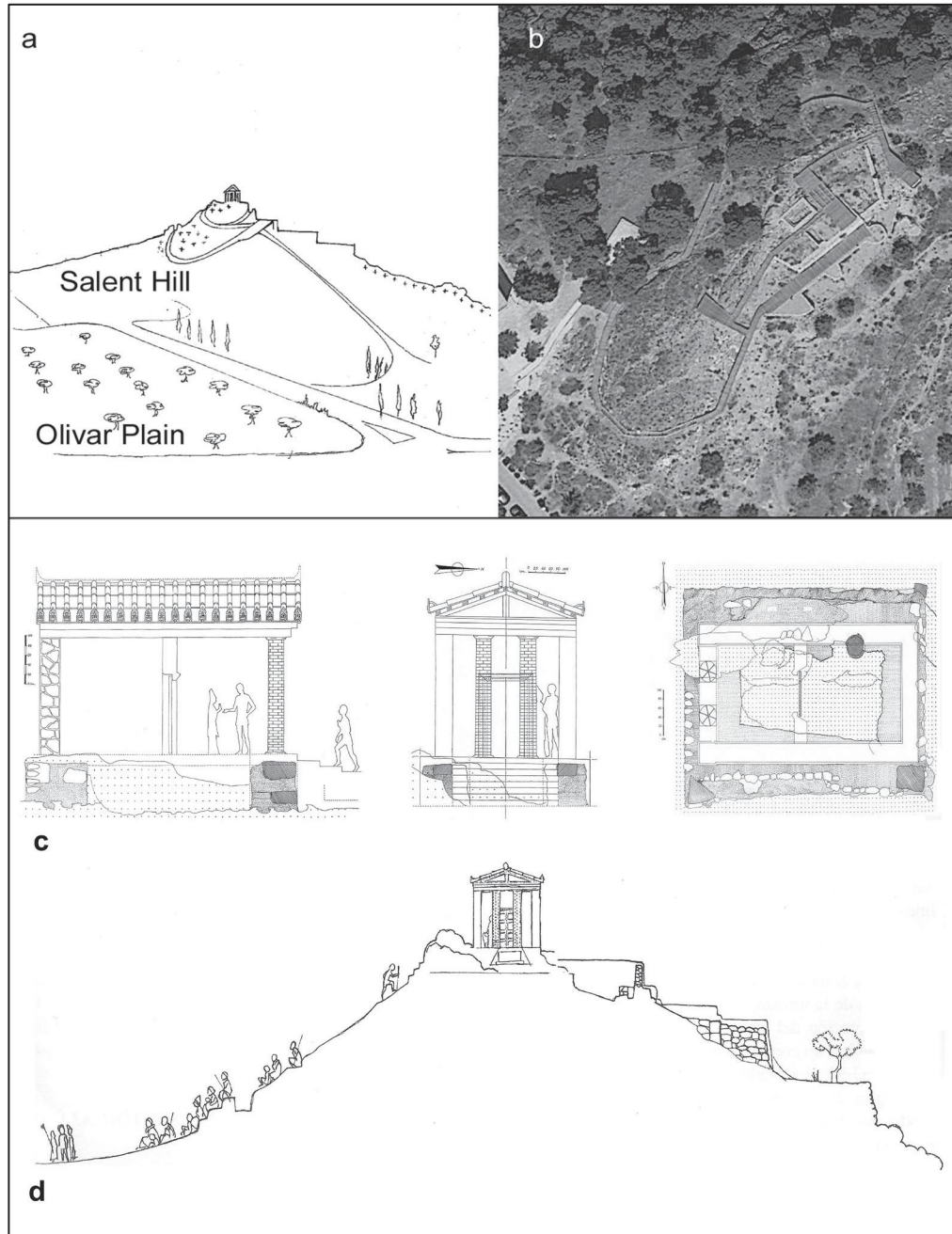


Fig. 4.8. Plans and views of the sanctuary of La Luz: a. Plan of the sanctuary with the location of the two different sectors (after Lillo 2002, 208, fig. 5); b. Aerial view of Salent Hill with the current remains of the sanctuary; c. Floor plan and elevation of the temple (after Lillo 1995–1996, 103); d. West view of Salent Hill with the temple on the top (after Lillo 1995–6, 103).

As seen in the case of La Encarnación, the location of La Luz and its role within the landscape of the Late Iron Age are crucial factors to be considered in order to understand its development from the end of the third century BC. The cult place, together with the necropolis and oppidum, are located on the slope of the Carrascoy mountains, occupying a strategic position within the Iberian south-east (Figs 4.2 and 4.7). The sanctuary

was placed on the so-called Salent Hill and reached the lower part of it, the Olivar plain (Fig. 4.8). The hill was not far from the oppidum, giving the cult place a certain extra-urban character. Its position provided it with a wide control over both the confluence of the Segura and the Guadalentín valleys and the main communication axis between the coast and the interior, which would be also followed by the later Roman road to Complutum. It

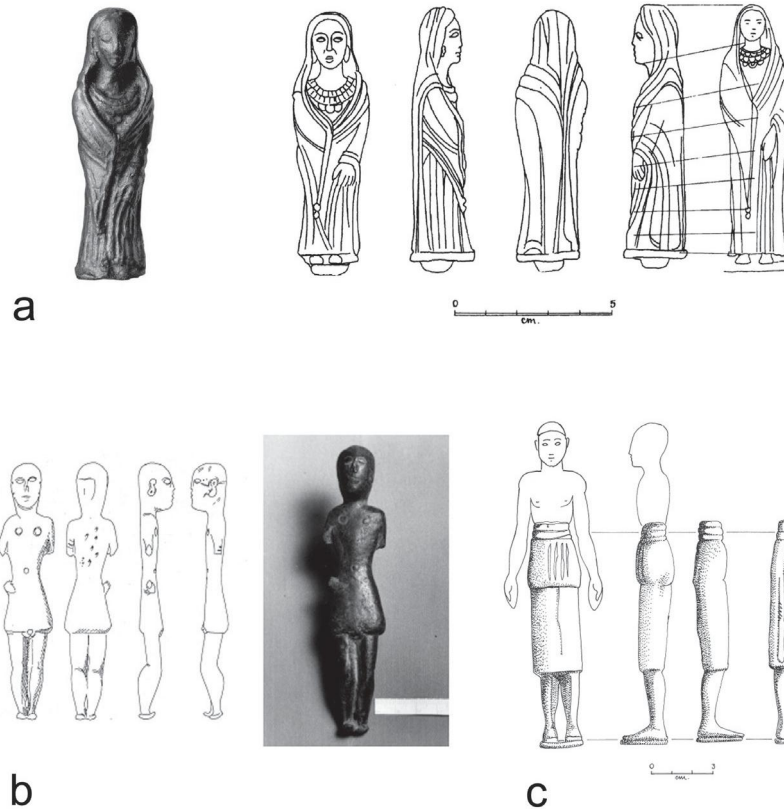


Fig. 4.9. Votive bronze figurines of La Luz: a. Feminine figure dated back to the transition of the third–second centuries BC (after Lillo 1991–2, 133); b. Warrior figurine (end of the third century BC) (after Lillo 1998, figs 7–8); c. Fragment of bronze figurine identified with a priest (after Lillo 1999, fig. 6.1).

therefore dominated the access to the Segura valley from Carthago Nova, which is a remarkable point, especially taking into account the historical importance of this centre during the period analysed.

Finally, the location of the cult place presents another interesting and noteworthy characteristic. It is near a transhumance path that runs parallel to the valley and unites other later religious places in the area, including the remains of a Late Antique basilica. In fact, some religious buildings are still located in this sector, such as the monastery of La Luz and the chapel of San Antonio El Pobre (Fig. 4.7). All of them, along with the region’s natural environment, its situation in the forest area of Carrascoy and the great number of springs, reveal the unique character of the location.

Regarding the development of La Luz, fieldworks have revealed a first occupation of this area already at the end of the fifth century BC (Lillo 1991–2, 117; 1998, 128), coinciding with the earliest phase of the necropolis of Cabecico del Tesoro (García and Gómez 2006, 63). Unfortunately, little is known about this initial occupation.

It was during the next century when a substantial change took place: the area was restructured and a *temenos* was built (Lillo 1995–6, 99). In addition, the remains of workshops, which manufactured the numerous bronze votive offerings

found in the cult place, were also documented (Lillo 1991–2, 117). The iconography of those bronze figurines, such as richly dressed women, horsemen and warriors with belt buckles – a power symbol for the Iberian people (Lillo 1991–2; 1995–6, 114) – and an individual related to priestly functions (Fig. 4.9), links those representations with the aristocratic groups and their interests in enhancing their social prestige within the community (Derks 1998, 231–3; Tagliamonte 2004, 104–5; Pedley 2005, 108–10).

Taking into consideration its location, its connection with the main centre of this territory and those materials, the sanctuary appears at the eve of Rome’s conquest as a central point in the landscape of this region and a space of social representation and interaction for the one or more communities. Moreover, due to its wide visibility over the lowlands of the Segura basin, the cult place would have contributed to reaffirm the power of the Santa Catalina oppidum and its elite over those territories (Castillo *et al.* 1996; López-Mondéjar 2014), while also functioning as place of aggregation for the surrounding populations (Pedley 2005, 12). In addition, since it has been linked to an indigenous deity, probably related to the agricultural cycle (Lillo 1991–2), its presence should have ensured the harvests and the fertility of the land for the inhabitants of Santa Catalina

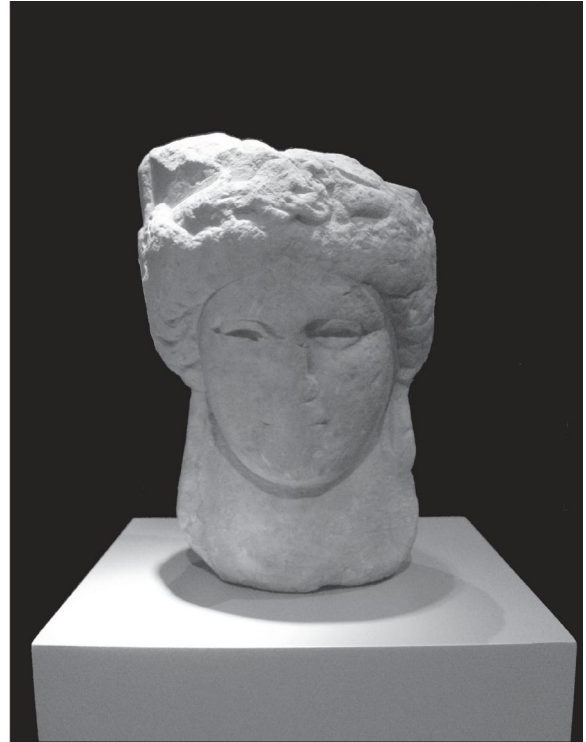


Fig. 4.10. Different models of antefixes from the temple of La Luz (after Lillo 1995–6, 107) and female head in white marble dated (second century BC) (height: 24.4 cm; Archaeological Museum of Murcia, photo by the author).

and also for those of the small sites dispersed in the valleys and dependent on the oppidum.

This is the panorama that defined this site at the end of the third and beginning of the second century BC when the sanctuary underwent a major transformation with the construction of a temple on the Salent Hill. It was a temple *in antis* with two large columns, made of bricks and stucco, placed in the frontage and presenting a rectangular plant, with a *pronaos*, a *naos* and a *cella* (Lillo 1993–4; Fig. 4.8). Beyond the building, the sacred complex was completed by different terraces with a buttress, a grandstand in the slope of the hill, ambulatory paths, intended for processions, and a water tank located close to the access path to the temple, probably related to purification rituals (Lillo 1995–6).

In addition, other changes are documented during this period. One of the most interesting ones was the development of new representations, linked with the indigenous deity to whom the temple was probably dedicated. On the one hand, there is a collection of antefixes that were part of the temple decoration, characterised by female faces placed between multiple and winged palmettes, which has parallels in eastern Mediterranean representations of Astarte (Lillo 1995–6, 110). On the other hand, a second interesting representation corresponded to a female head in white marble with similar attributes to those of Demeter (Fig. 4.10). Both of them show the connections of Iberian society of this period with the Mediterranean world, and its knowledge

of Mediterranean traditions. Also, the indicated grandstand, ambulatory paths and the presence of sacrifices of piglets point to the celebration of rituals with strong Mediterranean and Greek inspirations (Lillo 1993–4, 162–3; 1995–6).

The presence of those Hellenistic models was a result of the aforementioned cultural and economic contacts of these communities and their use in a sacred place insert them within a process of reinterpretation and adoption of foreign elements common to the whole Mediterranean area (Keay 2013, 302, 317). In this sense, there is no doubt that the strategic position of La Luz, close to *Qart Hadash* and to some of the main communication routes between the interior area, the coast and the south of Iberia was a key factor. The ‘assimilation’ and ‘appropriation’ of those models provides an interesting perspective to approach the reasons that could explain the transformation undergone by this sanctuary.

Certainly, it is true that, after centuries of Mediterranean contacts, those models would have been accepted by then and ‘appropriated’ by Iberian communities of this area. However, why use them in the new, remodelled sanctuary? The context in which the restructuring of the sacred space took place, marked by a stable Roman presence along the coast, is crucial when approaching that question. Studies developed in the Italic area, and particularly in Samnium, have shown how Hellenistic models were appropriated by native communities and used in their policy towards Rome to strengthen their identities (Stek 2009). In the case of La

Luz, the display of those Mediterranean models suggests similar processes: it is not by chance that the transformation of the sanctuary dates precisely to the transition between the third and the second centuries BC, coinciding with the Roman conquest of Carthago Nova.

However, it is not only that 'appropriation' of Mediterranean models that can be interpreted from this perspective. The analysis of the grave goods of the nearby necropolis of Cabecico del Tesoro shows an increment in the number of tombs with weapons during this period, rising from 17 in the third century to 26 in the second century BC. Furthermore, a considerable increase in the number of decorated 'falcatas' is noticeable, a specific kind of sword linked to aristocratic groups. Those swords dating to this period represent 33.3% of those documented in the necropolis, compared to just 8.3% in the third century BC (only the 8.3%) (Quesada 1986–7, 48). Thus, the number of these swords seems to have experienced an important recovery, reaching levels similar to those of the fourth century BC when these weapons peak as the grave goods in this area. Bearing in mind that the 'falcata' was probably the most emblematic weapon for the Iberian peoples during the Late Iron Age and, in particular, for the aristocratic groups of the Iberian south-east (Quesada 1997, 608–13, 622–3), this rise could also be read in connection to the aforementioned enhancement of the indigenous cultural traditions during this period.

Considering the suggested perspective, the monumentalisation of La Luz sanctuary should be understood in connection with the local people clearly displaying their indigenous identity to the new conquerors, and especially the power of the local elites. In this sense, the sanctuary's role as a place of social representation during the previous centuries is a key factor. In fact, the cult place's transformations represented a significant investment of communal action, also common to other Mediterranean areas during the Roman expansion (Bradley 1997, 121–2; Izzet 2007), and suggest, once again, the presence of a strong political power in the oppidum of Santa Catalina which articulated this whole stretch of the Segura valley.

All these issues are essential to understand the final development of the sanctuary at the end of the second and first century BC (Lillo 1991–2, 111). Archaeological works have shown a systematic destruction in the sacred complex, which affected above all the temple and the sculpture of the goddess, and which does not seem to reflect a spontaneous uprising despite its magnitude. Even though it is not possible to reject internal conflicts as the cause of these changes, for example between aristocratic groups or against the ruling elites, the historical context of the Iberian south-east suggests instead the involvement of Rome (Sala 2012, 214).

After the end of the Third Punic War in the 146 BC, the Roman strategy for the Iberian Peninsula, based on the maintenance of the status quo, changed and the end of the

Mediterranean conflicts allowed Rome to concentrate its energy on the complete integration of the Iberian territories. It is during this second half of the century when some important conflicts with the indigenous communities arose. In the area of Murcia, the first changes are visible in the landscape. Most of the regional oppida were abandoned, declined or destroyed, along with their cult places. The gradual disappearance of those sites from the second half of the second century BC onwards and the emergence of smaller centres in low-lying areas represented the development of a new settlement pattern closer to Roman models that will define this area from the first century BC (López-Mondéjar 2010, 75–80). Moreover, recent studies focused on these territories have brought to light the importance of some conflicts, such as the Sertorian wars, in the development of this area during the first century BC (Sala 2012).

It is in that context that the end of the sanctuary of La Luz must be explained. In fact, remains of lead projectiles have been documented in the cult area, which could be linked to this moment. However, whereas the cult place was destroyed, it is striking that the oppidum of Santa Catalina continued to be occupied, especially when taking into account that in other regional sites the disappearance of cult places was linked with a loss of vigour of the adjacent settlements. Bearing in mind the sanctuary's role for the community, the local elites and the surrounding area, would it be possible to consider whether Rome would have seen this native place of aggregation as a 'threat' to its initial interests in the area? In any case, the reality is that this site, marked by its ideological significance and its role in the display of the power of the local elites, had no more meaning within a new landscape that would give way to the Roman patterns and interests. Thus, its disappearance should be explained in connection with the process of dismantling the previous ideological, socio-political and territorial structure in which La Luz had played a key and central role from the fourth century BC (Mattingly 2011, 106).

Final remarks

The analysis of the two Iberian sanctuaries presented above demonstrates the considerable interest of these regional sites for the study of the first centuries of Roman presence in the Iberian south-east. Moreover, it demonstrates the importance of analysing these sites from a broader perspective, beyond the isolated study of their material record or architectural development which has traditionally defined research in this Iberian area. In this way, this comparative analysis has allowed us to explore these sites from a new and more fruitful approach, paying attention to their meaning within the landscape and the historical dynamics of these Iberian territories between the end of the third and the first century BC. Moreover, it has enabled us to establish a broader and

more complete picture of the cult places in this area, which previous studies lacked.

At this point, it is worth highlighting several points. Firstly, it is evident that our two cult places played a remarkable role in the integration process of these Iberian territories within the Roman orbit. Both La Encarnación and La Luz, as other Mediterranean cult places, were not simple ‘mirrors’ or ‘passive agents’ in the landscape during the Roman conquest (Becker 2009, 96–7; Stek 2009). On the contrary, they became active elements and were involved in the economic, social and political life of the Iberian communities.

The monumentalisation of these cult places through the building of three temples during the Republican period reveals how these sites kept their previous ideological and social roles during the third and second centuries BC. It is interesting to bear in mind the high ideological and symbolic value that has been historically placed on the temples since they give, more than any other public building, cultural identity and cohesion to a society (Vermeulen 1995, 190). In this sense, the temples built at La Encarnación and La Luz should have functioned as points of special significance for the inhabitants of these areas, enhancing their links with the main oppida and their territories. Not only did their location contribute to build up and reinforce community bonds, but they also determined symbolically the territorial domain of the oppida and, ultimately, the territory of the community, protecting and ensuring the fecundity of the harvests on which it depended. In this way, they played multiple roles, also at an ideological level, which was fundamental during the first stages of the Roman expansion in the Iberian territories.

Moreover, both Rome and the local communities sought to benefit from that valuable role of those sites. Whereas the former used the cult place of La Encarnación as a space to spread Roman iconography, architectural models and ideology, the latter made it into a scene to express and enhance the local traditions and identity. This must be understood within a context defined by the Roman presence and by a continuous renegotiation and redefinition of the identities (Van Dommelen and Terrenato 2007, 9–10; Jiménez 2008, 52; Mattingly 2011, 206–7).

Consequently, cult places became key spaces for both Romans and natives, although the two case studies allow us to illustrate how they were used and manipulated in order to achieve very different goals. On the one hand, the sacred complex at La Encarnación intended to spread the new Roman values and culture within the Iberian society. Such a different model of sanctuary should have had a considerable impact on the native communities of these inland territories (Vermeulen 1995, 196). By contrast, transformations developed in La Luz strengthened their own traditions in the face of the new Roman models and the display of the power of local elites towards both the community and Rome.

Thus, the building of the temple of La Luz, considering its aforementioned value for the community, also meant an ideological reinforcement for the authority of the native elites (Vermeulen 1995).

Furthermore, there is another factor that explains the different development followed by these two sites, and it is their own location within the regional area. On the one hand, the sanctuary of La Luz was located close to the principal route to Carthago Nova, which may explain the contacts with the Roman world visible from the first half of the second century BC onwards in the material record (Lillo 1991–2). On the other hand, La Encarnación was built in an inland and rural area, far from Cartagena and its surrounding territory; therefore, the use of Roman models in this sanctuary illustrates Rome’s strategies of integration in this peripheral territory, distant to the main areas of Roman influence.

Consequently, from a broader perspective, the analysed changes must be considered and studied as part of a far-reaching transformation that led to the dismantling of the landscape of the previous centuries and to the definitive integration of these territories in the Roman world (Mattingly 2011, 106). The changes experienced by those sanctuaries were an expression of the stable presence of Rome in the Iberian south-east after the conquest of Carthago Nova and a first step of that process that, eventually, led to the collapse of both the Iberian socio-political structure and the ideological system represented and supported by those cult places. The destruction of the temple at La Luz seems to be the clearest example of that.

Finally, the different development of those sites conveys another crucial aspect, the Roman interests in these territories during these first centuries of its presence in the Iberian south-east. In the first place, Rome sought to maintain the status quo in order to assure the control and stability of those territories. Beyond the alliances with local elites, Rome reinforced one of the main bases of their territorial and socio-political power, the cult places, or at least, as in the case of La Luz, Rome ‘allowed’ the monumentalisation developed by the local elites. With those alliances, Rome gained a certain indirect control over those territories. Secondly, another main interest of Rome was to keep an eye on possible dangerous or problematical elements due to their power as aggregation points for the native communities or to their significance at a socio-political and economic level. Although it is a widely held view that this part of the Iberian Peninsula had been controlled by Rome since the conquest of Carthago Nova, it was at the end of the second century BC, and after some local conflicts in other part of the peninsula, including southern Iberia and the nearby territories of Granada (Adroher and López 2004, 269, 281), when the entire region was definitively integrated into the Roman world. From this point of view, the sanctuary of La Luz, despite its Roman character, could have been seen by Rome as a ‘dangerous focus’ in

the area, especially considering that only the sanctuary was destroyed, not the oppidum of Santa Catalina. The settlement, however, declined and was abandoned after the destruction of its sanctuary and its population was distributed among new settlements along the Segura valley during the first century BC.

Our two case studies show that from the beginning Rome was aware of the significance of the cult places in this territory, a fact that led them to place them in a privileged position during the Roman expansion in the Iberian south-east. Thus, the role of those sites appears much more complex than the traditionally held view in this area, since they emerge as crucial points in the landscape not only in the Late Iron Age but also during the first stages of the Roman expansion in the Iberian south-east. In the new context, defined by transformations, contacts and negotiations, they became another arena where both Romans and natives expressed their particular interests. Hence, they constitute indispensable sites from which to obtain insight into the socio-political structure of the local communities and the dynamics of change that defined the integration of these territories in the Roman orbit from the end of the third century BC. There is therefore no room for doubt that all these aspects should be borne in mind in order to deepen our knowledge of the development of the cult places in the Iberian south-east and to reconsider thoroughly the transformations undergone by those sites during the Republican period as part of a broader process of change and reformulation of previous values, traditions, structures and landscapes.

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