

SITUATING GENDER IN EUROPEAN ARCHAEOLOGIES

Edited by

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Front Cover Illustration

Gold foil from Rogaland in western Norway showing a man and a woman,
often interpreted as the Nordic Vanir god Freyr and his wife Gerd
from the family of Giants. 7th–8th century AD.

(Photo: Svein Skare. © Bergen Museum, University of Bergen, Norway.)

Back Cover Illustration

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Gender and Identity in Iberian Funerary Contexts

(5th–3rd century BC)

LOURDES PRADOS

In this article I investigate gender relations within a specific culture, the Iberian civilization, based on its funerary record. This civilization arose in the 6th century BC, developed through the 1st century BC, and disappeared slowly with the Romanization of the Iberian Peninsula. This culture was characterized by a rigid social hierarchy composed of diverse villages which flourished principally in the Levantine area, stretching up to the north of the Pyrenees (modern-day France) and down through the southern part of the peninsula. The dominant funerary ritual was cremation, with the few known cases of inhumation reserved for infants; however, the study of cemeteries shows that not all individuals had the “right” to be buried. Thus, the relatively low number of burials in proportion to the extensive period a cemetery was in use is a factor to consider. According to the evidence, rituals and burial sites could vary across social sectors and cultural areas.

Most specifically, I will focus on the so-called *Ibérico Pleno* (“Full Iberian Age”) from the end of the 5th century to the beginning of the 3rd century BC, when local aristocracies were consolidated. During this span of time, Iberian culture experienced a period of profound social and economic change and a series of transformations which are reflected in its rigidly hierarchical burial system. The change of mentality resulting from these transformations triggered a shift in the representation of women, portraying aristocratic status through elaborate dress and jewellery, both in iconographic representations and in the richness of the objects – often including weapons – deposited in their tombs. This will be analyzed comprehensively through the case of Female Tomb 155 in Baza (Granada), which contains the richest collection of weaponry yet found in the Iberian Civilization.

Among the fundamental objectives of gender archaeology is the study of past gender relationships. We must make women the object of study to make them visible through archaeology (GILCHRIST 1999; MOORE – SCOTT 1997; NELSON 2006; SØRENSEN 2000). Considering that gender is a cultural construction that varies with different cultures and ages, one can logically assume that gender relationships within a society such as the Iberian, which is composed of several diverse villages that developed through a period of roughly six hundred years, would vary over time and in different geographical and cultural contexts.

Another aspect to consider is that the study of gender often overlooks factors of age, social status, and ethnicity. As Sarah Nelson points out, questioning the role of women in archaeology leads to other questions concerning the differences between separate groups of women within one single culture (NELSON 2006, 4). Experts are conscious of the great difficulty in applying gender concepts to archaeology (BRUMFIEL 2006; NELSON 2006; SØRENSEN 2006; SPENCER-WOOD 2006). Research on gender relationships has created interest in other groups traditionally “invisible” or overlooked within archaeology, such as children and the elderly. Gender archaeology is carried out in several specific fields: funerary contexts, daily living quarters, and religious roles, although “almost any set of data from archaeological sites can be approached with gendered questions” (NELSON 2006, 1).

One of the principal problems with funerary studies of the Iberian Culture is that analyzing osteological remains from cremations remains difficult. Therefore, “sexing” a burial often relies on the grave goods. Traditionally the presence of weaponry has been interpreted as designating a male burial, while the presence of textile objects – such as spindle-whorls, plates of perforated bone, punches, or pins – has indicated female tombs. This study intends to show that such linkages are not always justified and that each case must be studied individually, without previous ideological conditioning.

Although we know that gender representation in grave goods does not necessarily reflect directly upon the actual gender relationship within the society, it imparts much important information. Marie-Louise Stig SØRENSEN (2000, 85) states that different forms of social categorization, including gender, are expressed in representing the dead. She describes this as the “visualization and ideological reproduction of gender systems”. However, it would be a mistake to consider that only two kinds of gender (male and female) based upon two sexes (man and woman) can exist. Many noteworthy studies exist concerning alternative gender constructions in other cultures (HOLLIMON 2006; WHITEHOUSE 1998). Unfortunately, such examples, including a contemporary one in rural Albania (BILEFSKY 2008), exceed the scope of this contribution.

Traditional archaeology has shown an interest in “sexing” excavated funerary remains. In general this interest has sufficed to indicate, when possible, the sex and age of the buried individuals. Such classifications have often been established through osteological remains, although in other cases sex has been determined exclusively through analysis of grave goods, as previously mentioned. In addition, many factors intervene that are out of the archaeologist’s control when “sexing”

the osteological remains of an individual, including the state of conservation, age at the time of death, the sexual dimorphism of a specific population, and the technological development of the specific analysis (LUCY 2000, 65). In the majority of cases in which there is doubt concerning the osteology, the gender attribution has been awarded to the masculine sex, omitting the initial doubt in subsequent publications. We know through the funerary record that other forms of differentiation can be established according to the use of space, specific orientation of bodies, and placement of certain grave goods. For instance, Bettina ARNOLD (2006, 142) establishes distinct sectors of analysis in the study of gender through funerary remains: the landscape of the cemetery, the cemetery itself, the way the corpse is laid out, the position and orientation of the body or its remains, and the spatial distribution, type, and quantity of materials that make up the objects in the tombs.

On the other hand, although one can “sex” the burials, burials of different sex may have much in common, such as orientation and placement of the grave goods. However, as Sam Lucy states, “the relationship between grave goods, gender and sex must be investigated, not assumed” (LUCY 1997, 155). This lack of investigation has been – and continues to be – a grave error in many funerary studies of the Iberian civilization.

It is also interesting to analyze the prominent role women have held within different aspects of funerary rites across diverse cultures. Examples include the preparation of the corpse for burial in the late medieval Anglo-Saxon context (GILCHRIST 2005) and the placement of certain offerings, such as pots for food preparation, studied in Phoenician burials of the Iberian Peninsula and Sicily (DELGADO – FERRER 2007). In many cases, the funerary role of women is interpreted as an extension of the maternal role, prolonging her living function into the after-life. One can also highlight the forms of mourning assigned to gender (GILCHRIST 2005, 57). The gesture of despair of mourning women paid to weep at funerals is characteristic across many cultures and throughout history.

In what follows, I will attempt to sex Iberian tombs also taking into account variables other than grave goods that seem necessary for a complete archaeological study. As such, I decisively reject the typical pattern of association concerning grave goods, which presupposes male or female tombs depending on the presence or absence of certain objects, such as weaponry (traditionally associated with male tombs) and spindle-whorls, small plates of perforated bone, punches, and decorated pins (generally associated with female burials).

Iberian Funerary Contexts

When analyzing the Iberian funerary world, one must address problems such as old excavations and incomplete documentation of sites and publications. Such problems limit the possible interpretation of excavated materials and structures, and put into doubt previous interpretations. The first studies to incorporate new methodological approaches for the “archaeology of the dead” in Spain were initiated in the 1970s. One such work is that of Arturo RUIZ (1978) who presented a study of the Iberian territory of the Alto Guadalquivir based on data analysis of the cemetery and settlements there. Martín ALMAGRO GORBEA (1978) established a relationship between the typology of the tombs and Iberian society at the time. Later work includes that of Fernando QUESADA (1989) about the cemetery of Cabecico del Tesoro and a later study based on the analysis of Iberian weapons deposited in warrior tombs, Juan Antonio SANTOS VELASCO (1989) about El Cigarralejo, the synthesis of different territories offered by a conference on Iberian cemeteries (BLÁNQUEZ – ANTONA 1992), and the diverse publications of Teresa Chapa and Juan Pereira, including, among others, Castellones de Ceal (CHAPA – PEREIRA 1986, 1992; CHAPA *et al.* 1998). One may also highlight the social interpretation of the Jaén cemeteries, pursued by Ruiz and Manuel Molinos (RUIZ – MOLINOS 1993, 207–231) and studies of gender perspective by several researchers (CHAPA – IZQUIERDO 2010; GARCÍA LUQUE 2003; GARCÍA LUQUE – RÍSQUEZ 2005; IZQUIERDO – PRADOS 2004; PRADOS – IZQUIERDO 2006; RAFEL 2007; RÍSQUEZ – GARCÍA LUQUE 2007a; 2007b; RÍSQUEZ – HORNOS 2005).

In recent years there has also been great development in the study of osteological analysis of cremated remains (GÓMEZ BELLARD 1996), which has allowed important advances in the attempt to establish not only sex but also age groups and palaeopathologies. Prominent among them are the works at the cemetery of Pozo Moro (REVERTE 1985), El Cigarralejo (SANTONJA 1985; 1986; 1993), Villares de Hoya Gonzalo (REVERTE 1990), Cabezo Lucero (GRÉVIN 1993), Turó dels Dos Pins (CAMPILLO 1993; 1995), Corral de Saus (CALVO 2000), Torrelló del Boverot and in Moreres de Crevillente (GÓMEZ BELLARD 1996; 1999; 2000) and the new analyses of tomb 155 of Baza (TRANCHO – ROBLEDO 2010).

During the past 30 years, research interests have focused on clarifying matrimonial customs through the consideration of grave goods, dating the graves by means of palaeodemographical and osteological studies, examining graves belonging to different generations, and studying characteristic patterns of burials throughout time (IZQUIERDO – PRADOS 2004). In this sense, the work of Maria

Eugenia AUBET (1995) and other researchers (AUBET *et al.* 1996) on tombs A and B of the Tartesic cemetery in Setefilla in the late eighth century is very relevant. Their analysis concerns palaeodemographical aspects such as the mortality index (much higher for women than for men), life expectancy (30–27 years for men compared to 22 years for women), and the number of burials according to sex (with many more male burials). The analysis also revealed the repetition of certain grave goods, for example knives in male tombs and pottery urns in female ones. We can also consider the Iberian cemetery of the Corral de Saus in Valencian Contestania, where the most significant tomb is a paved stone tumulus of large dimensions in which two adults are buried, one male and one female. The small tomb is surrounded by simple pit graves (IZQUIERDO 2000, 349–341), which allow us to focus on a fascinating and little studied aspect: the existence of double graves and, in some cases, triple graves in the Iberian world. One of the most significant of these is the well-known tomb 200 of El Cigarralejo (Mula, Murcia) which was excavated by CUADRADO (1968; 1989). Due to the richness and diversity of goods found inside this tomb, its excavator concluded that it was a double grave of a man and a woman. The burial site dating between 425 BC and 375 BC has a solid superstructure in a paved tumulus with a rectangular plan (2.50 x 2.20 m). At the southeastern end were two niches, one of which contained an ovoid urn whose mouth was covered with a stone and which contained the remains of a cremation. The other niche contained precious goods consisting of weaponry, personal items of clothing and decoration, a series of loom weights, a large number textile objects, 57 spindle-whorls, different types of cloth, and 35 Greek and Iberian vases (*Fig. 1*).

Carmen Rísquez and Antonia Garcia Luque (RÍSQUEZ – GARCÍA LUQUE 2007b) concluded that textiles and minor weaponry would have been intended as important elements emphasised in tomb 200 of El Cigarralejo similar to tomb 277 of the same cemetery, which was considered “princely” by its excavators (CUADRADO 1989, 55). Also highlighted in this tomb were Attic ceramics that may have been used in a funerary banquet ritual to honour the dead. Whatever the case, these researchers believe that this tomb was indicative of the influence that the buried woman had on her community (RÍSQUEZ – GARCÍA LUQUE 2007b, 168). Ana Delgado and Meritxell Ferrer (DELGADO – FERRER 2007), however, consider that the lack of osteological analysis would make relating any prior study to this one dubious, as it is not even clear whether it is a double or single burial, much less what its gender attribution should be.



*Fig. 1. Grave goods, tomb 200 El Cigarralejo Mula (Murcia, Spain)
(after CUADRADO 1989).*

In the Iberian cemeteries that have been studied, male graves outnumber female ones. For example at the Pozo Moro necropolis the percentage of male tombs (21%) is twice that of female tombs (11%) (REVERTE 1985), and at Los Villares the ratio is six to four in favour of male tombs (BLÁNQUEZ 1990, 409). In the province of Corral de Saus, the male population reaches 58.3% as opposed to 8.3% female (CALVO 2000, 328). In the Turó dels Dos Pins (Cabrera del Mar, Barcelona), 59% of the graves are male compared to 13.6% female; this cemetery contains the only possible case of a joint mother and child burial (GARCÍA ROSELLÓ 1993, 209, Fig. 88). Of the nine individuals whose gender has been identified in Coimbra del Barranco Ancho (Murcia), seven are male and two are female (GARCIA CANO 1997, 90). Finally, male tombs outnumber female

tombs in Cabezo Lucero (Alicante) (ARANEGUI *et al.* 1993, 54). In this cemetery, the quantity of graves containing weapons is much higher than those in other burials in the peninsula (QUESADA 1997; 2010). As such, the confirmed male population percentage is higher according to the anthropological studies that have been carried out. In addition, female life expectancy is lower here. However, as we have already shown, these analyses are not exempt from difficulties and in many cases the conservation of bones is limited due to combustion and a high degree of fragmentation. These limitations affect the identification of women to a greater extent than men since graves are often assigned to males unless bones are specifically identified as female.

However, even though there is an increasing number of osteological analyses, in the majority of cases, gender continues to be determined according to the grave goods or at least they are used as resources when the osteological analysis is in doubt (SANTONJA 1993). On the other hand, there are cemeteries where many tombs lack grave goods or contain only small objects insignificant for determining gender. In others, the immediate association of gender to grave goods can lead to error. It is well known nowadays that the presence of spindle-whorls does not always indicate female graves. Similarly, the presence of weaponry does not always indicate a male individual. However, it is certain that, to date, there are cemeteries such as Cabezo Lucero (Alicante) (ARANEGUI *et al.* 1993) mentioned above, where weaponry is found exclusively in male graves.

Tomb 155, Baza Necropolis (Granada)

The aristocratic funerary world of the 5th through 4th centuries BC witnessed a series of social and economic changes that culminated in the *visibility* of aristocratic women in tombs. At this point in Iberian Culture, one can confirm that some women performed powerful functions. It is also likely that women played an important role in the transference of lineage (RUIZ – MOLINOS 2007).

One of the most interesting cases of Iberian funerary archaeology is tomb 155 of the Baza necropolis, in the old Bastetania, now a province of Granada. This cemetery is the provenance of the famous “Dama de Baza” which is now the subject of a monograph (CHAPA – IZQUIERDO 2010). The tomb comprises a funerary chamber of 2.6 m x 1.80 m excavated in 1971 (PRESEDO 1973; 1982), dating to the beginning of the 4th century BC. It included a female limestone sculpture converted into a funerary urn and containing the remains of a cremation. Osteological analyses determining that the remains were those of a thirty-year-

old woman were confirmed the next year, although not without controversy (TRANCHO – ROBLEDO 2010). As well as other funerary offerings such as four white vases with plant-like motifs, this tomb presented the largest collection of weaponry found in an Iberian burial site to date. According to specialists in the field, it can be considered a group of four complete sets of armour (QUESADA 1997; 2010).

The sculpture converted into an urn depicts a seated woman wearing a richly decorated blue tunic with borders under which appear delicate petticoats. The mantel, open at the front, covers her from head to foot. Also depicted is jewellery typical of high-ranking women, consisting of a headdress over the mantel, chokers and necklaces, and large rings and earrings. She is seated on a winged throne whose front legs form animal claws and whose one side holds the cremated remains of the deceased. Her feet, clad with red footwear, rest upon a footstool. In her left hand, half-closed, she holds a small blue pigeon. (*Fig. 2*). Some scholars have suggested that this sculpture may represent a divinity, (OLMOS –TORTOSA 1997), although I am more inclined to support its interpretation as a mortal person (PRADOS 2008, 2010; PRADOS – IZQUIERDO 2006). I believe that the woman's



Fig. 2. Dama de Baza (Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid).

face is that of a real person, possibly even an image of the deceased herself. Certain elements suggesting this are her marked double chin and her black hair styled with two waves on either side. These characteristics are very different from the idealised image of *La Dama de Elche*, for example (OLMOS – TORTOSA 1997) (Fig. 3). However, various divine symbols, like the winged throne or the small bird that she holds in her left hand, also appear. These divine elements are probably included to create the impression of a person of high rank embarking on a journey into the afterlife. It is a way of heroicising the deceased, a practice that had existed previously in Iberian funerary iconography, for example in the Pozo Moro (Albacete) monument (ALMAGRO GORBEA 1983). Therefore, I do not consider that the mere presence of the seated sculpture justifies its identification as divine. In my opinion, the *Dama de Baza* symbolises self-portraiture of the elite – in this case a middle-aged woman – in a funerary context. The image of the aristocrat, a non-idealised image, expresses power through symbols such as the depiction of richly decorated clothing, jewellery, and symbols of immortality including a bird and a winged throne.

Thanks to archaeology, the image of female aristocracy from the 5th century to the beginning of the 4th century BC has been incorporated into the repertoire of



Fig. 3. Dama Elche (Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid).

funerary art. Cases like the seated lady, women portrayed at men's sides in plaques and funeral wakes, and young women on stelas and tower funerary monuments reveal not only a new figurative language emerging from indigenous workshops but also the growing participation of women in funerary rites (IZQUIERDO 1997, 100; RÍSQUEZ – HORNOS 2005; IZQUIERDO – PRADOS 2004).

Material wealth is expressed through luxurious dress and jewellery, which, as many recent analyses have confirmed, were covered in tin on the Baza sculpture to achieve greater realism and a stronger visual impact (GÓMEZ GONZÁLEZ *et al.* 2009). This reminds us of the importance of dowries in the handing down of wealth and power in lineages (RUIZ-GÁLVEZ 1994). Several years ago Chapa and Pereira (CHAPA – PEREIRA 1991) noted the absence of gold in Iberian necropolises, which could be due to its social and economic function of being passed from mothers to daughters. This is reflected in the abundance of jewellery, as we have observed in the previously mentioned bust of *La Dama de Elche* and



Fig. 4. Baza tomb (4th century BC)
(Granada, Spain) (Legacy F.
Presedo, courtesy A. Caballos.
(after CHAPA – IZQUIERDO 2010).

in the numerous votive offerings in stone, bronze, and terracotta that come from Iberian sanctuaries.

The distinctive hierarchical feeling of the rich tomb of Baza shows the importance granted to the burial of this woman. Some scholars claim that this tomb needs to be understood in the context of an aristocratic society and that the woman buried there had kinship links to the local aristocrat whose remains were cremated and deposited shortly afterwards in the nearby tomb 176 (RUIZ *et al.* 1992; RÍSQUEZ – HORNOS 2005). Other theories suggest the possibility of an enormously important figure in the community whose duties were potentially religious (CHAPA – MADRIGAL 1997).

Another similar example can be observed in the Andalusian necropolis of Toya (Peal de Becerro, Jaén) (PEREIRA 1999) or in the nearby necropolis of Galera, tomb number 20 of Cabré (CABRÉ – MOTOS 1920; PEREIRA *et al.* 2004), where the famous alabaster sculpture known as *La Dama de Galera* (CHAPA – MADRIGAL 1997, 196; OLMOS 2004) was deposited. Additionally one must consider that the female who is buried in the Baza tomb could carry an important ideological meaning. In fact, the sculpture shows attributes of a divinity, such as the winged throne and the small pigeon in her hand (IZQUIERDO – PRADOS 2004; PRADOS 2007, 2010). Although I argue above that she represented a mortal person, after her death she may have become a community heroine with divine attributes.

It seems clear that we see a person of high status whose grave goods – including four displays of arms – could be attributed to her position within either her lineage or other dominant lineages. Years ago, Fernando QUESADA (1989) suggested that four vessels in the corners could be related to the four collections of weapons which, in turn, would represent other such lineages (*Fig. 4*). Whichever the case, the weaponry that is part of this burial's grave goods would have a different meaning from those that accompany the typical *warrior tomb* in Iberian context, which generally includes only one set of weapons. This symbolic offertory character would explain the presence of weapons in other female or infant tombs in Iberian context, although always in fewer numbers than in male tombs.

Conclusion

Iberian culture of the 5th through 4th centuries BC, a period of profound social and economic changes, underwent a series of transformations reflected in its rigidly hierarchical burial system. Many of the funeral monuments had a clear

function of territorial domination. This period witnessed the consolidation of an aristocracy of warriors, landowners, and livestock-breeders. A change of mentality accompanied a shift in the representation of women, portraying aristocratic status through elaborate dress and jewellery, both in iconographic representations and in the richness of the objects – often including weapons – deposited in their tombs. It is possible that the very existence of such moments of change – of social and political instability – contributed to the emergence of aristocratic women holding prominent roles in society, as in the Celtic world during the transition period of Hallstatt to La Tène (ARNOLD 2002). Hence, since the publication of Patrice Brun's *Princes et princesses de la Celtique: le premier Âge du Fer en Europe, 850–450 av. J.C.* (BRUN 1987) and particularly since studies conducted on the impressive female tomb of Vix, it is not surprising that the Iberian Culture could likewise produce a female tomb with princely characteristics. One difference to highlight, however, is that the Celtic tomb does not possess weaponry; rather, its grave goods reflect an extraordinary power through pieces such as the bronze decorated krater, golden collars, funerary chariot, and the collection of imported ceramics linked to the consumption of wine. In this sense, Arnold's studies concerning gender in burials prove interesting (ARNOLD 1991; 1996; 2002; 2006).

Meanwhile, we must emphasize that, in Iberian Culture, not all burials with weaponry as grave goods are male (DAVIS-KIMBALL 2002) and that weaponry can also indicate other forms of importance such as status, lineage, and ethnicity. This necessitates anthropological studies, independent of the nature of the grave goods, for the identification of the Iberian tombs. In turn, the paradigm of typical grave goods, which presupposes male or female tombs according to the presence or absence of certain objects such as weaponry – traditionally associated with masculine tombs – or spindle-whorls, small plates of perforated bone, punches, and decorated pins – which are for the most part associated with female burial sites – must be decisively rejected. It is possible that the majority of cases comply with this association, yet as we have seen, there is an enormous variety of grave goods that do not always follow these guidelines.

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