





Jaén Journal  
on Approximation

ISSN: 1889-3066  
vol. 3 (1) (2011), 8M-17M



# Journey to the World<sup>of</sup><sub>the</sub> Iberians

*“A tour of the culture which gave its name  
to the Iberian Peninsula in the 7th to 1st  
centuries BCE, predating the Romans, the  
Visigoths and the Muslims”*

**B**efore Romans, Visigoths or Muslims ventured onto the territory which is now Spain – particularly the East and South – it was mainly inhabited by people who are still largely unknown to the general public, but who were important enough, among other things, to give their name to this end of the continent of Europe: the Iberian Peninsula.

The development of Iberian culture in the 7th to 1st centuries BCE left a notable legacy, mainly in the form of sculpture. Over time this has been added to with other remains and traces, helping to give us a better understanding of these people, who over the centuries became mixed with the other civilisations invading their territory.

One of the areas where time has worn away the story of the Iberians the least is the province of Jaen. The extraordinary archaeological heritage which the culture of this civilisation left in Jaen is unique, and forms the nucleus of a cultural travel itinerary, “Journey to the World of the Iberians”. This major project by the Local Government of Jaen and the Tourism Council of the Regional Government of Andalusia, co-ordinating with different town councils and with the collaboration with the Council for Culture and the Andalusian Centre for Iberian Archaeology at the University of Jaen, promotes the recovery and reappraisal of these and other archaeological sites, and the creation and improvement of a network of visitors’ centres, museums and interpretation centres.





The Journey to the World of the Iberians includes visits to interpretation centres and Iberian galleries in local museums, and the Iberian Museum of Jaen which is currently under construction in the provincial capital, as well as such iconic sites as the fortress cities of Cástulo in Linares, Giribaile in Vilches or Plaza de Armas de Puente Tablas in Jaen; the heroes' sanctuary of El Pajarillo in Huelma, the burial chamber of Toya in Peal de Becerro, the burial mound of Cerrillo Blanco in Porcuna and the cave sanctuary of Cueva de la Lobera in

Castellar, all fundamentally important sites for understanding the history of the Iberians in the Alto Guadalquivir region, and essential for researchers of Iberian culture.

The seven stops, described in full detail on the website (in English and Spanish) of this Journey to the World of the Iberians <http://www.viajealtiempodelosiberos.com>, can take us back in time, from Romanisation to the origins of the Iberian princes, or in the opposite direction, following the historical timeline from the 7th to the 1st century BCE.



# The home of the gods

The first stop is in Castellar, the site of Cueva de la Lobera, a place heavy with history and magic. This is a cave sanctuary from the 4th to 3rd centuries BCE, with a surprisingly strategic location, on the edge of a large territory where people would come regularly to worship the gods. Numerous Iberian ex-votos or figurines have been recovered from this site and can now be seen in the Museum of the Santuario Ibérico in Castellar. The approach to the site reminds us that this was a sacred space for the ancient people of the Alto Guadalquivir, and respected as the home of the gods. A narrow path

of about 500 metres leads to the cave, a path which 2,500 years ago was used by the Iberians who knew the secrets of the cave.

The Castellar Museum stands less than a kilometre from Cueva de la Lobera, dedicated to the Iberian ex-voto figurines recovered from the Sanctuary of Cueva de la Lobera. Its galleries show how the ex-votos were made and what they meant to the Iberians, their beliefs about the afterlife and their relationship with their gods. A magnificent collection of these figurines whose faces still express the mystery of the people they represented.





The second suggested stop in this journey into the past, a few centuries BCE, is in Linares. Cástulo and the Museum of this important Iberian city are the ideal location for learning about the Second Punic War, the conflict which pitted Romans against Carthaginians, and facilitated Rome's conquest of the Guadalquivir Valley. It also contains information about how the city was romanised, the mint of Cástulo which issued coins from the late 3rd century BCE, and the mines where copper, lead and silver were extracted.

This basic route introducing the mysterious and fascinating Iberian civilisation continues to Peal de Becerro, where the Burial Chamber of Toya can be visited. The purpose of this stop is to show what a princely burial chamber was like and what it meant in

the context of aristocratic Iberian society. Also, thanks to the excavation of the Hypogeum of Hornos we can see how princely burials evolved, as the Princely Tombs centre at Peal explores the subject of the afterlife and funeral rites.

From Peal de Becerro, the proposed itinerary takes us to the next Iberian site of Jaen and one of the most important, the Heroes' Sanctuary of El Pajarillo (Huelma), site of the discovery of a well-known sculptural group where a wolf and a hero face each other, surrounded by other animals, including lions and gryphons, and placed on a stone tower, in a monumental setting of great importance. This site shows how the territory controlled politically by the princes was formed, and what the historical conditions were, as well as the role of the hero, another variant of princely power in the Mediterranean area. At present this site cannot be visited, but the magnificent sculptural group can be seen in the Provincial Museum of Jaen.

And Jaen is the next destination in this Journey to the World of the Iberians. Here we find the oppidum of Puente Tablas (Jaen), the most characteristic of the Iberian fortified cities of Andalusia. Built in the 7th century BCE over a 9th century settlement of huts, the site lets us see what a 4th century BCE village was like, and how the princes and their subjects lived. The fortification, street plan and houses give us an insight into the social relationship between princes and subjects, princely gifts to win power, tributes and the Iberian agrarian economy.



Before we leave Jaen, we must visit the Museum of Jaen, where we can see one of the most important archaeological collections of the Iberian world, soon to form part of the Museum of Iberian Art now being built on the site of the former provincial prison. As noted above, this museum complex houses the Iberian monument from the Heroes' Sanctuary of El Pajarillo, Huelma, dating from the 4th century BCE, and depicts a hero confronting a wolf in the presence of two mythological beings. The scene has been recreated with total precision, and the different sculptures can be seen in their original positions.

The main building of the museum also houses the impressive sculptural group from Cerrillo Blanco, Porcuna. These sculptures, dating from the 5th century BCE, tells the mythical history of an aristocratic lineage, where the scenes of battles and warriors are especially notable for their impressive degree of realism. The museum also has galleries for temporary exhibitions, a magnificent collection of local painters from different periods, and a large archaeological collection of prehistoric, Roman, Visigothic and Islamic pieces.

This cultural tourism route ends in Porcuna and the burial mound of Cerrillo Blanco, one of the most iconic sites of Iberian culture. Walking through the Cerrillo Blanco site, we come to a burial complex from the 7th century BCE. Here, in the 5th century BCE, the Warrior was buried, accompanied by a fabulous set of Iberian sculptures, which can all now be seen at the Provincial Museum of Jaen. The archaeological site at Porcuna includes the keys to understanding this sculptural group and the meaning of death in the Iberian world.

Next to this site is a visitors' centre, with innovative equipment to help us discover the key points in this emblematic archaeological site. Interactive audiovisuals show us how the Iberians of the Alto Guadalquivir thought, how their society was organised on the basis of lineages and aristocracy, and the funeral culture of the earliest Iberians. Finally, we should visit the Museum of Porcuna in the 15th century Torre de Boabdil, in the historic town centre. Dedicated to prehistory, Iberian and Roman culture, it has an important collection of Ibero-Roman sculpture.

The visit to Porcuna ends this suggested Journey to the World of the Iberians, which is not the only possible route - the website can be used to organise thematic visits and activities or plan a personal route - but we hope this itinerary helps visitors to experience another era, to live, understand and feel like the Iberians who inhabited the Iberian peninsula before the Romans, the Visigoths and the Muslims.





# Who are the Iberians?

The Iberian Culture is identified as the historic period of the Iron Age, that is, a period from the 7th to the 1st centuries BCE. In ethnic terms, the same population had occupied Andalusia since Neolithic times, so we can discard theories that the Iberians arrived from Africa or Asia with an existing culture, as some have proposed. However, there are large differences between the different phases characterising the development of the Iberian Culture, as one would expect in a period of seven centuries.

The Iberians, from a technological and economic point of view, produced iron agricultural tools and weapons, used the potter's wheel, and made advances in cereal cultivation with the incorporation of the rotary mill. They also developed the cultivation of trees (almonds, grapes, olives and fruit trees) as a new agrarian strategy.

From the social and political viewpoint, the society was aristocratic, and had been developing along these lines since the Bronze Age. The society was based on an extended lineage, that is, a related group united by shared ancestry; however, to extend their power, aristocrats had to increase the number of members of the lineage, which they did by developing relationships of patronage, so that many families could form part of the lineage without being related by blood, taking on the name of the aristocrat, head of the institution, giving part of their agrarian production to the prince in exchange for land to cultivate and forming part of the circuits of gifts and services which the aristocrat offered to his army, among other matters.

Iberian culture was urban, because the identity of the group centred on the place of residence of the lineages normally established in the oppida, large



or small urban centres which showed the power of the aristocratic lineage with impressive fortifications. Inside, there were planned streets on a grid; houses were organised in blocks and built on stone basements with adobe and clay walls, and wattle and daub roofs, as they did not have roof tiles.

The princes, especially in the 4th century BCE, drove the development of sculptors' workshops, with the appearance of extraordinary sculptural groups in Cerrillo Blanco, Porcuna and Cerro del Pajarillo in Huelva, which often lent grandeur to their tombs. From the 4th century, the lineages were buried in Iberian necropolises, where the social differences between princes and subjects were shown in the construction of the tombs and in the grave goods.

The geography of the Iberian peoples shows how much diversity there was among them, even in as homogeneous a territory as the Guadalquivir Valley.

Historic sources confirm the existence of large ethnic groups in the earliest times: one was the Tartessians, located in Lower Andalusia, and another the Mastians, who occupied Higher Andalusia from the Segura Valley to the Mediterranean coast. Other groups must also have existed. The evolution of this map in the following periods is not clear, although archaeology has detected cultural differences between the territories of the Tartessians, called Turdetania by later sources, and the Mastians, known as Bastetania and Oretania. It is possible that this reference is purely geographical, as the new collective identities must have developed from the 5th and 4th centuries BCE, based on the oppida. People identified themselves by their lineage and the oppidum where they lived. For some researchers the difference between Tartessians and Mastians (bastetanos and oretanos) justifies the recognition of two differentiated cultures with different funerary traditions, and even different written and spoken languages.

