

## WEALTH AND POWER IN THE BRONZE AGE OF THE SOUTH-EAST OF THE IBERIAN PENINSULA: THE FUNERARY RECORD OF CERRO DE LA ENCINA

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*Summary.* As a result of recent fieldwork undertaken at the archaeological site of Cerro de la Encina, our knowledge of the funerary ritual has increased considerably. The funerary record shows a significant concentration of wealth in burials corresponding to the family groups of the highest social status. Dramatic social differences can also be found in the internal organization of the settlement. The locations of burials within the settlement area, under the floors of dwellings, allow us to establish that the settlement space was closely related to the social identity of the families. The high number of burials with double and triple inhumations, in contrast to other Argaric necropolis, also stands out as an important feature of Cerro de la Encina, suggesting that familial relationships seem to be more marked here than at other Argaric sites. All these data are discussed in relation to the funerary ritual of the Argaric Culture.

### INTRODUCTION

The site of Cerro de la Encina is located a few kilometres from the city of Granada, on the right bank of the Monachil river, one of the rivers flowing from the Sierra Nevada (Fig. 1). The settlement extends over a large and steeply sloping hill bounded by two deep ravines that clearly delimit it from its immediate surroundings. These characteristics give the settlement considerable strategic importance (Fig. 2). Research undertaken mainly in the 1970s and early 1980s documented a long sequence of occupation belonging to the Bronze Age. Two cultural periods, separated by a phase of abandonment, were identified: the first, on which this paper will focus, corresponds to the Argar Culture, and the second to the culture of the Late Bronze Age of the south-east (Arribas *et al.* 1974; Molina 1978, 1983; Aranda 2001).

The Argaric settlement can be characterized by its central position in the spatial organization of the Argaric population of the region. Cerro de la Encina would have been the settlement that controlled and centralized the exploitation of a large territory corresponding to the Vega of Granada, where other smaller settlements, focused on the exploitation of specific economic resources, have been located. These secondary settlements would have been dependent upon the central site. There are three main criteria that define Cerro de la Encina as the settlement occupying the highest hierarchical position: firstly, its considerable dimensions, occupying approximately 12 ha (Fig. 3). Secondly, its defence characteristics. In addition to its

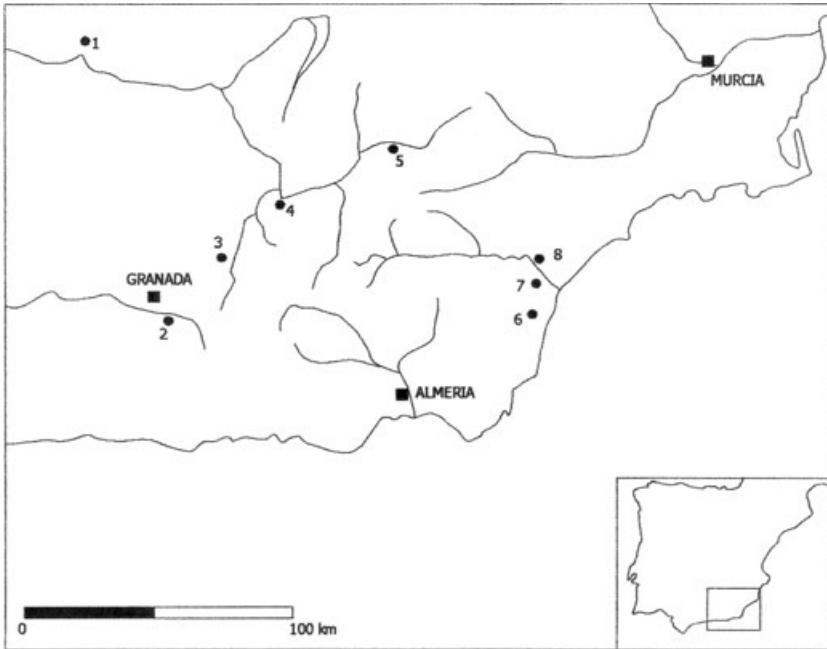


Figure 1

Map showing location of settlements mentioned in the text. 1 Peñalosa. 2 Cerro de la Encina. 3 Cuesta del Negro. 4 Castellón Alto. 5 Cerro de la Virgen. 6 Gatas. 7 Argar. 8 Fuente Álamo.



Figure 2

General view of the settlement of Cerro de la Encina.

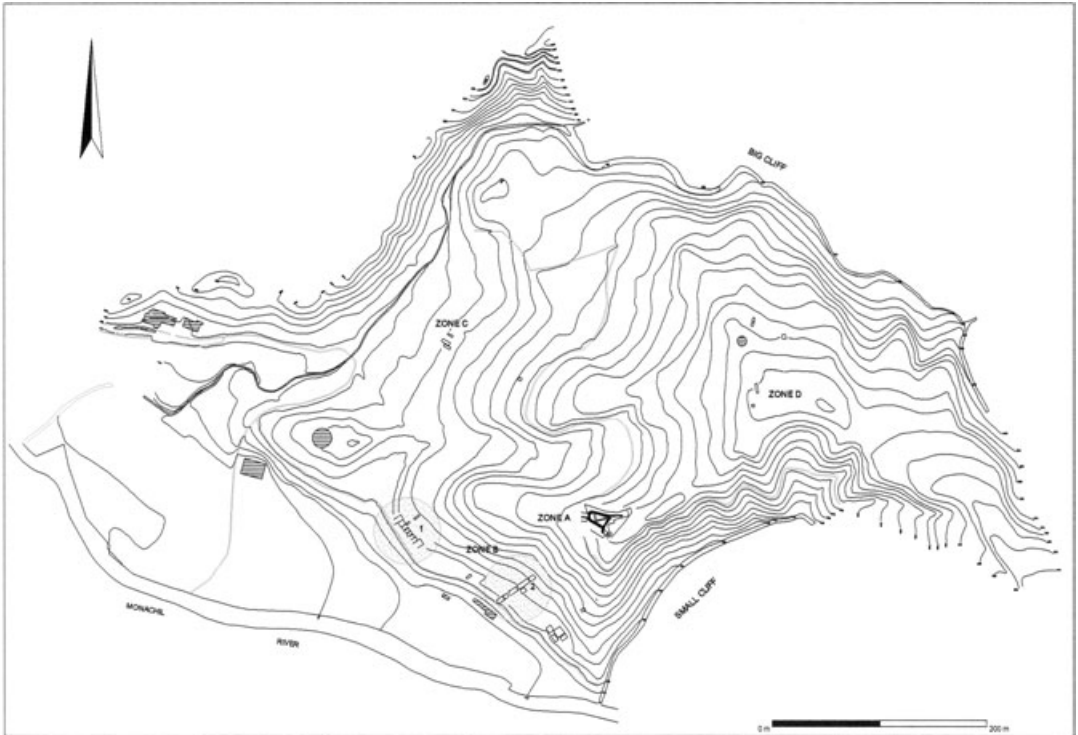


Figure 3

Topographic plan of the settlement showing the excavated zones. 1 Western sector of Zone B (see Figure 7). 2 Central sector of Zone B (see Figure 8).

natural defences, Cerro de la Encina possesses significant defensive works. More specifically, in the area which is most inaccessible and which allows the best visual control of the surroundings, there is a large stone enclosure wall which is roughly rectangular in shape and of considerable monumentality (Fig. 4). The habitation areas are found on the hillsides and plateaux contiguous to the fortification, following the classic urban planning pattern of this culture, with artificial stone structures, terraced into the natural slopes serving as platforms for dwellings. Thirdly, the settlement is significant for its remarkable accumulation of wealth, archaeologically documented in the extraordinary grave goods, which, as we will see below, demonstrate the power of the different social groups that inhabited Cerro de la Encina. For the Argaric sequence of the site C14 dates establish an uninterrupted occupation period between 2000 and 1450 cal BC.

#### THE FUNERARY RECORD

Following the typical Argaric funerary ritual, the burials were located within the settlement area under the floors of dwellings and consist of single, double or, more rarely, triple inhumations in cists, pits, urns and *covachas* (artificial chambers cut into the rock). In Cerro de



Figure 4  
View of the stone enclosure from the front.

la Encina *covachas* are the most characteristic, although burials in pits or cists built with slabs of stone have also been documented. The bodies always appear in a flexed position. The burial rite also involved the deposition of grave goods, the quantitative and qualitative variety of which have been used to establish differential access to wealth, and consequently a strongly stratified society (Molina 1983; Lull and Estévez 1986; Contreras *et al.* 1987–88; Lull 2000; Chapman 2003).

As part of the fieldwork currently in progress, and in order to prepare the site for display to visitors, an excavation season was undertaken between November 2003 and May 2004. The results have considerably increased the number of burials studied and therefore our knowledge of the funerary ritual (Aranda and Molina 2005). This new information has confirmed the significant accumulation of wealth in the Cerro de la Encina necropolis and enables us to draw conclusions regarding the social organization of the settlement. In total, the necropolis of Cerro de la Encina comprises 22 burials, 17 of which have been excavated systematically (Table 1). The remaining five include the burials published by Cabré (1922) and Tarradell (1947–48), most of which belong to plundered tombs.

At the highest social level the burials are associated with a large accumulation of wealth. Tomb 21 is particularly notable not only because of its rich grave goods but also for the monumentality of the grave structure (Fig. 5). The burial consists of a large rectangular chamber cut in the rock, measuring 2 m in length and 1.2 m in width, with a depth of 1.9 m. On its sides

TABLE 1

Burials of Cerro de la Encina necropolis. M = male, F = female, CH = children, YO = young, A = adult, S = senile, Y = year, G = gold, S = silver, C = copper, br = bracelet, ne = necklace, dag = dagger, kn = knife, be = beads, ear = earring, pot = pottery vessels, st = stone, orn = ornament, cat = cattle, ovi = oviacaprid, off = offering

BURIAL NUMBER	BURIAL TYPE	INHUMATION/S SEX AND AGE	GRAVE-GOODS
BURIAL 6	COVACHA	1FA/1CH 4Y	1C. awl, 3 pot.
BURIAL 7	PIT	1CH	
BURIAL 8	PIT	1CH	1G. br., 1C. dag., 5C. rivets, 4S. nails, 1 pot.
BURIAL 9	CIST	1MA	2G ear., 1C. dag., 4 pot., 1 cat. off.
BURIAL 10	COVACHA	1M/1FA/1CH 2-3Y	1C. dag., 2C. br., 1S. br., 1C. awl, 3C. ear./rings, 1S. ear./rings, 12 pot.
BURIAL 11	COVACHA	1MA/1FA	1S. br., 1C. awl, 1 bone awl, 1 st. orn., 1 pot.
BURIAL 12	COVACHA	1YO/1FA	1S. br., 1S. orn., 1 st. orn., ne. st. be., 5 pot.
BURIAL 13	COVACHA	1FS	1C. dag., 1C. awl, 1 bone orn., 2 pot., 1 cat. off.
BURIAL 14	COVACHA	1MA/1FA	1 pot., 1 ovi. off.
BURIAL 15	PIT	1MA	
BURIAL 16	PIT	1MA/1FA	
BURIAL 17	PIT	2A	?
BURIAL 18	COVACHA	1MA/2FA	1C. axe, 1C. dag., 1S. br., 1C. awl, ne. st. be., 4 pot., 1 cat. off.
BURIAL 19	PIT	CH 9Y	
BURIAL 20	COVACHA	1MA/1FA?/1YO	1S. br., 1C. awl, 3S. ear./rings, ne. st. be., 5 pot.
BURIAL 21	COVACHA	1MA 20-22Y/1F 16-17Y	1C. dag., 4C. br., 2S. br., 2S. ear., 1C. ring, 1S. ring, 1C. awl, 1S. hair-pin, 1C. kn., 2C. be., 2 ne. st. be., 1 archer br., 7 pot., 3 cat. off.
BURIAL 22	CIST	2CH 3Y	1 ne. st. be., 3 pot.

marks of wedges used in the construction process and of the notches employed to fit the roof of the tomb are visible. Remains of wooden planks, located on the long sides of the burial, can also be recognized. They would have supported the roof of the tomb, which was probably made from organic material covered by large slabs of stone. The collapse of this structure, especially the stone slabs, has damaged the human remains and the grave goods. The burial contained an inhumation of two individuals, one male and one female, which were perfectly articulated in a flexed position, suggesting that they were buried at the same time, a circumstance rare in Argaric necropolis. Normally when more than one individual is found, only the last to be buried remains anatomically connected, the previous inhumation usually having been removed and the bones disarticulated, piled up and laid in one corner of the tomb or on top of the subsequent burial.

This burial is also remarkable for its very rich grave goods, with a total of 29 items shared between the two individuals. Pottery comprises one chalice-shaped vessel called *copa*, two cooking vessels, two bottles (globular-shaped pots with constricted necks and very narrow mouths), and two tableware vessels. Metal grave goods consist of a long dagger with six silver rivets, six bracelets, four made in copper (one of them in a double spiral) and two in silver (one of them in a triple spiral), two silver earrings both in triple spiral, two rings (one in copper and the other in silver), a copper awl, a silver hair-pin, a copper knife and two fragments of copper beads. Two necklaces made of polished stone beads, an archer bracelet and three cattle offerings complete the grave set.



Figure 5  
Tomb 21.

Several other burials also contained very rich grave goods, for example Tomb 9 which consists of a cist formed by four large stone slabs located inside an oval-shaped pit. The inhumation, an adult male in a flexed position, was placed on a floor made from slabs (Fig. 6). The grave goods comprise two ceramic vessels of carinated shape, a chalice-shaped pot with a narrow pedestal, a parabolic bowl, a long copper dagger with two rivets for the hilt, two gold earrings recorded at the height of the temporal bones and a cattle femur placed inside one of the vessels. Tomb 8 is also very rich, consisting of a pit burial of a child, again found in flexed position. Its grave goods included a long dagger with two notches for the hilt, various copper rivets, and four silver nails with semispherical heads, probably used to secure the sheath, a gold bracelet formed by a double spiral, and a pottery vessel. Burial 10 is also outstanding for its richness. It consists of an artificial cave cut into the rock and closed by a large vertical slab and a stone wall. This burial contained three bodies: two adults, one male and one female, and a child. The grave goods included 12 ceramic vessels, among them typical ritual wares such as chalice-shaped vessels and bottles, along with a dagger with three silver rivets, a copper awl, one silver bracelet and two of copper, and three rings, one in silver and two in copper.

Together with these very rich burials, there is another group with accumulations of wealth, although without the quantity and quality of those described above. In these cases the grave goods usually include various pottery vessels, normally a copper awl and some ornaments such as earrings or bracelets, sometimes in silver, or beads made of polished stone or bone.



Figure 6  
Tomb 9.

Other elements such as daggers have also been documented, but much more exceptionally (Table 1). This is true, for example, of burial 12, a double inhumation in a *covacha* (artificial cave cut into the rock) with grave goods that included four ceramic vessels, a silver bracelet, different necklace beads, a pendant made of bone, and a silver item, possibly an ornament. Another example is burial 22, a cist containing a double inhumation of two children accompanied by three pottery vessels and a perfectly articulated necklace made of polished stone beads. The poorer burials contain no more than one item as grave goods, usually a pottery vessel, or were unaccompanied. This is the case with burials 7, 15, 16 and 17.

The funerary record of Cerro de la Encina shows a significant accumulation and concentration of wealth in the burials corresponding to the family groups with the highest social status. This contrasts with the lesser accumulations of wealth documented in other Argaric settlements such as La Cuesta del Negro (Molina *et al.* 1975; Contreras *et al.* 1987–88), El Castellón Alto (Molina *et al.* 1986) and Peñalosa (Contreras *et al.* 2000). These would have occupied a secondary position in the settlement hierarchy. In these instances burials with the richest grave goods include a number of items inferior in quantity and quality to those described above. The impressive concentration of wealth associated with aristocratic social groups is the basic criterion used to characterize Cerro de la Encina as a settlement of the highest hierarchical level, and one likely to control the exploitation of the Vega of Granada region.

The Cerro de la Encina necropolis can be characterized by the dramatic differences among the funerary grave goods, which suggest a marked social stratification and therefore a clearly differentiated access to manufactured goods. Numerous authors have traditionally considered this tiered social organization to be a basic characteristic of Argaric societies (Molina 1983; Lull 1983, 2000; Contreras *et al.* 1987–88; Castro *et al.* 1993–94; Contreras 2000; Cámara 2001). In Cerro de la Encina, however, social differences can also be found in the internal organization of the settlement. Although the burials have been documented in different areas of the site, there are two important concentrations corresponding to two areas in which intensive archaeological research has been undertaken. These areas are known as the western and central sector of Zone B. They are relatively close to one another and are located on the south-western slope of the site (Fig. 3). In the western sector, nine burials have been identified (Fig. 7). All, with the exception of burial 9, which has been seriously affected by erosion, contain very rich grave goods and the differences among them seem to be much more related to gender and age inequality than to class differences. The fact that all the grave goods are of considerable wealth would suggest that this part of the settlement corresponded to one of the residential areas for social elites. The funerary record of the central sector of Zone B is radically different (Fig. 8). Although few burials have been excavated, there is clear evidence to suggest that this area was inhabited by people of a low, or very low, social status. Of the three burials documented, two of them appear with no grave goods at all, while the third contains only a pottery vessel of carinated shape and the remains of an offering of meat (Aranda and Molina 2005).

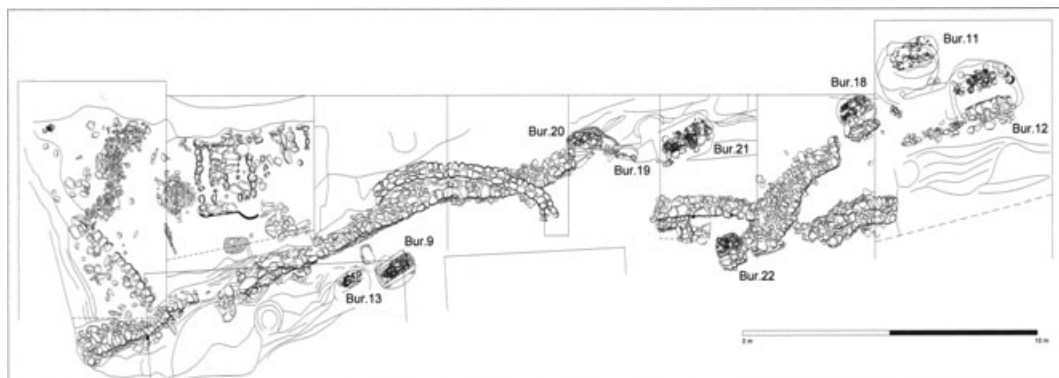


Figure 7

Distribution of burials in the western sector of Zone B.



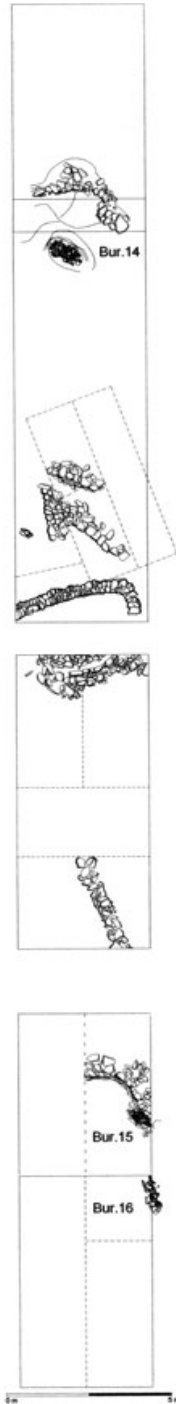


Figure 8  
Distribution of burials in the central sector of Zone B.

The evident contrast between these two areas of the settlement would confirm that the different spaces were organized in accordance with the social identity of the different families who inhabited Cerro de la Encina. The varying degrees of access to manufactured goods can be seen not only in the grave goods and in the internal organization of the settlement, but also in characteristics evident in the human remains such as illnesses and activity patterns. An anthropological study carried out on 19 individuals supports the clearly stratified social organization. Diseases such as osteoarthritis and periostitis together with strong or medium muscular development were concentrated in people buried with poor grave goods or with none, while individuals with a low incidence of degenerative diseases and a moderate to weak muscular development appeared to be associated with the richest grave goods (Jiménez and García 1989–90). All this evidence would imply the existence of important differences in activity patterns and diet between the social groups.

Another important trend documented in the necropolis of Cerro de la Encina is related to the high number of burials with double and triple inhumations. If we consider only the tombs excavated systematically, eight are double, six are individual and three are triple (Table 1). Additionally, if the burials published by Cabré (1922) are considered the number of double and triple inhumations increases to a total of 15. These data provide a clear contrast between the individual inhumation ritual predominant in Argaric necropolis such as La Cuesta del Negro (Molina *et al.* 1975), Peñalosa (Contreras *et al.* 2000), Fuente Álamo (García 2000; Kunter 2000), Gatas (Buikstra *et al.* 1999) or El Argar itself (Kunter 1990), and the ritual documented in Cerro de la Encina, where burials containing more than one individual are prevalent. The significant number of double and triple tombs suggests an important feature of Cerro de la Encina, where familial relationships seem to be more marked than at other Argaric sites. The adoption of the Argaric Culture and specifically the funerary ritual may reveal certain peculiarities of the local populations in the region of Vega of Granada, in which Cerro de la Encina occupies a predominant position.

#### DISCUSSION

The analysis of the distribution of tombs in the settlement has allowed us to determine a clear spatial structure based on the social identity of the individuals. This form of organization would imply that, at least in Cerro de la Encina, it is social status that gives shape to the spatial arrangement of the individuals and that nuclear families are responsible not only for the burials, as has been recently proposed (Lull 2000), but also for the degree of wealth of the grave goods. We must remember that the social position of individuals is inherited (Molina 1983) and therefore depends on the nuclear family to which each individual belongs. Social identity, both horizontal (social class) and transverse (gender and age), is acquired, in a strict sense, in the framework of the nuclear family. The urban structure of Cerro de la Encina reflects this principle, with families, in which all the members share a social position and specific access to manufactured goods, occupy a distinct urban space.

This idea contrasts with a recent proposal according to which Argaric kinship relations are understood in a broad sense (Castro *et al.* 1993–94; Lull 2000). More specifically, the dating of double tombs and the patterns of residential mobility have led to the suggestion of a social organization model based on matrilocal. The greater mobility of men, along with the tendency towards the burial of women prior to the burial of men and also the temporal distance between the two burials, are the arguments used in favour of a social organization in which maternal

relationships are dominant, as opposed to the traditional idea of a nuclear family (Castro *et al.* 1993–94; Lull 2000). At this point it must be mentioned that this interpretation was based on a sample that is not very representative; only five double burials had been dated and the focus was restricted to the Argaric nuclear area, without taking into account other regions.

In the case of Cerro de la Encina, although we do not have absolute dating of the tombs, we do have evidence of at least one case of what was very probably a simultaneous burial of two individuals. We are referring to Tomb 21 described above. The evidence leading us to make this statement includes, first of all, the large size of the tomb, which denotes advance planning for a space large enough to receive more than one body. Secondly, the presence of two adult individuals whose bodies remain perfectly articulated anatomically. This is a rare occurrence, as indicated above, since usually when more than one individual are found, only the last to be buried is articulated. Thirdly, the grave goods recovered can be ascribed to one individual or the other, as they are situated either directly in contact with the bones, as in the case of bracelets, rings, earrings, a copper knife and an archer bracelet, or they are located at the ends of the rectangular-shaped pit holding the bodies and are therefore in direct association with one or other of the two individuals. This fact also contrasts with the norm, according to which both the bones and the grave goods of the pre-existing burials are moved from their original position and placed in a corner of the tomb when another individual is about to be buried. This is the case, for example, with Tomb 18, which consists of a triple burial in a *covacha* (artificial cave cut into the rock). Only the last body to be buried remains articulated, the other two having been put in a corner and mixed with their grave goods.

Furthermore, in Tomb 21, even if a certain period of time did separate the two burials, the first individual to be buried was an adult male since the second body, a young woman, is partially superimposed over the first one, indicating that she was placed in the tomb after the male. This is contrary to the assumption of female burial prior to male in the double tombs (Castro *et al.* 1993–94; Lull 2000). Nonetheless, all this evidence is not to be taken as definitive; it simply suggests that there is room for debate. As new lines of research, such as those undertaken in Cerro de la Encina, progress we must ask whether, as we suggest below, some of the differences appearing in the Argaric Culture respond to markedly regional forms of social organization.

As indicated above, the differential consumption of manufactured goods, which can easily be verified by analysing grave goods, represents one of the basic criteria used in describing Argaric societies as class-based, and this has led to Argaric society being characterized as a state society (Lull and Risch 1996; Lull 2000; Arteaga 2000). Although we share this definition, in that we do indeed believe that Argaric society was based on a system of exploitation and coercion of certain social sectors by others, we also think that there is significant diversity in the material and social expressions of each region or territory. In the case of Cerro de la Encina the supposed uniformity imposed by Argaric power on the entire cultural area, as suggested by Lull and Risch (1996), is questioned by the appearance of specific social expressions, such as the importance of tombs with two or more inhumations, especially when they represent 68 per cent of the total, in contrast to other Argaric necropolis where individual burials are in the overwhelming majority.

Moreover, in Cerro de la Encina there is documentation of specific formal expressions that affect materials with a high symbolic or ideological content. We are referring to the appearance of large pottery vessels called *copas* (chalice-shaped in form) with a square base that represent a distinctive element within the normalization and standardization of ritual pottery

production (Aranda 2004). Also worth highlighting as a characteristic specific to this Argaric settlement, not documented in any other, is the process of economic specialization in the raising of horses. In the late phases of the Argaric sequence, horses represent more than 50 per cent of the identified remains of domestic species (Driesch 1974; Lauk 1976; Friesch 1987). These social and economic characteristics, although found within a context of broad uniformity that defines these populations as Argaric, would suggest the existence of political units of a regional nature controlled by power centres such as Cerro de la Encina, El Cerro de la Virgen or El Argar itself.

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