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BEYOND STONEHENGE

ESSAYS ON THE BRONZE AGE IN HONOUR OF COLIN BURGESS

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10. The Early Iron Age Transition in the Goldwork of the West of the Iberian Peninsula

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ABSTRACT

A group of four assemblages of jewellery from Portugal are presented in this paper and a date in the 9th and 8th centuries BC is proposed for them. The technical and artistic characteristics of these pieces as products of a transitional period between the Atlantic Late Bronze Age and the 'Orientalizing' Iron Age are discussed.

Keywords
Bronze Age, Early Iron Age, Transitions, Gold, Iberia

INTRODUCTION

Iberia in Antiquity was thought to be a land whose rivers ran with gold. Late Bronze Age goldwork lends weight to this idea, for some of this jewellery is among the most outstanding pieces known in Europe, sometimes attaining a weight of over 1000g in an individual piece.

The importance of the workshops involved in the Iberian school is attested by the duration of this tradition: Iberian Iron Age jewellery is also remarkable and current research tends to view a substantial proportion of it as a product of local craftsmen, rather than being a Mediterranean or 'Oriental' import.

The purpose of this paper is to present, as a coherent group, a number of pieces and an assemblage that, although already published and the subject of repeated analyses (most recently Armbruster, with all the previous bibliography), have never, to our knowledge, been put together into a single perspective. This perspective will emphasize the important historical undercurrents that brought them together, rather than stress the particularities of individual pieces.

This theme is a matter dear to Colin Burgess; I hope the paper satisfies his demanding standards. I'm sure he would extensively correct my English (and for good reason) but, tough luck; on this occasion he'll have to live with it.

THE BRACELETS FROM AN UNKNOWN LOCATION IN NORTHERN PORTUGAL (**Fig. 10.1**)

The bracelets held at the National Museum 'Soares dos Reis' in Oporto (Alarcão *et al.* 1996, 300; Silva 1986), are unfortunately of unknown provenance and context, yet make an imposing group. Each of the pair measures approximately 7.0cm by 7.5cm, providing a striking decorative effect.

The appearance of these pieces, which are solid apart from their clasps, is obtained by alternating round plain grooves with flat plaques decorated with rows of small spikes, rather resembling the products of the Villena-Estremoz tradition (Armbruster 1993), but at a rather reduced level of technical accomplishment, demonstrated particularly by the small size of the spikes. The terminal grooves, which are not round but flat, are decorated with hatched triangles of a design found on a number of Late Bronze Age pieces sometimes described as the 'Sagrajas-Berzocaña' group or tradition (Almagro 1974). The clasp device of each bracelet is a separate segment mounted with spikes that closes the piece by means of engaging with sockets on the main body of the bracelet. This method of closure is typical of many pieces in this tradition.

The original appearance of this pair of bracelets is

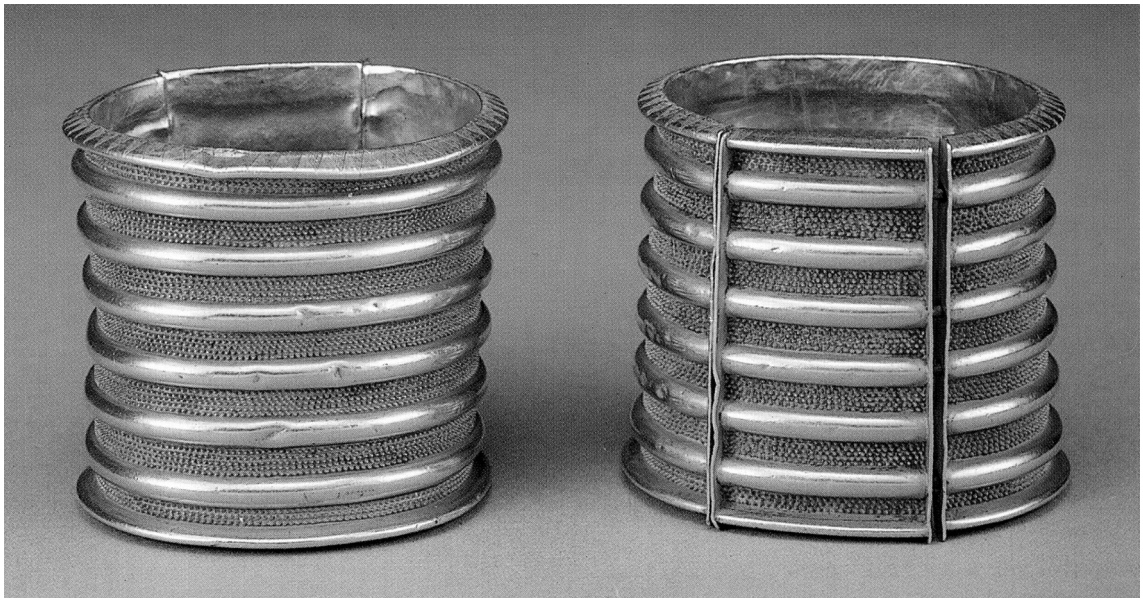

Fig. 10.1 The bracelets from Northern Portugal (©IPM)

very important. Although the large multi-grooved bracelet is a concept known elsewhere (*e.g.* Parreira *et al.* 1993, 128–9), the alternating matte and shiny surfaces reveal, in our opinion, a distinct artistic concept, found in other pieces to be mentioned later in this paper, but unknown in other parts of Iberia.

THE CANTONHA BRACELET (**Fig. 10.2**)

This is the only bracelet that survived from the chance discovery of a gold hoard at Cantonha (Guimarães, Northern Portugal) (**Fig. 10.5, 1**) and is a remarkable piece. It is highly complex in its construction, although of rather small dimensions, measuring 3.5cm by 7.0cm and weighing 231g (Parreira *et al.* 1993, 140–3; Armbruster 1995c). Its main, more conspicuous features are two elements with circular cross-sections decorated with hatched lozenges, which if taken in isolation would be fine examples of open bracelets of the Sagrajas-Berzocaña tradition and important jewellery in their own right. But, in the case of the Cantonha piece, these 'two bracelets' have been joined together by an element constructed in the Villena-Estremoz style featuring the distinctive alternating bands of spikes and ridges; this joining element ends in two small rectangular blocks mounted just short of the terminal buttons of the outer hoops. These blocks also hold in place the ends of the third and last decorative element of the bracelet: six twisted wires of angular cross-section located between the spike bands and the ridges of the middle element, adding remarkably to the complex decorative effect of the whole piece.

Thus to summarise, three distinct styles or techniques coexist in this one piece: the geometrical decoration on the outer elements are of the Sagrajas-Berzocaña

Fig. 10.2 The Cantonha bracelet, front and rear aspect (©IPM)

tradition; the Villena-Estremoz spike-and-ridge construction is represented on the central element; and the application of gold wire is a characteristic of 'Oriental' gold work.

The coexistence of these techniques had already been discovered elsewhere, for instance, in the Sintra collar, but not to the extent of technical integration present in the Cantonha bracelet. The technical quality of this piece makes it difficult to envisage a situation where its three elements were fabricated independently, then at some later date re-worked into a single bracelet. Rather it seems likely that this piece is the work of a goldsmith manipulating the designs of these various traditions to produce a single predetermined, but composite effect.

THE TORRE VÃ BRACELETS (**Fig. 10.3**)

The pair of bracelets from Torre Vã (Ourique, Southern Portugal) (**Fig. 10.5, 11**) are very elegant pieces with a singular D-shaped form and section (Parreira *et al.* 1993, 144–7). The effect of the half-spheres that decorate almost all of their external surfaces is outstanding and a unique artistic achievement.

On a technical level these pieces are of interest. The terminals of these bracelets are typical of a group of bracelets associated with the Sagrajas-Berzocaña group and are also seen on the Sintra collar (Hawkes 1971, Armbruster 1995b). The ends of the terminals are also decorated with a row of small stamped circles around the outer rim; similar stamped decoration is also seen on the Moura treasure (see below).

Fig. 10.3 The Torre Vã bracelets (©IPM)

The most conspicuous feature of these bracelets is the hemi-spherical decoration covering much of their external surfaces; such motifs are uncommon on Iberian goldwork. Apart from these pieces, similar decoration is seen in the treasure from Carambolo (Seville, Andalucia [Kukahn *et al.* 1959]), in some earrings from the hoard of Serradilla (Cáceres, Spanish Extremadura [Almagro 1977, 221–9]) and in the pieces, most probably belt decorations, from the hoard at Baião (Porto, Northern Portugal [Alarcão *et al.* 1996, 235–7; Silva 1986, 242 ff.]). All of these examples are of Early Iron Age in origin, and are viewed as 'Oriental' assemblages of goldwork.

With such parallels, the final decorative feature of the Torre Vã bracelets is not surprising. A small segment of the bracelets between the hemi-spherical decorations and the terminals is decorated by granulation in a triangle and lozenge pattern. This is quite typical of the 'Oriental' technique from all around the Mediterranean. This design element must be a significant chronological indicator.

THE MOURA TREASURE (**Fig. 10.4**)

The important hoard from Moura (**Fig. 10.5, 13**) comprises three collars and a pair of bracelets (Heleno 1935; Correia 1993a; Parreira *et al.* 1993, 74–7). The collars are all different, each is a remarkable artefact in its own right.

The hollow collar

The hollow collar from Moura is a piece that appears, on first examination, to be of the Sagrajas-Berzocña tradition. There is, however one remarkable difference that sets it apart from that group: it has a hollow construction. As a result it was produced using a significantly smaller amount of metal (and by a radically different technique) and weighs just 171g. This is barely a third of the weight of smaller pieces such as those of the Baiões hoard which weigh 583g (Parreira *et al.* 1993, 64–9).

Its decoration is composed of concentric triangles, alternately hatched and plain, covering approximately two thirds of the piece. This decoration terminates in panels with opposed hatched triangles, placed longitudinally to the body of the collar. Its separate closing segment is mounted with a single spike at either end, which insert into sockets on the main body of the collar and is similarly decorated.

The laminated collar

The second Moura collar was crafted from a single sheet of gold, shaped into a truncated cone and ending in hooks, on which the clasp, pierced by two holes, secures

Fig. 10.4 The Moura treasure (©IPM)

the collar. The decoration is composed of opposing hatched lozenges between panels decorated with stamped concentric circles similar to those seen on the outer rim of the terminals of the Torre Vã bracelets. A row of small stamped circles decorates the edge of the piece and draws an apparently anthropomorphic figure on the clasp. The overall decoration of the collar and clasp appear different but the stamp used for the small circles appears to have been the same for both pieces.

Parallels for this collar have been drawn with Irish *lunulae* and with later pieces from Central Portugal, but it must be stressed that there is no exact match for the design of the Moura piece. However, individual elements of the Moura collar do have parallels. The clasp is similar to the one from Sintra and the lozenge decoration is seen in the Sagrajas-Berzocaña group. In addition, the stamped circle motif is common in later goldwork.

The Halskragen

The most impressive piece from the Moura assemblage is the triple *Halskragen*, comprising three circular bands – all hollow – joined by two plaques decorated with filigree producing an almost corrugated effect. The main elements of this piece have similarities with the single collar from the hoard and the clasp of the collar is similar to that of the single hollow example. It is possible to state with some certainty that they were the product of the same 'hand'.

The filigree decoration was created by placing W-shaped pieces of gold wire side by side. Other wires were then mounted along the solder fixing the plaques to the circular bands. This type of meandering filigree appears on other pieces of gold work in the West of the Iberian Peninsula, such as the leach-shaped earring from Santana de Cambas (Beja, Southern Portugal [in the MNAE collection]). The use of gold wire is also characteristic of the workshop (of unknown location) that produced earrings found at Monte Molião (Lagos, Algarve [*idem*]) and Utrera (Seville, Andalucia).

The bracelets

Each of the two bracelets from Moura is constructed from ten bands of circular cross-section (each thinner bracelets in their own right) that were soldered together with remarkable precision to form a single piece. Technically they are a different way of producing the effect of a spiral bracelet when tightly wrapped around the arm. Their design is reminiscent of the more simple ridged bracelets from Villena (also known in Southern Portugal [Parreira *et al.* 1993, 130–3]).

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PIECES

The pieces presented here demonstrate the existence of a workshop, or a group of workshops, in the West of the Iberian Peninsula that had the ability to produce remarkable pieces of goldwork using a range of techniques and a large number of artistic concepts. These concepts remained separate at first, but eventually were combined into a distinctive regional tradition, absolutely original in its appearance.

It might be suggested that this combination of techniques is more likely to have evolved from a single workshop rather than a group of them, but this is purely conjecture. In any case, the techniques and artistic elements present in these pieces must have been directly influenced by the exchange networks operating in the west of Iberia. Exposure to novelty induces change, in technology and in other aspects of social life. The relevant fact about these pieces is their combination of

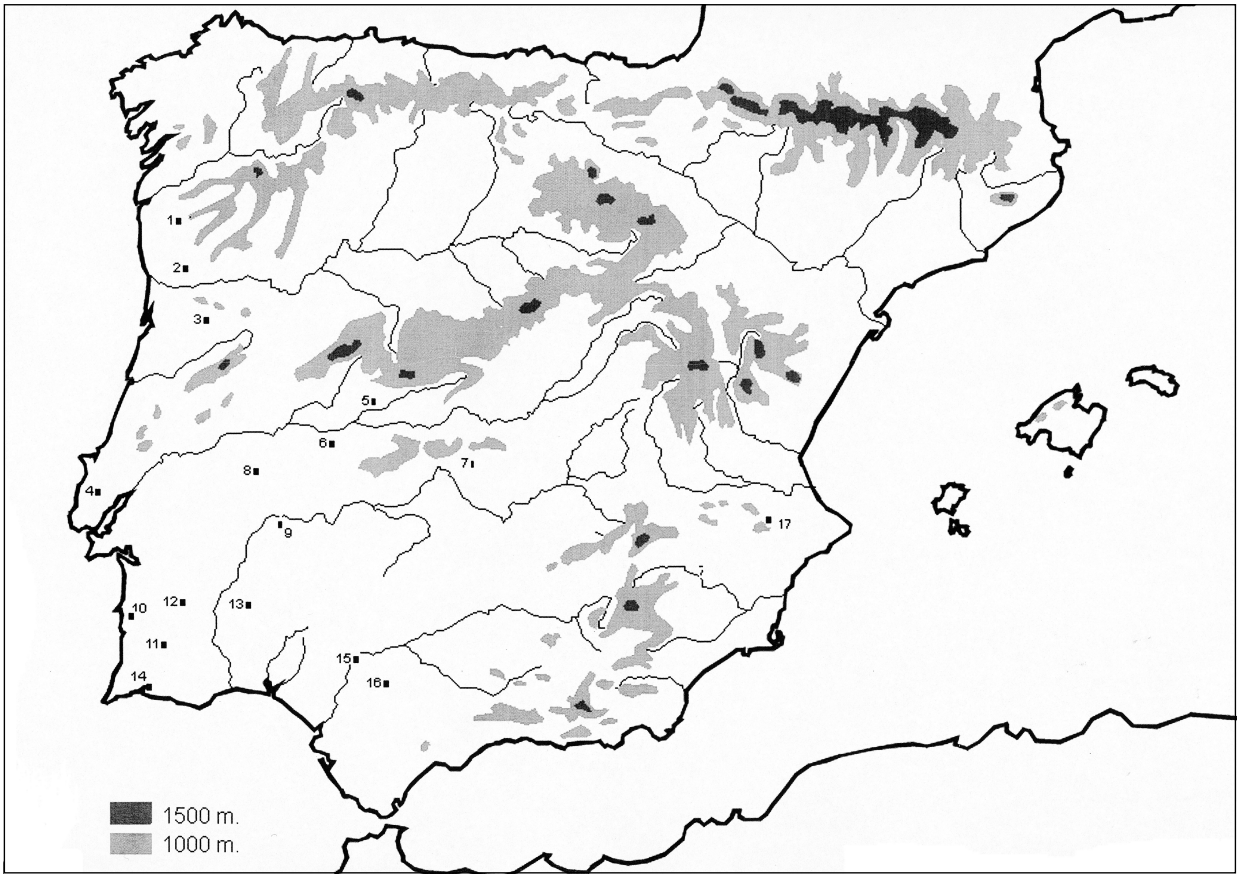

Fig. 10.5 Sites and other places mentioned in the text (location is approximate. CSIC's base map): 1 Cantonha, 2 Baião, 3 Baiões, 4 Sintra, 5 Serradilla, 6 Aliseda, 7 Berzocaña, 8 Estremoz, 9 Sagrajas, 10 Gaio, 11 Torre Vã, 12 Beja, 13 Moura, 14 Monte Molião, 15 Carambolo, 16 Utrera, 17 Villena

the multiplicity of influences derived from the contact and exchange networks which were recycled by the workshops into a new and unique goldworking tradition.

As an illustration we can point out that at Baiões (Kalb 1978) bronze production was simultaneously concerned with delivering round section bracelets that imitated the gold pieces of the Sagrajas-Berzocaña group (Silva *et al.* 1984, 91), ridged ones that were produced in gold by the Villena-Estremoz group (Silva *et al.* 1984, 90) and ritual chariots copying 'Oriental' prototypes (Silva *et al.* 1984, 84–5). The exchange networks, of course, operated on more than one level. At Baiões, we also know of one gold hoard of two collars and a bracelet (Kalb 1992) which show signs of wear suggesting a long period in circulation, implying that its metal was probably destined to be recycled. Such contexts are remarkably difficult to interpret but it is tempting to think that the eclipse of the use of gold pieces was contemporary with the destruction of the bronze smiths workshops. If that was the case, Baiões and the assemblage from Berzocaña (Almagro 1974; id. 1977, 22–24) could be shown to be part of a similar process which saw the end of the use of massive gold pieces in contexts where there is evidence of contact with the East (in the case of Berzocaña, the 'Oriental' *patera*). At Villena itself, the use of iron with gold in composite objects (echoed at Baiões in at least one bronze/iron object), is probably part of the same scenario influenced by a major change in traditional goldworking stimulated by intense contact and information exchange (Soler 1965).

THE CHRONOLOGY

It is difficult to find well dated contexts relevant to the discussion of the chronology of this group of pieces. The Berzocaña assemblage can, on the basis of a bronze bowl it included, be dated to the 14th–13th centuries BC (Schauer 1983), although the duration of its use remains a problem. Contact with the East at these dates, though, is no longer a point of polemic (Burgess 1991).

For Baiões, close dating is even more elusive. Traditionally, the archaeological horizon to which it belongs is dated to the 10th–9th centuries BC (Correia 1993b), but recent research would push that chronology

further, and highlight the early use of iron in Central Portugal (Senna-Martinez *et al*. 2000).

The transition of the second to the first millenium BC is also the date generally given for the Villena-Estremoz group (Armbruster 1995a). Around the 10th century BC the Sagrajas-Berzocaña and Villena-Estremoz traditions coexisted, with different techniques and artistic repertoires. This does not mean, however, that individual workshops were restricted to using only one goldworking tradition to craft their pieces but a flexible approach allowed them to satisfy a *clientelle* with eclectic tastes, as in the case of Baiões (at least for bronze bracelets). This appears to be a better explanation for examples such as the Cantonha bracelet or the clasp in the Sintra collar, rather than the reuse of fragments of different provenance, as has previously been suggested. This date range around the 10th century BC should constitute the upper limit for dating the group of pieces presented here.

If this assumption is correct then a situation may have arisen which stimulated individual workshops to experiment and produce firstly, the composite objects and secondly, radically new products. This is a very narrowly drawn evolutionary argument, but it would help to explain the composite nature of these pieces.

We could then point out, on the other hand, that jewellery of 'Oriental' type (some of it properly 'Oriental', some of Southwestern production) is widespread throughout the West around the 7th century BC (Correia 2005). This, then, perhaps constitutes the lower limit for the date range for this tradition. Workshops had by then certainly adapted to new fashions or ceased to produce goldwork.

CONCLUSION

The pieces brought together in this paper have had a troubled history in Portuguese archaeological literature. The mere fact that allegedly Iron Age pieces are published in a catalogue covering the Chalcolithic to the Bronze Age is a good indicator of the generalities of the issue (*pace* R. Parreira and B. Armbruster).

The jewellery attributed to the 9th and 8th centuries BC in the western part of the Iberian Peninsula is, indeed, a group of pieces contradictory in its essential characteristics. Bronze Age techniques are used for the essential parts of the objects, but the decoration is artistically and technically that of Iron Age origin, as should be expected. In other cases the technique itself evolves, but the desired appearance of the objects is still a traditional one.

Technological advances are faster than the evolution of the basic economic realities that lay behind the production and use of these *regalia*. It is likely that massive gold pieces would still be required by the elites who controlled the circulation of precious metal – at just the time when technology allowed gold smiths to dispense with the need for vast amounts of metal for the production of large items.

When the need for large amounts of precious metal disappears, or when the level of production no longer exists, technical and artistic evolution becomes more than a mere refinement, it is a necessity. This then affects the development of the tradition as a whole, undoubtedly in association with fundamental changes in the social hierarchy of leadership. We can only guess at how the filigree decoration and the fabric used for garments would have looked together, the golden belts, etc., of 'Oriental' type in the funerary deposits like Aliseda (Almagro 1977, 204–20) or Gaio (Costa 1966, id. 1973), contrasting starkly with the comparatively simpler (but ironically much more valuable) assemblages of collars and bracelets of so many Late Bronze Age hoards.

Other evolutionary processes might also be suspected. A shift from ritual deposition to funerary deposit is one; a growth in the relative importance of feminine jewellery is another. The whole context of wealth circulation was probably in flux, and that would account for much of the driving force for social change that inescapably followed.

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