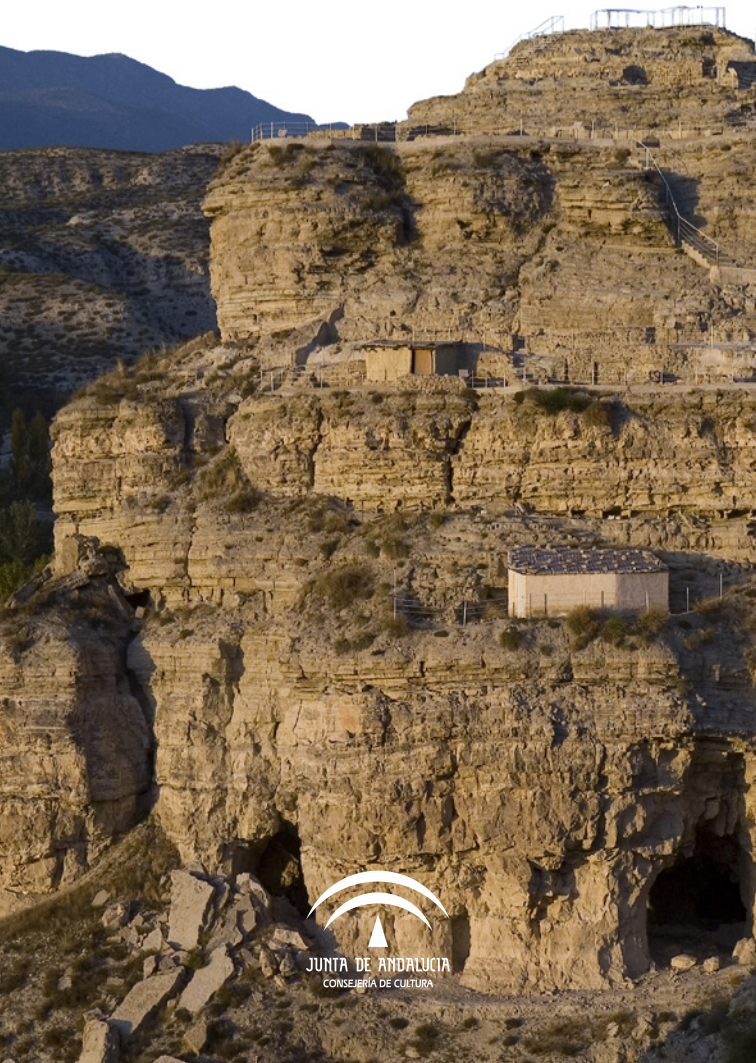
enclave arqueológico

CASTELLÓN ALTO



JUNTA DE ANDALUCIA
CONSEJERÍA DE CULTURA

General view of the site

The Castellón Alto archaeological site is part of the Argaric Culture, from the latter part of the Middle Bronze Age. Its chronology dates between 1900 and 1600 cal B.C. It is a medium sized agricultural village.

THE LANDSCAPE AND SURROUNDINGS

The village of Castellón Alto is part of a territory control system, along with others following the same pattern of settlement. They are located dominating the valley and on the left bank of the rivers to protect them from the wind and benefit from the south-facing areas. There is a settlement which acts as a centre (Cerro de la Virgen) and upon which the others depend. In order to ensure the regular exploitation of resources and create an effective defensive system, they were established at similar distances from each other. Castellón Alto is located on an elevated promontory above the valley of the Galera River, with visual control of the area. Its tiered and fortified aspect is strengthened by the construction of rows of walls, which integrate it with the landscape and provide a very effective defensive system.

The landscape that we can now see from Castellón Alto has not changed significantly, although there are some different elements, as the river would have flowed faster and higher than today. The vegetation in the high areas would have been leafier, with scattered pine trees and a greater concentration of riverbank vegetation.

Front: view of the three natural terraces of the hillock

The cultivated areas would have bordered the floodplains of the river, although they would not have been fully cultivated or parcelled as they are currently.

SPACE AND HABITAT ORGANISATION

Castellón Alto is organised in two areas: a hill in the form of a spur which extends over the valley and an adjoining slope. The spatial layout of the homes is the result of social differentiation, although in other cases it was organised by family relationships.

At the top we find three natural terraces: the upper terrace, where the acropolis is found, and the middle and lower terraces, which have a more regular organisation. On the adjoining slope, the huts are set out over four artificial terraces. The streets are narrow and in some cases paved, serving to organise and separate the homes.

The existence of a water tank in the acropolis area indicates to us that control of the water was exercised by the higher level families who lived here. The larger size of the homes of this area and the wealth of the grave goods in this area also confirm this.

To construct their houses, the inhabitants of Castellón Alto erected a wall made up of branches covered with mud on a stonework plinth. The structure was strengthened by pine beams. The roofing was made up of a lattice of branches upon which a layer of mud was placed to waterproof it. The interior of the homes was set out for carrying out different domestic activities

View of the top with the three natural terraces

Domestic areas of the middle terrace

AGRICULTURE, LIVESTOCK AND HUNTING

The inhabitants of Castellón Alto chose this place for controlling the territory and taking advantage of the resources that the valley offered them for carrying out agricultural and livestock activities.

The environment which surrounds us has changed a lot in the last 40 years, as the climate is currently dryer. Studies carried out in Castellón Alto show us a Mediterranean forest landscape in which the first signs of degradation due to human influence are observed.

Interior of a reconstructed house

Agricultural activities were carried out such as cereal and legume cultivation, as well as for linen to make fabrics. Near the village, livestock farming was carried out, mainly of goats and sheep. Additionally, the forest was used for food, fuel, construction materials, medicinal herbs and as a place for hunting, especially of deer, boar and rabbits. Fishing was also carried out in the river. Animals were bred and kept in sheds within the village. There were horses and bovines used for carrying great weights. These animals were sacrificed when they reached

adulthood in order to use their meat. Dogs were in charge of guarding livestock.

CERAMICS, WOOD, ESPARTO, BONE…

The ceramics found in Castellón Alto are those found in most Argaric sites. Carinated drinking vessels are the most typical forms. They were not decorated, although there was great care taken in their surfaces.

They used stone gathered near the village to construct their homes and manufacture numerous articles.

Fabric was made on vertical looms, and for this activity linen and wool was used.

Esparto grass was used to make sandals, baskets, ropes and mats. Even the bones of animals were used to make needles, awls and buttons.

The conditions of the land have allowed this site to preserve the remains of organic materials quite well, and thus the remains of fabrics, baskets and wooden articles have been perfectly documented.

The existence of an elite class led to a need for valuable materials which were obtained through exchanges and trade. Grave goods with bracelets and other objects made from copper and silver have been found, which came from other places, as in Castellón Alto there are no signs of metalwork.

Virtual reconstruction of the Acropolis

THE FUNERAL WORLD

In Castellón Alto tombs are located within the homes, following three typologies: in mud pots (children); in graves directly in the ground; and finally, in open recesses in the rock next to the rear wall of the houses. After placing the deceased, all were sealed with stone slabs or wooden planks.

The ritual consisted of placing the bodies in the foetal position and wrapping them with a shroud so that they would maintain this posture. Along with the body, their bone, stone and metal weapons and tools were placed. Finally, they would receive offerings of food in ceramic recipients. They were buried individually, as a couple or in family burials, a sign of the importance of kinships.

Palaeoanthropology, a science which studies the remains of human bones, provides a lot of information in Castellón Alto. The average life expectancy at birth was 23 years, as there was a high rate of infant mortality. Men suffered trauma to their shoulders and spine from carrying out hard activities such as transporting weights. Women were more affected in the elbows and the lumbar region due to cereal milling work. The remains found also provide information on the differences in diet between individuals from the same settlement.

Tombs 18 and 19 of the slope

TOMB 121 – AN EXCEPTIONAL FIND

During the 2002 excavation, in November, on the Lower Terrace of the Argaric site of Castellón Alto, there appeared a tomb with partially mummified human remains. This was tomb 121, excavated on the slope of the terrace.

Remains of tomb 121

It was a recessed tomb, the type normally used in the site, the closure made with bracketed panels of black pine upon which there was a layer of mud and a stone wall. This tight closure isolated the grave for centuries, not allowing the filtration of earth or water, which, along with the environmental dryness, allowed mummification by dehydration.

The human remains belong to an adult male between 27 and 29 years of age, and a child. The adult is 1.60 metres tall, of medium build. The remains of body tissues and locks of long, dark hair remain on the head, combed into two lateral braids and a central pony tail. The remains of the beard and body hair are also preserved, still attached to pieces of skin. Several fragments of the linen and wool fabric have been recovered, as well as impressions of linen on some bones such as the phalanxes of the hands.

The child, 4 years old, died earlier and was taken from his original grave to be buried with the adult, and therefore his bones are in disorder, placed at the rear right of the tomb. He was partially mummified when extracted from his first tomb, and remains of soft tissues and short, dark hair, combed forward forming a fringe at the front, are preserved. Fragments of a linen fabric and remains of a possible woven wool hat covered with leather have also been found.

The grave goods are made up of four ceramic pots, among them a cup, copper bracelets, silver rings, a copper dagger with remains of leather of the sheath, and a copper axe with the full holm oak wooden handle, which still retains the remains of the fibres of the handle. This axe, by the way it is inserted in the handle, would have been used as an adze (for woodwork). The child had a bronze bracelet on each forearm and three necklace beads. Along with his bones, the remains of a very young sheep appeared.

RECA
RED DE ESPACIOS CULTURALES DE ANDALUCÍA

ADDRESS AND CONTACT

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OPENING HOURS

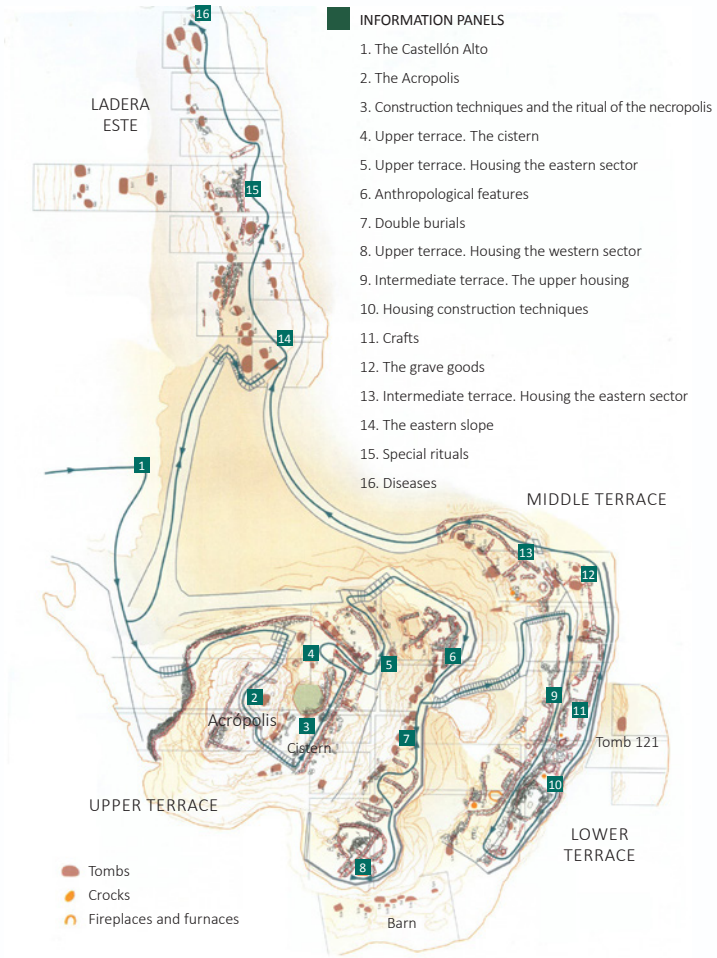
Closed on Mondays and Tuesdays except for arranged group visits

1st of October to 30th of April:
Morning: 11:00 to 13:00 / Afternoon: 16:00 to 18:00.

1st of May to 30th of September:
Morning: 10:00 to 12:00 / Afternoon: 19:00 to 21:00

Guided visits: all visits to the site are guided

Closed: January 1, prior to Ash Wednesday, the first Sunday of August and 25 December.
Other holidays, consult by phone or e-mail

PRICES

Normal entry, 2 € / Reduced entry, 1 € (Groups and under 10 years of age)