

(PANEL 1) THE BRONZE AGE AND THE ALCOI MUSEUM

The Museu Arqueològic Municipal Camilo Visedo d'Alcoi was inaugurated in 1945, 80 years ago. Its collection contains numerous prehistoric remains, including various objects from the Bronze Age peasantry that inhabited the valleys of Alcoi between 2200 and 1200 BC. The excavations carried out in 1925 at the settlements of Mas de Menente and Mola Alta de Serelles not only made it possible to recognise how they lived, but also served as a basis for the subsequent characterisation of the oldest Valencian culture: the Valencian Bronze Age.

This small exhibition allows visitors to discover the way of life of those populations and to immerse themselves in the archaeological research carried out over the last 100 years, which has placed Alcoi at the forefront of Valencian archaeology.

(PANEL 2) FROM 1925 TO 2025: 100 YEARS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDIES

Forty years after the excavation of the Gruta de Les Llometes cave, the sites of Mas de Menente and Mola Alta de Serelles, located in the foothills of the Serra de Mariola, were discovered. On 6th February 1925, Fernando Ponsell Cortés, an industrialist based in Alcoi, began the excavation of the Mas de Menente, and on 25th August, Ernesto Botella Candela, an industrial engineer, excavated the Mola Alta de Serelles. The scientific reports published in subsequent years (1926 and 1928) placed Alcoi at the forefront of the study of Bronze Age communities.

Its outstanding importance was the reason why the collections of objects were bought to create the Museu de Prehistòria de València in 1927 and, later, to consider Miquel Tarradell Mateu, professor of Archaeology at the University of Valencia, to excavate, together with the director of the Museu d'Alcoi, Vicente Pascual, at the Mas de Miró and define the Valencian Bronze Age culture.

(PANEL 3) A MOSAIC OF PEASANT CULTURES

4,200 years ago, at the beginning of the Bronze Age, important political transformations took place in the organisation of the peasant communities that inhabited a large part of the Iberian Peninsula. The consequence was the emergence of new cultural groups. In contrast to the El Argar culture in the southeast, the so-called Valencian Bronze Age culture developed in a large part of the Valencian lands. The characteristics of the Mas de Menente and Mola Alta de Serelles sites were the basis for proposing the existence of this cultural area.

Nearly 40 open-air settlements from the Bronze Age have been recorded in the valleys of Alcoi. Due to their small size and short temporal duration they could be considered as farmsteads, with the exception of Mas del Corral, located in the Vall de Polop and Penya del Sapo, located in La Canal, whose duration would exceed 800 years, functioning as main villages.

(PANEL 4) WAY OF LIFE AND PEASANTRY

The Bronze Age peasant communities that lived in the Alcoi valleys were organised in small family groups. Over several generations, each family resided in farmsteads or small villages near their fields. All the labour activity revolved around the cereal harvest cycle. The

cultivation, care, harvesting, threshing, conservation and grinding of the cereal grain almost daily with stone mills, together with the cultivation of small vegetable gardens and the grazing, care and feeding of herds and the production of cloth for making garments, occupied the daily activity of all the members of the family from childhood onwards. The material remains documented at Mas de Menente, Mola Alta de Serelles, Mas del Corral and Mas de Miró are clear evidence of this.

(PANEL 5) FABRICS, BASKETS AND ROPES

The Bronze Age peasant groups tried to be self-sufficient. They made their own cloth from linen or wool on vertical looms, which we have evidence of through the loom weights in all the excavated settlements. These were plain weave fabrics, very simple, of varying lengths and sewn together in sections, with which they wove tunics and trousers. They wove woollen wool into hats and, with reeds, they used to weave protection from the cold and rain. They also wove baskets, mats and even espadrilles made of esparto. The production of reed threads and esparto grass ropes also played a fundamental role in numerous tasks, especially in the construction of their houses.

(PANEL 6) EXTRAORDINARY CRAFTSMANSHIP

Some of their working tools were made of arsenic copper or bronze. Some of the ornaments they used, as well as stone, shell, bone or ivory, were also made of copper, silver or gold. None of these metals exist in the lands of Alcoi, most of them coming from distant territories in the southeast, west or northeast of the Iberian Peninsula. The copper came in the form of scrap and also ingot and was melted down to make tools such as awls, points or axes which had to be forged using hammers. Remains of smelting, stone moulds and tools have been found at several sites, which shows the interest in being self-sufficient and providing for their own needs.

(PANEL 7) BEYOND LIFE

The hygienic and living conditions of those populations were quite precarious. Anthropological studies show that life expectancy was low, below 30 years. Many children died of infections within a few years of life and very few people lived beyond the age of 45. The death of loved ones was a constant occurrence. Deceased people were given farewell, accompanied by food, by depositing their bodies in caves and crevices, just as their ancestors had done millennia before. However, from 1750 BC onwards, they began to bury their bodies individually in inhabited areas, using pits and stone cists for adults and ceramic vessels for children. Mas del Corral is the site that has provided the most information.