

The Rock Sanctuary

In the heart of Ulaca is a rock sanctuary which observed some sort of sacred activity. The amount of effort put into the creation of the rock sanctuary is meritorious and shows how much importance the people of Ulaca put in their religious practices.

Like the verracos, the sanctuary was made out of granite, which was mined in the local area of the Vettones and in Ulaca. The activities practiced here are thought to be sacrificial due to some similarities with the Panoias sacrificial altar in Portugal (Álvarez-Sanchís 2005, pp.263).

The ‘temple’ is cosmologically aligned to follow the suns rise and fall, as well as the seasonal equinoxes and solstices (Gutierrez 2015). This, as well as finds such as the horned deer of Laxe dos Carballos, shows us that Celtiberian's had an understanding of astronomy as well as a probable twelve month calendar and a time keeping method (González-Garcia 2016).



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Images

Map: https://www4.uwm.edu/celtic/ekeltoi/volumes/vol6/6_4/lorrio_zapatero_6_4.html

Ulaca Sanctuary: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Castro_de_Ulaca_10_by-dpc.jpg

Veroccas: <https://ladyofthecakes.wordpress.com/2014/05/24/the-mysterious-bulls-of-guisando/>

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The Veraccos of the Vettones in and around Ulaca



Ulaca Overview

Ulaca is the largest site of the Vettones in what is now Western Spain. The survey revealed 250 houses, indicating to a **resident** population of between 1,050 and 1,400 people (Álvarez-Sanchís 2005). Because of its size, it was obviously an important site for people who lived in the area both religiously and societally (Fernández-Götz 2017, pp.147).

The oppidum is separated into different zones: artisanal, domestic, agricultural and religious (sanctuary and ‘sauna’);



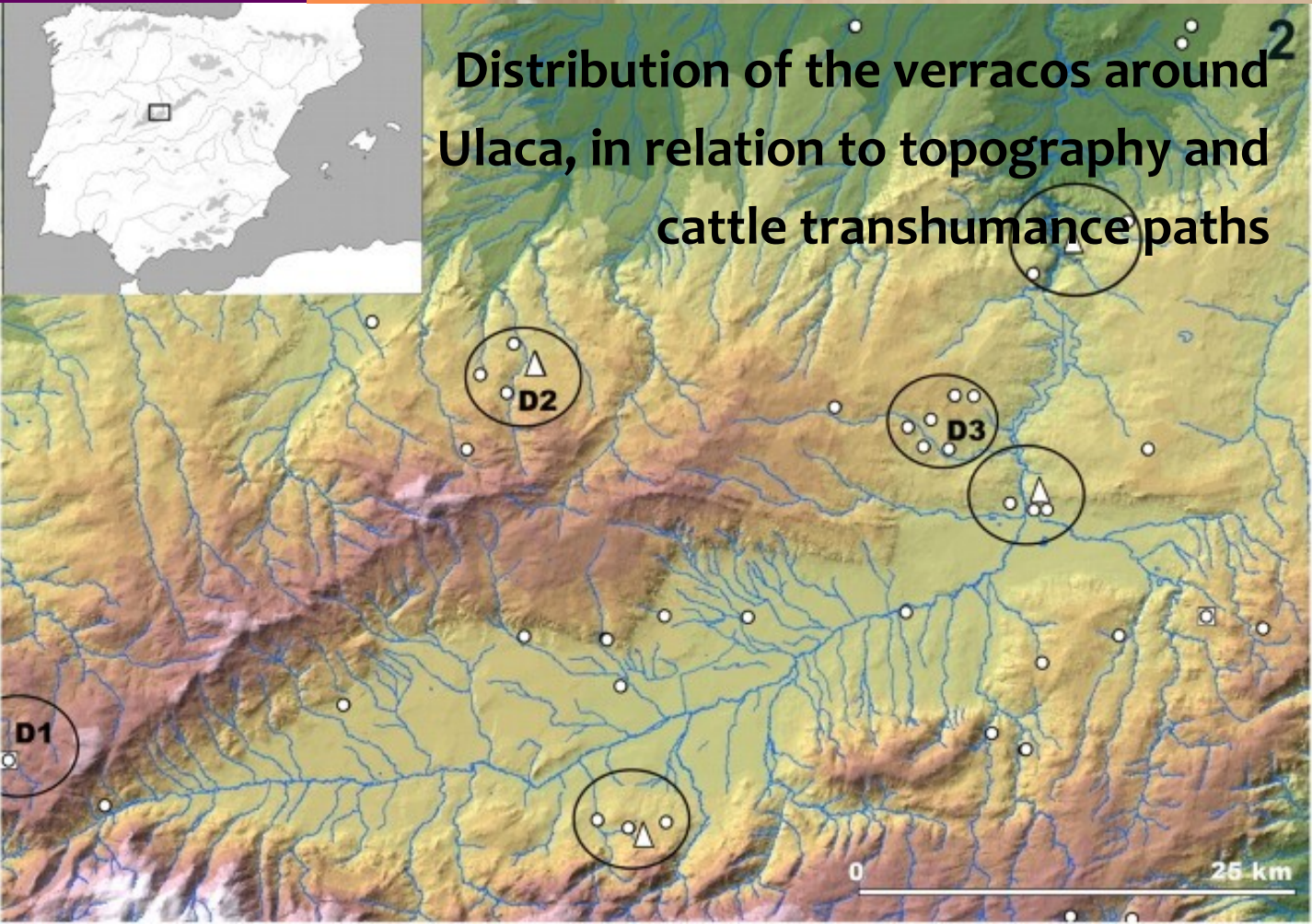
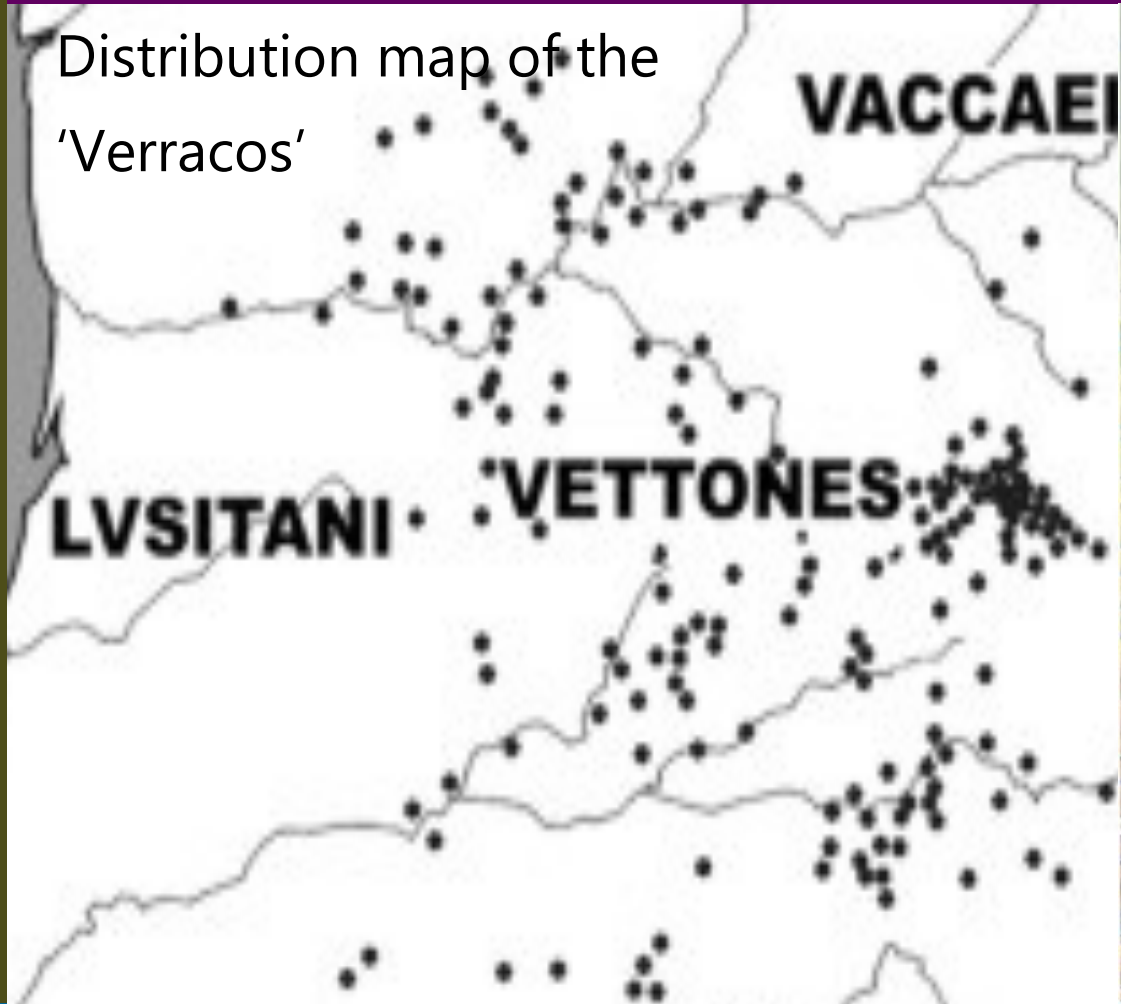
Boars in Celtic Religion(s)

The image on the right from Neuilly-en-Sullias is an example of how boars were portrayed in generic La Tene Art.

Art in Iberia tends to differ from the classical La Tene art of the period and, because of this, is sometimes disregarded by scholars (Gonzalez-Garcia 2016, pp.481).

Boars in Celtic society were an important symbol linked to sexual virility and strength (MacKillop 2004).

We know that boars were important religiously due to the fact that they were often part of carnyses, a horn used in religious practices, and their art depictions mainly revolved around war and strength (Green 1998, pp.74/87).



What are Veroccas?

In the territory of the Vettones as well as around Ulaca itself are many granite sculptures of boars and bulls, some of which are also astronomically aligned with the sunset and sunrise on equinoxes (Gutierrez 2015, pp.1181). Cattle was of particular importance in Celtic Iberia and this may have been why they were venerated in stone by the Vettones (Sánchez-Moreno 2001, pp.400).

General consensus between scholars dates the creation of the Veroccas to the fourth to first century BC (Berrocal-Rangel 2016, pp.345). These stone monuments are unique to the Iberian peninsula, and are therefore an anomaly in not only ‘Celtic’ Iberia but also in the entire ‘Celtic’ world.

What were they made for?

J. Álvarez-Sanchís (2003, pp. 342), the primary scholar source on the Veraccos, proposes that their use was ‘to establish visual points of reference in the landscape in order to indicate specific resources’ such as pastureland and the availability of water along cattle paths leading to settlements in order to trade. He believes that they may have also been placed in these areas for protective purposes over the land and animals being brought along cattle paths.

This seems to be possible but is also problematic, as many of the Veraccos are not in an area good for pasture at all, some are higher up in the more mountainous areas, which means the land was probably not ideal for grazing purposes.

What is probably more likely is that the Veroccas had a religious meaning, perhaps also protective in nature. This is more likely in part due to its alignment to major astronomical events which would have had religious significance.

They may have been used as a fertility statue in order to help ensure the cattle's procreation (Marco Simón 2005, pp.301) . This is a lot more probable due to the boar as an important symbol of sexual strength and could also explain the apparent link to cattle paths in the area.

To conclude, the importance of Ulaca in the territory of the Vettones is apparent in its size and the cosmological structure of its sanctuary. Boars in the Celtic world as a whole are of religious significance, therefore, the verracos of the Vettones were more likely used in a religious context than as a marker of recourses.