IN THIS ISSUE: Bringing order to chaos - The armies of Diocletian

Bringing order to chaos: The armies of Diocletian

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Ancient Warfare VI-5
La Batista: “the most powerful fortified city in Europe during the Bronze Age”

Bronze Age people living in the Iberian Peninsula may have learned the art of fort-building from travellers from the eastern Mediterranean, say Spanish archaeologists.

An impressive fortified structure, nowadays called La Bastida, stands in the sierras of Totona in the southeastern Murcia region. Dating to 2200 BC, the outer walls and pyramid-shaped towers of the fort represent some of the most advanced ideas in military architecture of the Bronze Age.

Archaeologists of the Universidad Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB), under the direction of Vicente Lull, professor of prehistory, have uncovered a perimeter wall, 3 metres (10 feet) thick, made of large stones and lime mortar that was once 6.7 metres (22 feet) high. Six towers have been identified along a 70 metre (230 feet) long length of the curtain wall, which extended for about 305 metres (1000 feet).

The researchers argue that the fortifications surrounding the 4 hectare (10 acre) site are typical of early Mediterranean civilisations, such as Troy II in Turkey or the urban settlements found in Israel or Jordan. They contend that the features found at the Spanish site were not part of Hittite or Mycenaean military architecture, between 400 and 800 years later.

These include a passageway with strong walls and large doors at its end that formed the gateway to the fortified enclosure. The doors were kept closed with thick wooden beams. The remains of a hidden secondary doorway or postern gate near the entrance with an intact arch is the first to be found in Europe from prehistoric times. The lime mortar, which bound the stones and aggregate together, also presented an impermeable surface making the walls hard to climb for an invader.

Previous excavations at La Bastida have revealed a pool capable of holding 454,600 litres (100,000 gallons) of water, as well as large houses and public buildings interconnected with passages and open squares. La Bastida “was probably the most powerful city in Europe during the Bronze Age,” Lull said.

Once excavations are completed, the site will be turned into an archaeological part with a museum and a research and documentation centre.

Picts lived the high life at Rhynie

Rhynie in Aberdeenshire, Scotland, was a key seat of Pictish power and may even have been a royal settlement during the fifth and sixth centuries AD, according to the latest work of Dr. Gordon Noble, senior lecturer in archaeology at the University of Aberdeen. The conclusion derives from excavations undertaken around the Craw Stane. This megalith remains in its original place on top of a ridge about 150 metres (492 feet) southwest of the Rhynie Old Kirkyard site. Digs have established that it stands at the entrance to a Pictish stronghold encompassing a number of timber buildings within it. The quality of items found – many unique to Pictland – indicate it was a high-status settlement. Finds include pottery imported from the Mediterranean, which is highly unusual and represents the first time such items have been found in all eastern Britain, and the northernmost of such finds in the world.

Fragments of glass drinking vessels from France and decorative clothing pins, including an axe-shaped pin, were found at the site in the 1970’s.

Themes and deadlines

The following are the themes for the next upcoming issues.

- VI.6 The Celts of Europe
- VII.1 Egypt under Pressure
- VII.2 Wars in Sicily
- VII.3 The early Roman republic (February 20th)
- VII.4 Logistics and the Army train (April 20th)

If you have a proposal that fits our themes, we’d be interested to hear from you to discuss the possibility of publishing an article. Send your proposal – including the angle you propose to take, ideas for illustrations and artwork and your qualifications – to editor@ancient-warfare.com. Do make sure you send them before the proposal deadlines mentioned above.