

archeological site

# LOS MILLARES



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CONSEJERÍA DE CULTURA



Aerial view of the plain of Los Millares between the Rambla de Huéchar and the River Andarax

The **archaeological site of Los Millares** is located in the township of Santa Fe de Mondújar (Almería), on a spur-shaped plateau between the gully of Rambla de Huéchar and the River Andarax, 20 km from its mouth.

Los Millares is considered one of the most important Copper Age sites in Europe, as its spatial distribution evidences an extraordinary degree of functional complexity for the period in which it was occupied (3200–2200 BC).

It consists of an urban area with four rings of concentric curtain walls, a necropolis with collective burials, and a system of 13 outlying forts on both banks of the Rambla de Huéchar that complete the impressive defensive system which controlled the settlement and the surrounding countryside.





Reconstruction based on an aerial photograph of the necropolis of Los Millares

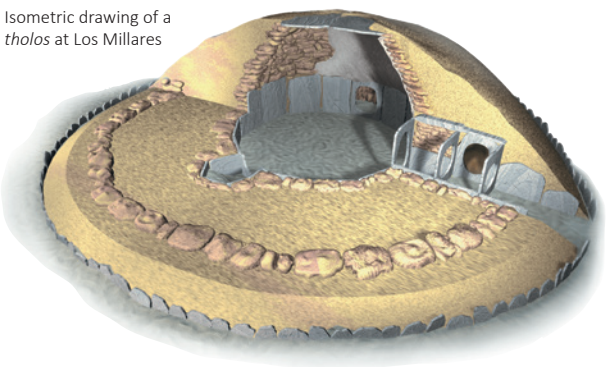
## THE NECROPOLIS [1]

The tour of the archaeological site begins by walking from west to east across the necropolis, which occupies 13 hectares on the outskirts of the settlement.

This cemetery contains approximately 80 large burials and various ceremonial structures. The graves are arranged in small clusters that reflect the family, social and symbolic ties which existed at Los Millares.

The burials are collective. Most comprise a circular chamber between 3 and 6 metres in diameter, with vertical slabs of slate lining the inner walls and occasionally decorated with red paint. Several also have side niches. In some cases the tombs were covered by bringing the uppermost rows of slate together to form a corbel dome, and in others by adding a flat wooden roof resting on a central pillar. The chamber was accessed by a corridor, which also has side niches in some graves. Slate slabs with a hole in the centre were placed at the outer entrance, the entrance to the chamber and between each section to serve as doors. Once completed, the entire grave was covered with a mound of earth and stones.

Isometric drawing of a *tholos* at Los Millares



Each tomb contains up to 100 individuals, and the niches were used to bury children. As the chambers and niches filled up, bodies were placed in different sections of the corridors as well.

The status of the interred individuals is denoted by their grave goods—in other words, the objects with which they were buried. Remarkable examples include objects made of exotic materials such as ivory and ostrich eggshells, copper tools, pottery vessels with symbolic or Bell-Beaker decoration, and flint arrowheads and daggers.



Grave goods from Tomb 40 (National Archaeological Museum)

Outside the necropolis, there are two graves that were originally located beyond the settlement but which ended up being absorbed by the town when it grew and the outermost curtain wall was added. These tombs remained in use until the settlement was abandoned.

## THE SETTLEMENT

The settlement of Los Millares has three concentric curtain walls that enclose and segment the urban area. A fourth fortification resembling a citadel is located at the tip of the spur.

It has an organised urban layout consisting of circular dwellings, a few public buildings, and structures associated with water distribution and storage. The principal economic activities of its inhabitants were farming, raising livestock and hunting, as well as more specialised trades such as metallurgy and arrowhead production.



Reconstruction of the settlement of Los Millares during the Middle Copper Age (drawing: M. Salvatierra; data: F. Molina)

## Wall I or Outer Wall [2]

This is the most recent of the curtain wall rings, erected following the settlement's expansion circa 3000 BC. It is broken at regular intervals by a number of bastions and towers, inside which archaeologists have found vestiges of domestic and specialised activities.

The wall itself consists of a 2.5-metre-high masonry base, presumably built up with earth to a total height of 4 or 4.5 metres. Today only the masonry is still standing.

This outer wall protected the first enclosure, which could be entered via two gates. The most monumental was situated in the central section. This main gate had a large barbican or gatehouse whose walls were dotted with narrow arrowslits or openings arranged at regular intervals, from which guards could survey the entire countryside and shoot arrows with short bows. Given their proximity to the ground, archers probably had to kneel when shooting.

Various small round huts were built inside this first enclosure, many of which abutted the curtain wall and were found beside smaller enclosures that may have served as storage areas, animal pens, etc.

Exterior view of the northern section of the outer wall







Virtual reconstruction of the main gate

Here we also find the two graves created prior to the construction of this enclosure, which ended up inside the town perimeter after this curtain wall was built.

### Wall II [3]

The second fortified line of defence divides the central plateau from the settlement. This wall presents a high degree of complexity, as it was in use the entire time that Los Millares was occupied. The entrance in particular is quite complex, with several phases during which a narrow gate and a corridor flanked by hollow towers were maintained. There is also a deep moat or trench running along the wall.

Beyond the trench are a series of structures that may have been dwellings, and several large huts were built abutting the wall's inner face. Hearths delimited by rings of refined and fire-hardened clay were discovered inside some of these huts.

### Wall III: The Most Singular Enclosure [4]

This wall encircles the innermost area of the central plateau, considered the most singular enclosure because of the buildings for communal use discovered here. These include structures with rectangular floor plans which have been associated with

CE 72 metallurgy workshop



metalworking activity, based on the presence of a furnace and an area with slate flooring slabs believed to have been used for extracting and smelting copper ore. There is also a large public building with a rectangular floor plan, a central courtyard and rooms abutting the south wall, which may have served as a palace-temple and storehouse.

## The Citadel [5]

This part of the site has not yet been completely excavated. It is delimited by massive curtain walls, and inside 9 phases of superimposed dwellings have been documented. This indicates a very long period of occupation, making it the oldest enclosure in the entire settlement. The citadel has a large cistern to which water was carried by a conduit that ran across the plateau of the necropolis and through the curtain walls.

## The Forts

The defensive system of Los Millares was rounded out by 13 forts located on the highest promontories on either side of the gully of Rambla de Huéchar. Their forms vary widely, from round towers with a simple floor plan and a small barbican defending the gate to much more complex structures. An example of the latter type is Fort 1 which, in addition to its strategic military function, appears to have been used for other purposes: grinding and storing grain, training young men in the art of carving arrowheads, and performing ritual or symbolic activities, as this site has yielded numerous anthropomorphic idols made of bone and stone.

Aerial view of Fort 1 in 1985



## LOCATION AND CONTACT DETAILS

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Free admission

