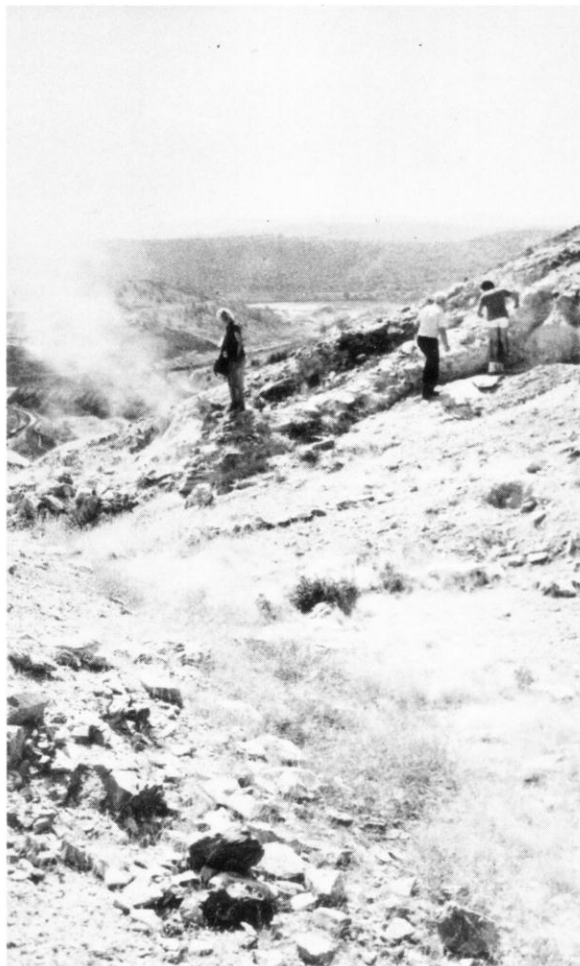




*Underneath this small heap of stones, a finely cut pit was found containing the debris of Argaric silver smelting
Right: More remains of ancient Iberian silver smelting and a workshop were discovered here at Las Arenillas*

2nd millennium BC.

Unlike the dolmen, which were communal tombs, these were individual burials in simple stone coffins, built into the ground. One, however, larger than the rest, had probably contained the bodies of a man and his wife, and alongside it was a much smaller one which may well have been for their child.

A heap of stones, disturbed and abandoned by local treasure hunters, was noticed in the vicinity of the cemetery and excavated by the IAMS team. Beneath the stones they found a small oval pit, cut into the bedrock. In its hard "fill" were many sherds identical to the Argaric ware found in the cists. There were also nodular lumps of slag, and part of a tiny clay crucible, no more than 8 cm. in diameter, with metallic encrustation. Analysis showed that this crucible had been used, not, as at first thought, for copper casting, but for silver making, and may well be the earliest cupel found to date.

Following an ancient well-paved path on the southern outskirts of Nerva, the IAMS explorers came upon a stone fence encircling a hill between Nerva and the Rio Tinto mine.

"The whole area above this fence was found to be covered by ancient ruins", says Professor Rothenberg. "It quickly became obvious that treasure seekers had indeed located many pieces of metal, but as these turned out to be 'worthless' lead or litharge, they left them alone.

"There was also much slag of different types, heavy pieces of speiss and even pieces of metallic silver. A large number of sherds indicated an Iberian-Rome date, though remains of earlier periods may yet be found.

"Among items of special interest, we found jewellery and tools, a seal, coins, a silver ingot and four large iron bars, as well as finely decorated Iberian and Roman pottery.

"The metallurgical remains and workshops visible all over the hill indicate a large-scale silver-working site, from cupellation to finished silver objects. Whilst the huge slag deposits of Rio Tinto are mainly the debris of primary smelting of silver, copper and iron, the remains on the hill near Nerva represent a technological follow-up, and their study promises new archaeometallurgical information of great importance."

Bristol conference on history of zinc and brass

The recent successful excavation of medieval zinc furnaces in India (featured in IAMS Newsletter, June 1984) lends special interest to a conference on the history of zinc and its principal alloy, brass, to be held on June 7-9 next year.

Appropriately, the venue will be Bristol where the English pioneer, William Champion, designed and built his zinc smelting furnace in 1738. The event is being organized by the University of Bristol in conjunction with the Historical Metallurgy Society and the British Museum.

Work done in Bristol over the past 20 years has gone a long way to establish the history of brass-making there and its origins on the continent. Efforts are being made to preserve the remains of the industry and its products.

As well as papers describing the progress of these endeavours, important work on Roman and medieval brass-making will be discussed.

There will also be a visit to the site of Champion's Warmley Company and the Saltford brass battery mill.

Further details can be had from Dr. Paul Craddock, Research Laboratory, British Museum, London.