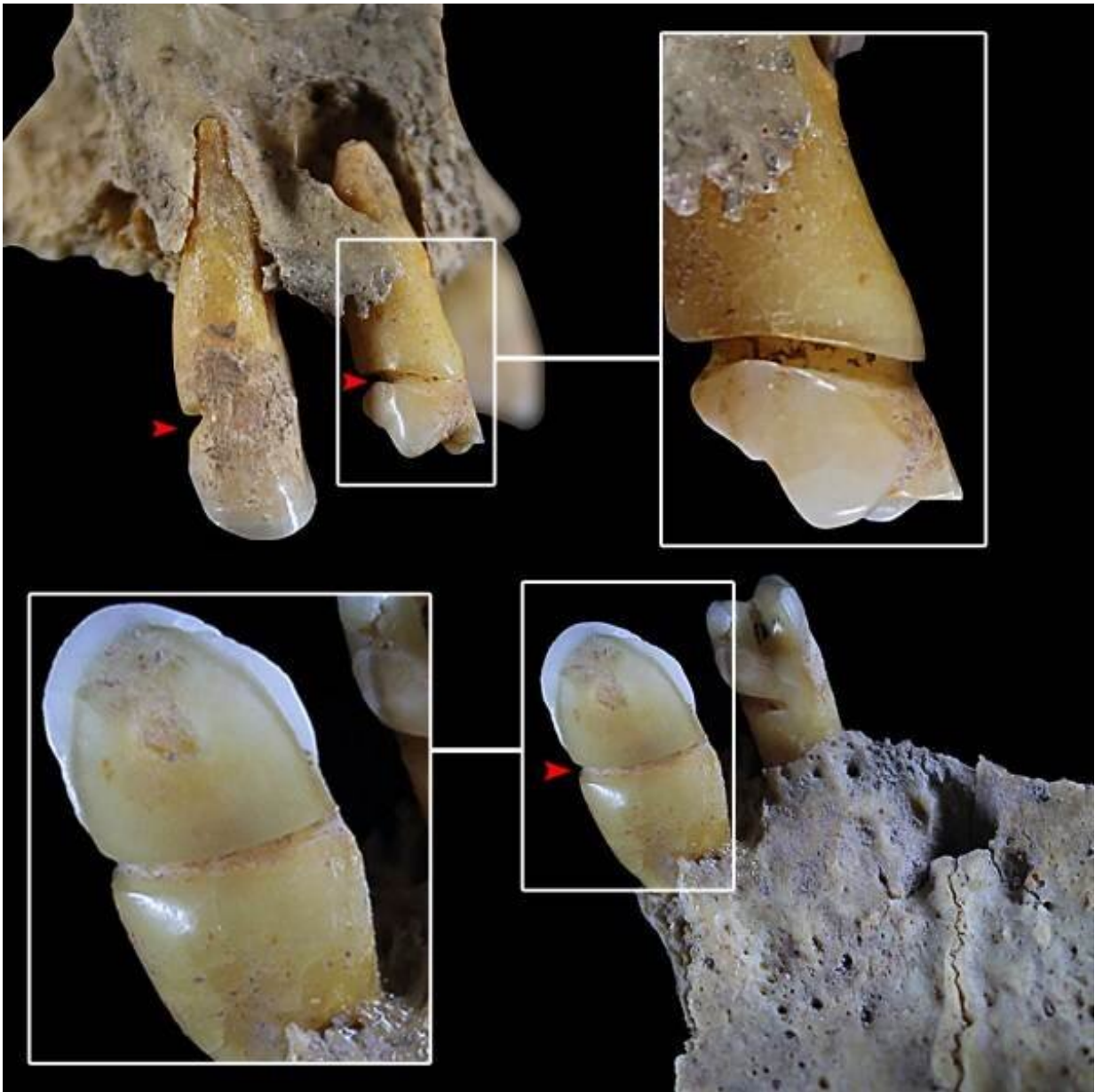


# Almost 4,000 years ago, some tasks were already specialized according to gender

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Individual 90 from Castellón Alto, showing evidence of the use of teeth for non-masticatory purposes. Credit: Ángel Rubio Salvador

A study of the dental wear of 106 individuals buried in the Castellón Alto archaeological site (Granada, Spain) found that only women used their anterior teeth as tools to make threads and cords

Between 2200 and 1550 Before Common Era (BCE), the culture of El Argar developed in the south-eastern Iberian Peninsula. It is known that this was a complex society that practiced social differentiation based on gender, age, and specialization in tasks such as craftwork—that is, working with ceramics, lithics, textiles, and metals. This understanding has now been reaffirmed by a new study published recently in *Journal of Archaeological Science*.

The study, led by Marina Lozano, researcher at the Catalan Institute of Human Paleoecology and Social Evolution (IPHES) and Rovira i Virgili University (URV), was conducted in collaboration with scientists from the Anthropology Laboratory of the University of Granada, including Ángel Rubio Salvador, one of the co-authors of the published study.

Analysis of dental wear from the remains of 106 individuals buried at the Castellón Alto [archaeological site](#) in Granada, Spain, revealed that, as early as the Bronze Age (1900–1600 BCE), women used their anterior (front) teeth to perform certain tasks associated with making threads and cords.

The signs of wear observed with different types of microscopy included notches, chipped enamel, and occlusal and interproximal grooves resulting from the manipulation of fibers of plant and animal origin. Such materials were already known to be related to textile and basketry

production, thanks to pre-existing evidence of the material culture of El Argar, but prior to this new study, it had proved possible to establish such a direct relationship that would point to the identity of these artisans.

## A dual division of labor

Thus, one of the most important findings of this study is the evidence that, as early as the end of the Bronze Age—that is, almost 4,000 years ago—there was a dual division of labor: only a small group of people were devoted to craftwork in the making of threads (the very basis of textile production), and this group comprised exclusively women using their teeth as tools.

Furthermore, given the fact that this behavior has been identified from the remains of individuals of different ages— the older the individual, the more pronounced the wear—it can be inferred that this specialization began in adolescence and that the women continued performing this task throughout their lives.

This study forms part of one of the research strands at the IPHES that aims to identify the use of teeth as tools. In this case, the research also generated data on age- and gender-based division of labor, thus providing a clearer understanding of the lifestyle and social organization of the El Argar culture.

**More information:** Marina Lozano et al. Argaric craftswomen: Sex-based division of labor in the Bronze Age southeastern Iberia, *Journal of Archaeological Science* (2020). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jas.2020.105239](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jas.2020.105239)

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