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# Julius Caesar's Battle for Gaul

New Archaeological Perspectives

*edited by*

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# Chapter 12

## Archaeology of the Roman Civil Wars: The destruction of Puig Ciutat (Catalonia, Spain) and Caesar's campaign in Ilerda (49 BC)

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### **The archaeology of Julius Caesar: from *de Bello Gallico* to *de Bello Civili***

Recent years have witnessed an important increase in archaeological research on conflict archaeology related to the late prehistoric and early historic periods (see Fernández-Götz and Roymans 2018). The archaeology of Julius Caesar's military campaigns against tribal groups in Gaul continues to provide evidence that complements and expands the discoveries made since the mid-19th century at iconic sites such as Alesia (Reddé 2018; this volume). Recent research in north-eastern Gaul is proving particularly fruitful, with the identification of new Roman military camps such as Hermeskeil near Otzenhausen (Hornung 2018; this volume), assaults on indigenous fortified sites such as Thuin in Belgium (Roymans *et al.* 2012, 20–24; Roymans and Fernández-Götz 2015), and the interpretation of Kessel/Lith in the Dutch River area as a massacre deposit and the crime scene of Caesar's genocidal policy against the Tencteri and Usipetes (Roymans 2018; this volume). In addition, the first direct evidence of Caesar's crossing of the Channel has now been uncovered (Fitzpatrick this volume).

In sharp contrast to this rich material evidence for the Caesarian conquest of new territory, material remains from the Civil Wars fought by Caesar against other Roman leaders – most notably Pompey the Great – are much scarcer (although see Maschek 2018). Here we present a case study from north-eastern Iberia: the late Republican site of Puig Ciutat, its destruction seemingly linked to Caesar's campaign of 49 BC in Ilerda (Lleida).

### **Puig Ciutat: the discovery and investigation of a late Republican site**

The site of Puig Ciutat (Oristà, Barcelona) is located in inner Catalonia, near the city of Vic, between the basins of the rivers Ter and Llobregat (Figure 12.1). Therefore, it is positioned on one of the main natural communication routes that connect the

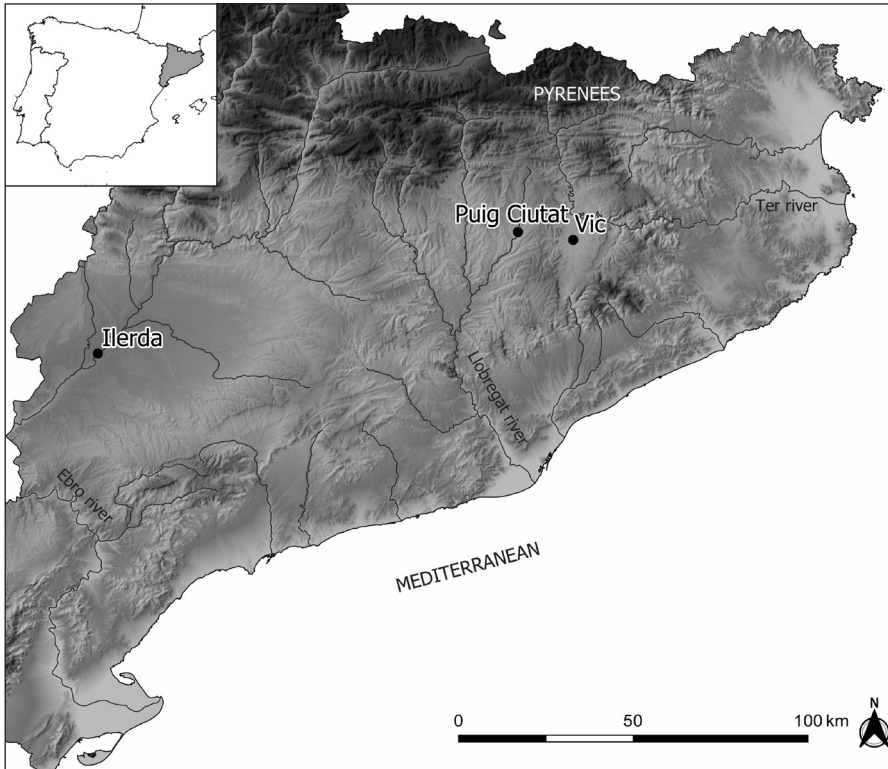


Figure 12.1 Location of Puig Ciutat and Ilerda in Catalonia (authors).

Pyrenees with the territory of Lleida and inland Spain. The site lies on a fluvial terrace that forms a plateau promontory covering approximately 5 ha. The eastern slope is less steep, which explains why it is here that the excavations have discovered an entrance and the main evidence of defensive walls. The hill is surrounded by a meander of the Gavarresa stream, just before the waters of the Olost flow into it (Figure 12.2). A twin hill where the medieval Tornamira castle is situated lies to the north-west of Puig Ciutat.

At the beginning of the 1980s, earthmoving for gravel extraction revealed a large quantity of archaeological finds and various structures. News of the discovery attracted the attention of clandestine excavators, who began systematically to loot the site. By the early 1990s, several local enthusiasts were in possession of numerous Iberian- and Roman-period finds from Puig Ciutat (Padrós *et al.* 2014, 101–102). In 2005 and 2007, a team from SOT Archaeological Prospection, under the direction of Roger Sala, carried out preliminary geophysical survey. This seminal study revealed a complex organization of the site, with a large central building (Building 1, below) and possible evidence that the settlement had been destroyed by fire.

Systematic study of Puig Ciutat began in 2010 (Padrós *et al.* 2014, 102–103; Pujol *et al.* 2014; 2016). Excavation is still ongoing, but we have a good preliminary idea of the internal organization of the site, its chronology and its eventful history (Figure 12.3).

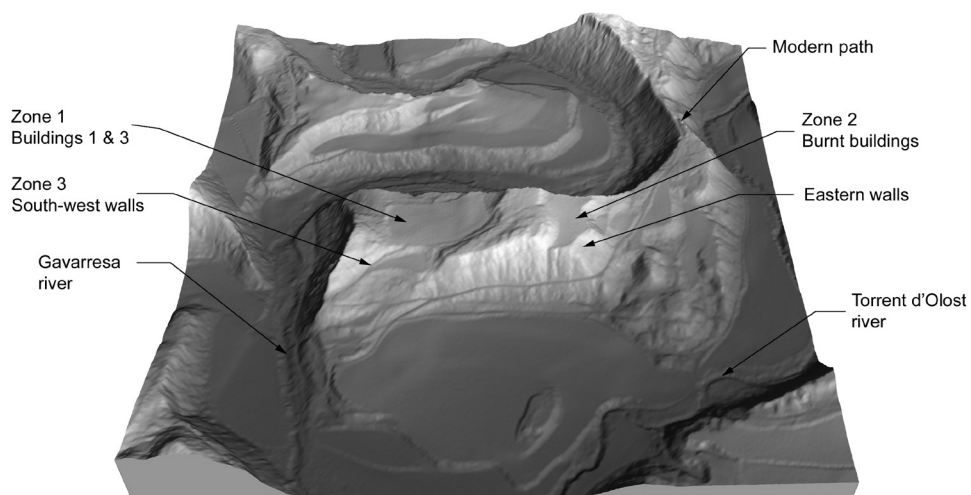


Figure 12.2 3D relief model of the setting of Puig Ciutat, showing the principal archaeological remains and natural features (authors).

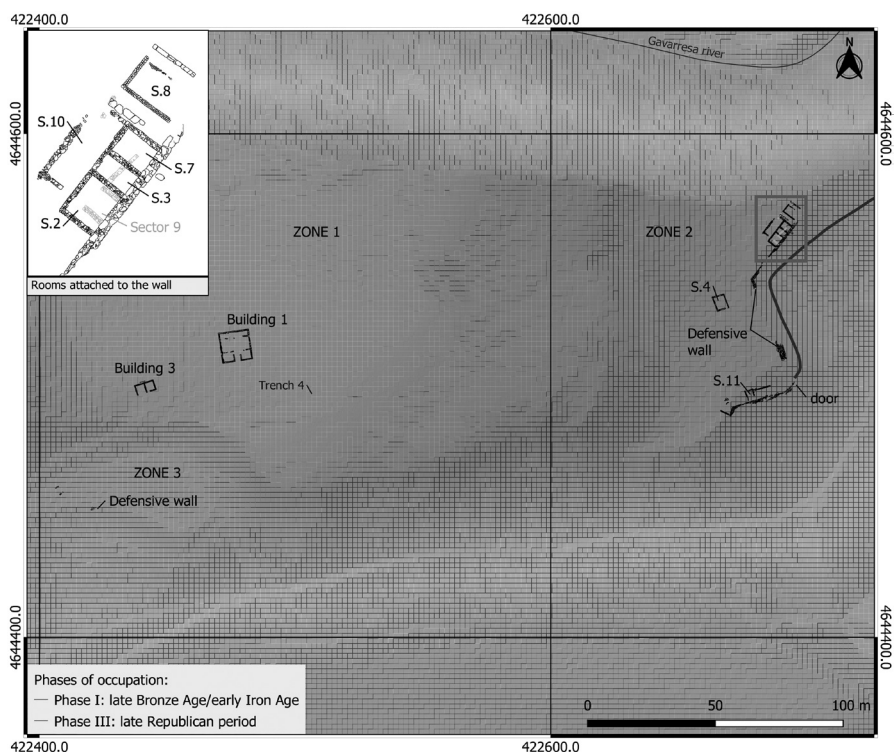


Figure 12.3 Puig Ciutat: the three main archaeological zones and principal buildings. Inset: structures adjoining the defensive wall in Zone 2 (authors).

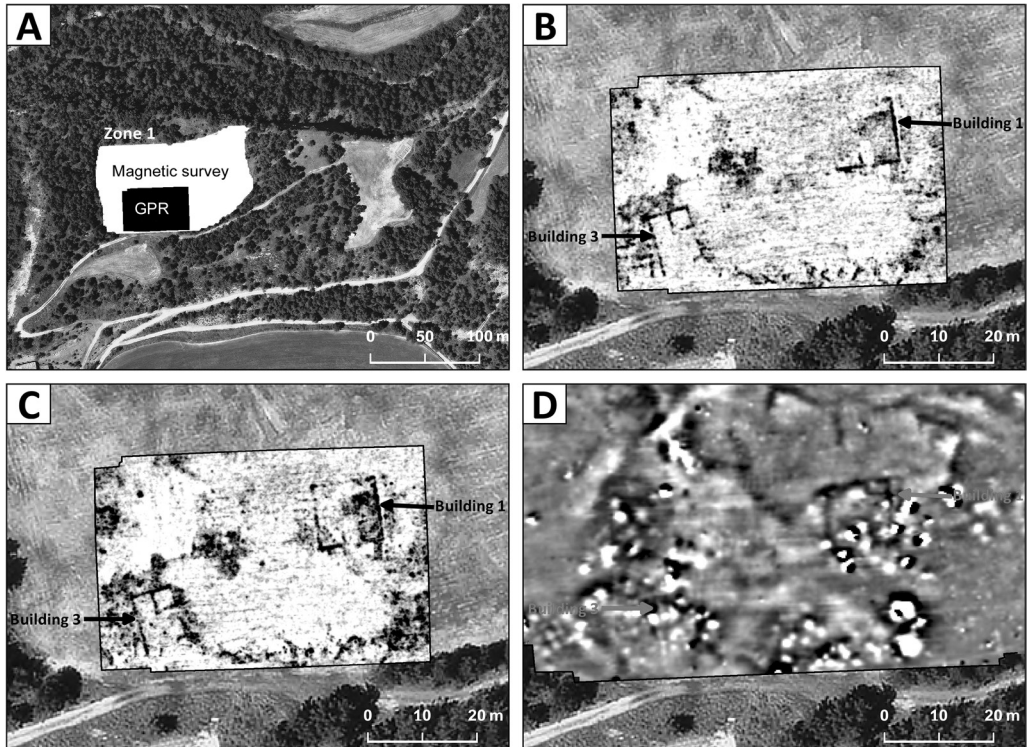


Figure 12.4 The geophysical surveys carried out in Zone 1 at Puig Ciutat (A) location; (B–C) GPR time slices; (D) magnetometry (authors).

### Geophysical survey

Since the start of systematic archaeological investigation, various methods of geophysical survey have been used, including geomagnetic and ground penetrating radar. In general, the surveys show an apparently unplanned settlement layout, with empty spaces and, above all, the presence of fires across the entire investigated area. The results from the different zones explored are as follows:<sup>2</sup>

#### **Zone 1 (Figure 12.4)**

Practically all the anomalies detected in the geomagnetic survey can be interpreted as archaeological features, with those that present the greatest contrast probably indicating areas of burning. The survey results suggest a complex settlement layout, with no obvious orthogonal organization. Within this layout, strips of positive polarity have been interpreted as possible streets. In the middle of Zone 1, a series of linear anomalies arranged in almost cardinal alignments seem to reflect a single structure, designated Building 1.

In the south-eastern part of Zone 1, where agricultural activity had brought building material and pottery to the surface, geomagnetic survey revealed high-contrast anomalies suggestive of burning. The results from Zone 1 were complemented by the information obtained using ground penetrating radar, which provided more details of some of the groups of buildings. Building 3, detected in the south-west of the surveyed area, was one of the most clearly defined structures, corresponding to a rectangular anomaly approximately 11 × 8 m with an observable internal division.

### **Zone 2**

The geomagnetic survey here mapped numerous anomalies representing archaeological structures, some of which contained evidence of burning. However, the ground penetrating radar revealed a division crossing the field from north to south, caused by two areas of highly reflective anomalies, which, according to tests from the soil samples, can be interpreted as bedrock. East of this division, groups of orthogonal anomalies are interpreted as parts of buildings. At the north-eastern end there are structures adjoining the defensive wall documented archaeologically in the 2010 campaign. Based on the geomagnetic data, the trial trench was extended southwards until the enclosing wall of the building was found.

In the middle of Zone 2, another group of orthogonal anomalies coincides with the burnt areas detected by the geomagnetic survey, suggesting the existence of a group of buildings that were burned down. Of particular interest is a linear space with no anomalies in the southern part of Zone 2, which is likely to be a street. If it is confirmed that the southern end of this feature links with the road that climbs from the east of the defensive wall, the area without anomalies could indicate an entrance to the fortified site.

### **The excavations**

The excavations since 2010 have allowed us to define three clear phases of occupation at Puig Ciutat:

- Phase I, late Bronze Age/early Iron Age. Various pottery sherds of this date were found on the surface of the eastern slope of the hill. During the excavations in Zone 2, a large amount of late Bronze Age/early Iron Age pottery was found in Test Trench 15 in levels beneath Sector 9. Although the finds were very fragmented and came from archaeological infill, not structures, their quantity is significant and could indicate a more or less stable use of the site during the 9th and 8th centuries BC.
- Phase II, intermediate. Below the occupation level of Sector 2, another structure (Sector 9) corresponds to a phase prior to the Roman Republican period. This structure had been almost completely razed to the ground. It extends below the

late Republican wall, suggesting that, in its final phase, the size of the settlement was reduced at its eastern end. The material culture from Phase II is very sparse and fragmented and it has not been possible to specify a precise chronology for the remains; although the finds establish a *terminus post quem* in the Full Iberian period, no imported items have been found that would allow us to give a more accurate chronology.

- Phase III, late Republican period (1st century BC). This is the best-defined period of occupation at Puig Ciutat. A defensive wall, various buildings and a large number of archaeological finds have been documented. The wall, composed of large stone blocks, is 1.1 m wide. In general, it appears to have been built on the debris from the preceding phase, although in some places, as at the south-eastern end, it could have been built either on the wall of the preceding phase or on the rock itself. Various habitation spaces were identified in this final phase, of which the most outstanding are presented here:

### Zone 1

Identified in the centre of Zone 1 through the geophysical surveys, Building 1 was a structure of c. 11 × 11 m (equivalent to 40 Italic feet). The remains had been badly damaged by farming, but the complexity and size of the building leads us to hypothesize a possible *praetorium* or *principia* from the late Republican period, similar to that identified at the Monteró 1 site (Camarasa, Lleida; Principal et al. 2015, 319–323). Interestingly, a burned beam was found at the building's entrance, which, together with carbonized remains in one of the rooms, suggests destruction of the building by fire, a phenomenon also observed in other structures from this phase across the site.

At the south-eastern end of Zone 1, where modern agriculture had brought a large amount of archaeological material to the surface, removal of the surface layer in Test Trench 4 (10.5 × 1.5 m) revealed two walls that marked the ends of various structures, along with burned areas, pottery and metalwork. The ceramics included Campanian C wares (corresponding to one or more types of the Lamboglia 7 form), coarse wares and amphorae of various origins (Circle of the Straits of Gibraltar, Africa, the Adriatic and Italy). Among the metal finds were various iron objects which could be scissors and the hilt of a bidiscoidal dagger (the predecessor of the Roman *pugio*).

Building 3, also detected by geophysical survey, was partially excavated in 2017. Located west of Building 1, it appears to comprise a courtyard or large room to the south, with two smaller rooms on the northern side. Only these smaller rooms have been excavated so far; they have provided evidence of burning in the form of numerous fragments of burnt beams. Among the finds are two *kalathoi* and an amphora, and other objects such as a pair of weights (*pondi*) and coins from various Iberian mints. Additionally, a sling bullet was discovered in the destruction layer.



## Zone 2

Adjoining the large wall in Zone 2, Sector 2 is a room measuring  $4.20 \times 3.40$  m. In the lower part of the collapse layer from this structure, a large number of ceramic vessels were found *in situ*. This group of ceramics included a *dolium*, late-Cales and Campanian C black-glazed wares, oxidized wares, white slip wares and reduced wares. Various spindle whorls and a weight were also found. The accumulation of pottery in the southern half of the room and its distribution suggest that the objects had been placed on a shelf or in a cupboard that fell, leaving the pottery strewn across the occupation level. Of particular interest is the quantity of metal objects recovered from the room, especially items of weaponry, such as two catapult bolt heads, several arrowheads, sling bullets and a *pilum* shank.

Sector 3 is another room, measuring  $3.5 \times 2$  m and adjoining the wall, immediately north of Sector 2. Finds from the lower part of the collapse level here included a door key, iron nails and abundant faunal remains. Above the occupation level, in the south-eastern corner, was a group of four horizontal slabs. At the northern end of the west wall an entrance was found.



Figure 12.5 Zone 2, Sector 7 during excavation (authors).

Sector 7, a third room of 3.50 × 2.60 m adjoined the wall, next to Sector 3. In its collapse levels, a dolium and an amphora were found, the latter of Adriatic origin. These objects, however, do not appear to belong with the use of the room, but rather to have come from the demolition of an upper structure (Figure 12.5). The occupation level of Sector 7 yielded a series of pottery sherds (black-glazed, coarse ware, amphorae, etc.) and various pieces of metal. It should be emphasized that the occupation surface is compacted and consists of marl, making it easily identifiable.

Sector 10 lay west of sectors 2, 3 and 7. The northern and western walls of this building had been almost completely destroyed. There was a hearth next to the western wall. The building presents a destruction level very similar to that of the areas adjoining the wall, with an abundance of throwing weapons (sling bullets and catapult bolt heads). A rich pottery assemblage included a dolium, two amphorae of Dressel 1B type (products of the Straits of Gibraltar Circle and Tarraconensis), various pieces of Cales black-glazed wares, and locally produced wares. Seven Iberian-tradition coins from the mints of Iltirkesken, Ilturo, Kese and Bolskan were found in this structure, marking it out from the surrounding areas. Sectors 2, 3, 7 and 10 probably formed part of the same complex building, which has been designated Building 2. Sectors 3 and 7 seem to have been used for storage, whereas the hearth in Sector 10 could indicate a cooking area.

Separated from the previous sectors by a street, Sector 8 has a surface area of about 5.5 × 4.5 m, much larger than the previous rooms adjoining the wall. At the north-western end there appears to be a doorway. Excavation of this room yielded a large number of macro-faunal remains, especially cattle and horse bones, which showed signs of trauma.

### **Metal detector survey**

Given the evidence of destruction documented within the interior, a survey using metal detectors and GPS devices was carried out in the area outside the settlement, with two main objectives of (1) identifying evidence of an assault from outside the walls, in order to confirm an anthropogenic cause for the destruction and an external origin for the attack; and (2) defining the routes taken by the possible attacking army.

The first surveys were carried out on the eastern and south-western slopes of the hill on which the settlement is located, since these were the only two possible access points. Some hobnails (*clavii caligae*) and a sling bullet were recovered on the eastern slope, whereas the results were negative on the south-western slope. A metal detector survey in 2017 confirmed the lack of evidence from the south-western area; thus, the idea of an attack from this side can be discarded.

The survey was extended northwards, following the trail of hobnails (*clavii caligae*) across the Collet d'en Roca pass. In this direction, overlooking both the pass and the settlement itself, is Pla Revell, an elevated plain initially proposed as a possible site

of the camp of the attacking army on account of its geographical position. During the survey a sling bullet was found. Another plain known as Vila Granada lies south-west of Puig Ciutat on the other side of the Olost river; when surveyed, this area produced a Roman legionary hobnail.

The evidence recovered to date thus suggests an assault on Puig Ciutat by an external army, rather than a siege. Interestingly, the two projectiles documented from outside the site are very different from those recovered in the interior, which could indicate that they belonged to the defenders and attackers respectively.

### Chronology and interpretation

The finds from Puig Ciutat include imports of late-Cales and Campanian C black-glazed wares, both clearly produced in the 1st century BC (90–20 BC). On the other hand, none of the sectors has yielded *in situ* finds of pre-terra sigillata or Arretine ware, the production of which peaked in the last quarter of the 1st century BC. This allows us to more accurately delimit Phase III to the period between 80 and 35–25 BC. Among the amphorae, those of Italic origin (Tyrrhenian and Adriatic) stand out, as well as Roman-tradition products from the Iberian Peninsula, such as those from the Circle of the Strait of Gibraltar and Tarraconensis. Of particular note in the two last groups is a piece of Rinconcillo ware (Algeciras) in the Circle of the Strait of Gibraltar with the stamp SCG. According to the latest studies, this dates to around 70 to 35–25 BC. Also relevant here is the presence of an Ovoid 4 amphora from the province of Cadiz, produced from around 70 BC, with a *floruit* between 50 and 25 BC. The Tarraconensian amphorae, which have ‘Roman tradition’ fabrics, have a date range of c. 65–40 BC (Figure 12.6).

As indicated above, an important outcome of the excavations has been the identification of traces of violent destruction across the different parts of the site. Since the 1980s, there has been a major methodological debate regarding archaeological indicators that could attest the violent destruction of settlements by human agency (Pesez and Piponnier 1988, 11–16; Hourcade 2008, 239–260; Noguera *et al.* 2013). Among the possible indicators, we can cite archaeological evidence of fire with various origins; large amounts of pottery preserved *in situ*; a concentration of weapons; and the presence of human and/or faunal remains in anatomical connection and/or with signs of violence.

These archaeological markers are fundamental elements for interpreting other destruction events that took place in the Iberian Peninsula at the end of the 1st millennium BC, such as at Valentia (Ribera and Calvo 1995, 19–40) and El Cerro de la Cruz (Quesada-Sanz *et al.* 2010, 75–95; Quesada-Sanz *et al.* 2014), and can also be applied to Puig Ciutat (Padrós *et al.* 2015, 287). The last site meets all the criteria except, to date, the presence of articulated human remains on the occupation levels. And it is interesting to note that in addition to the burned buildings and militaria (Figure 12.7) at Puig Ciutat, the excavations have also uncovered the articulated skeletal remains of

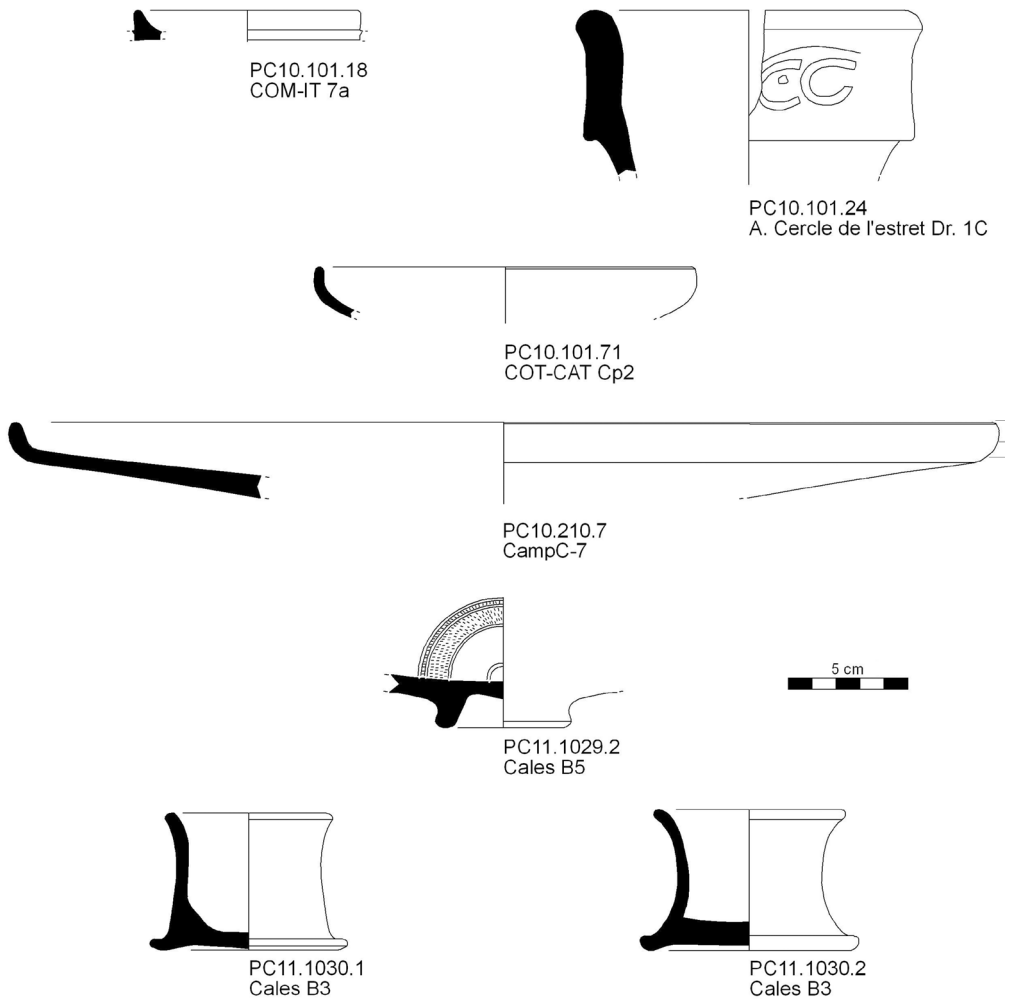


Figure 12.6 Ceramics characteristic of the late Republican occupation at Puig Ciutat (authors).

two dogs, one of them chained up at the time of its death (Padrós *et al.* 2015, 286–287), suggesting that they died during the attack on the site. In sum, the evidence seems to indicate an assault on and destruction of Puig Ciutat by an external army.

### The historical context: the prelude to the battle of Ilerda

Based on the recovered evidence, in its final phase Puig Ciutat can be considered to be a late Republican Roman garrison, guard post or *praesidium*. It may have been a billet for a detachment of Roman soldiers occupying the site of a former indigenous settlement, which had been either abandoned or evacuated. The soldiers would have

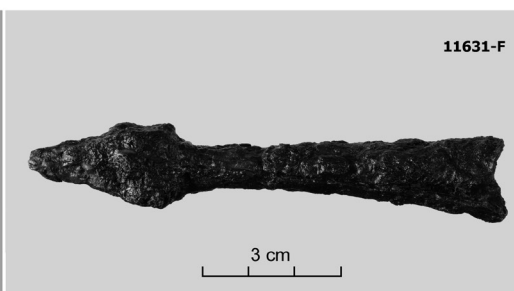
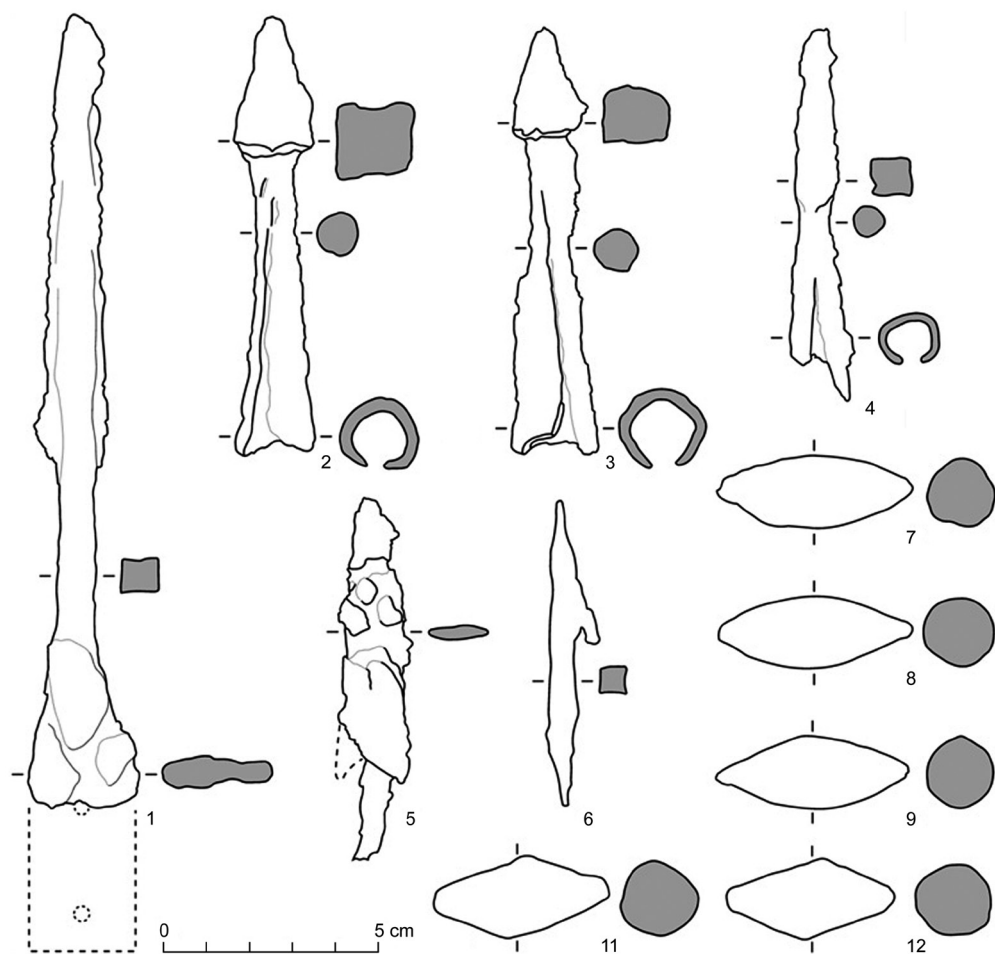


Figure 12.7 Selection of projectiles discovered at Puig Ciutat (drawings E. Ble; photos R. Maroto, CRBMC).

been charged with guarding the pass on the route between the Pyrenees, the Plain of Vic and the interior of the Iberian Peninsula.

The chronology offered by the finds suggests a context for the final moments of the site around the mid-1st century BC. This brings to mind an episode of the Civil War between Caesar and the supporters of Pompey (49–45 BC). We are specifically thinking of the preparations made during 49 BC in Hispania Citerior by Pompey's legate, Lucius Afranius, who would have installed a series of *praesidia* along the Pyrenean passes to impede or hinder the march of Caesar's supporters (Caesar *de Bello Civili* 1.37. 1–3; Cassius Dio 41.20.2). According to the written sources, while Caesar was preparing to march from Italy, he sent his legate Fabius in advance to Hispania, along with three legions he had left wintering in Narbo. Caesar's orders to Fabius were clear: quickly to take possession of the passes across the Pyrenees, at that time apparently occupied by detachments under Lucius Afranius. Fabius began a forced march towards Afranius' army (*de Bello Civili* 1.37.1–3), probably crossing the Pyrenees through La Cerdanya (Coll de la Pértiga; Pons 1986–89, 221). From that point, following the right bank of the river Segre, at least with the bulk of his troops, he would have arrived at the Plain of Lleida, in the vicinity of Ilerda, where Afranius and Petreius were waiting for him, entrenched there with a hastily formed army including troops from Hispania Citerior and Ulterior.

The characteristics of the settlement at Puig Ciutat – its location, chronology and the evidence for violent destruction (notably the Roman *militaria* indicating an exterior attack and the presence of burned buildings) – all suggest that the site was destroyed as part of the military operations that preceded the battle of Ilerda between the forces of Julius Caesar and the Spanish army of Pompey the Great in June 49 BC. In this sense, we can hypothesize that Puig Ciutat was occupied by followers of Pompey as part of the attempt to control the strategic route between the Pyrenees and the area of Ilerda. They were attacked by the approaching Caesarian army, which destroyed the site apparently without reoccupying it. Thanks to the archaeological programme, we are uncovering the remains of a short, rather marginal military event, but one that was directly linked to the wider theatre of operations of the Civil Wars in the dying days of the Roman Republic.

## Acknowledgements

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the fieldwork at Puig Ciutat has been carried out in collaboration with the University of Edinburgh, under the joint direction of Àngels Pujol, Roger Sala, Manuel Fernández-Götz and Xavier Rubio-Campillo. We would like to thank the Consorci del Lluçanès and the Leverhulme Trust for their support of the 2017 fieldwork at Puig Ciutat and in the production of this paper.

## Notes

- 1 Corresponding author: Dr Manuel Fernández-Götz.
- 2 This paper employs the nomenclature used in previous publications on Puig Ciutat in Catalan and Spanish: 'zones' = main areas of the site and 'sectors' = building structures, mostly rooms.

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