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Tracing the Roman Republican Army. Military Archaeology in the Northeast of the Iberian Peninsula

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Funde, die seit 2006 an verschiedenen archäologischen Fundstätten geborgen wurden, erlauben es, unsere Kenntnisse zu Römern und Karthagern im Nordosten der Iberischen Halbinsel zu erweitern. Chronologisch sind die Funde drei Zeitabschnitten zuzuweisen: dem Zweiten Punischen Krieg, dem Sertoriusaufstand und dem Bürgerkrieg zwischen Caesar und Pompeius. Das Fundmaterial setzt sich aus *clavii caligae*, *glandes*, Amphoren und Münzen zusammen.

The following paper is an overview of the results of the research projects conducted in the north-eastern Iberian Peninsula¹. At the beginning, the project focused on the Roman camps on the lower reaches of the River *Iberus* dated to the Second Punic War. The results obtained highlighted the necessity to broaden both our chronological and geographical frame. For this reason, during recent years we have extended the analysis to any evidence for conflict and war in all north-eastern Spain from the end of the 3rd to mid-1st century BC. The projects, from a methodological point, should be framed within the theoretical approach known as Conflict Archaeology². This approach to military archaeology was put into practise for the first time during work conducted around the site of the Battle of the Little Big Horn³. One of the most relevant traits of this discipline is the extensive use of metal detectors, a tool commonly criticized by most researchers, but recently defended by several archaeologists⁴. The methodological issues faced during our research have already been addressed in a previous paper⁵, so here we will focus on the results.

The Republican period was an era of great turmoil and changes for the northeast of the Iberian Peninsula. We can distinguish three main phases of war stress. The first begins with the Second Punic War (218–201 BC) and lasts until the suppression of the Iberian uprisings in the first quarter of the 2nd century BC. The second phase includes the conquest of the Balearic Islands (123 BC), the Cimbrian Wars (113–101 BC) and the Sertorian War (80–72 BC). The last phase corresponds to the Civil War between the followers of Caesar and Pompey (49–45 BC)⁶.

FIRST PHASE OF WAR STRESS (218–195 BC)

The Second Punic War started in 218 BC. The conflict spread around the whole Mediterranean Sea and the Iberian Peninsula was no exception. In fact, it was one of the main theatres of operations. The victories of Scipio at *Qart Hadasht* and *Ilipa* forced the Carthaginians to retreat from Hispania, making Rome the only power in the area. After Scipio had left the peninsula in 206 BC, several Iberian tribes revolted against the policies of Rome. A general uprising took place in 197 BC and was repressed by Cato the Elder. Yet, Rome still faced problems until the second quarter of the 2nd century BC (Fig. 1).

Between 2006 and 2011 several archaeological surveys were conducted at the archaeological site of La Palma. The evidence points to the existence of a military camp during the Second Punic War. This encampment has been identified as *Nova Classis*, mentioned by Livy⁷, which was active between 217 and 209/8 BC. In the classical sources the site is mentioned several times⁸. It is also the starting point of the march against *Qart Hadasht* (Cartagena) by Scipio in 209 BC⁹. In fact, it seems to be one of the main logistical bases of the Roman army and, even when the theatre of operations had moved further to the south, it still played a role in the war, as Scipio stationed 3,000 infantry and 300 cavalry soldiers in the valley of the River *Iberus*¹⁰.

Nearly 200 coins dating from the Second Punic War have been found on the site. It is worth mentioning the presence of bronze Roman coinage minted before 215 BC, which is associated to the presence of soldiers¹¹. There is also a high concentration of Carthaginian coinage, probably obtained through plunder. Finally, we found several coins minted by *Massalia* and *Emporion*, both allies of Rome. Another interesting fact regarding coins is the low presence of silver issues, just 21 coins.

The pottery collected is also noteworthy, consisting mostly of storage and transport vessels. No tableware has been found and the fragments collected show a low density and a wide distribution. Both aspects match with the specific types of ceramics associated with a marching camp¹². Even so, the concentration of Graeco-Italo amphorae was

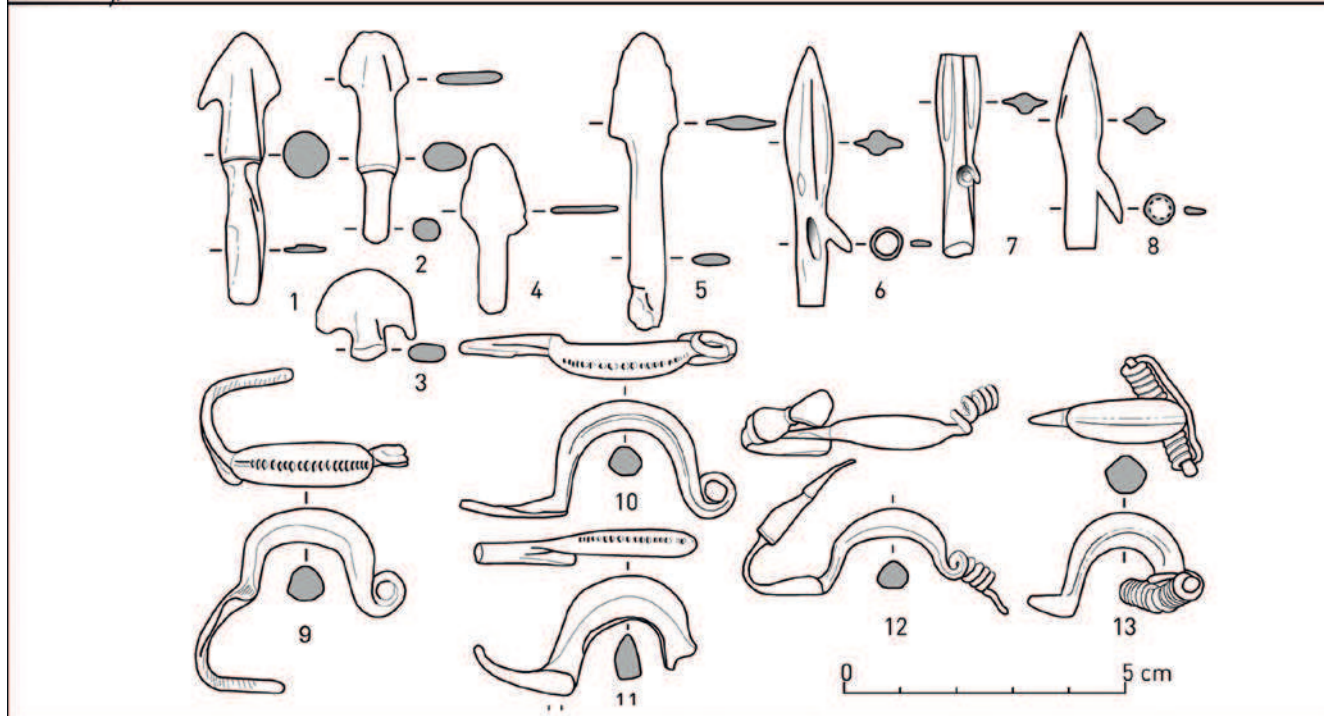
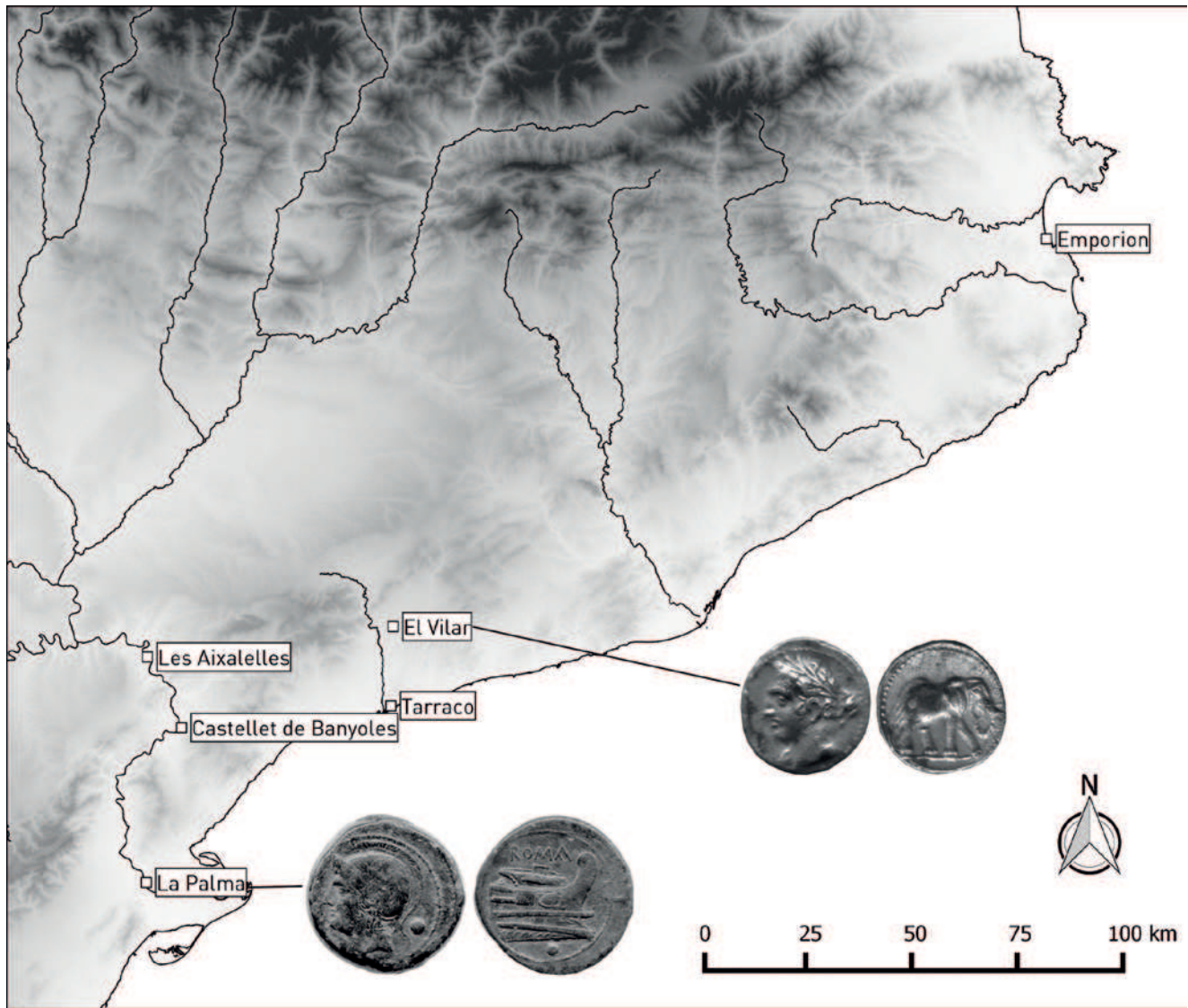


Fig. 1: Map of the archaeological sites dating from the first phase of war stress with related finds including a quarter-shekel from El Vilar de Valls and an *uncia* RRC 38/6 from La Palma – *Nova Classis*. 1–5 tanged arrowheads with wings and flange from La Palma, Les Aixalelles and El Vilar; 6–8 socketed arrowheads with a single barb from La Palma; 9–13 La Tène I type fibulae from La Palma (J. Noguera/E. Ble/P. Valdés/J. López Vilar).

unusually high (65 %) for a Spanish site of the 3rd century BC¹³.

At the same time, several elements of weaponry and military equipment have been found. Arrowheads deserve special attention, as three types following different traditions were documented. One is of iron with a socket and pyramidal head that can be attributed to an Italic origin. Its form resembles a catapult bolt (*pilum catapultarium*), but its smaller size disallows this interpretation¹⁴. The rest are made of bronze. A second group of tanged arrowheads with wings and flange, commonly known as the Mailhac type, can be traced to the Late Bronze–Early Iron Age in north-eastern Spain (Fig. 1,1–5). The third group formed by socketed arrows with a small, lateral barb (Fig. 1,6–8) can be traced to an Orientalizing tradition related to the Punic world and south-eastern Spain¹⁵. The last two types were commonly dated between the 8th and 6th centuries BC, but their frequent appearance at sites from the Second Punic War, such as La Palma or the battlefield of *Baecula*, forces us to lower their chronology until the end of the 3rd century BC¹⁶.

In addition, 17 lead sling-bullets have been found, most of which weigh around 35 g and some more around 70 g. As some scholars have pointed out, these measures may correspond to the equivalent of 8 and 16 Attic *drachmai*¹⁷. The use of a Greek basis in Spain is especially attested before 100 BC, so these *glandes* can be dated during the Second Punic War¹⁸. Also, 16 fibulae of the La Tène I type have been found (Fig. 1,9–13). Considering their presence on the battlefield of *Baecula*¹⁹, it seems that they have to be related to the Second Punic War as well²⁰. A light *pilum* or javelin and a short spear have also been documented²¹. Finally, several *clavi caligarii* have been attested²².

During the years 2012, 2013 and 2016 several archaeological surveys were conducted at another archaeological site that can be ascribed to the Second Punic War: Les Aixelles. This site is located near a ford of the *Iberus* at a strategically strong position. In this case, the fieldwork included visual, metal detector and geophysical surveys.

These undertakings revealed a huge amount of coins, among which 18 Hispano-Carthaginian bronzes stand out, as a clear indicator of a military presence²³. Most of them are Class VIII units and fractions, minted between 221 and 218 BC²⁴. The presence of such a group of these coins on a site north of the *Iberus* is an anomaly, especially taking into account it is situated upriver. Their presence could point to the presence of a Roman camp, like at La Palma, but the absence of any Roman coin from the period rules out this interpretation. Moreover, all of them seem almost new, without much use, so they had been recently minted. It is well known that the Punic armies minted their own coinage on campaign. Consequently, in this case the presence of Carthaginian coinage should be associated to the crossing of the *Iberus* by Punic troops during the initial years of the war (even Hannibal in 218 or Hasdrubal in 217 BC).

From 2013 to 2015, three consecutive campaigns of surveys were conducted near the Iberian settlement of El Vilar (modern-day Valls). Old urban excavations had already revealed that the site had been destroyed violently at the end of the 3rd century BC. Our surveys with metal

detectors produced several Hispano-Carthaginian coins and lead sling-bullets, both on the northern and eastern sides of the town. This kind of evidence points again to the presence of troops camped outside the settlement, either as a friendly army or as an assailant.

In addition, through the analysis of aerial photographs, a possible linear structure was detected north of the theoretical limit of the settlement. To check it, we resorted to electrical tomography. All the resulting profiles showed a U-shaped anomaly, interpreted as traces of a ditch. The subsequent excavation identified a structure 14 m wide and 5 m deep, which extended in an east-west direction for at least 400 m. More work to confirm the extent of the anomaly is still pending. We consider that El Vilar can be associated with *Kissa*²⁵ or *Cissis*²⁶, the town destroyed by Gnaeus Cornelius Scipio in 218 BC.

The last archaeological site of this phase, Castellet de Banyoles, is related to the Iberian uprisings that took place at the beginning of the 2nd century BC. The Iberian settlement was already well-known thanks to previous excavations undertaken inside it. Some findings pointed to a violent destruction of the site. To verify this hypothesis, several archaeological surveys were conducted from 2007 to 2009 in the area outside the fortified area, known as Camí del Castellet de Banyoles. The results seem to confirm the existence of a Roman camp, even though the presence of Graeco-Italo amphorae is scarcer than at La Palma, although at 10 % of the finds it is still much higher than inside the settlement, where they make up just 0.5 %. Also, the fragments surveyed show a low density and a wide distribution. Also, 43 % of the ceramics found inside the settlement correspond to tableware, a class of pottery non-existent in the area associated with the Roman camp. Concerning the coinage found in the surveys, 84.2 % is Roman, in contrast with the coins found inside the settlement, where Iberian silver casts are predominant²⁷. The absence of Carthaginian coins and the presence of *denarii*, which were not found at La Palma, seem to indicate that this camp should be dated after the Second Punic War, very likely at the beginning of the 2nd century BC. In addition, the contemporary violent destruction of the Iberian settlement, which involved the use of artillery in the form of bolt throwers (*catapultae*) and stone throwers (*ballistae*), should be clearly attributed to the Roman army camped outside²⁸.

The archaeological evidence examined so far fits the pattern of a period of high military stress. Not only can we find remains of the prolonged presence of a large contingent of troops, like those stationed at La Palma, or traces of their movements, as in the case of Les Aixelles, but also evidence of violent confrontations in the form of sieges at El Vilar and Castellet de Banyoles, or in many more Iberian settlements, whose destruction have already been attested through archaeological excavations. In fact, all these events had a huge impact on the economy, society and policy of the Iberian tribes²⁹.

SECOND PHASE OF WAR STRESS (150–72 BC)

The Sertorian War (80–72 BC) started as a derivation of the First Roman Civil War (88–87 BC). Yet, at the same time, it was an indigenous rebellion, as Sertorius also exploited the

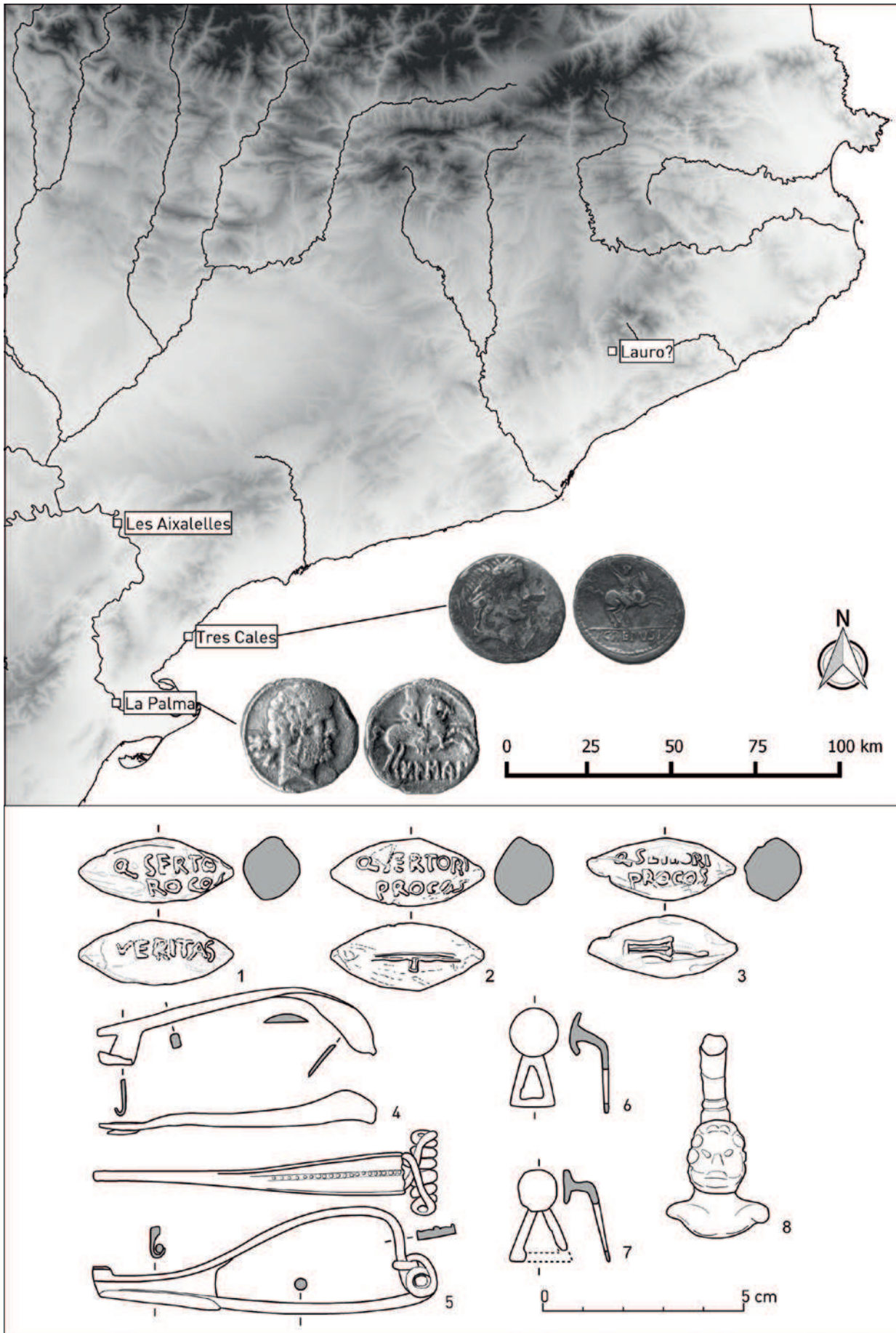


Fig. 2: Map of the archaeological sites dating from the second phase of war stress with related finds including a Bolskan *denarius* from La Palma from the beginning of the 1st century BC and a T. Publius Crepusius *denarius* (RRC 361/1c) from Tres Cales. 1–3 *glan-des* from Les Aixalletes; 4–5 fibulae type Nauheim and La Tène III from Tres Cales; 6–7 Button-and-loop fasteners; 8 Piatra Neamț type handle from La Palma (J. Noguera/E. Ble/P. Valdés/J. López Vilar).

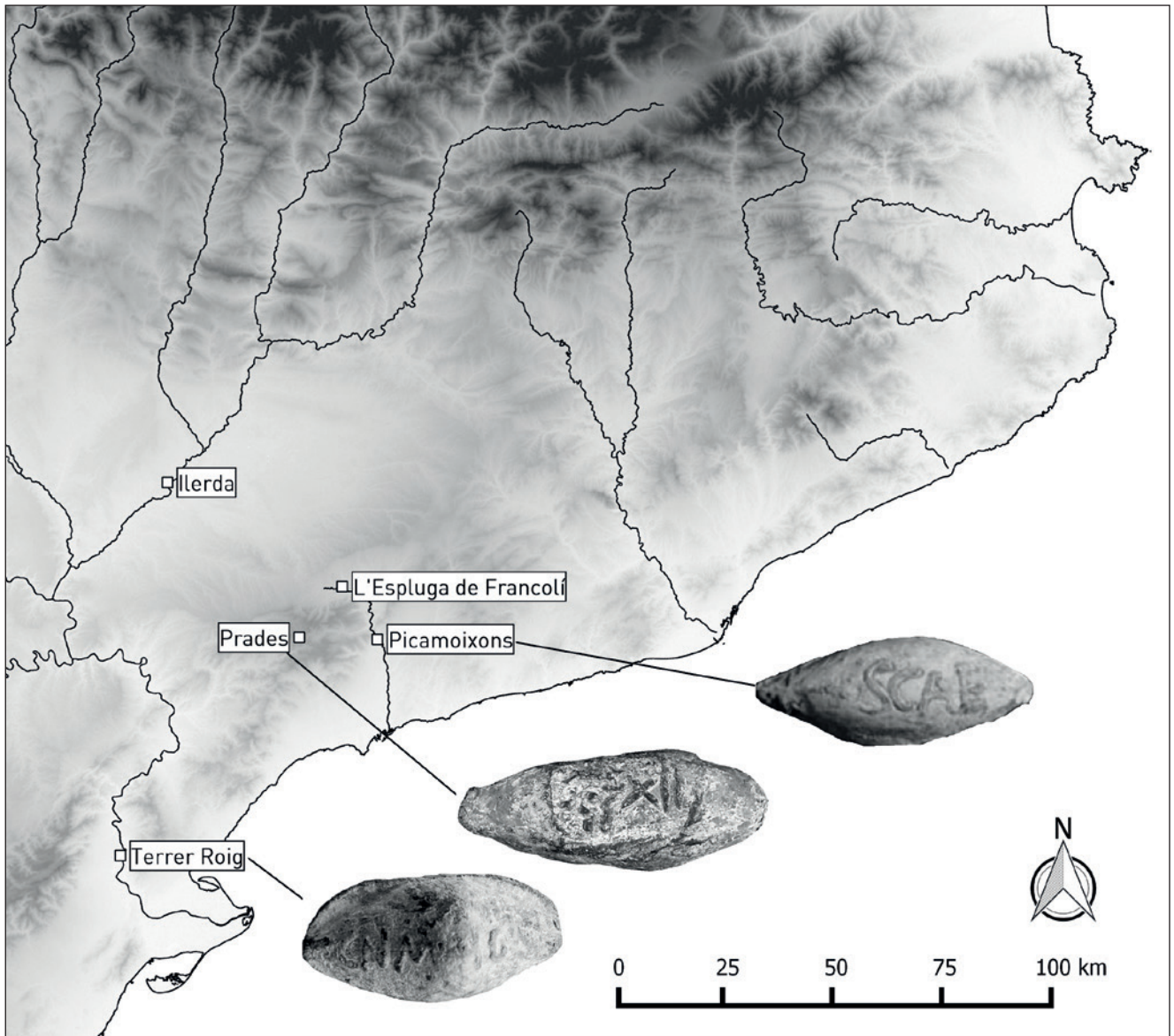


Fig. 3: Map of archaeological sites dating from the third phase of war stress with related finds. Sling-shots from Terrer Roig (CNMAG), Prades (eye XI) and Picamoixons (SCAE) (J. Noguera/E. Ble/P. Valdés/J. López Vilar).

disaffection of the different tribes of the Iberian Peninsula. In 80 BC Sertorius arrived in Hispania and until 76 BC held the upper hand, thanks to his knowledge and superiority over Quintus Caecilius Metellus Pius. The arrival of Pompey (76 BC) led to a more aggressive policy, yet in the same year he suffered a decisive defeat near *Lauron*. Even with the huge logistical problems faced by Pompey and Metellus³⁰, in 75 BC Metellus defeated Hirtuleius. In 73 or 72 BC Sertorius was finally murdered by Perperna. With his death most of the resistance to the Roman armies faded, even so Pompey stayed another year fighting the last remnants of Perperna's army. The north-eastern region of the Iberian Peninsula was one of the theatres of operations (Fig. 2). At least three archaeological sites can be associated with this period, two of them already being mentioned. The first one, Tres Cales, is situated at a very strategic position with excellent control of its surrounding area, including the coast and the nearby road, the ancient *via Heraklea* (the later *via Augusta*). It also lies close to a natural port and a natural source of water, one of the few existing in the local area. This makes this site a very important point for anyone travelling from the *Iberus* to *Tarraco* or

vice versa³¹. The surveys were conducted in 2014 and 2015, and until now we have documented 38 sling-bullets, two of them with the inscription *Q(uitus) SERT(orius) PROCO(n) S(sul)*. In addition, we can mention a triangular button-and-loop fastener, an element possibly related to the suspension system of a *gladius*, *clavi caligarii* and two fibulae of the types La Tène III and Nauheim (Fig. 2,4-5).

The second one is Les Aixalletes, where the evidence of this period is mostly associated with soldiers' weaponry and military equipment. Again, there have been found many sling-bullets, four of them with the inscription *Q SERTORI PROCOS* (Fig. 2,1-3), a triangular button-and-loop fastener and several *clavi caligarii*, a clear sign of the presence of troops. It is worth mentioning that the proportion of *clavi* found on this site is much higher than on any other site studied in this project.

The last site is La Palma where, apart from the elements related to the encampment of the Second Punic War, several objects, dated to the first half of the 1st century BC, point to the presence of a contingent of Roman soldiers. Among them, it is worth mentioning the *denarii* and Iberian coins, another triangular button-and-loop fastener and

some pieces of bronze tableware, mainly fragments of *simpula* and handles of the types Piatra Neamț (Fig. 2,8) and Ornavasso.

All these sites could be framed in the actions undertaken by Perperna throughout the lower *Iberus* during the year 76 BC to stop Pompey's troops marching to the south. The Sertorian defence of Hispania citerior was focused in two regions: In the upper *Iberus* where Sertorius was based and the lower *Iberus* where Perperna was stationed³². Pompey was defeated at *Lauron*, which traditionally has been located on the Levantine Coast. Yet, new research conducted at Puig del Castell indicates that *Lauron* may lie in the area of Barcelona³³ explaining why Pompey retreated to the Pyrenees after his defeat³⁴, which makes more sense.

The concentrations of troops at Tres Cales, Les Aixalletes and La Palma could be a testimony of the efforts undertaken by Perperna to withstand the southwards march of Pompey's troops. This disposition was short-lived, as the next year (75 BC) Pompey took *Valentia* and plundered it³⁵. The fact that the following battles were near *Sucro* and *Saguntum* clearly show how the *Iberus* was lost for the Sertorian cause.

THIRD PHASE OF WAR STRESS (49 BC)

The last phase of war stress is associated with the Second Civil War, the conflict between Caesar and Pompey (49–45 BC). Hispania was one of the main theatres of operations, as several Pompeian legions were stationed in it. Before his arrival in Hispania, Caesar had sent C. Fabius with six legions to occupy the Pyrenees. When Caesar arrived, Fabius was near the River Segre. The defeat of Pompey's lieutenants Afranius and Petreius at *Ilerda* marked the end of the Pompeian party in the Peninsula as several rebellions erupted in Hispania ulterior, forcing Varrus to surrender. Although Caesar refers to the operations conducted before his arrival, archaeology shows a more complex and widespread conflict. Four archaeological sites are associated with this period (Fig. 3).

At the first one, Picamoixons, 82 sling-bullets were located, all of them showing the inscription *SCAE*. The site has been interpreted as a small camp or a control site occupied for a very brief period. The second site is Prades, where two more sling-bullets were found, one of them carrying the inscription *SCAE* and the second XII behind an unclear pictogram, maybe an eye. The numeral points to *legio XII* which took part in the *Ilerda* campaign with Caesar. The third site is located at L'Espluga de Francolí, and it is the only one intensively surveyed so far (although we are planning to work on the rest of them in future years). Several *clavi caligarii* have been found there, together with two more *glandes*, one with the inscription *SCAE*. The last site is Terrer Roig, where two sling-bullets have been attested, one with the inscription *CN(aeus) MAG(nus)* and the other with (eye?) XII³⁶.

All these sites are situated at regular distances from *Ilerda* and seem to be related to the battle somehow. At least in the case of the *glandes* with the *SCAE* inscription, they seem to reflect movements prior to the confrontation. In fact, they provide us with information on the movements of troops and the extent of the conflict. The distribution of

the inscribed *glandes* seems to suggest that the troops probably took a mountain path in a straight line to go from *Tarraco's* hinterland to *Ilerda*. This evidence indicates that several skirmishes were fought, many of them not reflected in Caesar's narration³⁷.

Finally, this work highlights the importance and extent of the conflict, which was much larger than the classical authors might indicate. This was something already implied by the excavations at the site of Puig Ciutat, destroyed during this period³⁸, and confirmed by the new finds.

CONCLUSIONS

All the works presented point out the complexity of the Roman army presence in the northeast of the Iberian Peninsula. Also, they shed some light on unknown aspects of the conflicts that took place in this period. In less than a decade, many unknown sites have been made public, broadening the narration of the classical authors. Yet, several questions remain unanswered.

Firstly, the methodology developed during our research project has enabled the study of several Roman camps, yet their Carthaginian counterparts are missing. Indeed, the findings at Aixalletes point towards the movement of Punic troops, so the next step in our research is to find their camps, which are virtually unknown so far.

Another aim of our project is the location and study of a battlefield. The research conducted at *Baecula* has proved how ancient battlefields can be located and the huge amount of information they can provide³⁹. The northeast of the Iberian Peninsula experienced several battles, such as *Kissa*, *Hibera* and *Ilerda*. We have already started the analysis of *Kissa*, with surveys at Valls. Yet the evidence is still too scarce to place the battlefield in any of these locations.

Finally, this project also aims to investigate the impact all these war stress phases had on the Iberian population. There are several pieces of evidence for the different consequences these conflicts had, such as the numerous examples of destruction and abandonment attested between the end of the 3rd and the beginning of the 2nd century BC. Unfortunately, most of these archaeological sites lack a detailed and renewed study. In the same way, regarding the second phase of stress, several indicators point to important transformations that took place as a result of the logistical needs of the Roman army⁴⁰. All these aspects highlight how important it is to undertake a global study of the impact of the Roman military presence.

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