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The roman-republican *castella* on the south-eastern coast of Hispania Citerior: the beginning of the romanization of the Iberian population.

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Abstract: Some archaeological sites located on coastal promontories of the north coast of Alicante (Spain) were traditionally interpreted as small Iberian enclaves from the 2nd and 1st century BC dedicated to trade with Rome. This interpretation stemmed from their location next to good inlets and the outstanding number of Roman amphorae and fine ware among the findings. However, the research project being developed since 2010 reinterprets these sites as a network of forts built during the first roman civil wars, around 77 BC, to control the passage of senatorial ships between *Ebusus* and *Carthago Nova*. In this new context, Roman ceramics are no longer the object of exchange between Iberians and Italic merchants, but the kitchen and tableware used by legionaries, as well as the storage containers for their own food. The Iberian amphorae and other painted Iberian vessels present in the forts are the containers of the products that the Iberian population, allied with Sertorius, provided for the provisioning of the soldiers, but it may also be pointing out a hypothetical presence of Iberian *auxilia* in the coastal garrisons. In any case, it is through this contact, in the midst of a war in the 70's BC, when the Iberian population of the *regio* Contestania first encounters the Roman economic system and starts the slow transmission of new cultural values.

Keywords: Roman-republican fortification, Iberian and roman pottery, Romanization.

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1. THE RESEARCH'S BACKGROUND

It is widely considered that ceramic vessels are a mean of cultural transmission or, at least, an excellent tool through which Archaeology can recognize economic and ideological changes in ancient societies. However, the goal of this presentation is to show you a case of an erroneous Reading. The excavations conducted during the first half of the twentieth century in some archaeological sites on the southeast coast of Iberia dating between the 2nd and 1st centuries BC discovered abundant Roman pottery. The archaeological historiography of that time interpreted them as enclaves in which the Iberian population was engaged in exchange with Italic merchants and considered this scenario as testimony to the beginning of their Romanization. The Iberians learned to drink the Italic wine - which came in amphoras Dressel 1 and Lamboglia 2 - in the pertinent tableware - glasses of black gloss ware A and B and thin-walled beakers -. In this initial process of romanization, the Roman currency and Iberian mints began to play a decisive role, whose presence in these deposits indicated the first contacts of the local population with a monetary economy. This idea was consolidated in the first general study carried out on Contestanian Iberian

culture by E. Llobregat¹ and commercial activity was established as the framework for the cultural transformation of the Iberian population.

These sites are located in a territory in the southeast of the Iberian Peninsula identified as *Contestania* from late Latin texts and their inhabitants are cited as *contestani* (fig. 1). They are located on the north coast of the Alicante province around Cabo de la Nao, an important geographical reference for ancient and current navigation. From south to north these sites are the Tossal de la Cala (Benidorm), Cap Negret (Altea), Penyal d'Ifac (Calp), Punta de la Torre (Teulada-Moraira) and, passing the cape, Penya de l'Àguila (Denia) and Passet de Segaria (Benimeli). From the map we highlight the mountainous interior of the contestanian territory, difficult to be travelled by land even in modern times. There, the Iberian settlements were organized in each small valley as independent political and economic units². It can be easily observed how the intricate orography reaches the sea, giving rise to a very abrupt coastline, where high cliffs alternate with small coves that become excellent shelters for ships (fig. 2). In summary, the mobility and transit of goods through this Iberian territory were feasible by sea and not by a coastal land route impossible to travel, although it has traditionally been traced on land route maps of republican Hispania³.

These settlements have a somehow homogenous disposition. They are small enclaves of a half a hectare located at the top of headlands. At its base we find in all cases those coves suitable for the sheltering of small ships. In them the characteristic Iberian ceramic with painted decoration appeared (fig. 3), very characteristic of this time frame in the properly Iberian

¹ LLOBREGAT 1972.

² GRAU 2002; MORATALLA 2004.

³ SILLIÈRES 2003, fig. 1.

settlements. It is a very refined and good quality ceramic, made with an oxidizing firing and characterized by geometric decoration painted in shades of vinous red. However, on the occasion of a salvage excavation at the Cap Negret site in 1987⁴, we were able to see for the first time that Iberian ceramics appeared in smaller numbers than imported Roman and Punic ceramics (tab. 1), and also the high NMI of Dressel 1 (20), Lamboglia 2 (20), and Greco-Italic amphorae (9) and forms of Campanian black-slip ware of the types A and B (39) and thin-walled beakers (13) (tab. 2). Even admitting that the population engaged in commercial exchange, these amounts of imported ware began to seem excessive for the standards we were working with in different sites⁵. Another fact also caught our attention: the variety of Roman kitchen glasses. We will come back to this fact later in this paper.

2. THE RESEARCH PROJECT

In 2010 we began the study of these enclaves with the aim of knowing in depth how the Iberian population lived and characterizing the process of cultural change that was undergoing. First, we compiled all the known data from the old excavations and restudied the findings⁶. Among these findings, were identified armament and Roman militaria, medical instruments like *spathomele*, *stili*, Gallarate and Piatra Neamt jug handles, situla feet and tools for construction and maintenance⁷ (fig. 4), common

⁴ SALA 1990.

⁵ SALA 2003.

⁶ The materials of these excavations are deposited in the Provincial Archaeological Museum of Alicante-MARQ and in the Municipal Archaeological and Ethnographic Museum of Jávea.

⁷ BAYO 2010, pp. 122-132; BAYO 2014, fig. 5-10.

objects also found in well-known republican military camps of the Sertorian Wars like Cáceres el Viejo in Lusitania⁸. The documented coins minted in the 2nd century BC did not give the initial date of the habitat but were being used with full exchange value in the early 1st century BC⁹. On those dates, specifically between the years 76 and 75 BC, very close to our study area, three battles were fought decisive in the outcome of the first Roman civil war that confronted the Sertorian and Pompeian armies in the Iberian Peninsula¹⁰. In addition, *Dianium*, the current city of Denia, is cited in sources as the naval headquarters of *Sertorius* and its fleet. This navy consisted of the ships of the Cilician pirates put at the service of its cause, as Strabo (Str., III.4.6) and Sallust (Sall., *Hist.*, I.124).

Hence, these objects referred without a doubt to the presence of the Roman army. For this reason, we began to consider the hypothesis that in the coastal enclaves there could be small roman garrisons temporarily installed in the Iberian fortification, and that all of this should have affected the inhabitants of the Contestanian territory to a greater or lesser extent. The presence of Roman military contingents in local settlements is not a new issue in the archaeology of the Roman conquest, although it has gained interest in recent years thanks to the recording of new examples. In the Portuguese area, C. Fabião has described the issue as *the "hidden" Roman army within indigenous sites*¹¹, thanks to the record of sites such as Cabeça de Vaiamonte, near the Cáceres el Viejo camp, or the Castro de Alvarelhos (Santo Tirso), in the north of Portugal, related to the Augustan conquest of

⁸ ULBERT 1984.

⁹ DOMÉNECH 2014, pp. 95-96.

¹⁰ SALINAS 2014, pp. 27-29.

¹¹ FABIÃO 2007, 128-131.

the northern towns of the Iberian Peninsula. Examples have also been documented in France, Switzerland and Luxembourg in recent years. M. Reddé highlights the sites of La Chaussée-Tirancourt (Somme), Bâle, a small rauracian *oppidum*, or Titelberg (Lamadeleine), the great *oppidum* of the Treveri, three confirmed cases of the cantonment of Roman troops in protohistoric *oppida* between the end of the Gallic War and the Principality of Augustus¹².

The research continued and with the geo-positioning and digital mapping of the fortifications we found that they were simple but well-planned buildings, which were not urban but strictly defensive in nature. See, for example, the clever adaptation to the abrupt orography in *Penya de l'Àguila*: three massive barrier walls between 2 and 3 m wide built in the narrowing of the summit. The settlement occupies an area of half a hectare and is located more than 1 km from wall III, from which the site was accessed. The intermediate space between the wall III and the habitat is empty, then the walls had the function of slowing down a hypothetical enemy advance. These walls have breaks to gain flanking and to give stability to the stretch. Also, a single access as sally ports of just 90 cm wide (fig. 5). With these simple elements, it was intended to achieve a virtually impregnable location during a very critical episode, something that was already noticed by the first researchers¹³. Another example is the fortification of the *Passet de Segària*. On a steep summit a visible section of a wall of more than 45 m closes the long side of a rectangular building that once again occupies half a hectare. It is built in a pseudo *opus quadratum*, a

¹² REDDÉ 2008, 70.

¹³ HEMP 1929; SCHUBART 1963.

technique without any tradition among the Iberian fortifications (fig. 6). This enclosure was built in a mountainous pass that leads from the port of *Dianium* to a nearby valley of Iberian settlement.

The key to the definitive reinterpretation of the Iberian enclaves as republican Roman forts was provided by the architecture of the Tossal de la Cala. The site was partially excavated in 1943¹⁴ and 1956¹⁵. Our team resumed field work in 2013 and it has been going until today and giving us enough data to be able to correctly identify the architecture. It is not an architecture of Iberian dwellings but a modular and repetitive architecture that uses the *pes monetalis* as a unit of measurement. It presents two constructive types (fig. 7): a simple plant of 2-3 rooms that develops perpendicular to the wall, has its access from the main street, and stairs that descend to the lower rooms with the wall as closure (Nos. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 13); and another more complex type has a greater number of rooms connected by narrow spans (Nos. 10-12 and 14-15). These and other constructive details, on which we cannot extend here, confirm that we were facing a fort from the first Roman civil war¹⁶ and that it meets the characteristics to be typified as a *castellum*¹⁷.

The occupation of protohistoric sites by the Roman army in Central European regions takes place in a second phase of the conquest process, when in the respective territories, which are already occupied, it is necessary to reaffirm control with a permanent presence of Roman garrisons. This is not the situation of the Alicante coastal sites. They were

¹⁴ BELDA 1950-51.

¹⁵ TARRADELL 1985.

¹⁶ SALA *et alii* 2014a; 2014b.

¹⁷ JIMÉNEZ DE FURUNDARENA 1995.

built *ex novo*, have a single horizon of occupation and were inhabited for a very short period during the 70s BC. According to our calculations, they formed a network of forts of half a hectare of extension and capacity to house two centuries. Everything began to fall into place: the weapons and *militaria* belonged to the soldiers; the abundant amphorae of Italian wine and oil, of salted fish from Cádiz and from other sources¹⁸ were part of the provisioning of the troops; the black-slip Campanian pottery and thin-walled goblets were for the rations of wine; and they spent their leisure time in games of chance¹⁹, as indicated by the *tessera lusoria* found in Passet de Segària (fig. 8).

Current research understands commensality as a means of identifying a social group through its gastronomic customs and, in fact, both the preparation of food and the way of consuming it are part of the cultural baggage of each society. The kitchen-ware in the Tossal de la Cala, Cap Negret and Penya de l'Àguila is undeniable italic and presents a varied repertoire -*aulae*, *patinae*, *caccabi*, *lopades*-, which contrasts with the low percentage of Iberian kitchen ceramics²⁰ (tab. 3). In the *aulae* you could cook *puls* or also boil vegetables, meats, etc.²¹. In the *patina* a kind of tortilla or quiche was cooked without dough that included vegetables, fish or meat with curdled eggs and brains²². The *caccabus*, a container between the *aulae*

¹⁸ As a curiosity we will point out the presence of a wine amphora from the island of Kos in the Tossal de la Cala. It contained a long-maturing salty wine, to which Pliny attributed medicinal properties (*Nat. Hist.*, XIV, 77-79), and that was highly appreciated in military circles, in TCHERNIA 1986: 19.

¹⁹ RODRÍGUEZ 2016.

²⁰ BAYO 2019, pp. 510-530.

²¹ ROTH 1999, p. 45; BELTRÁN 2002, p. 205; OLCESE 2003, p. 38.

²² BELTRÁN 2002, p. 206; HUGUET 2013, p. 311.

and the *patina*²³, made it possible to cook the *minutalia*, a stew made of meat, fish and vegetables minced into tiny pieces. In the *lopades* the fish was stewed in its juice by covering it with a lid²⁴. *Sartago* was used to fry or sauté fish or meat, or to make cookies or cakes²⁵. It was the definitive turning point, since it was hardly credible that the Iberian population had changed their eating habits in just a few years.

3. THE HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK AND THE ROMANIZATION PROCESS

From the sequence of military operations it follows that *Sertorius*'s intention was to secure control of the territories that provided him with a safe base to march on Italy: the Ebro valley, the Pyrenean foothills and the Levantine coast²⁶. Everything changed when in 77 BC Pompey crossed the Pyrenees at the command of his army to reinforce the legions of *Metellus* in Later Hispania. With the important port of *Carthago Nova* in the hands of the senators and Pompey descending the Mediterranean coast, *Sertorius* needed an escape route by sea to Italy and leaned towards the port of *Dianium* as a stronghold and naval base²⁷ that same year (fig. 9). The confrontation of the archaeological data with the historical facts allows to attribute to *Sertorius* the construction of the forts around the Cabo de la Nao. They respond to a studied plan of fortification of the southeast peninsular coast, since they maintain visual connection among them. This was possible

²³ BATS 1988, pp. 46, 69.

²⁴ BATS 1988, pp. 68-69.

²⁵ BATS 1988, p. 50.

²⁶ SALINAS 2006, p. 156.

²⁷ PÉREZ VILATELA 1992, p. 131.

because the Iberian *Contestania* he had a friendly retro-country thanks to the alliance with the *contestani*, as *Titus Livius* affirms in the *Periocha* XCI. With the ports of *Ebusus* and *Carthago Nova* out of his control, monitoring the passage of senatorial ships in front of the cape was vital to his army. The assault of the senatorial ships by *Sertorius's* allied Cilician fleet tried to remedy the serious supply problem caused by the closure of the official channels²⁸. We defend that this is the explanation for the high number of italic amphorae in Alicante's forts²⁹ (fig. 10). It is the archaeological testimony of a question to which the written sources alluded³⁰: the importance of the provisioning of the legions in the development of conflicts.

Going from the traditional vision of the sites of the north coast of Alicante as Iberian towns to an interpretation of a network of *castella* of the Sertorian wars supposes a substantial change for the knowledge of the Roman civil wars in the southeast of Hispania. Its reinterpretation is already a milestone in the investigation that cannot be concluded without dwelling on the consequences among the Iberian population. It is possible to think that, by virtue of the agreements of *Sertorius* with the *contestani*, they had to provide products for the supply of the coastal garrisons. The Iberian amphorae and vases found in the forts are the containers for transporting and storing the products - food, esparto ropes, skins, etc. - that the people from the interior valleys would contribute to the Sertorian army. It is also probable that they

²⁸ We believe that Cicero alludes to this situation in the defense of *Marcus Fonteio* who, being governor of Gaul, sent convoys to Metellus because the aid sent from Rome by sea was intercepted by the Sertorians on the "Levantine coast" (Cic. *Pro Fonteio*, 13), in MUÑIZ 1978, p. 252.

²⁹ SALA *et alii* 2013.

³⁰ CADIOU 2008, pp. 435-450.

contributed auxiliary troops, the existence of which we believe to see in a *graffiti* in the Iberian language on a plate Lamb 5 from campaniense B or the representation of a military parade painted on a Iberian ceramic fragment found in the Tossal de la Cala (fig. 11). Auxiliaries did not reside in this fort, since we have just seen that all the kitchenware is Roman, but it is true that in the surroundings of the forts, *auxilia* and/or the Iberian population that came with their products could hear Latin, participated in their measure of the discipline of the Roman army, met a different commensality and observed the rituals dedicated to the Roman gods, among other daily gestures.

This environment could have marked the beginning of the Romanization process of the *contestani*, but the Sertorian conflict ended only five years after the construction of the forts, just after the death of *Sertorius* in 72 BC. Then, the contestanian territory would remain practically empty of Roman population until the Augustan period, when Archaeology confirms the presence of the Roman civil and/or military population with the foundation of the colony of *Ilici* and the municipality of *Lucentum*, following now a different strategy of consolidation of the conquered territories. Consequently, can we speak of the romanization of the Contestanian Iberian population? Not in the terms that traditional historiography defended and certainly not at an early date³¹. The cultural change begins from Augustus and it is in the Flavian era when we can speak of a Romanised context around cities and their *territoria*³².

³¹ The theoretical debate on the scarce or non-existent Romanisation of the Contestania's Iberian population that can be deduced from this new archaeological framework has been dealt with in depth by one of the members of the research team in her PhD thesis: BAYO 2019, pp. 31-103.

³² OLCINA 2014.

Cultural changes arose in conjunction with the process of conquest and included the spread of Latin as the vehicular language of the provinces, the development of Roman urban forms and resources, new identities and ways of dressing, changes in diet, the extension of Roman religious practices and the adaptation of Roman artistic expressions combined with the traditions of the conquered regions³³. We find in this definition of S. Keay the final scenario of Romanization in Contestania, but as far as the times are concerned we are in favour of the opinion of G. Woolf, who suggests that Mediterranean Hispania was under effective Roman control during generations before there was any cultural change³⁴. Against this idea F. Beltrán, a good connoisseur of Romanization in the Ebro valley, is positioned³⁵. According to this researcher, in this territory, with an italic presence since the 2nd century BC, elements of Roman affiliation are adopted, reworked and integrated into local structures that retain a notable role and, thus, synthesis phenomena occur from which societies with a clear provincial profile emerge³⁶.

Other regions of *Hispania Ulterior*, with enormous economic interests for Rome, either for its rich agricultural production, or for the exploitation of minerals, and with an italic presence since the end of the Second Punic War, also experienced an early Romanization that can be pursued through something as simple but revealing as it is the appearance already in the 1st century BC of a “romanized” amphoric production for the packaging of oil and salted fish from the *Baetica* that reached as far as Rome³⁷. This does not

³³ KEAY 2001, p. 123.

³⁴ WOOLF 1997, 346.

³⁵ BELTRÁN 2017.

³⁶ BELTRÁN 2003, p. 180.

³⁷ GARCÍA VARGAS, 2009; BERNAL *et alii*, 2013.

seem to be what happened in Iberian Contestania in the 2nd and 1st centuries BC.

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Fig. 1. Location of archaeological sites on the north coast of Alicante (MARQ cartographic base).

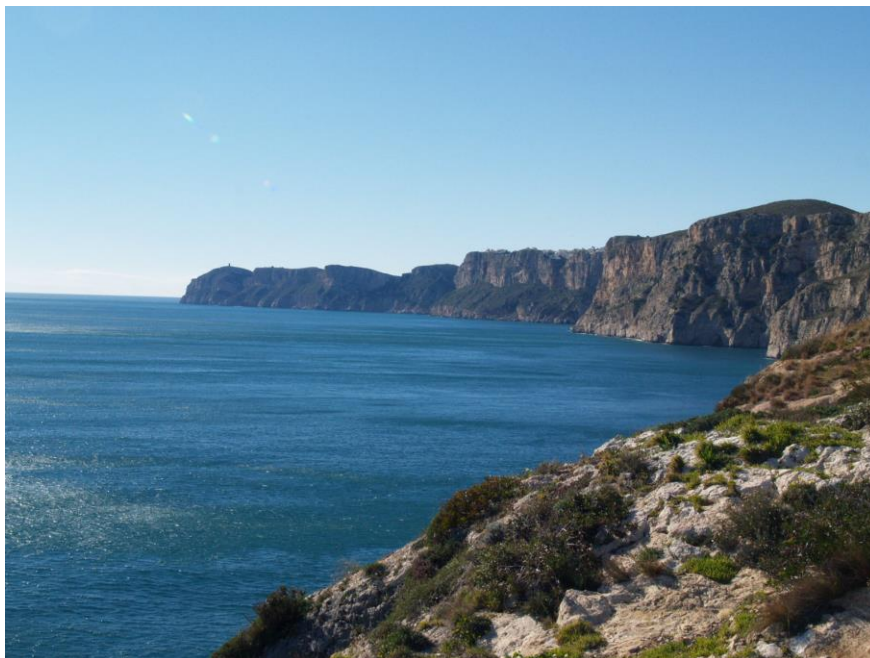
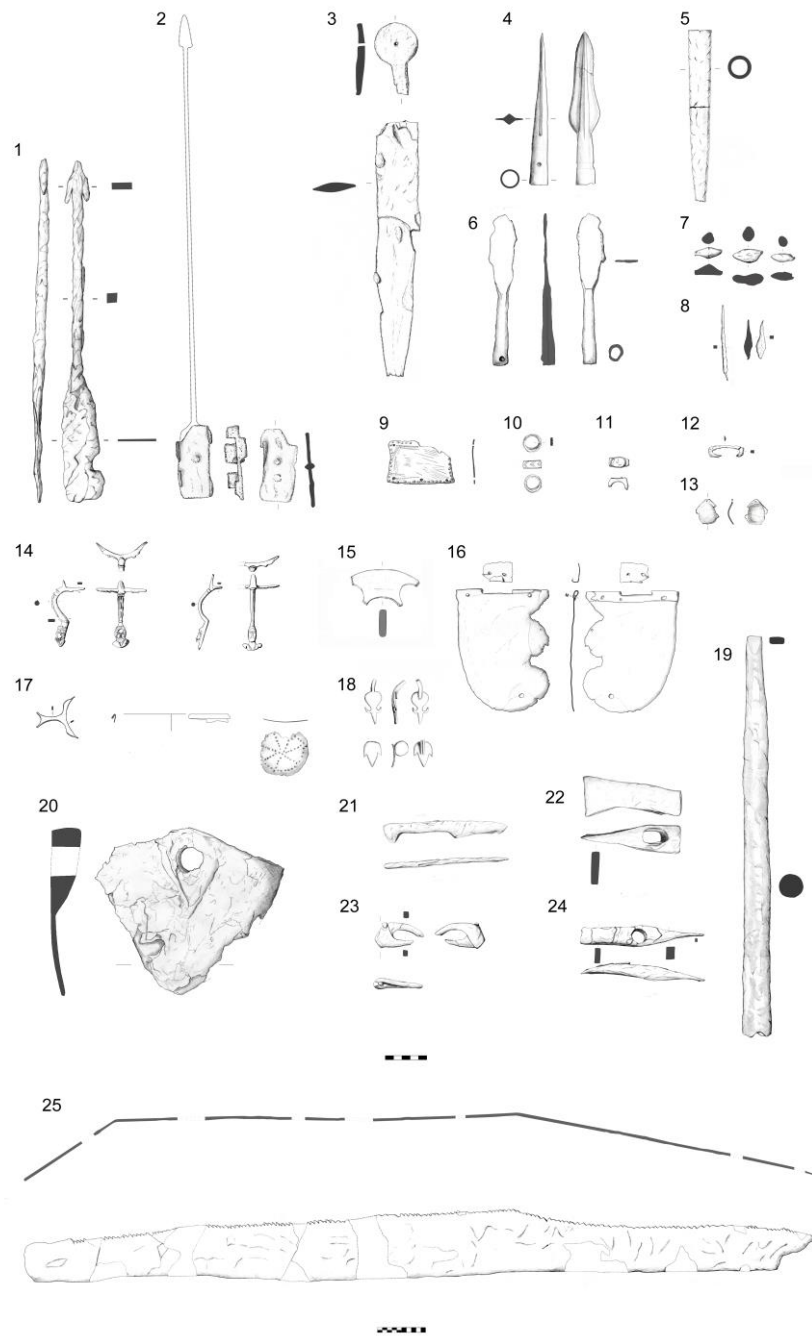


Fig. 2. Image of the coast taken from Cabo de la Nao. In the background, the Punta de la Torre archaeological site (photo by X. Bolufer).



Fig. 3. Selection of painted Iberian vases from Tossal de la Cala (photo by S. Bayo).



Drew by S. Bayo

Fig. 4. *Militaria* and other findings from the small coastal forts in Alicante: (1–2) *pila*; (3) *gladius*; (4–6) spearheads; (7) lead sling bullets; (8) spears; (9) cavalry harness fitting or belt plaque; (10–11) bone and iron rings; (12) strike-a-light; (13) seal box (*bulla*); (14–15, 18) bronze jug handles and *situla* fragment; (16) cheekpiece from Montefortino type helmet; (17) fragments of strainer (*trulla*); (19–25) various tools. Nos. 1, 4, 6, 8–9, 11–12, 16–17, 19–24 Peña de l'Àguila; No 7 Passet de Segària; Nos 2–3, 5, 10, 13–15, 18, 25 Tossal de la Cala (drawings by S. Bayo).



Fig. 5. Aerial photograph of the Peña de l'Àguila fort. The three defensive lines in barrier are appreciated (drawing by F. Sala).



Fig. 6. *Pseudo quadratum* section of the wall of the Passet de Segària fortification (photo by F. Sala).



Fig. 7. General plan of the fortress of Tossal de la Cala with indication of the construction types (drawing by Stereogràfica). The wall of the western sector was plundered at the beginning of the 20th century for the construction of the town's port. The marked path with a thick outline is the path opened in 1956 to urbanize the hill. It crossed the wall and annexed buildings. It is possible that at that point there was one of the gates of the fort.



Fig. 8. *Tessera lusoria* found in the Passet de Segària fort (photo and drawing by J. Boronat).



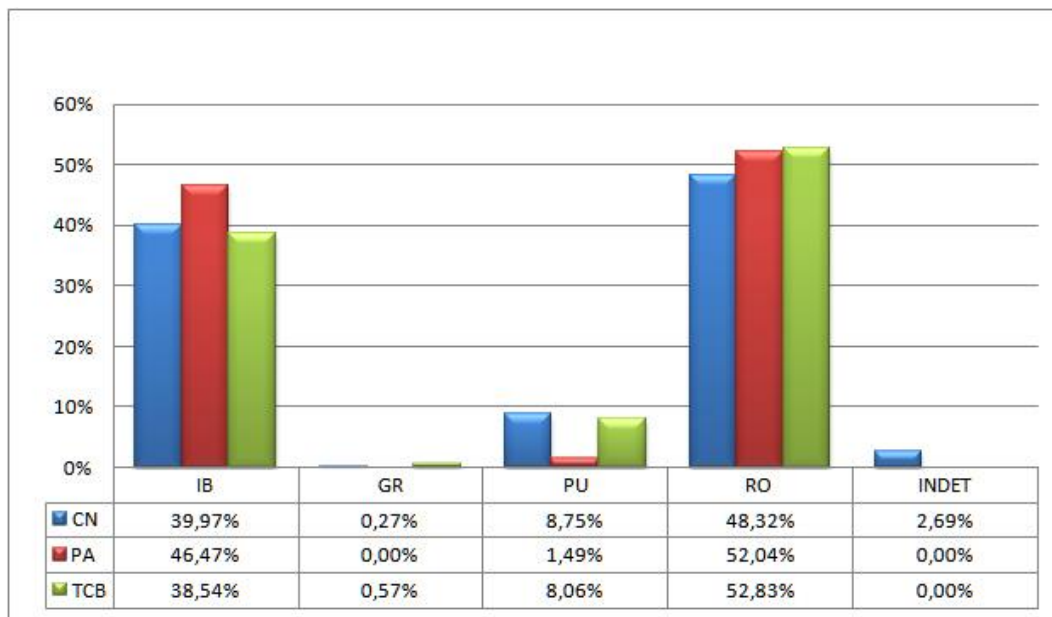
Fig. 9. Historical cartography of the Sertorian conflict in the southeast of Hispania with the location of the archaeological sites in the Alicante coast around the Cabo de la Nao (white points). With a white square, the *castrum aestivum* of La Vila; with a black dot the sites of the second half of the 1st century BC (Caesarian wars or Augustan times) and with a white star the location of battles or military clashes mentioned in the sources (*Lauro*, *Sucro*) or with archeological evidence (*Valentia*) (drawing by S. Bayo).



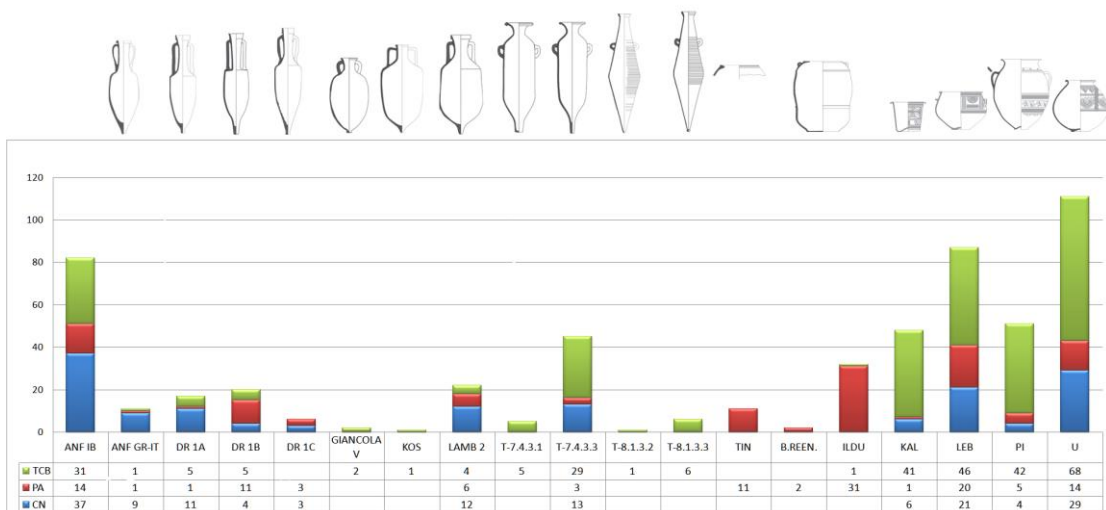
Fig. 10. Image of the Tossal de la Cala and its surroundings. At the top it can be seen part of the wall and its attached buildings in the eastern sector. The cove and the island would be ideal places to hide the Cilician *myoparones* waiting for the passage of senatorial merchant ships (photo by S. Bayo).



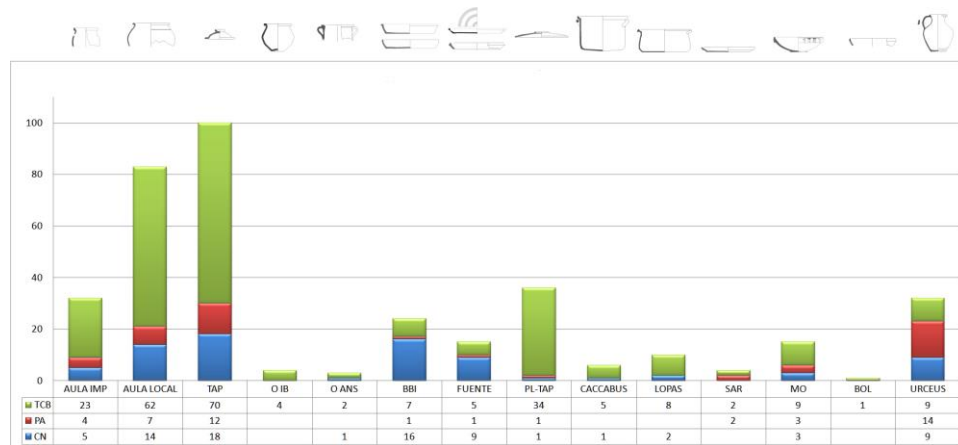
Fig. 11. Iberian pottery fragment with representation of a military parade and a *graffiti* in the Iberian language on the Camp. B, Lamb. 5 *patera* found in the Tossal de la Cala (photo by S. Bayo).



Tab. 1. Percentages by provenance of the pottery in Cap Negret (blue), Peña de l'Àguila (red) and Tossal de la Cala (green) (drawing by S. Bayo).



Tab. 2. Comparative repertoire of the types of amphorae and other transport and storage containers of Cap Negret, Peña de l'Àguila and Tossal de la Cala (drawing by S. Bayo).



Tab. 3. Comparative repertoire of kitchenware in the forts of Cap Negret (blue), Peña de l'Àguila (red) and Tossal de la Cala (green). The higher figures in Tossal de la Cala are due to the fact that it has undergone a greater number of excavations (drawing by S. Bayo).