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NON CVM CORPORE EXTINGVVNTVR MAGNAE ANIMAE

Jaume Noguera

LA PALMA – NOVA CLASSIS. A PUBLIUS CORNELIUS SCIPIO
AFRICANUS ENCAMPMENT DURING THE SECOND PUNIC WAR
IN IBERIA

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to present the latest archaeological data dealing with the very beginning of the Roman conquest of the Iberian Peninsula. It is based on the initial results of a research project on Roman camps of the Republican era in north-east Spain, which began in 2006¹. So far two temporary camps have been located. The oldest is next to what used to be the mouth of the River Ebro, in La Palma (l'Aldea, Tarragona), and was occupied by Roman troops during the Second Punic War in Iberia (218–206 BC). The other one has been located close to the indigenous town of Castellet de Banyoles², further up the same river in Tivissa (Tarragona), and is a temporary camp which was probably related to the Iberian settlement being attacked and destroyed by Roman troops between 200 and 190 BC (fig. 1).

This paper will deal only with those events related to the conflict which set Romans against Carthaginians in the north-east of the peninsula. To prove the existence of a camp at La Palma during the Second Punic War we will base our arguments on written sources, geostrategic considerations and the archaeological documentation generated by the research project.

2. Current state of research

Archaeological research into the Roman army has traditionally been carried out by German and Anglo-Saxon researchers. To a large extent this can be explained by the many Roman military settlements to be found on the Limes with Germania and Britannia³. There is no doubt as to the quality and quantity of the information, but it has little to do with the subject of our study because it deals with more permanent camps dating from the time of the Empire.

¹ Funded by grant 2007ACOM 00030 from the AGAUR (Agència d'Ajuts Universitaris i de Recerca de la Generalitat de Catalunya), Council of Tarragona, the Departament de Cultura de la Generalitat de Catalunya and the Institut d'Estudis Ramon Muntaner.

² Noguera 2008, 41–47.

³ Unz 1983; Genser 1986; Planck – Schurbein 1992; Connolly 1998; Rabold et al. 2000; Goldsworthy 2003.

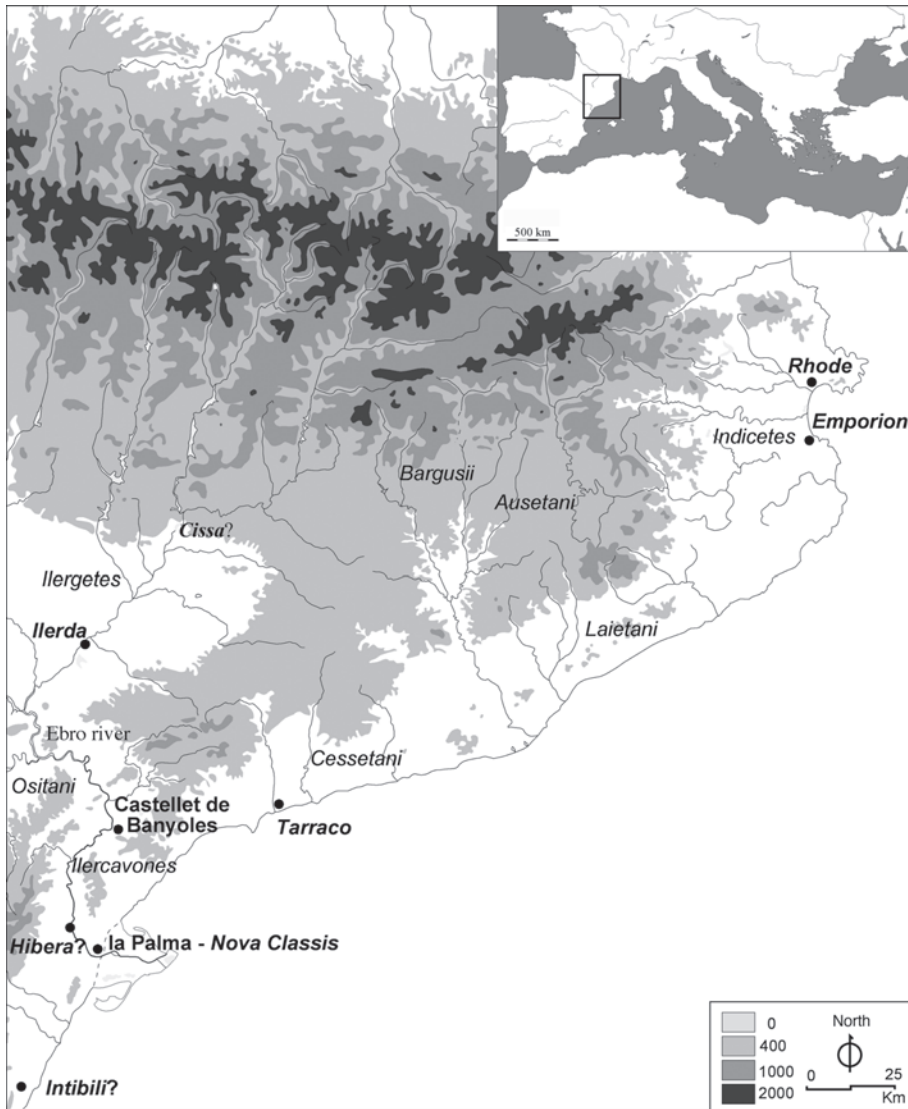


Fig. 1 Map of the north-eastern Iberian Peninsula showing the distribution of indigenous groups and the location of Roman camps next to the River Ebro.

As regards the Republican era, research has been carried out in France on camps and sieges dating from the Roman occupation of Gaul⁴, basically in the 1st century BC.

However, it is difficult to extrapolate the results of an archaeological study of the Roman army at the end of the Republican era or during the Empire to the army existing during the 3rd and the beginning of the 2nd centuries BC. Information on this period obviously needs to come from those territories affected by the first stage of Roman expansionism – the Iberian Peninsula, the Italian Peninsula and central Mediterranean islands, Greece and North Africa – where

⁴ Feugère 1993; Reddé – Schnurbein 2001; Reddé 2006.

the presence of legions is documented in ancient sources during the Second Punic War, during conflicts with the indigenous groups of the Iberian Peninsula and during the Macedonian Wars. Surprisingly, archaeological research on these conflicts is almost non-existent.

In the case of the Iberian Peninsula, there has recently been an increase in the number of studies on Roman military archaeology⁵, but the vast majority of work on the Republican era refers to research carried out in military settlements of the 1st century BC⁶. This work is the continuation, many years later, of Adolf Schulten's excavations of the Roman camps that surrounded the Celtiberian city of Numantia⁷ during the 2nd century BC, which have recently been revised⁸. The large amount of new information on Roman camps in the Iberian Peninsula has been criticized from some quarters due to doubts about identification and chronology⁹. But to return to the period that most interests us, only two research projects dealing specifically with the very beginnings of the Roman military presence in Iberia have been carried out: the project upon which this paper is based, and another which focuses on an archaeological analysis of the Battle of Baecula (Cerro de la Albahacas, Jaén), which was fought between Publius Cornelius Scipio and Hasdrubal Barca in 208 BC¹⁰.

In the case of Italy, where written sources, basically Polybius and Livy, situate a larger number of camps and confrontations from the Second Punic War – such as battles that took place by the River Trebia, Lake Trasimeno, Cannae and the River Metauro, along with the sieges of Capua and Syracuse, to mention only the most well-known – there is virtually no archaeological information¹¹. In the words of Lawrence Keppie¹²: “It will doubtless surprise the reader to know that not a single Roman camp has been found in Italy itself, to testify (for example) to operations against Hannibal, or the Celtic tribes in the Po Valley”.

The archaeological panorama is equally bleak in the case of North Africa, where no research work has been carried out into the Roman landings starting in 204 BC, their camps and sieges, or into the battlefields of Utica, Great Plains and Zama. As usual, research is limited to trying to locate the places mentioned by the sources. However, this is based only on topographic or toponymic coincidences and is not backed up by subsequent archaeological work¹³.

Similarly in the case of the Balkans, where Republican Rome confronted Macedonia – hostilities being especially intense during the Second (200–196 BC) and Third (172–168 BC) Macedonian Wars, which both culminated in victories for the legions over the phalanxes in Cynoscephalae (197 BC) and Pydna (168 BC) – no systematic archaeological excavations or surveys have been carried out to investigate the camps and battlefields involved in these conflicts, although attempts have been made to locate them geographically¹⁴. Archaeological evidence linked to Roman troops at the end of the 3rd and beginning of the 2nd centuries BC is limited to chance discoveries or very old ones¹⁵.

⁵ Morillo – García-Marcos 2002.

⁶ Ulbert 1984; Peralta 2002; Morillo – Aurrecoechea 2006; Morillo u. a. 2009.

⁷ Schulten 1927; Schulten 1931.

⁸ Luik 2002; Dobson 2008.

⁹ Cadiou 2008.

¹⁰ Bellón u. a. 2009.

¹¹ Coulston 2001, 25 f.

¹² Keppie 1998, 12.

¹³ Lazenby 1978.

¹⁴ Hammond 1984; Hammond 1988.

¹⁵ Horvat 2002.

3. *Written sources mentioning the River Ebro during the Second Punic War*

The main written sources for the period covered by this paper are basically Polybius of Megalopolis and T. Livy. Polybius is considered to be a very reliable source of information, especially as he underwent Hellenistic military training and was possibly in the Iberian Peninsula during the final stages of the siege of the Celtiberian town of Numantia in the second half of the 2nd century BC, under the auspices of Scipio Aemilianus. We can therefore assume that he had first-hand information. This is abundantly clear in his descriptions of the Roman military structure, its camps, its marching order, internal organization, etc., although he has a certain tendency to idealize the Roman military system¹⁶. Unfortunately part of his Histories referring to the war in Hispania has not survived. The only years available are 218 and 217 BC (book 3) and those between 210 and 206 BC (books 10 and 11). Nothing survives from the years after the departure of Scipio Africanus, and only two small fragments remain from the years 216 to 211 BC (books 7 and 9). Livy, on the other hand, wrote *Ab urbe condita* at the start of the Imperial period, over 200 years after the events narrated took place. For this reason there are more errors than in Polybius, but at least the complete works covering the years of the Second Punic War have survived. It is curious that the geographical references and descriptions are less frequent and more ambiguous in Polybius than in Livy despite the fact that, as mentioned earlier, Polybius spent time in Hispania and actually met some of the people mentioned, such as Publius Scipio's adviser, Caius Lelius¹⁷, whereas Livy wrote many years after the Second Punic War. As we will see later, it is in Livy that the clearest references can be found to the location of a Roman camp by the mouth of the Ebro.

In fact the written sources indicate that most of the combat during the initial stages of the Second Punic War in the Iberian Peninsula took place in the lower reaches of this river (fig. 2). The actual hostilities between Rome and Carthage did not begin with the taking of Saguntum in 219 BC, but with Hannibal's troops crossing the river at the end of spring 218 BC. In order to cross the Alps before winter arrived, the Carthaginian general set off northward avoiding the coastline between the Ebro and the Pyrenees, which was occupied by Greek cities allied with Rome and Iberian groups who were sympathetic to the cause. To prevent reinforcements being sent to Hannibal from the Iberian Peninsula, in 218 BC Gnaeus Cornelius Scipio Calvus landed in the Greek colony of Emporion and shortly afterwards defeated Hanno's Carthaginian troops at Cissa (Pol. 3, 76). This meant that the Romans were then in control of the territory to the north of the Ebro, while the Carthaginians established their bases to the south.

The following year Hannibal's brother, Hasdrubal Barca, headed for the mouth of the Ebro with an army and 40 ships, but a combined fleet of Romans and Massaliotes¹⁸ won a naval victory and captured most of the Carthaginian vessels, after which the army led by Hasdrubal retreated south (Pol. 3, 96; Liv. 22, 19–20).

¹⁶ Walbank 1957, 697–723.

¹⁷ Scullard 1970, 16 f.

¹⁸ Richardson 1986, 37 emphasizes the importance of the Massaliot naval contingent, which is habitually underestimated.

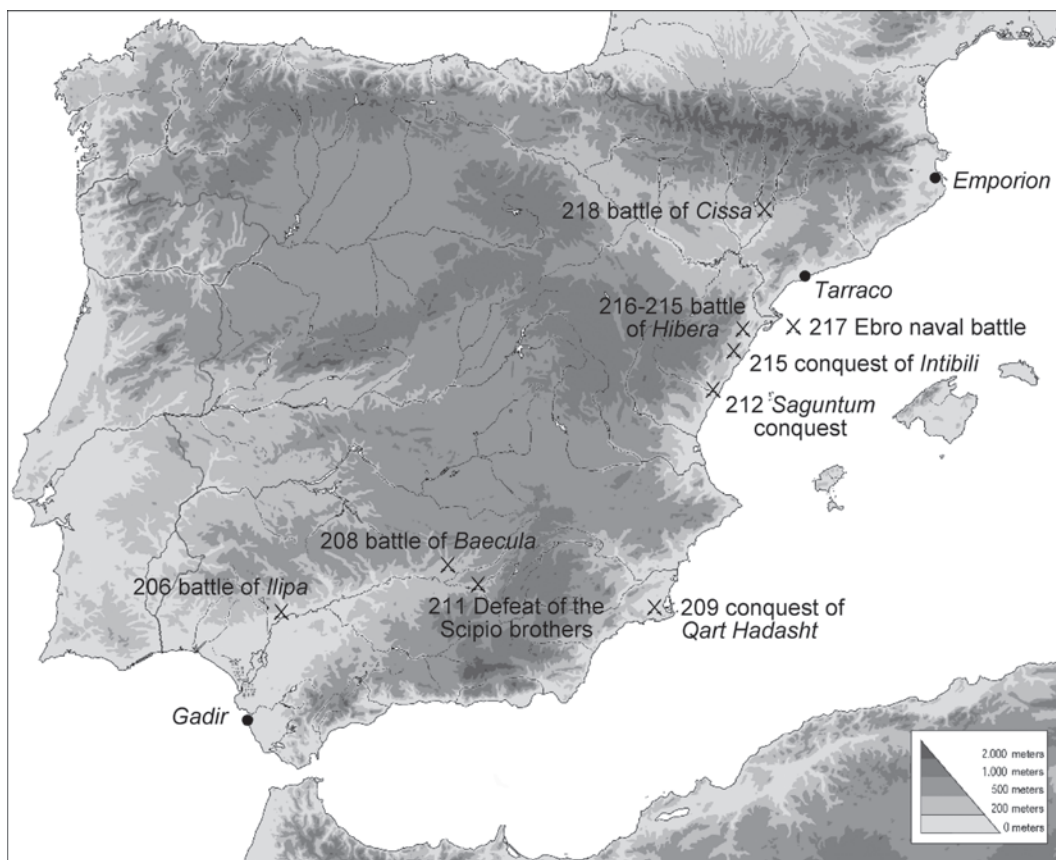


Fig. 2 Main battles of the Second Punic War on the Iberian Peninsula.

In these initial stages of the conflict Publius and Gnaeus Cornelius Scipio were aiming to prevent reinforcements and supplies from reaching Hannibal from his bases in Hispania. Proof of this can be seen in 216 BC, or possibly the following year, when Hasdrubal again headed for the Ebro to try and break the Roman blockade and, along with his troops, re-join Hannibal in the most critical moments of the conflict in the Italian Peninsula (Liv. 23, 27, 9). The Romans, however, concentrated their troops next to the Ebro and crossed it in order to prevent the Carthaginian army from passing (Liv. 23, 28, 9).

After a series of tactical movements, both armies faced each other at an unknown spot probably halfway between the indigenous towns of Intibilis and Hibera. After what appears to be a failed attempt to repeat the strategy followed by Hannibal in Cannae, the Carthaginian army was defeated. Specialists have not deemed the Battle of Hibera worthy of any particular attention, but it had a great effect on the future of the Second Punic War as it not only prevented the arrival of the reinforcements that Hannibal expected, but Carthage also had to divert the troops it had ready to send to the Italian Peninsula to the Iberian Peninsula (Liv. 23, 32, 5–12).

We only know of the events that took place in Hispania between 214 and 212 BC through Livy, who mentions a series of Roman victories in the heart of the Guadalquivir

valley. Most researchers today are dubious about these events because the scene of these supposed combats is too far from the area under Roman control, which at that time followed a line north of the River Ebro¹⁹. It could well be an invention on the part of annalists to extol the figure of the Scipios and play down their subsequent defeat. It is more likely that the Romans carried out operations of little importance while advancing slowly and in stages southward along the Mediterranean coast. Hence in 215 BC they headed for Intibili and in 212 BC conquered Saguntum, a base of operations from which it would be easier for them to advance deep into the Guadalquivir valley. In fact it would be from that moment on that it was decided to change strategies in order to bring the war in the peninsula to an end (Liv. 25, 32). Following these new directives, at the start of spring 211 BC the two Scipios went deep into the heart of Carthaginian territory but made the mistake of dividing their forces, which led to their defeat and death. It was only through the resolve and organizational capabilities of a cavalry officer, Lucius Marcius, and one of Publius Scipio's advisers, Tiberius Fonteius, that the troops were able to regroup and withdraw back to the River Ebro, and it was almost certainly only the divisions among the Carthaginian generals that prevented the annihilation of the Roman army in Iberia. It is at this time that there is a first, rather ambiguous mention of a Roman camp being located by the River Ebro: "But so preeminent was a mere Roman knight in his personal influence with the soldiers and in the respect they paid him that, after they had fortified a camp on this side of the Hiberus and decided that a commander of the army should be chosen in an election by the soldiers, relieving each other as sentries on the wall and in out post duty until all had cast their votes, they unanimously conferred the high command upon Lucius Marcius" (Liv. 25, 37, 6–7, trans. B. O. Foster).

Despite the gravity of the situation, the conquest of the Campanian city of Capua in 211 BC enabled a great number of troops to be spared. A contingent of 12,000 soldiers and 1,100 cavalrymen was sent to Iberia, commanded by the *propraetor* Gaius Claudius Nero, who took control of the troops led by Lucius Marcius and Tiberius Fonteius. Livy's version of these events provides us with a second, much more explicit mention of a Roman camp next to the Ebro, which we can relate to the previous quote: "At Rome the senate, having discharged its responsibilities so far as concerned Capua, voted to assign to Gaius Nero six thousand infantry and three hundred cavalry of his own choosing, from the two legions which he had had before Capua, and from the Latin allies the same number of infantry and eight hundred cavalry. This army Nero embarked at Puteoli and transported to Spain. Arrived at Tarraco by sea, he there disembarked his troops, beached the ships, and armed even the crews, to increase his numbers. Then setting out for the river Ebro, he took over the army from Tiberius Fonteius and Lucius Marcius" (Liv. 26, 17, 1–2, trans. B. O. Foster).

Despite a few passages of doubtful veracity, the troops commanded by Gaius Nero probably remained on the defensive, and it was not until the arrival of more reinforcements led by Publius Cornelius Scipio (later Africanus) in 210 BC that the Romans regained the initiative. In 209 BC Publius devised a new strategy for defeating the Carthaginians: instead of meeting them in battle in open country in the heart of enemy territory, he set off for Qart Hadasht (Cartagena), the most important city and the base of operations upon which Punic military power in Iberia depended. The speed of the attack and the lack of coordination of

¹⁹ Lazenby 1978, 129; Richardson 1986, 39.

the Carthaginian armies, far away from the theatre of operations, ensured its success. Livy mentions that at the start of the campaign Publius Scipio concentrated his troops by the mouth of the Ebro. This is the most explicit quote regarding the existence of a large Roman camp on this site: "In Spain at the beginning of spring Publius Scipio launched his ships, and after summoning the allied auxiliaries to Tarraco by an edict, he ordered the fleet and the transports to sail thence to the mouth of the river Ebro. Having ordered the legions to leave their winter quarters and meet at the same point, he himself with five thousand allies set out from Tarraco to join the army" (Liv. 26, 41, 1–2, trans. B. O. Foster).

The conquest of Qart Hadasht represented a radical change in the course taken by the war in Iberia. From 209 BC all confrontations took place in the south of the peninsula, in Carthaginian territory. Hence in 208 BC Publius Cornelius Scipio and Hasdrubal Barca faced each other in Baecula in what appears to have been a battle in which the Romans came off best, but which was perhaps a tactical victory for the Carthaginian general as he managed to escape from the Roman army and head north to cross the Pyrenees and the Alps in order to send reinforcements to his brother Hannibal, although the following year he was defeated and killed near the River Metauro in northern Italy. Finally in 206 BC came the last great battle between Romans and Carthaginians in the Iberian peninsula, at Ilipa, the outcome being a crushing Punic defeat which resulted in their definitive withdrawal from the peninsula and the start of the final Roman offensive in North Africa.

It is precisely during the supposed discussions as to the advisability of attacking the heart of Carthaginian territory before driving Hannibal from the Italian Peninsula that we find Livy's last reference to the presence of Roman troops stationed at the mouth of the River Ebro. In the words of Fabius Maximus: "Over an unmolested sea you sailed along the coast of Italy and Gaul, and put in with your fleet at Emporiae, a city of our allies. Landing your troops you led them through country everywhere perfectly safe and reached allies and friends of the Roman people at Tarraco. From Tarraco it was then a march from one Roman post to another. Along the Hiberus were the armies of your father and uncle, which after losing their generals had gained more spirit even from disaster" (Liv. 28, 42, 3–4, trans. B. O. Foster).

After this short review of events from the viewpoint of the written sources, it is clear that between the landing in Emporion in 218 BC and the conquest of Qart Hadasht in 209 BC, the lower reaches of the Ebro was the main scene of hostilities between the two sides. Some of the main camps of Roman and Carthaginian troops must therefore be located in this area.

4. Geostrategic considerations

One of the fundamental considerations in choosing a site for a military camp is undoubtedly its geostrategic importance. The location of the camp at La Palma meets many of the conditions which, according to military writers of the time, had to be met for a temporary camp: it was a large area of flat land which was easy to defend and had a water supply, river anchorages and good communications. It is situated on a large river terrace to the left of where the mouth of the Ebro used to be, next to the last mountain spurs flanking the lower reaches of the river to the east. Communication difficulties are not so much due to the

River Ebro but the mountainous land that flanks it, especially to the east. The next crossing point upstream is located next to a ford and a path that crosses the mountains. I do not believe that it is by chance that the later Roman camp of Camí del Castellet de Banyoles was situated here²⁰ (fig. 3).

The camp at La Palma also controlled the main north-south communications route, the Via Heraclea, the road that followed the coastline and later became the Via Augusta. The importance of this road is unquestionable as it was undoubtedly the one along which the Carthaginians and Romans moved their armies. In fact the topographical configuration of the area means that all land communications have to cross the river terrace of La Palma, as can be seen from the current route of the AP7 freeway, the Barcelona-Valencia railroad and the national highway.

The camp's location next to the former mouth of the Ebro and the old coastline also enabled river and sea traffic in this sector to be controlled²¹. It should be remembered that the current river delta was formed after the Roman era, and at most there would have been an area of sandbanks and shallows. This explains how easily the Roman ships would have been able to tow away the Carthaginian galleys beached in the area by their crews after the battle at the mouth of the Ebro River in 217 BC, in full view of the Carthaginian army situated on dry land (Pol. 3, 96, 6). The river was also wide enough to enable fairly large-drafted ships to navigate at least as far as the city of Tortosa (supposedly the ancient Hibera named in written sources). The existence in this area of river ports such as the one situated in Camp-redó, two kilometers upstream, is recorded in medieval documents (fig. 4).

Its location on a river terrace 15 m above the Ebro may have made the construction of large-scale artificial defenses unnecessary. Its natural limits would have been the steep slope of the river terrace to the east, the course of an old riverbank to the north and the old coastline to the south, while to the west the landscape has been so utterly transformed as to re-

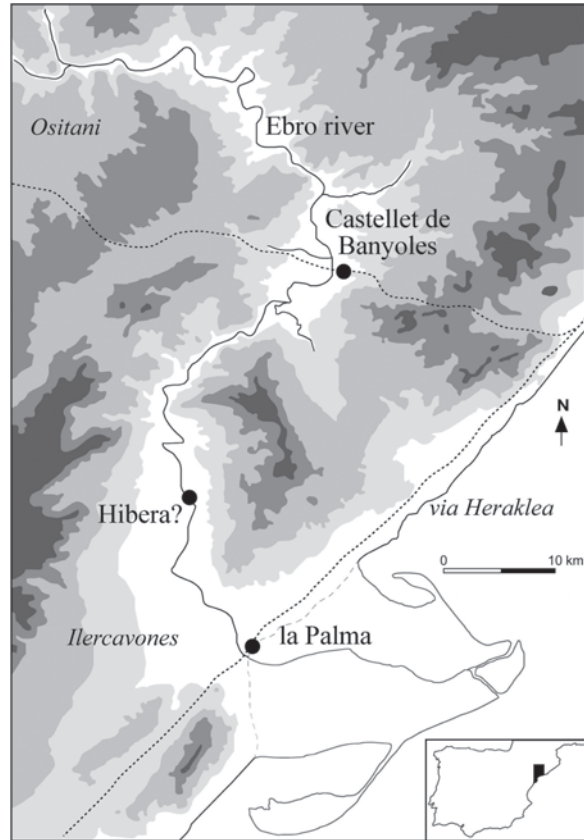


Fig. 3 Map of the lower course of the River Ebro, with the location of the camps at La Palma and Camí del Castellet de Banyoles, both next to important communication routes.

²⁰ Noguera 2008, 42.

²¹ Rankov 1996, 53 emphasizes the Roman interest in controlling the coastal ports in its domination of the Mediterranean during the Second Punic War.

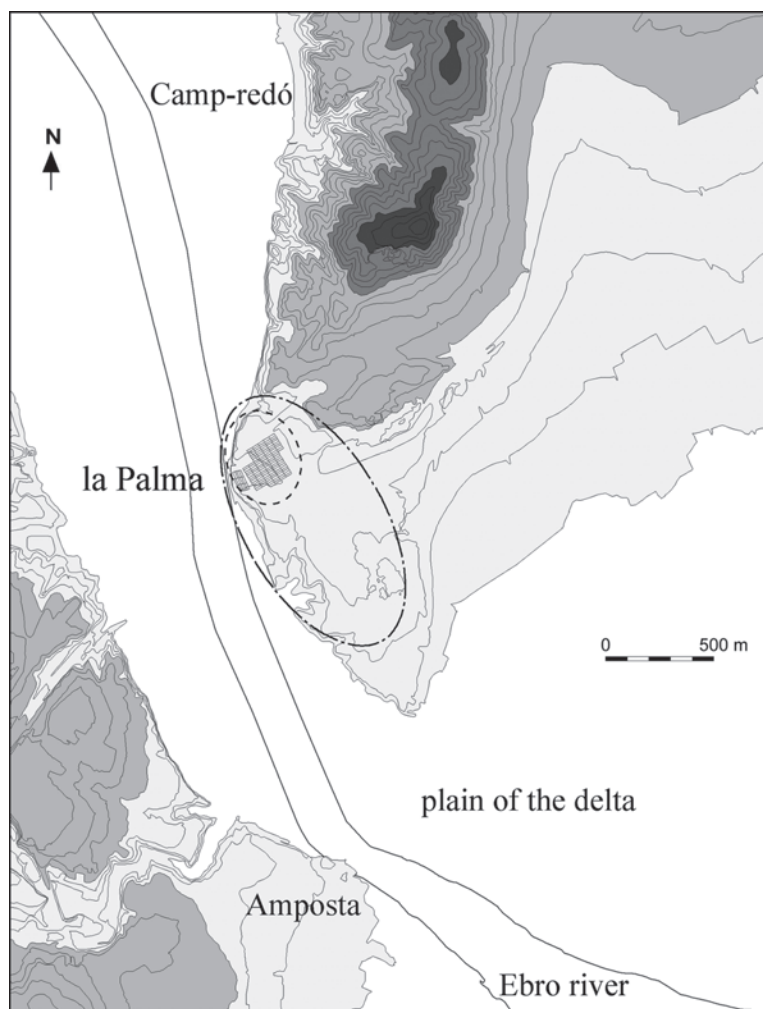


Fig. 4 Map of the mouth of the River Ebro, with the location of the Roman camp at La Palma. The broken lines show the maximum limits of the settlement and the area where fieldwork was carried out by the survey units in the 2006 campaign.

move any sign of artificial defenses or natural limits. The photographs taken by German planes belonging to the Condor Legion during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) provide an image of the area before the current changes were made, showing a surface area of over 100 ha (fig. 5).

The strategic importance of the spot made La Palma the scene of fierce fighting during different periods of history. In 1808, for example, Napoleonic troops were defeated in Bailén, in the Guadalquivir valley, and retreated to the Ebro to form a line of defense in an episode which has many parallels with the Roman defeat in the south of the peninsula in 211 BC and their subsequent withdrawal across the Ebro. In 1812 a fleet of 18 British transport ships ran aground on sandbanks at the mouth of the river, five of them then being captured



Fig. 5 Aerial photograph of the river mouth taken by the Condor Legion during the Battle of the Ebro (1938), with the location of the camp at La Palma.

by the French²² in an episode similar to that which took place between Romans and Carthaginians after the Battle of Ebro River in 217 BC

Years later, during the First (1833–1840) and Last (1872–1876) Carlist Wars, the city of Amposta was besieged and occupied on a number of occasions, and there is even a record of troops crossing the Ebro in the area of La Palma on October 12, 1874²³.

The most recent episode came about during the Battle of the Ebro in 1938, when troops of the XIV International Brigade carried out a bloody diversion attack in the area, resulting in the complete annihilation of the Commune de Paris battalion²⁴. As can be imagined, archaeological surveys have recovered large amounts of shells and shrapnel corresponding to these confrontations.

5. Archaeological surveys at La Palma

Of all Roman military settlements, temporary marching camps were the most provisional as they would only have been needed for a very short time, just a day or perhaps months or

²² Blanch 1968, 498.

²³ Cuerpo de Estado Mayor del Ejército 1888, 127.

²⁴ Delperrie 1968, 355.

even years, depending on strategic considerations and the length of the conflict. They were designed to be temporary and were therefore generally constructed using light materials that were easy and cheap to obtain, such as wood, earth, etc. (Pol. 6, 34, 1). Because they were only temporary and the materials were perishable, these sites are almost invisible and very difficult to identify. This explains why there are so few of them, and until very recently those dating from the end of the 3rd and the beginning of the 2nd centuries BC were practically unheard of.

In contrast the written sources continually refer to their existence during the various campaigns of the Second Punic War, for example the 8.000 soldiers stationed at the camp in Sucro in 206 BC (Liv. 28, 24, 5). It should also be remembered that apart from the camp we have already mentioned next to the Ebro, there were also other, probably less important garrisons between Tarraco and the Ebro (Liv. 28, 42, 3–4). It was also normal practice for the Punic and Roman armies to disperse their forces in winter camps and regroup at the start of spring to begin a new campaign (Pol. 3, 99; Liv. 25, 32, 1; Liv. 26, 41, 2; Liv. 29, 2, 1).

Perhaps the most important of these camps for Roman troops stationed between the Ebro and Tarraco is that of La Palma, next to the former mouth of the river. The site was discovered thanks to extensive surveys being carried out to serve as the basis of a doctoral thesis on protohistoric population patterns²⁵ and after a study of the archaeological material (mainly coins) kept at the local museum in Amposta (Tarragona) and in private collections.

Four archaeological surveys have been carried out since 2006. Methodologically the work has been based on intensive surveying, aerial photography, geophysical surveys (magnetic gradiometer, georadar), test pits, the systematic survey of large areas of land and the use of metal detectors. The methodology used for this type of site has already been effectively tested on similar sites²⁶. The main aim was to locate building structures or undisturbed archaeological strata which could be excavated more thoroughly at a later date, but so far all efforts in this direction have been fruitless. This lack of success is probably due to the types of materials used (wood, earth...) and their provisional nature. The only chance of attesting closed archaeological contexts lay in identifying natural or artificial depressions where materials from that time may have been preserved, like those documented around Mont Auxois during the Battle of Alesia²⁷. I am also convinced that the original ground occupied by Roman legions in La Palma had already disappeared as a result of the land being plowed up in the course of agricultural work, meaning that the only archaeological materials preserved would be out of stratigraphic context.

Thanks to systematic surveying, we have therefore been able to recover a large amount of material remains from the surface which can undoubtedly be traced back to the activities of Roman troops stationed here during the Second Punic War.

First it must be said that, although we have recorded that the remains of pottery, coins and other metal objects were recovered from a site of approximately 30 ha close to the river, the area today has undergone such profound changes due to the construction of a number of communication routes across it (railroad, freeway...) and a large housing development to the south that we have only been able to work on a surface area of around 7 ha (fig. 6).

²⁵ Noguera 2007.

²⁶ Coulston 2001; Harnecker 2004; Bellón et al. 2009.

²⁷ Reddé – Schnurbein 2001.



Fig. 6 Aerial photograph of the La Palma site (2007) next to the River Ebro, now crossed by the freeway and railroad. The parallel lines in the foreground are due to the systematic stripping of layers.

The first intervention, which took place in 2006, focused on land surveying. In zone A1, covering 17.000 m², no work could be carried out because the area had temporarily become an illegal garbage dump. Superficial work was carried out in zone B1, covering almost 40.000 m², in order to make visual surveying easier. Later it was divided up using stakes and elastic cord into 131 units – 30 m long and 10 m wide – which were systematically surveyed by a team of seven people equipped with metal detectors. 419 pottery fragments were collected, of which 72 % are from Greco-Italic amphoras, 24 % are Iberian and 4 % undetermined. Finally in zone B2, covering 10.000 m², a survey was carried out without the use of transects, but with all the remains of archaeological materials being located by a total station. 126 pottery fragments were collected in this sector, of which 48 % are from Greco-Italic amphoras, 42 % are Iberian and 10 % undetermined (fig. 7).

The Greco-Italic amphoras have long, solidly-made pivots with 45 % inclined rims (fig. 8) and can be dated to around the end of the 3rd or beginning of the 2nd centuries BC²⁸. There is a complete absence of Campanian A black-glaze pottery, and most of the fragments of Iberian pottery come from transport and storage materials. Finally, three coins and three lead sling bullets were also recovered. The results of this first survey confirmed the initial hypothesis insofar as the percentage of Greco-Italic amphora fragments and their chronology could only be explained by the presence of Roman troops, and probably by the direct arrival of supply ships. The Italian dishes that would have been used at the time, Campanian A pottery, are almost non-existent. However, it can be assumed that legionnaires did not complete

²⁸ Lyding 1982.



Fig. 7 Ground plan of the systematically surveyed areas showing the result of the survey using 300 m² transects in zone B1 and the dispersal of the recovered coins.

their long hard marches weighed down with fragile pottery cups and plates; instead, with all the equipment they had to carry, they would have used more resilient containers made of leather, wood or metal.

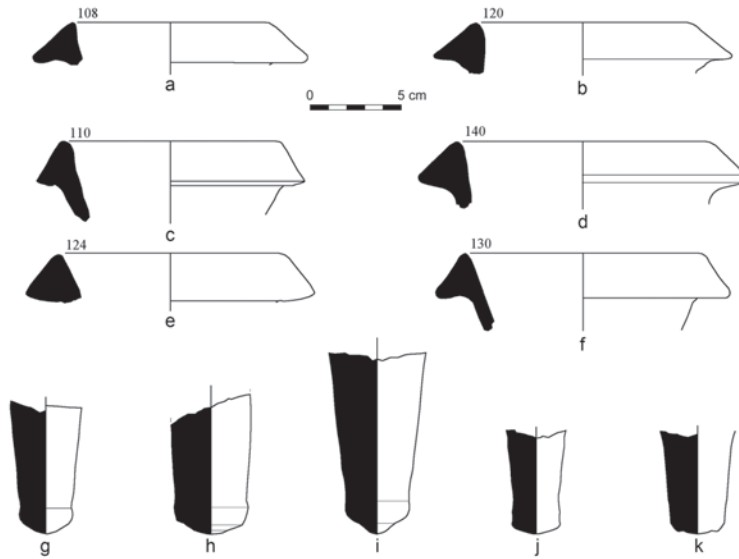


Fig. 8 Fragments of rims and pivots of Greco-Italic amphorae from the end of the 3rd century B.C.

Nevertheless, the way the material is so widely dispersed on the surface, along with its very low density (around 125 fragments per hectare), suggests that this is a very specific type of site, some kind of provisional military camp.

Based on these first results, a geophysical survey was carried out on a strip of land covering 15.000 m² parallel to the River Ebro, an area where the previous campaign had detected a high concentration of pottery remains. The aim was to find geomagnetic anomalies that might point to concealed structures (ditches, post holes, palisades, walls, etc.). The result was not encouraging and all the test sondages were negative. A series of aerial photographs was also taken, but these only made it possible to see a chromatic anomaly due to differences in vegetation growth caused by what appears to be an old natural depression crossing the site from the north-east to the south-east. Nevertheless, the surveys continued from 2007 to 2009 with 50.000 m² of surface area being systematically stripped and checked with metal detectors. The result was spectacular as numerous coins, lead projectiles, arrow- and spearheads, bronze fibulae and other metal objects have been recovered.

This material is still being studied as most of the pieces, especially those made of iron, are in a very bad state of preservation, making it difficult to analyze them. Even so, a number of square-stemmed tent pegs around 20 cm long have been identified (fig. 9), identical to others documented at similar sites that are thought to be tent pegs²⁹. There is also a lance tip, a pilum tip and what is probably a pilum catapultarium, along with an extraordinary number of shapeless or cut-away fragments of lead, probably caused by intense metallurgical activity. The only objects with a recognizable shape are a number of weights and twelve sling bullets, all without inscriptions or marks (fig. 10). Finally, there is a great deal of bronze, especially that related to personal objects, remains of dishes, etc. So far eight fibulae, vari-

²⁹ Gorgues et al. 2009, 275.



Fig. 9 Iron tent peg.



Fig. 10 Lead projectiles (sling bullets) found at La Palma.



Fig. 11 Bronze personal ornamentation objects: a winged scarab.

ous cup handles, a small winged scarab (fig. 11), amulets, fragments of small statuettes, medical or surgical instruments and large sewing needles have been recovered, and many other fragments are still awaiting classification.

However, the most abundant metal found – one that provides us with a more precise chronology – is a batch of 70 coins, of which 54 were lost during the Second Punic War.

Their distribution appears to be random, although there is a certain concentration of Massilia and Emporion coins in the area furthest away from the river (fig. 7).

These coins are still being studied, but we can give some basic details. They include 11 Roman Republic coins minted between 217 and 212 BC and a quadrigatus from 225–212 BC, 12 Hispano-Carthaginian coins from 221–218 BC, two Carthaginian coins (one of them from Sardinia), five bronze coins from Ebusus, ten bronze small coins and two obols from Massilia, a drachma and six coins from Emporion, one of them probably an Iberian imitation of a tetartemorion, and finally four Sardo-Punic bronze coins struck around 215 BC. The other coins are an as from Dertosa, a denarius from Bolskan, two asses from the period of the decline of the Roman Empire, three pieces of Jaume I from the mint in Valencia, one of Pere II of Urgell, one of Ferdinand VII, one of Carlos I, six from the second half of the 19th century, one from 1953, and one yet to be determined.

This collection of coins is similar in chronology and composition to that held by private collectors, recently studied along with the three coins recovered during the 2006 campaign³⁰. Of these 103 pieces, 82 were discarded during the Second Punic War. The set comprises 31 Roman Republic coins, 25 Hispano-Carthaginian, seven Carthaginian, six small bronze coins from Massilia, one coin from Emporion, one Emporion-imitation Iberian coin, one bronze coin from Arse-Saguntum, three Hellenistic tetradrachmas, one bronze coin of Hiero of Syracuse, two bronze from Neapolis, one from Gadir, and three from Ebusus.

Of this set we have been able to identify three silver and 28 bronze coins from the Roman Republic, minted before the denarius appeared in 211 BC. Among the silver coins stands out a Roman-Campanian didrachma showing the head of Mars/horse's head – RRC 13/1 – from 280–276 BC (fig. 12 c). The other two are quadrigatus minted between 225–212 BC – RRC 28/3 – with few traces of wear, meaning they were probably not long in circulation (fig. 12 d). One of the most exceptional aspects of the site at La Palma is the abundance of Roman Republic bronze coins from before 215 BC, which until now have seldom been documented in the peninsula and normally signify the presence of Roman troops. Two of the most interesting examples are a quadrans and a sextans of the RRC 35 series from 225–217 BC, made using the foundry casting technique (fig. 12 c. d). The most numerous group, however, is made up of coins from 217 to 215 BC, comprising 18 RRC 38-issue and 8 RRC 39-issue bronze coins, namely 15 uncias, nine semuncias, a quadrans and a sextans (fig. 12 g–l).

The second most numerous group comprises 25 Hispano-Carthaginian bronze coins. We have identified 20 coins from Villaronga 1973, class 8 issue dating from between 221 and 218 BC: seven units of type 1, head of Tanit wreathed with corn/horse's head, and ten units and three divisors of type 2, roughly styled. There are also three units and a divisor of class 10 and a single example of class 11 (fig. 13 i–n).

The rest of the coins from the Punic side comprise three from the mint in Ebusus (fig. 13 f), a divisor from Gadir (fig. 13 g) and seven Carthaginian coins. Of these, two are from the mint at Carthage (fig. 13 h), one SNG Sassar³¹ divisor from the end of the 4th to the end of the 3rd centuries BC, three divisors still to be classified and one coin in very bad condition cast in a one-sided mold.

³⁰ Noguera – Tarradell-Font 2009.

³¹ Guido 1994, 260–265.



Fig. 12 Coins from La Palma lost at the end of the 3rd century B.C.: a Neapoliton (Taliercio, 1986, group IIIa, series 4); b Hiero II of Syracuse. – Roman Republic coins from before 211 B.C.: c Didrachma RRC 13/1; d Quadrigatus RRC 28/3; e Quadrans RRC 35/4; f Sextans RRC 35/5; g Sextans RRC 38/5; h Semiuncia RRC 38/7; i Semiuncia RRC 39/5; j Uncia RRC 38/6; k Quadrans RRC 39/2; l Uncia RRC 39/4. Scale 1 : 1.

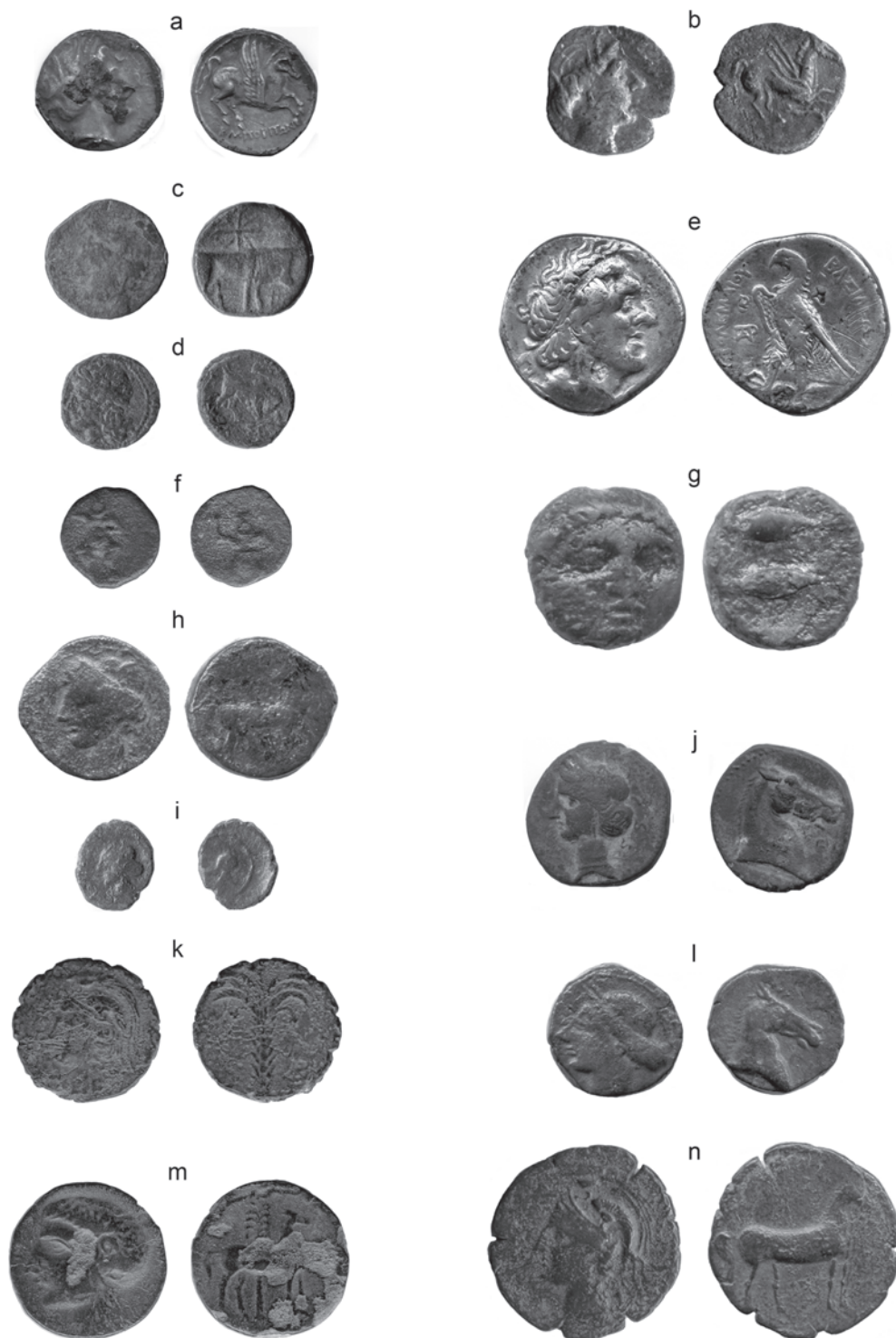


Fig. 13 Coins from La Palma lost at the end of the 3rd century B.C.: a Drachma from Emporion; b Iberian imitation; c Sardo-Punic bronze; d Bronze coin from Massilia; e Hellenistic tetradrachma of Ptolemy I or II; f Ebusus unit (Campo 1976, 50); g Divisor from Gadir; h Shekel from Carthage (Alexandropoulos 2000, n. 90); i–n Hispano-Carthaginian coins (Villaronga 1973): i N° 117; j N° 110; k N° 126; l N° 116; m N° 258–275; n N° 123. Scale 1 : 1.

Of the Greek silver coins, we have managed to identify three Hellenistic coins from the eastern Mediterranean, specifically a tetradrachma of Ptolemy I or II (fig. 13 e) and two split coins, one of Lysimachus and the other possibly of Alexander the Great, dating from the 3rd century BC. There is also a divisor from Emporion with two dolphins on the reverse (fig. 13 a), and an Iberian imitation of a divisor from Emporion with Pegasus and the dolphin symbol on the reverse (fig. 13 b), both minted at the end of the 3rd century BC.

The Greek bronze coins are special because of their rarity. There are two from Neapolis from 270–250 BC (fig. 12 a) and a bronze coin of Hiero of Syracuse (fig. 12 b). There are also six small bronze coins from Massilia, the obverse the laurel-wreathed head of Apollo and the reverse a charging bull, sometimes with an abbreviated inscription on the edge or a symbol over the bull (fig. 13 d), which recent studies date between 215–200 BC³². And finally there is one bronze coin from Arse-Saguntum which could also have been lost at the end of the 3rd century BC.

The other coins, which will not be dealt with here, are from Iberian and Roman mints from the end of the Republic and the early Empire. These coins, along with the medieval and modern pieces recovered during the surveys, confirm that the river terrace of La Palma was continuously occupied, probably due to its strategic position at a junction of communication routes and more especially to the likely existence of a crossing over the River Ebro at this spot.

As we can see, the coins found at La Palma form an exceptional collection and are virtually incomparable to any other known site. It is important to point out that of the 136 coins recovered up to now that were lost certainly by the end of the 3rd century BC, only 15 are silver. The fact that low denomination bronze coins predominate is confirmation that this was a place where abandoned coins were being used and that it is therefore not a cache.

6. *The camp at La Palma – Nova Classis?*

Bearing in mind the repeated references in the written sources as to troop movements, fighting and sieges around the River Ebro, along with the geostrategic importance of the site and the archaeological data recovered, we believe that there are sufficient indications to suggest the presence of a Roman camp at La Palma during the Second Punic War. Clearly the importance of the camp lay in its control of the mouth of the Ebro, a place of high strategic value and a necessary crossing point for armies using the Via Heraklea to move around. This area was the scene of various Carthaginian attempts to oust the Romans and send reinforcements and supplies to Hannibal's troops on the Italian Peninsula. We also believe that it was in La Palma that Publius Cornelius Scipio gathered the army and the fleet before his attack on Qart Hadasht in 209 BC. The conquest of this city signified a definitive change in the direction of the conflict between Romans and Carthaginians on the peninsula. The fighting moved southward and therefore the military settlement at La Palma would gradually have become less important until the end of the conflict.

³² Py 2006, 185.

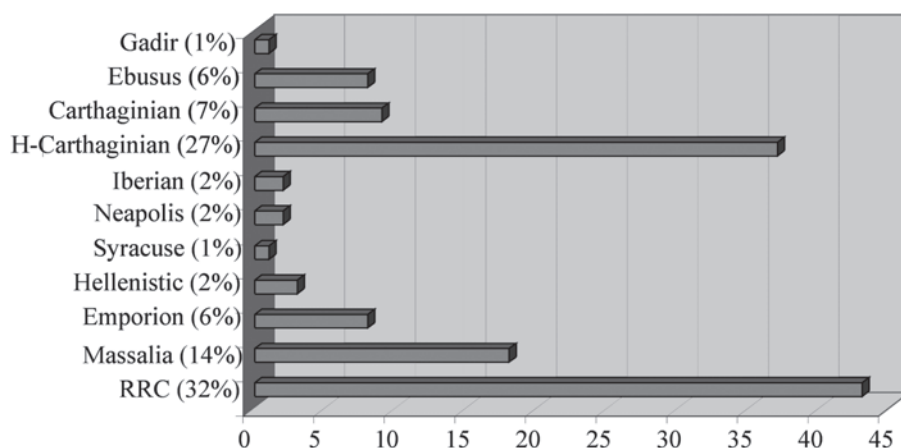


Fig. 14 Percentages from the different mints identified.

The numismatic set is consistent with the events narrated in the written sources; there are coins from the Greek cities Emporion and Massilia which were allies of the Roman Republic. There is also an abundance of Punic coins, especially Hispano-Carthaginian ones (fig. 14). This could be explained by the four consecutive defeats suffered by the Carthaginians in the nearby area – Cese (218 BC), the Ebro River naval battle (217 BC), Hibera (216 BC) and possibly Intibilis (215 BC) – as anything of value would have been seized by the Romans (Liv. 21, 60).

From a numismatic point of view, the absence of victoriates, denarii, quinarii and sestertii suggests that all the coins found were lost some time before the appearance of the denarius system in 211 BC³³. However, the written sources are explicit as regards the presence of Publius Cornelius Scipio at the mouth of the Ebro in 209 BC, with troops that had recently arrived on the peninsula. Therefore, taking into account that there are none of these coins in La Palma, it would appear that the reinforcements that arrived had not been supplied with the new coinage. In fact it appears that not even in the final stages of the conflict did Rome use the new coins to pay its troops in Iberia. It should be remembered that the Republic had serious economic problems at the time, as shown by the rebellion of Roman soldiers in the camp at Sucro in 206 BC over unpaid salaries, although Publius Scipio himself would occasionally have paid them in goods obtained on the ground (Pol. 11, 28, 3–6). Therefore the absence of denarius coinage in La Palma would confirm the hypothesis that it did not reach the peninsula until after 206 BC³⁴.

To summarize, the diversity and provenance of the set could correspond to coinage in circulation on the Italian peninsula, Sicily and Sardinia before 211–210 BC, along with coins minted on the Iberian Peninsula from indigenous, Greek, Punic or even Roman sources (fig. 15). In this respect we should bear in mind how the written sources refer to the various consignments of supplies sent from Rome, which were unlikely to have always been accompanied by money (fig. 16). Apart from the troops and provisions that arrived with Publius and

³³ Crawford 1974.

³⁴ García-Bellido 1993, 332.

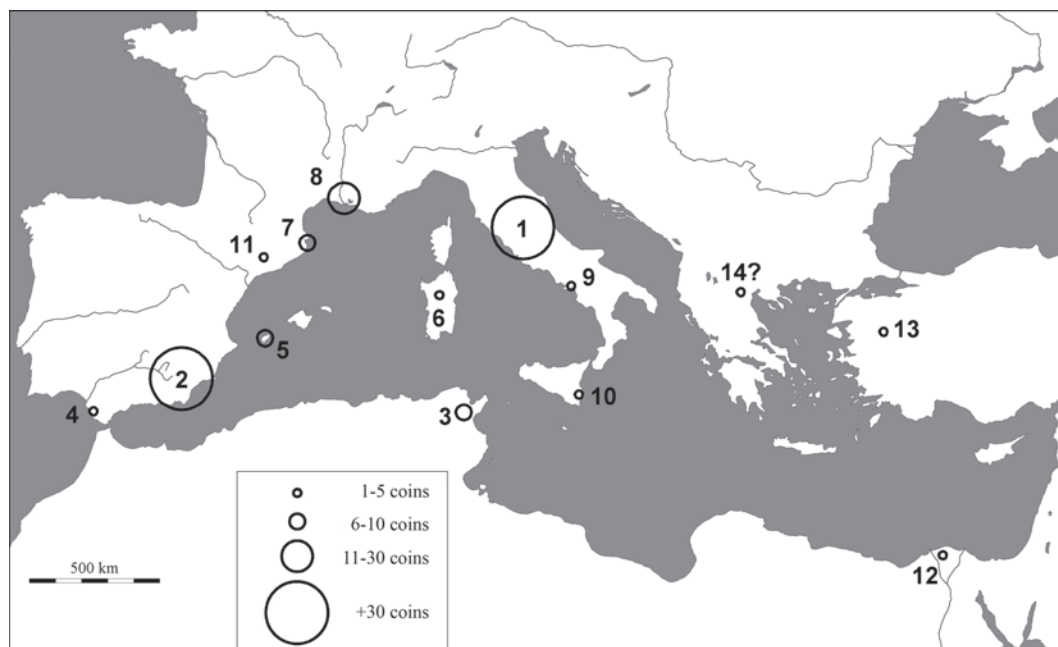


Fig. 15 Provenance of the coins recovered from the Roman camp at La Palma: 1 Roman Republic (43); 2 Hispano-Carthaginian (37); 3 Carthage (9); 4 Gadir (1); 5 Ebusus (8); 6 Sardo-Punic (4); 7 Emporion (8); 8 Massilia (18); 9 Neapolis (2); 10 Syracuse (1); 11 Iberian (2); 12 Ptolemy I Soter or Ptolemy II Philadelphus (1); 13 Lysimachus (1); 14 Alexander the Great? (1).

Gnaeus Cornelius Scipio in 218 and 217 BC and those brought by Gaius Nero and Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus in 211 and 210 BC respectively, there was also a supply fleet sent in 217 BC, captured by the Carthaginians near Cosa (Liv. 22, 11, 6) and consignments of supplies in winter 217–216 BC (Pol. 3, 106, 7) and 215 BC, obtained thanks to a loan from a society of publicani (Liv. 23, 48, 4).

At this stage in the research we would like to put forward a new hypothesis: the possible connection of the Roman camp at La Palma with a place mentioned by Livy. Shortly after the Ebro River naval battle in 217 BC – certainly within the same year – the Carthaginians set up camp in Ilercavones territory while the Romans were based next to Nova Classis: “It looked as if the rest of the summer would be undisturbed, and so it would have been as far as the Phoenicians were concerned. But, besides that the Spaniards themselves are constitutionally restless and eager for change, no sooner had the Romans withdrawn from the pass to the seacoast, than Mandonius and Indibilis – the latter had formerly been a chieftain of the Ilergetes – roused up their countrymen and invaded the peaceful territories of Rome’s allies, on a marauding expedition. To oppose them Scipio dispatched a tribune of the soldiers with light-armed auxiliaries. They easily routed the enemy – a mere hastily-organized militia – slaying a thousand of them, making some prisoners, and disarming the greater part. Nevertheless, this outbreak induced Hasdrubal, who was retreating towards the ocean, to turn back and cross the Ebro, for the purpose of protecting his allies. The Phoenicians were in camp in the country of the Ilergavonenses, the Romans near Nova Classis when tidings came which gave at once a new turn to the campaign” (Liv. 22, 21, trans. B. O. Foster).

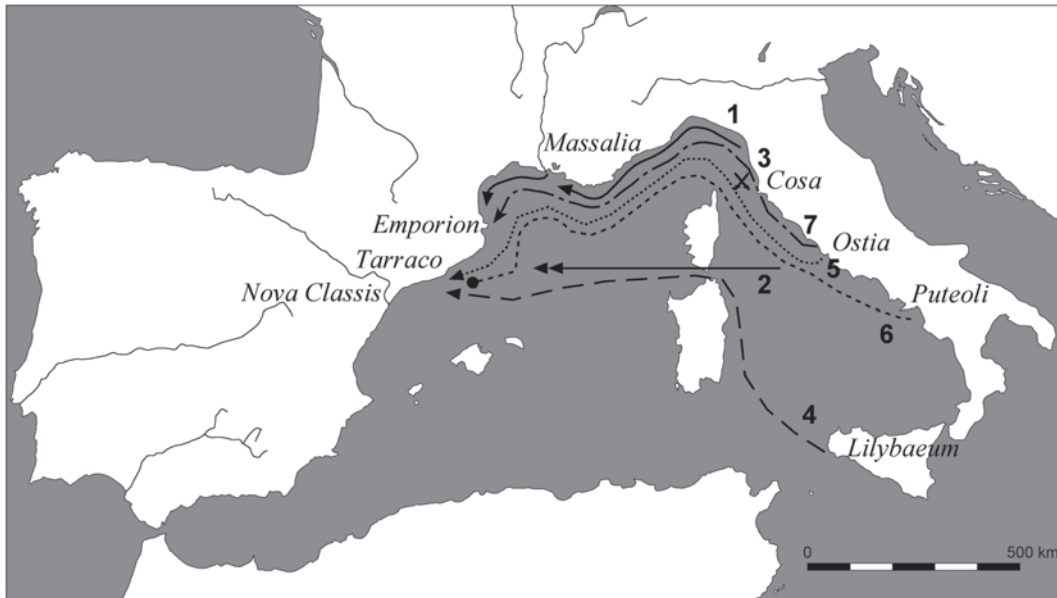


Fig. 16 Troop reinforcements and provisions received by the Roman army in Iberia during the Second Punic War: 1) 218 B.C. - Gnaeus Cornelius Scipio, 60 ships and 19,000 soldiers (approx) (Plb. 3, 76, 1; Liv. 21, 60). - 2) 217 B.C. - Publius Cornelius Scipio, 20–30 ships and 8,000 soldiers (Plb. 3, 97; Liv. 22, 22). - 3) 217 B.C. - Supply transport fleet destined for Iberia, captured by the Carthaginians near Cosa (Liv. 22, 11, 6). - 4) 216 B.C. - Everything the Scipios needed to carry out their operations in Hispania, transported by a fleet situated in Lilybaeum (Plb. 3, 106, 7). - 5) 215 B.C. - Undetermined, but probably clothing, wheat and equipment for the fleet (Liv. 23, 49, 5). - 6) 211 B.C. - Gaius Nero, 12,000 soldiers and 1,100 cavalymen (Liv. 26, 17, 1–2). - 7) 210 B.C. - Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus, 30 ships, 10,000 soldiers and 1,000 cavalymen (Liv. 26, 19, 10).

The same translation notes that *Nova Classis* should possibly be connected with the *ad Novas* mentioned in the *Itinerarium Antonini*, between *Ilerda* and *Tarraco*, a hypothesis taken up by other researchers such as De Sanctis³⁵. However, we believe that this proposal should be rejected for two reasons.

Firstly, as Livy himself mentions, the troops sent to repel *Ilergeta* raids were light-armed auxiliaries led by a tribune, and therefore this did not involve moving the main body of the army. Immediately afterwards the Carthaginians advanced toward the river *Ebro* to help their indigenous allies, setting up camp on *Ilercavon* territory, and straight away, in clear opposition, there is a mention of the main Roman camp located next to *Nova Classis*.

Secondly, the etymology of the name ‘New Fleet’, a Roman toponym, needs to be taken into account, indicating that this is a camp situated on the coast and not inland³⁶.

Nova Classis could obviously be situated anywhere along the coast between the *Ebro* and the *Pyrenees*, but taking into account the dynamics of the conflict, it would be reasonable to locate it on the stretch of coastline between *Tarraco* and the mouth of the river. More specifically, the location of *Nova Classis* by the mouth of the *Ebro* would fit in with the logic

³⁵ De Sanctis 1917, 243.

³⁶ Schulten 1935, 68; Blázquez 1974, 30; Lazenby 1978, 127.

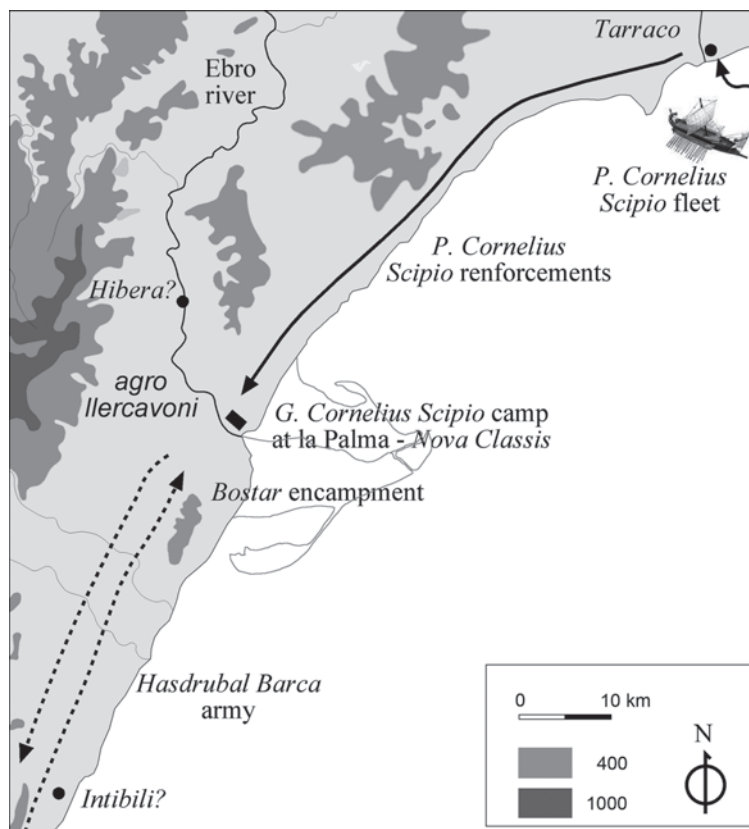


Fig. 17 Roman and Carthaginian army movements during 217 B.C. after the naval battle at the mouth of the Ebro.

of events: the Romans, after defeating and capturing a great number of Carthaginian ships, set up a camp and a naval base in this place, which gave its name to the military settlement and at the same time commemorated the victory, which resulted in the capture of 25 Carthaginian ships, basically a new fleet. Indeed the camp at La Palma would lose much of its strategic value if it had no warships or transport, absolutely essential for crossing the river in both directions at the start and end of each campaign and for avoiding possible Punic raids.

Finally, to be fair, it must be said that this fragment of Livy is part of a fairly confused account and some authors doubt its veracity³⁷, especially considering it is not mentioned by Polybius. However, it does coincide with his version in the sense that the Romans did not cross the Ebro until after the arrival of the second Scipio, Publius. And in Foster's translation it is made clear that the Carthaginians crossed the river Ebro, which makes it unlikely that the Roman camp of Nova Classis would have been located at the mouth. We believe that the text could be interpreted in a different way in the sense that the Carthaginians headed toward the north of the Ebro but did not actually cross it, as appears to be the case in oth-

³⁷ Richardson 1986, 37 places in doubt the multiple Roman naval incursions following the battle of the mouth of the Ebro, although not the subsequent troop movements related to the mention of Nova Classis.

er translations³⁸. It is also difficult to accept that Hasdrubal would have crossed the river without being challenged by the Romans, as happened a year later at the Battle of Hibera before he even attempted it.

The hypothesis associating the camp at La Palma with Nova Classis contradicts none of the passages from Livy or Polybius. On the contrary, it gives them more sense. Hence in 217 BC Publius Cornelius Scipio landed in Tarraco with 20 ships (30 according to Livy), 8.000 soldiers and a great many supplies “and set out to join his brother” (Liv. 22, 22, 3), who must have been next to the Ebro in Nova Classis (fig. 17). The Roman army led by the Scipios crossed the river, which was poorly defended by the Carthaginians as the main body of troops led by Hasdrubal had set off for Celtiberia to put down a rebellion (Liv. 22, 21, 7–8). The crossing was only defended by a Carthaginian contingent led by one Bostar who, probably seeing he was outnumbered by the Romans, retreated to Saguntum (Pol. 3, 98, 5).

It is interesting to see how a single tactical movement, the arrival of reinforcements in Tarraco and their transfer by land to the mouth of the Ebro, was repeated at least twice more – the first time after the arrival of the contingent led by Gaius Nero in 211 BC, and the second after the arrival of Publius Cornelius Scipio’s troops in 210 BC, in this case after landing at Emporion.

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³⁸ Liv. 22, 21, translation by J. A. Villar.

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Provenance of illustrations: Fig. 1–17: author.

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG — RESUMEN — SUMMARY

In diesem Beitrag wird die Entdeckung des ältesten römischen Lagers auf der Iberischen Halbinsel vorgestellt. Dabei handelt es sich um ein Feldlager des Zweiten Punischen Krieg in La Palma (Tarragona, Spanien), unmittelbar an der Ebromündung gelegen. Obwohl keine Überreste von Mauern gefunden wurden, sprechen doch der strategische Standort, die Auffindung zahlreicher Münzen, Waffen, Amphorenfragmente und diverser andere Objekte für ein Militärlager in der Zeit von 218–209 v. Chr. Die Revision der schriftlichen Quellen, insbesondere bei Polybios und Livios, legt die Vermutung nahe, dass es die Gegend um Palma war, wo sich die Legionen des Publius Cornelius Scipio vor dem Angriff auf Carthago Nova im Jahr 209 v. Chr. sammelten.

Abschließend wird die Identifizierung von La Palma mit dem römischen Militärlager Nova Classis vorgeschlagen, das von Livius während der Kriegsgeschehnisse des Jahres 217 erwähnt ist.

Schlagnworte: Römisches Militärlager – Zweiter Punischer Krieg – Survey.

En este artículo se presenta el hallazgo del campamento romano más antiguo de la Península Ibérica. Se trata de un campamento de campaña de la Segunda Guerra Púnica localizado en La Palma (Tarragona, España), junto a la desembocadura del río Ebro. A pesar de que no se han localizado restos de construcciones, el interés estratégico del lugar, junto con la gran cantidad de monedas, armamento, fragmentos de ánforas y otros muchos objetos, indica que en este lugar se estableció un asentamiento militar entre el 218–209 a. C. La revisión de las fuentes escritas, fundamentalmente Polibio y Livio, sugiere que fue en la Palma donde se concentraron las legiones de Publio Cornelio Escipión antes del ataque a Carthago Nova en el 209 a. C. Finalmente, se propone la identificación de La Palma con el cam-

pamento romano de Nova Classis, citado por Livio durante los acontecimientos bélicos del año 217 a. C.

Palabras clave: Campamento romano – Segunda Guerra Púnica – prospección arqueológica.

This paper presents the discovery of the oldest Roman camp on the Iberian Peninsula, a camp from the Second Punic War situated in La Palma (Tarragona, Spain), by the mouth of the River Ebro. Although no structural remains have been found, the site's strategic interest along with many coins, arms and fragments of amphoras and other objects indicate that a military camp was established here between 218 and 209 BC. Written sources, mainly Polybius and Livy, suggest that La Palma was where the legions of Publius Cornelius Scipio gathered before the attack on Carthago Nova in 209 BC. The paper ends by suggesting that La Palma may be the Roman camp of Nova Classis mentioned by Livy during the events of the war in 217 BC.

Key words: Roman camp – Second Punic War – archaeological survey.

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