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THE ROMAN REPUBLICAN BATTLEFIELD AT PEDROSILLO  
(CASAS DE REINA, BADAJOZ, SPAIN). NEW RESEARCH (2007)  
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ABSTRACT: El Pedrosillo (Casas de Reina, Badajoz) lies at the northern foothills of Sierra Morena. The surveys and diggings undertaken during the years 2004-2006 showed a Roman military complex, formed by two polygonal marching camps built in stone, circular redoubts and an attached system of complementary defenses as isolated walls (*titula*) that take up both banks of a stream, extend more than 350 ha. This entire complex seems to be part of a battlefield set by the Roman Army against the indigenous cavalry during the Lusitanian Wars (155-138 BC).

The excavations undertaken during 2007 have confirmed that we are dealing with two polygonal forts, 9.9 and 3.5 ha respectively, whose walls were some 1.6m wide and were built in *emplecton* with two facings built with medium and big stones, in irregular rows. The walls are about 1.20 meter high. The inner face of the wall is slightly bent (17°). The same constructive system was found in the fortlets and *titula* or stretches of wall isolated in the terrain and in the circular constructions.

The georeferenced surveys with metal detectors have shown up characteristic Roman military collection of Republican times as a slingshot, an iron head of *pilum catapultarium* and a tent peg, as well as a Punic coin from the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC.

RESUMEN: El Pedrosillo (Casas de Reina, Badajoz) está situado en la vertiente septentrional de Sierra Morena, justo en la salida de uno de los pasos naturales que conducen al valle del Guadalquivir. Las prospecciones y excavaciones arqueológicas llevadas a cabo durante los años 2004-2006 revelaron la presencia de un complejo militar romano, constituido por dos recintos poligonales construidos en piedra, fortines de planta circular y un sistema de defensas complementarias entre las que destacan lienzos de muro aislados (*titula*), extendido a ambos lados de un arroyo, elementos todos ellos que cubren una superficie de cerca de 350 ha. Este yacimiento parece constituir un campo de batalla preparado por el ejército romano contra un enemigo con ponderosa caballería durante las guerras lusitanas (155-138 a. C.).

Las excavaciones llevadas a cabo durante 2007 han confirmado los rasgos constructivos de los dos recintos poligonales, de 9, 9 y 3.5 ha respectivamente, cuyos muros perimetrales son de aproximadamente 1, 6 m. de anchura, construidos mediante la técnica de *emplecton*, consistente en dos paramentos construidos con piedras de pequeño y medio tamaño en hiladas irregulares y núcleo interior de piedra menuda. Las murallas son de unos 1, 20 m de altura. La cara interior de las mismas presenta una inclinación considerable (17°). Los fortines circulares y los *titula* o segmentos aislados de muro presentan el mismo sistema constructivo.

Las prospecciones magnéticas georeferenciadas mediante detectores de metal realizadas en algunos sectores han revelado un conjunto muy significativo de materiales militares (*militaria*) del periodo romano-republicano, como una punta de jabalina (*pilum catapultarium*), agregar una bala de honda de plomo y una clavija de tienda, además de una moneda púnica de finales del siglo III a. C.

# THE ROMAN REPUBLICAN BATTLEFIELD AT PEDROSILLO (CASAS DE REINA, BADAJOZ, SPAIN). NEW RESEARCH (2007)<sup>1</sup>

## **Pedrosillo Battlefield. Previous Archaeological Interventions**

The settlement of El Pedrosillo (Casas de Reina, Badajoz) is located in the northern foothills of Sierra Morena, near the actual city of Llerena (Fig. 1). It occupies an extensive surface on both banks of the river Pedrosillo. The surveys and diggings undertaken during the years 2004-2006 revealed a Roman military complex from Late Republican times (Gorges & Rodríguez Martín, 2006; Rodríguez Martín & Gorges 2006; Gorges *et alii*, 2009). In fact, the elements observed in situ are spread on a surface bigger than 350 ha. The archaeological surveys, together with the help of aerial photographs, shows several interconnected elements, extraordinarily adapted to the topographical features of the site.

The excavations undertaken during 2006 (Gorges *et alii*, 2009) have confirmed that we are dealing with two polygonal camps, 9.9 and 3.5ha respectively. Aerial survey had lead us to suppose the existence of an ancient fort with earth and timber defences (agger) below this auxiliary fort. Further excavations ruled out this hypothesis. The trenches

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<sup>1</sup> This work is integrated in the following research archaeological project: I+D HAR2011-24095: *Campamentos y territorios militares en Hispania*. It has been given by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (*Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación*) and is being carried out since 1<sup>st</sup> January 2012 under the management of A. Morillo. We would like to acknowledge F. Morales Hernández for his help during the georeferenced magnetic surveys and in the identification of some of the materials.

revealed domestic circular structures from Chalcolithic times, made with big rough stones (Gorges *et alii*, 2009: 270-274). These structures, in the highest point of the terrain, were intentionally dismantled, throwing the stones outside the structures and reusing partly, probably to create a clear area that allowed a full visibility from the Roman fort.

### **2007 Campaign: new archaeological interventions**

The second excavation campaign at Pedrosillo was undertaken in October 2007. The excavations consisted of 7 trenches in different spots of the military complex. We have used the same numbering to those referred to a same structural entity (ie. the outside and inside of the same walled area, 4a & 4b) (Fig. 2). We started also a georeferenced magnetic survey with metal detector.

The majority of the excavation works were focused on the legionary camp to complete its archaeological record. Since the ground level used by the several military structures lies some 20-30cm below the actual level. Also, it was attested the homogeneity of the measures of the perimetral walls of all Roman constructive structures (between 1.80-2.50m), as well as of the constructive technique used, the *emplecton*. They built two facings with big stones without mortar, placed in such a way that the outside face is highly regular and vertical, much like rough ashlar, with an inner filling of smaller stones. Apparently, these walls lacked of earth or inner mortar to bond the stones.

Trenches 2 and 3 had the target of assessing the constructive system of the wall. The first of them (trench 2a) took place outside the walled area, in the side. The trench (5 x 4m) was open perpendicular to the wall. The results confirm that the wall lay directly on the natural terrain without foundations; the first stone row buried 15cm with regard to the ground level in use. In the furthest extreme from the Roman wall, there appeared remains of a stone collapse with lots of Chalcolithic ceramics. This led to the enlargement of the trench parallel to the wall in 5 x 2m. A new circular structure, similar to those found in 2006 to the east of the small Roman fort, was located. This new finding confirms the intentioned dismantling of the ruins of constructions from the Chalcolithic settlement, that was aimed, as we sketched in the previous campaign (Gorges *et alii*, 2009), to provide with material for the rising of the

wall of the Roman forts and to clear the area of obstacles, creating an artificial slope.

After the end of the interventions inside the Roman camp, the excavation was undertaken in the inner area (Trench 2b), opening a trench of 2.5 x 2m (5m<sup>2</sup>). The stratigraphic record inside is similar to that obtained during the excavation of the year 2006 in a similar position and that undertaken in the outer face of the wall. Inside the wall, there is a corridor some meter wide, completely free of stones from the collapse of the Prehistoric structures. It does not seem by chance, but that the collapse has been removed intentionally from the place, leaving a corridor or *intervallum* 1 meter minimum in width that would make it easier the access to the wall and the mobility inside the enclosure.

Trench 3 (3 x 2.25m) was opened in the outer facing in the southeastern side, where the wall of the fort is a little bit wider than in the rest (2.5m).

The same target had trench 7 (1.2 x 1.3m), attached to the inner facing of the eastern side of the wall, very well delimited and protected by the bedrock of the stream. The constructive features of the wall coincide in the rest of the points of the perimeter. The wall width in the sector varies from 1.60-1.70m, while its height reached 1.20m. This measure seems to be very closed to the original elevation of the wall (probable 1.40m), as we could confirm recently in another forts of Republic times in Hispania (Morillo & Adroher, 2012: forthc.).

Trench 1 (8 x 2m) has as a target to find possible inner structures in the legionary camp, in an area with a more visual control of the surrounding area. As we supposed, no constructive remain at all was recorded. Probably, as the same contemporary Roman fort, the settlement in the camp was articulated by means of temporary structures, probable tents. This hypothesis would be confirmed by the finding through metal detectors of a new tent peg inside the Roman camp.

The rest of interventions (trial trenches 4, 5 and 6) took place in other sectors of the battlefield. Intervention 4, with 4 different small trenches, had one of the circular small fortlets as a target (Fig. 3). Those were laid on both sides of the stream, basically in the northern side of the military complex. We chose one of the best preserved, set in the northwestern side of the stream that divides the battlefield in two halves. From such structure the whole northeastern side of the fort as well as the valley of the river can be controlled. It is well preserved, although in the upper part of the walls and both facings, the peasants themselves

have stored big quartz rock blocks that impeded the agriculture. The fortlet measures correspond to a slightly oblong oval whose major axis was 26.05m and 24.4m the minor.

Trench 4a took place in the western sector of the fortlet, at its entrance (2.5 x 3m outside and 2 x 3m inside). The sequence obtained let us establish the same constructive pattern than that used in other sectors in the camp (Fig. 4). The wall width varies between 1.77 and 1.93m and its maximum elevation is 1.40m. We could record the threshold of the gate that accessed the circular fortlet, 0,44m wide, pattern that appears repeatedly both in the Roman camp and in the small fort. The wall adapts itself to the topography of the terrain, without founding trench. The structure and constructive system of the wall was confirmed by means of the trial trenches 4c (2.5 x 2.5m) and 4d (2 x 2-5m). They were done inside (4c) and outside the wall (4d) of the fortlet in its western side. The Roman ground level lay some 0.35m below the current one (Fig. 4).

Inside the circular fort we undertook another trench, 4b (2 x 2m), destined to check the existence of possible internal structures, not documented.

Trenches 6a (3 x 1.5m) and 6b (2.5 x 1.5m) were useful to check the constructive system and the archaeological record of one of the polygonal fortlets, that set in a rising of the terrain in front of the big camp. Also in this case, some interventions next to the outer and inner facing of the structure were undertaken. We could confirm that the measures of the perimetral wall (aprox. 1.60m wide) and its constructive system were identical to those of the other structures of the military complex. The preserved wall height was, in this case, much less, some 0.45 m at its maximum.

One of the most spectacular elements of the defense system is, undoubtedly, that constituted by parallel lines of artificial stone obstacles (*titula*), set in the mid and low part of the hill, at both sides of the stream. Generally made with an earth slope preceded by a trench (Pseudo-Hyginus, 49-50, v. Henderson & Keppie, 1987), the *titula* are here real sections isolated from stoned walls. We have more than a hundred. They are built following also the constructive technique used in the rest of the complex (*emplecton*). Their longitude varies from 10 to 30m or even more in some lines, and 3m wide. The archaeological record of these elements was the target of the last intervention of the campaign, the trench 5. We chose one of the biggest and best preserved

*titula*, in eastern side of the stream, between the big camp and the polygonal fortlet where the trial trench 6 (21.5 x 5m) took place.

The excavations revealed that its construction was very regular. Its longitude reached 20m while its width varied between 1.7 and 2.2m. Its four faces were perfectly worked with square corners. A stratigraphic sequence similar to other sectors of the site was here also attested. On the geological substrate there was a slight preparation earth layer, and on it, they settled the big and medium stones, defining the four wall facings. The better squared facing was the face wall, getting so a vertical surface. The inner filling consisted of smaller and more irregular stones. The original preserved height is of 1 meter at least, and the Roman circulation level lies 0.28m below (6 & 7).

### **The georeferenced surveys**

The Roman Republican military sites and the battlefields pose many problems to the research because they have little stratigraphy and no pottery -such ceramic recipients are not taken along during the campaigns-. Being it so, a new survey system has successfully been applied recently, that allows for the use of a metal detector as part of the non-destructive survey techniques (Quesada, 2008: 30-31). That is why a georeferenced magnetic survey making use of that technique has been undertaken, combined with a general surface survey. The results have been transferred to a cartographic and digital base for its computer treatment and processing by means of a geographical information system. In Spain, recent archaeological activities in Republican battlefields like Andagoste (Ocharan & Unzueta, 2002), *Baecula* (Bellon *et alii*, 2009) or in the military sites of the Cantabrian Wars (Peralta, 2007; general view in Morillo, 2010) have confirmed the utility of this modern system of intervention.

During the campaign in 2007 we initiated the magnetic georeferenced survey of the whole complex, using a metal detector with the appropriate license of the regional government (Junta de Extremadura). With this method we systematically surveyed various areas in plots 1 meter away from each other (Fig. 8). We wholly surveyed the surface of the small Roman fort and a little bit less of the half of the legionary camp. Also intensively surveyed were the round fortlet of the western side of the stream and the surroundings of the *titulum* in which some trenches



had been opened. Most of the outside areas, which would correspond to the battlefield itself, as well as a great part of the camp, still await excavations in next campaigns.

The Roman little fort was completely surveyed. The intensive survey of the small camp during 2006 made it possible to document in situ several tent pegs still nailed in the ground at regular gaps of 3.30-3.60m. (11-12 Roman feet), what gives the module of distribution of the tents.

No more pegs were recorded in 2007. Nevertheless, some 15cm deep and near the western wall of the site, a Punic-Hispanic coin with the following characteristics was found:

Type: Bronze (1/5) of the type Tanit and the horse.

Weight: 1.73gr.

Module: 15cm.

Obverse: Tanit head crowned with spike wreath to the right.

Reverse: horse head to the left.

Bibliography: Villaronga, 1994: 69, nº 49; García-Bellido & Blázquez, 2001: 156-166; Alfaro, 1997: 77.

Mint house: Possibly *Carthago Nova*.

Chronology: 221-218 a. C. (Villaronga clase VIII; García-Bellido & Blázquez, 2001: 156-166, 9ª emisión (9ª C).

Hispanic-Punic coins were abundantly minted in the last decades of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, coinciding with the second Punic war itself, that confronted Rome and Cartago in Iberia. It appears especially in the Levantine area and the *Baetis* valley (Guadalquivir). It sporadically went to Cataluña and the Meseta. It is also recorded in the southern area of Extremadura (Blázquez Cerrato, 2002: 251-253). The coin we make now known is attested in archaeological records from the last decades of the third century BC to the end of the second century BC, almost always related with the main means of communication. *Carthago Nova* is usually suggested as the minting house of this coin, but C. Alfaro already pointed out that rough coins like this are more abundant in Andalucía, and hence, she proposes a second minting house in *Gades* (Cádiz) or Montemolín (Sevilla) (Alfaro, 1997: 77), house linked by Chaves to a possible Carthaginian camp (Chaves *et alii*, 2003: 79-83) (Fig. 9).

The presence of this coin in the context of a battlefield like Pedrosillo may point out the origin of the troops in charge of the military works: undoubtedly the *Baetica*. Also, a Punic coin in Roman hands does not

pose interpretation problems either since Punic currency circulated abundantly in indigenous contexts in the second century BC. It may be also pointing out the presence of Hispanic auxiliary troops in Pedrosillo.

The partial surveys with metal detector undertaken in the legionary camp yielded several findings. All of them gathered in the northern area, the best place for the settlement from a topographic point of view.

One of the most important findings appeared in the western area, closer to the river. It is an oval lead slingshot (*glans plumbae*) 5.2cm large and a maximum diameter of 2.4cm. It weights 89gr. (typus Ia Völling) (Völling, 1990: 34) (Fig. 10). This kind of materials are abundant in Roman military contexts as it is attested in Hispania by the findings from Republican battlefields like *Numantia* (Schulten, 1927: 251, lám. 35; Luik, 2002: Abb. 95, n. 257-258), *Munda* (Engel & Paris, 1906: 445-448; Pina & Zanier, 2006: 34-36) or Andagoste (Ocharan & Unzueta, 2002: 314-315, fig. 2, 7-8)<sup>2</sup>.

In the northern area appeared another tent peg of the same type of the documented in the little fort. It is a large iron nail with quadrangular section, finished in T-shape. In this case, its longitude is 12.9cm and its maximum section 1.2cm, fitting into the module of those found in the small fort of Pedrosillo. Unlike them, this had been turned over and appeared out of its original place, but very close of the wall. This kind of tent pegs, which coexists with better known ones like those with round and pierced head, has been left unattended in the research as Roman military artifact, being more often thought of for domestic use. Nevertheless, they are widely recorded in Roman military contexts as Newstead (Curle, 1911: Fig. LXVII, 21, 24, 26, 27). In Hispania it appear in the camps of *Numantia* (Manrique Mayor, 1980: 20, fig. 3), Cáceres el Viejo (Ulbert, 1984: 238, taf. 38, n° 440-445) and the Augustan marching camps of La Loma and La Muela (Peralta, 2007: 508-509, lám. XII). Frequently, it appear in the bibliography like simple nails (Fig. 11).

Further to the east, also inside the legionary camp, we documented in surface an iron head of *pilum catapultarium* with quadrangular section. It is 4.3cm large and its biggest section is 0.85cm. This kind of heads is well attested among Roman *militaria* from the Republican period

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<sup>2</sup> A recent state of research about the modern Portugal in (Mendes & Pimenta, 2013: 51-58). They are quite scarce in Imperial contexts in the Iberian Peninsula, having only been recorded in the Augustan camp in Campo de las Cercas (Peralta, 2007: 497).

onwards. In Hispania it appears in the military sites of the *circumvallatio* of *Numantia* (Schulten, 1927: Taf. 34, n° 12-17; Taf. 35, n° 1-10; Taf. 36, n° 7, 10, 12 & 18; Luik, 2002: 193, n° 142-146, n° 148-150, Taf. 86; 195-196, n° 194-200, Taf. 90), Renieblas (Luik, 2002: 231-232, n° 206-213, Taf. 190), Andagoste (Ocharan & Unzueta, 2002: 314-315, fig. 2, n. 1-5), La Muela (Peralta, 2007: 503-504, lám. VI) and Herrera de Pisuerga (García Díez & Sáez Abad, 2007: 458-459, fig. 5) (Fig. 12)

The last metallic element found proceed from a smaller interconnected structures located far on the other side of the stream. At a time, we related them with storage rooms or spaces for horses. The piece is a fragment of an iron projectile weapon that could be interpreted as another spear (*pilum?*), in this case bigger than the previous one. It is 14.6cm long and its maximum section is 1.9cm. It is elongated and quadrangular in section while the haft presents circular section, possibly with spike handle. No exact parallels have been found for this object (Fig. 13).

### Final considerations

The campaign of 2007 in El Pedrosillo has helped us enlarge our knowledge about this Roman site. The constructive homogeneity of its structures has been attested. Such homogeneity shows up both in the dimensions and in the technique and material used for the wall. All of them lie on the natural substrate, without foundation trench, at best after cleaning and slightly preparing the soil. The technique used is the *emplecton* with two facings built with medium and big stones, in irregular rows, although they used to place the most regular face of the stones outside, so as to stress the regularity and verticality. Nevertheless, the external face of the wall show a slight slope (17 grades) to the inside, maybe aimed to settle down better the wall structure<sup>3</sup>. The maximum wall height recorded is 1.4m. More than walls properly, we could consider it as a parapets, very similar to another republican military structures built in earth and timber. This type of rampart provides both protection and visibility to use weapons like spears and slinghots.

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<sup>3</sup> This same slope appears also in the wall of the *circumvallation* of *Numantia* in the section comprised between Peña Redonda and the Merdancho river. We thank Fernando Morales for this unpublished piece of information.

No defensive ditches have been documented, although there existed drafts of a possible patrol way or *intervallum* in the big camp wall to make it easy the mobility around the walls. The absence of inner stone structures points out a temporary settlement, probably with temporary structures (tents), what got confirmed by several pegs, some of them *in situ*.

Under the legionary camp, there were also several Calcolithic structures already documented in 2006 in the other area of the Roman fort. As in the previous case, they had also been intentionally destroyed to clear the hill. That confirms that the preparation of the place was conceived as a whole and erected in a short period of time.

This same strategic plan is also endorsed by the constructive homogeneity of the other structures that define the complex (circular and polygonal fortlets, *titula*, etc.), already recorded by means of the archaeological trenches.

The interpretation of the archaeological complex as a Roman military establishment prepared as a great battlefield against an enemy with a powerful cavalry has also been completely confirmed through the finding of remains of Roman *militaria* (*pilum* projectiles, slingshots), without forgetting the tent nails. Bearing in mind all these findings, the presence here of marching Roman troops is out of any doubt. The Hispanic-Punic coin, minted at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and outstanding during the following century among the natives, is the first undoubted chronological evidence of the Roman intervention in this territory to the north of Sierra Morena. Taking into account the historical context, we have dated it back to the period of the Lusitanian Wars (155-138 BC), possibly in the campaign of 140 BC (Gorges & Rodríguez Martín, 2009: 381). Thus, Pedrosillo would be the first testimony of the Roman castramentation related with this clash (v. Morillo 1993; 2003: *passim*).

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FIG. 1 – *Pedrosillo. Site location.*



FIG. 2 – *Aerial photograph of the military complex of El Pedrosillo, with the position of the 7 trenches of the archaeological campaign of 2007.*

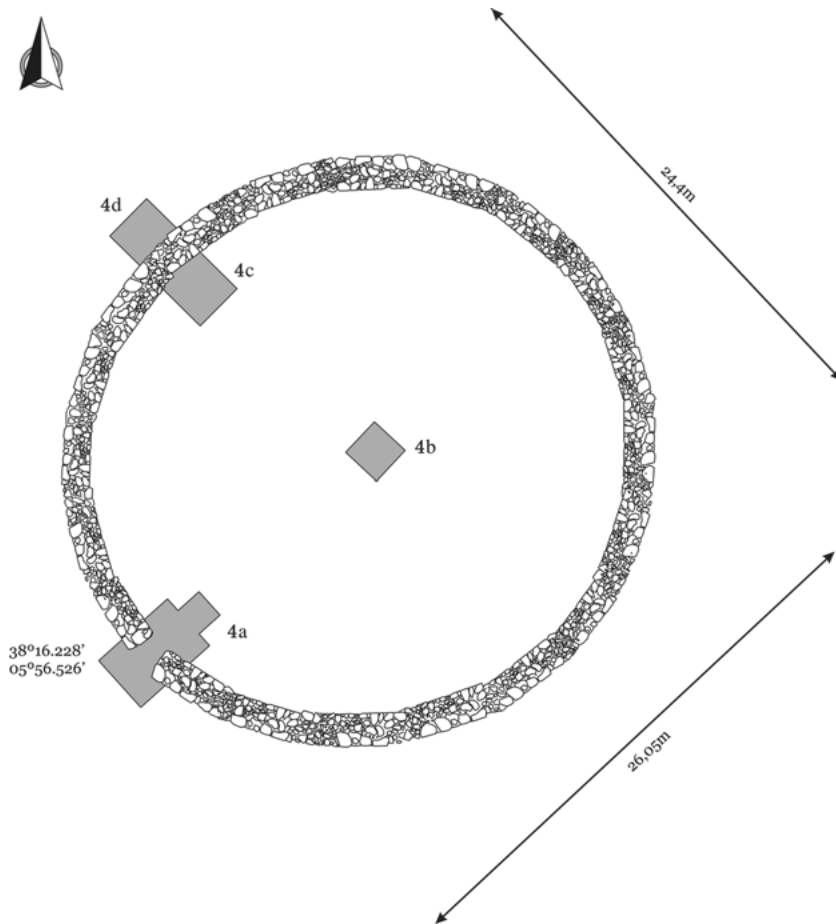


FIG. 3 – Circular fortlet with the position of the trenches of the archaeological intervention of 2007.



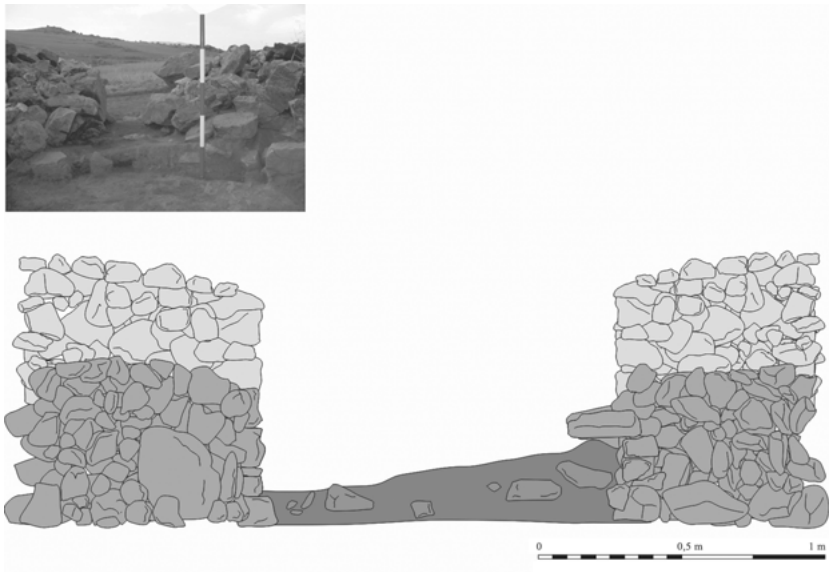


FIG. 4 – Trench 4a of circular fortlet. Frontal view of the gate.

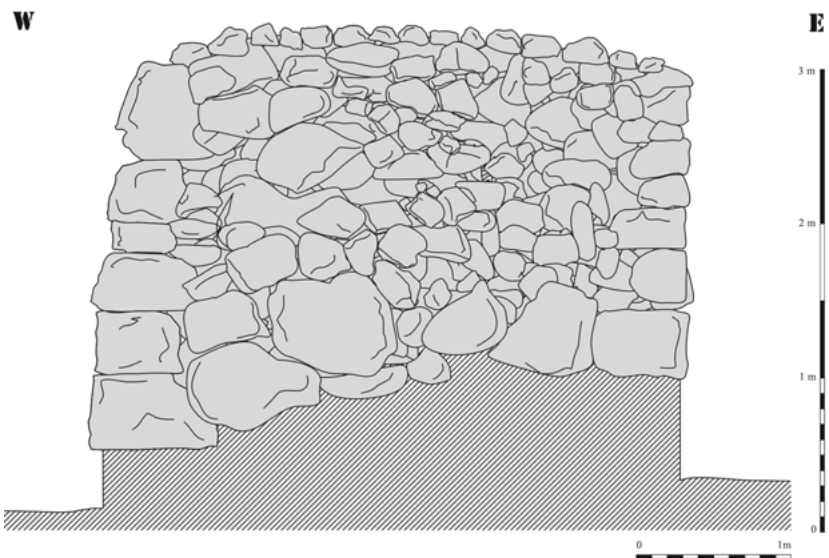


FIG. 5 – Section of the perimetral wall of the circular fortlet (trenches 4c y 4d).



FIG. 6 and 7 – *Photography of the titulum during the excavation of trench 5.*



FIG. 8 – *The georeferenced surveys with metal detectors undertaken in 2007.*

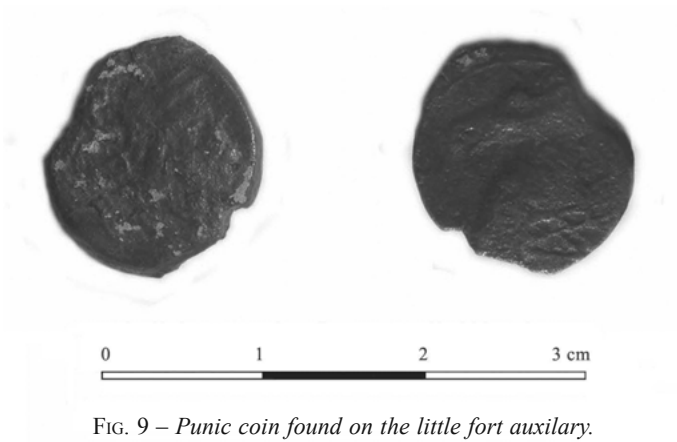


FIG. 9 – Punic coin found on the little fort auxiliary.

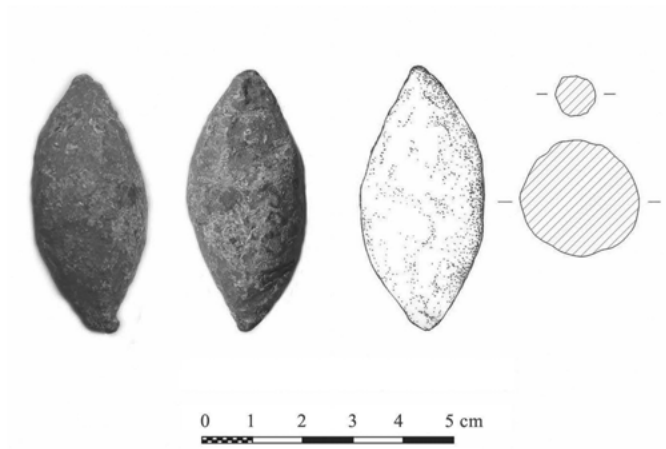


FIG. 10 – Lead Slingshot of the legionary camp.

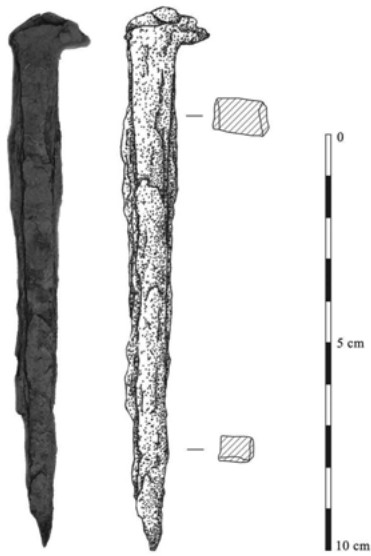


FIG. 11 – Iron tent peg found on the legionary camp.



FIG. 12 – Iron head of pilum catapularium of legionary camp.

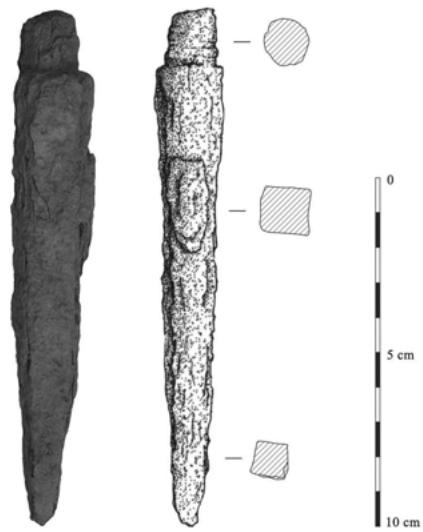


FIG. 13 – Spear (Pilum)? found in the structures located on the other side of the Pedrosillo stream.