

STRATEGY AND STRUCTURES ALONG THE ROMAN FRONTIER

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The Roman-Republican fortress at Cáceres el Viejo (Cáceres, Spain)

Old theories and new perspectives

Carlos S.P. Pereira

For a long time, the archaeological assemblage of the fortress at Cáceres el Viejo (Cáceres, Spain) remained hidden in the warehouses of the museums of Cáceres (Spain), Mainz and München (Germany). Only a few selected collections have attracted the interest of researchers and a small sample of the whole set has become known. Even with the monographic study of Günter Ulbert (1984) most of the archaeological collection of the Roman fortress has remained unpublished. The site is currently being studied again by a large team of researchers of different specialties, including the collection recovered during the archaeological intervention made in 2001 (Abásolo *et al.* 2004), with 1822 artefacts in total, nearly all of them unpublished. With this work, we intend to publish a monograph on the whole collection, so that we can better integrate this important site into the long and complex process of the Roman conquest of Hispania.

This new approach to the fortress was put together due to several reasons. For a long time, there has been a debate about the chronological and historical scope of this military site (Hurtado Pérez 1927; Corchón García 1954; Callejo Serrano 1962; Arias Bonet 1966; Beltrán Lloris 1973/1974; Morillo 1991, 155-158; 2003, 58-59). In fact, literary sources provide us abundant information on military activities in the region of Spanish Extremadura, a situation that has led some researchers to relate this archaeological site with the campaign of Q. Servilius Caepio (Fernández-Guerra y Orbe 1873, part I, 96; Salas Martín 1996, 78), while others consider to have been relevant in the post-Lusitanian War (Fabião 2014, 14-15; Heras Mora 2018, 702-703). Still, most seem to follow the opinion of Adolf Schulten, who considered it in the context of the Sertorian conflict (Morillo 2003: 58-59; Abásolo *et al.* 2008, 115; Heras Mora 2014, 164; Morillo & Sala Sellés 2019, 52-54; Pereira & Pereira 2020, 304).

In fact, one of the events most closely related to the fortress of Cáceres el Viejo was the one committed by Quintus Servilius Caepio in 139 BC, having established *Castra Servilia* to invade the Vettonian territory. The relationship between these two realities, the historical and the archaeological, is an old debate, but in its genesis was built on empirical data and without great archaeological facts. The history of the evolution of research on Cáceres el Viejo explains the dynamics of the interpretations given to it and clarifies some persistent positions (Corchón García 1954; Arias Bonet 1965, 247;

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1966, 319; Salvatore 1997). The current study of the artefacts does not agree to an interpretation in that sense, excluding any relation with historical and military events before the early 1st century BC.

Until then, it is difficult to guarantee that the region was under the control of Rome, a situation which changed from the turn of the 2nd to the 1st century. Besides, literary sources also record the establishment of a fortress in this region by Licinius Crassus (Beltrán Lloris 1973/1974; 1976, 15-16) in the 90's BC. However, for the last decades of the 2nd century and the beginning of the 1st century BC, the information we have on military activities is scarce.

It is precisely in this military context that most researchers place the well-known fortress of Cáceres el Viejo, but despite this, we must consider a broader chronological time than considered by A. Schulten. We are therefore dealing with a moment of great military and cultural complexity. This conflict opposed Romans to Romans, initiating a dualistic process accomplished by two Roman political and military factions facing each other, and in each of them there is a process of acculturation of its own.

Cáceres el Viejo is a remarkable site for the study of the Roman military settlements of the first quarter of the 1st century BC, but it is equally relevant for the definition of the archaeological contexts for this phase of the Roman conquest process (Morillo & Sala Sellés 2019, 52-54). We now know that the overview of material culture that we knew was too simple and, in the light of recent advances, different ceramics allow more complete readings of the military diet, economy, supply networks, military productions and even relations with civilian settlements in the region.

Cáceres el Viejo and some of the new data

This Roman fortress is well known by specialists from Schulten (1928; 1930; 1932) and Ulbert (1984; Salvatore 1997). Nevertheless, we recall that the defensive system remains visible today and is characterized by the existence of an orthogonal perimeter, rectangular in shape (24 ha), with right angles and a double ditch (fig. 1). The wall has a double rampart, joined by transversal stone ties, and was built with stones and filled with the soil coming from the opening of the two ditches.

The wall and the ditches are interrupted to allow access to the settlement. It had six gates, communicated by the main streets, each with different width sizes and with various defensive techniques. It seems likely that these differences resulted from the construction of the wall and gates by distinct groups of men. In fact, each legionary could perform engineering tasks (Fields 2008, 43). For this reason, each unit was in charge of building about 25 m of the ditch and the wall (Richardson 2004,

10-14; Jones 2017, 525-526). At Cáceres el Viejo it was possible to detect the connections of each of these sections (Salgado Carmona 2020), and it is possible that the gates were also built by different groups.

On the architecture and internal organisation of the fortress, Ulbert (1984) made a detailed analysis of the buildings, a work that remains a reference. Indeed, the recent excavations made at the site (Abásolo *et al.* 2004; Salgado Carmona 2020) have not extended this data, although it has allowed the identification of some building details, as was the case with the construction of the rampart by sections. The last archaeological intervention allows us to identify the internal *agger* and the *via sagularis* (Pereira & Morillo 2024).

Furthermore, this Roman fortress offers a restricted time of use, which facilitates the definition of type-sets for a specific time in the process of the Roman conquest of *Hispania*. Many of the artefacts were already known since the works of Schulten (1928; 1930; 1932), Paulsen (1928; 1930; 1932) and Ulbert (1984). Nevertheless, recent advances regarding Roman ceramics and the fact that we are now studying the whole collection allow us to sketch a more precise preliminary chrono-political and military framework (Pereira & Morillo 2024).

For instance, the amphorae show that the fortress did indeed receive wine and its by-products, oil, and fish products, but we did not know exactly in what percentages. The wine was the most consumed product, with several types of amphorae of different origin, while olive oil and fish sauces were balanced in lower percentages (fig. 2). The study of amphorae shows an almost complete absence of containers with Punic shapes, a situation which reveals an overwhelming preference for Italic products.

Although the amphorae of type Dressel 1, Ancient Tripolitanian (= Ancient African) and Lamboglia 2 represent most of the group, they do not reflect the real complexity of the economy of this fortress. To these, we could add others, such as the evolved Greco-Italian amphorae produced in *Ulterior*, the Dressel 4 from Cos, those from Brindisi, those of the Carmona type (T-8.2.1.1.) or the CC.NN. (T-9.1.1.1.). Although these types are a minority in the set, they are essential to adjust the chronology of occupation, since their production starts or ends during the first third of the 1st century BC.

We should also consider some presences and absences that allow us to define the limit *ante quem*. This is the case of a few fragments of variant C of the Hispanic Dressel 1 type, whose most ancient contexts point to its appearance around the first third of the 1st century BC (Arteaga Matute 1985, 218). In addition, if we also consider the absence of ovoid amphorae containers produced in the Guadalquivir valley, which begin to be manufactured from this time onwards, it is not possible to extend the chronology of the fortress beyond 70 BC.

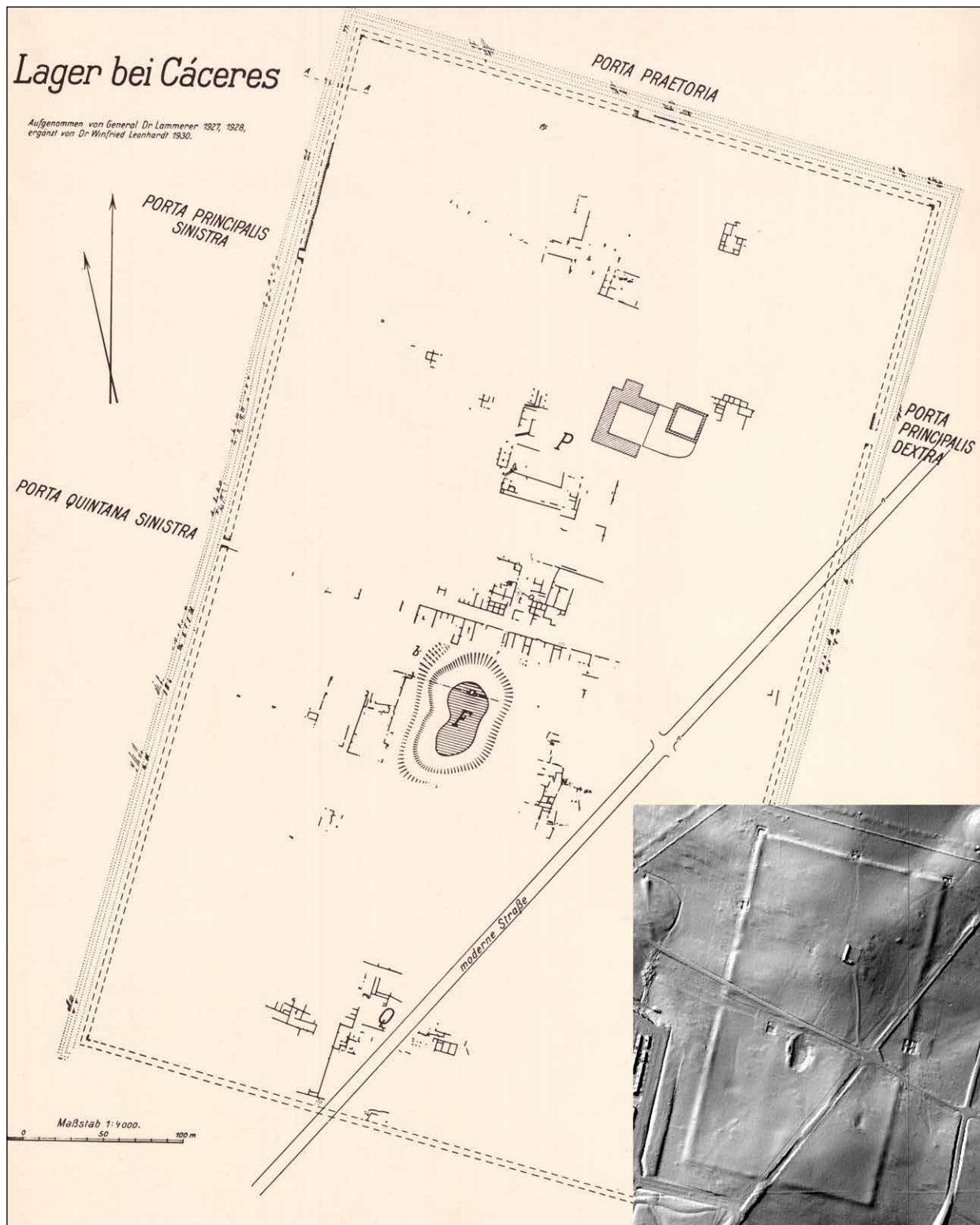


Figure 1. Plan of the Roman fortress of Cáceres el Viejo (drawing is part of the collection of Günter Ulbert, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Madrid; below, LiDAR survey, authored by CSPP).



Figure 2. Percentage of imported products in amphorae (MNI basis) and some representative specimens. 1. Tyrrhenian Dressel 1A; 2. 1B; 3. 1C; 4. African Ancient Tripolitanian; 5. Brindisi type produced on the Adriatic coast; 6. Ulterior evolved Greco-Italic type; 7. Ulterior Dressel 1C; 8-9. T-8.2.1.1.; 10-11. T-9.1.1.1.

As with the amphorae, the Roman black glazed pottery, the common ware of the same origin and that from *Etruria* and the *Ulterior* province show a relationship with specific and synchronous areas, symptomatic of the probable southern routes used for the provisioning of the fortress. However, not all the products were imported, and a considerable percentage of pottery was manufactured locally. This phenomenon of imitations is transversal to most of the known categories and is something that stands out in this fortress in high percentages.

The local productions that imitate Roman black glazed pottery and common ware are the most noticeable (fig. 3), with around 45% the first and the latter with 77%, although in this case we should bear in mind that not all the vessels made locally imitate Italic shapes. Nonetheless, the reproductions of black glazed pottery faithfully imitate the profiles and dimensions of the Italic shapes, a situation

that suggests that there was a workshop in the fortress, or very close to it, whose Italic craftsmen were very familiar with the repertoires of the vessels that were produced on the Tyrrhenian coast.

In the case of common ware, the panorama of local/regional productions is what would be expected in a context of this nature. Vessels made locally correspond to the majority, while Italic productions are a minority. The lack of imported manufactured products in Cáceres el Viejo was balanced by those produced locally, which was also the case with the Roman black glazed ware, the lamps, and the thin-walled pottery. From the *Ulterior* province, we notice the presence of vessels produced on the coast, both in the Gaditanian and Malacitanian regions. Nevertheless we should also mention the residual percentage of ceramics produced in the Guadalquivir area, mainly mortars.

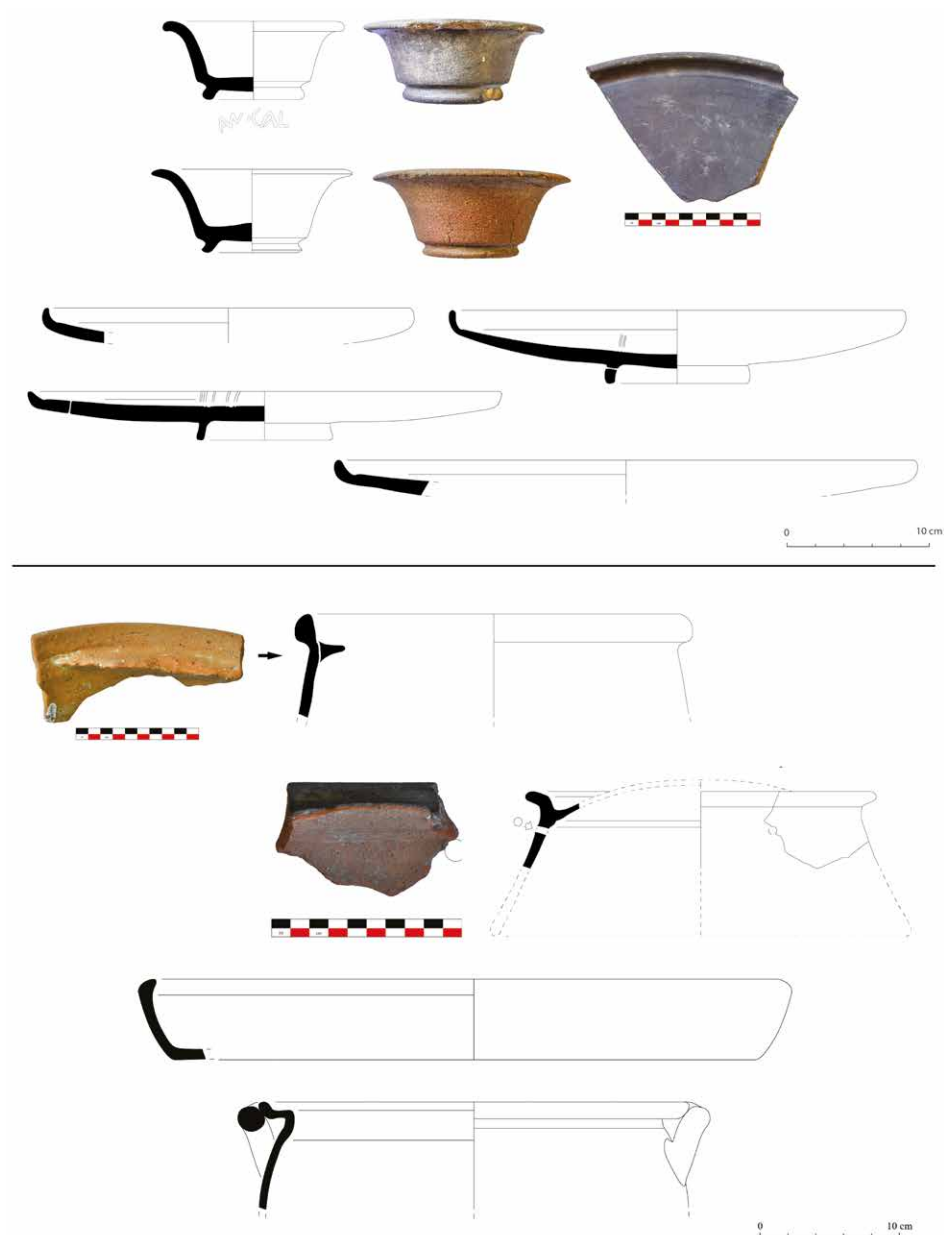


Figure 3. Some examples of the imitations of Roman black glazed pottery (above) and common ware (below).

Bearing in mind this phenomenon of imitations of black glazed pottery, this same pattern was recorded in the settlements of Villaviejas del Tamuja (Hernández *et al.* 1989; Hernández & Martín Bravo 2017; 2021; Morales Martín *et al.* 2021) and Cabeça de Vaiamonte (Fabião 1998; Pereira 2018), sites where these reproductions are well documented and integrate the same characteristics as those recovered at Cáceres el Viejo.

These artefacts are known in other settlements of the Iberian Peninsula, as is the case of *Valentia* (Marín Jordá *et al.* 2004), *Libisosa* (Uroz Rodríguez & Uroz Sáez 2014) or *Azaila* (Beltrán Lloris 2018). Moreover, the same situation is verified in the metallic tableware, which offers identical containers to those that were recovered in *Libisosa* (Uroz

Rodríguez 2015). Among these, we highlight the famous edge *amphora*, strainers, bitroncoconical jars (Piatra Neamt and Gallarate types), Idria cups, basins, and buckets. A wide range of tools can also be associated with this service, such as *simpula*, forks, knives, cleavers and stands or tripods. Several of these vessels were used in the preparation, serving and ingestion of liquids, which corroborates that the officials of this fortress maintained Italic dining practices. Still, other metal containers show that other practices were part of daily life, especially personal care, such as the basins.

Although we could expose other artefacts that will make up the future monograph, already submitted, it is crucial to talk about *militaria*. All kinds of passive and

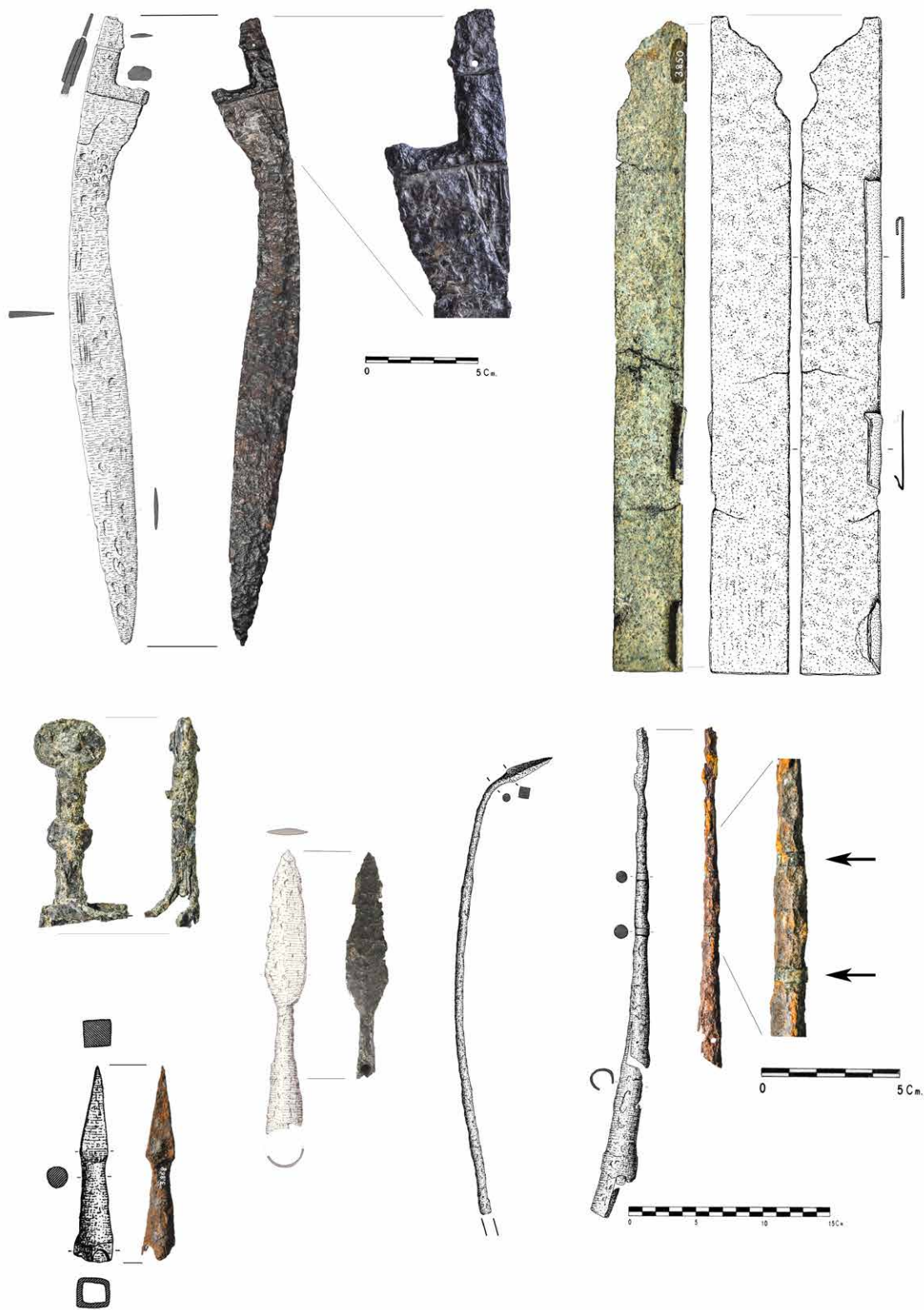


Figure 4. Some of the weaponry recovered in Cáceres el Viejo.

active equipment were documented, both infantry and cavalry, for combat or throwing, as the well-known Iberian *falcata*, which coexisted with other typically Italic weapons (fig. 4). Above all, the collection shows that in this fortress there was a dense infantry group composed mostly of Italic soldiers, but also Hispanic origin troops, together with a smaller number of cavalry. There are also artefacts to support the hypothesis of a unit deployed for the use of war machines, as demonstrated by the projectiles of darts or large-calibre stones. These weapons clearly show an army that had innovated and adapted to the reforms of the Roman army traditionally assigned to Gaius Mario or, more probably, after the Social War.

Concerning numismatic material, an in-depth review of the coins from the old and new excavations at Cáceres el Viejo has corroborated a chronology in the early decades of the 1st century BC for the abandonment of the site. In addition, the study of the unpublished documentation kept in the Museum of Cáceres has allowed us to identify other coins that complete the composition and monetary supply in circulation. Comparison with the numismatic record found in other Sertorian contexts of *Hispania* shows their similarity and links the coin finds to this warlike conflict.

The analysis of the weights, ingots, and scales recovered at this military settlement has proved to be also of great interest. From their study it has been possible to observe the use of *aequipondia* and *librae*, in addition to *pondera* of various characteristics responding to different metrological patterns, which are indicative of the coexistence between the Roman and Phoenician systems. The second one was very usual in the south of Iberian Peninsula till this moment. Some sets of weights are clearly for official use, while others are related to the artisanal areas of the fortress.

The study of clay building material is very interesting. In addition to antefixes, rhomboidal bricks used as paving tiles (*opus figlinum*) are detected, also a reflection of marble pavements. The scarcity of tiles leads us to suggest that the roofs were made of timber. Altars and *thymiasteria* made of local ceramics are also detected. Equally noteworthy is the study of the lithic artefacts recovered, which confirm the existence of a daily life that was not exclusively dedicated to war, but also to the maintenance of military equipment, weapons, and military diet. We highlight the existence of hand-operated rotary querns, sharpeners, and polishers for the maintenance of weaponry.

In short

The debate about the chronological scope of this Roman military settlement and the possibility of existing two overlapping fortresses is closer to a resolution. Detailed studies make it clear that the chronology of the different categories of artefacts matches a specific moment in the 1st century BC. However, we should consider that the

site does not allow any chronostratigraphic interpretation, as only future excavations will make it possible. Regardless of these questions, the material pattern of Cáceres el Viejo offers similarities with other contemporary sites in *Hispania*. It is the case of the destruction contexts of *Valentia* (Alapont Martín *et al.* 2009), Azaila (Beltrán Lloris 2018), *Libisosa* (Uroz Rodríguez & Uroz Sáez 2014) or Tossal de la Cala (Bayo Fuentes *et al.* 2021).

We must also mention other important questions, namely the fact that the material culture clearly shows the coexistence of Hispanic and Italic artefacts. Although it is consensual that Schulten forced the archaeological data to historical conclusions (Beltrán Lloris 1973/1974; 1976; Morillo 1993), we consider that this researcher was quite accurate in many proposals, namely that this fortress was in service of the senatorial army. Although the presence of a Hispanic military unit is recognized there, the access to civil and military products of considered quality, and above all the local reproduction of most of the Italic repertoires to satisfy the requirement of the military stationed there is proof that the officialdom enjoyed the privileges of the main military supply networks during the first quarter of the 1st century BC.

It should also be considered the recent work carried out by one of us on a settlement located north of the river Tagus, called Cáceres Viejo de Santa Marina (Pereira & Dias 2020). The data obtained there allow us to propose a possible contemporary military function of both, but they exhibit an antagonistic topographical, architectural, and cultural reality. Although we cannot rule out that the settlement north of the Tagus may correspond to an outpost of the fortress of Cáceres el Viejo, it seems more probable that this was a border area. It is possible to trace a distinct material culture to the south (Berrocal-Rangel 1989; Hernández *et al.* 1989; Fabião 1998, 465-473; Hernández & Martín Bravo 2017; 2021; Pereira 2018, 62-63) and north of the Tagus (González Cordero & Quijada González 1991, 159; Martín Bravo 1999, 134-136 and 141; Río-Miranda & Iglesias Rodríguez 2002), and it is likely that Cáceres el Viejo functioned as a main base for senatorial military activities during that moment in time using as well the main civil settlements as support bases.

The use of civilian settlements had clear advantages for the armies, whether for movement, supply or recruitment. This system is not unprecedented in the Roman military world, although it is better documented for more recent stages (Erdkamp 1998; Roth 1999; Morillo 2006). This systematization of two-way relations with nearby civilian settlements guided the military strategy of advance and control of territory, especially in the case of fortresses that were established in areas already controlled and that integrated safe areas near 'frontier zones' or deployed in regions where the army enjoyed the support of allied cities.

Despite this very simple view, there is no doubt that these relations should be more complex than is proposed here or the archaeological evidence suggests. We cannot apply the same interpretation for all the cases, as has been shown in other studies: for instance Villasviejas del Tamuja, for which an imposition of the Roman presence is suggested as being supported by the orthogonal enclosure adjacent to the settlement, with buildings related to the presence of troops (Mayoral Herrera *et al.* 2021, 182-183), or that of Cabeça de Vaíamonte for which it has recently been suggested that the army presence must have been voluntary and peaceful (Pereira 2018, 350-354). Regardless of the process of assimilation or capitulation of the pre-existing civilian settlements to the Roman military cause, most authors agree on its relation to the events of the Sertorian War (Morillo & Sala Sellés 2017). We have no doubt about the identification of this archaeological site with *Castra Caecilia*, established between 79 to 77/72 BC, supported by archaeological data. Its architectural features show us a new pattern of *castrametatio*, a pattern of transition between Republican and Augustan fortresses (Pereira & Morillo 2024).

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