

Textiles on the March: Textile Activities in Roman Republican Military Contexts of Western Iberia (1st Century BC)

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Abstract: In the absence of textual evidence comparable to that of the Imperial period, archaeological data constitute the key source to reconstruct textile supply to the Late Republican Roman armies. As the scenario of many of the main conflicts of the Late Republic, the Iberian Peninsula offers a particularly fertile ground to study that supply. However, studies on this topic remain rare. This contribution aims to offer a first overview of available evidence through a discussion of selected case studies from Western Iberia which relate to a particularly dynamic phase of the Roman military presence in the Far West – the 1st century BC. The selected case studies cover a range of different situations, all connected with the Roman army. These include formal military camps (e.g. Cáceres el Viejo), militarised indigenous settlements (e.g. Chibanes, Cabeça de Vaíamonte and Cáceres Viejo de Santa Marina), settlements founded *ex novo* with a strong military presence (e.g. Monte dos Castelinhos and Pedrão) and later small forts with a territorial control function (e.g. Castelo da Lousa). These case studies illustrate various facets of textile supply, production and procurement, from relatively significant ‘in-house’ production in military sites to an intensification of local production in militarised settlements and areas.

Keywords: Hispania Ulterior, loom weights, militarised settlements, military camps, military supply, Roman army, spindle whorls

Setting the stage: research on textiles and the Late Republican army in Iberia (or the lack thereof)

The Roman presence and military expansion in Iberia are a direct result of the Second Punic war which had in the Iberian Peninsula one of its main scenarios.¹ However, the landing of the forces commanded by Gnaeus Cornelius Scipio in Emporion in 218 BC was just the beginning of a long and drawn-out process marked by multiple military conflicts – not only against local groups, but also in the framework of Roman civil wars – which would not be completed until 19 BC with the Roman victory over the Cantabri and the Astures of Northern Iberia under Augustus.²

These 200 years of conflict make the Iberian Peninsula a truly unique laboratory through which to study the Roman army of the Late Republic, its equipment, its

strategies, but also its approach to the supply of critical resources and materials.³ These included, of course, the textiles used for garments, tents, for storage and transportation of goods, as well as for a host of other practical uses around military camps and encampments. This fact, however, is seldom acknowledged in the existing literature.

Despite the virtual absence of research on this topic until recently (see below), textile activities were undeniably a part of daily life in Roman military camps in the Iberian Peninsula. However, for the Roman Republican period at least, there is still a lack of detailed studies on textile crafts in military and militarised contexts. It should, however, be borne in mind that this was an indispensable activity for armies.⁴

This being said, and in the absence of textual and inscriptional evidence comparable to that available for later periods,⁵ any reconstruction of the textile supply

¹ Knapp 1977; Edwell 2011.

² For syntheses on this long process, see contributions in Morillo Cerdán *et al.* 2003; Morillo Cerdán and Aurrecochea 2006; Morillo Cerdán 2016 and 2024; Morillo Cerdán and Sala-Sellés 2019; Pereira *et al.* 2021; see also Heras Mora 2018.

³ Erdkamp 2010.

⁴ Polyb. 6.39.15.

⁵ Droß-Krüpe 2011 and 2012; Liu 2012.

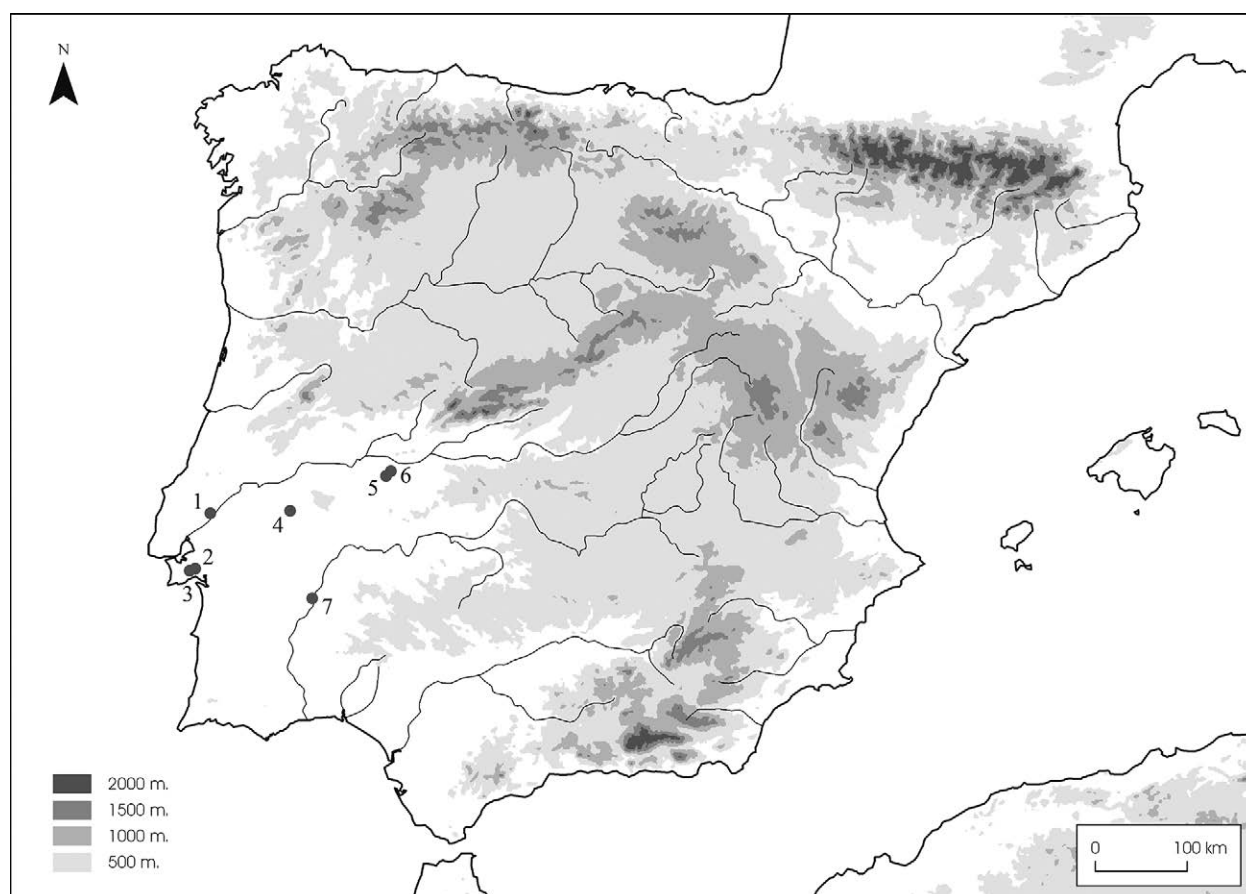


Figure 1: Location of the sites discussed in the text in the Iberian Peninsula: 1 – Monte dos Castelinhos (Vila Franca de Xira); 2 – Chibanes (Palmela); 3 – Pedrão (Palmela); 4 – Cabeça de Vaiamonte (Monforte); 5 – Cáceres el Viejo (Cáceres); 6 – Cáceres Viejo de Santa Marina (Casas de Milán); 7 – Castelo da Lousa (Moura) (cartographic base: Trabajos de Prehistoria/CSIC).

chains serving the Roman armies in the West is difficult, not to say impossible. However, this contribution aims to highlight that there is strong evidence that, at this time, the needs related to textile products were not met just by long-distance supply chains. This paper in fact provides an overview of military and militarised contexts in Western Iberia dated to the 1st century BC – a particularly complex period in the history of the Roman military presence in this area – which have yielded more or less substantial evidence of textile production (Figure 1).

As will be discussed below, there are good reasons to believe that some military enclosures, especially those that housed the army for longer periods, enjoyed local or regional supplies. This, in turn, raises new questions about the social and economic relations between textile producers and the army and the impact of the presence of military contingents on local/regional textile production. These questions will be outlined in more detail in the conclusions, but before a discussion of the aforementioned case studies is in order.

Textile activities in Roman Republican military contexts of Western Iberia

Monte dos Castelinhos (Vila Franca de Xira, PT)

The itinerary proposed in this contribution starts in the Lower Tagus valley, an area that was incorporated into the Roman sphere fairly early and in which recent research has brought to the fore substantial evidence of an early presence of the Roman army.⁶ A particularly good example is the site of Monte dos Castelinhos, in Vila Franca de Xira, which occupies a large hilltop area overlooking the Tagus and the Rio Grande da Pipa⁷ (Figure 2). Its unusual and strategic position in the landscape, controlling a natural border area, led to the *ex-novo* foundation of a settlement during the Roman conquest, which may be identified with ancient Ilerabriga.⁸

⁶ See contributions in Fabião and Pimenta 2014; Pimenta 2022 and 2024.

⁷ Pimenta 2013; 2015; 2024; Pimenta and Mendes 2022.

⁸ Pimenta 2015; 2024: 688–696.

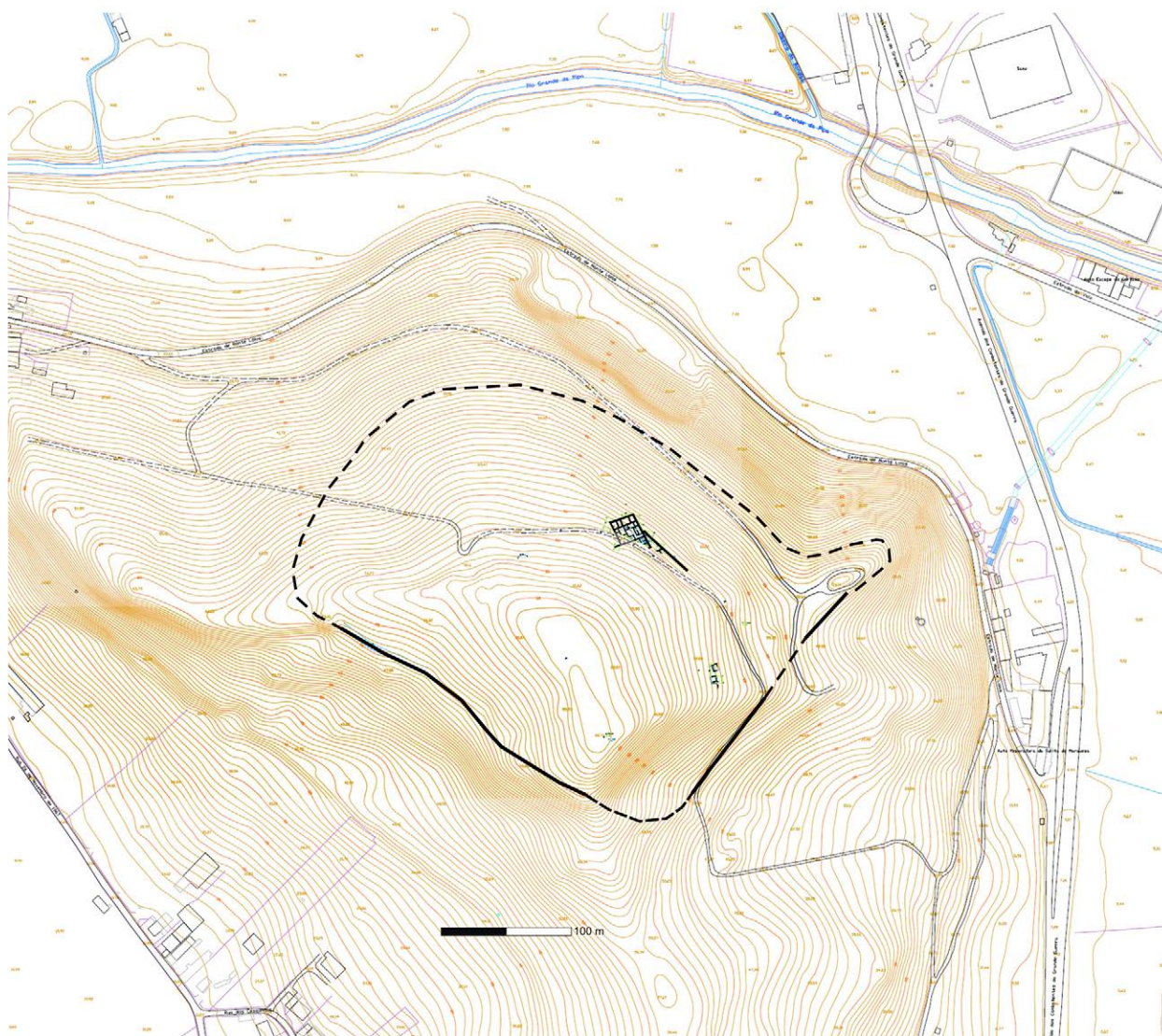


Figure 2: Topography of the Monte dos Castelinhos settlement and position of the excavated area and structures (drawing: after Pimenta 2024).

The relative abundance of loom weights and, to a lesser extent, of spindle whorls is a testament to a thriving textile activity in Monte dos Castelinhos.⁹ The widespread distribution of this material by the architectural complexes thus far documented points to a domestic production for self-consumption, as we shall see.

The loom weight assemblage from Monte dos Castelinhos (Figures 3-4) includes 177 pieces retrieved in Roman Republican contexts,¹⁰ although it is worth highlighting that weights and textile tools are also attested in Augustan contexts, further stressing the importance of this craft activity in the settlement.¹¹

These loom weights are distributed by the two main Roman Republican phases of the site. 44 examples belong to the site's earliest phase (c. 70-50 BC), which so far has only been documented in a restricted area. All these pieces were retrieved together in Compartment B, fallen on a pavement, and most likely indicate the presence of a loom in this space.¹²

The levels attributed to the second Roman Republican phase (c. 50-30 BC), which have been more extensively documented, yielded the remaining 133 examples. These are distributed throughout the various spaces that make up the architectural complexes excavated on the site.¹³ It is interesting to note their spatial distribution, as some concentrations in specific

⁹ Pimenta 2024: 402-417.

¹⁰ Pimenta 2024: 406-417; see also Santos 2015.

¹¹ Pimenta 2024: 407.

¹² Pimenta 2024: 408.

¹³ Santos 2015: figs. 4-5; Pimenta 2024: 408.

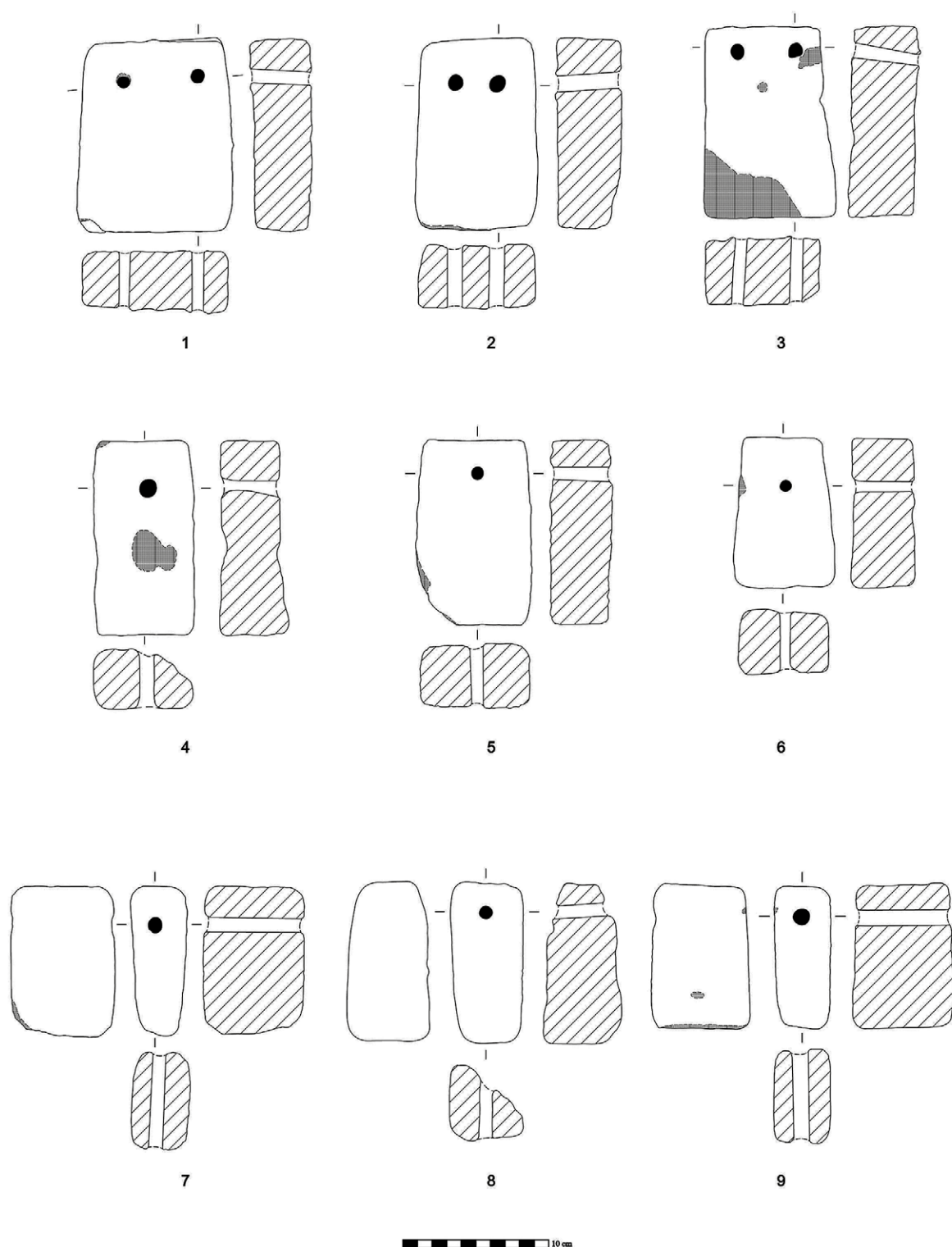


Figure 3: Examples of loom weights retrieved during the excavations in Monte dos Castelinhos (1) (drawing: after Pimenta 2024).

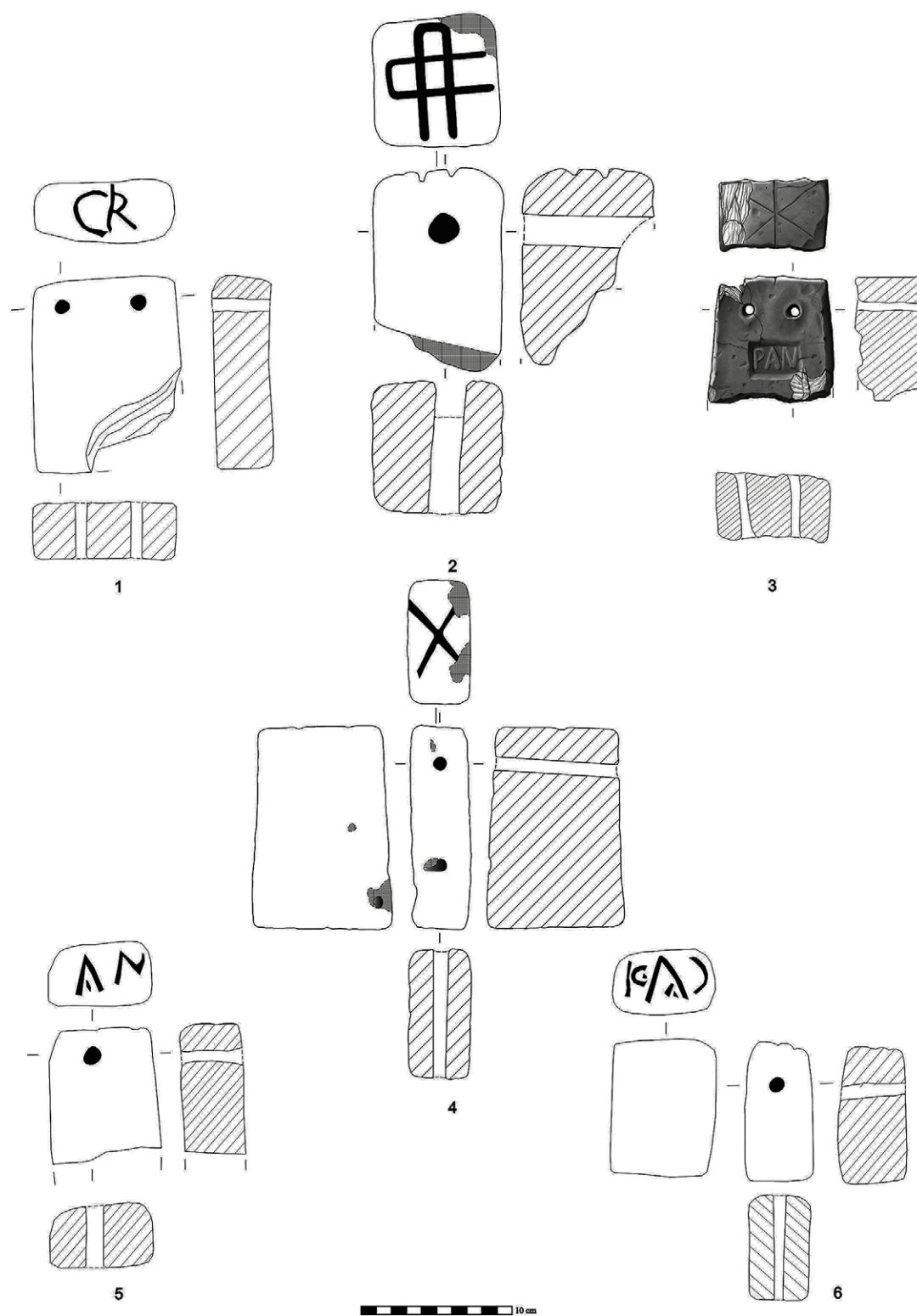


Figure 4: Examples of loom weights retrieved during the excavations in Monte dos Castelinhos (2) (drawing: after Pimenta 2024).

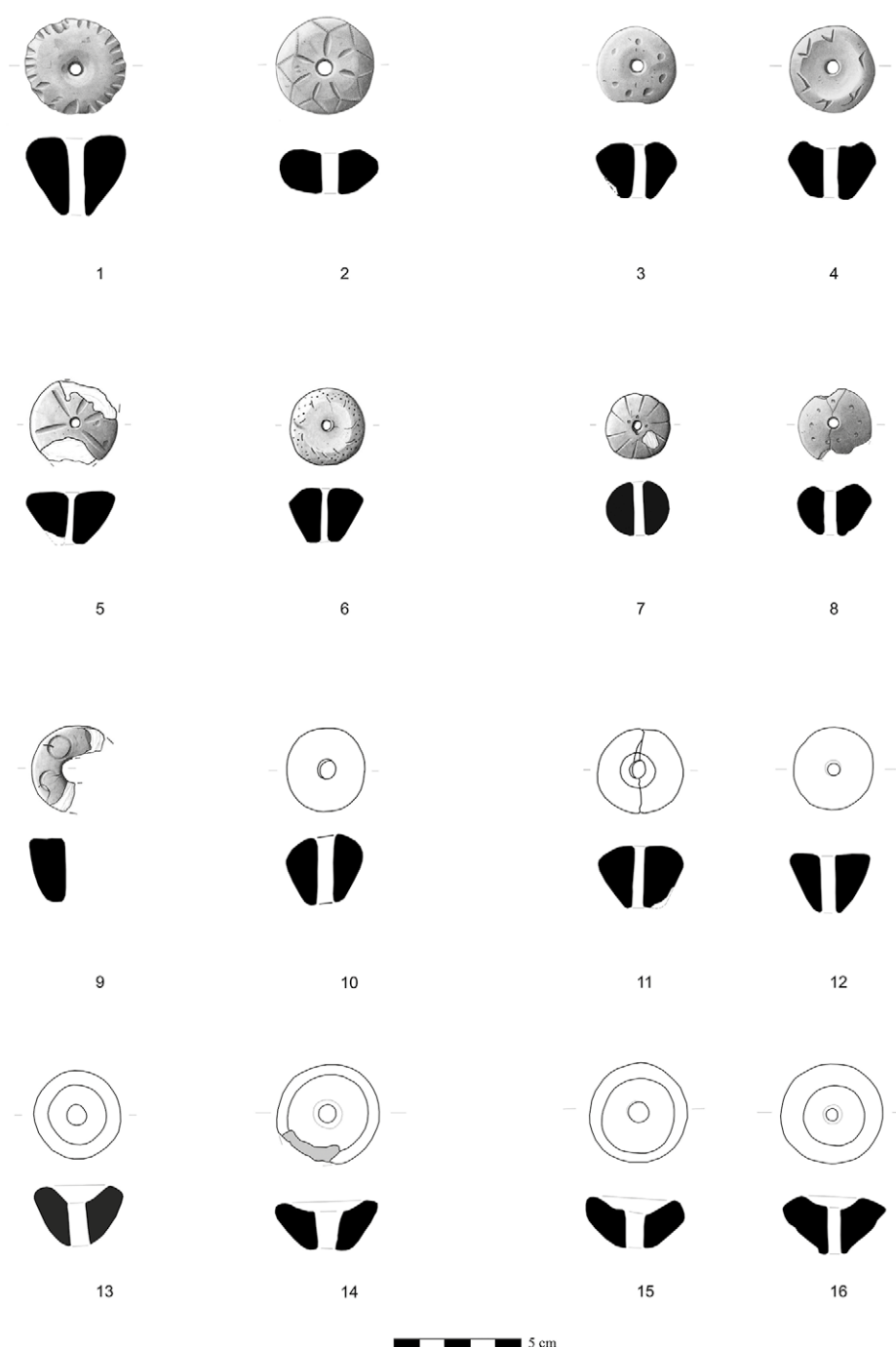


Figure 5: Examples of spindle whorls retrieved during the excavations in Monte dos Castelinhos (drawing: after Pimenta 2024).

areas can be observed, and can offer insights into the functionality of some of the architectural structures documented in the site. In other cases, however, loom weights seem to have been reused as construction material during this phase.¹⁴

Typologically, the best-represented group of loom weights includes parallelepipedal pieces with two

perforations, followed by the ones with just one perforation and the ones with a transversal perforation; the rarest type includes large weights of truncated pyramidal shape.¹⁵ Beyond their use as textile tools, it is also interesting to note that these weights served on occasion as epigraphic supports, offering insights into the literacy and writing practices of the local groups and even into the organization of textile production.¹⁶

¹⁴ Pimenta 2024: 408.

¹⁵ Pimenta 2024: 408, fig. 99 and Gráfico 38.

¹⁶ Pimenta 2024: 409.

Spindle whorls are less common in Monte dos Castelinhos, amounting to a total of 26 pieces¹⁷ (Figure 5). They are very regular and symmetrical and seem therefore to have been wheel-made or mould-made.¹⁸ This being said, their physical structure points to a certain productive heterogeneity.¹⁹ The morphology of these pieces is also variable, but there is a clear predominance of conical and biconical shapes.²⁰ It is also worth noting that a little more than one third of these spindle whorls were decorated.²¹

In light of these characteristics, it can be said that the spindle whorls from Monte dos Castelinhos derive from productive traditions with indigenous roots, as they have good parallels in Protohistoric contexts.²² Therefore, it could be said that these spindle whorls follow a local tradition. It should nonetheless be mentioned that this type of pieces is present even in contexts related to the earlier phases of the Roman conquest in which an Italic component is strongly represented, such as Lisbon.²³

The presence of substantial textile activities in Monte dos Castelinhos is an interesting element for understanding the economy of the site, but also for approaching its significance as a settlement or a military establishment. The need for any newly founded establishment to be self-sufficient and to take advantage of its surroundings was only natural. The ample distribution of spindle whorls and loom weights throughout the architectural assemblages excavated in different areas of the site suggest that here textile production was a domestic affair geared towards self-sufficiency,²⁴ which does not mean it was not a relevant economic activity for the site and its inhabitants.

Castro de Chibanes and Pedrão (Palmela, PT)

To the south of the Tagus estuary, in the Setúbal Peninsula, two archaeological sites excavated and published by Joaquina Soares and Carlos Tavares da Silva can be related to the first Roman occupation of the region. One of these sites, Chibanes, has been associated with the ancient Caepiana mentioned by Ptolemy in connection with the final events of the Lusitanian Wars.²⁵ Chibanes has a military or militarised Roman Republican occupation, with two distinct phases: one from the early 2nd to the early 1st century BC,²⁶

probably related to the Lusitanian Wars; and another dated between 75 and 40 BC which may be related to the Sertorian War and Caesar's Civil War. The location of the site, with a wide visual domain over the basins of the Tagus and Sado rivers, must have been a decisive factor for the Roman military presence.²⁷

The recently published study of the textile tools retrieved in Chibanes includes an assemblage of 100 spindle whorls, three loom weights, six copper alloy needles, a bone spindle shaft and three scissors, possibly shearing scissors.²⁸

The spindle whorls of Chibanes are made of clay and were mostly modelled by hand, although a substantial number could also have been mould-made; only two were wheel-made. Asymmetrical biconical pieces are predominant in the assemblage, as is also the case in other contemporary sites. Most pieces are comparatively light (especially in the 20-25 g and the 15-20 g ranges), suggesting the production of medium-thickness threads. More than a third of the pieces were decorated, mostly pre-firing, and sport motifs which are common to other contemporary sites. The presence of pieces decorated with the imprints of metal needles²⁹ is particularly interesting, as it not only suggests that the users of these implements took part in the production of spindle whorls, but also ties together the different steps of textile production.

Loom weights, on the other hand, have a much smaller quantitative expression, with just three parallelepipedal examples. Two of them have the same morphology and share similar decorative motifs, with good parallels in other Roman Republican contexts. All of these pieces weigh over 1 kg and show use marks.³⁰ These finds were concentrated in the western area of the fort and belong to the first phase of the Roman Republican occupation. Chibanes also yielded a total of six copper alloy needles, with varying eye sizes which could be related to uses with different qualities of thread and fabric.³¹

It can thus be said that in Chibanes, a site connected with the northward movement of the Roman armies, textile activities are documented in the domestic environment of the western residential area of the hillfort.³² The presence of women in this area, to which textile activities can most likely be associated, is particularly notorious in the case of Building C, where three spindle whorls were retrieved in an area in which a child burial was also documented.³³ It seems clear

¹⁷ Pimenta 2024: 402-406, ests. 118-119.

¹⁸ Pimenta 2024: 402.

¹⁹ Pimenta 2024: 402.

²⁰ Pimenta 2024: 402, Gráfico 37.

²¹ Pimenta 2024: 402-403, est. 118.

²² As a comparison, see for example the material from Porto Sabugueiro, Salvaterra de Magos - Pereira 2016/2017.

²³ Pimenta *et al.* 2014: 722.

²⁴ Pimenta 2024: 416-417.

²⁵ Guerra 2004.

²⁶ Tavares da Silva *et al.* 2021: 44.

²⁷ Soares and Tavares da Silva 2021: 17.

²⁸ Pereira *et al.* 2021.

²⁹ Pereira *et al.* 2021: 283, fig. 3.9.

³⁰ Pereira *et al.* 2021: 288, fig. 6.

³¹ Pereira *et al.* 2021: 288-289, fig. 8; Pereira 2021: 332.

³² Pereira *et al.* 2021: 290.

³³ Soares and Duarte 2021.

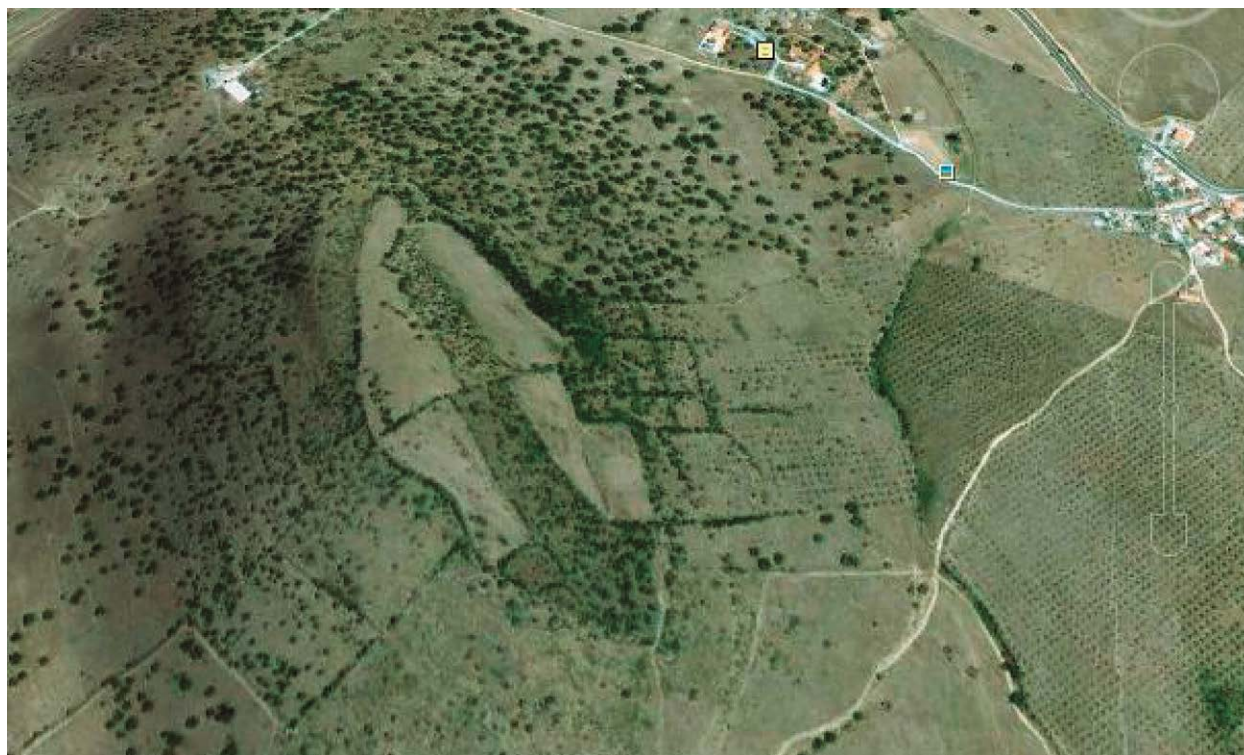


Figure 6: Aerial view of the settlement of Cabeça de Vaiamonte (photograph: after Pereira 2018).

that women continued to carry out their domestic functions and they may also have assisted the army with obtaining and maintaining fabrics and garments.

Close to Chibanes, the hillfort of Pedrão was excavated, studied and published by the same team.³⁴ The layout of this settlement is quite different, but the Italic-type material retrieved here, dated between 125 and 85 BC, also suggests a military function and a connection to nearby Chibanes as part of an axis ensuring territorial control over the Sado Valley during the Lusitanian and Sertorian Wars. Here again, textile tools can be found in an eminently military establishment, including a dozen spindle whorls, some of which are decorated, and a needle found in a fireplace.³⁵

Cabeça de Vaiamonte (Monforte, PT)

From the Atlantic coast, an important axis of territorial penetration by the Roman army to the interior of the Peninsula can be traced, which includes some of the most important scenarios of the second- and first-century BC conflicts. The cases of Cabeça de Vaiamonte³⁶ and Cáceres el Viejo (see below) can be presented in this context as examples of the Roman Republican occupations further to the interior of the

Iberian Peninsula. In the former, the Italic contingents occupied a pre-existing settlement, while the latter corresponds to a canonical Roman military camp. Due to their proximity, contemporaneity and obvious similarities in material culture, it seems important to analyse the presence of textile tools in these two different environments.

Cabeça de Vaiamonte (Figure 6) was an indigenous settlement occupying an isolated hillock controlling the landscape between the Sorraia/Tagus and the Caia/Guadiana valleys. The assemblage retrieved during the excavations in this site in the 1950s and 1960s is particularly important since it illustrates nearly all the stages of the textile *chaîne opératoire*, from the practice of husbandry and the shearing and carding of wool, to spinning, weaving and sewing.³⁷

The assemblage of spindle whorls from Vaiamonte (Figure 7), in particular, is remarkable in many ways, not least of which is the sheer number of individual pieces retrieved in the site, which ascends to a staggering 1660 pieces.³⁸ This is by far the largest assemblage thus far studied in the Iberian Peninsula. They also show a significant typological and decorative diversity, although biconical pieces are the most abundant.

³⁴ Soares and Tavares da Silva 1973; Tavares da Silva *et al.* 1973.

³⁵ Soares and Tavares da Silva 1973: 30.

³⁶ Fabião 1998; Pereira 2018.

³⁷ Pereira 2018: 265.

³⁸ Pereira 2013.

TIPO	SUBTIPO	VARIANTE	1	2	3	4	5	6	%
A									4,8%
B									7%
C	a								7,3%
	b								
D	a								18,5%
	b								
	c								
	d								
E	a								50,3%
	b								
	c								
	d								
	e								
F									4%
G									3,5%
H									4%
I									0,4%

Figure 7: Typology and quantification of the spindle whorls retrieved in Cabeça de Vaiamonte (drawing: after Pereira 2013).

Apart from its sheer volume, the spindle whorl assemblage from Vaiamonte is also notable due to the high percentage of decorated pieces, which amounts to 43% of the total. Of particular interest are the numerous spindle whorls bearing apparent graffiti and, in some cases, what appear to be inscriptions, or pseudo-

inscriptions, apparently in different Pre-Roman writing systems used in Iberia.³⁹

There is also a representative group comprising 25 individual loom weights, the morphology of which

³⁹ Pereira 2013: 683-684.

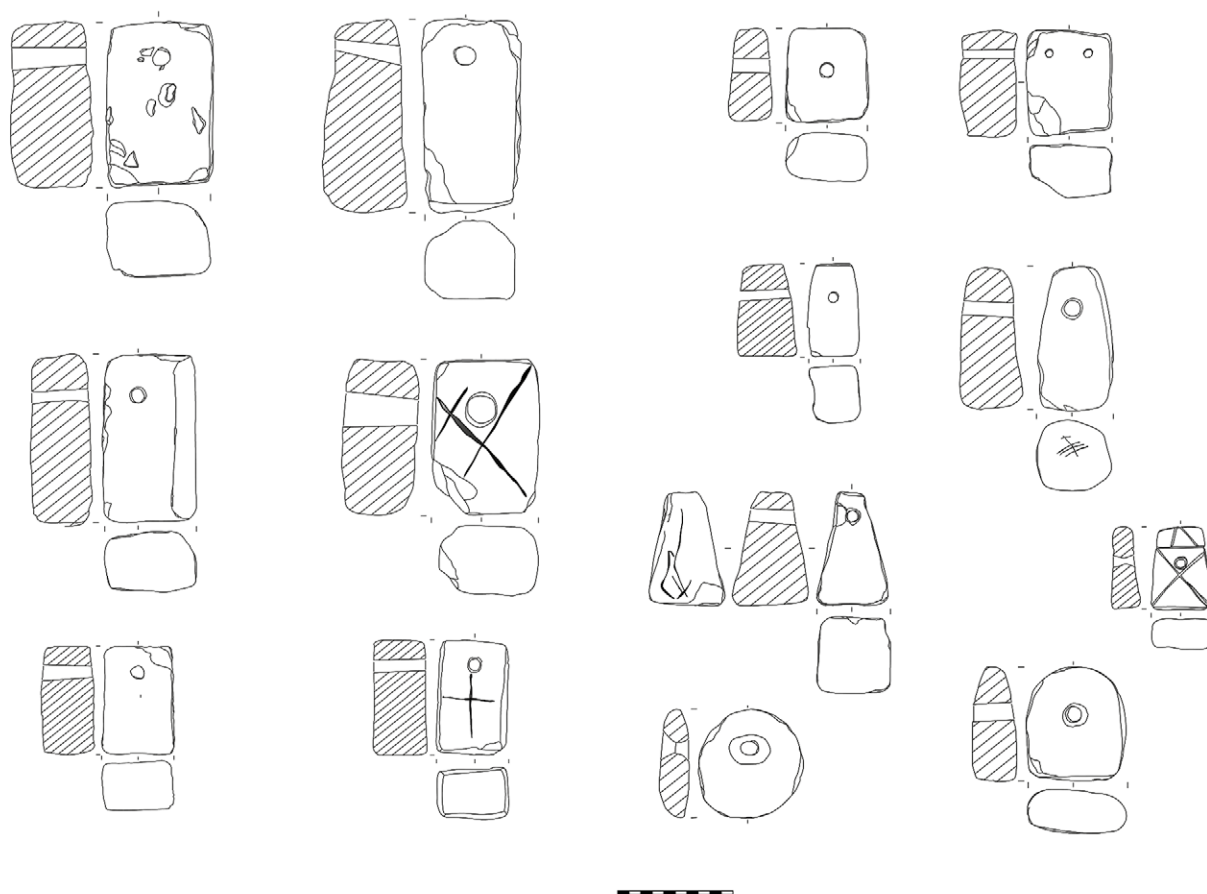


Figure 8: Examples of loom weights retrieved in Cabeça de Vaiamonte (drawing: T.R. Pereira).

covers a series of characteristic typological groups (Figure 8). The most representative type includes flat rectangular examples, which account for 68% of the total, but flat quadrangular, pyramidal truncated and discoidal types are also represented.⁴⁰

Unfortunately, the site was excavated at an early date and the stratigraphic contexts of these materials are now lost. However, it could cautiously be suggested that the spindle whorl assemblage could reflect a relatively long diachrony of use. The function of these textile tools, and especially the spindle whorls, in this site remains unclear. The sheer scale of the assemblage stands out in the regional – and, in fact, in the overall Iberian – panorama and is difficult to explain purely on productive terms. While the presence of textile activities in Vaiamonte seems undeniable, as it is also attested by the presence of a carding comb and 75 needles/awls,⁴¹ the scale of production suggested by the number of tools – especially spinning tools – seems quite displaced in the available panorama.

Furthermore, several aspects of the assemblage – such as the abundance of decorations, and especially of inscribed pieces, and the presence of pieces that seem not to serve a strictly functional purpose (e.g. spindle whorls with incomplete and decentred perforations) – could point towards a ritual function, perhaps as *ex-votos* in the framework of a sanctuary or a votive deposit. Therefore, it seems at least plausible that this assemblage relates, at least in part, to a specific type of ritual practice rooted in the regional Late Iron Age, in which textile tools played a significant role, perhaps in connection with the specific nature of the worshipped divinity. It seems likely, however, that these ritual practices intensified during the Roman Republican period, perhaps as a result of their adoption by indigenous *auxilia* from other parts of the Iberian Peninsula stationed in Vaiamonte with the Roman army, as suggested by the apparently mixed nature of the inscriptions documented in the spindle whorls.

Finally, as a side note to the consideration of this site, it is worth mentioning that other instances of textile activities taking place in militarised indigenous settlements during the Late Republic may exist at the

⁴⁰ Pereira 2018: 265.

⁴¹ Pereira 2018: 268–271.



Figure 9: Location of the military camp of Cáceres el Viejo in the Iberian Peninsula (cartographic base: WMS map of the UAM Cartography Services).

regional level. This appears to be the case of Castelo Velho de Veiros (Estremoz), which seems to have known a significant Roman military presence in the 1st century BC.⁴² Unfortunately, the documentation available for this site is limited, as only a small area has been properly excavated. However, the presence of a loom weight in Late Republican levels which have also yielded *militaria* is worth noting here.⁴³

Cáceres el Viejo (Cáceres, ES)

The Late Roman Republican military camp of Cáceres el Viejo, in Spanish Extremadura (Figure 9), is located between the Sierra San Pedro and the Tagus River, a short distance to the northeast of the city of Cáceres.

The site is located close to the so-called Vía de la Plata, the main communication route between the south and the north of the Iberian Peninsula. It dates to the first quarter of the 1st century BC and was excavated in the early 20th century by Adolf Schulten and Rudolf Paulsen.⁴⁴ Later, Günter Ulbert⁴⁵ studied most of the archaeological material retrieved in the Roman camp.

This is a paradigmatic site (Figure 10) for the study of the Roman military settlements of the first quarter of the 1st century BC, and for this reason, summary descriptions with some very specific considerations on the camp can also be found in general bibliography on Roman camps.⁴⁶

⁴² Arnaud 1970; for the military nature of the site, see also Fabião 1998: 238; Mataloto and Roque 2012.

⁴³ Arnaud: 1970, fig. III.

⁴⁴ Schulten 1928; 1930; 1932.

⁴⁵ Ulbert 1984.

⁴⁶ Morillo Cerdán 1991: 155-158; 2003: 58-59; Pamment Salvatore 1996: 131-134; Hanel 2006: 224-227; Heras Mora 2018: 129-144.

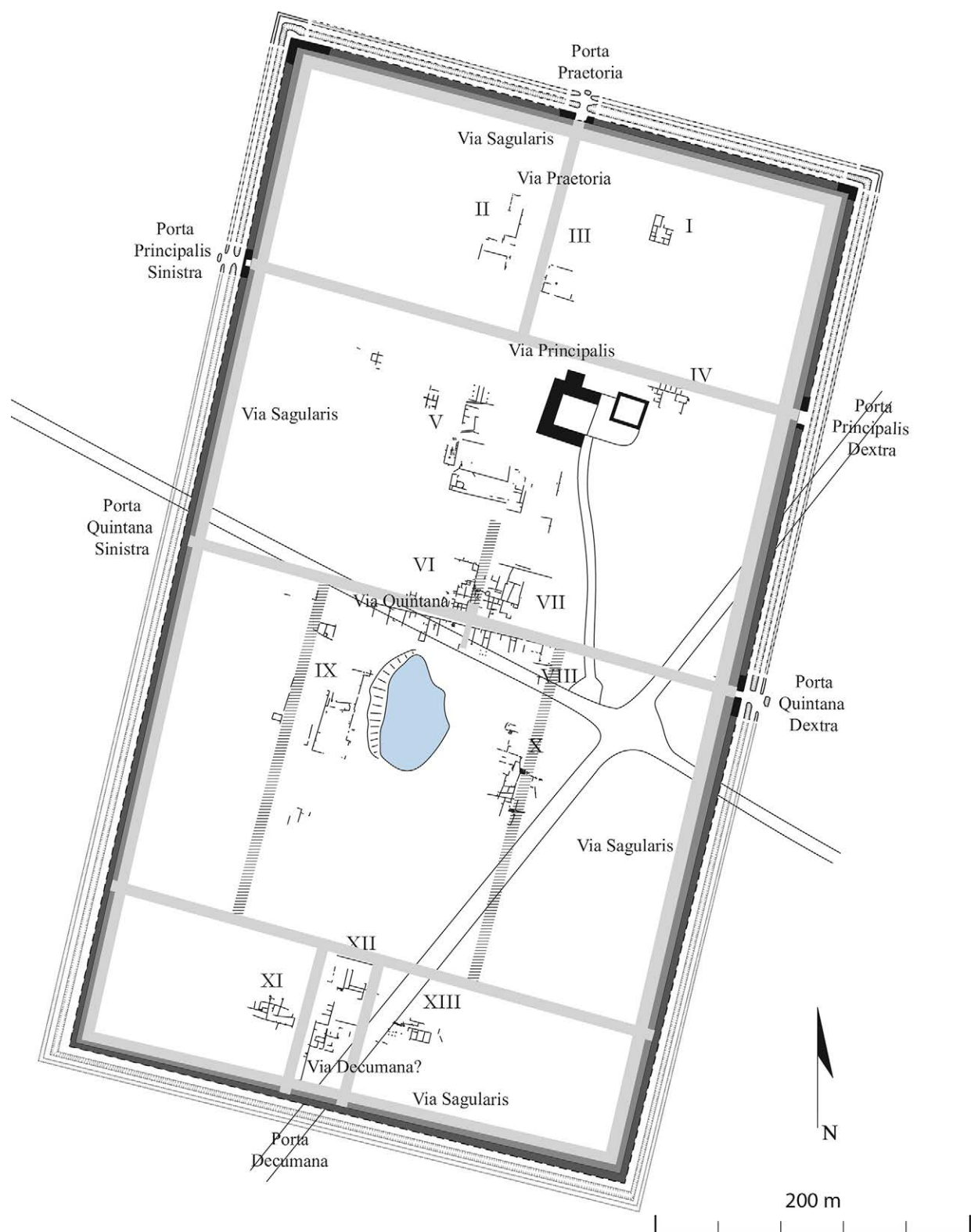


Figure 10: Ideal reconstruction of the street layout of the camp from the data of archaeological excavations, with indications of the buildings and gates (drawing: C. Pereira and A. Morillo).

Despite this fact, today it is difficult to reconstruct the stratigraphy and the archaeological contexts of the excavated portions of this site.⁴⁷ This hinders the recognition of evidence related to textile production or maintenance. Nonetheless, this settlement was recently restudied by a large team of researchers with different specialties. This work resulted in a large monograph on the whole collection.⁴⁸ This new approach to the legionary camp affords some new insights into this kind of activity, that were certainly taking place inside the military enclosure.

Besides, there is strong evidence that the camp of Cáceres el Viejo established relations with the civilian settlements in its surroundings, ensuring dependence or loyalty to the Roman army settled there. Apart from the evidence from the camp itself, these relations can also be tracked in the archaeological record of some civilian settlements, such as Villavieja del Tamuja⁴⁹ or Cabeça de Vaia Monte,⁵⁰ for which the presence of military units has been posited.

It is unlikely that the Roman army relied only on regular state supplies or local suppliers exclusively, as there are clear indicators that textile production was also taking place at these military sites. Cáceres el Viejo is not an exception, as it has yielded evidence not only for the production but also for the maintenance of fabrics adapted to the performance of military functions. Textile-related tools from the site include 16 spindle whorls, 78 *pondera* (Figure 11), four needles and nine scissors.⁵¹

The characteristics of this assemblage seem to point to the prevalence of wool as the main textile fibre. This is due not only to the presence of scissors, most likely sheering scissors, but also to the technical and morphological characteristics of the assemblage of clay spindle whorls and weights. These would have been well-adapted to the optimised processing of that animal fibre. The features of the needles documented on the site, namely their eyes, suggest a widespread use of medium-thickness threads. Only one bone spindle whorl was identified, which could be related to the spinning of a finer thread, although it cannot be excluded that this piece was part of a rattle. Also noteworthy is the presence of four spindle whorls with a weight close to the Roman *uncia* (c. 27 g), one of which has an incised cross that can be related to that Roman unit. This motif is repeated in the set of *pondera*, in which other incised and printed motifs also appear.

Unfortunately, as mentioned above, the context in which these elements were recovered within the military enclosure cannot be reconstructed. However, some comments can be made on their probable provenance and how they may be indicative of contexts of textile production or maintenance. The testimonies of Schulten and Paulsen, as well as the data provided by Günter Ulbert who re-examined the original excavations in the 1980s, provide some relevant information on possible concentrations of elements that may be related to these activities.

Concentrations of loom weights in buildings VI and XI stand out,⁵² and they may indicate that textiles were produced at these locations within the camp. Furthermore, it is known that part of the buildings of the forum were occupied by metallurgical workshops (e.g. Building X), so it is not surprising to find other craft activities in this area, namely in Building VI, north of the *Via Quintana*. In the case of building XI, it is difficult to establish a specific function, but it may also have been related to textile activities. Unfortunately, the provenance of the remaining textile tools is unclear, as they were smaller in size and did not receive specific attention in excavation reports.

On the other hand, the aforementioned restudy of the site yielded some innovative insights regarding the analysis of some internal structures of the military camp.⁵³ The forum (Buildings VIII, XI and X, Figure 10) is located south of the *Via Quintana* and in a central position in relation to the longitudinal axis of the camp. Apart from the building that has been defined as a 'temple',⁵⁴ no detailed descriptions are available for the buildings that surround this open area of 133 m on one of its sides. However, as stated above, the identification of some artefacts that have been recovered in these areas makes it possible to infer that these spaces around the forum corresponded to *tabernae* and *fabricae* dedicated, at least in part, to metallurgical and textile tasks.

Cáceres Viejo de Santa Marina (Casas de Millán, ES)

Cáceres Viejo de Santa Marina, another settlement with a probable military function, is located near the Roman camp of Cáceres el Viejo (Figure 12) and is possibly contemporaneous with its occupation. The existence of the site was first reported by Publio Hurtado.⁵⁵ Fernando García Morales further discussed this site and its interpretation, linking it with the Roman camp of Cáceres el Viejo and assuming that it was an advanced post of that military establishment.⁵⁶

⁴⁷ Pereira and Morillo Cerdán 2025.

⁴⁸ Pereira and Morillo Cerdán 2025.

⁴⁹ Hernández Hernández *et al.* 1989; Hernández Hernández and Martín Bravo 2021; Mayoral *et al.* 2021; Mayoral 2021.

⁵⁰ Fabião 1998; Pereira 2018.

⁵¹ Pereira 2025.

⁵² Ulbert 1984: 46.

⁵³ Morillo Cerdán 2025.

⁵⁴ Schulten 1928: 7-8, fig. 4.

⁵⁵ Hurtado Pérez 1927.

⁵⁶ García Morales 1979.

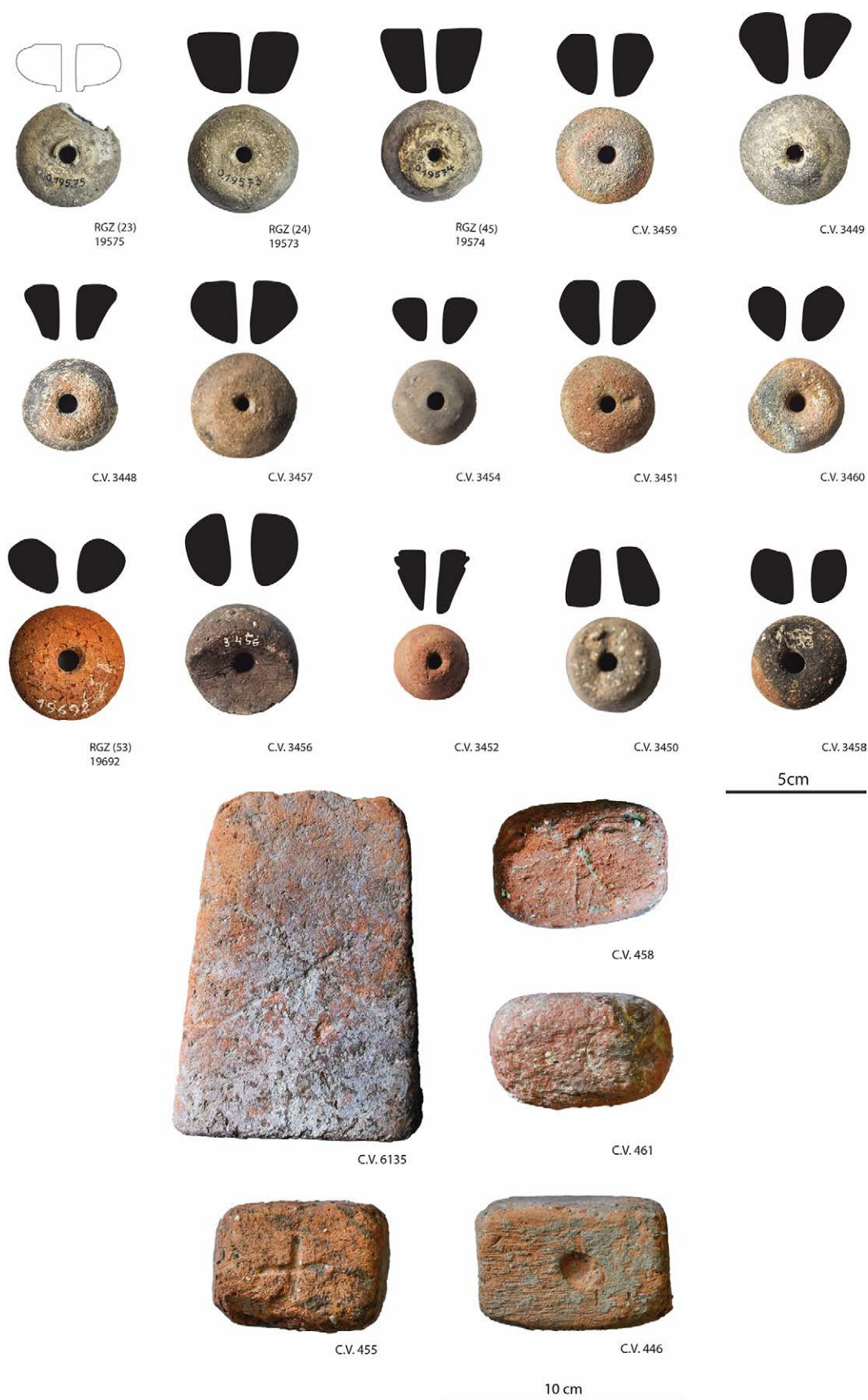


Figure 11: Some spindle whorls and decorated loom weights from Cáceres el Viejo, Spain.

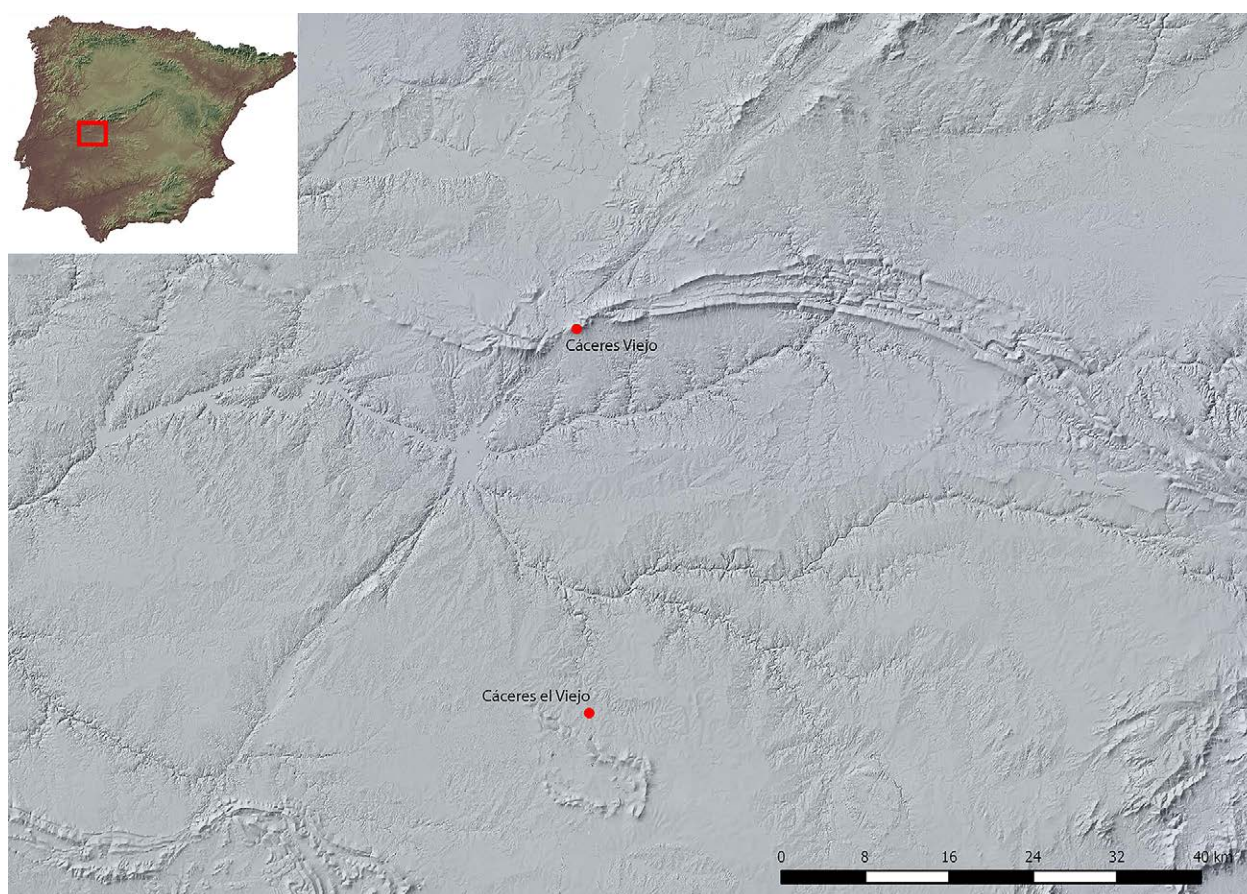


Figure 12: Location of Cáceres Viejo (Casas de Millán) and Cáceres el Viejo (Cáceres) (drawing: after Pereira 2017: fig. 11).

Knowledge about Cáceres Viejo de Santa Marina has not increased significantly since the work of Publio Hurtado, as research has been limited to reproducing what was said in the 1920s. However, recent excavations at the settlement have shown that its characteristics are very different from those of Cáceres el Viejo as far as location, architecture (Figure 13) and material culture are concerned.⁵⁷ This is a high-altitude settlement located on the slopes of a high-rising hill and its material culture strongly differs from that of Cáceres el Viejo. While the latter shows an evident affinity with the Italic world and with the senatorial army, Cáceres Viejo de Santa Marina shows ties with the Spanish Meseta.⁵⁸

The architecture is also quite different, as it is simpler, with well-defined spaces implanted on platforms created for this purpose.⁵⁹ Buildings with private spaces have been recorded, with fireplaces and possible benches or racks, in one of which a storage area was documented.

These differences also extend to the record for textile activities. The aforementioned room with the storage area yielded the only textile-related finds from the site, specifically four spindle-whorls.⁶⁰ Contrary to what was recorded in Cáceres el Viejo, here no specialization and no possible workshops can be observed. In this site, textile activities were a sporadic craft taking place in common spaces together with other daily activities, as these spindle whorls were found together with a set of seven *glandes plumbeae*, three stone bullets, a circular hand millstone (*catillus*), two knives and several ceramic vessels.⁶¹

It can therefore be said that, while both settlements are related to a military presence, they are in fact in juxtaposed contexts. This apposition, however, is not limited to the implantation strategy, the architecture, or the relationship with the territory and the local communities. It is also evident in daily contexts and the activities practiced in each site: in one, a clear specialisation in the production and maintenance of textiles can be observed, while in the other, textile activities were more sporadic, perhaps answering

⁵⁷ Pereira 2017; Pereira and Dias 2020.

⁵⁸ Pereira and Dias 2020: 122.

⁵⁹ Pereira 2021.

⁶⁰ Pereira and Dias 2020: 111, fig. 8.

⁶¹ Pereira and Dias 2020.



Figure 13: Plan of the structures identified in Cáceres Viejo (drawing and photograph: after Pereira and Dias 2020: fig. 3) with the location of the findspot of the spindle whorls.

specific needs as they emerged. This distinction is also evident in the quality and nature of the raw materials used to produce spindle whorls.

Castelo da Lousa (Mourão, PT)

The last case study considered in this contribution is that of the military establishment of Castelo da Lousa.⁶² Associated with a later period than the previous sites, in the mid-to-late 1st century BC, this architectural complex seems to have been intended for military and territorial control. It has also yielded an assemblage of 82 spindle whorls, of which 35 were decorated (Figure 14), as well as 110 *pondera* of different weights and morphologies (Figure 15).⁶³

The case of Castelo da Lousa shows that even in a comparatively late defensive structure with particular characteristics the domestic economies, probably carried out by local inhabitants and not by Italic military

contingents, continued to be indispensable to the daily activities in military or militarised contexts. In a context connected not so much with military advances but with the consolidation of territorial control and administration, textile production remained a key aspect of the productive activities associated with the daily life in military establishments.

Furthermore, and as an epilogue to the panorama presented in the preceding pages, it is worth pointing out that this association between textile activities and military or militarised contexts can still be detected towards the later Republican period and in Augustan times. This can clearly be observed not only in the case of Monte dos Castelinhos discussed above,⁶⁴ but also in the military camp of Alto dos Cacos, in Vila Franca de Xira, in which spindle whorls and loom weights were also retrieved,⁶⁵ and in the fort of Caladinho, in Alandroal, which has yielded a substantial number of loom weights.⁶⁶

⁶² Alarcão *et al.* 2010.

⁶³ Pinto and Schmitt 2010: 221.

⁶⁴ Pimenta 2024: 407.

⁶⁵ Pimenta *et al.* 2013: 272, fig. 16.

⁶⁶ Mataloto 2002: 180; Mataloto *et al.* 2014: fig. 10.

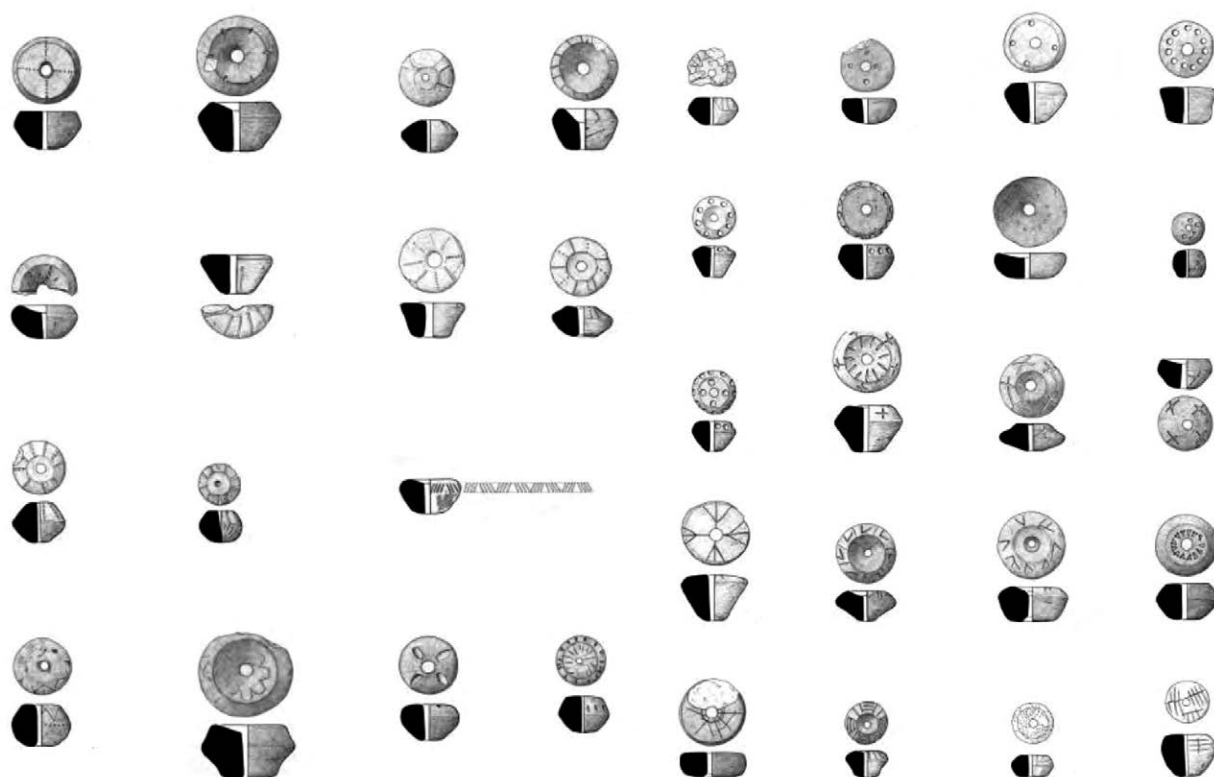


Figure 14: Examples of spindle whorls retrieved in Castelo da Lousa (drawing: after Pinto and Schmitt 2010).

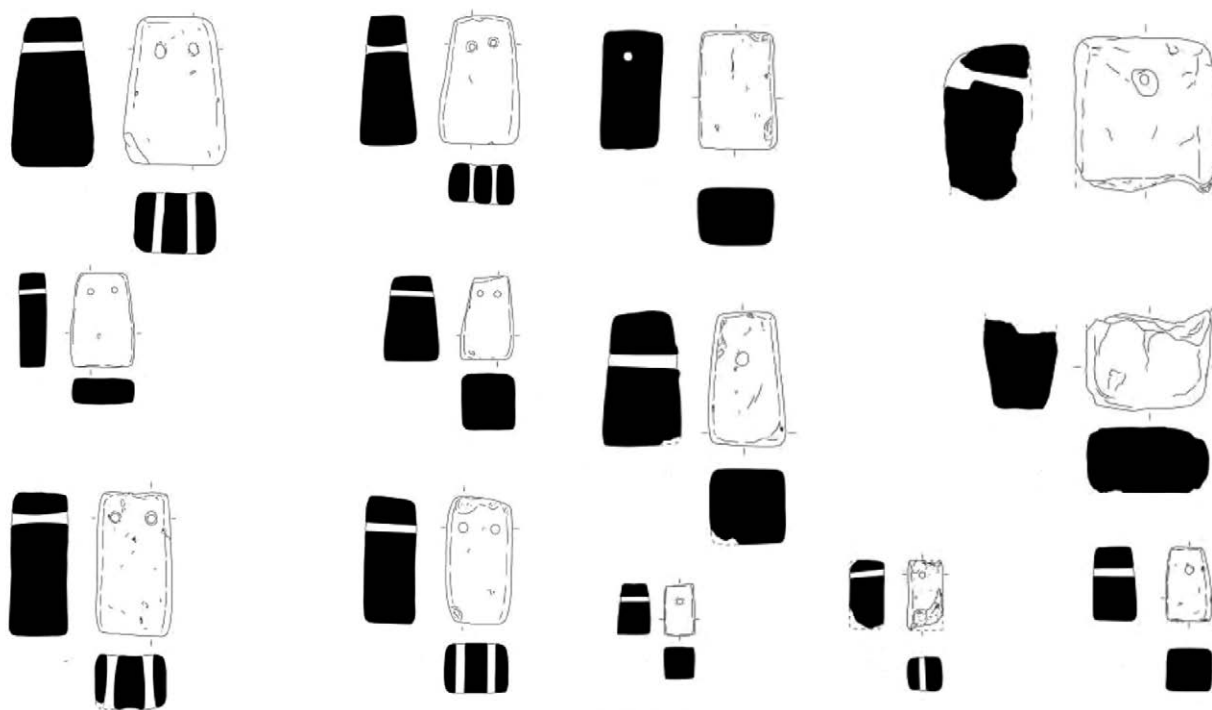


Figure 15: Examples of loom weights retrieved in Castelo da Lousa (drawing: after Pinto and Schmitt 2010).

Textiles on the march: towards an interpretation of textile supply during the Roman conquest of Western Iberia

In light of the evidence presented above, it can be said that textile activities are well-documented in the Late Republican military or militarised contexts of Western Iberia. Textile-related implements, chief among which loom weights and spindle whorls, can be found in 'classical' military establishments, such as Cáceres el Viejo,⁶⁷ in settlements with a strong military component founded *ex novo* in the framework of the Roman conquest, such as Monte dos Castelinhos⁶⁸ and perhaps Pedrão,⁶⁹ in likely indigenous sites which housed military contingents, such as Chibanes⁷⁰ and Cáceres Viejo,⁷¹ as well as in later fortifications related to the pacification and administration of the early provincial territory, such as Castelo da Lousa.⁷²

This panorama clearly indicates that, despite the lack of written and inscriptional evidence comparable to that available for the Imperial Age,⁷³ archaeological data can offer us insights into the issue of textile supply to the Roman Republican armies. This is crucially important, as there are reasons to believe that such a supply may have been quite different in nature during these earlier times. In fact, the contexts presented here predate Augustan military reforms and the rise of a permanent standing army, the supply of which was ensured by the state and its agents in a more direct way, benefitting from the complementary resources of different provinces and the relative ease of long-distance trade.⁷⁴

While the existence of long-distance, state-sponsored supplies cannot and should not of course be ruled out for the period considered here, the southwestern Iberian examples discussed in this contribution show different facets of textile supply. On the one hand, examples such as Cáceres el Viejo show a local production within 'classical' military camps which, while probably not enough to supply the entire military detachment camped there, may have been enough to ensure the maintenance of existing textile elements and to respond to emerging needs.⁷⁵

On the other hand, however, there are several indications that the Roman military presence induced an increased textile production among apparently local

communities, in the context of military or militarised sites and areas. This seems to be the case in Monte dos Castelinhos⁷⁶ and Chibanes,⁷⁷ but likely also in Cabeça de Vaiamonte,⁷⁸ although in the latter site, religious considerations may also have been at work.⁷⁹ The available data is not clear on whether this resulted from a simple demand and supply effect, or rather from the imposition of tributes and levies, or even from the establishment of more direct modes of dependency, as potentially suggested by the 'in-house' textile production in the militarised contexts of Chibanes.⁸⁰

This being said, and from a technological point of view, it is worth noting that the characteristics of most textile tools documented in the sites discussed here, and particularly of the loom weights and spindle whorls, do not differ radically from what was known regionally during the Late Iron Age.⁸¹ This could further point to the active role of members of local/regional groups in supplying the army, but it raises the question of whether those members were actually embedded in military contexts (as could be the case in Cáceres el Viejo or Chibanes) or merely juxtaposed to them.

While this must remain an open question, the technological features of the material discussed here also offer some insights into the impact (or lack thereof) of the Roman army on the regional textile crafts. In fact, and beyond issues relating to the scale and possibly the organization of production (see above), the available evidence does not seem to indicate any radical technological shifts in regional textile activities during the Late Republican period. It is therefore likely that, as in many other regards, the true reorganization and transformation of textile production in the area under study was a product of Augustan reforms and reorganization.⁸²

However, in order to clarify the potential context of textile production in the military and militarised sites discussed here and, conversely, their impact on the regional textile economies, further research is still required. In particular, it would be useful in the future to develop comparative approaches setting the emerging patterns of textile production against those of other craft activities also present in these and other military/militarised contexts.

Such an approach, however, goes beyond the scope of this contribution. Still, it is hoped that this preliminary

⁶⁷ Pereira 2025.

⁶⁸ Pimenta 2013; 2024.

⁶⁹ Soares and Silva 1973.

⁷⁰ Pereira *et al.* 2021.

⁷¹ Pereira and Dias 2020.

⁷² Pinto and Schmitt 2010.

⁷³ E.g. Sheridan 1998; Droß-Krüpe 2011 and 2012; Liu 2012, with bibliography.

⁷⁴ For important overviews, see Wild 1976; Sheridan 1998; Droß-Krüpe 2011; Liu 2012.

⁷⁵ Pereira 2025.

⁷⁶ Pimenta 2013; 2024.

⁷⁷ Pereira *et al.* 2021.

⁷⁸ Pereira 2013; 2018.

⁷⁹ Gomes *et al.* in press.

⁸⁰ Pereira *et al.* 2021.

⁸¹ Berrocal-Rangel *et al.* 1994; Berrocal-Rangel 2003; Gomes 2021.

⁸² For an overview of the evidence for the Early Imperial period, see Bustamante Álvarez 2018; Alfaro Giner and Martínez García 2019.

survey has at least shed some light on an often-overlooked aspect of the supply of Roman Republican armies – one that was nonetheless critical to ensure the success of military campaigns and assignments. It is believed that, through further and more in-depth analyses, the archaeological data surveyed here, and that of other comparable sites, holds the potential to offer much clearer and well-developed insights not only into issues of military supply, but also on the role of the army in changing the landscape of textile production in the territories which came under Roman influence and control during the Late Republican period.

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