A collection of Roman Late Republican seal-rings discovered in the Eastern Pyrenees and their historical significance

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Abstract: Roman presence in mountainous areas has traditionally been considered to be marginal. However, recent archaeological studies in several European regions have reshaped our way of understanding the occupation and exploitation of these areas. In the case of the Eastern Pyrenees, this has become apparent thanks to archaeological studies conducted in the Cerdanya valley. The discovery and excavation of several indigenous settlements have allowed us to perceive an earlier and more intense Roman presence there, especially military activity, and the exploitation of the resources of the area. In this paper we will focus on the case of Tossal de Baltarga (Lleida), a site at which the discovery of a group of Roman seal-rings offers a window into this historical situation.
Key words: Eastern Pyrenees, Cerdanya, Tossal de Baltarga, *oppidum*, Roman army, seal-rings.

We often think of the Roman presence in Western Europe as being located on plains, along main rivers and in coastal areas; a society developing its way of life in cities, *villae* and roadside settlements. However, Romans were also interested in other kinds of landscapes, such as mountain regions and marshland areas, whose resources were complementary to the main agricultural or livestock production. The processes of occupation of some of these complementary areas, such as the Alps or Pyrenean highlands, reflect the capabilities and interests of the Roman provincial administration and the Roman army in exploiting these resources from the 2nd to 1st century BC.

Surprisingly, archaeological investigations carried out in one of these areas, the Eastern Pyrenees (in particular the Cerdanya region), have identified an earlier and more profound Roman presence in these highland areas (from 1.200m to 2.100m above sea level), which is documented by specific artefacts, such as seal-rings. Roman seal-rings are often found in urban contexts and are rare in rural contexts, even more so in supposedly marginal mountainous areas (Olesti forthcoming, Olesti 2019). The presence of several Roman seal-rings in the Eastern Pyrenees dating to the 2nd to 1st century BC, one of them outstanding in quality, is the subject of this paper. The study of the objects, their function,

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[2] We would like to dedicate this work to the memory of our colleague Gertrud Platz-Horster, who passed away during the elaboration of this study.

and especially their historical interest will allow us to reanalyze the Roman presence in the Pyrenees and their complex relationship with local communities.

1. The Roman military presence in NE Iberian Peninsula (2nd-1st c. BC.)

In the last 15 years, several archaeological excavations have convincingly identified the presence of the Roman army in northeast Hispania (modern-day Catalonia) during the 2nd-1st century BC.[3] Despite the well-documented presence in key cities, like *Emporion* or *Tarraco*, new data from several military *castra* or *castella* (frequently positioned close to the coast) and from a number of strategical outposts, reveal the interest of the Roman provincial army in controlling the territory and its indigenous communities. In fact, most of these sites are not fortresses or *castra*, but logistical sites connected to the main roads.

Meanwhile, the Roman army was also present in some indigenous settlements, in a system of *praesidia* (garrisons), which are well-attested in the literary sources. In general terms, we may suggest that a significant part of the Roman army in northeast Hispania was settled in a number of key indigenous settlements (some of them *oppida*, others just roadside sites), such as garrisons, controlling the most important roads, territories and resources. These patterns of control were not only deployed in the coastal zones, as was supposed, but also inland, including in the Pyrenees.

Such is the case of the Cerdanya region (Eastern Pyrenees), where our team is carrying out the study of the Roman conquest from an archaeological and territorial perspective (Olesti *et al.* 2017). It is a mountainous region that has attracted human interest since prehistoric times due to the availability of natural resources (wood, pastures, iron, gold, etc.) and its role as a key communication point between the Iberian Peninsula and the Gallic territory (Modern-day France). This is seen in the classical sources which refer to different conflicts relating to the control of the Pyrenean mountain passes which also affected the Cerdanya region; the passage of Hannibal and his army is one instance that took place through this area.[4] After the defeat of the Punic armies, Rome decided to maintain control of this zone and started a process of adaptation of the territory to its (mainly military) interests, the main evidence of which is the creation of *castra* or *castella*. During the 2nd century BC, the key role of the Pyrenean passes in the conquest of Southern Gaul is well known, with the possibility that the territory of the *Cerretanii*,

[3] For an overview of this phenomenon: Olesti 2010; Olesti, Mercadal 2017; Noguera *et al.* 2014.
[4] For the debate around this subject, with a comprehensive bibliography: Morera 2017, 1176-1189.

the local tribe who occupied the area[5], acted as a logistical base for military operations. Finally, there are two different periods in which the Pyrenean passes were exposed to military activity during the 1st century BC: the first during the Sertorian War, and the second, the Civil War (Morera *et al*. 2016). In both cases, the pass on the *Narbo-Ilerda* axis was key, and the fortifications and combats throughout this region are mentioned by ancient literary sources (Plut., *Sert.* 7; Caes., *BCiv.* 1.37; Caes., *BGall.* 3.20.1; Oros., *Adv. Pag.* 5.23.4). The process of integration of the Cerdanya region into the Roman Empire was completed in 39 BC with the commander Domitius Calvinus' suppression of a major uprising by the *Cerretanii* (Dio Cass. 48.7; Vell. Pat. 2.79.3). Subsequently, most of the indigenous settlements were abandoned, and Roman territorial structures were implemented under Augustus. In the case of Cerdanya, this is clearly seen in the creation of *Iulia Libica municipium*, the central settlement of the region during the Early Empire.

From the middle of the 2nd century BC the impact of Roman presence is evident at several sites in Cerdanya, such as El Castellot (an Iberian hill-fort), Tossal de Baltarga, Llívia (the main centre of the *Cerretanii,* later developed as *Iulia Libica*) or Pi del Castellar (an indigenous *castellum*).[6] Especially interesting is the case of El Castellot de Bolvir, an Iberian *oppidum* belonging to the *Cerretanii*. Founded during the 4th century BC, its modest size (0.6 ha) suggests a secondary position in the territorial patterns of the *Cerretanii*. From the mid-2nd century BC, the *oppidum* underwent important reformation with the construction of a new gate (protected by two towers) and several buildings using Roman systems of measurement (*decempeda*) and constructive layout. The storage of grain in silos was one of the functions of the new site, but metalworking activity has also been identified. An interesting element is the erection of a complex metallurgy workshop, where the use of iron, copper and lead has been identified, as well as cinnabar, silver and gold, possibly linked to the presence of alluvial gold in the region (Morera *et al*. 2016, 2017). This technology, along with the presence of some objects, like a *latrunculum*, a *tintinabulum,* a fire-lighter or a *simpulum*, in our opinion, indicate the presence of a Roman garrison at the *oppidum*. Nevertheless, 85% of the pottery is handmade,

[5] About the *Cerretani*, Olesti-Mercadal 2017, Morera 2017. They were mentioned in the ancient literary sources as part of the Iberian culture (we know their Iberian anthroponyms and writing), and had similar settlement patterns to other Iberian tribes, adapted to the high mountains context.

[6] Recently, two more seal-rings –one iron, and the other bronze- have been recovered in the archaeological interventions at Pi del Castellar (Fontanals de Cerdanya). It is a small *oppidum* located on the eastern slope of the valley, occupied during the Iberian and Roman republican periods (4th to 1st century BC). The study of these rings is still in its preliminary phase, but they can be included as an example of the historical processes analysed in this study.

suggesting a large indigenous population at this reconstructed hillfort. We have also discovered some writing implements at the site: an iron seal-ring (badly preserved, with no gem or gilded surface) and an iron double wax-spatula.

However, it is the site of Tossal de Baltarga that has been of greater interest in recent years, bringing to light a significant collection of *militaria* which can only be explained by the presence of the Roman army. In fact, it should be noted that El Castellot is located just 10 km from Tossal de Baltarga, where we have documented another three seal-rings. The concentration of Roman seal-rings in this very specific zone is remarkable. The fact that this area is linked to one of the major roads crossing the Pyrenees is significant, and this matter shall be dealt with later.

It is not always easy to identify the presence of the Roman army at many of these sites, given that the material culture and some of the structures are, logically, remarkably similar to those found at Iberian sites. However, in some cases the outposts have been very well identified: the presence of Roman *militaria*, the use of Roman measurements and models in the buildings, and the introduction of new techniques (such as *tegula*, *opus signinum*, or advanced metallurgy) have been used to justify the presence of the Roman army (and local *auxilia*) at these sites, despite the absence in some cases of walls or defensive structures (Noguera et al. 2014, Morera *et al.* 2016, Morera *et al.* 2017, Ñaco 2017, Padrós, Ruiz de Arbulo 2015). However, little attention has been given to a number of important objects related to writing, sealing and the inventory of resources that frequently appear at these sites which were occupied by the Roman army, the local Iberian communities, or both. One such object, the seal-ring (*signacula* or *anulus signatorius*), is particularly well attested at Tossal de Baltarga, as was noted above. Through the analysis of the three rings found at Baltarga and their contexts, we aim to provide an insight into the features of Roman control of the territory of the *Cerretanii*, focusing particularly on the role of the military in this process.

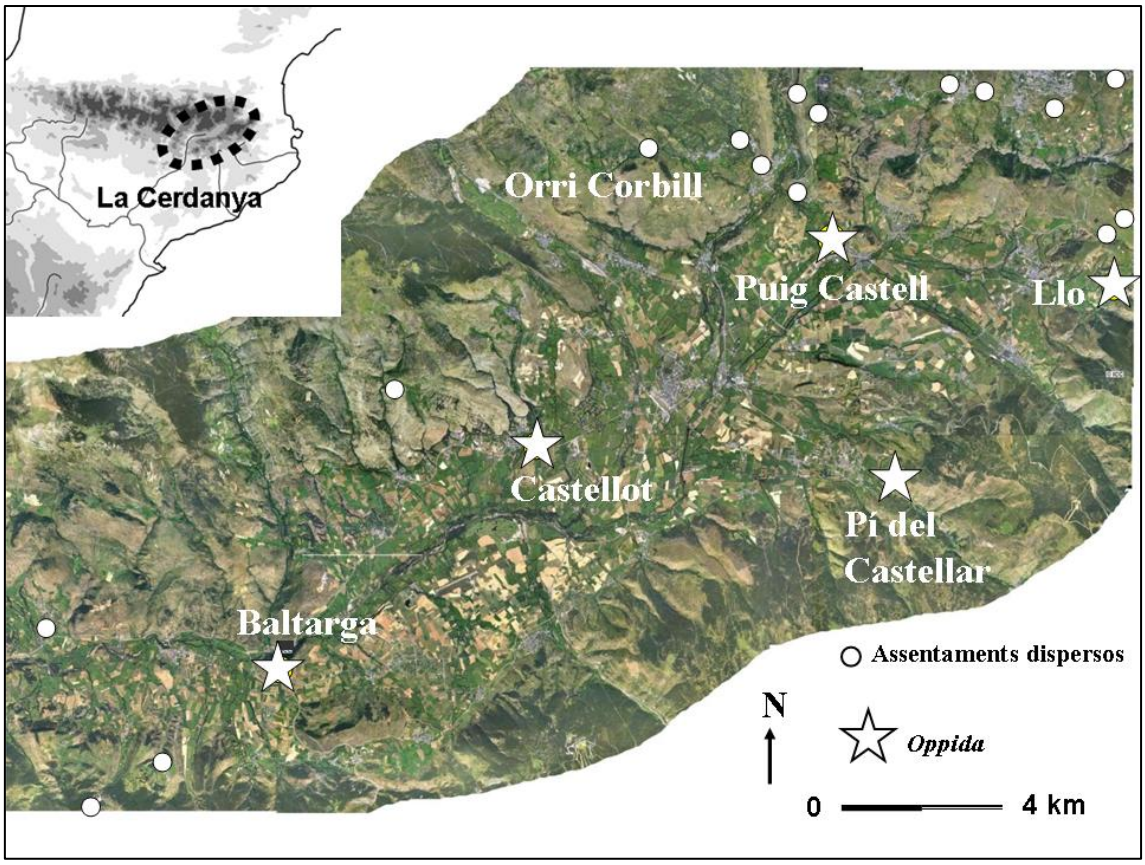

Fig. 1: The Cerdanya region with the main ancient archaeological sites documented (source: authors).

2. The site of Tossal de Baltarga

Work at the site of Tossal de Baltarga began in 2011.[7] Located in the municipality of Bellver de Cerdanya, it is situated on the top of a hill that strategically blocks off the valley, allowing the control of both the access route to Cerdanya from its southern slope and, from its northern slope, the River Segre, one of the main communication axes of this area in ancient times.[8] After several seasons of excavations, we can determine the existence of a small settlement with the clear function of territorial control, consisting of three chronological phases. The first, the Late Bronze to the First Iron Age, is little known and only identifiable from a small number of materials found, with characteristics of the so-called *décor cerdan*. The second dates to the Iberian period (4th-3rd century BC), in

[7] These data are available in the archaeological reports and in several publications (Oller *et al.* 2015; Olesti *et al.* 2016; Morera *et al*. 2016; Morera 2017; Morera *et al*. 2017; Oller *et al*. 2018a; Oller *et al*. 2018b; Mercadal *et al.* 2018). Eight excavation seasons have been carried out so far, meaning that our knowledge of the site is still incomplete. It is also necessary to highlight the precarious state of preservation of the structures and the scarce stratigraphy preserved due to the erosion of the hill, which sometimes makes it difficult to interpret the buildings.

[8] In the year 942 the so-called 'Battle of Baltarga' took place, between forces of the Carolingian counties and a Magyar army that had plundered the area of Lleida, demonstrating the strategic nature of the settlement.

which there is already evidence of territorial control with the erection of several buildings oriented towards the valley. Finally, the third, republican Roman phase, dates to the 2nd-1st century BC. In this Roman phase some fortification structures were built, being especially remarkable a watchtower. This allows us to both determine its strategic territorial character and suggest its function as a *turris*.[9]

2.1 The Iberian phase

There is not enough data to be able to offer an overview of the first phase associated with the Late Bronze and First Iron Age periods and, as is the case with other nearby settlements such as El Castellot de Bolvir, the evidence is scarce and difficult to verify. Thus, although the presence of materials consistent with this period are documented, they are not accompanied by any relevant evidence concerning the structure of the site. However, the Iberian phase offers more interesting clues for understanding the occupation patterns of this site. From this period we have a set of structures (scattered and partly unconnected given the poor state of conservation of the remains) that define several grouped buildings, without showing any real urbanism and without a perimeter wall.[10] The walls are made from local stone bases beneath rammed earth architecture. From these structures we can identify, for the moment, four houses with relative precision: buildings A, D, F and G.

[9]For the definition of '*turris*' and some examples of this type of settlement in the northeast of the Iberian Peninsula, see: Noguera *et al.* 2014, 33; Moret 2010, 11 ff.

[10]At present we have not been able to determine the limits of the settlement, but all the data indicate that it would not be large, nor delimited by any enclosure or perimeter wall. After eight seasons of excavation, a constructed area of about 0.2 ha has been identified.

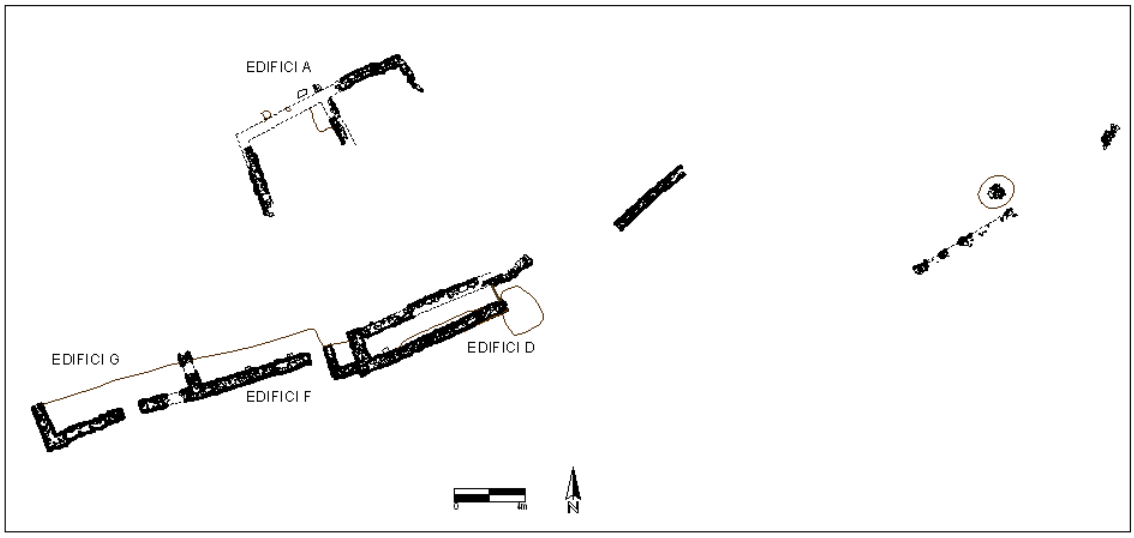

Fig. 2: Map of the Iberian phase of Tossal de Baltarga.

Especially interesting are buildings D, F and G, as they were burned down and violently destroyed around the year 200 BC.[11] The destruction allowed *in situ* preservation of a large quantity of materials, including ceramic containers, a concentration of carbonized wheat in Building D (probably stored in sacks), several dead animals (one dog in Building D, four goats and a horse in Building G), elements linked with productive activities such as weaving (more than 20 *pondera* in Building G), different metallic materials (for instance, a *dolabra* and a horse bite in Building G), coinage and the largest ceramic assemblage ever recovered in the region. In the case of Building D and G it was clear that they were two-storey rectangular buildings with a ground floor used as storage and stabling spaces and an upper floor, made with earth architecture, with a probable residential function. The materials and coins discovered allow us to place the destruction of both buildings during the same event that affected Building D.

[11]In the case of Building D this date is determined by the recovery of a cup of the Rosas workshop (shape 26) and by radiocarbon dating showing a temporary framework between 230-200 BC (Beta-458585: UE 3157). For the other edifices, the recovery of more fragments of Rosas workshop pieces in Building G and two coins in Building F (an Ampuritan drachma and a Gallic imitation of an Ampuritan drachma) allow to place the destruction of these structures in the same context: last quarter of the 3rd century BC.

Fig. 3: Image of the remains of Building D during its excavation.

Fig. 4: Image of the Building F. In the upper right corner, we can see the remains of the wall in which one of the rings was found.

We must remark the important amount of coinage recovered. So, apart from the coins found in Building F, next to Building D a silver Gallic coin from the middle of the 3rd century BC, consisting of an imitation of an Ampuritan drachma (ACIP, 243), was found.[12] In addition, during the metal detector survey that took place in 2017, throughout the Baltarga hill area a total of three Ampuritan drachmas, two Gallic imitations of Ampuritan drachmas and one drachma fraction from *Rhode* appeared, dating to a period between the 4th and 2nd centuries BC.[13] Moreover, it is notable that at the site of Tossal of Baltarga at least four more pieces have been recovered by local amateurs and within a radius of no more than three km from the site, another nine coins have appeared, all of them imitations of Ampuritan drachmas. Significantly, then, almost all the coins in the region which fall within these dates are concentrated around the site (Campo, Mercadal, 2009).

Therefore, we consider that in the Iberian period Tossal de Baltarga was a settlement of small dimensions, with a clear function of territorial control. In this settlement, the living spaces would probably alternate with others related to the main function as a controlling point, guarding the access routes to the Cerdanya plain. Its proximity to El Castellot de Bolvir, as well as the fact that each settlement is visible from the other, allow us to consider it a point of territorial control dependent on this *oppidum*.

2.2 The Republican phase

After the complete destruction dated at the end of the Iberian phase,[14] the settlement was reconstructed during the Roman republican period, meaning that at some point during the 2nd century BC, probably 2nd half, most of the structures were rebuilt. This is the main period of interest for this study since the rings in question are identified with this last phase of Roman presence.

Despite the reconstruction, the dimensions and features of the settlement remained the same: a small nucleus consisting of several scattered buildings, without regular urban planning and without a walled enclosure. In this phase, however, a square-based watchtower became the central element of the site, around which the rest of buildings

[12]Documented in Villaronga 2000, group 4-2-4 of imitations (plate LIII).
[13]This group of coins is currently under study and, therefore, the information provided is preliminary.
[14] This chronology, end of 3rd c. BC (documented also by C14, 230 ± 30), could connect the destruction of the site to the beginning of the 2nd Punic war, and the Punic and Roman intervention in the Pyrenees.

were structured. This confirms the continuation into the Republican period of the basic function of Tossal de Baltarga as a strategic point for territorial control. As for the different structures identified, for this phase we have identified about seven buildings, along with other disparate structures. These buildings can be divided into three groups: those presumably linked to domestic use (Buildings A and E), those of indeterminate functions (Buildings C, D, F and G) and the tower structure (Building B). In some of them, a phase of reconstruction could be identified, suggesting the existence of two subphases of construction in the Republican period.

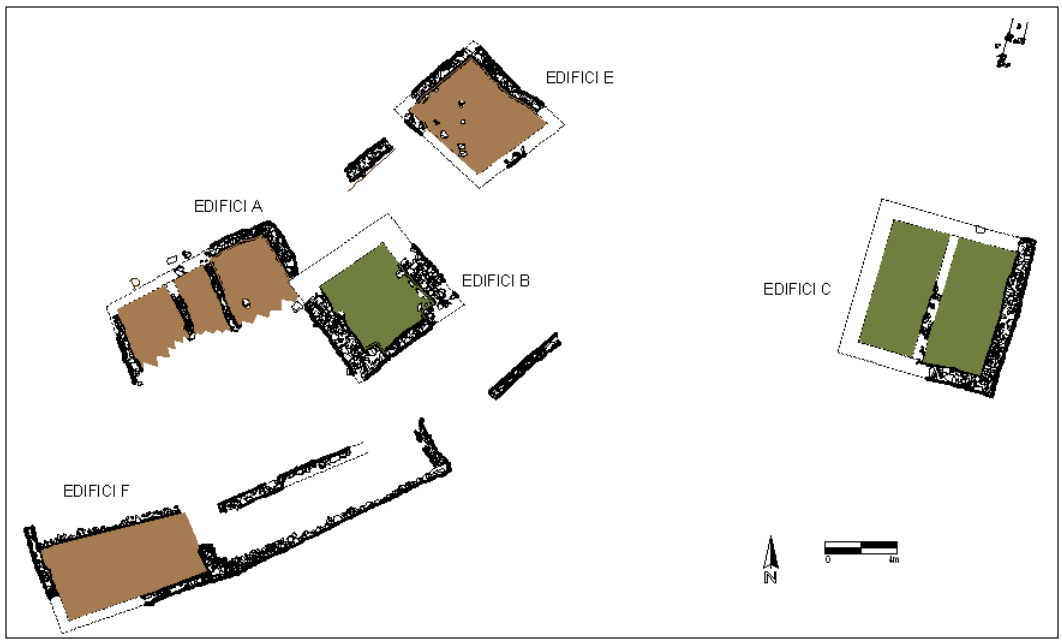

Fig. 5: Map of the Republican phase of Tossal de Baltarga.

In the case of the structures linked to domestic use, Building A, in the northwestern part of the site, already existed in the Iberian phase with a two rooms structure. From the 2nd century onwards, there was significant reconstruction and it became a tripartite building. Production and manufacturing activities were conducted here, as suggested by the presence of several combustion points and various *pondera*. The other building linked to the domestic use is Building E, an isolated house with a square shape in the central part of the site. It has a surface area of aproximatedly 25 m², with evidence of the existence of an upper floor thanks to the discovery of fallen constructive remains.

The second group is made up of buildings of a considerable size whose function is not known. Building C, in the south-eastern corner of the site, consists of two large walls

which indicate the existence of a structure that, hypothetically (if we project the existing remains), could be formed by two rectangular areas of about 7.2 m in length. Although the associated stratigraphy is virtually non-existent, the excavation of the foundation pits of the walls allowed the recovery of a *caliga* hobnail, which is very important in establishing a link with the military presence at the site.[15] Unfortunately, we do not have more data to propose a function for this structure, although it is clear that its morphology and the size of its walls point to a certain importance within the settlement.

Building D, was burned at the end of the Iberian period and was reconstructed during the Republican period (2nd half 2nd c. BC), creating a new structure of uncertain function. Thus, it seems that when the hill was reoccupied after the destruction, this building was rebuilt with a set of new walls that expanded its original area with a strong but crude closure wall (without an internal face). The interior of the building is covered with a significant layer of collapsed materials, which were levelled to create a flat surface. This surface probably served as the basis of an upper structure or as a space for circulation of which has not conserved any further evidence.

Building F, located to the west of Building D, was also reconstructed at this time. This is especially evident in the case of Building F, where a southern wall that connects with the closure wall of Building D was created, together with a northern wall embedded in the cut in the geological rock level made during the construction of the Iberian phase of the house. To the west we find another wall, creating a wide rectangular space which would have been accessed on the east side. It is in this space where the ring BTB'17-3176-1 was found in the abandonment levels that covered the southern wall of Building F. The fact that it appeared in these latest levels means that it can be associated with the final moments in the life of the building, between 50-30 BC. Meanwhile, this find could be good evidence for linking this space with the residence of a military figure of a certain rank, although evidently the scarcity of available data does not allow us to go beyond a hypothesis.

In the upper area between Buildings D and F, another ring was found (BTB'17-3001-21). However, in this case, it was found by prospection with a metal detector. Therefore, it is

[15] During the 2018 season, another *caliga* hobnail was found in the superficial levels excavated to the west of the Building G. Moreover, during the metal detector survey of the hill, five more *caliga* hobnails were identified.

difficult to obtain a clear chronological context for the ring, meaning its typological analysis is fundamental for its dating.

Finally, we turn to Building B, probably the structure that gives sense and cohesion to the entire settlement during this phase. Located in the central part of the site, it consists of a square structure with an internal width of 4.45 m, which has been identified as a tower. The access was at the southern face, through a door with a threshold 2.95m wide (the equivalent of a Roman *pertica*). The rear closure of the tower is not preserved, being that the walls overlapped with the rock of the hill. Therefore, the hypothesis that we propose is that this level of rock that closes the building on its north side would have been used as a base to support the walls at this point. This is a common feature at the site throughout its evolution and there are several examples of this method of construction that takes advantage of the rocky outcrops of the hill.

The stratigraphy associated with this tower is unfortunately one of the examples of poor conservation of the archaeological levels, with a limited stratigraphic depth from which almost no material was recovered.[16] Therefore, in general, the documented evidence is very scarce, but it should be noted that just below the door, at a superficial level, another of the rings presented in this study (BTB'13-3058-1) was identified. It is an iron ring with *signaculum*, which contained a gold foil made with an amalgam of gold and silver (Montero *et al*., 2017). The fact of being found in the lower levels associated with the tower connects the ring to the last layers of use of the building, which probably eroded and were displaced over time.

[16]Except for the foundation trench of the walls, which at some points reached 40 cm deep, showing the solidity of the structure.

Fig. 6: Image of the tower or Building B. View from the north. The ring appeared just below the southern wall of the tower, in the superficial levels below its door.

Artefacts such as the rings, *caliga* hobnails or abundant coins recovered, along with the presence of some pottery types such as Greco-Italic amphora, would undoubtedly indicate a military context at Tossal de Baltarga during this Republican phase (Carreras *et al*. 2017). Especially important are a number of coins dating to the Republican period. Several finds were made by local inhabitants, as well as during the excavation seasons. Thus, the metal detector survey allowed the recovery of several Iberian coins from mints such as *Untikesken, Iltirkesken, Seteisken, Ilturo, Kese* and *Arse*. To these coins must be added the numerous previous findings on the hill (with mints such as *Oskumkem, Lauro, Baitolo, Iesso, Kelse* and *Bolskan*) (Campo, Mercadal 2009). In terms of Roman coinage, the finds of local amateurs have allowed us to identify a Roman denarius from 120 BC with the legend *M Tulli* (RRC 280/1), a Roman as from 46-45 BC with the legend *Cn Mag imp* (RRC 471/1) and another denarius from 43 BC of *Petillius Capitolinus* (RRC 487/2). To these finds we must add the discovery during the metal detector survey of a silver denarius of *Caesar* dating to 49-48 BC (RRC 433/1).[17] In the surrounding area, local amateurs also found an Helvetian *quinarius*, *NINNO/MAUC* (BN 9349), 80-50 BC, an exceptional indicator of foreign troops in the Roman army.[18] All this refers to a time

[17] We have evidence of another of these coins also found on the hill by local researchers.
[18] For this group of coins, see Campo and Mercadal 2009.

of abandonment of the hill during the civil war period of the second half of the 1st century BC and reinforces the idea of a link between this settlement and the military.

Fig. 7: Reverse of the silver denarius of *Caesar* dated in 49-48 BC found in Tossal de Baltarga (image: Ramon Maroto).

Regarding the rest of the materials, it should be noted that the ceramic materials of this phase still maintain a large presence of handmade vessels (75% of the total), but with a higher proportion of wheel-made pottery (25% of the total) compared to the previous phase.[19] Most of this wheel-made pottery corresponds to pieces of Iberian oxidized pottery and Iberian grey pottery. If we consider imports, these continue to be a very small proportion, with the documentation of Italic and Greco-Italic amphora, Campanian A and B and also some *dolium* fragments. Several metallic items were also recovered, in particular a large collection of iron nails.

In conclusion, we consider that the Republican phase in the Tossal de Baltarga implies the maintenance of its basic function as a strategic point for the control of the territory. This is seen in the reconstruction of the settlement, making the watchtower its main element. Surrounding it, several dispersed buildings linked to domestic use, productive

[19]In the abandonment levels of the site, a proportion of 55-45% of handmade pottery vs. wheel-made pottery can be found.

activities, and probably other functions, were created. This situation would also imply the presence of a small military garrison, well identified by the various documented *militaria* elements. This garrison, or *praesidia,* would be especially important during periods of conflict in the Eastern Pyrenees such as the conquest of southern Gaul, the Sertorian War or the Civil Wars between Caesar and Pompey. The garrison would have commanders in charge, and it is precisely by the presence of these commanders (and perhaps their relatives), that the recovery of materials such as the rings analysed in this paper can be understood.

3. The seal-rings from Tossal de Baltarga.

As we have seen, three seal-rings has been recovered so far at the site of Tossal de Baltarga. Through the detailed analysis of their features, we will attempt to gain an insight into the context of their production, use and abandonment.

3.1 Iron ring with intaglio: Achilles and Penthesilea

Fig. 8: Details of the ring BTB'17 3176-1 (images: Ramon Maroto).

Ident-No.: BTB'17 3176-1

Findspot and context: The ring was found at the site of Tossal de Baltarga, during the 2017 season. It was found in the layer 3176 which was made up of a brownish non-

compacted earth level that covered the Republican structures of the so-called Building F on the southern edge of the site. These structures were created around the mid-2nd century BC, while we can date its abandonment to around 50-30 BC.

Description: Intaglio, sard, brown, somewhat transparent. Oval, front subconvex, border bevelished to the front, edge straight. Intact, polished. Inserted from above into the head of an iron ring whose vertical shoulders are slightly inclined to the top. The inside of the hoop is flat and circular. Heavy incrustation has been removed and corrosion stabilised.[20]

Dimensions: Ring height total with gem: 21 mm, without gem: 20 mm, max. width: 21.4 mm, depth: 16.5 mm, interior diameter 12.1 x 12.1 mm; intaglio height: 17 mm x width: 15.5 mm. Weight: 8 g.

Date: 100 – 50 BC (Ring and intaglio)

Device: Achilles and Penthesilea. The Greek hero, equipped with armour, sword and helmet, lunges to his left behind the Amazon queen who already dropped to her knees. Achilles looks back to protect her from possible attackers with a round shield on his right arm. With his left hand he holds the fatally wounded woman below her left arm as a double axe slips from her raised hand. Her *pelta* shaped shield is floating in the background besides Achilles' right leg, behind which Penthesilea's right arm vanishes. She is dressed in a high girded *chiton* whose overlap around the hips ends in little pointed tails; on her thighs the garment is layered in parallel oblique folds and leaves the lower legs free. Her inclined head is framed by a row of tiny round locks, with her hair fastened in a knot at the neck. There is a short ground line under Achilles' right foot and under Penthesilea's knees and foot. The lower part of her left leg and Achilles' left leg are not engraved. The vivid design of both bodies with fine detail of the faces, the joints, and the clothing, engraved with a fine round pellet pontil, contrasts with the linear elements, like the folds of the dress and the *pteryges* of the armour. The composition of the dramatic momentum between the two protagonists is enhanced by the hero's shimming crest and the abrupt turn as well as by the double axe slipping from the fallen Amazon's open hand.

The Thracian Penthesilea was an ally of the Trojans. When Achilles killed her during a battle, he gave her corpse to the Trojans for burial (contrary to custom, allegedly because

[20] For the ring, see Guiraud 1988, 78 Type I b; Guiraud 1989, 180; Micheli 2012, 19 tipo III fig. 6, gold rings idem p. 37, 40, 42, 46, 56, 59, 63 (150–75 BC); iron ring with glass gem from Manching: Platz-Horster 2018, 25 n. 2 (100–50 BC).

he had fallen in love with her).[21] This motif appears quite often in glyptic art, where it may be roughly separated into two groups. In the first, both figures are dressed; Achilles in full armour rescues the already slain Penthesilea ('Berge-Gruppe'). In the second Group, both figures are naked (apart from a short cloak in the back); Achilles with a helmet supports the falling Penthesilea by holding both her arms ('Stütz-Gruppe'). The first group is best illustrated by an Etruscan scarab from banded agate, now in London.[22] The newly found intaglio from Baltarga falls into the first, rescue group, a type which is also well illustrated by a brown convex glass gem from Ensérune (Hérault), insula V, which has a very similar depiction.[23] The second group, in which Penthesilea is often characterized by the Phrygian cap, is exemplified by a flat carnelian from London,[24] a flat banded glass gem from Berlin,[25] or brownish-grey sard from Hannover.[26] Whereas the first (and presumably earlier) group accentuates the point of conflict of the tragic encounter with the detailed armour and clothing, the second group seems to foreground an erotic nature, with the nudeness of the protagonists, supporting and embracing each other. This version of the story of Achilles and Penthesilea remains the favourite in glyptic art until the end of the Roman Empire.[27]

Besides these two versions (both widespread in the tradition of Etruscan-Italic glyptic art) a third type appeared during the Hellenistic era, apparently originating from the Eastern Mediterranean world. It is well represented by a clear, biconvex amethyst intaglio (15 x 11 x 6 mm) from a rich male grave in Ancona, Necropoli del Cardeto, Tomba XLV, dated ca. 140–120 BC.[28] In this case Achilles is naked except for his helmet and looks back while holding Penthesilea by both her arms. Already on her knees, she is armed with a kind of a parapet in addition to her *chiton* and the Phrygian cap. Behind Achilles stands his spear and the Amazon's *pelta* lays before her. It follows the formula of the 'rescue group' outlined above, but the composition takes on a new dynamic with the hero's right fore leg set in the centre and his foot placed on a second ground line, giving the

[21] For the different versions of the story and its representation, see Kossatz-Deissmann in: LIMC I 1981 s.v. Achilleus, Kap. XXII, 161ff.
[22] See Walters 1926, 77, Pl. 11, 634; Zazoff 1968, 46-48, pl. 156, 48 (after 450 BC); Horster 1970, 10-12 pl. II, 1-2; Zazoff 1983, 223, n. 41, pl. 57,6. I. Krauskopf 1995, 26, 51, 74, 96, n. 329.
[23] With regard to the composition, dresses and attributes, see Guiraud 1988, 137, n. 440, pl. 29, 47, fig. 16 (ca. 50 BC); Guiraud 1997, 38, n. 17, fig. 4-5; Toso 2007, 26-28, n. 37 and 282, Tav. II, fig. 6; Russenberger 2015, 141, fig. 66.
[24] Walters 1926, 112, pl. 14, 964; Martini 1971, 71, 81, 84, 125, 140, n. 101, pl. 20, 5 (225–200 BC).
[25] Furtwängler 1896, p. 48, pl. 9, 617-618 and Zwierlein-Diehl 1979, 41, pl. 16, 670 (50–0 BC).
[26] Schlüter, Platz-Horster, 1975, 86, pl. 49, 333 (60–30 BC); Russenberger 2015, 141, fig. 67.
[27]See e.g. red jasper from Dambach, Platz-Horster 2018, 52, n. 32; also Weiβ 2007, 203, n. 264.
[28] See e.g. Micheli 2008, 9-21, fig. 5; Micheli 2012, 45-46.

composition a sense of depth. This version appears in several convex glass gems,[29] as well as a series of clay stamps from convex seals at Delos.[30] This version of the 'rescue group', where Achilles holds both arms of the fallen Amazon, varies, for example in a convex carnelian from Vienna[31] Achilles' action is mirrored as he pulls out his sword (ca. 50 BC); or a glass gem from Vienna, where Achilles is depicted legs sideward and with a cloak.[32] Only this third group, represented in high quality by the amethyst in Ancona (dated by context and presumably imported from the East),[33] corresponds with the well-known Hellenistic statuary group most probably originating from Asia Minor. Its invention thus cannot be dated later than ca. 140–120 BC.[34]

3.2 Bronze ring with glass gem: club and globe

Fig. 9: Details of the ring BTB'17 3001-21 (images: Ramon Maroto)

[29] e.g. Furtwängler 1896, 139, pl. 26, 3111 or Schmidt 1970, 125, pl. 136, 1346.
[30] See Hatzi-Vallianou 1996, 206-210, Kap. I.2.1, Type A, fig. 1-2, pl. 42; Micheli 2008, 13, fig. 2.
[31] See Zwierlein-Diehl 1973, 104, pl. 48, 279.
[32] See Zwierlein-Diehl 1979, 41, pl. 16, 669.
[33] See above.
[34] See Berger 1967, 61-75; Berger 1999, 113-143; Grassinger 1999, 323-330, pl. 90-93; Vorster 2004, 107-110, n. 57, pl. 73-75: head and antetype of late 2nd c. BC, "…a paragon made in the same workshop"; Micheli 2008, 11, fig. 1; Gensheimer, Welch 2013; Russenberger 2015, Gruppe VI, 384-420. About the topic, see also LIMC I 1981, 161 s.v. Achilleus (A. Kossatz-Deissmann); LIMC I 1981, 597-601 s.v. Amazones, Kap. B, Achille et Penthésilée n. 168-229 (P. Devambez / A. Kauffmann-Samaras); Raepsaet 1985; LIMC VII 1994, 296-305 s.v. Penthesilea.

Ident-No.: BTB'17 3001-21

Findspot: Tossal de Baltarga, recovered during the 2017 season in a metal detector survey conducted at the site. The ring appeared in the superficial level above the so-called Building D, located on the southern edge of the site, just beside Building F, to the east, in a circulation area between the different buildings.

Description: Gem, glass, violet, transparent; vesicular, surface scarred, cracked in three parts. Oblong, front highly convex. From top inserted into a bronze finger ring with protruding shoulders; the inside of the hoop is flat; its lower part is missing. The glass gem is highlighted by an inlaid gold foil which gives it a yellowish hue; a small bronze frame secures gem and foil in the setting. During the restoration of the heavily corroded finger ring, a black mass/compound was discovered between the frame and the inlay, presumably bitumen for better adhesion.

Dimensions: Ring max. height with gem: 16.8 mm, without gem: 15.9 mm, width: 17mm, depth: 8.7 mm, interior diameter, horizontal: 16.7 mm; gem height: 8.3, width: 7 mm. Weight: 2 g.

Date: Early 1st century BC (ring and gem).

Device: The poor condition of the glass (cracks, bubbles, and sinter) only allows the suggestion of the depiction of a standing club with a globe at its left side. This would fit to the highly convex form of the glass gem and the ring form. The club and globe symbolize peace and wealth as do cornucopia, rudder, caduceus, palm branch etc., which also feature in glyptic art.[35]

[35] For the motif, see convex glass gems in Munich, Schmidt 1970, 225, no. 2124-26, pl. 184 (club & globe in various combinations); flat carnelian in Hanover, Schlüter, Platz-Horster 1975, 150, pl. 93, 724 (club, cornucopia, palm branch; 1st c. BC); flat carnelian Coll.. Bergau, Nürnberg: Weiß 1996, 152, n. 426 (detailed interpretation). For the ring form, see Guiraud 1988, 78, type I c; Guiraud 1989, 179-180, fig. 9-10; Micheli 2012, 19, type VIb, fig. 6; iron rings idem, 36, 39, 43-44, 47 (ca. 150– 50 BC); Platz-Horster 2012, 43-44, fig. 7-8; Platz-Horster 2018, 12, n. 27, fig. 1; also another parallel found in the fort of Waddon Hill, Dorset (Henig 1974, no. 406). For the gold foil under the glass gem, see iron rings from Oberaden (left 8 BC) and Haltern castles (left 9 AD) in Hofter 1988, 599, n. 444, 447 and 449 (J.-S. Kühlborn); Trier 1989, 130-131, fig. 121-122, 129 (R. Aßkamp).

3.3 Iron ring with gold foil

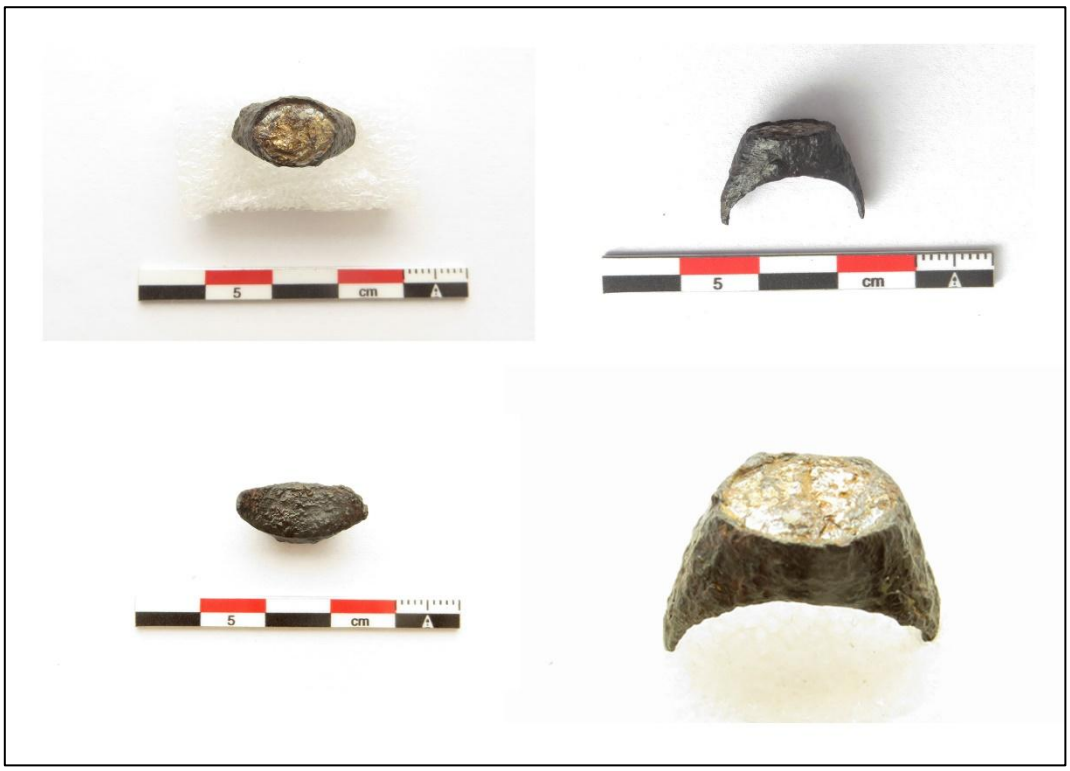

Fig. 10: Details of the ring BTB'13 3058-1 (images: authors).

Ident-No.: BTB'13 3058-1

Findspot and context: Tossal de Baltarga, identified just below the so-called Building B, the Roman *turris*. It appeared in a superficial level just below the structure of the tower and is probably related to the eroded materials from the inside of this building. Thus, it must be linked to the final moments of the use of this Republican structure (1st c. BC).

Description: Fragment of an iron finger ring with highly protruding shoulders; the inside of the hoop is flat; its lower part is missing. The flat cavity of the head of the ring still preserves a crinkled gold foil, most probably the inlay for a missing glass gem whose colour it was meant to highlight.[36]

Dimensions: Ring max. height: 12.5 mm, width: 18.1, depth: 9.3 mm; inner dm max.: 16.1 mm; Weight: 4 g.

Date: 100–50 BC.

[36] For the gold foil under the now missing inlay, see previous bronze ring. For the ring form, see: Guiraud 1989, 179, fig. 9, type I b; Platz-Horster 2018, 13, fig. 1.

The presence of these three seal-rings at the site must be connected to the Roman occupation of the region, as all the rings present a high level of technical skill (the use of gold foil) and, especially in the case of the Achilles ring, the procedure and cost of the object make it unlikely that they were produced by the indigenous community. At Baltarga, there is no evidence to link this luxury object to a member of the local elite. As well as the lack of wealthy importations in the region before the Roman presence, there is no indication of aristocratic buildings or objects at the site (or in the region). As was mentioned above, the imported products found in the Cerdanya region during the 2nd-1st century BC are modest, rare, and in most cases can also be connected to the presence of the Roman army. We cannot identify any local person wearing this kind of imported luxury seal-ring.

A recent paper (Olesti forthcoming) has shown the link between of this kind of seal-ring (especially iron ones) and the Late Republican Roman army in *Hispania*. This is shown by the example of the *Baecula* battlefield or the destruction levels of *Valentia*, where iron seal-rings were personal, and official, belongings of member of the Roman army. In fact, seal-rings are part of the instruments used for writing and registering and must be linked to the needs of the army and the provincial administration in managing military logistics and the exploitation of local resources (Olesti 2019). All these functions fit very well with the archaeological and historical context of Tossal de Baltarga.

4. The seal-rings as an indicator of the roman presence.

There are several examples in the literary source describing the Roman presence in Hispania (2nd-1st c. BC) which mention the use of seal-rings and tablets. This is the case of T. Sempronius Gracchus, a quaestor in Mancinus' army in Numantia (137 BC), who recovered his official written accounts stolen by the Numantines (Plut. *Ti Gracch*. 6):

> 'However, all the property captured in the camp was retained by the Numantines and treated as plunder. Among this were also the ledgers of Tiberius, containing written accounts of his official expenses as *quaestor*. These he was very anxious to recover, and so, when the army was already well on its way, turned back towards the city, attended by three or four companions'.[37]

[37] We cite the Perrin Edition, LOEB 1921. The presence of a *librarius* in a military camp is epigraphically attested at the beginning of 2nd century AD in Moesia Superior, where a soldier "*ad praetorium cum*

Also interesting is the case of the *praetor L. Piso*, who broke his *anulus aureus* at *Corduva* while carrying out military exercises. He bought an *aurifex* in the forum of the city to replace it. The new gold ring weighing a *semiuncia* was produced in front of the people to avoid any speculation of corruption (Cic., *Verr.* 2.4.56).

In both examples, the context is essentially military, but this is not always the case. The use of seal-rings and tablets are also documented for other provinces during the same period. In the East, for example, where this habit had a long tradition, Cicero advised his brother Quintus to use his *anulus* as a part of himself during his task as governor of Asia in 60 BC. (*QFr.* 1.1.13).

Rings in the Roman army were also a form of identification of their possessors, usually officials and commanders. After combat, the dead –and mutilated- body of a Roman official could still be recognized by his ring. In 216 BC, during the Second Punic War, Mago brought to the Carthaginian senate a huge amount of gold rings (*anulos aureos*), filling one to three *modii*, obtained by Hannibal on the battlefield. Mago indicates that these gold rings were worn only by the Roman *equites*, and mainly by the *primores* (Livy, 23.12).[38] We find another example in 148 BC during the Third Punic War, when Manilius, disobeys Scipio and suffers a major defeat against the Punics. Scipio asks Hasdrubal to allow the burial of the tribunes, and the latter searches among the corpses: 'recognizing them by their signet rings, for the military tribunes wore gold rings while common soldiers had only iron ones, he buried them' (App., *Pun.* 15.104). According to the early imperial sources (such as Plin., *NH* 33.5), Roman commanders generally used iron rings, and the spread of gold rings was later, but as Apian or Livy reflect, gold was in fact used much earlier.

Many of these *anuli* also had a seal function during military operations. Again in 148 BC in Africa, Apian mentions a letter sent by an ally, Gulussa:

> 'While he was in this helpless state a messenger brought a letter from Gulussa's army to Scipio, which he showed to the consul under seal. Breaking the seal, they read as follows: "On such a day I will occupy such a place. Come there with as many men as you please and tell your outposts to receive one who is coming by

librariiss" (sic) belonged to the *Cohort I Hispanorum Veterana Equitata* (British Museum Papyrus. 2851, Bruckner-Marichal, 1971, 127).

[38] Plin., *NH* 33.6 reflects the same fact, mentioning the three sacks of rings.

night". Such was the content of the letter, which was without signature, but Scipio knew that it was from Phameas' (App., *Pun.* 108).

The text confirms the use of seals, probably impressed with a seal-ring, in military correspondence. The absence of a signature, but the secure identification of the sender by Scipio, shows that the seals offer images, signs, or symbols, that allowed the identification of their origin; exactly like the seal-rings documented at Baltarga.[39]

Turning to the case of Hispania, also significant is the case of Sertorius, who on the night of his murder was accompanied by his two *scribae* (Sall., *Hist.* 3. 79), Versius and Maecenas, demonstrating the importance of their role in the military administration and probably also civilian life of the Sertorian side.

But not all documents connected to the Romans were necessarily military. There are some clear examples of the role of tablets, letters, and seals in civic and economic affairs. There is no information in the literary sources referring to *Hispania*, but there are some episodes from *Gallia Narbonensis*, close to the area of our study. Some of these episodes are among the best-known references to the role of Roman citizens in the west in the 1st century BC thanks to the speeches of Cicero. Thus, there are clear references to debts registered in the *tabulae*, for instance in *Font*. 2.3:

> 'No one—no one, I say, O judges—will be found, to say that he gave Marcus Fonteius one sesterce during his praetorship, or that he appropriated one out of that money which was paid to him on account of the treasury. In no account-books (*tabulis*) is there any hint of such a robbery among all the items contained in them there will not be found one trace of any loss or diminution of such monies'.

There is a similar episode in Cic. *Font*. 5.11:

> 'that in the time of this praetor Gaul was overwhelmed with debt. From whom do they say that loans of such sums were procured? From the Gauls? By no means. From whom then? From Roman citizens who are trading in Gaul. Why do we not hear what they have got to say? Why are no accounts (*tabulae*) of theirs produced? (...) All Gaul is filled with traders, is full of Roman citizens. No Gaul does any

[39] The best archaeological examples of ring-seals connected to the Roman army are the group of iron rings found on the battlefield of *Baecula* (12 in total, four of them seal-rings). For this example, see Bellón *et al.* 2014.

> business without the aid of a Roman citizen; not a single sesterce in Gaul ever changes hands without being entered in the account-books (*tabulis*) of Roman citizens'.

Debts, loans, registers, trade, etc., were the kind of actions that needed writing and sealing instruments to function properly. In fact, this habit was so widespread in the Roman world that it was also employed in private life, as Cicero (*Fam.* 16.26) mentions with reference to his mother: 'It was her custom to put a seal on wine-jars even when empty to prevent any being labelled empty that had been surreptitiously drained'.

Regarding the ring-seals of Baltarga, El Castellot and Serrat del Castellar, in our opinion, they are most likely to pertain to a military context. The indigenous character of the sites, and the relative modesty of trade and economic activities, imply that the owners of the ring-seals were Roman officers. Especially in the case of the Achilles *intaglio,* we might expect the owner of the seal-ring to be a commander, perhaps a *tribunus*. But the other two seal-rings with the gold foil are also significant. The presence of a gilded surface beneath the gem, which reflects light, increasing the visual effect, is well known in the literary sources (Plin., *NH* 33.6.23) and implies an owner connected to the styles of the period. On the other hand, we must remark that the use of heroic depictions in engraved gems was usual among soldiers in Roman army (Henig 1970).

Another important matter is to try to understand why we find three of this type of ring in this specific context. Again, we can only offer a hypothesis due to the scarcity of evidence. If we consider that these rings could be related to military officers, then the loss of three of them in the same context (including some fine pieces like the Achilles *intaglio*) could be linked with some kind of military event that affected the settlement. We have seen that all of them were discovered in the late phases of the Republican buildings. Therefore, it is possible to relate the loss of the rings with the time of abandonment of the site. If we consider the discovery of the coins of Caesar, Pompey and Petillius, the date for this event must be in the context of the Roman Civil War of 49-45 BC, or perhaps slightly later. In fact, the literary sources quote several military movements of Caesar and Pompey's sons in this area of the Pyrenees. These movements could have affected the key area of Cerdanya and some of the most important settlements there, such as Tossal de Baltarga and El Castellot. The moment of abandonment of this second settlement is

also well attested in this period, especially thanks to the discovery of an as of Sextus Pompeius dating to 45-44 BC (RRC 471/1).

As mentioned above, there are other archaeological examples of Roman military seal-rings lost in battlefield contexts. This is the case of the *Baecula* battlefield (206 BC) where the presence of several iron seal-rings was accompanied by the finds of other significant Roman *militaria* like armour, *clavi caligae*, coins, fire-lighters, etc., allowing the identification of the evolution of the battle on the ground (Rueda et al. 2015; Bellón et al. 2016). More striking is the case of *Valentia*, where the massacre of some of the Roman commanders (tortured and killed in the *forum*) was documented, where a cut-off hand was identified with the iron seal-ring still on the finger (Ribera 2014).

Therefore, we suggest that the loss of the seal-rings must be linked with the abandonment of Tossal de Baltarga due to the military phenomena experienced in the territory of the *Cerretanii* during the mid or second half of the 1st century BC. Although there is no evidence of violent destruction at the settlement at this point in time, its key role as a major outpost in the area could imply a fast dismantlement of the garrison. In this context, and without any more precision, the seal-rings could have been lost, and the settlement abandoned as part of a major restructure of this territory after the suppression of the last Ceretan uprising in 39 BC. Concerning chronology, we must highlight the well-known predilection for Trojan War subjects in engraved gemstones towards the end of the 1st century BC and the possible identification of Roman generals such as Pompey or Octavian with Achilles. Even if we cannot be certain about the relation between the Baltarga seal-ring of Achilles with some military officer linked to these figures, it is tempting to place its abandonment in this period of the second half of 1st century BC, a moment in which, as we have seen, several military events related to Pompey and Octavian armies directly affected this Pyrenean region.[40]

5. Conclusions

The occupation of the Tossal de Baltarga between the mid-2nd century BC and the third quarter of 1st century BC coincides with a period of great dynamism in the NE of the Iberian Peninsula in the form of occupation and exploitation of these territories and their resources. It is a phase, starting in the middle of the 2nd century BC., where the results of

[40] For the discussion above this identification between Pompey and Achilles, see: Golyzniak 2020, 106-109. For the case of Octavian in the same subject: Golyzniak 2020, 157-159.

a process of economic and social transformation linked with Roman presence are reflected at a territorial level. The presence of some *militaria* at the site (and also at El Castellot, such as a wax spatula) and especially of four seal-rings, must be connected with this military presence. Baltarga and Castellot were key points in the Roman system of occupation, focused in this case on a strategic road that crosses the Pyrenees.

This network of *stationes* and garrisons (*praesidia*) had a double function. On the one hand, it guaranteed the control and submission of the conquered areas (and its proximity to the main indigenous *oppida* and insertion in the road network would be especially useful). On the other hand, it served as logistical support to a military presence that also facilitated the exploitation of natural, productive and human resources of the territory. Without direct or indirect military support, it would be difficult to understand the existence of mechanisms for draining indigenous resources, ranging from the presence of *praefecti oppida* mentioned by the sources (military officers in charge of the collection and forced purchase of agricultural surpluses in the same indigenous *civitates*), until the management of the *vectigalia*, fees established on the exploitation of iron, salt or silver mines. The army, and its logistics infrastructure, were the nerve through which provincial goods would circulate, guaranteeing both their own supply and export in the form of booty and riches to Italy. The seal-rings are a good indicator of its presence and for the registering and controlling activities.

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